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### Oral History Interview: James Anness

James Anness

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ORAL HISTORY OF APPALACHIA  
 400 Hal Greer Boulevard  
 Huntington, West Virginia 25755-2667  
 304/696-6799

SUBJECT: Owen Glass Project

ORAL HISTORY NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

MORROW ACCESSION NUMBER: #531

ORAL HISTORY

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DATE: 6/6/94

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OWENS ILLINOIS GLASS HISTORY PROJECT

AN ORAL INTERVIEW WITH: JAMES ANNESS  
INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY: CHRISTINA KASPRZAK

DATE OF INTERVIEW: JUNE 6, 1994

Christie: Okay. Today's date is June 6, 1994 and this interview is being conducted by Christina Kasprzak for the Owens Glass History Project with Mr. James Anness..Anness.

James: Anness.

Christie: Anness. Is that your full name?

James: James Edward Anness.

Christie: Okay, and are you married?

James: No.

Christie: Okay. Have you ever been?

James: Yes. (laughter)

Christie: When were you born?

James: August the 8th, 1940.

Christie: Okay. Here in Huntington?

James: Here in Huntington.

Christie: Here in Huntington. Um, did you go to high school down here?

James: Yes.

Christie: What high school did you go to?

James: Huntington East High School.

Christie: Did you get to take any college?

James: I took a course or two but a..you know, \_\_\_\_\_, (laughter)..that's what I took. I don't know if he's even over there now. I can't even remember his name. He's a health nut. He makes his own bread, rides his bicycle. I can't even remember his name now. Boy, he was a character.

Christie: Okay, so when did you begin working at Owens?

James: I went to work in June of 60. And then I was laid off..at that time I didn't know how they really done that. They just hire so many to work vacation times, you know. But then, I was laid off for about 6 months and then they called me back in March of 61 and I started working permanently then.

Christie: You weren't laid off anymore after that?

James: Well, yeah. Everytime they had to rebuild..what they do,



rebuild is when they completely rebuild a furnace over there. They had five furnaces at that time. They were about 2500 people working there and each furnace held about..I'd say 250 to 500 tons of glass. And a..it was a continuous operation 24 hours a day, seven days a week. And when you run furnaces like that eventually you gotta shut one of them down to repair them. Everything wears out in them. And then you do a complete rebuild. And when they shut a furnace down, that eliminates 5 to 6 lahrs, that's where the ware comes out on the..well, it's a cooling process..the bottles go into the lahrs and then a..the women would pack them, look for defects and everything and pack the bottles. Then they would go down conveyors out to the inspectors in shipping and then they would ship them out to the customers. So you had so many people that worked those lahrs and when they had a rebuild they would lay all these people off you know. They would go back and lay them off by seniority. And a..so anyhow, I was laid off along with a lot of others. And then after the furnace was completed they would call the people back and then they'd start it all over again. That happened to me 2 or 3 times. Then eventually enough people retired or just moved on and then I got to work permanently. From a..I think from 63 on I was never laid off again.

Christie: What did you do during the periods you were laid off?

James: Well, a..fortunately they used to be a lot of good jobs around. (laughter) And a..I was lucky when I a..I had been in the marine corp and I came back and I got a job working with the post office. And I worked with them for a while. I really wasn't that crazy about the job at that time. And the next time I got laid off, I worked for the C & O. But I worked down at Raceland, Kentucky. And a..when I went to work at Owens I was only making \$1.61 an hour. And I got a job down at C & O making \$2.50 an hour. And a..so you know, that was pretty good but it was a lot of driving and everything but we had a car pool. And a..I worked 4 to 12 shift down there and I worked there for about 4 or 5 months and then when Owens starting calling people back, I had to make a decision but then I was lucky enough that I got to work at Owens on dayshift. I'd get off at 3:00 and I said, well, I'm going to hold onto that job down there. So I worked dayshift and then drove like crazy to get down to Raceland. And I worked that for about four more months. And it was really rough. (laughter)

Christie: Yeah.

James: You're talking probably 70 miles and a..not getting very much rest. But down there at C & O at that time they were really bad about injuries and everything. They didn't know what the word safety meant. And they was people..2 or 3 loads..when I'm saying load I'm talking about 5 to 6 people at a time they'd take out of there in an ambulance. So a..I eventually got away from there and decided to a..stay at Owens. Well, one thing, my car wore out. (laughter) So, anyhow, I got on the..permanently like I said at Owens. And then a..I worked in the shipping department.

Christie: Is that where you started?

James: That's where I started at. I started at the..what they called they old tobacco warehouse, it's still up there on 25th Street next to the river. That's where they'd bring all the tobacco and they had the sales, well Owens rented about 3/4ths of that place. And they would take and ship a lot of the ware that they made at the plant. Our warehouses wasn't big enough so they would rent that and..there and at the Polan warehouse down here in Westmoreland. So a..they had a shift..two shifts at each place and I started working up there. And then eventually I got lucky enough to bid to get a job in the factory. You know, you don't even feel like you're part of Owens working up there in a warehouse. And a..so I eventually got that and then I went to work in the shipping department in the plant. And I worked in there for about a year and it was really cold,..(laughter)..cold weather down there. And I kept, you know, staying down there and looking around..and throwing..used to take huge boxes of champagne bottles, they weighed about 73 pounds a carton..and you'd throw those things and load up boxcars and trucks and everything. And a..finally you start thinking, this is great but is this all I'm ever going to be. And a..so a..I just had a little more desire. (laughter) I wanted to do something besides that for the rest of my life. And a..a maintenance job came up. Well, they had about 125 people in the maintenance..well, probably 150 people. And at that time it didn't pay..I think it paid probably 35-40 cents or less on the hour than what the shipping did. But I could see the handwriting on the wall. That eventually this guys..excuse me..this guys that were up there in the maintenance department doing all this kind of work..special skilled work and everything..that eventually the union is going to start paying them for what they know and do. And a..so after about 3 times of trying to get in the maintenance business, I was lucky enough to get in there. And when I got in there, I started out just an ordinary whatever you know, a do-all. (laughter) And they a..I've done everything. I started out wheeling concrete in barrels..wheel barrels. If they needed a restroom cleaned out. (laughter) I was the youngest man. We went under the floors and cleaned glass, and dust out from under the conveyors, painted, carried steel..if the iron workers needed steel from down in the plant..in the backyard there where they kept it which was down next to Owens. You didn't have very many tractors and stuff then, and forklifts and stuff like that to get that heavy stuff and you'd put in on your shoulders and carry it. I've done a many of them. I've carried beams myself that weighed 400 pounds. And a..anyhow, you done everything sort of a..just back like..almost like prehistoric days is what we called it. (laughter) And a..so then what I done, I'd know to advance I had to learn some type of skill and I was always wanting to learn anything I could. I watch a..I'd watch the electricians, I'd watch the tinnerns, the people that made up the steel works..just anything a skilled person done, mechanics, anything. And at that time Owens..they were just starting a school for people to go and learn some type of trade and everything.

Christie: When was that?

James: Oh, that was..they..it was in about 65-66-67, somewhere along in there. And a..it was apprentice but it wasn't an official apprentice class. What I done..I went to..up to East High School, the trade school, and I seen that the way that you advance is that you learn..seem like welding, iron work and everything was the main thing at that time. So I enrolled in the welding and blueprint. So a..I went to school but I had to pay for it out of my own pocket. And I had gotten married and a..our first baby was due was due in 63, it was June the 7th. She'll be 31 tomorrow. (laughter) And a..anyhow, it was a little hard paying for it and everything but I finally paid and when you complete the course, Owens would reimburse you half of it. But that was kind of rough. You know when you're only making \$2.00 an hour something like that, and paying half of it out for going to school but that's the way you had to do it if you wanted to go any further in pay raises. So a..I kept doing that and eventually I kept a little bit from different people. It took me about four years of really hard work. I mean I've done everything from a..cleaning of the tops of the buildings after a fire. See, back on the hot end where they made all the ware and all the machines, well, you had to have..all those machines had to have a lot of oil and plus it accumulated a lot of grease and everything and it had buildup. And with all the glass dropping out and if the machine would breakdown see, you had that flow of glass that you couldn't stop. You had to cut it off and a..lot of the glass would run down and ignite that oil and grease.

Christie: So it was dangerous?

James: Oh, it was super dangerous. But it's a wonder..but Owens had a..I'd had to say that..see back then, everybody tried to work together and everything and look out for one another because you know, it was our jobs. And a..naturally everybody wanted to take care of one another and nobody wanted to get hurt or see anybody get hurt. And we had a real good fire department in the plant itself.

Christie: Oh, I didn't know that.

James: Oh yeah, we had our own fire department. And a..our fire fighters..usually the shift foreman would be like the chief of that shift. And then a lot of us would..we'd go to fire fighting school and they had a fire fighting school where the fire department, Huntington Fire Department put it on and we'd go up there and learn an awful lot of stuff. How to..what types of fires and what to use on them and things like that. We had our own fire buggy in there with equipment on it. Different nozzles and we had places set up so you'd know exactly where to go and hookup and things like that. It was really good. The general assistant over there was one that took care of that. And a..we just..I guess we learned everything. That was one thing in the maintenance department, we were really skilled. I mean, after awhile you learn so much and everything and we were really sort of a elite group. I mean, we were the

heartbeat of the plant. When you hear maintenance, people generally think of a..well, this guy he's one of these that's out here sweeping and a mopping or painting. But we were a skilled group. We a..like I said, we could do all that. We could paint, I could go in there and mop a floor but I could also go and help rebuild a furnace..15-20 million dollar furnace. And to work on machinery..they'd be machines there worth 100 thousand dollars. And a..until I got really..I was skilled in one particular craft. That's the way they used to do back then. They'd get some people that was good at a..say maybe a carpenter, and they was a lot of carpenting work done. Whenever you change a furnace we'd always have what they called a temples. That was the patterns. And you'd have so much work to do like forming up something or a..making patterns for this machine. And when you got to change the floor steel in the floor, what that was it had different machines. The machines would be as big as this room and they have to sit a certain way in that floor. Well, when you change your furnace around and everything, your floor patterns change to. So you had to take these huge beams out of the floors and cut them loose and move them all around and weld everything up and it was..people just wouldn't believe how much of a..how much that is to do and everything. It's just amazing. And I really enjoyed doing things like that. And a lot of times it was awful hard work. And a..but you didn't really pay attention to it. I was young and I was just tickled to have a good job and everything. And a..you know with a good job you get good money and you can do a lot of things. You don't want to be one of these that has a champagne taste on a beer budget. (laughter) But a..like I said, I spent all my life practically over there and I really enjoyed it. I went from being a iron worker to a..after I done that for quite a while then I got into what they called the surface treatment. Surface treatment was a..bottles have to have a treatment on the bottles or they break easy or they get scratched up. You know there is no customer that wants a bottle that is all scratched up and real ugly to put their product in. (laughter) I don't thing it would sell very good that way. And we made beautiful..we made all kinds of bottles. We made Avon bottles, we made medicine bottles, beer bottles, pop bottles, whiskey decanters, used to be a bottle out for Downy, it was a detergent type..beautiful bottle. It didn't last very long. (laughter) Women and the men got those bottles. (laughter) And a..we made all kinds of pretty things. And with this you had to have a new type of treatment that would last, like I said, you don't want them scratching and this was called a..you wanted \_\_\_\_\_ on the bottles which was the hardness. And you could take the bottles and rub them together and they wouldn't scratch. And then we started making the baby bottles, Beechnut and Gerber, (mmh-hmm) and with that..that's really why they came out with the \_\_\_\_\_ on the bottles, something that would really..it's called tin chloride..\_\_\_\_\_ chloride rather. And that was a hardener that you put on the bottle and it was..when you make the bottle, when it came out of the machine, then it had about 10 foot away on this little conveyor that goes into what they call the lahrs, that cooled the bottles and everything, well, you had this little..we called the little doghouse..what this doghouse, when the bottles



went through it would spray this treatment on the bottles. And without that treatment on the bottle they wouldn't accept them and see make them bottles hard cause you know they would hit together on the conveyors, they move around and they rub against one another.

Christie: Keep them from breaking easily.

James: Yeah. The main thing was keep them from breaking because they were baby bottles. And then after a while the customers see, well, this is a good thing. They put this on the baby bottles and so they eventually starting having it on all the bottles. It all depended on the customer if they wanted to pay that little extra out. And they was five of us that specialized in that. And a..I stayed into that for probably five or six years. And then they started combining the jobs. It used to be each one like I said they had a carpenter, you had the tinner, you had the electricians, you had the iron workers, the mechanics, and you know each one had a little group of their own.

Christie: But they were all in the maintenance?

James: But they were all in the general maintenance.

Christie: Okay.

James: General maintenance. And then we had the other people that was in general maintenance but they called it the systems and that was your pipe fitters and your men that runned the power house, they were called stationary engineers. They were the ones that runned the big generators and boilers and everything to heat the factory and to supply the air and electric for the factory. And that was what I ended up eventually being. (laughter) But a..anyhow, they a..I went from doing that..the surface treatment, that was the name of it, surface treatment..they combined that job with a mill rights job. And the mill right was the person that would..whenever something would breakdown and they were a lot of breakdowns you know with machinery and stuff running 24 hours a day. And they would call me..I eventually started working shift work. What it was, I would work like I was on A shift. A shift would work a week of dayshift and then they would be off one day, two days rather and then they'd come back and then they would work 3 to 11. Well after the 3-11 shift ended which was five days, then we'd be off one day and then we'd come back and then we'd work a week of midnight shift and then just start all over again, and working one week and you know, it was a killer. (laughter)

Christie: How long did you do that?

James: I worked it one time for about ten years. The next time I worked it..it was about seven years. But they was a lot of poor people over there that worked it shift work for thirty, forty years. And a..working that kind of stuff like that you never get no rest or anything and a..anybody that's ever worked shift work,

they know what I'm talking about. They feel sorry for one another. But then there are some people that like to work you know, straight midnight shift. I'd rather have a sharp stick in my eye. (laughter)

Christie: What kind of social life can you have when you're working shifts?

James: Well, you can't have much. (laughter)

Christie: Did you end up spending your free time with other people that were on your same shift cause they had the same time off or..?

James: Well, not really. Whenever you had some time off..working shift work is like being a..like a poor dog with a chain around his neck, chained to a tree. You know you never could go very far. You couldn't do nothing really. And by me being in the maintenance department, whenever they would have a breakdown, even on my day off or maybe I'd work 16 hours that day and come home and go to bed, I might get a phone call at 4:00 in the morning to say there was an elevator in the hole and they'd want us to come out and work. And that's happened a many of many of times. Probably..while I worked over there it probably happened to me 500 times. There is so much to tell, golly. It'd take a..forever, I could..but I've seen so much over there and everything. And a..like I said I went and took the job as a..I can went up back and worked regular day shift but you know after a while you get used to..you're your own boss when you're working evening shift and midnight shift. And a..that way you don't have to be bothered with trying to look out for..all you do is look for your ownself instead of everybody else. And there is always a bunch running around you know, in the supervision that's wanting to move up too and they're always looking to see if they could see somebody doing this or that and they said yes, well if this person has so much time you know, let's make something else for him to do, you know. So, you could go out there and kill yourself just about, working like a dog and..

Christie: They were always watching you like that?

James: Yeah. People was always watching, yeah. That's the way, in this day and time, that's the way you moved up. A lot of people say, hey so and so is out there doing this and standing around and it don't look good or but yet this guy could have been up on the furnace patching something and he would burn up you know he was actually taking maybe taking a breather trying to cool off, cause see you'd get so hot that a..I've been up on those furnaces and everything and have to walk out on a board and your shoes would catch on fire and your clothes. I mean, you know, they just..

Christie: Did you ever get hurt that way, I mean seriously?

James: Oh I've been hurt. (laughter) I've been hurt a lot. A lot of times you get hurt as just part of the job and you don't say nothing about it unless you really get hurt real bad. Because you

know there is always somebody wanting your job. (laughter) There's a lot of people there and they want to move up and if a person gets hurt or a..like I said there is always somebody wanting your job. And a..at that time we started in the maintenance we started being recognized for our skill and then a..they started giving us..negotiating these contracts. And they said, well, look at here, the skilled people are only making this and the people that's packing bottles and things like that which really don't have any skill even though it is in a way, it's hard work to stand out there and do that. I felt sorry for those poor women, they stand there hour after hour after hour packing them bottles and backs and legs a killing them, and neck. And a..it was awful hard on them. But like I said they could only do the one thing and a lot of the guys could only do one skill and where we had learned multiple skills and go to school and pay for that out of our own pocket until we completed it. So they negotiated and everything and then we'd get maybe \$1 or \$1.50 more than the other people.

Christie: Now who is negotiating, the union?

James: Yeah. The union and the..all the factories see, at one time Owens had about 25, 30 factories on the East Coast. And they would usually go down to Florida for the conventions and stuff like that and they would renegotiate the union, the whole contract and then they would say well, you know, they would make up well, we're going to put another holiday in and we're going to do this and we're going to do that and maybe give all the shift workers maybe an extra 3 or 4 cents on the hour for working shift work. And a, you know, negotiating a contract to a..they just kept adding things on it and everything. And a..when we would get say like I'd get maybe a 80 cent raise on the hour, the other people that worked down in the factory they'd get maybe 20 cents, 25 cents. But a..eventually you know they started getting mad because we were getting more money but then there was lot of people that realized. They said, well you know my gosh, they really do do a hard job. And a lot of times there is a lot of leisure time but we were always, we were always planning other things and doing other stuff that people didn't really see. You know you could be walking by and they think that you're just out there loafing but I could be looking at gauges or something, looking, trouble shooting. See, and a..the old saying is you know, well, like an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of..I don't remember what it was now. (laughter) I wish I hadn't had said that now. But anyhow, we were trouble shooting..preventative maintenance is what it was. And if you see a gauge..say you'd been trained to just be walking by maybe talking to somebody and you automatically just look up and happen to see a gauge down in the basement not in the normal position, well you know something was wrong. Well, you can go and have that checked or maybe check it yourself or contact somebody that would know about it where you know, other people wouldn't even think nothing about that. Preventative maintenance was most of the people's job. Anytime you could prevent something from breaking down, you're going to save the company a lot of money, plus you're going to save a lot of things for yourself to have to do. One of

our big problems over there was these elevators we called them that carried the raw material up. And they'd have trains to come in and dump the sand and the different raw materials. And what it'd do, it'd drop it down between the tracks and then they would be conveyors under the..under the track and it would carry it up into what they called the elevators which had buckets on them and the raw material would fall in that and then it would go up into what we called the Maggie's Room. That was where the raw material would be on a huge conveyor say a..oh, the conveyor would probably be about 3 1/2 foot wide and that raw material would all be mixed, they'd know how much of it to mix and blend in and everything and then the operator could run it to different positions and then it would be dumped into the furnace and keep a supply of glass going at all times. And everything had its own operations you know, different operations for different..we had different colors of glass in there. Most of it was flint. But then for your beer bottles and naturally would be amber and then we'd have green glass at the end which took a whole different operation and everything. And you had to learn how to do all these things and make sure everything was right. These conveyors would have to be maintained all the time. They'd be bearings on them that..it was a huge operation just to try and supply that whole factory with stuff that run 24 hours a day. That's why it took so many at that one time there, 150 people really wasn't near enough for an operation like that. And it just flabbergasted me to even think of how that place ever made money with all the people working there and..but that factory alone right there probably would fill up West Virginia with bottles just from that one. And people really don't realize..not just because I'm a ex-glass worker but really I think food and drinks and things like that tastes much better in glass than this plastic stuff and cans and..I sound like a commercial don't I? (laughter)

Christie: Well, you mentioned the union..how did you feel about it and were you active in the unions?

James: For all the people..and I'm as guilty as the next and I think that's one of the things that's kind of happened over there. For 2500 people to work there, we really didn't have the attendance when we had union meetings. We sure have had lot more people to attend but most of the people, I'd say out of the 2500..I'd say probably 2000 of them..well, maybe 1800 were shift workers. Shift workers was tired and everything. They didn't want to get off of work and go to the union meetings and when they want to be home with their family, you know. They knew that they would be so many people there and if it really came down to what you call something a real important issue then people would turnout. Anytime it'd come to....for a..maybe sticking something that was totally wrong on people or that they had a problem like somebody that..like they're wanting to give a job to somebody else and just bypass that person. Then they would go and everybody would turnout for things like that. And anytime it come to messing with pocket book, (laughter) they definitely came out for that or something was totally unfair, you know to the workers and everything. But the



union..

Christie: What kind of things would be totally unfair?

James: Well, they started how..you know adding more things onto a person or letting a certain group get by with doing something than the other. Say one shift..they wanted something done this way and the other shift done it a different way. And a..at that time the shift foremans, they were like Gods. (laughter) I mean their word was law. And you'd have several of them there, I remember this one old guy he was my first shift foreman, Louie Pike, and he had been an old Army sergeant or something, I don't know what he was, I think he used to be the people who'd bite their heads off and chew them up or something. But anyhow, they had their certain ways they done things. And a..or like if some of these women would take an extra break or something or they didn't get their breaks when they're supposed to. A lot of times women have to you know, go to the..go to the restrooms and things like that and maybe they stayed a little to long or maybe they'd take a little smoke break a little to long. Well, there wasn't really nothing wrong with that but then they were certain people that got to take a..they showed a lot of favoritism back then too. That's what it really boils down to. And say maybe a..the company didn't want them to take..(clears throat)..excuse me..take a break in a certain area. And a..and where they had always done things like that before. When you get new people in on supervision, they have new ways, they don't ever..you know, they're like the type that sits behind a desk and never goes and sees what it's all about you know. And just little things like build up into eventually bigger things.

Christie: So the supervisors changed often?

James: Yeah, your supervision starting changing a lot more. It used to be people couldn't hardly wait to get in there to work. It was a such a..it was a family thing and people would work together, they'd work hard and they played hard. But over the years, especially here in the last 7 or 8 years, have a new bunch of people taking over and they got so that they..we used to have clubs and everything on each shift. Everybody had their own club. We'd go to the horse races, go to Cincinnati ballgames, always have parties over to..to the Clubhouse across from Owens. And this new breed that come in, they eventually just started phasing everything out.

Christie: All the outside activities?

James: Yeah, the first thing to go was your outside activities. Where Owens used to pay for a..we used to have Camden Park day for the families..we used to take the kids there, they really looked forward to stuff like that..used to have for all the holidays, they always had something nice.

Christie: So your whole family was really a part of that?

James: Oh yeah, yeah. Your family was connected with Owens.

Christie: How many children do you have?

James: I have three daughter and five grandkids.

Christie: Wow!

James: And like I said we were just one big, happy family. And then about a..about in the 80s is when everything started going downhill. And a..

Christie: And that's because..?

James: Well, I guess economical things..people just quit caring about people. That's what it's all about now.

Christie: Meaning the ownership and the [inaudible]

James: The people that takes over these industries now, they go in they don't care about the people that's working there that's worked there for years. They don't care about the history. All they want is to make sure that the factory stays in the red..or not in the red but in the black \_\_\_\_\_.sorry..(laughter)..I see red when I think about it. But a..anyhow, they don't care nothing about these people. Say a..you know Jim Anness's little girl, he used to bring her over here for Christmas and then he brought his other little girl, three years later and they got two little girls, and then five years later they got three little girls, and along with all these others and we used to go over there and we had a man that played Santa Claus and the kids, you know, they..Owens would give them gifts and everything and they you know, it was just fantastic. It was really happy, a..really a nice time. And that was the way it was almost 12 months out of the year and then..

End of Tape 1, Side A

James: Well, anyway like I said they..everybody was, Owens..we were just one big happy family and that's the way it was 12 months out of the year. But then new people took over and like I said, they don't care about anything except making money and they sort of put friendship and happiness and everything on the back burner. And then it got so that eventually that people was seeing how they was being mistreated, they all the time looking down your collar and threatening and stuff like that, that's what kept..that's what happened. Then we got a new plant manager in and he was pulling this tactic where he was going to be everybodys friend. And he had everybody that worked for him you know, the supervision, sort of pull the same stunt. And what it was people didn't know what to think about uh..management buddying up with the peons. (laughter)

Christie: That wasn't usual.

James: No, it really, you know..

Christie: The new management..

James: Yeah, people know this is the big shots and we're just the peons and we knew where our place was, you know. Because it just wasn't normal for you know, to buddy up with the plant managers and the big supervision, they kind of..that's the way it's always everywhere. They sort of look down their nose you know, like, you know, I make \$100,000 a year and you people just make \$15,000 you know, that's..I may not be putting it just right but that's the way it's always been everywhere. You got your rich and you got your poor. And now you got the middle class which is almost poor now. (laughter) Like I said, you're either rich or you're poor. And a..we had this one particular plant manager, his name was Terry Wilkinson, well we thought he was really going to be a super guy because he'd come around and pat you on the back you know, and hey, you're doing a fine job and this, you know. That was great. When you do a good job and management says hey, you done a fantastic job or whatever you know. That makes a guy really get in there and do more. And a..this guy, he would start doing that and everything, he had eating out of his hand. And then people would start saying hey, you know, they want to give ideas. And then what they were doing, they didn't realize it but people would..you always got some of these people that's what you call..sucks..(laughter)..they suck up to the company. And they would say hey, you know if you do this and you do that you could eliminate that. Well, by eliminating that, they might be three people doing that particular job. And what happened, a lot of them people would be a ratting other people out and they wouldn't know that they're doing that. But then some of them, a lot of people out there would do stuff, they didn't care whether they was hurting somebody else or not. They wanted to advance. They wanted to get their points in. And a..that's the way it started off.

Christie: When did this new management come in, do you remember?

James: Well..

Christie: Around what time?

James: Well, it started, it really started back in about the mid..early 80s, like 84 or 85. It's when it started..everything starting changing.

Christie: The big change from the family, you said, kind of atmosphere?

James: Yeah, well, really it started phasing out in about the 78 and it really got to where in about 85 everything was gone.

Christie: Strictly work?

James: Yeah. It was getting..it was..they was easing..they was

doing away with everything slowly but surely. And a..they started phasing people out. What they done, when they'd find out, well, we can do this, we can eliminate that and then they started modernizing things and a..they would do away with this particular job and then they do away with this particular piece of equipment. This job can do..this piece of equipment could do more than what these ten people were doing.

Christie: Were a lot of people starting to get laid off?

James: Yeah. Uh-huh. And a..they eventually went, like I said, from a..they started shutting one furnace down and then, instead of calling people back, they said well, we got a new piece of equipment, we don't need that furnace. And this new piece of equipment can do the job of that whole furnace, you know. So they would..they starting shutting the first furnace..shut down was the A tank. We had A through E tank. And a..so when they shut one furnace down, there's 500 people..500 people per tank. And then a..two years later, they go say, well, we're going to run these furnaces a little bit longer without having rebuild. And they would get better material to make the furnaces out of. So it used to be we'd have a rebuild almost every other year and then it started getting one year to two years to three years or until one fell in and then they would have to do it. And they just kept phasing everything out and then it went down to the two..well, when I left there it was only two tank operation.

Christie: And what year was that?

James: 92. And then they only had..where they used to have six lahrs..now when I say lahrs that's six machines on the hot end. And each machine had its only particular lahr. Lahrs usually about 100 foot long and they had a..a..cooling process and by the time they get out to where the women are and was treated with chemicals to make the bottles harder and different things. So a..like I said..it got down to where that they made only have three lahrs per furnace. There was only..I think when I left there was only five lahrs out of thirty-six that was still running.

Christie: And about how many people were there did you say?

James: Well, when I left there was only like about 600 people. So that's just how much they cut it down. But they also had a..one particular machine that made more bottles than..than say two furnaces. That's how fast it was a making them. Well, and..not only the bottles department..this new bunch, this KKR outfit that was associated with Brockway, they came in and the first thing they done..they done away with our corrugating department. We used to have the best corrugating department that ever was. We made every..we made every container for every bottle. And that was a huge operation. They had probably 150 people working in the corrugating. First thing they done..they up and sell that off and then we had to start getting our cartons from over in Columbus..Owens had an outfit that made cartons over there. And



during this time, probably like I said, 70..in the mid seventies..they started shipping different jobs out to different factories. And also that started cutting down and eliminating people. And they would say, well, we're losing this customer and this lahr because it's closer to our customer, or they got a better facility, you know, and this place needs updated..need different machinery and stuff. That's the thing they use all the time. Really, this is not because I worked there cause I know what I read and I know from the customers..previous customers eventually come back..Huntington plant done the best work. They made the best bottles, they had the best people that knowed what they were doing and a..the bottle makers on the hot end. They had good people. And when you go to these big places that's closer to your customers, they might be closer to save on shipping and stuff like that but what they were doing..they were giving up quality for quantity. And a..eventually we would get some of the better customers like Seagrams 7, made the big whiskey bottles and things like that. And that's what kept Owens going. And they a..well they just..we had better bottle makers and everything here. And just..they just done away with a lot of stuff, you know. These people that sent down here I think they sent them down here to eventually shut down..people thing that..these people from up in Toledo, that was the main office for Owens..and for some reason or another, people that's not associated with West Virginia, they think we'll all a..prehistoric people anyhow, you know. Either they think we all related to one another or something, I don't know. And I've even heard supervision this one last particular supervisor of mine, he was from up around Toledo, and they had told him not to dress like us. When they come down you know, they'd have people come..they'd say don't dress like people there, they said those people are a bunch of ignorant hillbillies and things like that. I..you know..that really got to me. To think that we'd..we'd..a lot of..a lot of people had actually died for that plant, you know. Swallowing that raw glass and everything. And then to say don't you even..well one particular boss..executive from up in Toledo had come down and seen this one was wearing jeans and a flannel shirt and things like that..they said when a..people..executives come down here don't you dress like them people. And a..you know..people was ashamed or something..I think we're just as good as anybody else.

Christie: You said Huntington plant had some of the best, maybe the best bottles coming out of it, right?

James: Yeah, right, right. And you know, they just use you. But yet they don't want to associate, you know. They want to use you.

Christie: They really didn't know anyone either.

James: No, they didn't take time out to know anybody. And like I said, what eventually caused me to get out of there..I'd never gotten as much as a finger hardly mashed and they were a bunch of accidents happen to me all at one time there in about 3 1/2 years. I got knocked off a conveyor 20 feet in the air. I was working on

a conveyor and the bottles had..were in the cartons and a railing that stuck out and caused that to get hung there and the bottles could go up and go on out into the shipping. And this one particular guy, (laughter) he was always a klutz and he was holding me up in the air on a forklift and I was trying to unjam it and I had the conveyor turned off and we always had some people that was trying to do everybodys jobs but their own. And this one particular time they was a pile of broken glass about three foot high and a..I was working on the conveyor and this boy that was holding me up in the air, he had the forklift running and in gear. Well when those bottles..what had happened the shift foreman had turned the conveyor on after I'd turned off. See, I was the only one that was supposed to turn that on or off, and a..or an electrician that would be with me. And he thought that it was already unjammed and it wasn't, and he turned it on and it starting shooting them bottles up and they was falling down and this guy that was holding me up, panic and jumped off the forklift and it ran out from under me and I dropped. I tried to hold on but I couldn't and I fell into all that broken glass. I ended up with 136 stitches in me. (laughter) And a..I had a..eventually had to have the cartilages in my kneecaps taken out and a..palm of this hand here it's..it's nerve damage in it. Then I had to have my neck operated on where I got cut. I got a big cut across my hip and a..that eliminated me from doing a lot of things that I used to do. I used to bowl for Owens, we used to travel..I used to be a real good bowler..averaged about 195 for about 18 years. And a..I used to play golf for them and I was real good golfer. (laughter) It's hard to believe now..the way I look now but I used to be real good at sports and everything. And after a..not being able to a..get out and go very much, you know from all this stuff that happened to me, I gained a lot of weight which made it worse.

Christie: How did the company handle your injuries? What did they do?

James: Well, I'll tell you, they was concerned..the old part was back in 81 when I first got hurt..they were concerned but they had a new breed of people coming in there which hey, we don't want to much injuries you know. And a..get these people back to work as fast as you can, no matter what. Well, uh..

Christie: So you did go right back..

James: I'd go back to work but then my leg kept getting worse and worse and you know, you was compensation but it's such a hassle. You got to a..it takes a while to first start getting it. That's the way they force you back to work. They..the company can hold that check up. It came from compensation but the money came from Owens, but compensation sent it out. And to really get back to work without a paycheck coming back, you'll go back to work and a..so you can have something coming in no matter if you are hurt. You hope you heal when you get back to work. Well, like I said, I never was off before or anything and then when I got hurt, I was off quite a while. And then I went back to work and I was, you

know, I was just tickled to death to be back to work and everything and about a..about a year later..I got a..all these injuries that I had somebody else done them to me. (laughter) Believe it or not. But then a..I a..got hurt again. A guy went and let a barrel slip off of a pallet, that's what they sit on. And we were putting these barrels, they were a..mixtures for boilers and stuff like that..they weighed about 600 pounds. And this one particular pallet that we were taking these off of had four barrels sitting on it and that barrel broke..I mean the pallet did and it fell over and it was going fall on him and I kind of put myself under it to grab it to keep it from falling on him, when I did it cracked the cartilage part of the artery..not artery but a..tendon and ligament and it messed that knee up and I was off a little bit with that until I had athroscope surgery done and stuff like that. And then I came back and then I worked about four or five months and then we were putting oil in the powerhouse for the compressors and everything and this a..oil \_\_\_\_\_ was about 4 1/2 feet high and what we done we put it in that, slide it in there with this pallet with a forklift and we'd get the oil drums in there and then a..I'd have to close these big gates and you'd stand on the pallet which at that time, we didn't..after we got rid of the pallet we had just a big iron trailer, solid iron that weighed about 1,000 pounds, and I'd stand on that to lock the gate, and then you'd ride that down only 4 1/2 feet to the..to the sidewalk. Well, what happened this boy..we was working in such a close area trying to keep from hitting the car that was parked along the street there, and he hit this wrong lever. When he hit the wrong lever it tilted the forklift..the blades like this..I slid off and was against the concrete wall and I'm standing like this and this trailer goes down to about a 45 degree angle..\_\_\_\_\_ like that..and it hit me right here about two inches below my left knee and broke my leg in four places. So there I am again. (laughter) Seem like..I'm short enough but I think it was just wanting to make a midget out of me. But anyhow, I broke my leg and then a..so here I am on compensation which they don't like. They don't like..there was a lot of people that took..you know, disadvantage of stuff like that. They really did take a..a lot of them did. But then most of the..I can actually most of the people in the maintenance that got hurt, it was honest, I mean and it was serious, cause the kind of work we done and things like that. And a..anyhow, they say hey a..you know you'd think like hurry up and come back to work and maybe get a light duty job. Well, this new bunch that come in they didn't believe in this light duty. You either come back to work and work or they'd do everything they could to get rid of you. They'd say, you come back and you do this or you do that, well see, I had a paper from the doctor saying that I was no longer to climb and that used to be probably 50% of my job. You had to climb up those elevators 100..over 100 feet high to get up to some of them breakdowns and things. And a..so I got a chance to bid, instead of doing all that climbing and stuff and everything, I got a chance to bid in the powerhouse and that's where I didn't have to..run all over the factory and everything. I had certain jobs that I done there and I'd go down in the basement and oil up and things like that. It was a much better job. But a..eventually my legs had got

so bad and all that walking and different stuff which I wasn't really supposed to be doing and the injuries..you know, it takes it's toll over a time. And I aggravated over my injuries which devastated me. I mean, you know, when you've been used to doing all kinds of things and I had never had nobody to do anything for me in my life, not really. I was on my own ever since I was eight years old. But then..it's just like you've been standing there and a house with no doors and all of a sudden you've got doors with iron bars on it. That's just the..that's jus the way it was with me, you know. I couldn't do much on my own. It really bothered me bad. Everything I started..you know, I had gained all this weight.

Christie: You didn't get much compensation at all either.

James: No, no. That's one thing. They don't give you much compensation. They a..they..well, it got so that these factories and plants, they owned their doctors. And..

Christie: Is that right? An Owens doctor..

James: Oh, I had..we had an Owens doctor but a..he was a company doctor. (laughter) That's all it was to it. He'd get you back as fast as he can. You had to see him before you returned to work. But Owens owned a lot of a..these outside doctors you know, they would send you to these doctors for evaluations. And they say, they wanted me to either be back or they would..as much as small as evaluation you know..say like a person should get maybe 10 percent, well you'd be lucky if you would get 2 percent. And they really..it wasn't worth it. I mean, when I'd lost all the stuff I had out of there and to be compensation no more than what I got, and at one time I was supposed to get..I think it was \$12,000 at one time.

Christie: For an injury?

James: The bones taken out and everything. You know, that was big money. Now I made decent money while I was off from them but then, when you get a permanent injury that you know is never going to get any better and that it's going to probably if anything get worse. And then..I wanted to buy this lot next door to me and I thought boy, I get that \$12,000 I could probably take half of it and buy that lot. Well, Owens decided that they would pay me \$900 a month instead of giving it to me in one lump sum. So they..they had so many ways like if you was off, they would tie up your income where you wouldn't get no money. (laughter)

Christie: How did that work?

James: Well, they just a..

Christie: When you were off because of an injury?

James: Yeah. If they didn't think that you should be off, and/or



that you're off too long. They think you should be coming back. And a..all of a sudden, things would get lost, your files would get lost and stuff like that. They eventually, like I said, starved you out. You had the wolves at your door a pounding. (laughter)

Christie: Now this experience you only had in the 80s, right, during your injury? Earlier years you never had any kind of experience like that?

James: No, no. They wasn't that bad. I mean..

Christie: But you hadn't gotten hurt either in the earlier years.

James: No, no. I know that they eventually..this compensation people was taking advantage, a lot of them were. That's probably one of things that started with most of these factories people taking advantage. But then the people that was really..that deserved it wasn't really getting it. Because of people that was taking advantage making it harder on a person. But anyhow, like I said, it started getting bad and a..and then my legs got so I couldn't hardly get around like I should. And a..also during all those injuries and everything, I lost seven people in my family. I got a divorce for one thing. Then a..then I lost my mother, my dad, and my stepfather. My mother and stepfather..they died within 58 days of one another. And a..I lost my uncle..two of my uncles..my grandmother..and a first cousin and then a..my sister passed away. And with all that stuff and everything it's..a lot of people you know they a..lose weight. And I'm the type I guess..just the opposite. I eat to..I really didn't eat that much but whatever I ate it just..without being physically able to be active you know. I would dearly love..I don't know..people in this society now..people look at fat people like they are something from another planet. And believe me, I don't like carrying an extra 150 pounds around on me. It's no fun. And a..if I could..I would like to have that magic wand that everybody thinks you can wave and all of a sudden you're..I'd be like I was in the Marines, 140 pounds but it don't work that way.

Christie: People just don't understand. A lot of times there are good reasons for...

James: And there are kids..children are so bad about that. You know people think ah, you're imagining that, but you don't imagine that, I've been around. Just like the other day I went into a restaurant and a..there was two kids there about 7-8 years old, look at that big fat man, you know, stuff like that. People..parents don't hardly say anything. And that's one thing I don't do, I don't make fun of heavy people, skinny people. I've had..you know, most of the time, a lot of them people that's making fun of people, you couldn't get within ten feet of them for their breath. (laughter) Or their teeth would be all rotted out and stuff like that, you know. I just don't believe in making fun of people like that, handicapped people and things like that.

Christie: Prejudice comes in all forms.

James: That's right, it does. It sure does. And I..the old saying, what comes around, goes around. When you live to be my age you'll know what I'm talking about. You may not see that right now but eventually it happens. That's just like a lot of these people that was involved in shutting that factory down, now they are having a big investigation over there.

Christie: Is that right?

James: Yeah.

Christie: What is the investigation for?

James: They a..I understand..they are keeping everything so quiet. I understand the FBI is in on it and everything. Embezzlement, something like \$20,000,000. A lot of these people that a..well, when they retired me for instance, this one particular supervisor, he said Jim, you've been a..you've been a real good employee for 30, almost 32 years and said you..we've never had no trouble out of you. You've never caused any trouble or anything but we want you to retire.

Christie: They asked you to retire?

James: Well, they told me. (laughter) You know, that's what I..they told me..they told me to either..well, the way they started out they said..I got a phone call at the powerhouse at 6:30 in the morning, I'd work midnight shift, and they said Jim, come into the morning meeting at 8:00. So I go down there and there they all are sitting there, about six of them, two of them was the union and so when I walk in, you know, what's this all about. They said, well, they look you dead in the eye you know, and they say, well, we are afraid that you're going to a..we're concerned about your health. We're afraid you're going to a..have a stroke or something and die and maybe shut the factory down cause I was in charge of a..over there in the boiler room and the powerhouse, or we're afraid you're going to hurt somebody and things like that. What they was really afraid of, they was afraid that I might sue them cause my first injury when it..it was related to a job that they was supposed to put a..what they call a catwalks and everything up around that..

Christie: That conveyor belt?

James: Yeah, they was supposed to do that. To save money, they had put them in and they never put that stuff in. And then right after I got hurt, they worked three guys around the clock to put that stuff up there and everything.

Christie: So why did you never sue?

James: Well, at that time in 81, it was a hard economical time for everybody. And you know, I guess it might be a little corny but I

was devoted to Owens, you know. And a..they had done..they had been good to me and everything and my family. And a..I didn't need to cause anymore problems. And a..so, you know, I just..I let it go. Really I could have done something about it but I didn't..I didn't want a..I'm not the type that, you know, that tries to get something for nothing. (laughter) Get a little choked up thinking about stuff like that, you know. But anyhow, I didn't do anything about it.

Christie: Well, you certainly wouldn't be getting something for nothing. You spent a lot of years and getting injured on the job is not really ripping off the company.

James: Well the thing of it is, things were really starting to get bad around there. And a..if I would have sued, they would say well, we're going to have to do away with so and so's job, or we're going to have to do away with this or we're going to have..because there's Jim Anness suing Owens and he's making it hard on you people. So, you know..I didn't..

Christie: You thought it would make it hard on other workers.

James: I thought if I done something like that, that it would make it harder on them and they would probably eventually get rid of me. See, they had their ways of getting rid of people that were trouble makers for them which really you was trying to a..do the right thing. But a..if you didn't..there's a right way and a wrong way and the Owens way. And if you didn't do it the Owens way, you just..you wouldn't in the click and eventually they..fade you out. But like I said, they told me in that meeting, they said that I had..there's was suggestions and things that I'd done that saved them hundreds of thousands of dollars which they never did award you but a..they thanked you and they used to have a suggestion club over there to which..it's penny ante stuff. But a..anyhow, they said that I'd done a great job that I'd never..I was always a big asset to the company and everything. But then they look you right dead in the face and say, Jim, you can't get around very good, you're not..we got reports that you're not really doing your job the way you used to do and which I have to admit, I got so that my legs were bothering me so bad that I had a couple of buddies of mine that would..they would be going that way and I'd give them a can of oil and just dump it in the compressor for me every once in a while. And it saved me a lot..I was having a lot of trouble at that time. And a..they'd come back up and say, we got it for you, you know. And a..somebody went and ratted me out I guess on that. You know, if you got a co-worker that's sick or something and you're going that way, you don't mind..that's the way it used to be. If somebody is sick or something, just like your neighbor is sick and knowing that he can't cook, well, you'd take him a bowl of soup or something. And that's sort of..now if it was everyday, everyday, everyday thing, it's different. But a..anyhow, they..I later found out, I'm getting a little ahead of my story but, anyhow, they told me they said well, you either..you want you to do the job our way or it's no way. And they said..they started saying

things they knowed physically I couldn't do. And they got rid of one guy named Wes Ferrell, the man crushed his arm and he was going to sue them. Well what they done, when he came back they made him come back to work and his arm was almost paralyzed. And they tried to make him take a test, pick up a wheelbarrow full of sand and everything and wheel that thing all the way across the plant. How are you going to wheel something with one hand? Well, he couldn't do it so they got rid of him. And a..

Christie: Did he ever sue?

James: I think they caught him a..where he had got some prescriptions and a..I think what it was, he didn't have no..they wasn't giving him no money while he was off and everything and what he done, he wrote down a few prescriptions that they didn't have to make ends meet was what I was told. And they eventually caught him up you know, and they fired him. I don't know whatever happened to the man, he lived out in Wayne. I felt so sorry for the guy. He was a good worker, but they..you know. Anyhow, they'd phase people out anyway they could and that's..they told me, they said Jim, what we're going to do is..we want you to retire, as a matter of fact, we don't want you, you are going to retire one way or another. We either fire you or you retire. And what they done, they said, we'll guarantee you that you get your disability. Well, I was only 51 years old, just..wasn't even quite 51. And what they done they said we're going to retire you and you'll get your disability. But see, I didn't know that if I could get my Social Security or not, by being as young as I was. And I was lucky enough that I got my Social Security but I didn't get it for eight months later. But what they done, they a..let me draw six months of insurance, which is \$200 a month..I mean a week, but after they take out you know, taxes and stuff I only got about \$150. Well, I lived on that and they said also, you know, they'll give me that and I'll also get my vacation check and everything. They wouldn't even let me go back and get any of my belongings, personal belongings. They said, we want you to leave right now. I said, well can I go back and get some..no. So I went out of that factory that morning like I was in the Twilight Zone, you know. And I just bought a brand new 1992 Lincoln Town Car four days before that. But I got disability insurance on it and I'm still having trouble with this disability bunch. They're trying to a..they done a bunch of underhanded tricks and everything. But anyhow, it's a..it all worked out to..really to the good cause I got my Social Security disability and I got my disability from Owens and thank God that I'm not in that poor bunch that got done the way they did, you know. A lot of people were in three or four months of getting their 30 years in and when we're under 55 years old, you can't get Social Security. And even at 55, your Social Security will go from 100 percent down to maybe 20 percent. How is people going to live on something like that? You'd either have to get out and look for another job, most people have to leave the area cause they're really nothing around here anymore.



Christie: Are you friends with any of the people that recently got laid off?

James: Oh, I'm..I'm..I'm friends with a..I had a lot of friends, I really did. I was really well-known over there. Everybody..I really never had no trouble with anybody and I was always good friends with everybody. I go play bingo a lot. It don't take a lot of physical..you know, get around and everything. I see a lot of old retirees, as a matter of fact, they have a meeting every..every month for the retirees and things.

Christie: Do you go to that?

James: No, really I haven't been going. I don't feel like I'm that old. (laughter) I probably look that old but I'm not.

Christie: No, not at all.

James: But a..there's a..I don't know I guess I'm just a kid at heart, you know. There's so many things I want to do but I just can't a..I would like to really get motivated to where I can try to do something that would help get rid of this weight and do things and go places and meet people and stuff like that. I'm also a Mason and a Shriner.

Christie: Wow!

James: I'm a 32nd degree, high as you can go. I used to be involved in the..taking children to a..the burns clinic. The kids that has gotten burned and things like that. And a..taking them down to Cincinnati. There is a lot of things that I could do but like I said...with the weight and my injuries, it really complicated a lot of things. There is so much things that I want to do but..and me getting hurt in the..sort of, I have to say like this, in the line of duty. And then, you know, to get the boot. (laughter) I mean all these injuries and things that happened to me was really, like I said, in the line of duty. I got hurt over there trying to do the job for them and I surely..

End of Tape 1, Side B

Christie: Okay, where were we?

James: Well, just talking about where I'd gotten hurt and a..you said they was a lot of things you wanted to ask me. It was just, anyhow, like I said, that's why when I left Owens and everything, they..I never had no problems getting my disability check or anything from them. They gave me a nice little plaque in there that says how, you know, for service for some many years and everything. I got a real nice clock in there, a big beautiful clock for 30 years and 25 year gold watch, and stuff like that, you know, that I was really proud of it. Just like I've talked to a

lot of people that's left over there and everything. How we used to really be proud of being a..had worked for Owens. And then to talk to people that has recently, you know, in the last year that's left over there and how people used to praise are really holding their head down now. And it's..don't seem like the same place. Well, it isn't. It wasn't the same place. And it's just a shame to think of all the memories and the history and the one thing..we need to talk about history. This new bunch, just here in the last five or six years and I have got a good friend of mine that's got a lot of pictures and he could give you a lot of history and everything about the plant. As a matter of fact, Martha Burgess that lives across the street on the \_\_\_\_\_ Avenue side has got the ball that was on the water tower at Owens. And see, that was a landmark. You could see that from all over and it had the big OI emblem on it. And this plant manager, if you want to call him that, had that thing taken down, cut down. And when you cut that down, that would be like a..a family heirloom getting broke. Because that was part of us, you know. And a..to have that thing taken out just like it wasn't nothing, that's just like..uptown there a big beautiful old tree a 150 years old and a new housing development going in and getting rid of that, that's you know, that's history. She's got the ball off of that, she talked to one them men to giving her that. She's a retired a..she was a..eventually worked up to being a foreman. And a..you know, they..just a lot of things that they done away with just like it wasn't nothing, you know. Just like you get a sock with a hole in it, and you throw it away and you had had them socks for a long time you know, you get..gradually you get attached to stuff like that. But things didn't mean nothing. I guess we're all just a bunch of sentimental people and everything. And you see these retirees and you sit back and you say hey, you remember the trick on old Don Skeens back in 78, and we'd sit back and laugh about it. Yeah, and I remember a lot of things we done, you know, we'd sit around and reminace.

Christie: Do you have particular close friends from the plant? Over the years are there certain people that you were very close to?

James: Well, I'll tell you. In the maintenance department, I mean, actually we..we were more together with one another than we were with our families. We really were. Especially in the maintenance..we might be on a job that required a lot of overtime to get that back in production. Maybe we'd be over there 20 hours straight. And we'd have big projects and everything, we'd be there..you know, we were there everyday, everyday. Where a lot of people just come in..they'd work 8 hours and go home. I might be there..I have stayed as high as 57 straight hours without going home. But a..they were friends of mine especially in the maintenance. There was, he just passed away recently, liked a..really tore me up, he's been dead I guess, now four years, it was Jack Hamlin. Everybody loved Jack Hamlin. He was a..he was a clown and everybody loved him, from the janitors right up to the supervision. He a..Jack didn't care, you know. He just cut up

with everybody. And a..there was Bill Ross. He's a good friend of mine and he and I talks to one another almost everyday on the phone.

Christie: You do?

James: Uh-huh. And then there was buddy like Danny Woodall. The famous Glen Woodall, that was his cousin. And a..there's Denzil Burch. He worked in the corrugated for years and then he got in the maintenance department and I talk to Denzil all the time. There's a lot of the ladies I see. We got one retirees, I guess, Goldie Purkee is probably the oldest retiree. And like I said, her name is Goldie Purkee and she's about 90 years old and it as witty and as smart as a 24 year old person.

Christie: What job did she perform at the plant?

James: Well, she a..she started out packing bottles just like..you know, mainly, that's all the women done. They..they took care of the ware and packed bottles and things like that. But I think Goldie had done a little bit of everything as far as womens work in the factory. And I think she may you know, by getting older had gotten one of the matrons jobs. See, they used to have a hugh lounge for the women, a fantastic lounge. The men was really jealous of that. But, I never was really jealous because those women worked hard. Those poor things would stand there day after day after day. The veins in their legs would break and then back problems. But anyhow, Goldie has been retired I'd guess, probably 25 years every bit of that. And her daughter retired from there. And her daughter used to want to take care of Goldie, you know. Goldie was real active even right now she bowls in a league and plays bingo. And she lives around 2 miles away right up on that..off Adams Avenue and 9th Street. And there's a lady that could tell you a lot of history. From her time, you know, to when it was the Charles Boldt plant in 1938. As a matter of fact I think I got a postcard in there, there's a little piece broken off of it. I got a little postcard in there that is 1924 or 1928 and it was addressed to Charles Boldt Owens plant, you know. It's where one of the inspectors was going to come down on a certain date and inspect the boilers. It's got the dates on it, postcard and all. Well, like I said, there's a lot of people..and Bill Ross, that buddy of mine, he can really tell you a lot of history and everything about the factory. And he took a lot of pictures and things like that. I wish I had taken pictures but I..you know, from the time that I was hired in, they're going to shut the factory down, you know. It's the last of the smokehouse..I mean the smokestack industry. They was always shutting her down, shutting her down but..I never dreamed it would come to past. (laughter) Cause there are so many people and Owens was a big economical for here in Huntington. I mean, my goodness, you got 2500 people working and when those people don't have a job anymore, it's just like a snowball effect, you know. That's just like with the country, if somethings happens to the car industry, well when they lay all those people off and they're not making them, then

these people that's supplying them with steel and plastics and all that stuff, then they lay their people and then the people that gets..you know, it just keeps on..

Christie: A chain reaction.

James: Just a chain reaction, it comes right back to the..all the way down to us. And a..that's about..(laughter)..that's just about it.

Christie: Can I ask you..you were talking about the women in one section, but you did say your friend Martha Burgess was a foreman. (yeah) So that's kind of unusual for a women to get that..

James: Well, yeah, they just started the women being able to get a foreman's job in the..probably about the..about the..about..in the mid 70s.

Christie: Is that because of the unions?

James: Well, the men..it's always been the men but then they started letting women, you know, it's just like with the..with the deal of women's rights. (right) Okay. And a..eventually some of the women had got to where they could start training to go on salary, and things like that. But it really didn't get down until a..it really started getting..going along about 80..in the mid 80s. But they really wasn't..the men would get the jobs. I don't know why. I never myself never was interested in any kind of supervision jobs. Because when you go on salary, for some reason or other, the factory..the plant..the company owns you. I've heard a lot of guys complain about..that you know, their time..they didn't have..especially this one particular boss of mine. He and I had started out as a..working in the maintenance and he was a tinner in the tin shop. And he took these ICS courses and everything and he eventually worked his way into the assistant foreman and then he got to be a foreman and he retired that way. And he was a super good guy. But, there's a lot of jobs just wasn't for women, you know. And..for some reason or other they let a couple of them get in there. I think mainly, this might sound a little bit a..I don't know..lot of women couldn't handle it, you know.

Christie: But was it difficult work you mean, heavy or..?

James: No, it wasn't that, it was bossing. Telling the other women and being real strict with them and things like that. I really can't really say what it is, it's just..I don't know whether they wanted it or the women wanted to jobs or they just wasn't interested in it. And a..but I do know that Martha sort of felt like I did, felt like they got all they could out of you and then when they couldn't get no more, they just tossed you out. But, they just mainly I think women enjoy working for men more than they do a woman, really. I really think that's..especially in



something..now if it was office work or something like that and say, women..they probably wouldn't mind working for another lady. I don't mean to make it sound..I'm trying to think of a word that they used for something like that, but I really think women enjoy working for men more than they do working for a woman. I might be wrong but, of course things change and everything.

Christie: I'm just wondering what kind of opportunities, do they have the opportunity to move up but they just didn't want it or was it real difficult?

James: Well, what it really is, once you get to be a foreman, you're a foreman from now until you die. So they just really wasn't that many jobs available cause..well, you know, they was a lot of young people. (laughter) Just like me, I started out young and they spend their entire life. Well you're over there..most of those people..I would say probably 80% of the people that was over there, they came right out of high school and they spent their life right there.

Christie: Did you do that?

James: Well, almost. I a..when I got out of the Marine corp, I went to work over at Owens and I was 21 and I'd been there every since.

Christie: So you actually got out of the Marine corp before you started working at Owens?

James: Yeah.

Christie: Okay. But I was wondering a..

James: But then I stayed in the..you see, I stayed in the reserves for six years after I went to work at Owens. And that was a hard thing to do. They started that stuff in the reserve of a..taking off on the weekends. Well I work weekends and then I had to miss a weekend one time and they came over..the MPs did and took me out of there (laughter) at gunpoint. And a..well, just like I said, everybody spent their life there. There's was a lot of people that went there and worked for four or five years and then they was able to leave. But once you get in there and..I never dated hardly any..I had this girl I met when I was 14 years old and I went head over heels. I was a skating instructor. And I met her and I lied about my age, I said I was 17. But I had..you didn't have to produce any kind of identification or anything, and I went down and joined up in the National Guard, I was only 14, you're supposed to be 17. And she was two older than myself. And she was going to Huntington High School. And I had met her at the skating rink and the way I met her, she was skating along and some kid didn't mean to and tripped and she fell, skinned her knees all up and I'd seen her there and I thought that was the prettiest thing I've ever in my life. And I went over and picked her up and took her over to the office and got some medicine and everything to put on her legs

and knees. And I..probably never seen you anymore for about a month and then when I seen her..it was just like a big ray of light (laughter) and a..that's the way I got to meet her and eventually I asked her out and I..see she thought I was her age. And a..I was still in school and everything and a..I just told her you know, that I was still in school and this and that and I didn't tell her my age. And I joined the guards and then I had my uniform on and, I don't know, I guess I looked good in that. (laughter) But a..her dad wondered why I wasn't working at some other place since I was out of school. And a..you know, I told her I said, well I've got another job that I'm going to go to and I really wasn't working no where like I said, but then I eventually got on at Owens and a..I dated her for about 8 years before we ever got married. (laughter) But when I got married, I got a..I went to work at Owens..at that time, they paid every two weeks but you had to wait a month cause they held back two weeks. I was going to get married on my birthday, August the 8th. Well, I didn't get a check (laughter) until the 25th, so that's when we got married on..on my..on our..it was the 25th. As a matter of fact, it was the 25th when she divorced me. (laughter) Well, they do tricks like that, don't they? (laughter)

Christie: Was your work at Owens..\_\_\_\_\_ with long hours and sometimes shift, was that hard on your family? I mean, you were \_\_\_\_\_ a lot. It's not really your fault but..

James: Well, I don't want to make it sound like I'm trying to blame everything but I think that's why I got a divorce. I had to..I had met this girl over there during a strike. Well, I mean she worked at the plant. And I was having problems at home with my sister-in-law and her kids. They was always over there tearing up my house and furniture and everything. And I had met this girl during the strike and we were walking picket duty together. She was telling me her problems which she had only been married a couple of months and her husband was messing around on her. And we were telling one another our problems and everything and then eventually it just happened that a..I just..I got sick of going home seeing the same old thing and listening..I'd go get groceries and my sister-in-law would be over there tearing up..getting groceries that I had just brought from the store and taking the stuff and you know. You just get tired of coming in to stuff like that, kids tearing up everything. And things just happened where you..I don't think it was meant to be and a..I got involved with this girl because it seemed like I was getting from her you know, understanding and things..where I had been putting in long hours and I was..really didn't seem like I was being appreciated. And I was trying to have the best for my family. But it didn't seem like that a..things, you know..didn't appreciate it. And then a..I, like I said, we was telling one another problems and then we got involved one time and somebody seen me go into her place and when I came out, it looked like a homecoming. There was my wife, mother-in-law, father-in-law, standing there. So then, everything just went down the tubes every..seem like every since. I wasn't planning on giving my family up for a cheap fling..(laughter)..is

what it boils down to. But then when everything happened, I ended eventually, ended up with that girl that I lost my family over. And, she had lied to me. She said she wasn't able to get pregnant, you know. But yet, she was pregnant and I said well, I'll stick with you, I'll stick by you. Because I knew there was no chance of me getting back with mine. And then eventually my little girl was born and so I decided after about five years, she was getting ready to go into school and Janet and I wasn't married and she gave me an ultimatum. She said I either marry her or she and the baby would leave and I'd never see them. So I said well, I screwed up my life with Linda and my two daughters and she was dating somebody, getting ready to get married and everything so I thought well, I'll try to make a go of it again, and I married her. And then I was working to pay out..at that time..paying \$55 a month child support well, you're only making a \$100, by the time you take out taxes and everything. And I didn't want my kids to go..I wanted them to have everything. I sacrificed..I slept in cars in winter time with no..with just newspapers to keep me warm. I couldn't even afford gas to run the car. But I felt I deserved it, you know. I was the one that messed up and I didn't want to ask nobody for nothing. I wouldn't let my mother and them know, they thought I was..had an apartment and everything. I didn't have nothing. Only thing that saved me was Owens, their cafeteria, and a..I'd go up and take a shower and stuff like that. So everything that happened to me, I could always fall back with Owens to help keep me alive.

Christie: Wow!

James: And a..but then I started working a lot of overtime and everytime and everything trying to make something of this second marriage. And, like I said, the more you work, the more you have, the more you can do. And I eventually..

End of Tape 2, Side A

Christie: Okay.

James: Well, anyhow, like I said, I took her mother in and she didn't have anyplace to stay and so a..that made me a..well, you know, need to work a little more so we'd have a little bit more. You got to buy a car and you got a daughter in school and you got two other daughters that was in school..high school and going to college. So when you got all those responsibilities, you got..to get that money, you got to stay in there and work and they gave opportunity for me to work a lot of overtime. Well, a..my second wife had gained a lot of weight from having a baby and then all of a sudden when we moved down here, she decided to start losing weight. And I was proud as I could be..I wasn't big then. And a..she was losing this weight and everything and I was so tickled pink for her and everything. And I would be over there working and when I come in and she'd be in bed and I didn't disturb you know, I'd sleep on the couch or something. But anyhow, everything

starting down the tubes. The slimmer she got the more she didn't want anything to do with me or functions. All she wanted to do was stay here and go across the street and talk to her friends and she had made some new friends and everything. And eventually, after five years, found out what was..well, we were married five years, but then the last year I found out what was going on..she had three young boyfriends. (Ah) Well it, everything just, (laughter) everything just went down the tubes. I..we got a..I caught them..I got robbed when..the next day when I found out about them, they broke in here and took all of my guns and jewelry and money and stuff. I had over \$16,000. But anyhow, it's..just been (laughter)

Christie: A rough time in your life.

James: I have. I had a lot of bad times. And a..I..you know, I blame it all, I blame it all on myself, you know. I believe, you know, when you do something wrong it comes back. And a..I've tried to do a lot of good to make up for the wrong that I've done but it just seems like a..just don't work out that away. (laughter) There is some people that can do every dirty trick in the book and don't seem they have any problems but a..it just seems like some people have more than their share of problems. And, like I said, I'm the type of person, I could win the Ohio lottery..I could win \$16,000,000 tonight and I'm the type I'd love to give 15 of it away. It will never happen but..(laughter) But I really do enjoy helping people and a..I used to..Owens gave me the opportunity, made good money. I started out, (clears throat) excuse me, from \$1.61 an hour to over almost \$17.00 an hour. And they gave me opportunity to help a lot of organizations and help individuals. I've seen people, people, a lot of people that knows me will know that I'm not lying or anything. I don't like to lie. But I've stopped people that you see that's really \_\_\_\_\_ and I have stopped them and hand them \$20. I remember here just not very long ago, this man and his three kids were coming down the street and long hair and dirty looking and them little kids a crying and everything. And they was standing out across the street from McDonalds there and I'm bad about this. I guess I'm like an old lady, like to listen and gossip a little bit. I can hear them say that they was hungry and they said told that little girl said Cheryl, be quiet, we'll get something later, you know. And they didn't have nothing, walking around barefooted and everything. And I pulled over to the side and he wouldn't let them come over to the car and I said, Buddy, come here a minute. And he said, what do you want. I said, are you all hungry? He look down you know, he didn't want to answer. And a..I said, here, this is for you. And I tossed him that \$20 cause he wouldn't come close to the car. And he looked at me and he said, Buddy you don't even know me. He said, why would you want to do this. And a..I told him, I said, Buddy I've been there too. Well, you know, it's an opportunity to where you can help people. I've done that a lot. I've caught people hitchhiking, trying to find a job, be hungry, and a..you know, if you could give something that makes a person feel good. (laughter)



Christie: Yeah.

James: It does me. And a..you never know, I might find that pot of gold one of these days. (laughter) That's about..I don't know, do you got some more..

Christie: That's wonderful. I hate to get back to like official stuff when you're on such a personal level.

James: Oh, I'm bad about..when you live by yourself and everything (laughter) you get somebody to talk to you, you really..I feel like I'm boring you, I don't mean to be talking this.

Christie: You're not at all. You're not at all. Please don't feel that away.

James: Get pretty lonesome and a..when you find somebody to listen, it's just like a..so many memories and everything. I like to listen to old people talk. And you think about all the hardships, the happiness, and the sadness that they have had. (laughter) It's just a..it's fantastic.

Christie: Do you have any strong memories of...did you ever just \_\_\_\_\_ down and strike or remember a strike?

James: Yes a..we've had a..we had about 3 strikes over there in all the time that we had worked. There was a lot of times a..when the union didn't..you know, if the union didn't authorize them, we couldn't do it even though we felt that we should. But, that's one thing we tried to stay together. Now if a..if the union said for us to strike that's what we do. But then a lot of times a..the company would try to get you to come back in there. And a lot of..that's what I meant to tell you, I get carried away with things but, a lot of the people got on salary. There was a lot of them that scabbed.

Christie: But the hourly workers..

James: Well, that's what I talking about. Some of the hourly workers went in there and worked. And then when they went in there to work, to..the company to protect them put them on salary.

Christie: Oh, I see. That kind of favoritism that you said earlier.

James: Yeah, yeah.

Christie: I see.

James: Yeah. As a matter of fact, we even got one poor ole boy, I'll never forget his name. We called him Happy Jack, Jack Bletsoe. He worked in the mold shop. He eventually got killed over that strike. Somebody a..he was sitting..we had a little different areas of the factory on the outside and we had

picket..picketers would be sitting there, somebody through a rock off..it had to be somebody on salary..through a brick off and hit poor ole Jack on the head. He ended up dying several years later from that. He was one of the nicest guys.

Christie: Wow!

James: His name was Jack Bledsoe. But a..yeah, one a..particular strike, the first one that I really participated in was the one that cost me my family and everything. It was 61 days, we stayed out..

Christie: That was in 69?

James: About 68 or 69, somewhere along there. And then..

Christie: What was the reason?

James: It was a contract dispute. I don't really recall what it was all about. Been so long and everything. But it was really..more or less it was over the wages and insurance. Insurance was always a big issue. Because the way everything's..you know, with the rising cost and everything. I'm sure it had to do a lot with that. And a..the working conditions. And wanting to take certain parts of the factory you know, the work that was being done there and ship it somewhere else. Well when you do that, you eliminate jobs. And a..anything that you know, that they can put on you, extra to put on you that's that much more the company would get.

Christie: Right.

James: So, what it all boiled down to was money. That's the whole thing. It's the more they can get out of you, the more they can save. And then they had a strike that only lasted about 15 days that had something to do with the \_\_\_\_\_. They were having a strike. I don't remember what it was a..consist of while they were out, but we sympathized. See, at one time we had 4 unions in that factory. And then eventually, we all emerged together.

Christie: How were they departed, by what positions they are?

James: Yeah, see the hot end had their union. And then the women, they had their own union. The men..

Christie: All the women were in one union no matter what their jobs was. Is that right?

James: Yeah, yeah. See, now women never even starting going into a..to a..different parts of the factory..into the skilled labor until they got this a..they finally got a..oh, a..I'm trying to think of what (laughter) what you call it. A..journeyman's..they started this apprenticeship program is what I'm trying to say. They started this apprenticeship program. Bob Bowen and Bill Smith

were the ones that got that thing going. And a..they got this apprenticeship program going, you had to serve four years apprenticeship. And then when you finish..when you completed that, then you would be top rate. But very few women got into the..Juanita Muncey was one of them that completed it. But it..see, the type of work really wasn't that kind of work for women, you know. Personally, I didn't think women should be in the skilled parts because there was so much involvement in lifting and danger \_\_\_\_\_. I can't see a woman out on a beam 60 feet up in air cutting with a torch and welding. Which I know there's a lot of women that would do that but a..they just wasn't that many. Eventually what they'd have to do, everybody would end up at the end of a jackhammer shooting big blocks of steel out of these furnaces. And I don't think a woman was made, personally myself, I might sound..I still can't remember the word that they call for a man that's talking a..

Christie; Sexist?

James: Yeah, sexist. (laughter) But you know, I don't think a woman was made..I mean men are big, muscular. Just like you, you're dainty and pretty and I can't see with a big jackhammer in your hand shooting and stuff like that. Women get hurt real easy. And a..a lot of people, the women that did go in there, a lot of the men done a lot of work for them. You know, they didn't want to see them get hurt and some guys done it for other reasons and things like that. But a..like I said, you had the women union, you had the men, you had the hot end union, you had the mold makers. And a..I think there was 4 different unions in there. And like I said eventually all of them except the hot end and the..I think the hot end was the only didn't merge together.

Christie: So there was 2 unions at the end. One for the hot end and one for everyone else?

James: Mm-mm.

Christie: Those were in local and then there was a national union.

James: Yeah, a national.

Christie: And you went on strike whenever they told you to go on strike, is that right?

James: Yeah, like I said..only 3 times I've know of, we ever had a strike down there.

Christie: But you felt like it was important for you and for your job?

James: Yeah, oh yeah. You didn't..you either go out when the union went out or a..I really wouldn't want to stay in there. You'd be called a scab, you know. And a..there was a lot of people that would later on that crossed picket lines..later on I'm talking

about in the..probably sometime in the mid 70s, we had a 15 day strike. I think that's the one about the a..mold makers. And you're supposed to honor their picket line. You don't cross their picket line but there was a lot of them that did. Especially the women, you know. Women didn't have to worry so much about that time, about losing their jobs. If they lost their jobs, most of them were married and had husbands that worked and made good livings. A lot of women used to work there and they just worked for the money to buy clothes and things like that. Now, of course, now, you know, in the last 10 or 15 years where so many duless men wouldn't take care of their families and pay child support, the women had to..when there's a single parent, you know, that was the only income they had. But then a..there was some people that..say hey, I need my job and they would go on in. And then they was people that crossed the picket line, maybe a..I never participated in it or anything, they'd come out and their car would be tore up or something. (laughter)

Christie: Yeah. Well, I think that's all the questions I had. There's one other thing, I know that political \_\_\_\_\_ has changed a lot, like you said that the womens movement in the 70s, same happened in 60s with blacks, was there a time when Owens started to hire a lot of blacks, do you remember?

James: Well, yeah. As a matter of fact, one of the, used to be a real good friend of mine, John Page, he was black. And he worked in maintenance. He eventually got in the maintenance department. I think they had to hire..they had to hire so many and John was lucky enough to get into maintenance and a..they discriminated a lot against him.

Christie: In what way?

James: Well, they didn't want him to..I know here in the last 5 or 6 years, John had enough seniority that he got the crew leaders job and the guys didn't want to work for him. And he was a good guy, John really was. But overall, now I don't want to make it sound like I'm a racist or something but, I would say out of the 50 blacks that was hired there, that there was a..most of them was girls and they wouldn't to keen on working shift work. You know, they liked to go out and party a lot of them did and a..but a..there were several now, I have to say there was several on them that really worked. I know this one she's..she's passed away now, Augusta, she was a nice person. She worked and John and several of the other..I'd say out of the 50 that maybe they might have been 6 left, that stayed there.

Christie: When the plant closed, you mean?

James: That a..yeah. Maybe, maybe six. And a..I'll tell you one time when John was there..had been there about 10, 15 years..about 10 years, I happened to be over to the credit union and they had turned him down for a loan. He was wanting to buy a van. He had a big family. And he..they turned him down. And a..at that time,



the credit union belonged to Owens. And I was there and I said, I can't believe you know, John was standing out there with his head down and he always called me \_\_\_\_\_. And I said, what's a wrong John, he said, I was wanting to get me a van and they said I hadn't had enough time here, they came up with all kinds of reasons. And I said, what's a matter. They said, well, I got to have a co-signer and he said nobody will co-sign for me. And a..I said John, I said, you and I have been working together in there about 10 years, I said you give me your word that you'll pay and I'll go in there and co-sign. And he looked at me and he couldn't believe it. I took him in there and they said, they got me over to the side and said, do you know what you're doing. You know these black people don't stay here very long they won't work, and they all leave. And I said, well, John's got a family and a..I want take his word that he'll and he got his new van. So, I see John every once and a while.

Christie: He's still around here?

James: Yeah, he lives over at South Point.

Christie: Maybe I'll get a chance to talk to him.

James: John Page. As a matter of fact, I see his daughter every once in a while at a Bingo game. (laughter) But a..and there used to be an old boy named \_\_\_\_\_ Dunning. And a..we called him Sam. (laughter) And he ended up being a preacher or something. He worked there for about 5 years. And he went down South somewhere. There was an old boy, I swear I don't..I can't even thing what his name is, I called him Porkchops. He was a janitor over there..Bill something or other. And he was a bartender up at Elks Club for years and years and years. He was an awful nice guy. I liked him. (laughter)

Christie: Did you go..said John and you were there..you're very close friends with him? [inaudible]

James: No, no. I didn't..it was all at work really. If I see him outside I'd holler at him or he'd holler at me or something like that. You know, I had my thing and John had his, as far going together and going places. I wouldn't you know, it just never entered my mind you know. I was in the service with them, black people, and it didn't bother me. But..it just..you know, John was always busy and a..we didn't socialize..we didn't socialize. But in the factory we was friends..good friends. I taught him how to weld. And John was a good mechanic. I liked the guy. I like him. (laughter). He's a good guy.

Christie: Well good.

James: But as far as you know, as..I wouldn't want to go up there and live up in the middle of 16th Street you know, because of so much stuff. You can..

Christie: Where he lives now?

James: No, he lives over at Burlington or South Point over there. But the way things are just seems like a awful lot of..this dope and stuff is all black related and you get a lot of these..a lot of white trash that gets in with them and they don't want to work, they want that fast money. All they want to do is..is kill. And you know, when I was a teenager, the only thing..dope and stuff like that, it was if somebody knowed somebody that was old enough or whatever, to get a six pack of beer and they'd be 10 people to split that six pack. (yeah) Or maybe be lucky enough to steal a pack of cigarettes from your dad. Well, I never smoked or drink or..I don't even drink coffee. But that was the big thing. Now look at all of this. You never had all this stuff back then..57 through the first part of 60. And then the sixties the marijuana stuff and it's gradually went from to marijuana to a..speed and then speed and then that wasn't strong enough you know. Now look what a..

End of Tape 2, Side B