

Historical Collections, Bridgeport Public Library
Oral History Project: "Bridgeport Working: Voices from the 20th Century"
Alfred Salamanca interviewed by Barbara Hall, December 10, 1997.

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- I: Al, why don't you give your name and the date you were born, and then we can get going.
- AS: Okay. My name is Alfred Salamanca. I was born April 25, 1946.
- I: Where were you born?
- AS: I was born in a little town by the name of Mineo, and it's right near Mt. Etna in Sicily, in the vicinity of Catania.
- I: Oh, I was there. [laughs] That's a nice place to live. I think it's a beautiful place. Now, you had told me that you came over here in 1959, was it?
- AS: 1959.
- I: So you were very young.
- AS: I was thirteen years old.
- I: What prompted your family to come over?
- AS: Well, primarily, I think it was a concern for my family since they had five children -- at least five -- to inspire a better future for them. And, of course, in Sicily back in the 1950s, there was nothing really happening. So we had the opportunity from my aunt and uncle that were here, in the States, to sponsor our family. So my parents sought the opportunity to seek a better life, if not for themselves, at least for their kids.
- I: Did your aunt and uncle live here in this area?
- AS: Yes. My aunt and uncle lived on Jettland Place, and my uncle --
- I: That's in Black Rock?
- AS: Yes. And my uncle, Louie Romano, used to run the Park City Shoe Shop in Black Rock for -- I think it's close to fifty years.
- I: My sister remembers him. How did you like growing up in that area of town?
- AS: Black Rock -- it was a wonderful area to grow up. Of course, it was somewhat rough for us since we did not speak any English whatsoever, and in Black Rock --

at least in that time -- there was not many Italians. It was primarily Irish and English and Swedish and so on. So it was not an easy area to grow up. But it was a very friendly part of Bridgeport to grow in, and certainly I think, for the most part, everybody made our life somewhat enjoyable.

I: When you came here, were you going to the school here -- Black Rock School?

AS: Yes, I attended Black Rock School. They started me off in the fifth grade. As I proceeded in the fifth grade, I guess it became known that I was really knowledgeable of the work. As a matter of fact, I was probably even a little bit more advanced than the other students in the fifth grade. But they recognized that the biggest concern was the language barrier. And for that purpose, I was upgraded to the sixth grade, and then, thank God, -- I wish I could remember her name -- but there was a teacher at Black Rock School that spoke Italian, and she volunteered -- I can remember it was a couple times a week -- maybe about an hour of her time, trying to teach me English. And at the same time, I was also attending Longfellow School at night, for English lessons.

I: Did you have brothers and sisters?

AS: Yes.

I: Were they all school-age, too?

AS: They were all school-age, and we all attended Black Rock School.

I: So did this teacher teach all of you at once, or how did the rest of the family manage?

AS: I don't recall them teaching my other brothers and sisters. They were younger. I happen to be the oldest. Although I'm not the oldest in the family. There is an older brother in Italy that is sixty-four. He did not come with us in 1959 because he was married -- because he was not allowed. Plus, as I said, he had his own family there. But I do not recall that they were -- I think it was just me because I happen to be the oldest one. Maybe they thought that being younger -- they would grasp the language somewhat faster, but really, it turned out to be the other way around. [laughs]

I: It's hard.

AS: Yes. The only English that I knew when I came here was "no smoking," since I learned it on the plane.

I: [laughs] How do you say that in Italian?

AS: "non-fumere."

I: Okay. That's right. What did your mom and dad do when they were here?

AS: My mom basically stayed home -- was a housewife. Of course, a very busy mother with five kids.

I: Sure.

AS: And the language barrier and everything else. But my dad was very fortunate. He was hired the day after we landed. He started working for Herman Isaacs Renderers, here in the West End.

I: Sure.

AS: He happened to have a friend who was a mechanic there, and he got my dad in. So my dad had a very enjoyable -- probably somewhere around twenty-five years or so -- from Herman Isaacs, and he became very close to the family -- the Isaacs Family -- that worked for them at the house. They attended all of our weddings -- my wedding, my sister's wedding. They became very close. We became like part of their family.

I: That's great. When he was working at the Isaacs, it was just Mr. Isaac, right, who was the head of it?

AS: There was Mr. Isaac, and there were two sons.

I: Okay. The sons were already there?

AS: Yes, yes. The two sons were basically running the business. Well, of course, even the wife was somewhat involved. And, of course, once Mr. Isaacs passed away, then the two sons became primarily the --

I: Did he have any stories to tell about working at Isaac's?

AS: My dad?

I: Yes.

AS: Oh, sure. He had a lot of interesting stories. I know one of the interesting stories was that the plant was unionized, and I remember that the union was trying to put a lot of pressure on my dad to join the union, and my dad could not see it because he felt that the money that he had to pay on a weekly or monthly basis for the dues -- he could feed his kids.

I: Sure.

AS: Well, Mr. Isaacs became very concerned about this, and I guess one day he set-up a meeting between the union and my dad and himself, and he, I guess, nonchalantly notified the union that as of that date, my dad was classified as a salary worker and not --

I: That's interesting.

AS: I would imagine, I guess -- another thing that probably should be told, because I don't think you see it in today's employers, how close they were to their employees. Once my dad was able to learn the language and get his driver's license, he wanted to purchase a car. He did not have the money to buy the car. So Mr. Isaacs instructed my dad to go to Fruitrich Cadillac & Oldsmobile, pick up a car of his choice, and tell Mr. Fruitrich that Mr. Isaac would pay for it.

I: Oh, my goodness.

AS: He instructed ---he basically told my dad that he could pay it back however he felt. Five dollars a week, five dollars a month -- whatever. I don't think my dad ever got to pay the whole loan back, before Mr. Isaacs passed away, and I think Mrs. Isaacs said that the loan went with Mr. Isaacs.

I: Oh, that's wonderful.

AS: You know, that type of relationship I don't think you see it too much today.

I: Yes, that's true. And it's nice to know. Were there a lot of people working at Isaac's?

AS: I don't recall, because they certainly had an awful lot of people on the road, such as drivers and so on.

I: Sure.

AS: And salespeople. My guess is that the total workforce was maybe somewhere around seventy-five to a hundred people, if that.

I: That's pretty big.

AS: Yes.

I: That's good-sized.

AS: Yes.

I: That's great. Back to your childhood -- what did you do to entertain yourself when you were a kid?

AS: I think my biggest place to visit -- just almost every day -- was Ellsworth Field. They had an awful lot of activities there run by the Parks Department. You know, it gave us the chance to really keep ourselves out of trouble, and at the same time, create friendships with other neighborhood kids. And, at the same time, what you're doing is, of course, you're also learning the language, because you don't have any choice but being forced to speak English.

I: Did you have any best friends?

AS: Oh, yes! There was a lot.

I: A group?

AS: Yes. We had favorite groups or friends that we hung around together every day, and we kind of grew up and stayed together. Of course, today, we kind of lost that close relationship. We knew who went north or who went south. But it was a great time to grow up.

I: It was a good time.

AS: Yes.

I: When you were growing up, did you go on to Bassick High School?

AS: Yes. I attended Bassick High School, but I did not stay to complete all four years. I left, and it wasn't too long after that that I got drafted.

I: Oh.

AS: But I was very fortunate. I answered the military during the Vietnam era. Thank God I did not get sent to Vietnam. I spent most of the time in Fort Bragg, North

Carolina. But I was very fortunate to attain the rank of sergeant in less than two years.

I: What were you -- is that Army?

AS: Yes. United States Army. Primarily my job was -- I started off as a company clerk, than became the re-enlistment sergeant. That's when they gave me my sergeant stripes. So I was very fortunate -- not only to stay in the States, but also to acquire the rank of sergeant in two years, which is kind of unusual.

I: Sure.

AS: You may be able to acquire that if you were at war. But being in the States --

I: In peace-time.

AS: Well, not so much peace-time, but being assigned in to stages, it's not that easy. But I was very fortunate. The first sergeant happened to be from Bridgeport, so we acquired a friendship, and the battalion commander happened to be Italian, so I'm sure that helped. [laughs]

I: [laughs] You have to have friends!

AS: Right. Right. [laughs]

I: Were you in there long?

AS: I was in two years.

I: Two years?

AS: Yes. I was in two years. When I was discharged and I came home, of course --

I: You decided not to go career.

AS: No, even though I was very much --

I: Because that's very good to get that rank in such a short period of time.

AS: Yes. And they were pushing me to re-enlist. As a matter of fact, they had offered me another stripe, which would have made me a staff sergeant in two years. They offered to send me to a recruiting school -- become a recruiter. But I could not be convinced into staying. I thought that two years was enough. So basically, I got discharged. I applied for unemployment, of course, and I was out of work for around six months when I finally decided to look for work. And the first place

that I was sent to was Avco-Lycoming. Well, low and behold, I was accepted for employment, but I was told that I could not be hired because I was not a citizen. I thought that once you served in the military, you automatically become a citizen, but that's not the case. Citizenship is a voluntary thing.

I: Yes.

AS: I had to go through -- it's a very funny story, but I sought help from a former schoolteacher of mine from Black Rock School. His name is James Curiale

I: Is that the one they named the school after?

AS: Yes, yes. And, of course, he died at a very young age.

I: Yes.

AS: But when I acquired help from Mr. Curiale -- at that time, I think, he was Assistant Superintendent of Schools for the City of Bridgeport -- he told me not to worry about it. He made a phone call to, I believe, at that time was Congressman Weicker. We sought his help. Congressman Weicker was very polite on the phone, and instructed me as to what to do, what forms to get, what offices to go to, and so on. But making a long story short, I think in no more than a month, a meeting was set-up between me, a couple witnesses and a federal judge, and I was sworn-in as a citizen, so that I could go to work at Avco.

I: You didn't have to wait?

AS: I did not have to wait. I already had the residency requirements.

I: Sure, sure.

AS: But if I had to wait, it probably would have been maybe six months to a year, and since I was seeking employment, I was very fortunate to have the help of Mr. Curiale and Congressman Weicker.

I: That's great.

AS: I was able to get hired right away.

I: I love to hear those stories. [laughs]

AS: [laughs]

I: It makes you feel good.

AS: Right.

I: How did you do at Avco?

AS: Well, at Avco -- at that time, of course, there were close to eleven thousand people working there. They were very busy making engines for the Vietnam War, which was coming down to an end.

I: What year was that?

AS: It was from 1968 to 1970.

I: 1968 to 1970 -- somewhere in there?

AS: Right. And then, of course, in 1970, things got real slow, and I think Avco cut half the work force. Even though they desperately tried to keep me, and they kept bouncing me back from different unions, different jobs. The end came when I got laid off.

I: What were you doing there?

AS: I was an expediter.

I: Oh, okay.

AS: I was an expediter at Avco. And a clerk. And then in 1970, I got married, and it was during that time that I was actually laid off from Avco. But I was very fortunate because the day that I went to the unemployment office to apply for unemployment, I was told that there might be a job opportunity at Bryant Electric because they were looking for an electrician, and I guess they kind of asked me if I could just go down there for an interview. That same day I went down there, got an application, I was interviewed, and I was asked when could I start. And thank God I started, I believe, two or three days later. I got hired as an expediter, promoted within production plant, from an expediter to a coordinator, I would say, probably within six months, and became a manufacturing supervisor -- part of management -- within a year-and-a-half after I was hired there.

I: Congratulations. That's the way to do it.

AS: Thank you.

I: That's great. Would you explain to us what an expediter does, because maybe

some people don't know.

AS: Well, an expeditor mainly works for a production planning department, which basically has the responsibility to purchase a plant. The workload for the plant from the time the material comes in through the door, it goes through the fabrication department, through the assembly department, to finally the shipping department, and hopefully, finally, to the customer. So the expeditor's job is to keep the flow of material at an even pace between purchasing fabrication, assembly and then finally to shipping.

I: When you were being promoted, did you have any staff under you? I mean, were you responsible for any people?

AS: I was not. I did not have any people under me when I was working as an expeditor or as a coordinator. But once, of course, I became a supervisor, I had from as few as twenty people under me, to as many as maybe forty or fifty, in different phases of operations during my twenty years of life with Bryant.

I: You were there twenty years?

AS: Well, it's 19.8 that actually counts on the books. But as of today, even though I'm still involved with Bryant and Westinghouse, it's really twenty-seven years.

I: Yes. When did you go there? What year?

AS: I started in 1970.

I: 1970.

AS: The plant closed in 1988 -- July of 1988. I was kept on -- well, prior to closing, I was sent to North Carolina, Georgia and Mississippi. That's where most of the operations got transferred -- from Bridgeport to those states, and my job was to instruct those people down there to the Bryant product. Even though I was all for opportunities there, I chose to come back to the Bridgeport area. But I was fortunate enough that Westinghouse and Bryant kept me on as a consultant, and low and behold, ten years later, I'm still here.

I: That's great.

AS: Of course, now, this is the final month. And probably by the end of this month, I

should be completed. Then I'll be looking for employment again. So if anybody's listening, I'm looking for a job. [laughs]

I: Okay. [laughs] What did you find were the differences between the people who were working in the south and the people who were working up here, or people working in different places?

AS: Of course, the wages were somewhat lower.

I: Than where?

AS: Than in the south. Back in 1988, my estimation that the average wage at Bryant was somewhere around ten dollars an hour. In Georgia, where I spent most of my time, the wages were somewhere between six to six-fifty an hour. But, of course, the difference isn't that dramatic because the cost of living is so much cheaper in the south.

I: Yes.

AS: But the people are somewhat -- at least I found them very friendly, but somewhat laid back. That's a typical southern image, anyway -- people are kind of laid back. They take life a little bit more leisurely than we do up north, where it's rush, rush, rush.

I: Yes, yes. Do you have any stories about working at Bryant?

AS: You know, I don't know that I have any really good story that would be of any significance. But, of course, the experience working with Bryant, with so many different types of people from different backgrounds, different languages -- I learned from it. I've had people that spoke Spanish, spoke Italian, Hungarian. In the early days, Bryant was primarily Hungarian. The West End was, at one time, nothing but Hungarian. So the early workforce at Bryant was primarily of Hungarian descent people.

I: That must have been difficult, though. I mean, communicating with them.

AS: Well, it was difficult. Most people were able to converse in English, so that was not really too much of a problem. Of course, being bilingual -- that I spoke Italian -- it kind of helped me with not only the Italian workers, but even somewhat with

the Spanish workers because the language is fifty percent understandable. And many times, I've had to hold meetings. And then, of course, I had to repeat the meeting maybe in Italian for my Italian-speaking workforce. But it was interesting.

I: Were you in a union in Bryant Electric?

AS: No, I was not. I was always management.

I: You were always management?

AS: I was always part of management, so I was not in the union. But, of course, even though we did try to get along, we did have our differences, and Bryant --

I: Were there ever any strikes?

AS: Bryant sustained many very long strikes.

I: I thought they did. Yes.

AS: Sometimes somewhat violent strikes. They got out-of-hand. Not so much -- I think it was through frustration. Being out of work for so long, the tempers kind of flare up. I remember -- I think the last strike that we had was around 1983, I believe, which was a pretty long strike. I remember having my tires slashed in my car. I don't think it was directed to me personally, but against management as a whole. But, you know...

I: What was the issue?

AS: Well, you know, the issue was always, of course, over the wages, more vacations, more contributions to the pension fund. You know, it's typical of what you see today.

I: Yes.

AS: Unfortunately, someday the union has to learn that they have to work hand-in-hand with management. I mean, if the company is making money, then you can make some demands. But if the company is going through a bad time, then you have to stick with the company, and hopefully, you and the company can turn things around, and maybe someday you could ask for more. So there are times when you really have to work hand-in-hand.

I: Was there any kind of management association, or anything like that? I know I worked at Warner's and they had a management association.

AS: The only management that I remember going to every month was a program sponsored by the YMCA, and it was a YMCA management group per se, and we used to meet at a different restaurant or a different place almost every month. And, of course, the company would pay for us to attend such a meeting. And basically, it was just a gathering of different managers throughout the Bridgeport area.

I: What did you do? Did you exchange ideas?

AS: We exchanged ideas.

I: Did you have speakers?

AS: Yes. We usually would have a main speaker that would come in and go through either -- talk about if we were going through a recession time or a good time, or things that -- it was primarily manufacturing kind of a meeting. So everybody there was really involved with manufacturing. And, of course, you had people that would promote new equipment or new ideas to the manufacturing. But it was very enjoyable because you got to spend time with other people once a month.

I: Yes. Did you belong to any other organizations?

AS: I did not belong to any other organizations, per se.

I: No Moose, Elks or anything like that? [laughs]

AS: No. I was going to join the Trinacria Club, which is an Italian club [Sicilian] with the Italian Community Center, but the fees were too expensive for me, even though I had relatives that were actually officers that I could have possibly have gotten in. But I led a very active life. I'm an avid bowler.

I: Oh, good.

AS: I'm an avid duckpin bowler, which is kind of fading away. Of course, my experience with duckpin bowling started in Black Rock, at the old Black Rock Bowling Alley. And as of today, I'm still avid at duckpin bowling. So I kept busy. And, of course, being married --

I: Did you have any kids?

AS: Thank God, after -- I think it was nine years after marriage, we were finally blessed with one son, which today he is nineteen.

I: What's he doing?

AS: Well, he's going to be graduating the first week of January, I believe, from Porter & Chester Institute. He chose to go into the HVAC profession, which is heating and air conditioning.

I: That's great.

AS: He chose not to pursue college, but to pursue a trade.

I: Well, that's fine.

AS: They're needed today just as bad as doctors or lawyers.

I: Some of them are making more money than the doctors and lawyers. [laughs]

AS: You're right.

I: Call a plumber in and you'll see.

AS: That's right.

I: Are you Roman Catholic?

AS: Yes.

I: Do you go to church?

AS: Well, we always attended St. Anne's Church. I was married in St. Anne's Church. Then, of course, after I got married, we bought a house in Milford, but low and behold, we attended St. Anne's in Devon. Of course, that's where the house is located -- in Devon. Of course now, I'm back in Bridgeport.

I: Commuting.

AS: From time to time, I thought that St. Anne's -- my parents attend St. Anne's in Black Rock.

I: They're still around -- your parents?

AS: Yes, my parents are still -- they just celebrated their sixty-fourth year anniversary.

I: Wow!

AS: They're both eighty-three.

I: Do they still live in Black Rock?

AS: They still live on Jettland Place in Black Rock, with my aunt, Mrs. Romano, upstairs. My aunt is almost eighty-five and my parents are eighty-three.

I: When you get together with family or anything, do you sing?

AS: My family gets together almost every week -- at least the ones that we can.

I: Dinner.

AS: I have two sisters that live in Milford, and I have a brother, of course, who now lives in Pennsylvania. But just about every Sunday, I know I'm going either to my mom's house to eat or to my sister's house to eat, or they're coming to my mom's house to eat. So we're basically together almost every week. They enjoy looking at old Super 8's or [?] millimeter movies that were taken years ago -- the family movies from Europe, or weddings.

I: Have you gotten back to Europe?

AS: Yes, I was back in early 1987. My parents and my aunt -- one of my nephews was getting married -- my oldest brother's son -- so I was very happy to go back, see my hometown again. I was able to find the house that I was born in. Even one of my gym teachers spotted me on the street and recognized and waved to me.

[laughs]

I: [laughs]

AS: I went back to the old church that we used to attend to and I knocked on the door, and the priest came out. The first thing he said to me -- "Alfredo."

I: [laughs]

AS: He remembered my name -- everything! This is almost twenty-five years!

I: Amazing.

AS: While I was there, I was also fortunate enough to spend ten days in Switzerland. I have a niece that lives in Switzerland, so I was able to go up and visit her for ten days.

I: Different terrain.

AS: Different terrain, different language.

I: Yes. Different place. That's great. I think it's wonderful that the family keeps getting together like that.

AS: Oh, yes.

I: You probably are looking forward to Christmas.

AS: Yes. Of course, unfortunately, because not everybody is close, it's very difficult -- like for my older brother -- to keep coming back.

I: What about your brother? How many brothers and sisters did you have?

AS: I have two brothers and two sisters.

I: So one brother stayed in Italy.

AS: Yes.

I: So you have one brother who is here and two sisters, and yourself?

AS: Yes. I had one brother that was a beautician in Bridgeport and Fairfield, but then he became a chemical engineer, and now he's working as a chemical engineer in Pennsylvania. He got married. I have a sister that works for the Milford Senior Center. As a matter of fact, this past month she was nominated for the Italian-American of the Year for the City of Milford at the Senior Center. They had a big story done on her in the papers, and at the same time, they celebrated my mom's eighty-third birthday, at the same party, which was a surprise to everybody. And then I have another sister that lives in Milford and she works. She has a husband. She has no kids. My other sister had two daughters. That's basically the family.

I: That's a good family. And you still have your uncle and --

AS: No, my uncle died. My aunt is still alive.

I: Did anybody else come over from Italy?

AS: No, nobody else has come over to stay. We have had other -- they have visited -- nieces and nephews, and so on. Aunts and uncles. But only to visit.

I: That's good.

AS: My parents used to go back pretty often. I would say they probably went back maybe every five years. Of course, now, because ultimately they can't really travel like they did before, but now the relatives in Italy come and visit us.

[laughs]

I: When you were in school, did you do any schoolwork -- any work after school? Deliver papers or do anything like that?

AS: No, but I did have part-time jobs. As a matter of fact, when I was going to Black Rock School, I used to work at the Ritz Luncheonette in Black Rock. I used to help out. I also worked at the Black Rock Bowling Alleys. I was taught how to repair the machines, because they're all automatic machines. Eventually I became -- well, during the time between my service and getting married and getting employed, I even used to manage the Black Rock Bowling Alleys from time to time.

I: How much did you get paid an hour? Do you remember?

AS: I don't recall, but I don't think it could have been no more than probably what the minimum wage is -- like five dollars an hour. Of course, I worked at the Doyle & Martin Furniture Store for a while, too, delivering the furniture, and the same person who owned Doyle & Martin had purchased Black Rock Bowling Alleys. So once he found out that I knew how to repair the machines, I was primarily placed at the bowling alleys, and since he spent so much time in Florida, I got to manage the bowling alleys. [laughs]

I: That's terrific. That's a loss -- that the bowling alleys are gone.

AS: Yes.

I: They were always fun.

AS: Yes.

I: Did you ever get involved in any sports or involved in anything that --?

AS: Yes.

I: I know you liked bowling.

AS: Yes, I liked bowling. You know, maybe as a fifteen- or sixteen-year-old, I used to play baseball. As a matter of fact, I think one year we were playing for St. Raphael's in Bridgeport, and -- actually, I used to attend -- there used to be a club at St. Anne's --

I: Oh, I know.

AS: I can't recall what they called it.

I: The youth fellowship.

AS: Yes.

I: What was it called? CYO

AS: CYO.

I: Yes.

AS: I used to send it at St. Anne's. It's funny. I did have some involvement. And, of course, I liked soccer. I never played here.

I: That was such an unknown game here.

AS: Yes, it was such an unknown game here that there were no teams. Not like today.

I: No.

AS: Kept active, anyway.

I: Bryant was a division of Westinghouse. When did that --?

AS: Bryant acquired Bryant Electric in 1902. Bryant was actually started in Bridgeport in 1888 by Mr. Walter C. Bryant.

I: What did he do?

AS: Well, Mr. Bryant actually invented the first electrical switch.

I: Oh, okay.

AS: That turned the power on and off. And, I believe, if I can remember my history of Bryant somewhat, is that his business actually started on Main Street downtown, next to People's Bank. And then I understand he was asked to be moved out of there because he was making too much noise, and I believe they relocated to John's Street, and after John's Street, he was able to acquire a school house on the corner of Morgan Street and State Street, which was owned by P.T. Barnum.

I: I know where Morgan Street is.

AS: I believe he was paying P.T. Barnum eighteen dollars a month to rent. And, then, of course, they acquired the company. He expanded it, formed a corporation. I think the two Hubbel Brothers were actually consultants to Bryant.

I: They were across the street, weren't they?

AS: Well, at that time, there was no Hubbel. The two Hubbel Brothers were actually consultants to Bryant, which, I guess, eventually, they opened up Harvey Hubbel. And then of, course, in 1902, since Westinghouse was very much into the electrical business and they were making the transformers and the electrical distribution -- having the ownership of the electrical switch was very important to them, and that's when they acquired Bryant Electric.

I: It's amazing -- I didn't know they were involved.

AS: I think it was only for something like maybe eight hundred thousand dollars.
[laughs]

I: Amazing. It's amazing. So basically, then, the people who were in charge of Bryant Electric were another company?

AS: Yes. I mean, basically --

I: It wasn't like Mr. Isaac, who was there. At this point, Mr. Bryant had died.

AS: Right. Yes. Bryant Electric basically ran independently as a company because we had all managers, controllers and so on. But certainly, we were very much controlled by the corporation that we reported to. At one time maybe you would report to a business unit of Westinghouse, which Bryant Electric fell under. But we were still given a budget to work with and property to build on, and so on.

I: It says here -- treatment that were by the superiors was -- talk to me about that.

AS: Okay. Well, Bryant was probably my second and only job that I've ever had, so I've never really experienced --

I: They obviously liked you because you stayed here so long.

AS: Well, Bryant not only liked me, but I think that if you talked to anybody that really spent time at Bryant, and I don't care whether they were management or hourly -- they would tell you one thing about Bryant -- that it was a family. It was a country club. I mean, I don't think --

I: It was a good place to work at.

AS: You could not have found a better place to work than Bryant Electric.

Management treated their people like their own. They certainly had many programs such as suggestion programs. As a matter of fact, I happened to be the beneficiary, I think, of the highest suggestion ever paid to an employee, back in the 1970s.

I: What happened?

AS: Well, basically what happened was that because of my involvement in being an expediter and working with production planning, I discovered there was an awful lot of raw material in steel down in the basement -- I'm talking maybe thirty or forty or fifty thousand pounds -- that hadn't been used in ages and it was classified as obsolete. And I said, "Well, if it's obsolete, why do we still keep it? Why don't we get rid of it, or use it for something else?" Well, I did some research and I was able to persuade management that if we shipped this steel out to another company locally, had it slit down to a narrow width, it would certainly become very useful for us because I made it a size of steel that we needed everyday. I don't know what the value of the thirty or forty thousand pounds of steel was at the time, but it was estimated that between what it cost us to slit it down, and the use and everything else, and my suggestion was -- I think it was the equivalent to five hundred dollars, which was the highest they ever paid to anybody. I think it was right after that that they discontinued the suggestion program. [laughs]

I: [laughs] That's a darned good suggestion.

AS: Right, right. But Bryant and Westinghouse was really very good to their people.

I: Did they have any organizations within the thing -- like the retirement organizations, and all?

AS: Oh, yes. If you go back to the very early stages of Bryant, there were many, many activities that took place within the community of Bryant, not only within the plant, but outside of the plant.

I: [unclear]

AS: Right. But even afterwards, after my era, we had retirement parties, we had Christmas parties, we had parties any time we had an opportunity to create a party.

I: Did you have clubs like the 20 Year Club?

AS: Yes, yes.

I: That's very good.

AS: Yes, we did that. And I think people really enjoyed many, many benefits from Westinghouse and Bryant. We had a very good health program for the employees, with a minimal contribution, and sometimes none. Of course, we had a very good pension package. Of course, everybody had sick and personal days and vacations.

I: What were the vacations?

AS: Well, the vacations -- I think you were able to go up to five weeks, with twenty-five years or more.

I: That's good.

AS: Even myself -- I was up to four weeks.

I: Did you carry any of it over?

AS: You were not allowed.

I: Oh, you were not allowed?

AS: No. Actually, I think the only thing that people were able to accumulate toward the end was some sick and personals. But not more than thirty days. And they could use it for vacation -- additional vacation time. But having four and five weeks for vacation -- it's kind of unheard of.

I: It sure is.

AS: You don't see that today. I think only the Europeans enjoy that.

I: Yes! [laughs]

AS: They get a month's vacation which is mandated by the government.

I: I know. I always wonder about that when they come over here and it's a culture shock, because they get a week for the first year...

AS: Exactly. If you're fortunate enough to have that.

I: So actually, then, your experience with Bryant Electric was really a nice, positive one.

AS: Yes. Positive -- not only from the management point of view. Like I said, since I

grew so fast within the organization -- not only, I was, of course, I'm assuming that I did my job well, but I also enjoyed a very good relationship --

I: What are you doing in the consulting field now that Bryant is not there?

AS: Well, basically what I have done since Bryant closed is for the first two or three years, we were basically trying to sell the building. So really, I had a security force. They kept the building up, maintaining it and so on, and hopefully trying to find a buyer or a user for the building. But when that failed, we decided that we'd start doing some environmental impact. So that's basically when I became involved. Kind of supervising and being ears and eyes for the corporation -- locally -- as to all of the projects that were going on, environmentally. We'd still be spending an awful lot of money on an awful lot of projects to clean up the site. And, of course then, in 1996, we struck a deal with the City of Bridgeport, where the city would pay for some of the demolition costs, and we would continue paying for the environmental costs. And very shortly, whether it happens this month in December, or in January of 1998, we will be transferring the property to the City of Bridgeport for a dollar, which they're hoping to create an industrial park. Not only for the Bryant property, but also for the surrounding three-block area. I believe the industrial park is going to become a twelve-and-a-half acre industrial park. And we still have another environmental project that we're just being starting at the Bryant site. So basically, my job at the Bryant site in Bridgeport for Westinghouse has been primarily to kind of supervise the goings and doings of the contractors...

I: The phasing-out.

AS: Phasing-out. And, of course, representing the corporation locally with any local issues that may come up, whatever it might be -- environmentally or with the City of Bridgeport, or so on.

I: Do you look forward to doing something else now?

AS: Well, certainly, yes. Fortunately, I'm fifty-one, so I'm a long ways a way from a pension. So I am seeking employment. I'm not looking for any particular areas. I

don't care whether it's manufacturing.

I: And you have a good background on a lot of stuff.

AS: Yes. So hopefully, something will come up.

I: Experience with discrimination or harassment.

AS: I have never personally experienced any discrimination. I think it's unfortunate when it does happen. The only experience that I've had related through that might be an incident that I can recall that happened at Bryant, where an employee had applied for a job, and it really required the understanding and the comprehension of English, due to the responsibilities. And I felt that his lack of knowledge --

[End of Side One]

AS: So, really continuing with that story, was that I did not feel that the employee was qualified enough for the job that he was applying for. Unfortunately, the union felt otherwise, and a grievance was filed. Shortly I contacted our attorneys to find out if I was within my rights in denying it. And they said I was. But at the end, I think the union finally realized that I was right, and basically, the employee was denied the opportunity. But certainly, I instructed him, through an interpreter, that I had gone through the same phase in my life with the lack of language, and I learned it, and today I'm your boss. It doesn't mean that if you don't learn your language, someday you can't be my boss. So basically, I tried to inspire to him that -- go to school, try to better your English, and certainly if I'm still here and you're still here, and you re-apply for the job, I'd be more than glad to give you the job that you're applying for.

I: That was handled beautifully.

AS: Yes. That's really the only incident I can recall. I mean, I don't know if that would fall under the category of discrimination or whatever.

I: That's a nice story. We're almost finished. I'm just interested in how you met your wife. [laughs]

AS: Well, basically, I met my wife at the Black Rock Bowling Alleys.

I: Oh, okay. [laughs]

AS: I was working there, and, of course, she was bowling in a league, and we kind of

met. We started dating. I think we probably dated maybe two years until a decision was made to get married.

I: Was she working?

AS: She was working at General Electric. And, of course, her being of Italian descent, too, although American-born, it felt okay with my parents.

I: Sure.

AS: Although I think my parents are open. They never restricted us to any type of people that you should get married to or socialize with. One of my sisters married an Irishman. My other sister married a Frenchman.

I: [laughs]

AS: So we're really pretty international. [laughs]

I: [laughs]

AS: I think the only thing that it might be worth mentioning since part of this interview or study is on Bridgeport industrial phases it has gone through -- I know I was interviewed by [name] one time as to my feelings about seeing the Bryant Building coming down, and its future of the facility -- the space. And my answer to that was that Bryant stood up for a hundred years, and that certainly over the years, served many, many generations of people with likelihood. And I would certainly hope that the next building that goes up within that area, can serve as many generations as Bryant did. Or really any other building that is torn down and gets re-built within Bridgeport. It served its purpose for its era, and hopefully, the new facility that they put up will serve the next generations -- the next era -- that Bridgeport will be going through.

I: That's well put. That's very well put. Well, thank you very, very much.

AS: My pleasure.

I: I think we've just about covered it all, and if there is anything else, we hope that we can call you again.

AS: It would be my pleasure. I really thank you for having given me the opportunity to contribute, for whatever.

I: Thanks.

End of Interview