

Historical Collections, Bridgeport Public Library
Oral History Project: "Bridgeport Working: Voices from the Twentieth Century"
Andrew Soltis (AS) interviewed by Elizabeth Van Tuyl (I) October 15, 1998.

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AS I was born in Bridgeport Connecticut on April 25, 1924.

I Your parents --were they from the United States?

AS No, my mother was born here but she went with her father to Czechoslovakia and then she came back. When she came back she was already married to my father in Czechoslovakia. My father came back to Bridgeport looking for work 1920-1921 somewhere around there.

I So the family was Czechoslovakian and then...

AS My brother John and my brother Michael were born in Czechoslovakia. I was born in Bridgeport, Connecticut, 1924. So I was the first born

I And how many other children were there in the family?

AS Well, after that Nicholas was born and after that my sister Ann and my sister Pauline

I Oh, okay, And ...

AS All during the depression years.

I Oh yeah, what part of Bridgeport was that, that you lived in?

AS All Bridgeport, Connecticut, on the East Side, I was actually in, I was born actually on Pembroke and Berkshire and I lived in that area about 70 years, more...

I Wow!

AS More let me see now, well put it this way, over 70 years I lived there, actually legit, there was a time there when my father moved to Vermont and I was only a young kid then, then they came back to Bridgeport, because the work was off and on quarries there, my father, my father went up to Putney, Vermont, he had friends up there and came back to Bridgeport and he got himself a job at Jenkins Brothers, the valve company, and one thing led to another then you had a depression, things were tough.

I Well, why don't you tell me a little bit more about the neighborhood, you said you lived in that area for more than 70 years and not a lot of people have done that.

- AS Oh, wow. I was born on the East Side, which is roughly Berkshire Ave, Pembroke Street, Hallett Street it was a wonderful neighborhood at the time, in fact I went to Garfield School. I lived right on Stillman Street up to the sixth grade, then after that living on the other side of Berkshire Avenue I was transferred to Beardsley School for two years and after that I went to Warren Harding on of course for two years then I transferred to trade school.
- I Okay, so for the record then Warren Harding was the high school?
- AS High School for two years, actually I transferred to a state trade school on Kossuth Street [became Bullard Havens School] for the course was sort of getting into the mechanical, at that time there was a name for it, but I forget now.
- I Now, were a lot of the kids from your neighborhood going into the trade schools?
- AS No, just to go to trade school I still had to take another test with the trade school to be....
- I So, is that something you were interested in....
- AS I was gonna, I started off trying to be a toolmaker, it didn't last long. No, I had foundry training and I was in the tool room and things didn't work out that way.
- I Now, had your parents suggested that you do that or was that...
- AS No it was all on my own.
- I It was all on your own
- AS And the course was, at that time they were trying to get people, students, to get into the more or less people work with their hands and get into the mechanical end of things like tool maker, machinist, machine work and that's what I started off and then it didn't work out for other reasons.
- I I want to hear more about your work, but let's back up for a minute and hear a little about the neighborhood...
- AS More about the neighborhood? Oh, when I went to school.
- I About the life in the neighborhood and what was your school like when you went to elementary there?
- AS When I went to school, the school, Garfield was up to the sixth grade. That was, that was limited and then we had to go to another school for religious training

I Oh, okay.

AS It was actually on Pembroke and Arctic, St., John's Greek Catholic Church at the time.

I And that's something your family sent you to?

AS Well, it was, it was against, that was the Board of Education recommendation for like once a week we'd go, well not everybody went to the same area, but they had a chance to go to their church of origin. So what I was about, I went to St. John's Greek Catholic on Arctic Street and the school was on Pembroke Street so we'd go there under Father Charnek and he would give roughly about two hour session, that's a requirement with the Board of Education.

I That's interesting, and so the state was requiring you to go to...

AS Well, if it was a state mandate, we, but it was ...

I But they allowed you to go?

AS Yeah, well I had to get permission from my parents that it was okay because we had to walk to school, there's no busing at the time, it was walk and you walked.

I Well, now why did you end up going to the Greek Orthodox Church [sic, "Greek Catholic Church or Eastern Rite Catholic]?

AS That's my parents.

I And they attended the Greek Orthodox Church [sic, Greek Catholic] as well?

AS They were involved with it on Arctic Street but they, that church was disbanded during the Depression days, they had problems with the Vatican and they went through different kind of law suits and they lost out. So eventually they built a church on Mill Hill Avenue, St. John's Greek Catholic Orthodox [St. John the Baptist Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church].

I Oh, okay

AS Now that's, they started from scratch again they lost Arctic Street and they built a church on Mill Hill Avenue.

I Now, what?

AS That's on the East Side, too.

- I What happened with that? They were Slovakian, right?
- AS Yeah, Carpathian, Morals....it's Czech, you got the Carpathian region that's where my folks came from.
- I So a lot of people from that background were attending the Greek Orthodox Church [sic Greek Catholic] at that time?
- AS Oh, yeah, well at that time was Greek Catholic, and other Catholic, was a moral issue under the Vatican then, but they had to split --something to do with the Priest marrying. See our Priests marry and at that time there's a lot of friction. I was only a young lad then. When that was going on, my mother had to contribute whatever it was and that was, you know, the depression years. Money was scarce. I remember even the Priest used to come over, you know, - look for funds.
- I Oh my goodness.
- AS Yeah, well that's the way it was then.
- I But what was it like at your school? Did you have lots of kids from all different backgrounds and there...
- AS Oh at Garfield school they were all from the neighborhood, no problem
- I All from the neighborhood?
- AS Yeah, yeah, no problem.
- I Well how would you describe the neighborhood at the time? Who were some of your neighbors?
- AS Oh, it was good, it was home and everybody was sort of intermingling with each other no problem, Italians, and Polish and the Russian and Irish you know it was one big happy family, it was, that's the way it was...not the way it is now. I'm going back in my growing up years during the Depression.
- I So you had a real feel of the neighborhood and the community?
- AS Oh, yeah.
- I Well, what were some of the things you did as a child with your family, did you have any hobbies or activities you did with your family or were your parents working the whole time?
- AS Well, I was always working most of my life, paperboy, but I never shined shoes. Everybody was trying to pinball you and stuff like that.

- I Was that your first job, the paperboy?
- AS Something like that, yeah. That didn't payoff. You didn't make much money.
- I How old were you back then when you were a paperboy?
- AS Oh, I was about, maybe 12 - 13 years on that summer.
- I So you did start early and then
- AS Yeah, I had to roll up the papers, all the "Times-Stars" (Chuckle). And there was more work than money involved, all those bucks was hard to get. You weren't around anyway you're not an old timer like me, I'm an old timer.
- I No, but I want to hear all about it, so what did you...
- AS Rocking chair's got me I'm rolling here....
- I After you were a paperboy what were some of the other jobs you had while you were still a student?
- AS Oh, at that time, the way the money was there was the light, the General Electric (GE) end was more or less of a big dumping area there and you go there and pick up scrap copper and you sell it for junk. It was not big money, maybe if you made a dollar or two in a scrounging you were doing good. In fact they used to have a [unclear], I'll never forget it they used to come with this horse and wagon, junk. They used to buy paper everything and I used to sell it to him.
- I So you would just run out from your house and sell it to him?
- AS That's after school I go down to, at that time GE used to burn right behind the Lakeview Cemetery, had a big dump there at GE and it was all legal (chuckle) nobody complained what a smoke job they had all over East Main Street, always smoking, 'cause they were burning all their, GE was a big place, they called the shots nobody stopped them, today they'd never get away with it, well that place is empty.
- I Now did your brothers and sisters have jobs too while they were going to school?
- AS My brother John he was a pinboy also, paperboy. If I --I'm going back before I went to high school, for about a year I was working with the Spring Valley Milk Dairy Company.
- I Oh, What did you do for them?

- AS I was a runner, more or less drop off bottles of milk from the truck
- I So they delivered milk to different houses in the neighborhood?
- AS Yeah, well the man I worked for was William Galski and he was more or less into the raw milk, specialized milk. And I was the only, 14, 15 round there somewhere, I had to hustle - early in the morning, guess what?
- I What?
- AS Three quarts of milk and \$5 a week, seven days a week the job was...
- I Wow! (chuckles) Times have changed.
- AS I made a kill (chuckle).
- I Now, what were your parents doing during this time?
- AS My mother was always, was pretty busy she used to have like a, she did ironing clothes for different people or she'd go have people that ask her to do housework. And like I said, my father worked at the Jenkins Valve company. The pay was about 14 - 15 dollars a week around there somewhere --not much.
- I And then did you rent the house that your family was living in that neighborhood?
- AS Yeah, it was rented, the rent was about \$14 a month from Manero's. Manero's owned a six family house. See, eventually we, the family was getting bigger we had three rooms then we went to the three in back so we had six rooms, we took over two apartments.
- I And did you have any other extended family in the area, any cousins, or aunts or Uncles or other people who had come over to work in Bridgeport?
- AS Oh, I had a lot of cousins and they were, they were in pretty well, good shape, they had all owned homes and their, I remember my father's brother he had on Pennsylvania Avenue (Northeast End Bridgeport) he owned a home there off East Main Street. And in fact when I was a youngster I used to go there and play with his rabbits and climb his trees (laughter). He had like a little acreage there when I was just a kid I go there with my father for a walk.
- I So some of those people had been in the United States for longer than you and your family or they all came over...
- AS Well, no, they came before, see what happened they came here first they're the ones that were sponsoring my father to come here and after my father got organized here, he sent for my mother and she came here with her two boys.

- I And she had first been in the United States but had gone over there...
- AS Well, she was born, my mother was born in Johnstown (Pennsylvania)...as a kid her father he moved back to Europe, he was jumping the fence back and forth he figured he was homesick for Europe and that's where my mother went with the family and that's where she met my father.
- I Now what language did you speak at home?
- AS I used to speak Slovak to my mother, and English.
- I And English?
- AS I was more or less Sloy.
- I And then at your church did you speak English or...
- AS Well, the church, to me, it was more of their Slavonic language [old church Slavonic], I couldn't pick it up.
- I So, it was different people?
- AS Well, if they had it in English I was with 'em, but if they didn't I might as well say I was just occupying the space (chuckle), you know what I'm trying to tell you.
- I Yup, yup.
- AS I didn't know, sometimes my mother said she didn't know the [old church] Slovanic language that good.
- I Right, well what about ---everybody was working really hard, 7 days a week. It sounds like fun, when you did things that weren't work, work related...
- AS Well, they're all, my bother Michael, the oldest, he quit school and he was getting like low paying jobs, he worked for Jenkins also and then at that time they had a rubber division I'll never forget he'd come home he'd smell, he'd be working with the jar rings, I'm going back years ago when they were, they took up another area where they were out of the valves they went into the jar ring business so yeah, those years people used to do a lot of jarring so you know there was a big demand for their product and then and tape.
- I So that would be a ring to put on a jar for canning and things like that?
- AS Yeah, right, right, you're right you're right, you're on top of it. And then they used to make a lot of tape, regular electrical tape there.

I Oh yeah...

AS And that was, that's where my brother worked and he suffered, (chuckle), he'd come home with that smell. Ohhhh!, the whole house would smell, my mother ordered him to put it in the hallway (laughter)...

I Well, how about your sisters did they go to work too?

AS Oh, my sisters were, they were sort of more or less ---there were no demands on them. They were sort of --my mother used to protect them, more less. They used to get miscellaneous jobs, like work in the, when they were of age they'd get a job working in the 5 and 10 cent store, stuff like that, you know.

I But they didn't go to work in the factories?

AS Yeah, my sister worked in the factory. My sister Ann, she worked at the GE and later on, as time went on she got into a secretarial job. She was graduated from Harding by the way, both my sisters graduated from Harding secretarial course. So they did good on that respect instead of, how should I put it, they always had jobs involving working with the top echelon, so.

I Now apart from work and church did your family or maybe your parents belong to any community organizations or charities or some kind of ethnic related community organization?

AS No. Actually my mother was too busy being at home. Had a family to take care of --always cooking and she had side jobs to do. And my father, they used him for a lot of volunteer work, my father was a strong, strong --and they used him for "bugga luggin," moving and all that stuff. I'll never forget when they come to something big, they used to --like a workhorse, my father was a strong man. I'll show you a picture of him later on.

I Oh, great. Okay, well then why had some of these older relatives originally come to Bridgeport?

AS Why?

I Out of all the different manufacturing towns do you know why they came to Bridgeport?

AS Well, put it this way, a lot of my relatives did go elsewhere, they went to Pennsylvania.

I To Johnstown?

AS Well, no, wherever my father went to Pennsylvania he didn't last long, he was in the coal mines and they had an explosion or something and he moved right out of there and he came to Bridgeport. That's a very short time he was there, looking for work

I That was in the teens or the 20?

AS Yeah, the 20's, the 20's, yeah.

I Okay, well why don't you tell me now a little bit more about what you were doing. You were a paperboy, and you worked for the dairy and then you went through the tool....

AS I used to caddie.

I Oh you were a caddie?

AS Yeah, a caddie at Beardsley Park. I used to caddie at Fairchild Wheeler. I was at work all day for about 65 cents.

I And how old were you when you did that?

AS About 14 years old, 15.

I And how did you come to get that job?

AS Looking for work (chuckle).

I Was it advertised?

AS No, you caddie. It was like Beardsley Park, they have a golf course there and then Fairchild Wheeler. You go in there and you sign up to be a caddie you can go there sit all day and you're just lucky you get a job, you know, a lot of waiting until somebody would come along. And they used to work off a roster, it was more of a clique. Matera, Bedsworth they were the caddie masters they used to have to call you whenever they felt like, whenever they felt like it. If you're in, you got jobs, if you weren't, you just sit there like a dummy.

I Now...

AS And now actually to get to Fairchild Wheeler it was all walking and hitchhiking.

I Yeah, because that's actually a ways to go from where you were living?

AS Before you can get to the job you had to hitchhike, you had to walk -- like I live

- on the East Side, Berkshire Avenue. I'd probably have to walk all the way to Brooklawn Avenue and from there I would hitchhike to Fairchild Wheeler golf course.
- I That's quite a ways.
- AS It was an all day, to make let's say 75cents, 65 cents was the minimum that was an all day project.
- I Now were there a lot of trolleys at that time?
- AS A lot of what?
- I Trolleys or what kinds of....
- AS Oh there's trolleys around yeah, I've been on trolleys, but most of my traveling was walking, hoofing it.
- I Well...
- AS You know, they had trolleys East Main Street down all the main arteries then later on after the trolleys they call it the horse and buggy days they come in with buses. The buses were more maneuverable, they can get around more.
- I About when was that?
- AS Was right after the trolleys fell off.
- I Back in the 30's?
- AS Yeah, yeah, yeah, 'cause I'll tell you when they, especially downtown they had a big, big, big project there they had what they called the streets were made from wooden blocks like bricks and they had to dig 'em all up with the rails that was a big job and people use to go and like we were like in a cold water apartment and had a coal stove we used to go more or less pick up some of those blocks and boy they would burn, today you'd never get away with it, it create too much smoke there all creosol, probably, treated, you know, you never heard of it that wooden ...
- I Oh, yep, yep --no I have, but that just brings me back to your house. So what did you have in your house, you didn't have a telephone, did you?
- AS No, no, no.
- I And you called it?

- AS Coal stove
- I Coal stove so can you explain what that means?
- AS That means you had to order coal and use wood, and then later on the same stove was converted to gas
- I Was that your sole source of heat before with the stove?
- AS Yeah, yeah, yeah, then they added, when we got the other apartment we had to get a space heater for gas.
- I When did that happen, when did you convert?
- AS Oh, boy, that was later on, oh let's see, probably 19... right after World War II, I'd say around there somewhere.
- I So in the mid 40's, so over there on the East Side at least with the houses like the ones you lived in there was a lot of smoke?
- AS All those houses were with cold water flats. They didn't have the hot water 'til later on the landlord, it was ordered, I think by the city, that start putting hot water in and converting over and getting rid of some of the lead pipes while they were at it.
- I That's a good idea.
- AS Well, that had to; they were ordered; In fact, as time went on they had to convert the house to higher electricity. [1960's]
- I So you didn't have electricity?
- AS Yeah, you had it but it was a 30 amp service which today you at least have to have 100 amps, I believe, like here this apartment, you got 100 amps so you got enough juice here like say I can run my air conditioning here, when I bought ...that, let's see in the 50's where I lived it wouldn't take it somehow the circuits weren't high enough even though they converted the electricity they just didn't give it the amperage into each circuit, but this house I can do it. But I can do the air conditioner but if I put the electric iron on I'll throw the circuit off so I don't do both. This house is hot. So that's why I got that.
- I Well, is that something with the electricity and the different kinds of energy and heating methods and so forth, was that something that people complained about or everyone had the same thing?
- AS No, that was mandated by law, that's law all these houses, all the houses had to be

converted over, it was in violation of the codes when you lived on the East Side that was the old houses that were probably put up during World War I and at that time there was a....

I That was the norm.

AS I remember actually going back before they had electricity we were using gas, gas mantle, I remember or kerosene to go back, you know and it was it probably when I was, let's see I was born in 1924 but I'd say during the depression years that's when the house I lived in used to have gas and they used to buy these mantles to heat with the gas or give you electricity with the gas too and later on they came on with the electricity.

I And how about the streets?

AS The what?

I How about the streets? Were they pretty well lit?

AS Oh yeah, the streets were all right there's no problem, put it this way, at that time everybody was trusting each other, they were sort of like an honor amongst neighbors that was then

I Well, who was your landlord, who owned all those houses?

AS Maneiro, Maneiro he owned all the houses. In fact, he owned the Pickwick Restaurant down on Pembroke Street

I Do you have any friends from that neighborhood from that time?

AS Have I any what?

I Do you have any friends from that neighborhood from that time still...you still have contact?

AS Oh yeah, I, yeah lot of friends I had but I do go there occasionally I even hate to show you the house that I lived in when I, I only been here officially about two years

I So you've lived in the other neighborhood practically your whole life?

AS I, put it this way. I lived there while my Mother and Father was there when they passed away my brother Michael and I had an apartment next door and I...was, my brother in the meantime was coming there my lady friend Helen all those years so I maintained that apartment and I'm here, so she's just past away couple of years ago, Helen, so then I did move.

- I So that brought you over to this neighborhood?
- AS Yeah, I took over year, I may be leaving it's up for sale.
- I Oh I didn't see that. When you went into the special trade school and you said that didn't work out, what did you do after that? You must have been working?
- AS Oh, you got a good memory, good memory on you.
- I So do you. I'm trying to follow (chuckle)...
- AS I got a job working at Wylig's Silver Company, you probably never heard of the Place. That was probably 19...prior to World War II at Wylig's Silver and I was a *plater's helper* there.
- I Well, why don't you just explain all about that, you know, for the record.
- AS It was a small plant and if I remember correctly I was making about 40 cents an hour at the time. And I remember going there and asking --his name was Superintendent Pistey, for more money. And I got him up to 45 cents and while I was there. I was there maybe eight months, nine months I was --sort of worked my way into the plating room I was working on, I was handling the gold on these loving cups, trophies and all, that was my job in the plating room treat it with gold, there's a lot of technicalities when you work with plating
- I Did they give you special training for that?
- AS Well, I learned on the the job but I never forget the, Salvatio was my foreman, and he says, "Andy gets this job," he says "I trust him with the gold (chuckle)." Well, I used to have to count seconds, a magic wand it was pure gold and he trusted me and he used to come out, put is this way, the product come out good and I was only 16 years old then.
- I Wow, now how many people were working...
- AS At that job I had to get working papers to work.
- I Now what did that entail, because you were 16 or because....
- AS Yeah, working papers, yeah, yeah.
- I And you got that from the State or from the City or...
- AS What's that, the job?

- I The papers.
- AS You had to go to the City. Because at a certain age you had to get working papers to work in a plant; that was the rule.
- I Was it a large plant?
- AS In fact, when I was there, a friend of mine told me about a job at Singer's. And I quit Wylig's and I went to Singers and there I had to get working papers too.
- I And what did you do for Singer's?
- AS I worked in a polishing room I was more or less making, see in the polishing room they make a lot of grinding wheels and they used different grits of sand. And that was my job to make up the wheels for the polishers. In the meantime I worked on some assembly work which was piece work at the, it was more or less he had me on day work and sometimes when they were a little caught up they put me on piece work. So I averaged maybe \$20 a week 15 cents an hour working Singer's when I was there.
- I So at this point you were living still with your family, but you had finished your education and now you were working at Singer's?
- AS Yeah, yeah, well my education, like I told you, when I left the training school I went and looked for work.
- I Now Singer --that was a huge operation at the time. What was that like for the...
- AS No, I got hired John Vraholak he told me they were looking for a handyman. I says, I'll be there tomorrow and I got hired right on the street. See, the hiring was on Barnum Avenue it was an old building there, that's all torn down it's an empty lot now. But what happened when I went there, this is an old man, his name was --he was a hired hand I think it was Ian, before I went in I met him at the doorway then I start talking to him. I introduce myself, I mention --John Vraholak, a neighbor, said there was a job opening in his department. He says, "You're the man I'm looking for." Like I says, that was only 40 cents an hour.
- I Was it, how long did you stay at Singer's?
- AS I was there let's see I was there about a year on that first assignment, then I quit I took a job at Remington Arms. What happened, at that time early 40's or so they had a draft, World War II, and Remington Arms was giving good bonuses if you were drafted from Remington Arms. They were giving, oh maybe 2 or 3 months bonus if you were going in the armed forces so I went there, that's how it is, I didn't get into the Army (chuckle).

- I So that was, of course, that was a munitions factory?
- AS Oh yeah, that was all, Barnum Avenue was all blocked off. I worked in the bullet area, steel cores. And I was on, I was more or less a machine tender for about 20 girls. I used to feed them the material, I was like the *stock handler* for them.
- I And did you have to get special training to do that?
- AS No, no, it was all labor work, all heavy, it was heavy work then and my back still hurts me from then everything was like lead and all that it was all heavy. It was a job to keep those girls going and then...
- I Gosh, they were hiring a lot of people during the war.
- AS Yeah, the pay was about 90 cents an hour it was about 36 bucks a week then. That was considered not bad, you know, at that time. And then I quit.
- I And then what happened?
- AS I was supposed to go, I was being drafted. So what happened, I didn't pass. I was 4F. Bad shape they said. That's what they said, but I'm here today.
- I Were you disappointed or you didn't want to get?...
- AS Well, I was because everybody was gung-ho during the 40's they all were trying to get in and beat up the Japs and the Nazis which is ridiculous, you know, they all had that spirit, like my brother John --he joined the Marine Corps. All his friends were joining and everybody was joining or getting drafted one or the others. My brother John, he actually joined the Marines. He was like a hero at that time. Sometimes I wonder...I did eventually go in the service but that's all at that time the way the publicity and the way the government was propagandizing it was, you know, more or less they brain washed everybody and they figure you going in you're gonna come back a hero. But it didn't work out that ways. A lot of them are gone forever, never came back, so...
- I When you worked at those large factories like Singer what was the atmosphere Like? You must have had workers coming from all different places....
- AS At Remington Arms I had all girls they kept me jumping, (chuckle), I was going home, Andy! Andy! my ears was burning, I said I gotta get a, I got off of that job. They transferred me to the stock room down in the cellar.
- I Where?
- AS At the Remington Arms, that was about 1943 I got laid off from there --no actually I didn't get laid off. I quit, I quit. I had, from Remington Arms, I had to

- get permission from more or less the Labor Board cause I was gonna go into --I latched on to another job National Cash Register Company, apprentice.
- I Oh!
- AS I was gonna go into that, you know, fix cash registers and stuff like that.
- I And how did you find about that job?
- AS That advertised in the papers so I had to go for a hearing and all they okayed it for me to leave Remington Arms, you were not allowed to leave on your own that...
- I So because of the draft because....
- AS Well no because at that time you were frozen to your job so I come up with my alibi, not alibi, my facts were that I was getting no where at Remington Arms. It was a dead end job and I says there's an opportunity going to National Cash Register, they're looking for trainees.
- I Okay, well can you explain a little bit about why you were frozen to the job and how did that work at the time...
- AS Well at that time there was law you used to --couldn't quit your job. If you had a job working at a government facility, that was it. You couldn't say you quit. It was like conscription more or less. You could leave with proper commission and you had to go before a hearing so I got into this National Cash Register. That didn't, it lasted about ten months, it got to where it was like another dead end job
- I What were you doing there?
- AS I was going around more or less, keeping the machines, putting ribbons in cleaning them up and miscellaneous repairs. And it was a job where you had to go by bus, you had to go more or less be a salesman to get your whatever you done you had to go collect your payment and all it got to be a problem where I thought the job was not worth my effort. Just didn't work out.
- I Well, how many people were working there?
- AS Oh, about a dozen people.
- I So it wasn't very large?
- AS They were more or less older than I was but the fact was I did whatever it was and the pay was only \$32 a week. That wasn't, today \$32 is like it's almost impossible to believe that the pays were that low, but that's it. At that time, well anyway, I quit that job. I just look the other day and I went over toRemington Rand. I

was there for, let's see, I got hired at Remington Rand... I worked at Remington Rand 1944 to '45.

I Oh, Great

AS That advertised in the papers so I had to go for a hearing and all they okayed it for --I was working in the B Division, we were working on the more or less what we were working on was sort of the beginning of making a electronic steering devices for the product that was being produced and I was the gyroscope inspector at that time.

I Now, what product were they producing?

AS Well they were making a bomb. They got what they called like sort of a guided missile. It was suppose to be a big secret. In fact, during my stay there I was awarded from the government a citation for my work effort in which I thought all I was doing was inspecting gyroscopes --make sure that they were functioning. I had about six people working for me. I was head inspector. That job paid a \$1 an hour, 40 bucks. Today, look at me today (chuckle). And when the war ended in 1945, I got canned. That was the end of that. There was just --it was a government contract job and that was it. So I think Remington Rand had a shaver division. Well, it didn't work out. They transferred the shaver, so I went back and got a job in Singer's back to Sorrento.

I So what did you do when you went back to Singer?

AS It's hard to believe I went to Singer's for a job. I said the reason why, it's closer to where I live. I can walk to work. See, when I worked at Remington Rand, I had to go all the way to Seaside and hop buses I found that inconvenient. Not that I'm lazy, but if I gotta go to work, I may as well go to work when it's near my home

I Sure.

AS So I went to Singer's and I had my interview with the same, where I was years ago, and he told me Herman Lusibrink is looking for a more or less of a bench mechanic, I says I'm interested. It's working on sewing machines in the casting department. So he sent me over to meet the boss, Herman Lusibrink, and we, I got hired, --actually on Pembroke Street (chuckle). He didn't want to show me the place he figured I would never take the job (chuckle) 'cause it was old. It was a cast iron department, dirty and everything and I says, "I'll take the job." First the guy didn't ask me what I knew, he just says, "How much do you weigh?" I said, "I weigh about 170." He says, "It's gonna be a lot of heavy work." I says, "That's okay, I'm a weight lifter, you know, I pump iron." He says, "You're the man for the job." (chuckle)

I Did you really lift weights?

AS Yeah, I did.

I Oh, you did --that was a hobby of yours?

AS Shut it off. I'll show you a picture of me at Singer's.

I Now, you were saying that you were a weight lifter, that you had that as a hobby?

AS Yeah, I used to pump iron.

I Where did you do that?

AS The YMCA, Bridgeport.

I Down on State Street?

AS Yeah, muscles (chuckles).

I So, you've been doing that for a long time?

AS Wait, I got pictures. Well I think they were punchy. There, some of the guys I was with, they were all gung-ho where are they, let me show you a picture.

I Okay so you're gonna tell me about Beardsley School.

AS After Garfield School, it only went to sixth grade, so it was time to transfer for two more years either Barnum School which was on Noble Avenue or Beardsley School which was on Boston Avenue, the same that I lived on the other side of Berkshire Avenue they assigned me to Beardsley School for two years for the age, up to the eighth grade and while I was there it was considered a better school, because of the neighborhood, shut it, I don't want to say these peoples names....

(MACHINE SHUTS OFF AND COMES RIGHT BACK ON)

AS Well Mrs. Kernias at Beardsley School was my homeroom while I was there and from there I was transferred after two years of Beardsley School which was 1938, class of 1938 I went to Warren Harding

I You don't want to tape that, Warren Harding...?

(MACHINE SHUTS OFF)

I So you were mentioning that after all your long hours of work you did have some recreational activities like the weight lifting and --why don't you tell us some more about some of the other activities you did in your free time with your friends

or maybe your brothers?

AS Well, we did a lot of Polka dancing. There was the Ritz Ballroom, White Eagles, Pleasure Beach, Warsaw Park and that went on for years they had a lot of bands came to the Ritz all during the war, there was always a lot of places to go dancing, no problem.

I So you went out, you just went out with friends dancing?

AS Yeah we'd go to the ballroom and meet some people and you danced. Like the Ritz, you go to Pleasure Beach you meet the girl, you dance. You like her, you dance all night. That's your date and that was it and from there you went, no cars you had to go by bus so then, you know, at that time if you owned a car you were considered wealthy. It was all buses and --actually going to Pleasure Beach --then you transfer downtown to a smaller bus the bus had to be smaller to cross the bridge to go to the ballroom and that cost you a nickel. Or if you went to the Ritz ballroom you had to transfer to East Main Street downtown and there you transfer Fairfield Avenue way up to the Ritz Ballroom which is in Black Rock and that was a long haul by bus, you know, you had to wait for transfers.

I Now, how much did it cost to go dancing, how much did they charge?

AS Oh, 50 cents.

I How about the movies, did you go to the movies?

AS Oh movies, yeah, there was movies. It was the Colonial on Boston Avenue, there was American on East Main Street. There was the Strand on East Main Street. Then you had the ones downtown the Poli and the Lyric then you had burlesque shows at that time and a variety of entertainment. There was always something doing.

I And what about some of, were there other things you did, you went to the parks you went swimming while you...

AS Swimming, oh yeah, I was a member of the YMCA for years. Swim all year round. But then actually to be a member of the Y. It would cost you maybe \$15 a year when I was in my teens. I was member for years; I'd say a good 25 years.

I Oh, that's great.

AS You had to go downtown on State Street...swimming most of the time and weight lifting and then later on it was all swimming.

I Did you take swimming lessons there, is that where you learned how to swim?

- AS No, it just come natural like a duck takes to water. (chuckles)
- I How about with your brothers, or your brothers and sisters, did you go out with them at all or was everyone on a different schedule?
- AS Everybody had their own way of doing whatever they wanted to do. My brothers were golfers, you know, they played golf.
- I Did you go with friends from work when you went out?
- AS Did I what
- I Did you go with friends from work mostly when you went out or...
- AS Well, no, I mostly had friends from the East Side. We'd more or less got together. There was always something doing or if not we used to --actually, if I remember correctly, we used to even walk, all the way just for ice cream --all the way from the East Side, all the way down North Avenue almost to the Fairfield town line there was ... we used to walk it almost from Berkshire Avenue we'd walk it and for 15 cents you got yourself a treat.
- I Now, how long were your work days. You must have gone to work at the factory pretty early?
- AS Well, at that time when I first started at Singer's, I was limited. I couldn't work no more than 45 hours a week. You see, 8 hours a day was 40 hours, and he'd call me on a Saturday for 5 hours and that was it. 'Cause I was under 18 and I couldn't work at that time and at that age. I couldn't work on any machinery either 'cause I was under age. So what I did was mostly hand work, sort of a handyman work, bench work and stuff like that.
- I When you were working at some of these different factories were there any union activities that you remember, were there any problems with the management or strikes or anything like that?
- AS Oh problems when I worked at Singer's they had. It seems like they had - one, two, they had a couple of strikes when I worked at Singer's
- I Can you tell us one?
- AS Well, actually the one I remember --I was actually drafted again into the service. They had what they called a peace time draft and I qualified. They found me fit to serve. I was 1A, good shape (chuckle). No, I was drafted and it was January of, I believe it was January of '49 under President Truman. They had a legislation for

peacetime draft and they grabbed, around maybe, in Bridgeport, they grabbed about 25 that qualified for the draft. I went to Fort Dix for my basic then after Fort Dix. I went to the Army chemical center, Maryland and for...

I Now, is that something that you were interested in doing or ...

AS I was drafted that was either, in other words I was a U.S. draftee, 51090047, that's my serial number, I'm a marked man. No, that was it, actually, I was in a mortar company, like it was chemical training and then about 14 months that I put in. Then they, the government, decided we were surplus they offered early discharge for convenience of the government and the reason why that was happening. They didn't have money funded for us. The government was broke, sort of.

I So, still before the outbreak of the Korean War [June 1950-July 1953]?

AS Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah and what happened --I got sick. I had hepatitis. I was at Valley Forge General Hospital for a couple of months. So being there, they offered me the opportunity to send me back to Maryland or I can go home. So I chose to go home. I had a job at Singer's waiting for me, but that was short lived because the month, --I got discharged in January or February and in September I was recalled for Korea as a reservist. That was under Truman's direction as President of the United States. I was recalled as a reservist and I was retrained at Camp Breckinridge, Kentucky, 101st Airborne Division where training is. Then from there, I was shipped to Korea, 1950

I Why don't you tell me more about that?

AS Well, 1950 I was transferred from the comfort of the United States to Korea, Far East, and we went by boat, troop transport, Private Martinez. And at the time also I went with the Canadian Light Infantry. We were filling in the capacity of the ship, it was a 1,000 Canadian Light Infantry, Princess Pat and we were reservist, 500 of us. So we went by the, from Seattle, Washington up through the Alutian Islands on the Martinez went to Hawaii. They had a ceremonies for the Canadians. Then after that, we went up north again up to Yokohama Japan and I was there at Camp Drake for a couple of weeks and from there I was transferred to Sasebo Japan and from Sasebo transferred to Pusan, Korea which was in the 50's late 50's months of December, I'd say.

I And what did you do when you got there? You were in combat?

AS Then at the time it was, when I got to Korea, it was during the --say the month of December --it was disorganized. Evidently that's when, at that time I believe the Chinese entered the war because the outfit I was assigned to they were more or less annihilated. It was a second chemical mortar battalion is the outfit I was with regionally in the States and they were sent to Korea and I was sent in as a casualty replacement ...so what happened in Pusan...they made the change they couldn't

locate the outfit or the whatever...it was... they transferred me to a smoke company, smoke generator company, 'cause I was chemical corp.

I What does that mean exactly, what were you doing?

AS I was a casualty replacement. I fiddled, I fit into a job where somebody was killed.

I But with the smoke?....

AS That'd be, I was in the smoke generator company, we make smoke, well we can do everything else we were, (chuckle) I always say we were, they called us a bastard outfit, that's not swearing but that's, wherever they need you, they put you. We were everywhere.

I Oh, okay, I see..

AS And we were --I traveled with this outfit 69 Chemical Smoke Generator. We were everywhere, Air Force, we were with the Engineers, we were with the 10th Corp so I guess I did a lot of traveling with that outfit.

I Was that something that, I mean it must have been scary, but was that something that....

AS Actually, when I left Korea I was there not quite a year. I had three battle stars awarded 'cause I was in the area, but I did see --in the action area, I did, not that I was involved personally you know hand to hand but I was assigned to a job to be done and I was in the area, maybe you're not familiar with smoke generators. They use them for camouflage and they use them for decoys to psychologically transfer the action of the Army 'cause you're trying to conceal what you're doing so in other words you draw fire on you. In other words, they do that. That's like they're playing boy scouts but they're playing for real.

I Now, with the chemical division that you'd been in before, what would they have done?

AS Well, the Second Chemical --they were sent there before I got there and they were overrun by the Chinese, so they had a lot of casualties but they were sort of disorganized. They were annihilated

I But you had training

AS Yeah, but they couldn't put me there 'cause the casualties, they were disorganized, there was not enough manpower to call themselves organized so they transferred me to this generator company which also had the casualties but they weren't annihilated so that's about the size of it, I could tell you.

- I Now, you got back home to Bridge--, you went right home to Bridgeport?
- AS Well, after I got discharged I went back. I went back to Bridgeport and then I went back to Singer's.
- I And did you work in the same job that you had before?
- AS Yeah, yeah, but I went to another building. They put up a new building.
- I Better than the "hole" that you were in before?
- AS No, while I was in the the service it was, they decided to put up a new building and that's when they were on strike and I was in the service then.
- I Oh, okay, they went on strike when you were away.
- AS They had a strike I think they were out around 10 months.
- I Wow, what was that about, you must have heard...?
- AS They were, D'Addario, Bonnino and all those guys, the union officials, they ran it. I was in the service I, all I know is, I had a job with Uncle Sam. If I was at home then, I would have been involved but I was in the Armed Forces.
- I Before you left for Korea had you ever been involved in any union activities or strikes or anything at any of the places you've work?
- AS No, no, no, no, no, no. They were just organizing. The union and all that, see now, when I worked at Remington Arms, they had a union but there was a company union. There was no problems and most of my problems were actually when I went to Avco after Singer's. They transferred --I was at Singer's about 20 years.
- I Oh, okay you stayed there for quite a while.
- AS Oh, yeah I stayed until the end, until the company got out of the sewing machines. When I was department 7 and eventually they cleared up, they were transferring over to the --they were going into electronics, they were going into what they called a devise, more or less, I think they called it the Swami. It was a motion detection, it involved --actually, in fact, when ...for the test, the engineer, he sized me up, he said to me, I says, he says, "I don't think you can do the job, Andy, your hands are too big," (chuckle), I says, "Well, there's nothing I can do about that." In other words, "We can't utilize you," so they laid me off.
- I So, what year was that?

AS 1945, oh, my mistake let's see now it was '65

I And then you went to Avco from there?

AS Hold it, it didn't happen that fast, it was time to collect unemployment (chuckle).

I Okay.

AS I collected unemployment for a long time, for a good --maybe better than a year. "Cause when Singer's moved out I could collect and plus I got severance pay. They honored both, so they didn't penalize me. So I was more or less collecting unemployment at the time and then it got to the point where after --I had to go look for another job; my time was running out. So I took a job at --on Mountain Grove Street, K-Land. They did work for Sikorsky and that lasted about three months, --back to checks again, just one week off.

I Did they lay you off?

AS I quit.

I You quit, how come you quit?

AS He promised me a raise. He never gave it to me. He's a --Kaye, his name is Kaye, the boss. He says he couldn't afford to give me a raise so I says, "well then, good bye!" (chuckle) --and then back to unemployment again. I took the penalty and I collected again. I qualified 'cause the name of the game was, I didn't make much money with him, but I tried to get more money for myself but he didn't come true. He says, "I don't need you," I said, "okay," I says, "it's a two way street the door swings, I win."

I Well, with some of these jobs you've had up until the 1960's had you had anything like health insurance benefits or any kind of worker's compensation...?

AS Oh, when I worked at Singer's I had health insurance, Singer's yeah, Remington Arms had it.

I Was that unusual for the time?

AS Yeah

I That was considered desirable?

AS In this Kaye Land he had no insurance at all. It was a small place, small, very small, and the way it worked out it was to my advantage --the moves I made. 'Cause, let's face it, I'm working, working. I'm going nowhere and eventually I

- decided to go to the big leagues, either Sikorsky or Avco
- I Okay, so what happened?
- AS That's the big leagues (chuckle) and when I get there then I got hired the same day. I went there and the job they gave me was a day job it was --I worked on inlet housings. It's part of the engine where it's the housing where it had to be after its cast from the foundry then it was not done in Bridgeport or Stratford, a vendor would send the castings to Avco and then the department I was in, we had to hand cut everything, to specification, it was a little like sculpturing work you put...
- I Now did you have special training for that?
- AS I learned on the job.
- I They just showed you?
- AS And believe it or not in a week's time I was instructor. (laughter)
- I Well, did someone inspect what you were doing or they...
- AS I didn't know. The foreman didn't know the job and the guys that were working There, they were very selfish. They wouldn't tell you nothing, but I did know an inspector, in fact, he was a friend of mine from the East Side and he says, "I'll show you what to do." He was breaking me in. Before I know it, the foreman says to me, "Some new men are coming in. I want you." I says, his name was Dino, I says, "Dino, I'm new myself!" he says, "We figure you can do it." Him and --Sam Salvatio was the shift supervisor, and this sort of can be funny, I'm on there not less, I'll say close to two weeks or better than a week then they got me on overtime and before I know it the union's on my back
- I Uh oh, whenever the union...
- AS One of the co-workers, his name was John, he says, "Being a probation employee, you cannot work overtime." Now, over no fault of mine, because I'm a probationary employee, I gotta do what they tell me to do. So I says, I had my mouth open I said to Dino, "What goes on here?" he says, "I'll take care of that." They had a huddle, the union, defending the contract. They had Dino, they had Salvatio and another supervisor all got in the huddle and the part is this, the guy who was putting the grievance in against me being that I'm only a new employee, probationary employee --the fact is they were not depriving him of overtime. But they wanted me to learn the job and get the production out in the meantime. I was starting to be an instructor for all. I did --nobody knew enough to know how to do it. 'Cause my friend was the inspector was tipping me off different things and I got to be a crackerjack, like it was a natural thing. I liked the job and it was

- nothing to it where I didn't have to suffer, figure things out. 'Cause when you get a job in Avco you're suppose to be qualified to know what you're doing. They hand you the blueprint and you're, their paying you for that so called expertise that they're paying you extra money for... So, it was no problem. I figured things out. I was on the alert and it worked out nice.
- I Now what kinds of co-workers did you have?
- AS Oh there was Tony, John from New Haven, there was colored guys Otto and there was another guy, a DP, Eddie, some of these guys I broke in on the job.
- I So, that was the 1960's were people then driving to work at that point or coming from other towns?...
- AS No, no, when I worked in Avco it was after, let's see now, it had to be...
- I Oh it was...
- AS It had to be about 1969.
- I Oh, okay, so --much later.
- AS It was Korean, not the Korean War, it was the Vietnam War and then Avco, they had over 10,000 people working there, the place was booming.
- I People were coming from all over?
- AS All, the hardest part when I worked at Avco was the traffic. If you missed your, by minutes, nobody'll let you in or out of the parking lot. That's how close it was, like a rat race. It was really rough. And then actually when you come into the building the department I was in there was a long hall. It was another quarter of mile run. I used to advise you run to work to get there on time, because Avco I'd never been to Avco or that's a huge place, I'll tell ya, sometimes I wonder all these people that worked there from the day one when they built the Sikorsky Corsair there the buildings were high, high ceilings and all then when Avco came in there for engines there was a lot of space there, a lot of places where they, that's where all those people were working, it was a big place, about a..., that lasted until I got laid off from there.
- I And when was that?
- AS Let's see, now ah, Avco, that would be '69, '70' either '68, '69 and then '70 'cause then I took the job with the city in '72
- I Okay, so what were you doing for the city?

- AS Well, I took a custodian exam. I didn't like the job they gave me, that one resigned.
- I What job was that?
- AS Custodian, I couldn't go on to the course. First day they told me I was too old to go into the school system at that time which today would be discrimination.
- I Yes!
- AS So then they give me a job at police headquarters, polishing floors so I quit. But then the bridge job came up. I took the test.
- I That was for bridge operator?
- AS Yeah, yeah, and I went on the bridges in 1972 until I retired.
- I Why don't you explain more about what that is since a lot of people don't know.
- AS What, the bridges?
- I Yep, what you did and....
- AS Well I had to take an exam. It was more or less -- it was advertised in the local paper that there was positions open in the bridge department and you had a file on a certain date to qualify for the testing and which I followed all the rules 'cause at that time I was out of a job anyway. And what I did, I did pass. I come in number two. Actually, I come in number one because the guy who was number one, he didn't live in Bridgeport. He lived in Southbury. But I kept my mouth shut, between you and me, to --the testing involved a regular, a knowledge of practical things, you know, work-related chores plus also it was a little mechanical testing they gave you. It's civil service testing and they gave you a job interview. Then -- plus they more or less swore you in for the position. You got a very important job and then I did go to Pleasure Beach and I went to different bridges I operated, but most of my time with the city was at Pleasure Beach. I worked 'til 1994 of April then I retired. From '72 to '94.
- I But what did the actual job entail?
- AS The job was opening and maintaining the bridge. And actually, you worked all different kind of shifts. There was, each week there was a different set up they would make up a roster and you'd fill in; it was unpredictable where a job's gonna be. I was considered a relief man, like a spare tire, they put you where they need ya.
- I For Pleasure Beach, that bridge is now broken down?
- AS No, they had a fire and ...

- I You opened up for boats passing through and.....
- AS Pleasure beach is actually a swing bridge, you know. It's not up and down. It goes side ways. It's not a vertical, it's a horizontal and that was a very busy, busy bridge. They had couple thousand openings a year there on that bridge. Now, when I worked the Congress Street they probably averaged maybe three hundred a year. It was considered a --more special openings for Hoffman Fuel so they utilized that bridge a lot.
- I So, for the record then, Congress Street is further up, so it's closer into the city.
- AS Yeah, Congress Street is closer into the city then you have...the other bridge was East Washington Avenue Bridge. When I got hired at, I'm talking about City Bridges, there was Congress Street, East Washington Avenue, and the Grand Street Bridge which is still there, but it doesn't work anyway. They're gonna dismantle it. East Washington Avenue was torn down. They replaced it as it is now. There's a brand new bridge there and Congress Street bridge --I believe they're gonna replace that, because it was in the papers. They were gonna send out bids for engineering survey and all that stuff.
- I Now what was it like working for the city after your long career in different manufacturers?
- AS I found a home. Look, I took the job for security reasons. But even though I did get the job in 1972 when Mayor Pannuzio was mayor, they had a job cut back, I was laid off, --being laid off they put me on CETA, Comprehensive Employment Training Act, President Ford was the president. Well that, --I had to take that job for unemployment reasons 'cause the city was giving me unemployment so I had to go along with the program. But the only place I actually didn't get a reward was the part of the service with --CETA doesn't count towards retirement. About a little over three years, three and a half years was not, --everything else is honored by the city but being on CETA, a CETA employee, no way. That don't count, burnt again, but I survived.
- I But what were some of the differences? I mean, you said you had "found a home." So you liked it better, being a civil servant?
- AS Oh, I liked it pretty much. I was my own boss. You're on your own. I was sort of like a, how should I put it, you would go on a bridge, you don't know who, --your boss is not there. You just do what you have to do and you maintain the bridge. You have an opening and you do the openings which, how should I compare it, you're your own boss. You want to take a break, you take a break --which that part was good. You want to take a little nap, you take a nap. You know, it was more relaxing.

I Was there a big difference, --of course you were working, that was more recently --but was there a big difference between working for the city in terms of vacation time or benefits like health insurance and things like that and when you worked other....

AS I'll go, I'll say it right frankly. Working with the city the benefits were excellent I found nothing wrong. I accumulated all my sick days as much as I could. That was like money in the bank when I retired --I had one hundred and twenty days, eighty five percent of that I got lump sum. So those days are always an incentive of to be on the job. I don't know how it is now, but when I retired, I retired with ah, five weeks vacation because when I retired in April I qualified for more vacations, personal days, sick days, all piled up, so I made it, I made it out good.

I Now were you a member of the union?

AS Yeah, I was in NAGE [National Association of Government Employees]. NAGE, you belong to NAGE, don't ya?

I Ah, supervisors union, I think?

AS You belong to the supervisors union, oh then you're not with NAGE no, oh, I didn't know that.

I (chuckles) There are a lot of different ones [unions] at the Library.

AS Yeah, well, I'm saying with the...wait a minute. Yeah, I got a letter the other day, yesterday. NAGE, NAGE is involved with some kind of negotiations and -- something to do with the pensioners the day they didn't follow them through and there's a problem.

I Uh oh.

AS The longevity was ah, I was picking up fifteen hundred dollars near the end. That's like ah, a bonus plus that helped my pension too. It was from the city. The city, the city pension goes to the state and this year I got ah, five- percent raise. I never had such a good deal. (laughs)

I Did you ever think when you were a paperboy that you would have such a deal?

AS No, I can't complain; I mean, I'll be frank with ya. I started [retired] with the city four years ago, and each year my pension goes up five percent. It was before I started with the city it was maybe seven, eight hundred dollars a month. Now eleven hundred dollars. And each year it goes up, so ah, next July it'll be another five percent. So if I live long enough, I'll break the bank.

I (laughs) Okay, well lets see it!

- AS No, I'm saying the benefits are excellent, so I advise you stick with the city.
- I (laughs) Okay.
- AS But don't get fired.
- I (laughs) No, I don't want that. What about --you worked an interesting span of time, um, from the thirties through the 1990s and all in Bridgeport or and around Bridgeport.
- AS Yeah, I was always a local; I never worked out of town.
- I Did you, have a sense of times changing, the work environment changing while you were out there in the work force or were you just trying to get a job?
- AS Well, I'll explain to you. I worked twenty years for Singers, okay? Now working for Singers when I was there, if you're not twenty-five, then all those years don't count. So when I started, when I was, say, 16, 17 years old, 'round there somewhere, well say right off the bat those years don't count for retirement. Only start 25 and on years of age now. So I qualified, I got laid off in July and I qualified in the month of April for my pension. That's the rights with Singers which is fifteen dollars a month for twenty years service. I just made it by a couple of months, April, May, June, July, yeah by three months I made it. See? That's Singers, and I still get it, fifteen dollars and three cents.
- I Wow.
- AS Yeah, wow. That couldn't even buy a bottle of Bullsworth today.
- I But um, since we're working on, uh, during all these different years, during the Depression, and the war times, uh, did you notice a lot of changes in the city work force or in all the availability of employment?
- AS Aw, yeah sure. Well, 'cause I, if I remember correctly, when I was working at Singers ---the fire department, the police department, those guys work the long hours and they'd only be bringing home, thirty, thirty-five dollars a week. But their unions, they plugged. In fact, in today's paper the firemen --they're gonna have another pow-wow, they would [unclear] without a contract. Well, I always look at it this way, you gotta cry to get the action. A squeaky wheel without oil (chuckles). So, you know, ---see with NAGE, they're not that effective. It's a small outfit. The fact that when I left I got this from a grievance with the city, this television. I'm the guy who had all the evidence against the city; they were violating the contract. What the heck was his name? Well anyway, Bill Stoffer, yeah, he was the head of NAGE Union when I left, when I'm retiring and I'm the guy that had all these grievances in...bad boy.

- I You had all the grievances?
- AS I'm the one that put them in because I had the evidence that they were cheating.
- I Okay, so then could you back up for a minute? Who was cheating whom?
- AS The city was not honoring my seniority and they were changing my hours of work, so not to pay me or put junior men in my place. In other words, they violated my seniority, my job rights, okay? But I'm whitey; they get away with it. Ya know what I mean?
- I So what did you do? You had the grievances.
- AS So I put grievances in. And the way it worked out --I worked for Dan Sullivan.
- I Who was what? What position?
- AS He was Director of Maintenance. And it involved him 'cause he was a director and they had a girl handling the job and she, she, is that on?
- I Yes.
- AS Oh, I better not go on any farther.
- I Okay, well, um, I was just wondering if you wanted to tell me something, you know, about your work experiences in Bridgeport ah, something that we haven't covered; something that we might have left out?
- AS Well, talking about the present, [where] jobs are involved...I was lucky in my time of working years...the jobs were plentiful, 'cause the factories were here and, sort of, you could be a little picky. And if you quit you always found a job, but today, the way things are today, the industry's out of Bridgeport and it can be through politics --it's on a higher level. It could be through the state income tax, it could be other reasons. It's hard for a company to operate and I'm going at my outlook on the way things were then and the way they are now and how their companies more or less left this area. And part of it could be the state is a tough place to make ah, more or less ends meet for a company, there's too many restrictions.
- I Well, how about when you worked for Singer, you worked there for twenty years and then you were laid off we had already past the sort of um, World War II era boom. Did you get a sense back then that things were changing?
- AS When I left Singers there was just plenty of work, there was a Sikorsky, there was ah, Avco. They were hiring. And then well, I could have told you I utilized some of the unemployment benefits which I needed a little vacation or a rest.

- I Yes, I'd say you did deserve a rest (laughter).
- AS I had no ah, put it this way, I knew how to handle my money. I wasn't borrowing. I wasn't throwing it away. I don't gamble. I'm not ah, more or less, well, occasionally I take a drink but I never throw my money out on stuff like that. But it pays off, health wise and money wise. See that place across the street?
- I Uh, huh. The Catholic War Veterans?
- AS Imagine if I was a member there? It'd be Waterloo for Andy. I'd go over there, they got a bar and wild women, --be the end of Andy.
- I Uh oh, well, what about um, you mentioned the changing work environment that, you know, there are fewer and fewer factories here. How about your neighborhood that you grew up in? Have you seen a lot of changes there?
- AS Aw yeah, if you go to there today, it's all knocked down or burned out. Should I show you a picture? Shut it off.
- I Sure, we'll take the whole interview and we'll um, put a transcript, we'll make a transcript from it, so we'll copy down what was said. Um, at this time I guess I'd just like to thank you, Mr. Soltis, for being interviewed and we appreciate it. We're very interested in what you had to say.
- AS Well, see my nephew, you asked me over a year ago I think it was. Yeah I never bothered. But the, I called him a couple weeks ago and I says, "I'm a need ya again," 'cause I got a little things that have to be done. So the next thing is I'm gonna have my toe worked on, the big toe, and I gotta bug him to take me down to Bridgeport Hospital then take me home.
- I Right.
- AS Those are house rules.
- I Right. (laughs)
- AS I just can't see how --it doesn't work out that way, so I grab him.
- I Good.
- AS If he don't, I'll flatten him.
- I Uh oh. Well, I believe it. So I was wondering if you would be willing to tell me again about what you were saying a few minutes ago about your advice for work and not to, working for the company.

AS My advice, like I gave advice to my nephew Johnny, is this on tape?

I Yes.

AS Okay, my nephew Johnny was out of a job, and I'm the one that was after him to get a job with the Bridgeport Public Library System --to take the examination. And being a city employee myself under bridges, I thought it would be something more or less he can fall back on, some security. 'Cause the jobs he had were fly by night jobs, --was not a job where you can call a job. It was insecure jobs and knowing my nephew Johnny --he was a bookworm, I told him to take the test for the Librarian I. And the fact remains he waited until the last day of the sign in. (laughs)

I Don't we all?

AS After me, actually, I'm on his back to get movin'. He was --something about the fact that --I really don't know, then he finally did make the move and the last day, the deadline to put the application in he did show up. 'Cause I called and asked my friend Jack Colligen if it was so and he says "yeah." So...

I And how about what you told me about working for yourself and not working for...

AS Well, working for the city --the job I had as a bridge operator, I was more or less my own supervision, which was a lot of freedom. Not many jobs are like that. In other words, it's a trust, --my assignment to do my duties and whatever it has to be done to service the public, be a gentleman, --which I believe was a wonderful feeling, where I could help. And the job itself --in other words, reporting to the job was like a home. It was no pressures. And one thing led to another and I finally retired.

I A well deserved retirement.

AS Now the money's rolling in.

I Good

END OF INTERVIEW