

Historical Collections, Bridgeport Public Library
Oral History Project: "Bridgeport Working: Voices from the 20th Century"
George C. Scott interviewed by Mozella Burns on January 24, 1998.

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George C. Scott interviewed by Mozella Burns on January 24, 1998.

GS: My name is George C. Scott.

I: What year were you born, Mr. Scott, and where were you born?

GS: I was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I was born at 6 and 28 and 14. [6/28/14]

I: What was it like when you lived there? What kind of neighborhood did you live in?

GS: It was a steel industry.

I: A lot of working families?

GS: Oh, yes. Quite a few.

I: Was it ethnically mixed? Was it black and white?

GS: Black and white. Mostly Polish people.

I: Mostly a Polish neighborhood?

GS: Yes.

I: Tell me about your family. How many children in your family?

GS: My mother had twelve, but they all passed away. The only one living is my brother and myself.

I: But there were twelve children born, all together?

GS: Yes.

I: And only two of you living?

GS: Yes.

I: How many sisters?

- GS: I don't know. I really don't know about sisters.
- I: I'm assuming both of your parents were African-American.
- GS: Right.
- I: Did both your parents work?
- GS: Yes.
- I: They did?
- GS: Yes. My father worked for -- I know my mother worked for private families, and my father -- I don't know where he worked at. I called him just a few minutes ago, but it's slipped my mind.
- I: But when did your family move to Bridgeport, and why did they move here?
- GS: Well, they moved here because my uncle -- he came up here with, say, about twenty-five men from Pittsburgh -- to the Navy Steel Company in Pittsburgh, and they wanted some men up there, so I think the foreman went around and talked to some of the men. My uncle came up here. The man that was fooling around with my mother came up.
- I: What year?
- GS: That was 1925.
- I: So what changes took place in your family when they moved to Bridgeport? Did anything change?
- GS: Yes, there was quite a change when I got here. You know, there were a lot of things around in Bridgeport at that time that were very -- I don't know how to say it, but discriminatory -- yes, that's what it was.
- I: So maybe what you moved into -- there was a lot of discrimination there?
- GS: Oh, yes. Plenty of it.
- I: Did you have any fights with the boys in the neighborhood?
- GS: No. I got along with the boys.
- I: You got along with the boys in the neighborhood?
- GS: Yes.
- I: Tell me about growing up here. How did you like growing up here, then?
- GS: Well, to tell you the truth, I didn't go out too much. Street cars were running at

that time, around in Bridgeport. There was no busses at that time, when I came up here. I turned around and -- let's see. It's been so long now, but I'll get up to it. [pauses] When I came to Bridgeport, things had changed quite a bit. So then I turned around and I got along with some of the fellows that I was fooling around with. Most of them were Polish people and Italians.

I: What street did you live on in Bridgeport?

GS: I lived on Railroad Avenue.

I: Okay. That was a mixed neighborhood then?

GS: Yes, a mixed neighborhood. Yes.

I: Tell me about the racial mix. How many were black, how many were white, were they all poor, were they mixed -- poor and rich?

GS: It was a regular mixed family.

I: But a lot of Polish?

GS: Yes. A lot of Italians, a lot of Polish people, too.

I: Where did you go to school?

GS: I went to school at Prospect School. I got kicked out of there. Then I went to Roosevelt School. That's where I graduated from -- Roosevelt School.

I: That was located on Warren Street, then?

GS: No, that was located on Warren Street.

I: Did you graduate from high school -- did you go to high school?

GS: I went right up to high school until -- my mother was working then for private families.

I: What high school?

GS: Central High. I went to two years of college and then I got shipped over from Congress High to Central High. But my mother was working in private families, and I told her -- I told her, "I'm going to get you out of there," because she was coming home at nine or ten o'clock at night, and she had to turn around, fix our -- well, she used to turn around and fix our supper for us, but in the meantime, she turned around and had to wash clothes, give us -- my brother and I -- baths. And then at that time, [unclear] wasn't doing too good.

- I: So you decided to quit school?
- GS: I decided to quit school. I quit with six months to my graduation.
- I: Okay. Tell me about your social activities. What kind of music did you listen to at that time? Did you go dancing?
- GS: Well, I used to go dancing down at the Fraternity Hall. That was on Main Street, right where Jenkins Valves -- where they got the baseball diamond at now.
- I: It's called Fraternity Hall?
- GS: Yes, Fraternity Hall.
- I: What kind of music did you listen to then?
- GS: I used to listen to jazz music.
- I: Did you dance?
- GS: Yes, I used to dance quite a bit. [laughs]
- I: [laughs] What kind of radio programs were popular at that time, that you listened to?
- GS: Well, we didn't have too many radios at that time. All we had was, say --
- I: The phonograph machine?
- GS: No. You know at that time what we had? We had, I'd say -- I can't call it by name, but what we had was -- I can't remember. It's so long ago.
- I: But you didn't have a radio?
- GS: No. We had a radio -- like a cabinet radio.
- I: Yes, yes. I wanted to know what kind of programs did you listen to.
- GS: Well, the programs that I listened to was, say, "The Shadow Knows." [laughs]
- I: Oh, yes.
- GS: "The Shadow Knows," and I also listened to -- baseball, too. Baseball used to come on.
- I: T.V. programs. When you finally got a T.V. -- when did you get a T.V.? What year did you get a T.V.?
- GS: I got a T.V. back in -- let's see. What year was it? We were down in the South End, living on Railroad Avenue. I think we got a T.V., say, about -- just before my mother passed away. She passed away in 1969.

- I: Did you have any favorite programs then?
- GS: No. Whatever came on, well, I listened to it.
- I: Newspapers -- did you read newspapers?
- GS: No.
- I: What newspapers did you read?
- GS: At that time it was *Bridgeport Star* and the *Bridgeport Post*.
- I: That's the only ones you read?
- GS: Yes. *The Times Star* and the *Bridgeport Herald*, too.
- I: Okay. Did you participate in the after-school activities when you were in high school -- sports?
- GS: Oh, yes. I played basketball, I played baseball. I played a little football -- not too much.
- I: Did you work after school?
- GS: No, I never worked after school.
- I: Did you belong to any ethnic or social organizations?
- GS: No.
- I: Did you attend church?
- GS: Well, the church that I went to -- I was going down on Broad Street.
- I: What was the name of the church?
- GS: Bethel AME.
- I: How long ago was that?
- GS: Oh, that was back in 1925.
- I: 1925?
- GS: Yes.
- I: Were you actively involved in church?
- GS: Yes, I was. I used to sing for Miss Kazee. She was our music teacher.
- I: Good, good. You sung the choir?
- GS: Yes.
- I: Did you do anything else?
- GS: I didn't take too much time -- only on Sundays I used to go to church quite a bit.

- I: So, why did you join this particular church, as opposed to the other churches?
- GS: Well, my mother was going to that church. She was going there with a friend of hers that passed away, Charlie Mines.
- I: Who was the minister of that church when you joined? What was the minister's name?
- GS: The minister there was -- what the heck was his name now? It's been so long now.
- I: Well, can you remember some other ministers in the church that you belonged to?
- GS: Yes. There was another minister there -- he came there about -- he used to live right there, right around on Broad Street. What was his name now? It's been so long, I can't remember.
- I: What was your first full-time job?
- GS: My first full-time job -- my part-time job was working in the Bridgeport Casting Company.
- I: What did you do in that job?
- GS: I was shifting weights. When the molders put their little what-do-you-call-it on the floor, and after they molded the [unclear] into these molds, well, I used to dump them and cut sand -- stuff like that.
- I: Okay. What about your full-time job?
- GS: I didn't have a full-time job at that time. I was going to high school and I was working part-time in the evenings.
- I: After high school, you started your full-time job. Where did you work?
- GS: I worked at the Bridgeport Casting.
- I: That was your first job -- you worked there how long?
- GS: I worked there, say, -- oh, up to about 1938 or 1939.
- I: And then, where did you work after Bridgeport Casting?
- GS: Well, after that -- we went to work for -- the WPA [Works Progress Administration] came in at that time.
- I: Okay. What did you do for WPA?
- GS: Well, at WPA I used to go out -- we had programs like, say, around Bridgeport.

Sometimes we had to go all around the City of Bridgeport.

- I: What kind of work were you doing?
- GS: The work that we were doing -- we were picking up trash and -- let's see. What else were we doing? It's been so long now.
- I: After you completed WPA, did you go to another job?
- GS: Yes. I worked at a government job, out in Black Rock -- I mean [Bostwick] Avenue.
- I: What was the name of the company?
- GS: The name of the company was --it was a government job. It was all together with WPA.
- I: All WPA?
- GS: Yes.
- I: Was there any company that you worked at full-time for many years?
- GS: Yes. I worked at Aluminum Company of America.
- I: Where was that located?
- GS: I started out in Fairfield in 1940, and then I came into Bridgeport, and I was made a foreman at that time.
- I: How did you get this job?
- GS: I got this job through -- well, to tell you the truth, I had to go out there and stand out there at Fairfield, and the man used to turn around and come out -- his name was Joe Jinks. He used to come out and he used to holler out, "I want you, I want you, I want you." Whoever that he thought could do the work.
- I: So he picked you?
- GS: Yes, he picked me out.
- I: So, you managed to stay on the job, once he picked you?
- GS: I stayed there right up until 1961.
- I: So you retired from that job?
- GS: No, they closed down. That was down in Bridgeport.
- I: Did you experience any difficulties in that job?
- GS: Well, once I did. We had a white fellow there -- he was Syrian [Masonic?] -- and

he was trying to get my job. You see, I was like a foreman, you know?

I: Yes.

GS: So, he turned around -- I used to turn around and make sure -- I had the electrical greaser and I had also men working under me, as far as oil and grease men. So I turned around. I had to go check with somebody downstairs. They had three floors at the Aluminum Company at Seaside Park, and I had to turn around and go down to the second floor to check on one of the boilers down there. And when I came back upstairs -- well, this white fellow -- he turned around -- he was a Syrian [Masonic] -- he turned around and messed up. You see, when we got finished at night, I told all the fellows -- we had a black man, too -- his name was Scott -- the same as my name. I asked him, "Walt, did you check up on everything upstairs?" "Oh, yes, George. Yes, I did." So I turned around -- I took him for his word because he was a big Masonic, you know? I figured he wouldn't lie. But he did lie about it. Some of the [unclear] burned up at night, and the white fellow -- the big boss held me responsible for it. And do you know what? I had to turn around. I was running back and forth, from Fairfield out to Bridgeport, until finally, I talked to Jack Cummings. He was an electrical boss. And Jack said, "I'm going to get you back in here." So I told Ron, "I don't know, Jack. I don't know. I don't think I want to come back." So he said, "Well, look. forget Jack Burrow, because I am the boss now -- of all the electrical department." He said, "I'm the boss. Whatever I say, goes." So I said, "Okay." Me and him got along great, you know?

I: Yes.

GS: So I turned around and --

I: You got your job back?

GS: I got the job back. I was working in the plant at the time. I got the job back. But where I was working at -- I was working as a custodian. Jack asked me did I want to come back in, you know? So I said, "Yes." I said, "Well, you know, you know you and Jack have got some differences between the both of you." He said, "I'm the boss." Just like that. He said, "I'm the boss."

I: Was there a union, and were you a member of the union?

GS: No, we didn't have no union at that time.

I: Oh! So it was up to the boss?

GS: Yes. The union came in later on.

I: Okay. When the union came in, did you belong to the union?

GS: Oh, yes.

I: What was the name of the union?

GS: Local 324, NIC Steelworkers of America.

I: What did you have to do to join? Did you have to pay money out of your paycheck?

GS: Oh, yes, yes, yes. They'd take it out.

I: They took it out?

GS: They'd take it out -- yes.

I: So, did you ever have to have them represent you or anything?

GS: No, no. They never represented me.

I: How were you treated by your bosses?

GS: The only one that I told you -- the big, general foreman -- me and him didn't get along -- the big boss.

I: No?

GS: No. We didn't get along too good.

I: Why not?

GS: Do you know one thing? He liked me at first because he told me, "You stick by me, and you'll go places with the Aluminum Company of America." But then, after [unclear] burned up in the oven that night, he turned on me. Oh, man! He really turned on me.

I: He turned on you?

GS: Yes.

I: Did you receive vacation time? Did you get vacation time?

GS: Oh, yes. We used to get, say, two weeks. And then, after two weeks, you'd get three weeks, and after you were there a certain many years, you used to get a

month.

I: Wow. How do you describe your relationship with your co-workers?

GS: My co-workers -- I got along good with them. I got along real good with them.

I: What was the racial mix at Aluminum?

GS: Well, the racial mix was Italians -- mostly Polish people.

I: Mostly Polish people?

GS: Yes.

I: Were there a lot of black people there, or just a few?

GS: Yes. Oh, there was quite a few blacks.

I: Quite a few blacks there?

GS: Quite a few blacks.

I: Did you receive benefits like insurance and sick leave, as part of the job?

GS: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. When the union came in.

I: When the union came in?

GS: Yes.

I: Tell me about your salary. Do you think you were adequately compensated for the work you did?

GS: Oh, yes. I certainly was -- yes.

I: Tell me about your salary. What did you start at and what did you end at?

GS: I started, say -- I was getting sixty-two cents an hour, and they used to pay you in money at that time.

I: Okay.

GS: That was out in Fairfield. And when I came to Bridgeport when, it turned around, after the union got in there. They said, "You better start paying off with checks." So, we used to get a check every week. Every Friday.

I: And what did you do with your check? Did you cash it at the bank?

GS: I used to turn around and give it to my mom, God bless her soul, may her soul rest in peace.

I: So, how large was this company? How many people worked there?

GS: Oh, during the war I'd say -- you know what? I was rejected out of the Army. I

got into the draft and I went in, but my right ankle was -- I had a compound fracture in my right ankle, so the doctor asked me -- he said, "Man, how did you get in this Army?" I said, "Hey, look, they passed me up in New Haven." I said, "Hey, you know, I got nothing to do with it. You're in the Army now." I turned around and I said to myself, "I'm in the Army now. I don't know what to do. I shouldn't be in here, but I'm I here." So then, right off the bat, I turned around and I said to myself, "Well, I'm in here. I might as well make the most of it." We were out on a trip. We were up there in Massachusetts, on a trip, preparing ourselves for overseas, you know? We turned around and my ankle swelled up so large after that compound fracture -- that's when the C.O. came to me and he said, "Hey, man, how did you get in the Army?" I said, "Hey, look, your doctors put me in here. I told them I had a compound." He said, "I don't want to hear that." So I'm in here. I turned around and I said to myself, "Well, I'm in here, I might as well make the most of it. This is the reason why I'm in here."

I: Did they discharge you?

GS: Yes, yes. They gave me the discharge, and they told me -- they gave me a discharge from up there in Massachusetts, and I had to go back to the labor board -- not a labor board. What was it at that time? Where they signed you up for the draft. I had to go back to them, and I told them, "They told me up there at Massachusetts -- they released me. I got to go back to work." They said, "Where did you work?" I told them where I worked -- the Aluminum Company of America. I said, "As long as I'm working, they won't bother me. They'll check on me every week. As soon as they found out that I am staying out of work and missing time, they'll put me back in the Army."

I: So you were back at the Aluminum Company of America?

GS: Yes, yes.

I: How large was the company? How many people worked there, approximately?

GS: Oh, a good twenty or thirty thousand people worked there, at that time.

I: At that company?

GS: Sure. We had one, two, three -- we had four floors down there at Seaside Park,

that was right next to Bassick Company, where Sikorsky is now. Before Sikorsky moved in there, it was all the Aluminum Company. Bassick wasn't in there.

They turned around and they rented out to Bassick, and they rented out to Sikorsky.

I: That's how they got in there?

GS: Yes.

I: Were there any strikes or lock-outs while you were there?

GS: Oh, yes.

I: Did you ever strike?

GS: We had a strike there, say, about twice, while I was there.

I: Now, what were the reasons for the strikes?

GS: The strike was for more money.

I: So, how long were you out before you went back in?

GS: Well, the first time we weren't out that long. But the second time --

I: How long were you out. Tell me about it. [laughs]

GS: [laughs] You know, the second time, it was during the wintertime, and it was rough.

I: Did you walk a picket line?

GS: Yes, yes.

I: Tell me how it worked.

GS: The picket line was bad.

I: Did they take attendance at the picket line? Tell me about it. How did they know who was there, how did they know who wasn't there?

GS: You know what? [laughs] I don't know how to explain it to you, but the picket line was real bad -- real bad -- because during the time that we were on the picket line, we had a rough winter. You know, winters around there like it was before. The winters that we had around here before were bad. Real bad. And it snowed. I know the time that I was working down at Aluminum, down on Bostwick Avenue. I'll tell you about that later on. Bostwick Avenue -- that was during the time before I went to the Aluminum Company.

- I: Okay, but I want to know about the strike. I want to know how the weather was and what you had to do, how long did it last.
- GS: It lasted, say, about four months.
- I: Four months?
- GS: Yes.
- I: You mean, no paycheck coming in?
- GS: No. All we do is get money from the strike fund.
- I: How much did they give you?
- GS: Every two weeks they used to give us so much money. Say, about twenty-five or thirty dollars. And at that time, things were cheap. You could get a pack of cigarettes for about five cents. And you could get a loaf of bread, milk -- whatever.
- I: So, did the union win this strike? Did you get what you asked for?
- GS: Oh, yes, yes. We definitely got it.
- I: You wanted more money?
- GS: Yes.
- I: What else did you want besides more money?
- GS: Essentials.
- I: Benefits?
- GS: Benefits -- yes. And also, we add what we call -- gee, it's been so long that I've forgotten a lot of these things.
- I: Let's talk about your living situation as a young adult. This is before you got married, before you had children. You're young, you're working. What did you do? Did you go out? Did you go to the movies? Did you date?
- GS: I used to play a lot of sports.
- I: Where did you play at?
- GS: Seaside Park.
- I: Organized sports?
- GS: Yes, organized sports.
- I: You played against other teams?

GS: Yes.

I: What did you play?

GS: I played third base, short-stop, second base.

I: What was the name of the team?

GS: Park City Giants.

I: And who did you play against?

GS: We used to play against quite a few teams. We used to go out of town, to Wilton. We played up in Danbury. Danbury was quite a -- it's a racial town up there, in Danbury. They used to call us Niggers and whatever, you know? "I bet if you took a piece of watermelon up there, I bet he would get it, you know?"

I: The team was all black -- the team you belonged to?

GS: Well, a lot of the teams that we played -- we played a lot of white teams.

I: But your team was all black?

GS: All black -- yes.

I: So, how did the team get organized? Who put it together?

GS: Bobby Green. He came here way before I did. He had the Park City Giants, and put it together. Because I was a bat boy for him at that time. When I came to Bridgeport, I was a bat boy for him.

I: Tell me about dating. Did you date a lot?

GS: No, I didn't have no time for that. [laughs]

I: No?!

GS: No. [laughs]

I: Okay. Well, then, you did get married?

GS: Yes, I got married later on in years.

I: How long were you married?

GS: I was married -- you see, that was my second marriage. The first marriage didn't--

I: You were younger?

GS: Well, I was young at the time. I loved the woman. Her name was Scott -- Dorothy Scott. But she tricked me. Do you know what I mean by tricking me? She used to work up in Bridgeport Harbor. She had that Northeast part of the

program up there. She used to turn around -- while I was working down at the loom and stuff, she turned around and used to go to the Elks, to the Legion, throw away a lot of money. "Oh, I got a man -- my husband. He's doing this and doing that." Then word got back to me, and when I found out and I started questioning her about it, she refused to -- she didn't own up to it, you know? But I said, "Well, I'll let it go at that."

I: So you got married a second time?

GS: Yes.

I: Did you have children from this marriage?

GS: Yes, yes. I had children.

I: How many children.

GS: Oh, about three.

I: Are they all living?

GS: Yes, but my ex-wife died. She got married again.

I: So, how many children do you still have living? Boys? Girls?

GS: All girls.

I: Do you have any grandchildren?

GS: Yes.

I: How many?

GS: I've got two great-great grandchildren, and I've got two grandchildren.

I: Very good. Boys? Girls?

GS: Yes, yes.

I: Two boys? Two girls?

GS: I've got a boy and a girl -- a great-great granddaughter and grandson, and I've got -- you know him?

I: Right -- your grandson. Yes.

GS: He was going to [unclear].

I: Right.

GS: And I also had -- oh, it's been so long that I've really forgotten a lot of them.

I: Tell me about the war. What war did your family live through here, and what

impact did it have on your family?

GS: Well, the impact was during the Second World War.

I: What kind of impact did it have on your family, in terms of housing and jobs and eating and places to live and food?

GS: Well, right at that time, things were real cheap. Not like today. So therefore, we didn't have too much, as far as going out and doing the things that we were supposed to do. You know, I turned around -- I hate to say this, but I'm going to say it. I turned around and I -- oh, I better not say it.

I: [laughs] So, during World War II, did your mother and father have trouble finding a job, keeping food on the table?

GS: Well, my father was dead. He died in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

I: Oh, okay. So your mom came here.

GS: My mom came up here.

I: So, did she have any trouble keeping food on the table in her house?

GS: No, no. All she did was work in private families.

I: Okay. So, when the Depression came, it didn't effect you at all -- the Great Depression?

GS: No, no. Because I told my mom -- I said, "Look, I'm sick and tired of you out there, working for them white people. I'm going to drop out of school." She said, "No, no, no. Don't drop out of school." I said, "Oh, yes. I've got to drop out of school."

I: So you dropped out of school during that time? Was it during that time?

GS: Yes.

I: Let's talk about your other job you had in Bridgeport. You told me you had another job after that.

GS: Yes, I had another job out there, with the -- that was in 1938-1940. Because in 1940, I went into the [unclear] Company. It was a government job, under the WPA.

I: Oh. So, after you left the Aluminum Company, did you work any place else?

GS: [pauses]

- I: You left there, I think you said, in the 1960s.
- GS: I went to AVCO.
- I: You went to AVCO? Okay. What did you do at AVCO?
- GS: I went in there because I knew -- you see, the girl that I went to high school with -- I knew her father, you see?
- I: Yes.
- GS: Her father told me -- he said, "Any time that you want to work for me or under me, you come over to AVCO and I'll put you to work." He was the top position over there. That's how well I was liked in Bridgeport. I told him when I went in I wanted to **stop** from the bottom and work my way up.
- I: So, what position did you start at?
- GS: I started as a custodian.
- I: And you worked your way up?
- GS: Yes.
- I: To what?
- GS: I worked up to -- what was it now? I went from material handler, I went up to stop chases, and during the time of stop chases, we were on a jurisdiction over at [unclear] -- you couldn't go where I used to go in. Because over there -- on my badge I had ABB. I could go anywhere in the plant.
- I: It's that badge?
- GS: Yes, the badge. And you were under jurisdiction with the Internal Revenue for about, say -- after you got out, or you were fired or anything, you were still under their jurisdiction.
- I: So, what was the racial mix-up at AVCO when you went there? What year did you start at AVCO?
- GS: I started back there in 1960.
- I: After you left the Aluminum Company?
- GS: Yes.
- I: So, what was the racial make-up at that time?
- GS: Oh, it was like Italians, Polish people, Irish people -- a mix.

- I: Were there a lot of African-Americans there then?
- GS: Oh, yes. Quite a few of them -- yes.
- I: How did management treat you there -- your bosses?
- GS: Well, my boss -- you see, I knew my boss. His name was -- he's dead and gone now. He died about four years ago. His name was -- I used to call him 'Boss.' But his name was Lenny Ceritello. Lenny used to treat me nice. I'll never forget him as long as I live. You see, I knew Lenny from over there on Lexington Avenue, and up on High Street. There's another street over there, right around that section. Harral Avenue. Back in those days, I used to know him right through there, because he went to Central High School with me, you know?
- I: Okay. So they have a union in AVCO?
- GS: Oh, yes. Yes.
- I: What was the name of the union? Did you belong to it?
- GS: Yes, I used to belong to it. It belonged to the union that local something -- 1010, that's what it was. That's what the name was, of course. 1010.
- I: How was your salary there? Did they give you a good salary then?
- GS: Oh, they paid me good.
- I: What hours did you work?
- GS: We used to work, say -- before the union came in, we used to work ten, twelve, fourteen hours to make any kind of money at all.
- I: And then the union came in?
- GS: And then the union came in, and eight hours a day. And if you ever worked overtime, they gave you time-and-a-half.
- I: Okay. Did you have any strikes while you were there?
- GS: Yes. We had quite a few strikes.
- I: As long as that strike you had at Aluminum -- four months? Any like that?
- GS: No.
- I: No? They didn't last that long?
- GS: No. But during the time that we had a strike at the [unclear], it was always during the wintertime.

- I: Always, also, during the winter?
- GS: Yes.
- I: You could walk the picket line, also?
- GS: Yes, I walked the picket line, right out in front of the personnel office.
- I: Did anything ever happen on the picket line?
- GS: No.
- I: No fights ever broke out or anything?
- GS: No fights. Everybody got along good.
- I: So, how did you get along with your co-workers at AVCO?
- GS: The core workers over at AVCO was all right. We had some that -- you know, you couldn't trust. And some of you -- you turn around and --
- I: Any racial discriminations? Did anybody call you any names?
- GS: No, no. But, you know [laughs] -- I say this but when we have a discussion among the fellows over there where I worked at, we used to turn around and I'd say, "Well, we turned around and" -- I don't want to say it.
- I: Say it. Say it. It's history.
- GS: You know, the people over there -- they used to turn around, and behind your back they used to call you 'nigger' and so forth and so on. But the word used to get back to us.
- I: Yes, they didn't say it to your face. It was behind your back.
- GS: Yes, yes, yes. That was the problem.
- I: But there were never any fights or anything?
- GS: No, no fights.
- I: What about your benefits? Did you get on good benefits?
- GS: Oh, yes. We used to get good benefits.
- I: Tell me about some of the good benefits that you got there.
- GS: Well, when we first started out, we were getting, say, two weeks. You had to work two weeks. You had to work, say --
- I: How many years until you got two weeks?
- GS: Say, the two weeks that we got, we used to get, say -- you know, I've been out of

this since 1959, so I've been out for quite a while.

I: Did you have insurance and sick benefits?

GS: Oh, yes. Yes. We had good insurance. Good insurance, good benefits.

I: Now, what kind of salary did they start you at at AVCO? I know you said you had a good salary at Aluminum in Bridgeport. What kind of salary did they start you with? Even more than you were making at your other job?

GS: Well, it all depended. It was all depending.

I: Well, when you wanted to get promoted -- like, you started as a custodian. Let's say you wanted to get promoted, how did you get promoted? Did you apply for the job?

GS: There were always jobs. They had billboards.

I: They were posted jobs?

GS: In these departments, it was a posted job.

I: So, you would just bid for the job?

GS: Yes, yes, yes.

I: Do you feel you were fairly treated when you bid for the jobs?

GS: Oh, yes, yes. Oh, yes. The union made sure of that.

I: Okay. So, did you have a good, strong union? Was it a good, strong union?

GS: Yes. Right up until the day that they moved out, we had a good strong one. 1010 was good.

I: How large was that company?

GS: Well, right through here and now, sold out.

I: Yes. But when you were working there, approximately how many people were working there?

GS: Oh, I'd say eighteen or twenty thousand people.

I: And they came from all over the Bridgeport area -- Stratford and all over?

GS: Right, right, right.

I: Now, how did you get out there? Did you drive a car? Did you take a bus? How did you get to work?

GS: Well, when I first started, I could drive. I had a license, but --I'd renew my

license right along. But I used to catch the bus.

I: So they had a bus going out there?

GS: Yes.

I: Tell me a little bit about the different jobs that were here in Bridgeport at the time.

The different companies and factories and the type of work that -- especially the type of work that African-Americans were doing here, in Bridgeport.

GS: Well, there were three shops in the City of Bridgeport.

I: What were they?

GS: There was the Bridgeport Brass Company, Aluminum Company of America and Bassick Company. And Sikorsky came in later on.

I: But those were the three that were there when you got here?

GS: Yes. You'd take those three outfits -- no, Stanley Works. Not Bassick. Stanley Works. Those were the only ones that would hire black people.

I: Those were the only three that would hire black people?

GS: At that time, yes.

I: The other companies were all --

GS: When you went to the Aluminum Company, all they wanted to do was put you in the knock-out room, and the knock-out room -- you used to go and get so much dust in there that you couldn't see the next person that works around you.

I: And that's where they would put most of the black people?

GS: Yes. But when I got started there, I was working up in Hartford at the time, and Governor Cross told me, "Look, I'm not going to run next year. You need a job."

I said, "Well, Your Honor, what do you intend to do for me?" He said, "I'm going to send you out to Aluminum Company of America, out in Fairfield, and you ask for so-and-so, and they'll see that you get a good job. Which I did, you know? I went out on a Monday, and I saw -- I can't remember his name. But by the same token, he was real nice to me, you know? He wanted to give me a job as, say, office help, delivering mail and stuff of that sort.

I: So when did other companies open up to hiring black people?

GS: Well, the other companies -- during the wartime, they had to hire you.

- I: Okay. So, then, what companies starting opening up hiring us [Blacks] at that time? The ones that were not hiring us -- what were some of the names of them that would not hire us?
- GS: Some of the names of the companies that weren't hiring people were, say, Bassick Company, Bridgeport Casting. You see, the only time that I worked at Bridgeport Casting was -- you see, they passed a law in the State of Connecticut, under Roosevelt -- they used to say that whatever you do, they had to hire you.
- I: Regardless of your race?
- GS: Yes. Regardless of your race, they had to hire you. They couldn't hold back on you.
- I: And that's how we started getting into these jobs.
- GS: That's right. That's right.
- I: When jobs opened up, did you see a lot of people migrating from the south, too, to Connecticut?
- GS: Oh, yes. They were coming in here -- I used to say Georgia, Tennessee, Carolina, South Carolina. A lot of people came up here from -- they had relatives working there, and they used to get jobs.
- [end of side one]**
- GS: The neighborhoods like Fairfield County.
- I: But in the South End or North End?
- GS: North End, South End. Most of the people lived in the South End.
- I: In the South End?
- GS: The South End of Bridgeport. That's where most of the black people -- then, over on the East End, the [unclear] were over on that side.
- I: So, after you left [unclear], is that when you retired?
- GS: No. [unclear] -- yes. I retired.
- I: We're talking [unclear].
- GS: Yes.
- I: Also, I understand that you were involved in politics in Bridgeport.
- GS: Oh, yes, I was.

- I: Tell me a little bit about your involvement. How did you get started?
- GS: Well, I got started through a fellow by the name of -- down in the South End. He used to work for [unclear] Bell. He was a Senator from the 23rd District. Walter Barrett.
- I: What year was that?
- GS: That was right after I turned twenty-one. Of course, they didn't allow you to vote until you got to be twenty-one years old.
- I: So, how did he get you involved?
- GS: I got involved by -- well, he was a South End boy, and John McCarthy -- he's dead and gone. [unclear] where they were going to have the baseball team that summer. They turned around and -- oh, I don't know. I just can't remember back that far.
- I: Now, did politics help you in getting these jobs that you had?
- GS: Oh, yes. It certainly did -- yes.
- I: Okay. So, your involvement did help you get into these factories?
- GS: Yes.
- I: So, what did you do in politics? Did you hold any office in politics?
- GS: Well, I was an alderman up in the 135th District. You see, we had three Districts up there. We had 1A, 2A and 3A. 1A -- Judge Kern was the Mayor of the City of Bridgeport when he got us in. There were only two black alderman at the time, in Bridgeport. There was Walter Evans and myself.
- I: There were only two blacks?
- GS: They didn't even think about no blacks.
- I: So, what gave you inspiration to run for alderman?
- GS: Well, the inspiration that -- he asked me -- he said, "Look, I want you to run for alderman in the 135th District, with George Brown." So I told him -- I said, "Well, look, Mayor. Judge Spear is the day." You know Judge Spear, right?
- I: Yes.
- GS: I said, "Judge Spear" -- he was an attorney at the time. He was affiliated with politics, and he was the President of the black Democratic Party in the City of

Bridgeport. I told him -- I said, "Look, if you turn around and make Spear's -- give him a commissionership -- then I'll run for office." So, he did. He said, "Look, if I get in -- if I'm elected -- I'll turn around and I'll see that you get what you want." Well, he did.

I: So, you became an alderman?

GS: Yes.

I: Did you help anyone get into these jobs that were open, or [unclear] for factories - - women that really needed a job?

GS: No, no. Not at all. I had no affiliation.

I: No affiliations?

GS: No affiliations at all.

I: When did you see the climate change in the job category in Bridgeport? I know when you first came, the only two factories were open to African-Americans, and then it started changing. When did you really see it really turn around and change, that we could just go any place?

GS: During the wartime.

I: It was during the wartime?

GS: Oh, yes. During the wartime.

I: So, how do you compare how open it was then, of all the jobs compared to the day?

GS: I'd say that it varies. It varies. During the wartime [World War II] at that time -- I mean, the jobs at that time was like, say -- let me get myself together now. At that time, you could turn around and do whatever you wanted here in the City of Bridgeport, but you had to turn around, and you had to be connected with the two parties. At one time, before I was elected, and I was not able to vote -- and I was eighteen or nineteen years old. When I turned twenty-one I got into politics. But I'll tell you about myself. I came out of the South End of Bridgeport. And Mr. Jordan was the black overseer of the black people in the City of Bridgeport, as far as Republicans. Walter Barrett -- he's dead and gone. He was the big chief down there in the South End. Walter Barrett told me -- he was standing out there next

to me, and I was talking to Walter Barrett at the time. He told me -- he said, "Hey, I hear that you affiliated around with the Democratic Party." I said, "No, you're wrong." I said, "Do you want to stand up and say that I'm doing this and I'm doing that, and working for the Republican Party and Democrats?" He said, "No, no, no, no. But you're affiliated with them." So I said, "Wait." So he said, "Well, I'll tell you." He said, "You're affiliated with them. When I'm not around or Republicans are not around, you're working right along with the Democrats." I said, "I don't know who told you this, but you're dead wrong." So, he snatched the bag up, you know? [laughs]

I: Oh.

GS: Yes, sir, he snatched it up right in front of me and Russ Barrett. I told you the Senator was there, too. Walter Barrett was there at that time. He said, "As far as you're concerned, you're [unclear] the Republican Club." I said, "Well, what about my pay up to the time I was there at six o'clock this morning?" That was about one or two o'clock this morning. He said, "I'll pay you up to that time." So then Walter Barrett said, "Well, look. You don't have to pay him nothing." Senator Barrett and the other gentleman told me, "You don't have to pay him nothing. We'll pay him. We'll take it on ourselves to pay him."

I: And they were Democrats?

GS: That's right.

I: And that's when you became a Democrat?

GS: That's when I became a Democrat.

I: So, when people got jobs here, you said you kind of had to be affiliated with either party.

GS: Yes, yes. They had to be affiliated. And most of the parties there -- the Democrats weren't too strong at that time.

I: Oh, no? The Republicans were stronger back then?

GS: Oh, yes. Right.

I: How many Mayors did you live to see here, so far?

GS: Well, you know, McLevy. He was in there twenty-three years, you know?

- I: I know.
- GS: I saw Buckingham. I was going to high school at that time. Who else did I see? Mayor Burns. Burns Public Market and stuff of that sort. Those were the two Mayors that I was affiliated with.
- I: And the labor force in Bridgeport, as far as civil service jobs -- policemen and firemen. When did you see black men get into those types of jobs?
- GS: Well, when they turned around and -- when they were affiliated with the party itself, then the jobs opened up for them -- like police department, fire department...
- I: But they were political?
- GS: It was political. You used to pay two hundred and fifty dollars, and you could be a fireman.
- I: Oh!
- GS: Yes, you could be a fireman.
- I: Did they still have a test then? Did you take a test, or just you paid the money?
- GS: Well, you used to take the test, but somebody else would take the test for you, you see? [laughs] And, on top of that -- I know one fellow. He was in the fire department. He was taking the test for everybody. Policemen and also the fire department. They caught up with him, though.
- I: The first black policeman -- do you know who that was, here?
- GS: Bill Piper.
- I: Bill Piper?
- GS: William Piper. Yes. He was the first black.
- I: And what about the first black fireman?
- GS: The first black fireman was Lenny Dower, I think. Lenny Dower -- yes.
- I: Now, did they stay first for a long time before the job market opened up for anymore blacks?
- GS: Well, at that time, the affiliation of all the blacks in the City of Bridgeport did come about through politics. But there was also the affiliation of the police department and the fire department used to come under the jurisdiction of -- you

had to pay this certain fellow that was on the fire department, which they caught up to and they fired him. So they turned around. He turned around and said, "I didn't do nothing with it. I had nothing to do with it." And they found out, because they told him -- as a matter of fact, you just took the examination for a fellow -- two policemen and three firemen. And they told him the date and everything.

I: If you compare Bridgeport today to Bridgeport then, when was it really bustling -- you know, a lot of factories and a lot of businesses? Downtown Bridgeport was booming --

GS: Well, they were booming at that time, but you know, on a Thursday night down right on Main Street, right in the heart of Fairfield Avenue by Walgreens and things of that sort, you had to walk down in the middle of the street. So many people were shopping. Thursday nights, the stores used to open up until nine o'clock. And on the left-hand side and on the right-hand side, right there, where the Superior Courthouse is now, we had Murray's there, we had a drug store, and right across the street, Woolworth's Store was over there, and so was May's.

I: So, when did you notice that factories were moving out and that the workforce was getting scarce and that the jobs were not plentiful anymore? About how many years ago did you see that happening? What kind of impact do you think has been made to the City of Bridgeport?

GS: I think the impact was made during the time that the shops were closing down, sort of like the Bridgeport Brass and McKessin and Robbins. McKessin and Robbins -- my brother used to work in McKessin and Robbins. He held two jobs, you see? He held a job at the brass shop, driving the elevator at night -- a crane at night -- and then he'd get up and go to work in the morning, and be on the job at eight o'clock in the morning or nine o'clock in the morning.

I: So, you'd have two jobs in those days?

GS: Yes.

I: It was easy to get two jobs then?

GS: Oh, yes.

- I: What do you see now, in the future of Bridgeport, with all the factories that have moved out? What do you think we need to revitalize this city, in terms of the job situation?
- GS: Well, to tell you the truth, I think something is in the works. Something is in the works. I don't know how to say it come about it, but something is in the works. Bridgeport is going to be back on its feet.
- I: Well, I thank you very much for this interview.

End of Interview