

SobolChesterChet_19920317

RICHARD SHARPLESS: This is an interview with Chester "Chet"

Sobol. Box 296A, RD1 Hellertown, Pennsylvania. It is
March the 17th, 1992. It is 8:00 p.m. in the evening. And
this interview is being conducted in his house. Okay,
first Chet, how old are you?

CHESTER 'CHET' SOBOL: Sixty.

RS: That's always the question you start with, which is always
touchy, especially with women. Okay. Where are you from,
originally?

CCS: Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.

RS: No kidding.

CCS: Right.

RS: I'll be darned. So am I. (laughs)

CCS: Really? Where from?

RS: I'll stop.

[INTERRUPTION]

RS: And how long did you live in Wilkes-Barre?

CCS: Oh, age 17. At which time when I graduated from the high
school there, Coughlin High School, I enlisted in the U.S.
Army in July of 1949.

RS: [00:01:00] How many years did you spend in the army?

CCS: 'Til December of 1952. About three and a half years.

RS: What did you do after that?

CCS: After I came out, I hung around for about a month.

Couldn't locate anything there in the Valley. Left there and went out to Newark, New Jersey, took a job over there. I started working in a machine shop.

RS: Doing what?

CCS: Worthington Pump.

RS: Worthington Pump?

CCS: Right.

RS: What did you do in the machine --

CCS: I started out first of all, pulling chips, sweeping the floor, the normal thing. And after about a day and a half, told me I was qualified to start operating a machine, so I started on a Warner Swasey A5. They used to have what they called "set-up" and at that time, they'd come over, set up the machine for you and then they'd let you run it. Give you the basics of what to do, hit the stop, what gears to throw it in, the speeds, feeds, and the like.

RS: How long were you [00:02:00] there?

CCS: I only spent a short time there really. Let's see, January till about -- 'til about June. I was only there about six months.

RS: Then where did you go?

CCS: I left there. Took another quick job with [D.I. Dupont?], [Dina Moores?]. Color matching, paint colors on these charts and the like and after the third day, I decided that wasn't for me and I left that job. (laughs) Then from there I went up to Bendix Aviation Corporation which was another big machine shop.

RS: That's in New Jersey?

CCS: That's also in New Jersey. Teterboro, New Jersey.

RS: Teterboro, right. How long were you there?

CCS: I was there for not quite 10 years. I went into the tool design department there, plant layout, I did some expediting in the purchasing department. [00:03:00] Tool, die work, in all the related fields, covered all the tooling with the corporation. It was a fairly good job, but being young and dumb, I wasn't moving fast enough to advance. I felt that I had more on the stick than what they were allowing, so I decided I was going to leave and improve my lot in life. Of course along with that though, I had that long haul every day, up Route 46 at which time that was quite a hectic road to drive.

RS: Where were you living at that time?

CCS: We moved from Newark to Hackettstown.

RS: Yeah, that is a long haul.

CCS: It was quite a haul. It was about, roughly about 57, 58 miles one way. Five days a week, it got to be pretty much of a job.

RS: That's tough, right.

CCS: It was quite a trip. You were doing 50 miles an hour and cars were [00:04:00] 50 inches in front, behind you and about 15-20 inches on either side of you. Everybody going in the same direction. And there were quite a few accidents on that road, too. When they'd have a pile up, there'd be 10, 15, 20 cars, just a big heap. Just amazing the way they'd pile up on the highway. And of course then you'd have the rubbernecking. Take you an hour and a half to drive 20 miles. Then the other almost 40 miles you could in 20 minutes. It seemed that way, anyway, by comparison, timewise.

RS: Where did you go after Bendix?

CCS: After Bendix, I took a quick job with the U.S. Post Office. That didn't last too long. I got kind of out of tune with that. Again, it was one of these things, packing mail, had no real challenge (laughs), already sorted out. So, I couldn't handle that too long either. So I left that after about eight or [00:05:00] nine months.

RS: Where did you go then?

CCS: Then I went back down with Worth -- not Worthington, place in Phillipsburg, Ingersoll Rand. They called it the Blower Division at that time. That's where I got introduced to the industrial engineering field. They had an on-the-job training type thing and program in effect, at that time, when they were starting up new products which weren't all that great, but it was still new.

RS: What year was that? Do you recall --

CCS: That was 1965. I stayed with them until I got laid off. I was there 'til '72. I got laid off there in February of '72, and nearly took a job with their place up in New York but they kind of right across the board, you know. You pay for your way to move there, you pay for all your expenses, and when you get there, [00:06:00] we're not going to guarantee you anything. So I just kind of let that slide along the wayside.

RS: Describe a little bit about what you were doing at Ingersoll?

CCS: Well, at the time, we went in -- Well when I went in there, there were several other new people also, and they had a time-study course that they were giving at the time. If you had a background in any of the related fields, machine shop --

[INTERRUPTION]

CCS: -- methods, methods, technology, or anything like that, then they decided you had enough qualification to learn this job. So I went in and I started doing their time-study -- their method of time-study. What they called a one-for-one plan they were installing at the time. It took, oh actually, a couple of years to go through the program although they had something, like an 80 hour class sessions [00:07:00] that you had to go through that were actually in-class sessions and they had some testing and different things that they did and they did other training -- training materials that they had, that they allowed you to work with in some [filming?] and you only went at your own pace. Then of course you went out into the shop and now you became acclimated with what was happening out there with another person. For several months, you stayed under his wing until he felt you were far enough along to go on your own. And then from that point on, you were on your own, pretty much.

RS: What was the reason for the layoff, in '72?

CCS: Well, they just didn't have any work. They ran out of work again. It was terrible because -- (noise) Well, right at that time I think everybody was feeling that pinch too, (background noise) that there wasn't too much to doing. The rock drill division, they were way down and the Cameron

division was down. Really, they weren't doing too much of
[00:08:00] anything at that time. And the steel mills, of
course, now at this time, their big item there was the
blowers.

[INTERRUPTION]

RS: And these were being phased out.

CCS: Right, they were being phased out, and anything that they
had now became mostly a repair or replacement type of
thing.

RS: So in effect your division, was sort of being --

CCS: It was starting to be phased out.

RS: -- phased out. Did they make any effort to place you
somewhere else in the company?

CCS: Oh, no, that was basically --

[INTERRUPTION]

CCs: Well, came time and they were just cutting back, but of
course, they were also looking at the other division at the
same time too. They weren't laying off as heavily, but
they were also under the same conditions we were. It was
just a matter of time.

RS: That was really the beginning of Ingersoll's --

CCS: Right, that was.

RS: -- slide, yeah.

CCS: They start to slide back then, and -- well, actually they started back towards the end of '71. [00:09:00] The reason we knew that is they were trying to get in this new unit with the -- I can't think of what the name of this thing is, it's like a rotor, you know, with the -- they put it in the -- it was a new engine, in that one car, I think it was the Mazda --

MARTIN DESHT: The rotary engine --

CCS: -- sounded like a sewing machine.

RS: The rotary engine (overlapping dialogue, inaudible).

CCS: Right.

RS: The Wrangle -- Wankel or Wrangle engine?

CCS: The Wankel, or Wrangle -- Wankel I think it was, I'm not sure. But it was that one that had the three ends on it, you know, looked kind of like a --

RS: Yeah.

MD: The compressor, the refrigeration compressor --

CCS: Similar to that, they were starting to work on that, and they were starting to make blowers in this area here. There were small ones, significantly smaller, but they were starting that. And then that was, well, under all engineering at that time and I never did know what happened to it from there.

RS: After you left Ingersoll, where did you go?

CCS: Then I went to Mack. Right from Ingersoll to Mack.

[00:10:00] And I started there March of '72. And again, I went into the industrial engineering department.

RS: And you've been there ever since?

CCS: Well, no, I was with them until 1985. And then we had that window that they came along, the package, and they gave us our choices. Take the package, you looked around, and seeing like 600 guys with me in the same room and they all had considerably more time than I did and they had pretty much other people in there pulling for them and I was kind of a loner in it anyway. And I decided I better take the package or I'd wind up hitting the bricks with nothing. So I took it and ran like a thief in the night. Right at that same time, in came the Dana corporation [00:11:00] and they took over the axle division from Mack and they send their people in and they were observing what we were doing, how we were operating our line. At the same time, they were also looking to see who they were going to select for the personnel that they were going to take with them. I kind of felt like we were sold. You ever get that feeling that you've been sold? (Laughs)

RS: In other words, you were being watched like merchandise?

CCS: Right, just like merchandise. Then we had an on-the-job job interview to see if we'd be willing to go down there

with the Dana Corporation and start up the axle lines on their plant. I thought, "Why not, I got nothing else," and I don't want to start working the streets, I figured I get another year or two, great. So I did. That's basically what I got, was another year or two, actually until 1987.

RS: So you went with the Dana until 1987?

CCS: Right, and once they picked the brains down there, they got everything they needed, then they did away with our job, or so they said [00:12:00]. They did away with our jobs. Myself and a couple of the older guys that were up over 55. The younger guys they hung onto, the older guys they got rid of.

RS: Did they give you a reason for that?

CCS: Well, yeah, they told me that my job was no longer there. They eliminated my job.

RS: Did you think it was possibly because of age discrimination?

CCS: It was several factors. It was age discrimination, I felt, one of the areas that they had -- they bragged about their age, that they only had age something, like 35 was their average, mean age. They used to brag about it. They said that, to me, at least they told me that I didn't understand their management functions. I wasn't management material in their type of plant. This is one of the things that

they told me. I think that's kind of strange because
[00:13:00] it was through my efforts and the other guys who
were there with me, that we got this whole line started up.
We trained the people on how to build these axles, what
materials to use, how to use them, made sure that the parts
got to the line on time to make sure that they could be
assembled. We knew everything, we knew the parts, we could
associate part numbers with the material and recognize it
even without numbers. You knew what it was just by looking
at it. Had that type of --

RS: Experience.

CCS: -- experience and know-how with the unit. You could see
one coming down the line and know it was wrong just by
looking at it, because of what something was wrong on it.
It might have been the wheels, it might have been the
brakes, it might have been the housing, it might have been
any number of things, but it was wrong for that particular
number. You could take one look at it and see that it was
wrong. We had that expertise, that knowledge. But I
didn't understand their management procedures. [00:14:00]
(laughter)

RS: Did you feel used?

CCS: Oh, I felt pretty much abused. Abused and used, both, you know, because, I thought the job would last for a few years.

RS: Did the other older workers, like you, feel that way too?

CCS: Oh yeah, yeah. The first guy to get it was a fellow by the name of Joe [Madel?] over here in Allentown. He was in the purchasing department there and he knew the parts inside out. He knew where they came from, what manufacturers and vendors had them. He knew what the cycle time was for delivery. He just about had his fingers on every part of it and he knew the people inside and out. Who he could get and where he could get parts from, he had alternate sources. He got it first, and I got it second, and I don't know who got it after me, but there were several others. I don't know who's left now.

RS: So in other words, you trained all these people --

CCS: Oh yeah.

RS: -- and you set up the entire line and then they fired you?

CCS: Right. Basically that's what it comes [00:15:00] down to.

RS: You had no idea that this might happen when you went with them?

CCS: Oh, I -- not right away, but I suspected after we were there about six or seven months that we were going to be there, I had even mentioned to the guys. We kind of had

one of these round table sessions one day, sitting there. Joe Madel, myself, and [Eddy Elias?], and another fellow, a couple of other guys who I don't remember at the time right now but I will, eventually. We got to kicking it around and we decided. One guy says, "How long do you give it?" I says, "About a year." Guy says, "Two if we're lucky." Guy says on the outside, "Yeah," he says, "Probably about a year and half." He was right, he did go a year and a half, because he went six months before I did, I went six months after he did. So we were both right in that respect. I don't know about the other guys, but there was a couple of others [00:16:00].

RS: So you knew this was going to happen when you went there --

CCS: Oh yeah.

RS: How did you --

CCS: Not right away, not right away but we knew eventually it was going to happen.

RS: It may be a stupid question but why did you take the job then, what was the point of going with them?

CCS: Well, the money was good, and there was nothing in the area here, because when Mack went down, we knew automatically -- At the same time, I had a couple of other buddies around here, lived right down here in Hellertown, a few of them, and they too were getting the axe over here at the Steel.

I also knew a couple of guys who were working over at Westinghouse. They were getting the axe at the same time. Came to the conclusion, that it looks like the thing to do is to take what you have and go from there.

RS: But you definitely felt that you were abused by this --

CCS: Oh, definitely --

RS: Did any of you consider bringing any action against them, for--?

CCS: Matter of fact, I did.

RS: You did? Could you describe [00:17:00] that?

CCS: Well, yeah, I did. I brought it down on the basis of age discrimination. Here of course, I'm under directive that, you know, I would come up with this and divulge this information, that I would be in a problem, so this is actually --

RS: Okay, okay, so you can't talk about it, but you did actually bring that --

CCS: Oh yes.

RS: -- Can I ask you whether or not the whole matter was ever resolved?

CCS: Oh yeah, yes.

RS: It was resolved. Okay, okay. Let's go back a little bit. What did you do at Mack?

CCS: At Mack, I was with the industrial engineering department and there I worked in the machine shop for a while.

Time-studies and the normal related engineering functions.

RS: How did you like working for Mack?

CCS: Oh, I liked it. I thought it was -- it was interesting, because it was under constant change. Things that I liked best about it is that you were never in one department or with one machine too long and you got to meet a lot of people and you had a lot of different insights into the job. Some of them were good, some of them not so good. But overall you got [00:18:00] a good idea of what was happening in the company.

RS: And you say you felt that you were fairly treated there?

CCS: Oh, yeah. I was fairly well-treated. Of course you had your, I won't use the term, but you know, you had those kind of people there which were not so desirable as supervisors, and then you had some real good ones. You had both ends of the spectrum.

RS: Were you a supervisor level?

CCS: Yes, I was in a supervisor level.

RS: Okay. When did you begin to feel that the company was getting into difficulty, or was in trouble?

CCS: Well, actually, as early as '73. Nineteen seventy-three.

RS: That early?

CCS: That early. It was things that were going on in the shop.

Watching the things happening in other areas and other facilities that they were expanding, they were buying new equipment, new machines, and things like this. Mack was kind of just sitting there, spinning its wheels.

RS: [00:19:00] You're saying they weren't reinvesting?

CCS: They weren't reinvesting heavily. They were reinvesting here and there, but not enough to keep current with it. Also at the same time, too, I could see that there was a, there was a, kind of a, I really don't know how to express this, management and union --

RS: Difficulty?

CCS: -- very much at each other. This went from the floor all the way right up to the chief executive officer and the union --

RS: This is the classic in the automotive industry.

CCS: -- This is the classic, right, and this was all the way up and there was awful lot of animosity.

RS: This was the -- United Auto Workers were in there, right?

CCS: Yeah, UAW. I think it was 667.

MD: Six seventy-three.

CCS: Six--

MD: Six seventy-seven.

CCS: Six seventy-seven. I knew I had something.

RS: So you feel the union management antagonism [00:20:00] plus the management was not keeping up with the --

CCS: No, they weren't keeping up. And I've always said -- I even told management there which wasn't -- I should have bit my tongue before I said that. I always said that, "It's poor management that creates unions." So I said, "You really have nobody to blame but yourself when it comes down to it." I said, "If you really look at the score, you'll see that it was poor management created the unions." They were a good thing of course when they started but again, they went too far on the spectrum too. They just went swung past center and now they begin to try to dictate to the corporation what they wanted to do and now you had, had the bucking of heads.

RS: Was it about this time that Mack was sold to the French consortium? Was that a bit later?

CCS: No, that didn't come about until the early '80s, late '70s, early '80s. But it was in the wind. There were several other ones in the wind before that and nobody was really paying too [00:21:00] much attention, that was now still back in the early '70s. It was after the mid '70s. Then you could start to see things starting to take a different change. They were trying to be more competitive but they were, at this point, they were throwing everything in too

late. That's where they really started out. Then they went out and bought this multi-million dollar rear axle line, now this was all automated. One heck of a machine. One huge machine that did the work of about 30 or 40 other machines all by itself. Put it in on one end and went all the way around and took it off on the other end and it was complete. The only thing it went down for was of course, tool changes.

RS: So management, then -- did management explain at all? Did you get any impression why they were not modernizing or why they were -- seemed to be falling behind [00:22:00] in innovations?

CCS: Well, it's --

RS: Let me put it this way, did you feel that they were taking out of the company rather than putting it in? In other they words, they were content with their --

CCS: They were content with what they had. Really, I lay it back to the managers in the U.S. system don't really start out on the floor. They don't go into four or five different areas and really get tuned into what's happening out there to really learn what the trade in the business is all about. I have to compare that with the Japanese industry. You take a manager level in there and they put them out on the floor. He's got to learn at least five

different sections of manufacturing. Not just a particular section or one area. He has to come up all the way through. He has to learn each one of those areas. Before he can --

RS: American managers.

CCS: -- American managers walk right in and the first thing they're concerned about [00:23:00] is turning over a quick buck. The good U.S. manager is the guy who can turn over a fast dollar.

RS: This has been the complaint about the auto industry in particular --

CCS: He's not thinking of 10, 15, 20 years down the line. He's thinking of the (snaps fingers), "Hey, that's a great manager. He's making money." No matter whatever else happens. That's where it really started --

RS: So that was really short-sightedness, rather than any kind of long range concern?

CCS: Right, there was no real concern for the future. It was that quick money up front and he was a good manager. He made money, he was a damn good manager. As soon as he lost money, they ousted him and brought in another.

RS: Was it at this time that the foreign competition began to cut into Mack's part of the market?

CCS: No, they haven't really cut into it. Mack has been pretty much predominant in the U.S. market and in the foreign market. Other than for Volvo of course. They handle most of that over there, and Renault, they're pretty much over there, so they have the European [00:24:00] access. But the Macks that are overseas, they're still running. Those that were left there since World War II are still running. You know, one heck of a good truck.

RS: Were you surprised when they decided they'll offer you this window, or this package to --

CCS: Yeah, I was, really, I was. I didn't think that they were going to offer it because I was only 53 and about a half at that time. I told 'em, "You can't mean me, they're talking about guys 55 years and up." They hadn't explained fully in the short note that I had from 'em that this was anybody that was going to turn 55 in the next year and a half to two years which had meant from a certain point in time, if you had over 10 years with the company [00:25:00] and if you reached this age criteria, all of this was set in there. So I didn't actually get anything out of it until after age 55. I had to become age 55 first. I had to pay, like my hospitalization, up front, and I had to pay that for the year and a half that --

RS: Interval.

CCS: -- interval there, so .

RS: Did you carry, then after the 55, did this kick in, your benefits -- your hospitalization thing?

CCS: Oh, yes. That all came back and I've got full benefits and I'm thankful for that and that's really helped out.

RS: I'm not going to ask you the sum but did they provide you with a lump sum or a pension, or?

CCS: Well they gave us what they called a "package deal" and that depended upon your time of service and whatever you had in there. I don't know their formula, how they figured it out. It was basically your time in service plus whatever month you had [00:26:00] times a dollar value. It wasn't a whole lot, but for me it was something, and I decided I'd take it.

RS: You think it was a fair amount they gave you, a fair package?

CCS: I think it was, yes. Had I had a couple of more years at age 59 and a half, I'd probably been retired.

RS: Then you went with Dana for a couple of years, and what did you do after that?

CCS: After Dana?

RS: Yes.

CCS: (laughs) Oh, a whole lot of things. I walked the road an awful lot, looking for a job, you know. Now we're at the age of 57, almost 58.

RS: Right, it was tough.

CCS: Tough is not the word. It was something next to -- You came to the point where after sending out several thousand resumes, and I sent them out throughout the country.

RS: All over the country?

CCS: All over the country. I even went as far as New York City to apply for overseas. [00:27:00] Thank God I never got the job, cause I ran. (laughter) Thank God I never got the job.

RS: Oh, Jesus.

CCS: Anyway, they wanted some people to work on trucks over there but what they were looking for was mechanics. They weren't looking for industrial engineers. They advertised industrial engineers but they were looking for mechanics. I was thankful that (laughter) --

RS: Yeah, I guess you were. How long were you unemployed?

CCS: Let's see. '87 'til -- let's see, that's July of '87. I had the, forgive me here, a little bit, I'm trying to think, I had so many things happen at that time. Eighty-seven, I think I landed a job in January of '88.

RS: Okay, so you're --

CCS: I was out there again about six months. [00:28:00] That's right, it was just before my unemployment ran out, I'd finally come up with a job. That was with the Mobil oil corporation, become a gas station manager. Kind of Big Brother type of deal I had a part of, it was like a sales, of goodies, you know, candy, cigarettes, and that type of stuff and then also operate the station for them.

RS: Where was this?

CCS: It was right down here in Bethlehem. On Schoenersville Road. That lasted about eight months. Because the thievery there and everything, it got the best of me and you were responsible. Anything that happened, it came out of your, out of my, earnings and I lost money on that venture, so I left that. I took a job up there with Chuck's Trucking and Refrigeration in Allentown and here again it was back in the trucking but here he was looking for somebody to save his business. He really didn't have that much. [00:29:00] Although what he had, they could function with, but he couldn't afford me. So I stayed there for another six months and he decided he'd lay me off so that came at December that year, that was '88. Again, I was on the street for a couple more months, pounding the pavement, and then I came up with two job offers at the same time, one was with the school district down in Central

Bucks and the other one was with Delbar Products down in Perkasio. And then IE. I really did some soul searching. When I walked through the plant, of the Delbar Products there, all I could see was mirrors. They had nothing else there and I just couldn't bring myself to say, "This is where I want to be in the IE department," because it looked like to me somewhat similar circumstances I had been in in other jobs, but they're looking for somebody [00:30:00] to come in and tell them what they could do to improve all of the improvements they already had up to this point. They were looking for, I guess, somebody to salvage, whatever could be done with it. I looked at it and I thought about it, and I thought: one item, how many mirrors can you make? How long can you make these mirrors before you're going to be out on the street again? Although it paid much more money, I opted and I took the Central Bucks School District job. About \$100 a week less. I thought, "Well here's I can make money right up front. Sure, that's fine, everything will be fine, and I'll be out on the street in another five, six, seven months again, looking for a new job again." I thought, "I just don't want to go through it again."

RS: So you're at the Central Bucks now?

CCS: No, I left Central Bucks, I quit there. [00:31:00]

(laughs) I quit there and I took another job, also with another school district, though, because what I wanted to do was improve, you know. Because I've always been impatient. I don't like to take a menial type job that is just me sitting there doing nothing. That you could do with your eyes closed. I just don't get along with that kind of work. I have that -- I got to be moving all the time, I have to keep things -- there has to be some action in it. Little challenge.

RS: What are you doing now then?

CCS: Right now, I am head custodian down at the Upper Dublin school.

[INTERRUPTION]

RS: You're looking forward to retiring, right?

CCS: Right, yes, in a couple more years I'm looking at that and I'm thinking if of course, if the job would change, if there'd be some more challenge, I may just stay a little bit longer. If there's no challenge, I'm just going to pack it in. Let the younger guys take over because I feel that there's more out to do in the world than just what I'm doing.

RS: [00:32:00] What effect did your -- you worked, according to what you said, your work record is pretty complete. You went to various jobs, but you were constantly working.

CCS: Yes.

RS: What effect did the unemployment, the fact that you, the Mack job and the next one came to an end, what effect did it have on you and your family?

CCS: There was quite a bit here. There were quite a bit of ups and downs here. My wife and I, I don't know how she put up with me all that time because there were times when I was unfit to live with. You know, I'd come in at the end of the day, I just didn't give a damn about anything. I didn't want to be bothered. Things started to really eat away at me because you know -- It's hard to describe this. You know, you're out all day, you come home. You've gone to maybe six, seven different places, and they [00:33:00] slam the door on your nose and, "Thanks but no thanks." "Don't call us, we'll call you." You get all of these type of returns of, "Great credentials, but we'll call you in the future when we have an opening or if we have some available position that you might be able to work into or place at." You keep getting these day in and day out, and it really cuts you down. It really takes a lot out of you.

RS: So it really affected you then?

CCS: Oh, definitely. Very much so. It was times when I was fully unfit to live with. It was just no escape from that. I don't know how she put up with me. (laughs) When I say she, I mean my wife naturally. She's been pretty good through it all.

RS: I didn't even ask you earlier, I should have. How many children do you have?

CCS: Four.

RS: Four. [00:34:00] Are they all here?

CCS: All over.

RS: They're not here at home anymore.

CCS: No, they're all out. Thank God. (laughs)

RS: Yeah. Most of them had left by I guess, by about the time you --

CCS: Yeah, they were all pretty much out. There was no one left at home. That was no problem. The biggest problem is is that it really cuts your ego, it inflates your ego -- or, deflates --

RS: Deflates it.

CCS: -- deflates your ego. Takes a lot out of you. I never really realized how much so.

RS: Did you, like many people that get laid off, they have a tendency to blame themselves rather than circumstances, did you sort of feel that way?

CCS: I did at a couple of different points and at different times. Though I shouldn't have, "What did I do wrong? Is there something wrong with my ability, am I functioning [00:35:00]? Is there something wrong that I'm not doing that I could better myself with? Or is it true that maybe I am too old and I don't know what I'm doing anymore?" I mean, you think all kinds of things.

RS: A lot of self-doubt, then, occurring.

CCS: You really start to eat away at yourself. You try to figure out, "What did I do wrong? Where did I go wrong? What happened? Why am I out in the cold all of a sudden?"

RS: Did you have occasion to talk to other people in your own situation, like yourself?

CCS: Oh, yes. Yes I did.

RS: Did they feel the same way?

CCS: Yeah. I had an occasion to speak with a fellow who had a master's degree and had been working for a good number of years and he wound up, he was actually working in a McDonalds. I mean, you know, talk about really getting cut down and being deflated. I asked him, he said it's the hardest thing he ever done in his life.

RS: Well, you know during the 1980s about a million and a half [00:36:00] middle management people lost their jobs, as much as workers and line workers --

CCS: That's what I say, I was in that middle management and that was the area that they were really chopping up.

RS: Did you -- During this period, did you get angry to the point where'd you say, blame the companies for what had happened? Felt that they were really responsible?

CCS: Only Dana, and not the company. I blamed it on the people in it and their ideals of what they thought was supposed to be right now. Whether they were following the company, strictly to the company rules or if it was something the way they interpreted it. I really don't know because I don't know enough about the corporation, but the chief executive officer there, as I understand it, he was a guy who didn't believe in any management. He didn't want any levels of management. He wanted just one manager and then everybody else was a worker.

RS: That's an interesting idea. (laughs)

CCS: [00:37:00] Basically that's what it was. Everybody else, this is what they wanted, they just wanted two levels. The managers and the workers. And see, I didn't fit in either category. So this is why they kind of asked us out. Because I didn't understand their method of management.

RS: Do you know what's happened to the company since then by the way?

CCS: No, not really. They're still in business. I know that.

RS: Still in business?

CCS: They're still - Dana is a big outfit. Quite big. They had got a ten-million-dollar contract -- ten-year contract worth much more than ten million.

RS: With Mack?

CCS: Yeah. And I know that they were moving a lot of material South. Now whether or not this plant is still out there and operating, I don't know. The last time I bumped into a fellow was a couple of years ago, one of the guys who used to work for me. Even then he said, "Boy, they still gave you a raw deal." I said, "It's over the dam already. I forgot about it all ready." He said, "Boy, they're really rotten and miserable. [00:38:00] Everybody. The workers included." Of course, that's been, like I say, a couple of years ago since I've seen him.

RS: From your perspective, do you think that in the last 10, 12 years, maybe the last 15 years, the attitude of management towards their workers has changed? I mean not just to unionized workers but to workers in general? Do you feel that the companies and corporations are -- figure that they can get away with more, that they can treat their workers differently?

CCS: Oh, yes, definitely. There's that chorus in you know, I mean, "If you don't do it my way, you're out." Like we

used to say, "Do it or I'll kill you." I mean this is basically what they mean is that "If you don't do it our way, you're out, you're looking at the street."

RS: Do you think this attitude has actually worsened?

CCS: Oh yes, this attitude has worsened over the last years, definitely over the past 10.

RS: What do you attribute that to?

CCS: Well, it's a lack of respect for the worker. [00:39:00] I find that this, he's the guy who's out there that's actually keeping the company afloat. But it's coming down, it has to be coming down from upper management which is saying, "If you don't get these people to work, we're going to unload you. We don't care what you do, how you do it, do it." This is coming right on down, just that way in there, person that doesn't believe in that type of managing philosophy, he'll eventually, he'll wind up, he'll either quit, he'll leave, or he'll get fired. This is really what it is.

RS: Cause we're -- as we talk to people, we're running into that sort of situation.

CCS: I believe that it is worsening. It's going to get worse before it gets better because I see that now in a lot of places, in a lot of people I talk to.

RS: I know that's true from the worker's perspective.

CCS: Definitely. And it's not just their perspective, but it's a fact, it's a reality, that they're all being [00:40:00] abused. When I say abused I'm talking about, you know, the attitude. "If you don't like it, we'll get somebody else. There's 10 guys out there waiting for you, they'll take your job. If you don't like it, you can quit" --

RS: Which is true, it's true.

CCS: It's true. This is the sad part about it, it is true. This is the way they feel about, they can get somebody else to replace anybody at any time, and they will. That's the worst part about it. No matter how good the person is, they'll do it.

RS: (pause) Let me talk, you dealt with the unions --

CCS: Oh yeah.

RS: -- you felt that the unions, you mentioned earlier, that the United Auto Workers, for example, had perhaps gone too far, pushed too far --

CCS: They had, they had. Now they recognize their point too and they recognize that there's a point [00:41:00] that they have to back off on, which I think they see fully now.

RS: Of course, it's a little late.

CCS: But it is late, again, you know hindsight is great. That's in any case, but they are striving to clear that up. They're trying to correct it and they're trying to get back

into the mainstream and they're trying to get their people to, "Look, this is the way it has to be whether you like it or not. You want your job, you're going to have to do it like that." That's improved, that's the good part of it.

MD: Can I ask you something?

RS: Sure.

MD: What does that do to your sense of loyalty to a company?
That kind of management energy?

CCS: You have none, you have none because you know that no matter how hard you work, it doesn't mean a thing.

MD: Do you think that gets filtered down to the workers?

CCS: It has, it has because the workers just don't care. There is no camaraderie, if you would, you know. When you went into a corporation, you felt like, "Hey, this is the place I want to stay." It's not true anymore. You know you're only there for a while, you're a number [00:42:00] and you can be replaced any time. They just change your number and that's all that is and that's the way that people feel today. Now I've been in both ends of it so I know exactly how the people who work for me right now feel that way. They're not more than a number and they don't care. They feel no, no loyalty at all to the company or the school. Even to the school district, they feel no loyalty for that same reason.

RS: You know, there's two things happening there. There's first of all, we've heard the Japanese and American management says the American worker doesn't work, doesn't work hard. On the other hand, from conversations we had, the workers, at least, say they're working harder and harder than they've ever had. On the other hand, they're being encouraged not to give a damn about the work they're doing which leads to sloppiness and inefficiencies and everything else.

CCS: That's true and management itself is the one who is creating it. [00:43:00] I feel that it's largely management at this point in time and not the worker themselves. Because I run into a lot of good people, I work with a lot of people, and I've even had some of the supervisors, if you will, come over and say, "That guy is a lousy worker. Get rid of him." I say, "Why? He's doing great. Working fine for me." "He never worked for me." I said, "It's just all in the way that you handle people, and you talk to 'em." "Well, you can have him, I don't want him." I say, "Fine. I never had a problem with him." Same people that other people had problems with, but here again it's the attitude, how you treat your people, if you're willing to work with them, they'll work with you. They'll bend over backwards to help you. You help them, they'll

help you, can work together. That's always been [00:44:00] a belief of mine. You work with the people, you don't work against them, you don't work over them. You don't have to do it this way, have to do it that way, you give them some leeway, give them a little time. You let them think. If you really want them to improve in their jobs, you let them do as much as they can do, in their own mechanical skills and ability, naturally. When they reach that ability and they need help, they'll come over and ask you for it. They don't have any problem, I've never had any problem with that. And I get people that will bend over backwards for me.

RS: This sort of attitude though, is disappearing.

CCS: Yeah. Yes it is. I have just the exact opposite supervisor over me. Now he's, "You're gonna do it my way." And I tell him "Isn't there any room for change?" you know, "We always did it that way." "Are we always going to be like this or is there room to do something different? [00:45:00] Maybe improve the task a little a bit. Make it easier, more beneficial, get a better job." "I want it done my way."

RS: That's it.

CCS: It's kind of hard sometimes to go along with that type of philosophy. I find it very hard. People who are unwilling to change, unwilling to bend, eventually will either sink a

corporation, company, or they'll eliminate themselves from a job, sooner or later, it'll do them in.

RS: You feel that this is a major problem with corporations in general in this country today?

CCS: Right, all the way down, it comes all the way from the top down.

MD: It sounds like a master-slave relation.

CCS: Mm-hmm, and this is what they're looking for.

MD: This is what they're looking for?

CCS: That, I believe, is what they're looking for. I've even heard a couple of us say slavery went out the window [00:46:00] back in 1800s, Lincoln freed the slaves, you know, the Emancipation Proclamation has been in for quite a while now. That's right here in the school district. So you can imagine the type of feeling that is going on between management and the worker today. It's not good.

RS: It seems to me somewhat shortsighted on the part of management, because long term everything depends on --

CCS: Exactly.

RS: -- on the workers.

CCS: I mean, if you want good workers and if you want job enhancement and you want people to grow in their jobs, there's only one way to let them do that. Leave them alone, let them work. Let them go to their motor

abilities. Gee, there's so many skills that these people have. They may not be great in math, or in the science field or anything like this, but give them a car. Give them something to tinker with. These people are great. Everybody isn't great in every field, [00:47:00] but in their particular field, they have ways, they have better ways of doing things, they have easier ways. Just listen. I find out that I learn an awful lot just by listening to people. I even find out, like, some of the fellows who were complaining about certain little things. I said, "To you it might not seem like anything. To me, it's nothing. But to that particular person, that little thing is galling him no end. Get that straightened out." They'll become the best workers in the place. I said, "It doesn't mean anything to you or me but to him that means an awful lot. All you have to do is, that one little thing, you straighten that thing out in his workplace, you'll have the best employee you'll ever have in the school district." And it works.

RS: You're well aware of what's [00:48:00] happened in American industry over the last 10, 15 years. How do you feel about it, sort of in general?

CCS: Well, I really don't like it. I don't like the idea that we're not able to take care of ourselves. We've always

been a country that we've mass produced, back from the early '30s when Ford first introduced the assembly line. And well, with the steel mills and everything. I find a lot of this stuff -- and the thing that really bothers me most is that it's the companies here sending their materials overseas, bringing it back here, and complaining about the taxes and the rates on it. And of course, they send the items that they've made here, over to any country, I don't care what it is, overseas. They assemble most of it over there, they send it back here, and they put a label on it, "Made in USA." Those things, that are, they really upset me. Shoes, clothing, and coats, [00:49:00] you look at trousers, you look at shoes. Tried to buy a pair of shoes today that fits. It's almost impossible. You get two size nines and one is like a seven and a half and the other one looks like a 12. Side by side --

MD: In the same box.

CCS: -- in the same box. I mean, it's fantastic but it's true. In clothing, the same way. You go out and buy a 16-32 shirt. You wash it one time and you put it on and you can't button the sleeves anymore and the sleeves were down here and now they're all the way up to here and they get the same price. That's what bothers me most, is that they get the same price.

RS: Do you think something should be done about this situation?
Not just the imports and things like that but what you've
been describing here.

CCS: Oh, absolutely. Let's use Aero for instance. I've always
liked Aero shirts. [00:50:00] You go out and buy an Aero
shirt, you put it on, it fit.

RS: It doesn't do that anymore, I stopped using Aero's because
it doesn't fit anymore.

CCS: No. I found that the same thing too. I always used them
and Aero and Van Huesen and I find out that they no longer
fit, so now I have to go out and buy a shirt, sometimes two
sizes too large so that when it does get in and washes the
first time, it fits. That's no good either because
sometimes I get one and it doesn't fit (laughs), decided it
still stays two sizes too large. I know it's a worldwide
market, we're in competition worldwide.

RS: That's an excuse.

CCS: But it's no excuse for the things that are happening. I
think the quality control is lacking. The materials are
lacking, that are either sent in or that are purchased.
The raw materials that go into the makeup of the final
garment or whatever it might be. Same way with the steels.
[00:51:00] I find out that we're making the stuff here,
sending it overseas, and then they bring it back here again

and they paint it or do something else and send it through, and there's always something inferior than it. Nuts, bolts, washers, I don't care what it is. Find all of that, it's all that way. There is definitely something inferior and they're cheating. That's what it really comes down to. They're cheating. They're making it cheaper and somebody over there says, "They'll never know the difference. Don't bother putting that in, don't put that element in there." Or, "Eh, you don't have to double stitch that, just single stitch and let it go." That type of thing. "We'll save on -- look at how many hundreds of meters of thread we can save if we do that, and look at how fast we can get it out of here. Better than making 10 an hour, we can make 20."

RS: Would you advocate some sort of controls on this sort of thing?

CCS: I certainly would, if it was me. [00:52:00] What should be done is that, whatever is stated in that garment or whatever it might be, it better come up to it and then have some sort of control right here when it hits the docks. Have an inspection of some sort that this had best meet the specifications, regardless of what it is, what you say it is, it had better be exactly what that says.

RS: Would you favor a policy of -- it would have to be done by the federal government because it would be that scale -- of various programs of reinvestment in American industry?

CCS: Oh, yeah. Definitely, definitely. I think the industry and the government should get together. I had read now, I don't know if it's still in progress down in Pittsburgh, that the steel company down there -- the government and this company were working together to try to develop a method of making steel [00:53:00] without using this here soft coal, coke. Without the smoke effect from it and get a much better product, a much cleaner product, without the pollution. I don't know if that's still in effect but things like that could certainly, certainly go a long way with the enhancing country's production in the steel area. Now, I think that Bethlehem Steel could do something instead of selling off everything that they're doing and reinvesting some of this money back into the plant, instead of sending overseas and investing over there because a lot of their stuff is going directly overseas and it has been for the last 15, 20 years.

RS: You mean their product? Or their money, their capital?

CCS: Their money and some of the technologies.

RS: Oh, yeah?

CCS: Oh, definitely. They'll probably swear up and down that it isn't, but everybody knows better. I mean, these ships coming back in here in port, they come in here and they [00:54:00] got Bethlehem Steel written all over them, you know, how can you miss it? They certainly didn't send it out of Maryland, then down to Florida and then send it back again.

RS: Okay. Martin, you have any questions?

MD: You did say something, I forget about which company you were talking about. You said they were sending stuff down South. Were you talking about Mack trucks?

RS: Dana.

CCS: Dana corporation.

MD: Dana. What did you mean?

CCS: Well, Mack did move down there. When I had wrote my thesis that was one of the things that I had in there, is I had speculated in it that they were going to down and I think I named the place as -- they moved to [Wellsborough?] and I think I had another place in there, it was a borough in there also. I think it was Wellsborough, Waynesborough, or something like that. I wish I had that --

RS: If you find it, I'd like to read it.

CCS: [00:55:00] Oh, I'm still hunting for it. I was hunting for it again tonight and I am really disillusioned by it and I

think, and I told my wife, that the professor kept it.

(laughter) I really do, I felt that he did keep that particular paper, because he had mentioned once earlier in one of the classes, that if he comes up with a classic --

RS: He's going to keep it.

CCS: -- he likes to keep them and use them as a reference source.

RS: Yeah, right, I know all about that. (laughs)

MD: You mean when like Mack Trucks moved to South Carolina?

CCS: Oh, yeah, I had predicted the demise of Mack Trucks. It was probably about four years or so before they actually closed the doors. I had predicted that. Then I wrote up why I felt that they were going to do that and then it wasn't too much longer after that that I was told they're closing down and our place was going and they're going and, it wasn't too much longer after that, matter of fact, I wrote this in '80. Matter of fact, I have this right here. I wrote this '84. [00:56:00] Mack went down there in '85.

MD: I heard the radio commentator say about Mack Trucks and their move to South Carolina that, "It was the worst move for the worst reasons."

CCS: It was, it was. Again, what they're doing is that they're using hindsight. But it was projected that the quality of the labor and help that they would get down there would not

be any more effective than if they had stayed right here and maintained the same labor force, the same hourly rate, the same people, and it wouldn't have cost them any more money than it has down there. As I understand, right down there, right now, that they sold the building that they're in that they built --

RS: That huge building?

CCS: -- and they're renting it back. Now I don't know how you do this. There's something in here that just doesn't ring right, but this is what I --

RS: It doesn't make sense.

CCS: -- a buddy of mine told me that they sold the [00:57:00] building --

RS: And then leased it?

CCS: -- and now they're leasing it back. They're paying a huge amount of rent on this thing.

MD: I wonder if they sold it to a foreign corporation.

CCS: I don't know --

MD: (overlapping dialogue, inaudible) Federal tax on it.

CCS: But still -- they're still paying an awful lot of money on it, and it doesn't make any sense to me.

MD: Well I understood that there are three bad reasons why they moved. One was they had a new product in a new plant with

new workers. You know who told me that, I think it was Barney Fournier.

CCS: Barry Fournier? Yeah, because I worked with Barry, I worked with him. Really, that's true because they didn't have people who understood the product, and they didn't have enough people who could go down there who could train them properly. There's just no way you can take people off the street [00:58:00] and train them to build a truck overnight, really, literally, because this is what you're doing. I mean, it took all these years for all these guys to learn the skill and you always had a trained worker with you. If you did something wrong, he was there right there to tell you, "Hey that's wrong. Change it." Or whatever you had to do it with it or do something different with it. They didn't have that luxury down there. You went down there, everybody just put things together, you know, he said "That's the way it goes, put it on there. It looks like the picture." (laughter)

MD: What do you think it's going to take to change the American management attitude? We were talking about the master-slave relationship. What do you think is going to --

CCS: Really, they have to get down at the level and they have to get out on the plants. They have to see what the people are going through. They have to get themselves dirty.

Really is what they have to do. They have to get down there and they [00:59:00] have to get dirty to understand what is really going on. What you would call "on the front line." Regardless of where they're at, in what plant or whatever is. There are people who don't even know where some of the places are within their own plants. You ask them to get down there. Let's just use Mack, not that it would, you know -- but there are actually people who say, "How would I get to the axle line?" It's been in the plant now for 50 years; they've been working there for 20 years! "How do I get down to the axle line?" They have no idea. Basically that's the type of thing I'm talking about. It might be a little bit you know, over on the -- but that's what you're looking at. Get people who come in there that haven't got the foggiest idea what they're doing, you know, like they used to say, "Go to work in the dark. Come home in the dark. All day in the fog." (Laughter) These are, you know, it's, and we have managers like this. [01:00:00] That's really what it is and they just have no idea what's happening around them.

RS: That reminds me of an expression we used to use in the army. "They treat us like mushrooms: kept us in the dark and surrounded by shit."

CCS: Right. (laughter) Yeah, really that's about it, you know. Some people make it happen and others stand around and say, "What happened?" You always have this. That's really, I think what they have to do is they have to get down there and find out what's going on. If they really want to understand their business, if they want to understand what they're working with, if they want to understand their employees, they have got to get down there. Iacocca hit it pretty good, hit it pretty on the head, "Get out there and find out what's going on."

RS: Well this, you know, American managers, especially in the auto industry stopped doing this, [01:01:00] I guess after World War II. They start hiring financial people and --

CCS: Exactly, and they have no idea --

RS: -- they have no idea how to assemble a car.

CCS: That's where the real problem comes in. A lot of them are completely unrelated to what they're doing. You keep business people in the business end of it, you put the engineering people and the builders in the building end of it. You just don't throw one in and throw the other into the other because they're both walking in land they're completely unfamiliar with.

MD: You see in the '80s where there were a number of panics in the '80s. It seems like one of the other panics was the need to make that money real fast.

CCS: Yeah, that started in the '70s, really.

MD: We seem to now be paying for that.

CCS: Yeah, it's coming around to bite everybody right on the backside because they're paying dearly for it now. It was shortsighted [01:02:00] management. That you can lay directly on management. They can blame the unions for a portion of it, yeah because the unions wanted their buck too.

(dog barks)

F1: Quiet.

CCS: Must be a cat or something wandering around out there. But that's really what it come into. I lay it, most of it, on management because the worker doesn't tell the plant where to go. He only does the job he's told by the people who are directing him, the foreman, the boss, supervisor, whatever you want to call him.

RS: You said that it's the --

CCS: It's strictly that management that called the shots of where we're going.

RS: Do you think that somehow American management in the '70s, or even in the early '80s, realized that the international

competition, that the whole nature of the international market was changing and they couldn't --

CCS: No, I don't believe they did. They were sitting on the big old Ford, [01:03:00] remember the '50s, the '60s, the '50s, the huge tank things that were coming down the road and they --

RS: Huge tanks, right.

END OF AUDIO FILE