

Narrator: Sandor (Alexander) Toth
Interviewer: Leslie Bilodeau
Date and Place: October 27, 2001 9:30 A.M.

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Begin Tape 1 of 1, Side A.

Leslie Bilodeau: My name is Leslie Bilodeau and I am interviewing Mr. Sandor Toth. He is known as Alexander Toth. We are interviewing today, October 27, 2001 at his residence in Granite City. It's about 9:30 in the morning. We're going to take a walking tour of the neighborhood as part of this interview today. Mr. Toth, what is your birthdate?

Sandor Toth: July 19, 1919.

Bilodeau: Where you born in the United States?

Toth: Yes, I was born in Lincoln Place at 1716 Spruce.

Bilodeau: To go back a little to what we were just talking about, we were talking about your experiences with Ms. Prather....

Toth: Miss Prather.

Bilodeau: Was she significant....was she the founder of the community center?

Toth: No, she was an employee of Commonwealth Industries, Commonwealth Steel Industries, who built the Community Center. It's the large building in the center of Lincoln Place. It had a large gymnasium. In the summer time we'd have woodworking classes for the boys, sewing classes for the girls, basket weaving for the girls, and she was paid... it was privately funded by the Commonwealth Steel Industries. A.T. Howard was the president, or A.T Bowen was the vice president, and Clarence Howard was the President of Commonwealth Steel industries at that time.

Bilodeau: Do you mind if I just take a few notes while we talk?

Toth: No! You can't remember it all.

Bilodeau: I know. I didn't mean to interrupt you. So....we were talking about the residents of the neighborhood enabling a state championship in basketball.

Toth: In 1940, five of the first string players were from down there.

Bilodeau: And was that in your age group then? Did you...

Toth: No, that was an age group younger.

Bilodeau: Younger than you?

Toth: A couple years younger. It was Andy Phillips, Andy Hagopian, Eftimoff, I don't remember his first name. But they were...the first team was totally from down there. And they were state champs! Out of 2 square, 3 square blocks!

Bilodeau: I know that, I was able to go to the local history section of the library and I did a little bit of research about your background, very preliminary - I wasn't snooping, just trying to give a fair interview, and after looking at where you grew up, 1716 Spruce, I saw that that was very near the Magyar Haz, which was established in 1925?

Toth: 1921-25...we'll look at the cornerstone of the building.

Bilodeau: Okay.

Toth: We're going to go down there. It was built by a group of Hungarians. They decided they'd have a lodge. It was called the Verhovy Lodge. They sold insurance, and there were other women's organizations, men's organizations, and all through the year we had festivities. One big event yearly was they raffle off an automobile back then, at a cost of seven or eight hundred dollars, a Ford, and they would pick a May Queen. We'll call it a Hungarian May Queen. She was picked by who sold the most tickets. They

raffled the car. The tickets were a dollar a ticket, see, and the girls would dress up in their Hungarian costumes. It's a dress that's pleated all the way around and gosh, it could be this wide [he reached his arms out parallel to the ground to motion that the dress was very full on the bottom] but it's all pleats. They wore a red velvet vest with gold braiding and gold buttons.

Bilodeau: It sounds beautiful.

Toth: Yes. A tight fitting vest, you know, and a big skirt. They would pick a queen, the queen was picked by whose father bought the most tickets. Then they'd raffle the automobile. One of my second cousins, John Petish, his first cousin, Regina Peters, was a queen one year.

Bilodeau: What benefits were for the Queen? Did she have anything...was her photo hung up? Or anything special...

Toth: She gets her photo in the Hungarian newspaper, you know, and a paper write up and stuff. Just the normal, nothing fancy. But it's an honor to be picked. Of course, all the mothers, even I and John, we had costumes that my mother sewed. We had vests, they were trousers because they had pants legs, but they were so full and they were pleated so tightly that it looked like a skirt. You know what I mean? But it actually had two pants legs, and a red vest with gold braid. John's probably got pictures of it at his house.

Bilodeau: I'll ask him.

Toth: Hmmm?

Bilodeau: I'll ask him when I see him. Did you have a lot of different cultural celebrations or holidays?

Toth: They had something going on all the time, by the season, and had a lodge with insurance policies, small policies. They didn't sell any large policies. And then Verhovy was a Milwaukee based insurance company, but they had branches in East St. Louis, Madison, Granite City, Wood River, and you name it. Verhovy, v e r h o v y, Verhovy. They sponsored a baseball team every summer. One year they decided that the team would travel to all the cities that there was a Verhovy Lodge. When the word got out in Granite City, well every ball player in town that had virtually nothing to do, they wanted to be on that Verhovy team. They'd get to go to Chicago, South Bend, Indiana, East St. Louis, Wood River, Alton...and, heck, all expenses were paid. Course they'd put four guys to a room, or something like that, you know, to save money. I thought it was a nice neighborhood to grow up in.

Miss Prather, she was an ex- school teacher, a little bitty woman, five feet tall, and weighed a hundred pounds wet. But she had so much respect of the boys, they named a school after her in West Granite, Prather Elementary. She'd walk up to a guy your size and she'd punch him in the rib with her finger and say, "Two days" and you know that bugger would walk out of that place and tomorrow, or the next evening, or that afternoon, there they'd come from someplace, groups of boys hanging in gangs, you know, four or five of them, and they'd all come in but that one who had the two day punishment. He wouldn't come in off the porch. He'd stay right out there. She'd look out of her office and see him standing there, I guess on the Niederinghaus side, and she'd open the door and say, "Now Alex, or John, or whatever your name was, do you think that you understand why I gave you two days?" He'd be so embarrassed that he'd just

[he made a motion of lowering his head in humility and regret] made a motion with your head, you know, and she'd say, "Aw, come on in." She was...nice.

My mother was working, so she sent me there because my cousins owned a confectionery right across the street. When we go down there you'll see it. Because I had an older female....., I call her a cousin but she wasn't my cousin, she was John's cousin, because the two fathers were brothers. Viola Peters. Petish was her name but they changed it to Peters. These foreigners came here and they'd change their name somewhat. From Petish to Peters. They'd moved out to make a place to live on the Adams for a while till they moved over here on State, 2200-2300. Viola's dad was one of the first Hungarians to own an automobile, a Studebaker. I'll never forget that.

Bilodeau: Do you know what year it was?

Toth: Twenty-five, or something like that.

Bilodeau: Goodness.

Toth: For a foreigner, you know....he was something like my godfather in Wood River, Condas. He had a car in 1917. He owned a night club, and behind the back bar there was this car, an open Ford, a touring car, four-door, with like a convertible top....and he was wearing goggles, and a dust cloth. His wife was dressed the same way. He's got big leather gloves, driving gloves...they wore gloves up to their elbows...and it hung behind the bar. He was a young man admiring that, you know? 1918, 1917 model Ford. For a foreigner to have a car back then, that was something. There might have been two cars in the whole town. [Laughter]

Bilodeau: That's amazing. So when you were young, how many were in your family?

Toth: Two. Eleven years. My brother, Ted, and he lives in Chesterfield, Missouri, and myself. There are eleven years between us.

Bilodeau: Was he called Tibor [pronunciation]?

Toth: Tibor. [He pronounced correctly] T I B O R. [spelling] that came out of....there was an almanac, a Hungarian Almanac, and like all almanacs, you know, they have the month, and Mama said to her husband, my father, "What should we name this boy?" There was eleven years between us. My father said, "Well, let me look." We called it a colendalium, a calendar. And he looked it up and there it was, for that day it was Tibor.

Bilodeau: Huh!

Toth: He said, "He brought his name with him."

Bilodeau: How interesting.

Toth: He brought his name with him, so now, that's what we'll call him. Now that's an odd name. How many kids in school were named Tibor, T I B O R!

Bilodeau: When I looked some information up I understood that sometimes lots of people lived in one household, more than one generation.

Toth: Yes, but at the beginning, when they first began to arrive from Europe, two families were living in the home that I was born in. There were not always, but at times, there would be two families who would live there. And everybody would have a summer kitchen. It was no more than a separate building from the house, today's garages by looks, but they just took some cement blocks and lay them down here and there, put some timbers across and put a floor in there, and put a flue in it so they could have a stove, and a water gate. My mother would do her laundry outside. We had no basement under these homes. Neidringhaus, you've heard of that family?

Bilodeau: Uh-huh...

Toth: They were real estate people. They built a lot of these homes throughout Granite City, and they built a lot of them, and sold them to you, if you had a steady job. I think my dad paid sixteen hundred dollars for his house. And my mother lived there fifty years and sold it for ten thousand.

Bilodeau: Wow. So when did your dad buy that house? When was that?

Toth: I'll take a wild guess ...1910.

Bilodeau: Did your dad come here from Hungary?

Toth: Hungary.

Bilodeau: What were the circumstances? Did he ever say?

Toth: Well, there was an influx of immigrants, oh, I'd say, in the early nineteen hundreds. The land of great opportunity. One arrives, and he writes a letter home to his family, or his brother, or somebody, "Oh my God, you can get a job by just asking for it. And you're making two dollars a day." Well, that was a week's pay in Europe.

Especially my parents. They lived on a large estate that was owned by a guy named Karoly. K A R O L Y [spelling]. I don't remember his first name, but he owned the land, the homes....there were ten families that were tenants and John Petish, my cousin, the wife of this gentlemen here [he is pointing him out in a photo] ...the wife of that guy. That's John Petish senior. She was my aunt and my father's sister, and she lived in Europe. There would three kids, four kids, mother and father live in a three room house.

Bilodeau: Then you didn't have all the conveniences that you.....

Toth: Oh no, no, no....in fact, most of those homes that the Neidringhaus family, the evidently wealthy real estate people, the founders of this community....the main street is

called Neidringhaus Avenue...they were enterprising individuals. They built homes, or had contractors build them, and they would sell them.

Bilodeau: And did they have indoor plumbing?

Toth: No, we had outdoor plumbing. I was eleven years old, I remember that, and my father passed away, and my mother was widowed. Eventually she remarried. She married a guy from her old village, that was a bachelor. And then she hired a contractor who raised the house. See, they were built without basements, so they were built about two cement blocks off of ground level. The contractor would come in and jack the house up and excavate the basement and pour concrete walls, or block walls, whatever you chose, and then lower the house back down. And in her case, I don't know why she did it that way. She had it raised and full concrete basement put in and all the plaster taken off of every room, new plaster put on, and the company, it was a Gregor Siding, wooden siding. She had that covered with asbestos over the old siding, and made it like a new house. We're going to go past that house.

Bilodeau: That'll be nice.

Toth: That's where I was born. But it's an altogether different house, you know, it was remodeled extensively. And I'll show you where John Petish, this guy [pointing to photo] where he lived. There was just one home between us, Hetterjacks.

Bilodeau: So you were born at home, actually in the house?

Toth: In the house. Most, even my brother was born at home, eleven years later. The woman, Wading, Mrs. Wading, she had a two-door model T, two door sedan, and they were rushing me out of the house, taking me to Wood River, so I wouldn't be there when the child was born. By that time I was eleven years old. I recognized her car stopping in

front of the house, so right away I said, “Aw oh!...” My mother was so big, normally, she was a heavy-set woman, I guess the pregnancy didn’t show that much, you know? Those women...they were something. There was nothing, whether it was Armenian, Macedonian, Bulgarian, Greek, or Hungarian food that my mother didn’t cook. You know, you have a neighbor across the street that is Macedonia, and this is an Armenian, and this is a Mexican, this is a Hungarian. We used to refer to it as Little Europe. It was nicknamed Little Europe by certain people, you know, because of the variety of nationalities that came from, and you know, each nationality speaks a different dialect, a different language. An Armenian doesn’t understand a Mexican. A Mexican doesn’t understand a Greek. A Greek doesn’t understand a Hungarian or a Pole or a Czechoslovakian.

Bilodeau: How did that work out?

Toth: It worked out perfect! The boys all, the kids all spoke English, they went to English school. We played together. Kids were, they were....how do I say....they showed, they were trained to have a lot of respect for the elders. It didn’t make a difference, you could be a third cousin, you could just be a neighbor, and if you wanted me to run to the baker’s shop for you, you’d say, “Alex, run to the store for me. Get me a loaf of bread.” May be just a neighbor, but I knew you were a friend of my mom’s.

Bilodeau: That’s really truly a sense of community.

Toth: Yes! I wouldn’t dare say no. I’d holler to my friend, “I’ll be right back!” playing ball in the street or at the community center. There was Kirchoff’s, Lovecheff, owned the building, and Kit Kirchoff, Bob Kirchoff went across the street, and run themselves a

grocery store, a new one. Then we had Kirchoffs, Lovecheff, Mitseff, Vartanian, and Stoyanoff. So we had plenty of grocery stores.

Bilodeau: You were close.

Toth: Close. But we'd always walk up to Cleveland, 19th and Cleveland. I don't know what's in that building now. Probably torn down, I don't know. But that was Tri City Grocery, Pershell family. You remember them?

Bilodeau: I'm not familiar with them.

Toth: They eventually owned stores in Wood River, Alton, and Granite City.

Bilodeau: I'm not from...I'm from Belleville, but I live in Collinsville now. This is my first exposure to Granite City, so.... I have this small map that I've been working off of. I see the names on here, Kirchoff, Lovecheff, Merchoff. I'm looking for Cleveland.

Toth: Kambarian Cleaners. It was Abe Kambarian. He owned the cleaners first, and then he sold the cleaning business and went into the tavern business. In fact, this woman next store. Decatur's daughter, Wendy, she married Kirchoff. He was a teacher in the Granite City High School, either the high school, or maybe thewhat do you call it....the....the other one, the junior high.

Bilodeau: The junior high?

Toth: Yes. They were teaching, and I guess they met, you know. Decatur had all women, and he saw his daughter, and she was a good looking gal. She's still a good looking gal, big gal. Big in a sense of height, not in weight. Firm, tall gal. You could say she's average, maybe above average, you know. She's very neat in appearance, and that's what you go by when you look out the window.

Kirchoff thought that he would play two fields, and he got caught at it. She just kicked him out. Of course, she was in a position to, her dad was an alderman. But there's....I'm not sticking up for her...I knew his dad and his grandpa and everything. Once you're married to a girl, you're married. You don't start spooning on the way home from work because you ride with her, you know what I mean, it's convenient. He was just totally wrong, and I don't think she had much choice, to save face. She's got a boyfriend now. He doesn't stay there, though. He's got his own house in Granite. But he comes here every day. Which is okay. But they're very good neighbors. I'm fortunate.

Mary Mang, she's widowed now, but that's the only people that ever lived there. [pointing in the directions of neighbors homes] Mrs. Slayman, now I didn't get along with her when she lived here. She had no children. It was her third marriage, I guess, and married a real nice gentleman that had a good job in St. Louis, but that was out of her field because she was a fighter. She would plant bushes, you see those shrubs there, along the line there, and I kept telling her, I says, "Now, it's alright, you plant what you want because it's your land, but when you plant a bush and the nursery tells you it's going to have a four foot spread when it grows finally, you don't plant it six inches from the line." You know what I mean? Because when it grows up it's going to be three foot in my yard. Now give me the benefit of the doubt and let me plant, or say to me every other plant will be yours and every other plant will be mine, or make some agreement. Not just say, "Well, he's not here, it's an empty lot and I'm already here, I'll do what I want." Then when you get there you find out you don't have a fifty foot lot, you have a forty foot lot.

Bilodeau: Did you have those kind of problems when you were in Lincoln Place?

Toth: No. No.

Bilodeau: Were the lots closer together?

Toth: No, they were fifty foot lots, and people had less. And they had fences.

Everybody had fences, front, back, side....I don't know why. They learned early in life that what is yours is yours and what is mine is mine. And they lived by those beliefs. If a guy wanted to plant a tree, he would walk over to your place and say, "I want to plant a tree, but where I want it, I can't plant it more than two feet or three feet into my own yard. When it becomes a full grown tree, it's going to be hanging over."

Now if I said, "I don't want it there. It's too close to my house, and the branches would be over my house. I don't want branches over my house." Then he would say, "Then where can we agree on a spot?"

And I'd say, "Yes. Move it down eight feet." You know? So when it grows up it won't be quite over my roof.

Bilodeau: And you respected each other?

Toth: Yes. Even though they were Polish, Hungarian, Romanian, Greek, Macedonian, Bulgarian, Slovak....of course our communication would be in broken English. Let's take a ride down there!

Bilodeau: Okay.

[During this time we drove down into the Lincoln Place neighborhood and took a two-hour tour, which included the Community Center, Magyar-Haz, Sandor Toth's homestead, and the historic sites and businesses mentioned during our discussion. When we returned to his home, he gave me a tour of his home, recounting the building of his

house and the intention behind the designs, which were all done by him. Upon our return, the conversation was so interesting that I didn't interrupt to introduce this segment of the tape. It starts in mid-conversation]

Toth: We had this big wall here. And I thought, what can I do with a wall in the kitchen that's big enough. You know, if I put another wall out here and have the dent to the basement and see if the middle here won't make me a book case. Now you can hide all your junk this way, see?

Bilodeau: Oh, those are great!

Toth: You know, I used to go to school, and I [he pulled out an old book to show me]

Bilodeau: When you went to school did you share books with other kids, or...

Toth: Yes. But when I took some night courses at Saint Louis U and S.I.U. and then you have to buy your own. That was under the GI Bill of Rights, so I didn't pay for them. I have some great books in here. Here, Production Handbook, Cost Accountants Handbook. It's like a dictionary for a cost accountant, for every time he runs across something.

Bilodeau: You studied these in school?

Toth: Yes. I studied accounting....I was going to be an accountant and ended up being a machine shop foreman.

Bilodeau: Timekeeping [he handed me a book on timekeeping]. Were you once a timekeeper, in 1941?

Toth: Yes

Bilodeau: And where were you working then?

Toth: In 1941....at NESCO.

Bilodeau: At NESCO.

Toth: Wait. In 1941 I went into the Army.

Bilodeau: I thought that you must have, because when I looked in the journals, I couldn't find anything from 1945-50, and it had US Army in there, so I thought so. What did you do in the Army?

Toth: I was at MAG supply site. There's 525 men in the battalion. Headquarters battery, they do the planning, then the gun batteries A, B, and C....then the service batteries and supply. I started out in the gun battery, and they'd transfer you around without asking you, and I ended up as the supply sergeant for just the service battery.

One day, the guy in B battery, this was in combat, he went berserk. So the old man, the commander, sent for me and I wanted to see him, he was the commander and we called him the old man. But he wasn't any older than the rest of us, from what I figured. And he says, "Get your gear ready and I'll send you down to B battery. The guy had a nervous breakdown down there."

I said, "Well, I'm happy where I'm at, sir."

He said, "It's not where you're happy, it's where we need you. Now move it!" So he sent me to B battery and when I got there, oh the mess I found there, the guy had a nervous breakdown and didn't tell nobody. This was in combat. So I straightened everything out, because paperwork goes on whether there's fighting or not, see. And they got to have requisitions for food, requisitions for gas, requisitions for clothing, whatever.

One day I was sitting there and all I owned was a trailer. And every time they'd find some ammunition truck or empty truck to drag my trailer and my supply house, and

he come to me and says, my commander, the old commander that I used to have, came down and says, "Get your gear together, sergeant, you're coming with me. Now, he's a Captain, so I got to do what he says. It don't make a difference who he is, he's a captain. I got my stuff together and set a bag here and let's go. I threw it in the back seat and crawled in the truck next to the driver. He sat in the back.

We come to the place, and when we got there I saw these were the soldiers, by that time. I said, "What's cooking over here? I had the best job in the battalion, in B battery, and he come and got me."

He says, "The guy who run the battalion supply, ALL of the five headquarters, A, B and C who want something have to come through this one guy." He says, "He was hooking up a trailer last night and got his hand smashed. He'll never be back. It looks like they're going to have to amputate that hand, the way it looks." You know? And then he said, "I guess the battalion supply is the most important because that handles the food, the water, the gas, and you name it for the whole five hundred and some-odd men." So I thought, damn, every time I get a job I like, they move me, you know? But...in the Army, it's the Army. You don't decide what you're going to do.

Bilodeau: Um hmm.

Toth: I mean, there's a captain or a lieutenant or somebody that's going to tell you something. Well, I stayed there till the end of the war. He was good to me. There was nothing in the world that I could not have. And these guys said to me, "You can't get this, you can't get that."

I'd say, "You have to do it the right way."

He said, "What's that?"

I says, "When I learned it, I was in high school. When I was a utility corporal, I was in charge of three hundred and some-odd men in that camp, called for repair of the buildings, electric, an keep that up, see. And I learned the hard way. I needed saw real bad. And I go to the engineers down the road about two blocks, and I could see the saw on the shelf, and it was in boxes. And I had a requisition signed by a captain, which is a second lieutenant, a first lieutenant, then a captain, you know, it's not a beginner. And a second lieutenant, which is also the lowest officer says, N.A., not available. So I said to the sarge, "Sarge, hell, I'm looking at it."

He said, "We're saving it because we're going to build a base hospital. And they want everything to be saved for the hospital."

I says, "What can I do? I got to have that saw?"

He said, "Look at me. I need fatigue clothes and we can't get them."

So I thought, hmmm, that's a lead.

The artillery and the infantry, from day one, by the orders of the commanding general of the island, whenever the boats come in it was the responsibility of the infantry units and artillery units. Of course, the officers already had control, to unload the boats.

"That's their job from day one till I change it." Now this is the commanding general in charge of the whole island, see.

Bilodeau: What island?

Toth: Iceland. So, that's the way it turned out to be. So I'm telling this one sarge, I look in the book, Sergeant Wolf. I went to look him up and I says, "Hey, I see you have an eight man detail." Each outfit had so many men. They had hundreds of them by the time

all the outfits left the little island. I says, “You know, I need a saw real bad and I just can’t get one with a legal requisition?”

“You do?”

“Yeah!”

“Well, what battalion?”

The next morning he comes and looks me up and he says, “Take that package off the truck that I got signed out for. I’ve got to turn it in. My shift’s up.” So I go out there and what do you think he has? It looked like a movie. 144 pair of assorted size jeans, fatigue clothes, sewn in burlap. 144 PAIR ASSORTED SIZES!!!. My God, what in the hell am I going to do with 144, I wanted four or five!!

He said, “Find something to do with them.” He jerks it open. “I have to turn the truck in. The ship’s going out.”

I’m pondering over it. I had a broken down truck that I used for my construction work that nobody wanted, I got it out of the scrap pile. I had some guy help me load it up and I took it down the road to engineering. The engineer, a couple days before, complained that they couldn’t get fatigues. That’s what they wore. They worked road work and on buildings, and I called that sergeant out there and says, “Can you use that? I have 144 pairs of fatigue clothes here.”

He said, “What are you going to do with them?”

I said, “I’m going to give them to you.”

He said, “What in the hell am I going to do with 144 pair?” [I continue to giggle]

I say, “Hey Mac, you’re not thinking.” I says, “You put it on the end of the chow line tonight” this was before the combat, before the war, and “anybody who walks by

wants a pair, let him pick it up. Pick your own size up. I'm betting with 110, 15, 20 guys in the company, they'll be gone before you know it."

The next day I saw him he says, "You know, they went like hotcakes!"

I says, "See."

After that, no matter what I wanted, I'd just look up that sergeant and whatever I wanted, you name it, I don't care if it was an instrument, tools, watches.....one day they said to me, "How do you get a battery to run your electric razor, a B battery for an electric razor that you normally plug in?" He says, "We can't get them for hell not."

I says "You can't? I'll take care of that for you." I looked at who's working on the boat docks. I says to him, "Now when you're unloading batteries to take to the warehouse, can you somehow let a couple of cartons (there was twelve batteries to a carton) get lost somehow?"

"We'll see." Those guys would steal from the President of the United States and never get caught. They were experts at it. The next day here he comes. I just give these to the engineers, you know, the guy that needed it for the electric razor.

I horse traded from one outfit to the other. It got to the point that no matter what you wanted, you name it and I could go get it. Guys were going to bet me that I couldn't get a jeep. I said, "No I can't get a jeep cause they've got serial numbers on the cars. Watches I can juggle, but I can't juggle a jeep. It's too big of a truck" but I says, "I can get one any time that I want it, use it, and turn it back in at night." I had it made.

Bilodeau: It seems you've always been able to carve that little niche out for yourself.

Toth: I always cut a niche. When I made battalion supply sergeant, I heard the captain telling those officers, "How's Sergeant Toth do it?"

He said, "Sergeant is an amazing person!" [we laughed] He says, "An amazing person. I don't pay no attention to him. I just let him have the run of the house. "

No matter what I wanted, I could just get on the telephone and call the ordinance, call the quartermaster, call the engineers, and tell them.....course I had one driver every day go out to each warehouse and pick up what the other five companies need there. He sent the requisitions and the supplies and records sheets to me, and the other go for rations, the other go for water and sometimes I would switch them off the water truck and the gas truck. I don't think there's anything in the world I couldn't have had in the Army.

Bilodeau: How do you think you learned that? Do you think you learned that from your dad?

Toth: I learned that the way you grow up not having it. And always having to scheme to get it. You know? I mean, I had good parents, heck of a good parents, I can't complain. My father was a hard worker, a trusted man. My mother was a good manager. And when you put a couple like that together. My mother was widowed for 20 years and had \$32,000 in the bank after twenty years of being widowed and not working a day!

Bilodeau: You said your dad died when you were eleven, so when you were around...

Toth: She remarried, she knew the guy. He was a bachelor. He was Hungarian like she was. She remarried about, oh, seven or eight years after she was widowed. He came over, and the reason she remarried, they wouldn't tell me, I had to figure it out. That big house across street from the community center, they lived there, and they lost it.

Bilodeau: That was the Petish place?

Toth: Yes. So then they, the daughter lived over there across the alley, she had a four bedroom house there. So they moved in with their daughter because they had to get out of there. Different things happened.

John and I were always good friends. When I built this, he's an electrician, he said, "I'm going to wire it for you. But don't tell nobody I did because the union will fine me." Well, nobody was going to know about it. When the inspector walked in, well, I'll show you.....there's a plug there, there's a plug there, there's a plug there, there's a plug behind there for the ice box. There's a plug there, there's a plug here. How many? Not many kitchens have that many.

Bilodeau: That's true.

Toth: There's a plug behind the stove, because a stove has to be plugged in, you know? Of course you have to have lights. I don't think I have them plugged in.

Bilodeau: Some unions were....

Toth: Yes, I have it plugged in.

Bilodeau: The unions were pretty powerful then. Did they have a lot of influence?

Toth: Ohhh. Very powerful! Very powerful. I'm surprised they didn't bother me when I was building this. A couple of times they came around and I run them off. I just made up my mind that it's my lot, my dollars going into it, it's my labor, and I don't think anybody should tell me whether he's union or non-union.

Bilodeau: Were you in a union shop?

Toth: No. I worked in a union shop, but I was always a foreman. Foremen can't join the union. But I had good labor relations. In fact, like I told you, when they told me to go to the machine shop, and run it, the first thing I said was, "I appreciate your confidence, but

I've never had any training as a machinist. I'm going to supervise people who are journeymen machinists that served four years as machinists, and they've known me for years, and they know who I am?" I only stayed twenty two years.

Bilodeau: And that was at A.O. Smith?

Toth: A.O. Smith. That was the last place I worked. When they decided to go they asked me how I felt about Milwaukee - a transfer, and I said, "No, give me what I've got coming." When they figured it up, I got \$32,000 in cash, a check, and two years of half pay, plus insurance for my whole family, hospitalization, until I reach social security age.

Bilodeau: So you retired a young man?

Toth: I retired very early. I retired in what, 50-53, something like that.

Bilodeau: That's amazing. Not a lot of people can do that.

Toth: No. But I was in the position. I had the best job in the plant, machine shop foreman. Best paying job.

Bilodeau: And is that where the women worked for you?

Toth: I had three departments. You can't run three departments. No one, except me. why? Every one of them were my aunts.

Bilodeau: Amazing.

Toth: I had ninety people for one foreman. When I went out there, when I quit..... you got to say now if I get caught up in this too much, now. Eventually it caught up with me and was too much. I quit and went to the mill and they hired me just like that. They put me in as a helper maintenance. Everybody goes labor in the mill. And the personnel manager said, "You scored so high on the entrance exam, I'm too embarrassed to put you in labor." I went into maintenance as a helper. I worked there three months.

The boss came out there one day and said to me, “You know they’re laying off a lot of people back ten years with seniority. But they can’t touch you, you’re skilled craft.” And I knew the layoff was coming because we did jobs all over the plant where they sent us, for sheet metal and duct work. Course, I was only a helper, now, you know. And I’m having this conversation. He comes back to me the next day and says, “I made a mistake. The union is ready to go on strike.” I said, “Yeah, I know all about it. Alex Kubish, the union president, is a brother to my brother-in-law, Mike. He’s been making deals for me and we had men get their tempers up.”

I took my lay-off. I was laid off two days. I wasn’t moved in here yet. I was still working on it. So the doorbell rings. They went down to my house, but my neighbors sent them here. So I see two guys in suits, ties, white shirt, brief cases. They said, “We work with the A.O. Smith Corporation. I’m Frank Hill and this is Mr. Harden, Charlie Harden. He says, “I am the personnel director when the plant opens up. And he will be the superintendent. Are you interested in working for A.O. Smith?”

I said, “Yeah, I’m interested in working for anybody. I’m laid off.”

He said, “Come over to the Hotel Jefferson. Tonight we’re interviewing people in the hotel at 12th Street, Jefferson. I went over there all dressed up in my Sunday best, white shirt, neck tie, shined shoes, like the book says you should. And I got down there and there were six guys in the hallway sitting in folding chairs waiting to be called in. Bells are ringing “ding dong.” Hey you’re not alone, here. They’re looking for a candidate. I got through the interview and they said, “We’ll let you know. We’re telling everybody we’ll let you know.”

Well, one day goes by, two days go by, I don't know, three days went by, I don't remember. You're talking about fifty years ago. I'm out here working and "ding dong." "Who the hell's that?" The salesman used the stop by. I opened the door and two guys in suits with brief cases, dressed like business, you know.

"I'm Charlie Harden and this is Mr. Frank Hill. We represent A.O. Smith. You've been recommended by Granite City Steel. You might be a candidate for laborer, bookkeeper, or a flunky boy, whatever you want to call it for our resident engineer while the place is being built. A. O. Smith engineer."

I said, "Yeah, I'm unemployed, I'll be happy to come in for an interview." And I went to an interview that night.

I didn't hear anything, and finally they came back and rang the doorbell, the same two guys and said, "Are you still interested?"

And I said, Sure."

He said, "Well, you report out on the site to Frank Hill. Tell him we sent you. Tell him you're the man we chose."

I went out there, and I looked up the superintendent of the construction, a big company. You know a small, a big company don't build a plant like that. They get a big construction company. I looked up the superintendent. On the constructions site, each site would have a shed, a temporary shed, you've seen those sheds that look like garages?

Bilodeau: Uh huh.

Toth: They're on skids. You can pull them wherever you want them. I said I better go ask them guys, "Hey! Who's the chief out here? Who's running this job?" They said, the

guy, I forgot his name now, is in that hut over there. I'm the timekeeper, and he's the superintendent of the construction company.

I went in there and introduced myself, and he said, "Well, Frank got called back to Milwaukee, and he won't be back till Wednesday." This was Monday. I felt like I didn't care if they ever came back. I'm on their payroll and I'll be here, you know? I'm going to show up on the site and sign in. Sure enough, he came on a Wednesday, and I introduced myself.

He said, "Well they told me all about you. They believe in you very much. I hope you work out for me." I only stayed 22½ years after that. [he laughed]

Bilodeau: That's wonderful.

Toth: What a company! What a company! If you couldn't work for A.O. Smith, you couldn't work for your own father.

Bilodeau: Why do you say that.

Toth: They were so good to you! You know, all of their fringe benefits. I had hospitalization for my whole family all the years I worked there. I had bypass surgery that cost \$136,000, this hospital admission, and do you know what I paid? \$36! Out of \$136, 000. When I went into the personnel office, and I knew the girl there, because she was our secretary when I was in the hospital, I said, "Betty, I'm not getting any bills. And it's been six months and I been back to work"

She says, "Just a minute" and she pulls the file, she has files in the personnel department on everybody. She pulled the health file and she says, "My God, Alex, you signed on the bottom line."

I said, "Well, yeah, I signed on the bottom line. I didn't sign in the middle of the paper."

She said, "If you wanted the money you should've signed in the middle. But you signed on the bottom and that's telling us, giving us the authority, to pay all the bills, that you don't want to deal with them."

I said, "That's what I wanted, for you to pay all the bills."

She said, "Well, what are you complaining about?"

I says, "I don't know. I just want to make sure all the bills are paid."

She says, "Well just forget it. Everything is paid." Every one was paid.

Bilodeau: That's wonderful.

Toth: For that kind of bypass surgery, or heart transplant, and everything.

Bilodeau: When you add that on that makes your salary a lot, when you think about all the benefits you draw.

Toth: Yeah, and I was the highest paid man in the machine shop.

Bilodeau: It's amazing, how the concept of people who were growing up in Hungary Hollow, how they thought for some reason or another, that those were not the people to be with....When you hear the stories, like your story for example, it's amazing....

Toth: Coming from nothing to the highest paid foreman in the whole plant.

Bilodeau: Not only there, though, you were a foreman at

Toth: At NESCO. General foreman there. I had three departments. When they went out on strike and all the girls in the office began to make friends, the second shift machine shop foreman came on days, and my boss decided he'd rather be on the line goofing off, and the lead foreman decided to go to general foreman, I ran the machine shop. No

matter what broke down in the whole plant. So the guy that helped me, to make the second shift, a journeyman machinist that made quota, was working there one day says, “You always told me you had no machine shop experience.”

I said, “Well, I told you that because I wanted to be honest with you. I’ve never worked in a machine shop in my life until they took me out of the press room and the set-up room, and put me in it.”

He says, “Amazing. You run every piece of machinery in here, the same as I do, and I spent four years as an apprentice learning to be a journeyman apprentice, and I worked eight years as a machinist.”

I said, “Well, I been here five years. You got to learn something in five years from just watching.”

He said, “Well, you’re an amazing person.”

Bilodeau: You know, that’s true. I’m sitting here thinking about, you know, I’m just thinking that when you’re a child you get skills you don’t know you’re ever going to have, and I’m thinking that when we were walking through the neighborhood you said there were people whose parents didn’t speak the same language, but there were five or six different nationalities of kids that were able to come together and just play together and grow together, which seems kind of like a pattern in your life. You seem to be able to organize

Toth: And get along with

Bilodeau: Everybody.

Toth: And fit in!

Bilodeau: Uh huh.

Toth: I had a party, unknown to me. They put me on second shift when I told them I'm going to quit – for punishment. I'm a day shift all of my life for twenty years, and now I'm on second shift.

Bilodeau: At NESCO?.

Toth: At NESCO - for punishment.

Bilodeau: OK.

Toth: I said, "I'll take care of it." So one day I sent them to lunch - the girls, I had thirty girls working for me, and gone to lunch. I look at the clock, and hell, they're due back. Beep, Beep, I blow their whistle.

There goes my maintenance man and he says, "Boy, you got troubles coming out of you know what." He said, "They're out there organizing a strike." I thought, my God, I'll straighten their butts out. That's the way I feel, see, because I'm mad. I headed up there, why, straight through that exterior door and that place was packed, and I took a second look and my wife and my four year old son are sitting there at a table.

I said, "What the hell are you doing here, girl?"

She says, "I'm here to enjoy the party they're giving for you." [I laugh]

Bilodeau: It was a surprise.

Toth: A surprise party.

Bilodeau: And what was the occasion?

Toth: I'm retiring. I'm quitting the company because they're putting me on the second shift. So they got chicken from Fipps. They had a place they called Fipps. Very fine boxed chicken. Including my wife and son. Peskin's was a men's store in town. They have the good stuff, you know, Arrow shirts, and they had silk underwear, flannel pants,

sweater, jacket, you name it. You know, why heck, you have forty people chipping in money. And there's my wife and child sitting there and chicken for everybody. I let them have, oh, about an hour for lunch. Then I says, "Girls, you know, we're having fun, I know that. I can see it. "But" I says, "we owe the company something. We're being paid by the hour." I got paid by the month, but they didn't know that. "Lets go back to work." We'd had about an hour and a half. Did you know those bums made every lost minute back up?

They went to work, and I'm sitting at my bench not caring what happens, it's my last day, my last four hours in this company. I'm looking at the conveyer thinking, "Damn, there's no gap nowhere!" No gap, I mean they just.....so I walked up to one of the girls and says, "What the hell's going on?"

She says, "We're going to make up the lost time."

Bilodeau: You can't buy that loyalty.

Toth: "Aw" I said, "You don't have to make that up."

She said, "We're going to make it up to make you look good. We don't want them to criticize you for nothing after us having that hour and a half long lunch."

Bilodeau: That's wonderful.

Toth: I said, "They ain't going to do nothing to me, I'm GONE!" And they evidently.....when I went to personnel, the guy said to me after I took the test, "Man I can't put you in labor, I don't know what to do with you," the personnel manager.

I said, "Put me anywhere there's an opening. I don't care if it's sweeping the street off in front of the plant. I came to ask for work and I'm here to work."

He said, "Would you take the helpers job in the sheet metal plant?"

I said, "Yeah, I'll take anything." So I went in there and I worked with my brother-in-law who was working as a helper.

"He says, "What the hell did they bring you in there for? We don't need nobody."

I said, "Well, they told me to come here and that's where I'm at. I'm going to stay here as long as they don't run me out." I worked there and the boss came out one Sunday...we worked ten on and four off, then ten on and four off. We had the crews split in half. Section one and section two, ten guys on each crew.

The boss came out and said, "Man they can't touch you. You're a skilled craft. There's men being laid off after ten years." I knew there were people being laid off up to ten years, I talked to people in the shop and we can do the job, now don't worry. We need the work but a union's a union.

I says, "Alex Kubish is a brother to my brother-in-law, Mike, and Mike's the chief of guards."

That afternoon they called me back and Mike says, "They're ready to go on strike over you. If we hold you, they're going out on strike."

I said, "Oh no, no, no, no. 3,000 people striking over me? Don't you pull that on me." I says, "I'll be run out of town."

Bilodeau: Uh huh.

Toth: Somebody will go batty that needs the money real bad and can't stand the strike. The personnel manager says, "Don't worry about it. If I don't call you back in two days, I'll get you a job." I came out of there thinking he's nice, he's just being nice to me. I'm out here working and "ding dong" the A.O. Smith people are at the door. Come to the Hotel Jefferson. How do you think A.O. Smith Milwaukee got my name? They came

down here to talk about the price of steel. They mentioned something like “we need a timekeeper or a book keeper for our resident engineer, Frank Holmes. Did you lay anybody off that you didn’t call back?”

“Yeah! Look him up. Here’s his name and address.” And they liked me over there. And I got the report from him over there.

Bilodeau: That’s good.

Toth: I honestly, and I’m not bragging, I honestly tried to give the people I work for, and I don’t kill myself, but I honestly tried to give them an honest day’s work. It’s in the back of my mind when I take the job. I worked out there with Cummings, a second shift foreman in our department, that was a journeyman machinist before we made quota, said to me one day, we’re running the shop and all the girls in the shop and all the foreman are running frames because of all the people out on strike, walking the picket line.

He says, “You told me that you never worked in a machine shop before.”

I said, “I’m telling you the truth because it will come out in the long run anyway. I said they took me right out of production, told me to come in here, and I didn’t know a lathe from a grinder. Never saw one.”

He says, “Then how is it that you run every piece of machinery in here?”

I said, “Don’t you learn anything in five years?”

Bilodeau: That’s true.

Toth: He says, “Yeah, but you run it like an expert.” He says, “There isn’t a piece of work I check after you that isn’t right on the money.”

I says, “That’s because I’m slow. I take my time, and I do it right the first time.”

He says, "Well, you're an amazing guy." And I stayed there till they closed the plant. Twenty years I stayed in that shop. And the second shift and the third shift, at first they hated me. They wanted to be on days, and they were entitled to it. But the boss was in there and he wanted ME! And you know, when you're the lead man in a department, a machine shop, you got to party. You're responsible for every breakdown in the whole plant. If the general maintenance can't handle it, it comes to you. If you can't handle it, it might go to a job shop in St. Louis or in Granite City. Like Dahl's on State Street or the big shops. I forgot the big one on North Broadway. They run seven days a week, 365, including Christmas and New Years. They run around the clock twenty four hours a day, seven days a week. So they were what we called our backup, if nobody else could take it. They were expensive. You'd pay double time for somebody whose making double time on a straight time hour. You're paying forty bucks an hour. You've got to know what you're sending out and why you're sending out before they keep paying forty dollars without asking you why. They had faith in me that I wouldn't do it. And when I think back to going in there with no experience. And be the boss of guys that were serving apprenticeships. I finally called him in the office one morning and said, "You like it here, John?"

He said, "Yes."

I said, "You want to keep your job?"

"Yes. What's the matter?"

"Either come around and be on my team or look for another job." He knew what I meant. They were just half-doing everything I'd leave them. See, you had to log everything. Each shift logs what they leave for the other, and those logs are kept forever

and ever. And when that logbook is full, you put another file in, a new one. [End of side]

[Tape 1 side B]

Bilodeau: Working at the steel mill or the casting company?

Toth: The steel mill, Granite City Steel. I had a brother-in-law, but he was a helper like I was. When I got here I had nobody. None of my relatives worked there. I started out in the pressroom, on the pressroom floor, because I was familiar with presses coming from NESCO. Then they decided they're growing, and they had the pressroom foreman in charge of the production and the set-ups. And the set-up is a job by itself. With 400 different types of guides, and you're responsible for ALL, hundreds of presses in the whole plant. They're supposed to do their own work, but whenever they have a problem, then you decide which parts will be done. If you have to go to engineering for information, that's fine. That's your business. But it's your responsibility to get it done. And to go in there with no experience, in a plant that had 3,000 employees at one time.

Bilodeau: Yes.

Toth: And to have the boss knowing that you didn't have any training in that field, and ASK for you, that he wants YOU, specifically you.

Bilodeau: That's what happened to you in the service.

Toth: Yes.

Bilodeau: When you became the supply depot manager.

Toth: The captain wanted ME.

Bilodeau: Uh huh.

Toth: He took me out of B battery. And I said why do you want to punish me. And he said, “ I need somebody I have faith in that’ll do a good job.”

Bilodeau: I’m sitting here thinking about all of the things that you’ve done. And I’m thinking about a boy in Mrs. Prather’s woodworking class. [He laughs] and I was thinking about that downstairs when you were showing me your shelves that you built and your hanging things that you built.

Toth: Yes.

Bilodeau: Have you always been crafty, or do you think some of that encouragement came from her?

Toth: Well, no, it’s the Hungarian people, because of their closeness of their money. They do all the work themselves that they can do. You know? Whether it’s electrical work, whether it’s cement work, whether it’s carpenter work, canning. If they can’t do it themselves, they have a friend who can. And you’ll help that friend when he has cement work to do, or brickwork. Now, like Mr. Bort, he was a bricklayer at American Steel. My mother decided that she was going to fix her basement up. She had the furnace room partitioned; the fruit cellar, where she kept her canned goods and her sacks of flour and sugar and that; and a kitchen area, where she could....what they call the family room now. So she got ole man Bort over there....these were used bricks, we bought them for a penny a piece off the brickyard used.

Bilodeau: When was that? About...

Toth: And built a wall across the basement. A door for the furnace room and a partition for her canned goods and her sacks of flour and sugar....and plastered both sides and the

walls were repainted, and it looks like new. See with used bricks you can't tell once you put plaster on them.

Bilodeau: Yes.

Toth: You know? And you paint it. And she painted the floor. And my father installed a sink down there, and she made a second kitchen down there. She had a laundry room down there, a fruit cellar down there, a furnace, all partitioned off.

Bilodeau: And, you know, when I looked at Magyar-Haz, I saw they had like a separate entrance to the basement. I guess that was a common thing....to have a lower level and an upper level.

Toth: Yes, see the upper level was the stage and the ballroom.

Bilodeau: Oh!

Toth: There was a ballroom in there. They had dances there all the time. And the bottom was divided, and they have a clubroom in the back, the back entrance, where they had a bar and four or five tables. People came there to play cards and drink beer. And the big side is partitioned off. Now when you rented that for a wedding, you had the wedding, then you'd rent the hall and then you'd rent the big basement, because the big basement had a full kitchen: sinks, oven, counters, refrigerators, everything. You could bring all your....they'd buy the chickens live and the women would get together and dress them and clean them. They'd put them on, they didn't have a freezer compartment, so they'd buy brand new wash tubs, galvanized tubs, and buy hunks of ice and ice it overnight. Because, you see, you can't buy those chickens, fresh chickens from the farm, and dissect them up into sections and go ahead and fry them all in one day.

Bilodeau: No.

Toth: So the ten-fifteen women get together and, boy, I mean they'd clean a hundred chickens like nobody's business. And they'd put them on, and some people had wooden barrels that they used for food, when they'd butcher, and they'd put them in ice over there. On ice, they wouldn't spoil over night. And then they'd come the next day, early in the morning, and they'd begin to fry that chicken. Then they'd put in the ovens, they had ovens over there, and they'd keep it warm. Then, when you'd come that evening, you'd have a sit down dinner with slaw, potato salad, fried chicken, soup, baked pork loins...

Bilodeau: Mmmmmm.

Toth: You'd have a big spread, see, and all kinds of....people would bring all kinds of cakes and pastries, your friends, and others would bake cookies. Oh, we had a meal when we had one of those weddings.

Bilodeau: Tell me about your wedding.

Toth: Oh my God.

Bilodeau: And your reception. Who was in your wedding?

Toth: She had five brides maids. And I had my cousin for my best man because I was his best man. And his wife was the maid of honor. We rented the Hungarian Home. And all of mother's friends came there and cooked Hungarian Goulash..

Bilodeau: Mmmmm

Toth: Potato salad and roast pork, roast beef, and you just name it, you know? Ham and we'd buy rolls of this white paper and covered those picnic tables, and they had a big serving table. And you'd go through there and help yourself. It would be all the meats

and chicken and salads. We used to go through there like smorgasbord. Oh you could have a meal out of this world. All home cooked !

Bilodeau: And what did you have for music?

Toth: I had a gypsy orchestra.

Bilodeau: Gypsy orchestra?

Toth: Violins, and a table with strings on it, and you'd beat it like a xylophone, and a saxophone accompany also.

Bilodeau: Did you do any kind of traditional dancing.

Toth: Yeah! They danced the Shoddish, they danced the Polka, they danced the Waltz....and because there were young people there, the orchestra plays a jitterbug once in a while, you know? They'd make everybody happy. Oh...it was....and the tables were set, all your mother's friends and their daughters, they come, and they set the table in the afternoon. Then that evening they helped serve. They actually...you'd actually sit down and they'd bring the plate to you.

Bilodeau: Ooo, that's neat.

Toth: Yeah, they'd bring your plate to you. Course they put the slaw, potato salad on the table if you'd want extra, and they'd put extra pieces of chicken, also, even though they'd bring you a plate individually. But, everything was free, the help I mean, but you'll do that for the next person, and the next person, you know?

Bilodeau: Did you have a wedding cake?

Toth: Oh, a beautiful one.

Bilodeau: Was it made at a local bakery, or did someone make the cake?

Toth: No, we had it made at the bakery, regular. Busy Bee bakery. Oh....four tiers high. You know, with the bride and groom on top.

Bilodeau: Did you do the thing like we do at wedding, like the bride and groom have the first dance, and then...

Toth: Yeah! And then everybody puts a dollar in the bowl?

Bilodeau: Uh huh.

Toth: I raised five hundred and some-odd dollars in a half-hour. My wife danced a half-hour and then she waved me. I was just sitting on the side. The groom dances last. That's the signal. He went to claim his bride.

Bilodeau: That's very symbolic and romantic.

Toth: Yeah....I went out there and I threw my dollar bill in the bowl, and I took a couple of steps and everybody starts clapping, you know [he clapped – I giggled], and naturally they want to see you kiss the bride.

Bilodeau: Yeah!

Toth: In those days you gave her a little peck, you know. You can't make a mushy kiss in public. Save it that for tonight. But she was a beautiful bride. Did you see her picture?

Bilodeau: I'll take a look at that.

Toth: She was..... there was five gals in that family. All five got married. All five had nice homes. One on Terrace Lane, one behind the park...only the one in Ohio, her home is frame, but it's comparable to this. The only one is Madison, Helen. She lived on Greenwood in an ordinary house. But she had a hardheaded husband, Polish, and she didn't fight him. I don't have a sister-in-law that I don't like.

Bilodeau: That's wonderful.

Toth: And that don't like me. I can go to any of their houses and they'll say, "I think there's some beer in the box." Or. "Are you hungry?" You know? But, that's family, see? I was good to their sister, I gave her a nice home. They don't realize that while I was giving her a nice home, she was giving me a nice home, too. You know, keeping it clean, cooking good meals....she sewed my bed, she sewed these curtains, she sewed her own clothes.

Bilodeau: I spoke with your son on the phone. Do you have any other children?

Toth: Uh uh. [he shook his head no] Dr. Toth.

Bilodeau: Dr. Toth.

Toth: He has a Ph.D. from Saint Louis U.

Bilodeau: And where is he? Is he in Granite City?

Toth: He's over there with his mom.

Bilodeau: And where is that?

Toth: You can talk to him.

Bilodeau: Oh, no. That's okay. [He was walking to the phone] That's okay! I already...he gave me some things. That's okay. I was just thinking....I just wondered if you had a daughter.

Toth: No. No daughter. That's what the wife really wanted. When they.... when....she had a hard time becoming pregnant. She took treatments from Dr. Cleveland for four years. One day I got a call at work from a nurse, his nurse, who said, "Mrs. Toth, no here." I worked in the type-setting office at that time, before I went down to be a foreman. He said the doctor would like to see you.

I said, “Well, any time you’re there just give me an appointment. I don’t want to come up there and sit in the hallway for an hour or two.”

And she said, “Well, let me look at his schedule.” So she came back in a few minutes and she said, “Which date would be a better date?” She had a couple of dates.

And I said, “Why don’t you make it” such and such. I don’t quite remember, but I knew it was in the afternoon.

And she said, “Fine.” Then she said, “Now when you come up, don’t come into the waiting room. Come to the back door and knock. I’ll hear it and I’ll...” See, from her office, patients can’t see that. So I knocked and she came right away. And, oh, she says, “He’s tied up with a patient right now.” So she put this chair out in the hall for me to have some place to sit. She said, “I’ll call you.” And sure enough, I waited about ten or fifteen minutes, she called me in through the back door ahead of all the customers in the front.

And he says, he knew me by that time because I’ve talked to him before. And he had charts made up and he says, “I think we lucked out.” Then he put these slides in a machine, what do you call it, it shows them on the wall, you know? And he says, and he’s pointing at certain circles in the ovaries, you know. He says, “Now this is an indication that there’s live cells here.” [we giggled with elation] And I just smiled! I wouldn’t be sending her here for a year and half to see him and spend all that money if I didn’t want a family. And he said, “I think you’re going to be a daddy!” And he said, “We’re going to be awful careful with her. We can’t take any chances.” He says, “If I tell you to take her to the hospital, I want you to take her right now, not tomorrow.” He said, “I’m going to

be awful careful with her, because I want you to be a daddy.” And he says, “you want to be one, don’t you?”

I said, “Sure I do! I wouldn’t be sending her here and taking her to St. Louis to specialists, and all that, if I didn’t.” And sure enough, everything was working pretty good. It got to the point when she was getting bigger, and bigger, and bigger, and then everybody in the neighborhood knew she was pregnant. [laughter] Going down the street her tummy would come around the corner first. But, oh, she was a...I can’t complain. I don’t know how one father who wasn’t very smart, who had a very poor job, had five daughters, and five daughters had good husbands, good homes, and take care of themselves how women should take care of themselves. When you see them someplace, they’re very neat, and makeup is on. Course, when they’re at home they’ve got a cotton dress on and no make-up, and you expect that from a woman who’s cooking a meal for her husband. She’s not going to be in her high heels and.....

Bilodeau: Not June Cleaver?

Toth: Yeah. But ...I just hit it lucky. Five girls and they all got nice and good husbands.

Bilodeau: But you got the best one.

Toth: [He laughed] Each brother-in-law thinks that! But I thought I had a very intelligent woman. In fact, with a GED only, when my boy was working on his masters then. He says one day, “Mom, for somebody who writes as well as you do, and spells as well as you do, why don’t you sign up at SIU and take that course for retired seniors that didn’t have the opportunity to go to high school.”

She said, “Do they have that? What does it cost?”

He said, "It costs almost nothing!" He says, "I'll pay for it!" Meaning him.

I says, "You're not going to pay for it! It's only going to cost maybe \$50 at the most. We can handle that, my God! I'm a foreman!" And I had been a foreman for years. So she went up there and she went through that with flying colors. Of course she was a GOOD speller, a good reader.

My boy used to say, "I can't figure this out and I'm working on my Ph.D. " And she'd out spell him! And you know you don't get to be a Ph.D. at Saint Louis U or Washington U, Washington U was even tougher.

Bilodeau: That's true! You know, women are a lot of things, aren't they? And they don't...even without education they know amazing amounts of things from being around the home, and running and organizing homes, and ...

Toth: Learn to sew, learn to cook. She's been gone for months, and this house don't look that bad. [His wife had Alzheimers. She no longer lives at home.]

Bilodeau: This house looks wonderful! [It was immaculate.]

Toth: Yeah, any woman would be glad to come in here and put her own touches onto it, you know, naturally. Every woman has her own touches. And for me to think that I drew the plans myself. On a piece of paper! In a type-setting.... and the drafting room was next door. I went in there and I says, "Hey! Give me some drafting paper."

"What do you want with it?"

I got a drafting board in industrial engineering. "I'm going to take it home. I have a drafting board at home."

He said, "What are you going to do?"

I said, "I'm going to draw a house plan." So I went home and I set it up in the basement, so I could screw around with it down there when I wanted to, in a small basement, you know, in a duplex. They had half a basement wall between them. Then I drew my plans, I took them into work, I run extra copies through there engineering department machine, it's made for that. And every time I'd hire someone, an electrician I didn't hire because there was an electrician in my family, but a bricklayer I hired...well, I just gave him a plan. There was a plan on how this house should look when it's done. Fine!

Joe Brill did the brick work. I forgot the guy lived on Grand over there, I can't think of his name. He was just going into business as a plasterer. He was working for other companies and finally went into business for himself. He did a job for a friend of mine, and oh, he did beautiful work. The house was over there on the empty lot on Grand, you know, that nice brick house there. People who built there had the same last name that I did, Toth. But not related. The daughter lives in the big house I showed you over there on Cleveland. Pershell lived in that, that's the owner. That's a five room house and from the outside it looks to be a six or seven room house. But you should see the rooms in there. Every one of them is like my living room. Big. They go to our church. And I think, man, I really lucked out! I really lucked out.

Bilodeau: You achieved the American Dream.

Toth: Well, I was ambitious. And I was, I wouldn't say I was intelligent,

Bilodeau: I would.

Toth: But I had a certain degree of ability to see the final picture. I saw this house in my mind when I put it on paper. I built this with my own hands.

Bilodeau: It takes vision and clarity to do that.

Toth: Yes, and people would come in here and said, You bought these plans? Who from?”

And I say, “I didn’t buy no plans! I went to Famous and Stix and they got book after book of pictures of a house and floor plans. Everyone I’d look at my wife would find fault with. The kitchen’s too small, the kitchen’s too big, I don’t like the dining room or where its at. Look at that bedroom. I would rather have this there instead of that. And you know, whatever is in her mind. And I finally said to myself, “Why don’t I just draw the plans? I can get all the drawing paper I want from engineering. They’re next door to the type-setting office. I went in there and got some paper, had a drawing board at home...I put it on there, and every night I’d lay some lines. When I finished that one, I took it back in there and made copies through the print machine, and run the prints, regular prints.

When the contractors come out here and I’d give them a print they say, “Where’d you get these prints?”

I’d say, “Hell, I made them myself!”

Bilodeau: That’s wonderful.

Toth: I worked right next to general printing at that time, and I know the engineers at the desk and had them printed, on the printing machine. Once you had them printed, brown line they called it, you put the brown line in there, just like you do in a Xerox machine, and put your copy in there and press the button, and [slaps the table] press the button, and feed the paper in. And out it comes, there’s not a mistake on it. But you know, I had the means, being in a position, and working the job I had. I went downstairs to general

printing whenever I could. I had sixty women work for me. Nobody could handle sixty women if they weren't your aunts.

Bilodeau: That's true.

Toth: You can't do it. Not even this guy! Because they came out there and says, "Well, you weren't gone one week and they had three or foremen in there."

And I says, "I knew it the day I walked out the door they were going to get three."

He said, "How'd you do it?"

I said, "I didn't. All them foreign women in there were my aunts and uncles, the men." I said, "The superintendent came down there and told the car-loaders one time that car's going someplace else. I don't want a full load. The load I want's wrote on this piece of paper.

"You no boss. Alec boss." And he's the superintendent! He come laughing, you know. I told him not to worry about that.

I went out that day and said, "From now on, when he comes out, he's superintendent. He's my boss, your boss, and everybody else's boss in all these departments on this side of the railroad tracks."

"He is?"

I said, "Yeah, that's Mr. Bigshot."

He said, "Well, we didn't know that." He said, "Our contract spells out that you take order from one boss."

I said, "Yeah, that's meaning that when a boss from that department or that department's coming over here to tell you what to do, you work for one boss. But that doesn't mean that you don't work for the plant manager or the superintendent." Oh, that

was a good company to work for. I'd have never had that job at the mill if it wouldn't have been.....By that time my ex plant manager was vice president of the mill. He got let out over there and came over here as general something. It wasn't no time, by God, and he was a vice president. Of course, I think he had connections up in Milwaukee, too. I got a job, just like that, when I walked through the door, because of him. When I put a reference, put his name down, when he was already a VP over there.

The personnel manager asked me how I knew him. I told them he was my plant manager over there at NESCO. "Oh, you know him well, then." How do you think I got that job as A.O. Smith? The mill. They came there to ask for the price of steel, and discuss the types of steel, the grades of steel they wanted, the gages of steel they would need.

Then during the conversation, "Hey, you got a young man you laid off you're not going to call back?"

And they said, "Yeah! I got a good one." I stayed there 22½ years. I didn't know if I was staying 30 years. But I was the oldest man they had. And they could tell me what they want. I got a \$32,000 check handed to you when you're walking out the door, and are told that you have hospitalization for yourself and your whole family until your sixty-five years old, Medicare age. And here's a hunk a money and a full pension on top of that.

Bilodeau: That's wonderful.

Toth: What can you ask?

Bilodeau: That's true.

Toth: I've been out of there since 1953 and I'm still drawing a pension. If I live to be 100 years old, A.O. Smith is big enough, with all their 14-15 plants. They're not going to close them all at one time. And to have people like Herzig, a union president, make a statement that the company is stupid and they don't know what they're doing? I said they didn't get twelve or 14 plants because they didn't know what to do!

Bilodeau: That's true!

Toth: All over the country. They did become multimillionaires because great grandfather had the vision. He started with thirteen employees – making bicycles.

Bilodeau: Amazing!

Toth: Making bicycles with 13 employees. And they got plants who make furnaces, hot water heaters, car frames – foreign and domestic, hot water heaters, at different locations, different branches.

Bilodeau: Thank you so much for sharing your stories with me.

Toth: I love talking to you. You're such an easy person to talk to.

Bilodeau: Well, thanks! Is it okay, if I have questions, when I go to type everything up and make my project, can I come back, call you?

Toth: If you're busy, give me a ring.

Bilodeau: Okay.

Toth: Sometimes I'm not in because I'll go to the store and maybe some afternoons, at this time, I may run over to Hardee's, just to be with the guys. But I would say that if you would call me in the morning before 10, and after 6:30 or 7:00 you would be sure to get me. Sometimes on Tuesday's at 8:00 they have council meetings. I go to the council meetings, just to see what the city's doing.

Bilodeau: Okay!