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Danny Gray Oral History Interview

Josh Koehne, Interviewer

Edwardsville, Illinois

October 19, 2016

Josh Koehne (JK): This is an oral history interview with uh... Dan Gray. Danny Gray?

Danny Gray (DG): Dan Gray. Danny, Danny D.

JK: For the Macoupin [Madison] County Oral History Project. I am Josh Koehne. We are at his house here in Edwardsville, Illinois, uh, on October... 19th? 19th. 2016. First question. What is your name?

DG: Dan Gray. Danny D. Gray actually.

JK: Danny D. Gray?

DG: Uh-hum.

JK: Uh... When were you born?

DG: Uhhhh... 8. Sorry about that, 8-19-58.

JK: So... August...

DG: August 19, 1958.

JK: 19th, 1958

DG: 1958... yeah.

JK: Umm... So you grew up in Granite?

DG: No, I was born, actually, I was born in... Granite but uh... actually, Granite or St. Louis I can't remember which one it was, but I didn't live in Granite until later on.

JK: Okay...

DG: I lived mostly in St. Louis, it just depends, we bounce all over. My dad was in the Air Force so we bounced all over the United States. So... We didn't get to Granite itself until... probably it was like 8th grade something like that.

JK: Okay...

JK: Um... What were some of the places that you lived? What's your earliest memory?

DG: Oh... My earliest memory is... St. Louis... We lived in Missouri. Hold on a sec... [Recording Pauses and Restarts]

JK: You were saying your earliest...

DG: Uh, my dad was in the Air Force, every time he went overseas, we ended up moving either to St. Louis or wherever. So mostly my... early early early years was St. Louis or Glen Carbon area.

JK: Okay...

DG: So, Glen Carbon, Illinois so...

JK: What was that like moving around?

DG: You know what? I thought it was normal. I thought it was a normal thing. I just thought that's what all kids did and... uh... I liked it because it made me make friends quickly, you know I could talk to strangers. Matter of fact, when Lisa and started dating, she looked at one time and we were in line at a movie I was talking to a guy behind me and she said: "Well, you can just talk to anybody, can't you?" I go "Yeap," I said "when you grow up like I did when you move every year. Sometimes, twice a year." I said "You gotta learn to make friends really quick. See you can't be afraid and shy not to talk to your next-door neighbor or when y' know you move into somewhere you gotta make friends really quick." So that's basically why I kind liked it. It's a lot easier when you're younger because when you're younger kids it's not bad. Now when you get older, it probably be a little tougher. So... But I did not mind it as a kid, I just kinda thought that was normal.

JK: Uh... What's your... favorite memory of bouncing around like that... er... do you have a... particularly powerful memory of something th...

DG: You know what... we lived so many places but probably my favorite was in Florida. We live Crestview, Florida, which is just outside of Destin, Florida. Of course, that was my favorite place down there; I loved that. And one of the biggest memories I have of that is when my dad went down ahead of time; we lived in base housing for about a week or two before we found a house to live in. So it was actually on Eglin AFB. My mom drove us down there, me and Charlie an... my brother Charlie, Debbie my sister, and me and then Pat... uh Pat, my sister Pat which is, of course, your mom.

JK: yeah

DG: And... eh... We drove down got in late one night and uh they put right into that base housing where my dad was staying. We get up the next morning, we're literally feet from the lagoon. The lagoon that goes out to the ocean so me and my brother Charlie went exploring and we walked down the beach and we come across... these guys doing uh... they were actually astronauts practicing in and out of the capsule we got to sit and watch them, you know at the time I didn't realize how big a deal that was but it was the actual astronauts and they were doing simulations of like after the capsule land getting them out of the capsule and putting them back in so that that was really neat there. and that was like the first day we're in

Florida it's just one of our memories you know. and so that part was really cool. So of course probably living in Crestview, Florida was probably my best memory, you know as far, as you know of all the places that I lived, I mean you're so many so many different ones. But that was probably my favorite.

JK: You mentioned uncle Charlie and, uh, and, uh, my mom, Pat.

DG: Pat, right

JK: Do you have any other siblings?

DG: Yes I do, I have two other siblings which came later on which they actually came after we moved to Granite. Actually, Joe, Joey come along, he lived with us in St. Louis at one time and my sister Cassie, soon after that's when we moved to Granite City, I was probably about 8th grade then, she was probably a year and a half old then, maybe two years, that's when we moved to Granite City Illinois.

JK: And that's where that, that sort of family joke that Aunt Cassy was really Aunt Debbie's kid

DG: Yeah that was kind of a funny joke because my sister Debby, her and Charlie when we lived in one part of St. Louis my brother Charlie went to live with my grandmother in Glen Carbon and Debbie quit school for a year because the school they were going to was uh 98% black and it was a rough school. The school I went to was almost 98% black, middle school, so Debbie actually quit for a year to help my Mom with the baby which would be Cassie or Cassandra and ah she was with the baby so much everyone thought it was her baby. I'd actually forgotten until you said that. Yeah, they actually thought that Cassie was Debbie's baby. Of course, it wasn't, it was my sister. But, eh... that's where that came from.

JK: And eh, let's see, so you grew up in St. Louis and Glen Carbon and bouncing around all over.

DG: That's right.

JK: Um, do you have a specific memory, hold on, let me see how I want to say this, all right, so after you grew up, graduating college, what was your first job out of college, I mean high school?

DG: My first job out of high school, actually I worked over in St. Louis with a friend of mine at a place called Wisco, Wisco, and they put sunroofs in Dodge cars, Dodge Diplomat and LeBaron those were cars from back in the early 80s, 70s I mean. And I worked there for about a year, it was assembly line work and eh, worked there for about a year and I think the company was about to close down and that's when basically I got hired on at Granite City Steel back in '78, year '78, April 4th of '78 no wait, April 9th of '78. I started working at Granite City Steel.

JK: So you were 19 in '78?

DG: Yeah, 1978 that's when I started in Granite City. I graduated in '77 so I worked at the other company not quite a year before I started working at Granite City Steel.

JK: What was your first job at Granite City Steel?

DG: Granite City Steel, I worked at the, let me see where I worked? I want to say I worked at the North

plant which we no longer have the North Plant, but the North Plant is where they have the galvanized steel sheetings and they corrugated it which means they ran it through the corrugator to make ripples in it to make it stronger. I worked over there for probably 3 or 4 weeks and from there I went to the BOF is where they actually melt the steel.

JK: Can you describe your first or earliest memory of walking into the steel plant and what it was like?

DG: Yeah, that was like, walking into the steel plant, that was like, I don't know how I remember that but I started on a Sunday, either Sunday afternoon or Sunday morning, on a Sunday and walking in and not knowing what to expect, you know, not knowing if I was going to get a hassle by the older guys or whatever, which I didn't, it was real nice. I remember my first or second day there I ended up cutting my arm which I still have the scar from, cut it on a piece of banding. I thought oh my God, two days on the job and I've already cut myself, they're going to fire me I know, which of course they didn't. I remember going to the dispensary and they bandaged it up so much I could hardly move my arm. It was just a small cut but I still have the scar from it. But uh, it was just kind of scary going in the first day cause you don't know what to expect. And then, as it went on you learn more about the job and the plant so it wasn't quite as bad, you know, till I left that department to go to another department. It's like going into a different school or moving somewhere different cause you don't know what that department's going to be like and what to expect.

JK: So eh, after your first job at the north plant you went to the BOF?

DG: Yeah, BOF, Basic Oxygen Furnace is what it stands for and that's where they actually melt the scrap steel and we actually make the steel there. And it's made by scrap steel and then they bring, they call it the raw iron or pig iron, it was from the blast furnace side, they bring that over and melt it down. That's actually melted down from coke, you take coke and super heat it and then you squeeze it and it gets all the impurities out of it and turns it into coal, which makes it into coke and once it's made into coke they reheat it again and melt that down and that's basically your raw iron, raw steel and that's melted down into liquid form and they send that to the BOF where it's poured into a giant ladle on top of all the scrap metal and they had a big oxygen hose that would come down and blow air into it and stir it all up is what that does and then when it stirs it all up that's when you get rid of the all the impurities. Where actually you could actually say we were recycling before recycling was cool cause basically that's all you do, recycle steel constantly, cars, whatever, metal then they put the pig iron on top of it, the raw iron, then heat it all up and back then it was poured into ingots, big giant ingots they look like popsicle, and then they are sent over to another department where when the ingots cool off they would heat them up again then they would have to roll them out manually back and forth on this big conveyor. They roll them out and into a long slab and the slab is sent to the hot strip and the hot strip heats them up again and rolls them into coils, they melt them into coils is what they do. And, they roll and smash them down, even more, to probably from 12 inches to probably a quarter of an inch, that's how the process goes, pretty interesting process. But nowadays we got rid of all the ingots, that part and now we melt the steel and send it right to the caster which pours it right into a slab automatically so it cuts out a lot of that rolling it into ingots and all that so now it pours it right into a slab which goes right to the hot strip. So it's a very interesting process.

JK: Yes, it is. So you've worked there almost 35 years?

DG: I've been there 38 years, it will be 39 years in April.

JK: Ok, so have... have things changed, you've mentioned how things have changed partly but can you elaborate on that?

DG: Oh yeah, I seen things change so much just from my short time being there because like I said it was basically, you pour the steel into ingots and have to go through all this process of reheating them, rolling them out into slabs and now the big change out there now is like I said, with what they call a continuous caster, now when you pour it, it already rolls it into a slab which saves us days of work and man hours and you know, everything with that and so that's one of the biggest things I've seen so you know, just that and all the automation and then we come along now, we used to have what they call the 7A galvanizing line cause some of our steel is hot rolled and some of it after it goes to the hot strip they send it to the cold strip which they run it through an acid bath and run it through the cold mill which brings it down even more till it's about a 1/4 inch, then by the time they get done with it, it might be down to an 1/8 of an inch or a 1/6th of an inch and that's where you start getting your galvanized steel, where after they get it down to about a 16th of an inch they send it down to the 7A line which they run it through liquid galvanize, they were they galvanize the outside of the coil. Now, we no longer have the 7A line we have what they call the triple G or the galvalume line. Now when they run it through now basically the same thing but it's run through galvanize and aluminum together, they call it galvalume so that was a big deal there, that was huge deal. Yeah with automation, like with the caster and all that, that cut out a log of jobs like we used to run everything by railroad, the slabs used to be put on railroad cars from the caster to the hot strip, well now they are picked up by what they call crest haulers, great big giant machines you might have seen when you went by there but they tires on these machines are probably 18, 20 foot tall, just the back tires on this machine. And they can pick up probably 5 or 6 slabs and the slabs are probably 150 or 200,000 pounds apiece. So it's just huge automation where we used to have to take time to put them on the train cars, we have to put each one on the train cars, now they just up, the slab haulers pick them up, they take them outside, they'll stack them outside and when they need them, just pick up a whole slab and run them to the hot strip where it used to be, they'd have to mag them up, put them on the train car, run them over there, mag them all off again while now it's just done by slab haulers picking them up, running them over them and setting them down. So that was two big like I said the caster was a big deal and then the 7A was a big deal. That's what did away with our North plant over there. The North plant used to be our big galvanizing line too to make corrugated steel. We don't do that anymore, it just kind of went by the wayside for us it was anyway. And actually if I'm not mistaken I think Granite City Steel had the pattern on corrugated steel at one time, they were the first ones to make it. If I'm not mistaken, they called it Strong Barn so that was a big deal too, we ended up selling our, when it closed down they ended up selling it to another company of some kind. So that was some big changes since I've been there you know, cause they did it the same way for years then I just came in at a time that automation was just kind of coming in and taking over and you know they were changing out the continuous casters, that was huge, I think it, I would say the continuous caster was a lifesaver for us because when other steel mills were closing down or being bought out or whatever, that kept us alive I think, we had so much automation in the caster area. so I think that was one of the things that kept Granite City Steel going for so many years. So, as far as changes that was probably the biggest changes.

JK: You mentioned earlier about how they sold the pattern. National had bought Granite City Steel in the early 70s

DG: That was, let me see how it went, it always been National Steel since I've been there then US Steel bought it, Granite City Works, I don't remember.

JK: I think it was 2003 if I recall

DG: Yes, it might have been about 2003, that's what I'm thinking. Around 2003 and as far as changes, you know, they haven't made any major changes yet but a few here and there.

JK: I think, I believe there was supposed to be a new coke plant that was supposed to be opened up, or break ground in 2008.

DG: Yeah, they built a coke plant, we call it the coke plant. It was built right across the street from our blast furnace. That, we do not own that, it is not US Steel owned. That was owned by Sun. We buy coke from them and eh, they do the same thing over there. Somehow they superheat it, and they squeeze and get the byproducts out then we buy that from them so I think that was another life saver for us at one time. They were building that while we had the plant closed, on idle and we were all worried whether they were going to open up again but at the same time they were putting Sun Coke in across the street which would have been dumb for

them to do that and then not open us back up again, which they did but I still think that was a big deal. One thing US Steel did, now that you mention US Steel when US Steel bought us, they bought Granite City Works, Great Lakes, and Midwest, that was all owned by National Steel. They sent the big boss down to Granite City Works to close us down. That was actually, I just remembered that just now, they sent him down to close us down because we were the oldest plant. Well, the longer the boss was there, the more money we were making and he was calling up saying "Hey, I don't know what's going on but these guys are making money down here." They were like, just keep an eye on it. Well, another couple of months went on and he was calling up saying, "Hey, these guys are still making money hand over fist, what's going on?" Well come to find out when National Steel sold us, the story I heard was they kind of switched the books around to make it look like the other two plants were doing good and we were doing bad and that's the story I got from it. Well, come to find out, they not only did not close us down but they started putting money into us, so they built another continuous caster so we have two now that's one improvement they did do. I think that was after US Steel came in so now we have two continuous casters and they've continued to put money into us, we just put a new bag house in and that was like 50 million dollars and they put a new, after number two caster, they actually took that out and bought a new caster and put that in which is supposed to be one of the few that can run a lot of steel that nobody else can run which was great for us too and I think that's some of the things that's keeping us going still yet. But like I say, they were there to shut us down, they were going to shut the plant down and sell it then when they realized how much money we were making, you know, they decided to keep us and start putting money into us which was great, you know, a life saver, and right after US Steel took us, I think about year after they took us, eh, a report came out that we were, we were number 1 for US Steel as far as profit, and number 1 in the nation for profit also, your know for a short time anyway. So that was a good deal, a huge deal so like I said US Steel keeps putting money into us, we're an older plant but we still turn out a lot of good steel so that was the main thing with US Steel.

JK: Are you still at the BOF?

DG: No, I've bounced around at a few different jobs. I went to the cold strip after that and then yard maintenance and now I'm in the, eh, store room. The store room is all the supplies come into the store room, that a steel mill can have which is a ridiculous amount of stuff, and our storeroom, we hold parts. Every part they need they put an order in for it and we deliver it out to them. I mean it could be anything from toilet paper to nuts and bolts to a drive shaft as big as your house, you know so that's where I work now. We call it the store room or we call it stores and so like I said when anyone needs anything they put a ticket in and it comes to the store room, we go pick it and we take it them, almost like Amazon does down there, take it off the shelf and that's what we do.

JK: Could you describe a typical day?

DG: A typical day for me? I deliver, we're all called storeroom attendants and due to seniority you can pick your job but it has to stay that for 6 months or a year. Well, I'm one of the delivery drivers which that's what I do best. My typical day would be coming in, getting my truck, inspecting my truck. We have to inspect our trucks now, eh, I do mostly small packages, smaller stuff and eh... sometimes I work on a 2-man truck, well that's usually what me and my buddy do now, we work a 2-man truck and then sometimes we'll get on a small truck by ourselves. But we'll take the small stuff that can be done by hand, can be taken off the truck by hand and delivered to the departments. So my job would be get up in the morning, go in there, I'd get a pallet, figure out which pallet I'm gonna take first, take it and put it on my truck, sort it on my truck however I want to and then I'd go through the plant, as I go along, just like a mailman, I know exactly where my delivery areas are, what needs to go to that delivery area, it's marked 12A, 12B, 131, we've got over 300 delivery areas at one time and you got to just memorize them all and I would do, we have east, west and blast. I would always do the west side, someone else would do the east side and we had blast furnace which is completely on the other side where they make the coke at, it's called the stinky part over there. And my day would be hitting all these places, getting rid of as much stuff as I can, come back and get another load. I did that about 3 or 4 times a day. And, eh I'd do downtown which is all the offices and stuff like that so I'd go out deliver it, come back, deliver another pallet, and so that's basically what I'd do all day long. It's almost like a UPS, it's basically like a UPS is what it's like but like I said it could be full of papers, computers, you know whatever department you're going to and whatever they ordered delivered so that's basically my day.

JK: So, before that, you were working in the yard?

DG: Yeah, I went to yard maintenance just before that and, eh, my department in the cold stripping closed down, I went to the cold strip for a little while, probably about 4, 5, 6, 8 years, I really liked that job and that department was closing down and they were moving it to a different section of the thing so I left there and went to yard maintenance which yard maintenance does kind of what you would think, they do all the outside work, you know, they need to dig up a line of some kind, a gas line or whatever, that's what yard maintenance does, you know, keeping the place clean, cutting the grass, they, eh all kinds of jobs you do outside the plant, whenever they need something done, so I went there and drove a truck there for a while and had a CDL, Class A license which is semi-tractor trailer, I can drive a tractor trailer so I drove trucks there, the big giant ukes, the big giant dump trucks, I've drove those before, that was an interesting job. And I drove the big load-luggers, like if someone needs a big box outside your house to put a bunch of scraps in, I drove that truck for years and years. Then I left there and went to, that's when I went to the storeroom. I've been in the storeroom for quite a few years now.

JK: And the cold line, cold strip?

DG: I was in the cold strip when I left the BOF, actually it was the north plant, BOF, hot strip, from the hot strip I went to the cold roll finishing, from cold roll finishing I went to yard maintenance then I went to the storeroom where I've stayed. Cold strip, cold roll finishing was probably one of my best jobs, I really liked it and met a lot of nice people there. I worked there, actually I was telling you how they run the coils from the cold mill, they would bring them over to the cold strip and we'd basically ship them from the cold strip is what we would do and I was in the shipping department, cold roll shipping. So I would load the train cars and semi-trucks. I would be in the train cars when they set the coils down or in the trucks. Actually, my job was truck loader, car loading is what it was. So that was my job there. I liked it, it was a neat job, I had to work with the crane man. We had a great crane man and you had to watch your back, you had to watch it all the time because any job in the steel mill was going to be a dangerous job anyway so you gotta watch your Ps and Qs. But, I was there for quite a few years then when that department closed down I didn't care for it and that's when I moved to north plant and then I went to the store room or I mean yard maintenance.

JK: And before that, you were in the hot strip?

DG: The hot strip, that was short lived, I was there probably a year or something like that. That's where they actually bring the slabs in and they heat them and they roll them into coils. I worked there for probably about a year, year and a half. And then like I said after that I went to the cold roll finishing, yard maintenance and then the store room. I've been in the store room probably for 15 years or something like that.

JK: So you mentioned that the, so if you could describe your favorite job that you've had, it would be the...

DG: It was the cold strip, I liked it when I was working in cold roll finishing, I liked the guys I was working with, it was hard work, you know hot and sweaty work, probably now would be the job I have now, delivering because I can go throughout the whole plant, I drive throughout the whole plant, I go downtown where our office buildings are, I deliver down there and I'd have to say that's my favorite job. My wife calls me the social director cause I know so many people because I get around to meeting everybody cause I'm through the whole plant now, I'm not just stuck in one little department so I'd have to say the job I'm on now which is store room delivery guy. That's me, the job I like.

JK: What's your favorite part of working at the steel mill, plant?

DG: You know what? That basically is it, I get to meet a lot of people, there's, you know, over 1400 people working out there and I know a lot of them. I've been there for so many years now, you know, I know a lot of them and they know me, you know. A lot of them I don't know by their first name but I know them by their nicknames or just by sight and a lot of times you'll see guys, cause we wear hard hats and glasses all day long, I'll see these guys outside the plant and I'll look at them and go, "well hell, I didn't know that guy was bald," because you never see him with his hard hat off, you know. And that is probably my favorite part, I get to meet a lot of people, I know a lot of people, people I've seen throughout the years and didn't know their name now some of them I even know their name cause I deliver to them

now. And it's kind of interesting now because when we started out, back in the day, you couldn't even drive a truck unless you had 30 years seniority, well now guys are driving a truck with 6 years seniority, you know things have changed that way where you know a lot of jobs are combined, they're doing a lot of job combining and stuff like that but I'd have to say just being out and driving through the mill and delivering my stuff, it's hard work too, there's a lot of heavy packages and stuff I got to unload but just getting out and meeting people that's my favorite part there.

JK: How does the job combining make you feel?

DG: You know what, I know they have to do it, it's hard cause you get settled in on one job you like to do and then now they start combining jobs but with automation, you almost have to do that and I understand that. I understand you have a company and a union, I'm a union man of course and I understand the company has to do that to survive, you know they have to get automation, like I said when they put the casters in that probably knocked out, oh God, probably 100 jobs or more you know with everything, maybe more a couple hundred jobs you know, start knocking jobs down cause automation is taking over now. Now they don't have to pour the ingots then take them over to the strip yard and take it out of there then reheat it, then roll it into slabs, then take it off of there and put it in the train car again, blah blah, you know that was a lot of steps so now they've moved that so I understand you know with automation, you know combining jobs but they didn't lose any jobs they just made the guys, combined jobs, moved the guys around here and here and there but I understand, nobody likes changes, especially me, that's, well I hate change more than anybody but it's got to happen, you've got to flow with the time, you know. Other than that, it's not bad, so just learn to take it.

JK: And you mentioned that you're a union man, eh, how has been, I assume you joined the union, when did you join the union?

DG: I joined the union the day you start the mill if you're going to be hourly, we call them hourly and salary. Union people are hourly and your bosses and management are all salary. So, yeah, if you're hourly you automatically join the union and it's been good for me. And I tell you what, unions are good for the working man. You know they did so much for the working man, it's crazy. It's basically got you, any benefits you got it's usually done through the union. I mean your lunch breaks, your vacation, your vacation days, your time off from work, healthcare, it's just an enormous amount. Your holiday pay is gotten through the union and I'm a super union person. A lot of people argue with it but I'm super union to go with the union because I felt they're good people. You got your, some of them that abuse it, there's no doubt in my mind but to me, unions are the only way to go. It keeps the company honest and it keeps the people honest too. So, you can step over the boundaries so many times and even the union will say "I can't help you anymore, you got to quit screwing around." I'm super big on unions myself.

JK: Most of my knowledge of the steelworkers union comes from the early 20th century. How would you describe, you're obviously pro-union, how would you describe it's changed over the time you've been there?

DG: It's changed dramatically since I've hired in, dramatically. Unions aren't as strong, the companies are probably more in charge now than the unions used to be so, unions are weakened. They're still there, they're not going to go away but they've weakened quite a bit because, well, to me when Reagan came on

he forced, it all started with air traffic controllers, they were union and they were on a strike and he forced them back to work or fired them. Well, under a union contract you can't be fired for a strike. You can't be fired for being on a strike. Now they don't have to bring you back, they can shut the plant down or whatever but that was a big step when he did that it really cut into the unions bad. And it weakened the unions quite a bit and they've changed quite a bit. Like I said, it used to be they were pretty well-respected even at the mill, now not as much especially with these big corporations and everything, you know. They've got a lot of big attorneys, they can spend a lot of money on keeping you off that we don't have the money to be off. So it changed quite a bit, they're still out there, I think they're getting a little stronger again but eh I mean I'm still all for unions, 100% but it has changed dramatically.

JK: How does that change make you feel?

DG: You know what, it's kind of scary because the unions have did so much for America, they basically made the middle class what they were. When this happened they started getting weaker it's starting to scare me now because all these companies are all sending jobs overseas. Well it gets to the point now we've got so many jobs overseas, there's no jobs here for us anymore. They all say we can make it cheaper over there for the consumer, but guess what? They make it overseas, bring it back here, they don't give you a cut. They're getting it done cheaper over there but we aren't getting any discount here. So to say we can make it cheaper over there for the consumer is really a bunch of bullshit. You never see the price go down on anything never but everything going over there, being made by pennies on the dollar so I think that's one of the big things hurting us here in America. There are no more jobs here in America. When I hired on at the mill back in '78 I could have went to a dozen places and probably hired in at \$40,000 back then, there were dozens of places. Now you can't find a job anywhere, not where people are waiting to hire you. You might find one here or there for that price but these factories anymore, people are getting in them and staying in them because it's a decent paying job and you just don't leave that until you have to. So I feel that the weakening of the union has definitely weakened our economy too. Back then we had jobs and now they're sending all these jobs, I could probably name off fifteen places just in the last year that has sent jobs overseas. It's killing jobs and there's no place to work and people are wondering how come we're spending so much on welfare, well there are no jobs, even if they wanted to work, let's say they want to work, there's no jobs that are paying. That's one of the reasons, I don't mean to get all on a tangent, that's one of the reasons people at McDonald's need \$15 an hour which I think is kind of ridiculous for a McDonald's worker but there's no jobs, that's the only jobs out there. And if you want them to work and stay off welfare we probably need to raise that up a little bit. As crazy as it sounds, cause that's all you got out there is part time jobs out there, you know, the fast food jobs. The industry is killing, hell, the Oreo cookie people, that gal just got a big raise for sending her company down to Mexico and that was over 6, 700 jobs that was lost going to Mexico to make Oreo cookies in Mexico. Carrier air conditioning is another one, down to Mexico, I just read yesterday, I don't remember which company it was, it's going to Mexico. There's so many jobs going to Mexico and people keep saying that Mexicans are taking our jobs but they don't have to take our jobs, all they got to do is go to Mexico to get a job because there's plenty of them down there. And that's one of the things that aggravates me about the unions. Another thing is they say Mexicans are coming here and getting our jobs, they're not getting our jobs. The Mexicans are doing the jobs we don't want to do, we don't want to cut grass, we don't want to clean hotels, you know the crappy jobs Americans don't want to do, to begin with. A Mexican cannot steal your job unless someone gives it to him. The companies give them your job, that's the only way they can get it cause they can't legally go in and say "Hey I want that job, blah, blah, blah." If the companies don't give it to them, they

can't steal them. So these are hiring these guys from Mexico to help cut grass and work in the hotels and whatever else, you know do the jobs we don't want to do. So to say, blame it on the Mexicans is not right you know because there's hundreds of grass cutting jobs if you want them but nobody wants to do those jobs cause there not enough money in it for them. And like I said, I didn't mean to get off on a tangent on you, it's just that and jobs are the biggest thing that's killing America right now, we're sending so many damn jobs overseas and then their bringing their goods back here, not getting charged for it, but when we ship our stuff out we get tariffed on our stuff going out—it's lose-lose except for the big rich guys you know, we can't win. I'm literally laid off right now because of Chinese steel coming in, Chinese steel, it's called dumping the steel, they're bringing Chinese steel, cheap steel, it's not good steel and people are buying that steel instead of the good American steel and that's what's killing us right now and that's one of the reasons I'm laid off, I've been laid off since February. This happened, the same thing happened in '08, we did the same thing, we idled the whole plant then because of Chinese steel. They put a tariff on it finally, then they slowly let it off someone's probably getting their pockets lined, they let it off and then, boom, we're flooded again. Well by the time we're flooded and you stop them, it's too late. Now all these steel mills are closing down and not just steel mills, it affects everybody, the mom and pop shops too. The lead hearts won't die, they did all of our work for us for a lot of our tool and die work, their shut down now, because of us. We were one of their biggest customers, now they're probably out of business because we don't have work, now they don't have work so it's not just the steel mills it's all the mom and pop shops. Back in the day when we filed bankruptcy and went out, before US Steel bought us there was a lot of mom and pop shops that we owed money to, these are little shops, we owed 3 or \$400,000 to, well we went bankrupt and you don't get your money now so those companies went down the tubes because we screwed them out of money because we filed bankruptcy. It all comes down to jobs, if we can keep our jobs up, fine and dandy, but if we can't things just keep getting worse and worse and worse, you got more and more people out of work and you got more and more people getting on welfare whether they want to or not, they have to survive, but that's my tangent about unions.

JK: No, that is awesome. We had already talked about how Chinese steel has sort of undermined US Steel's ability to produce a profit, could you elaborate on how that has affected, obviously that has affected you, temporarily laid off, but how has that affected you and your co-workers and how has that layoff...

DG: Well, you know, a lot of us are lucky cause, well not a lot, some of my friends, I'm older now so I'm more established, got a little bit of money in the bank, I'm not rich by any means, but we're lucky that our spouses work. Back in the old days, the spouses didn't work that much, you know, my wife works, she makes good money, I got two or three of my friends who are in the same position, their wives work, thank God, and it's keeping their heads above water between that and our unemployment and our sub pay and stuff like that. We're getting by, we're doing all right. I mean, we're just barely getting by but we're getting by. Now, there's a lot of young guys out there that are hurting real bad because I didn't get laid off until February, some of the young guys had left decent jobs in the coal mines to come up here, they've been laid off since December. And these guys don't get what we get, a lot of them had just hired in. You know, we get benefits because we've been here for so many years through the union. We get our unemployment for 6 months and our subpay, supplementary income pay which makes up 80% of our pay between the two of them. Well, after 6 months, we lose our unemployment and we get 60% of our sub pay which makes up 60% of our pay. Older guys like us that are kind of established and have things paid off, we're getting by, we're making it right now, but that only goes for another 6 months then it drops down to 40% so it slowly

starts tiering down. Some of these young guys are hurting for sure because they just can't get by because they are young, some of their wives work, some don't, like I said, they just hired in, they have houses, cars they have to pay for, utilities, they're probably out looking for another job, now they're probably working at some of these warehouses around here for \$12 or \$14 an hour compared to twice what they made at the mill, you know. So, like I said, there are just no good paying jobs, that's really hurting them, there's no doubt in my mind. You know what, we're getting by slowly but surely, it's just killing them, it's basically like losing your job. In fact, I'm hearing rumors where they're not going to have as many people working, bringing back as many people as we had working before we got laid off. Now, I don't know if that's just rumor or not but I learned that from one of my managers, and then we had a lot of managers, they're laid off, they took other jobs, they're not going to come back. So, what kind of management are we going to have when we come back that knows how to make steel. A lot of our older guys are retiring, they are going to go ahead and take retirement, they can. So there are over 100 or so of those guys who know their job pretty good. Now, they're not coming back so as far as the older guys, we're getting by, doing all right, and if we go back in the spring like they're talking about now, that will put me off work for over a year, so that's a hell of a difference. These guys are going to go out and look for a job, they're not going to find a job paying what US Steel pays unless they have a craft of some kind which we have a lot of pipefitters, millwrights, electricians, if you have a craft skill and you're a journeyman, you can go out and find a good job like that. You can go to Anheuser-Busch and some of these other companies, but if you're not, you know you don't have a qualified job, you're going to be hurting. That's what some of these guys are feeling right now. I'm sure there are some of them that have already lost their houses and maybe cars and everything else. So, like I said, the older established guys not too bad, the younger guys, it's really hurting them bad.

JK: You mentioned your wife, Aunt Lisa, still has a job, when did you meet Aunt Lisa?

DG: I met Aunt Lisa back in probably '79 or '80, I guess. Probably about the end of '79, we met and started dating in about '80, something like that.

JK: What was it like in those first early years, in the early '80s?

DG: The early '80 in like life itself or what?

JK: Life in itself.

DG: Oh, it was great, we were young and you know what, we dated about 4 or 5 years before we got married, a kind of long engagement, she always teases me about it. It was great, especially when I got back to work, I had a Z28 Camaro, had my own place, it was nice. Then we got married in '84, I guess it was. Life was good, she was working and I was working, I was happy with my job. Then the kids started coming along, Cory was born in '87 and Krissy was in '90 I guess it was. Then it was just raising the kids, you know, going through life raising kids and eh other than that it was good. You know it wasn't a bad life, we were able to afford a decent house and travel a little bit so we did good.

JK: We talked about the state of the steel industry, how it's kind of on its back foot. What would you say to the idea that the steel industry in the United States is sort of obsolete?

DG: Well, I wouldn't say they're obsolete because we make good steel here and a lot of our imported steel

is not good steel. It's terrible steel, it's not made good and, eh, I wouldn't say we're obsolete, I think people just think, with the companies we have to charge more for our steel with the companies and everything, charge slightly more than the imported steel but as far as our steel, we have #1 steel. As a matter of fact, we just had Toyota come into our steel mill, try our new caster I was telling you about, the state of the art caster, and we run steel for them and they said it turned out real good, not too many companies can run their steel, they're very picky about their steel. They actually made the comment that you guys actually make your steel better than we do in Japan. They said you are making this steel better than we can in Japan for these cars. So, to me that impressed me quite a bit, when back in the day, years ago, we taught the Japanese how to make steel, well now, they are coming back and teaching us how to make steel cause they get it and perfect it they way they want it and they're actually coming back and teaching us how to make steel again. Now, we make good quality steel, especially with US Steel, we make good quality steel and I'd put it up against anything. Actually, some of our steel was in the twin towers when they fell. They found US Steel steel in there. And so I guess that's a good thing, I don't know, cause there was really great steel in there before it fell but it was so high, it was going to take down anything, but a lot of our steel at US Steel made the twin towers. So, we've been around for years and years and years and I think we make just as good of steel as anybody else, like I said, it's like apples to oranges, if you want good quality steel you have to have good quality guys to make it. And I think we do just as good as anybody else. I think the steel mills are good in America, I think they're here to stay but if we've come so far from back when US Steel first bought us we had so many steel mills in the United States and it got to the point where the steel mills were buying slabs and bringing them in because it was cheaper than making it ourselves, that's how low the price of steel was. So the companies themselves, National Steel and Bethlehem Steel and these guys were buying foreign slabs and making them and rolling them cause that way it cut out a lot of the process. It was cheaper to do that but we were kind of cutting our own throats by doing that. It's like owning a cotton factory and instead of growing your own cotton, buying cotton from somebody else, well eventually it's going to hurt you because you're getting it a lot cheaper from somewhere else but it's just hurting your own company by doing that and that was one of the downfalls of us, so the government came together and said we have too many steel mills in America here, we need to start slimming these down, there's way too many steel mills. So Bethlehem Steel was a huge name, Bethlehem Steel growing up was a steel mill, they went under, I don't know how many went under but there's quite of few of these small steel mills that went under and how we ever made it is beyond me but I guess we made good quality steel even especially at Granite City Works. We were an old steel mill, we've been around for over 100 years but we've also automated too so we've kind of kept up and changed things and other than that I think we just make good quality steel.

JK: What is your most powerful memory of the steel mill?

DG: Most powerful?

JK: Most memorable, how about that?

DG: Hmm, you know what, I don't know if I have anyone. Probably, of course, the day I hired in, that was scary, but I don't know if I really have one powerful thing. One thing I do remember, of course, 9/11, I was working that morning when it happened and I went into one of the offices, they had the T.V. on and I heard it on the radio. Eh, other than that I don't know if I really have any powerful memories you know, as far as, you know, there's been a lot of people killed out there. I've had friends that have actually died out

there. One guy, I hired in with, he was killed out there. You remember stuff like that of course. Kind of a powerful memory. We had a couple of explosions, guys hurt out there. I remember when we had the big breakout, one of the first casters out there, actually pulling the liquid steel into the slabs and they call it breakout, something comes loose and the steel splatters everywhere, we had about 8 or 10 guys get hurt really bad out there. I remember that. I had a really good friend of mine that worked over there at that time, luckily he was on vacation that week. He keeps telling me he has nightmares, not even being there, he would have been for sure, blah, blah, blah. Stuff like that, guys getting hurt out there, people dying out there, there's been quite a few people die out there since I've been there you know, crazy accidents. Other than that, that's about it.

JK: How did you get started at the steel mill?

DG: You know what, like I said, I was fresh out of high school, I knew I'd be working in a factory somewhere doing some kind of factory work. Like I said, back then there were jobs everywhere. I could have went to Guaranteed Electric, I could have went to American Steel, Laclede Steel, which is no longer up in Alton, they might be running again now. Hundreds of factories at the time were open and running and I could have worked at any one of them. My best friend, Guy Jackson, at the time, his dad worked down at the mill, he worked at the blast furnace there, stinky part they call it. He said they were hiring, he went down there then called me and said "Hey, you need to go down there" and I went down and got hired on right after he got hired on. And I went to the main side of the plant and he went to the blast furnace side cause that's where his dad worked on that side. So, that's just how it goes and the rest is history over there.

JK: Do you have anything else that you think is interesting that you would like to add? It doesn't even have to be really interesting.

DG: You mean like the mill or just anything?

JK: Either one.

DG: You know what, just as far as my life here, this is a nice place to live. I love the Madison County area for one thing. Glen Carbon, Edwardsville area, my grandparents have been there for my whole life so I've always loved Glen Carbon, raised off and on there. My best friend was from Glen Carbon, still lives in Glen Carbon. I remember there was a kid, you know how things have changed just in this area in Edwardsville. Over here in the park, the Center Grove park, I killed my first rabbit over there and that was all fields over there at one time. It's just amazing how things have changed and how really how fast life goes. Cause when the kids were born, of course, you're the same age, your age, Cory, and Kristin, how fast things go and how fast things change, you know. I remember them telling me you need to start saving for college now, I'm thinking the kids are little bitty things, well, they were right. Come college, now I'm scrambling so you know what, time flies. It's like, live in your moment, I had my brother-in-law. He worked at the mill too, he died at 45 of a massive heart attack. Ever since then, I'm going to live life a little bit, I'm going to save money but I'm going to spend a little money too cause you never know when it's going to be your last day. That's kinda been my motto, just kind of live life as you go and life's too short not to have fun. Other than that, it's great. The kids are grown up now, Lisa and I are back on our own now, empty nesters, just kind of nice doing your own thing again, doing a little bit with the kids now and then. But it's kind of nice, life kind of goes in circles, you're single, then you're married together, then you

start having kids then they leave the nest and you're kind of back to your empty nest syndrome again, able to run and do what you want again. Other than that, that's about it.

JK: How about as far as the steel plant?

DG: As far as the steel plant, you know I don't know really what the future is, there's talk about going back in April. You know what, will they open back up again? They might not open again, they might sell that plant, I don't know. Rumor is, talking to guys, we're kind of like a step-child, I always say we're the stepchild of US Steel because they bought us later on, we're not one of the original plants, but we are a money maker for them. Now, things might start back up and we'll do just fine, I don't know just yet, it's one of those things and I'm at that age, I'm 58 now, I need at least a couple of more years before I can retire and leave. So if I can get a couple more years in I'll probably retire and do something else probably. But as far as the state of the plant I'm hoping they keep going. I've complained about it all the time but it's been a good living for me and it's like anything else, you don't know what you got till it's gone, we're just hoping it'll start back up and get things going again here.

JK: How would that make you feel if it didn't come back?

DG: You know, if it didn't come back, I guess I now wouldn't be at a point where I'd be so surprised, I wouldn't say I'd be devastated, I wouldn't be happy cause now I'm going to have to go out and find another job at 58 which is not easy to do, a decent paying job. And I'd never find a job for the money I'm making now. But like I said. it'd be different if Lisa wasn't working and making decent money it'd be a different story. But I'd just as soon keep working for another couple, three years if I can.

JK: Do you have anything else you would like to talk about?

DG: No, I don't think so.

JK: Well, I'd like to say thank you very much for doing this oral interview with me. It's awesome hearing about your life and your history with the plant and thank you so much.

DG: It's not a problem, I was glad to do it for you.