

Transcript of Oral History

Charles Lubke T-4-92 50 Years at the Car Factory

Transcribed by Patty Rivera 8/5/03.

Interviewer: The interview today is with Charles L. Lubke, 201 Thurman Avenue, Michigan City. It's hard to know where to begin but you mentioned the fact to me that your father worked for Haskell and Barker Iron Molder and you worked for Haskell and Barker. How many years altogether would that be? How many years did your father work?

Lubke: My father worked there twenty-five years. He retired at fifty because of account of he was wore out...[indecipherable].

Interviewer: And how long did you work there?

Lubke: Fifty years.

Interviewer: The two of you worked seventy-five years.

Lubke: Yes.

Interviewer: Why don't you give us some picture of what it was like when he was there and when you were there.

Lubke: Why sure I can. Well, my father, he...he went to work at 5:00 in the morning and uh...he walked to work, which was about a mile and a half and he had to put up his molds....he'd give us what we called a....[indecipherable]....box molder and that they used....malleable(sp?)....iron. That was an iron that doesn't break like cast iron. It'll bend and uh, that iron molder was far more experienced than the other type. Well, they put up their molds and we'll say from 5:00 in the morning they worked till about nine. Then they poured off the molds and shook out the castings and knocked the sand off 'em and then they went and took their bath and walked home. In other words they worked over eight hours. They walked home. As a rule they'd have to change all their clothes complete clothing because they did get sick from sweating so hard in the foundry as they had to those days. They didn't have no air conditioning of any kind.

Interviewer: Can you give me a date on that about what time...what time are you talking about. What year was this?

Lubke: Oh that was about 1890...1891. That was the year when my father started. And then he worked till he was fifty years old and then the doctor said that he can't work no more cause he had to quit so he just sat around for thirty years in the yard. We had a nice big estate and he sat there and one day in the fall he was raking leaves and he fell over dead. And he never was sick. He just was wore out from working in the foundry.

Interviewer: Remind me. He would come to the foundry every day...to the factory day to visit with the man and sit there?

Lubke: No he sat in our own yard.

Interviewer: Oh, in your own yard.

Lubke: We had a nice yard...three lots....and trees and flowers and chickens and we had pigeons and rabbits and that was what made it a nice home you know. We had seven children in our family. There was four girls and three boys. I was the oldest boy. And when I was sixteen I was out there playing ball one day and standing waiting for my chance to bat with another kid and a fella came up and said to this other boy he said "Hello Henry" and then they introduced me to him as this was Henry's uncle and Henry's uncle said "Would you boys like to work in the car shop? You'd get paid 14 cents an hour." And we both said sure we'd like a job. It was in the summer you know. So he said you better come with....be there early in the morning he said because we start work at seven and he said be sure to bring you a sandwich for lunch cause you work ten hours a day. So we both went and we got a job and we worked ten hours every day six days a week and after supper we'd...[indecipherable]...about a block and a half or so from home and sat in front of the store and talked...we never went on playing cause we were tired...we were only sixteen years old.

Interviewer: What did you first do there when you started working there?

Lubke: Well, what I....the first job I got was making drop bottom doors for boxcars. We made boxcars that had eight doors in the bottom that would open up and....so they could let the load out you know. And that was the only time that, in all the history that I worked there that they made their camera boxcars. And we made about two thousand of them for the Great Northern Railroad. And I worked on those doors. They were plank doors and they were about two and a quarter inches thick yellow pine and about eighteen inches wide and seven feet long and we....and after we made the doors if we had time we would go and try to help paint too. And we had a certain number of cars to make a day. I think it was fifteen...we made fifteen cars a day of that type. Then in between there'd be probably some flat cars being built....maybe fifteen flat cars and then maybe fifteen gondolas and that would be what, we'll say forty-five cars a day. That's the way they stopped work and they worked eleven hours every day. From quarter to seven till 5:30.

Interviewer: No overtime.

Lubke: No you didn't ask for it cause you couldn't make it...you know...you couldn't take it. The only fellows that worked overtime were the mechanics that adjusted the machines and that like in the wood mill they put the knives in there and fix the bearing or so forth. See, the cars were practically all made out of wood those days. They didn't have but very little steel in 'em. They were cast iron and wood and even the roofs were wood. They were double layers of yellow pine 13/16 thick tongue-in-groove with tar paper in between and there...and a lot of...a lot of the roofs were a ...[indecipherable]...white pine too and that's very...still better than the yellow pine you know. And each board had to have a certain number of nails in it and those fellows that made the roofs they....they earned good money, but they were all young guys from sixteen, seventeen through twenty-five...after that they couldn't cut it anymore because they walked on their knees you know laying those boards and nailing 'em down. Very few of those fellows ever got to be eighty cause I knew some of them that were neighbors of ours. They were all wore out from that hard job.

Interviewer: Describe what it would be like in the factory. Was it a...did you enjoy your work? Did the men....[indecipherable]....liked it?

Lubke: Everybody like it. You was treated good and you liked it...you were free you know. You did your job and nobody bossed you. If you could...if you wanted to come in on Saturday or on a Sunday and do some of your job you could do it. Some of the men did. You could come in....I had a contract for a while putting grab nails on the side of the car....[indecipherable]....if you had that contract you could have two fellows working for you. Maybe they'd get \$1.75. That would be a little more money than this other job that I had that paid \$1.40 see. Putting grab nails on was climbing and you had to go and get your own material and bring it to the places where you used it. Follow the cars around wherever the cars were you had to load them up. And the...the fellow who had the contract he got about 15 cents an hour more than the other fellows did see. And he had to furnish the tools, too. He bought the tools from the company at a discount and then when...when he was done with the...with the contract you could turn your tools back and get some rebate on them. And uh, there was a lot of families that worked together like if....[indecipherable].....maybe a son-in-law. They all worked together on these contracts.

Interviewer: I don't understand. Would one man get the job, then subcontract it to other...

Lubke: Uh well that the foreman...anything that you could contract to anybody. If I was a...in the line up there and the boss liked me and thought I was a good driver he'd say "How would you like to have this contract on this job?" see. Maybe there's two thousand cars that's all. You had that contract through that many cars and you got a little extra bonus for seeing to it that the job was done. The other foreman didn't have the power....[indecipherable]. You saw to it that...that the ladders were put there so that the other man could put 'em up. Then you bored your own holes in wood cars and you put your bolts through...put the nuts on. Then when a car got...if after a while it got into the paint shop and then it got painted and then it went out on the side of the shop where all the railroad right of way that was called the shipping crack and there the cars were inspected by the railroad inspector and our own inspector. And any little deviation that the contractor made when putting on the grab handle or whatever...if something was...[indecipherable]...wrong he had to correct that himself at...for free, you see. So they didn't make any repairs or anything. You had to do that. You was responsible. You even went during the day while....[indecipherable]....everything was all right. Maybe the night before it was dark in winter to see when you were working. Next morning when they should've put 'em on the side shipping track when they called you went along and looked and if there was a bolt or something missing you generally had some with you. They furnished plenty of wheelbarrows and everything. There was wheelbarrows all over. You could pick up a wheelbarrow anyplace and put stuff in it and take it there and leave it there if you wanted to. Somebody asked for a...[indecipherable]...to come back with see. There was dandy cooperation. There wasn't no trouble. There wasn't no union or nothing. And you only got paid once a month. And you carried a little check, a little brass thing with your number on it. On payday you would just presented your...the badge at the window and they gave you your money in an envelope...cash. It was all cash. And I worked in the...when after I got to work in the office, I worked in the paymaster's office once a month to put the money in the envelopes. We had over four thousand men and we had long boards and they laid the envelopes for the money on the boards and then under that

envelope was a number of the man's account, you know. And, uh, so maybe one fella'd have a whole pack of money and you just laid down all the twenties and another one would lay down all the tens and all gold money and then all the silver and then another fellow would check it to see that it was all there and then another fellow would come and put it in the envelope. Another would come along and seal it. That's a lot of work you know. And you do that in maybe two days...[indecipherable]...to service all those envelopes in two days. And they'd bring the...they used to bring the money from Chicago on a train. It arrived here four minutes after twelve on the day that it was supposed to arrive here. And uh, we sent a man and a chauffeur or a driver of a rig buggy and he had a man with him with a rifle or shotgun and he rode along with the driver and they went to the train and the baggage man put that great big box of money into the back of that little buggy. They brought it back to the office and put in the office. We never had a nickel stolen or nobody ever attempted to take it. And everything there as I said was gold and silver. No paper money at all.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Lubke: I don't know. I think it...I don't know.

Interviewer: Sounds like it was a sure bet. Now, you had said that he knew the man in the plant. Did you know him?

Lubke: Oh yes, I knew Mr. Barker. You see, when we...when...when...everybody that lived...most everybody lived near the....[indecipherable]....those days. They didn't...[indecipherable]....in those places. And uh, everybody went there. In their spare time they went down there and walked around the shop. There wasn't no fence. And they were nailing floors or roofs and you wanted to climb up there and help 'em nail or do that just for fun, you could do it. We used to go from after school...we used to go there and spike floors and uh nail on the roofs and the...the superintendent that was there his name...at that time, his name was Mr. Casey and he was a big guy about six foot four you know and he was local...[indecipherable]...and he was standing out there and he said "well here come some of my future floor layers" he'd say and we'd climb up the flat car and we'd grab a hammer and the nails were there by the bushels. They just had nails and spikes. The nails were about two cents a pound those days. I know...I remember when they were six cents...[indecipherable]...for price. We used to nail down...a fellow named John...[indecipherable last name]...and I we used to nail floors after school and crawl along on our knees. But those fellows that laid the floors, they all had special pads that they would buckle on. They made them themselves or had a harness maker make 'em. They used to walk around on their knees you know. Those cars were forty, fifty foot long you know and a lot of nails used. The roofs the same way. And there's nails, there's pipes, and nuts and bolts everyplace and wheelbarrows full of 'em when you needed a bunch of like...this door job where I was making doors...we needed washers, we just hunted around for a wheelbarrow and go through the old room they called it and they had bins, like coal bins. Instead of them having coal, they had full of washers and full of them and a big scoop where you scoop out a couple scoops and put 'em in the wheelbarrow and then the heavy stuff you can't hardly wheel it. We'd wheel it, dump it down there and maybe that was two, three days of work, see. Maybe somebody'd come after hours and take a couple buckets full so that they wouldn't have to go and get any. See, that's the way it worked, too. But it was all cooperation and if there's a...we had fellas come in from southern Indiana...old guys, you know....fifty-five, sixty...they'd be working on a farm and they was all wore

out, you know. But they gave 'em jobs. They didn't have 'em examed. They just gave 'em a job...we'll say marking lumber where they bored holes in lumber or give 'em a job somewhere where there was a bolt or a pipe where they could get some heat on, you know, or to keep 'em from getting sick...keep 'em on the payroll. You need four thousand men and it's a lot of men you know. And they worked eleven, twelve, some over twelve hours. Ten, eleven, twelve hours.

Interviewer: What are some of the stories you remember from going through the favorite things that happened or uh, some of the ways it's different from the way companies are today?

Lubke: Well, uh, there...we only had one watchman...we didn't have any watchman as a rule. And this one watchman, he was a...he knew everybody and he'd work...[indecipherable]... He lost part of his one hand on the shaper machine, you know, a big tool...[indecipherable]...cut his hand. They didn't have no guards on the machinery or nothing. Well, while that hand was healing, he would be given a job being a watchman. And he punched a clock and he had to....[indecipherable]....back and he would every so far and he'd punch it on a post you know. After his hand got healed up then he went back on a different machine where he could use that other hand and they kept him there till he died. They were good that way and uh, Mr. Barker, if he saw you there and you were getting pretty old and he'd say "How old are you" well we'd say "I'm so-so" and he said "You better not come so early. Come a quarter to eight." And that was just a treat you would....Mr. Barker and they didn't punch no clock or nothing. There was a timekeeper in each department. He had...he kept the time you see. It was understood that this guy comes at eight o'clock as....he got his pay anyways. And it was nice. And there was....and then if the shop shut down sometimes we'd get an order you know and then we'd have to shut down for a couple weeks because we hadn't gotten all the materials for the next order. Well, the...then the...you'd say well, they'd lay you off...they'd lay off a bunch of fellas and put in some of the little more experienced ones or those that had kids you know that they'd replace. But the sooner they started up again, they'd come to your house and get you. Night before, couple nights before they'd say "be in Tuesday morning we're starting up", see. You never had to go around begging or standing in line or nobody ever argued about wages or anything. I remember once we...Mr. Barker bid on a bunch of Great Northern cars and times were kind of tough and they told him he'd have to shave that job down and take it for less and he went around and they pulled a flat car out there and he sat on the flat car and he told the fellows, he said "The Great Northern they gave us the job to do. We got two thousand cars and that'll last us quite a while," he says. "If you fellows will take a five cent cut," he said, "we can take that job, otherwise" he said, "we'll have to shut down because there's nobody else available and switchers come around, this'll take you beyond Christmas." I think it was two guys that quit. One of 'em was a machinist. He said, "I'm not taking no cut for...[indecipherable]..." ...[indecipherable while laughing]....I got, uh, a dollar....fourteen cents an hour, see.

Interviewer: What year was that?

Lubke: 1907. And then I worked three years what we call trimming cars, like putting grab handles on and making these doors. Then we shut down. It was the slump and we were getting an early spring, I remember, and the snow was melting and water every place, you know. All uh, we went to Valparaiso, my Dad and I to visit. When we came back there was a guy at the house. He said that he was a different fella that I had worked for. He said that they had

chosen me to work in the tin shop. They were starting to work on the refrigerator cars and they were starting at the tin shop where they made all the sheet metal parts. So they put me in the tin shop. I never worked the tin shop before. In fact I didn't even know they had a tin shop. That was a big place, you know. And, uh, so I went...I worked in the tin shop. I crawled in a tank. They had what you called...[indecipherable]...tank. They tipped the tank over. The tank was about eighteen inches square and about 6-7 feet high. And they tipped it over and you'd stand in there or crawl in there and stand on your feet. Then you held a little dolly for the rivets. They put rivets in. You'd have little rivets in there about a quarter inch in diameter. You'd poke 'em in from the inside and then the guy on the outside, he would smash 'em with a hammer. You hung a little iron up against what they called a dolly. You hold the dolly up against the rivet. Well I did that for a couple days and uh, that was...that was hard work. It, uh, holding that dolly that was like a rolling pin. 'Bout half as big as a rolling pin and half as long and only it was solid steel, holding that up against there and a guy pound on that there all day. I...[indecipherable]...to the boss, I said can't...I heard you got a different job. I said I can't do that I'm too young and tender yet you know. Sixteen-seventeen. So he said okay, he said "See if you can run that bending machine." They had a bending machine. You bend those tanks. Those tanks were square. They weren't round, so they put the...nail that sheet down and the bending machine would it this way and bend it that way. So I...I run the bending machine. That was all leverages. Nothing to it.

....[indecipherable]...the bending machine. And when the...and I was the guy always looking for work. I never had enough work. I always said "Haven't you got anything else to do?" I didn't want to stand around. I didn't want to get laid off. That was the whole thing. So I remember when the bending machine job got done and we had maybe put in about five hundred of those tanks, they were all made already. We had to use them up in the cars cause they built the cars...[indecipherable]. I said "Haven't you got anything else?" And they said, "Can you solder?" I said, "I don't know how to solder." I said, "Maybe if you show me I can solder." So...they made up a fire pot for me. Put gasoline in it and pump it up with a foot pump. And they had these soldering irons they were about seven inches long and about an inch and a half square. The tinner could show you how to do....[indecipherable]...solder big all seams you know. Big long seam you know maybe the width of the boxcar you go along there and solder it. And lay on your knees and solder. That was a good job, I liked that. You even had knee pads on your knees you know. So I did that. I got good at it. At first you know they...took...told...had me break in another guy in how to solder see. How to tin the iron and all that. You had to file the iron...the tip of it. Get it just so. Then you had to tin it. You put it on a hunk of...[indecipherable]...or something and you rub it, clean it. Then you put the acid on and tin it. I had a brother. He was about eight years younger than I. A long time after I got out of that department, why he went to that boss one day and said, "My name's Lubke. My brother used to work here. He was a tinner" he said. That boss said, "Ohhh." He said, "Charlie, yeah." "Well" he said "I'd like to have a job soldering" my brother said. And this guy said, "Can you solder?" My brother said, "Sure I can solder." "Okay" he said. "There's the fire pot" he said, "Light it up. See what you can do." My brother lit the soldering...lit the fire pot. He got it...[indecipherable]...up and lit it. It was burning. Then he put the iron on...two soldering irons he laid 'em in a trough. This guys name was Bill Pagels. He watched him and he said, "Now what do you do?" My brother didn't know what to do. He said, "You've been watching your brother" he said, "And you don't know what to do." So he showed him to tin the iron and all about it. And he said, "I think you're...you'll be alright cause your brother was alright." So my brother was a tinner....[indecipherable]... But he didn't stay there long. He went to work on

the railroad and paid more money. Then, uh, after I worked in the tin shop a fellow came to me from the office one day that I knew in school. And he said, "Hey" he said, uh, "We've been watching you." I was working with tinners, kind of on those big cyclones where they'd be shaving pipes. Have you seen 'em in factories? There are big shaving pipes way up forty or fifty feet in the air they...[indecipherable]... We put them up as tinners. We put 'em up. They watched through the window and the one guy said, "Who is that little guy?" And that was me that was the little guy. Well this guy came out and said, "We want....they want to see you in the office." So I went in the office. They gave me job working in the office. And that was on a...by the month.

Interviewer: Were you, um, also at the time...[indecipherable]...

Lubke: Yeah. Then they uh...then they bought a camera after I was there a while. See the shop at that time...the shop was rolling for nothing. It had been there for maybe thirty-forty years but it was just a small shop. But in 1907 when I started it grew. Just grew like a weed. It was growing by leaps and bounds. And so, they, uh, bought a camera...the same big camera I still got today. They gave me the camera when I retired. They said nobody should use it cause nobody is experienced with the camera like me. So, uh, they bought this big camera and then they...a guy came down from Indianapolis to show me how to operate a camera. He was...he worked with a...[indecipherable] Company. That was the company that sold us the camera. And we bought a thousand dollar lens and then that big camera. And that was a lot of investment you know. ...[indecipherable]...

Interviewer: A thousand dollars? [indecipherable]...into that camera?

Lubke: Yeah. That was uh, something. I kept that lens up until I retired and I turned it...[indecipherable]...cars now. It's a...[indecipherable]....it's three lenses in one. I don't know if you ever used a combination lens. You can't use a combination lens on that. But this is a combination...combination lens. It's uh....it's got three focal lengths. Twelve and three quarters, eighteen and seven eighths, and twenty-seven inch. You see, you could take a picture of a boxcar two blocks away. And bring it right there. With those different focal lengths. And uh, they have cameras like that now. But camera lenses are so complicated that you never learn...[indecipherable]... You gotta learn your own lens and you're lucky if you can find out all the....

Interviewer: What was your job as a photographer?

Lubke: Well, I took the pictures.

Interviewer: Of...[indecipherable]...

Lubke: I went out and uh...every car that we built needed photographed. For instance, if you built only one car of a certain type before it was shipped it was photographed. So you could use it for sales. And they were all eleven by fourteen inch pictures. Just like I showed you here. And uh, then you...you kept a file. You had a big file case and you had maybe six or eight pictures of every car that you took. And as soon as the stock got down to the little bit you had to make up more.

Interviewer: ...[indecipherable]...publicity photographs...[indecipherable]...

Lubke: We all believed that publicity was what we had sampled...we had new kinds of cars. Sometimes we'd develop five or six different kind of cars. And then we...there'd be a slump. There'd be like a summer vacation time or so we'd shut down. Well then we'd have a display of the new kind of cars in the shop. We had it in the shop see. We didn't have 'em out in the yard. We had...[indecipherable]...around that shop see. Then we invited men from all over the country. Railroad men. They all came. And we had a...[indecipherable]...and showed them the cars. Then we distributed pictures if they were interested in a certain kind of a car. Well then, I had a...if I had enough in stock I had...[indecipherable]...hand 'em out for me. Somebody else in engineering did that see. But I wasn't in the engineering department. Then I was a draftsman too. And I went to the school at night. I took International Correspondence through a course in mechanical drawing and mathematics. So in the event that there was a slump in photography, I had my drawing table and I made drawings. And I was listed as a mechanic engineer because I made a complete drawing. Some drawings took as much as six weeks to make. The drawing thirty-six inches wide and five and a half feet long. Inches to the foot the whole car...inches to the foot. Every thing in detail. I got...I got....well I can show you. ...[indecipherable]...and uh, even the nuts and rivet heads and all that is in detail. You can scale it...[indecipherable]... I remember this car that I did make it was called a cinder car. It's the only car we ever made for hauling cinders. Hot cinders you know. Those days they used....uh, they had many power houses you know like pumping service companies did. They shipped...[indecipherable]...everything. Cause they burned coal and they made gas and they burned cheap coal and hot cinders. Well these cinder cars were something new. They were all made out of wood though. We never started making steel cars until just about the time...[indecipherable]...Mr. Barker died. We were...[indecipherable]...steel cars. Up until say 1912 we worked on mostly hundred percent wood cars. And after that we were getting lined up with Mr. Barker and I worked in this special room where we designed the first floor layouts and all that. That was under lock and key and that went on and nobody else knew your secret. You didn't dare tell anybody what you were doing. We were working on this new steel plant that they were going to build. Cause they bought property and everything. If it had got out that they were expanding, you know how things are. And I worked and there was one old man and he was the...he was about as old as my father. I worked in there with him and we had tables about as long as this room and about thirty-six inches wide and we had rolled paper...like yellow drafting paper. And there we made the sketches like three inches to the foot of a certain doorway or a certain curb or this and that and then they figured how a tractor....

[Side one of tape ends.]

[Side two of tape begins.]

Lubke:[indecipherable]... And uh, my grandfather he lived not far away...about five or six blocks and he had a horse and a wagon. A horse you know and a wagon, not a buggy, a little wagon. And it had seats on it. The seats were about six feet or seven. And my Dad used to...at supper...he used to borrow that rig from his...for my mother parents. We went out in the woods. We went back to the prison and out through the woods and we had our lunch and...and we ate our lunch and we picked cattails in the fall and we had bicycles with, uh....old bicycles. We didn't have tires on 'em. We put ropes on them for tires because tires were just...tires were too expensive. Besides a bicycle cost a hundred and twenty-five dollars those days. They were awful expensive. And we rode down the hills and everybody learned to ride a

bicycle. My sisters they could all ride bicycles. My...my Dad rode. My mother...course she didn't ride, but uh. And then there...that was back in the prison in ...[indecipherable]...where the prison is. And the prison...they had convicts used to escape there quite often. And they uh...sometimes we'd see two or three of 'em running through the woods you know. They were running. They had striped suits on. They wore stripes...[indecipherable]... My Dad used to say, "Where you going?" and they'd be like, "Did you see that horse run this way?" Then that would...then that would be the end and you'd never see 'em any more you know. Then we went down to the beach too. Where...where they...where the power house sits...[indecipherable]...Nipsco. That was all sand dunes there that great big sand dune. Why there was several old boats that were gone aground there in wrecks you know. Big boats. And you could go bathing there and uh, take your lunch, and uh, the kids could bathe you know in those old boats. It was dangerous but nobody ever got drowned. And yet you could fish. You could stand right on...on the shore and throw out a line and catch a fish. Or you could catch uh, couple hundred fish in a couple hours there. And uh, everybody had a boat and we had a boat. You could buy it...you could get a little boat and get a set of oars for less than ten dollars. Good..good ash oars. And you couldn't buy one for that now. We built a boat fourteen inches sides fourteen foot long you know out of white pine and course nails and screws you got them at the car shop. Anything that you could get at the car shop why you could get. There wasn't no...[indecipherable]... They didn't care. If you needed a couple boards well they'd throw a...[indecipherable]... your hand and go to the lumber yard and buy but if you could use a car factory board why you could use it. And...[indecipherable]...take home a half a gallon of it. They used...[indecipherable]...think it was water the way they put it on. And we had a fella that painted the cars. His name was O'Dell and I knew him real well. I knew him for many years. He told me he came by on a freight train and the freight train stopped near the car shop...that the....the...the railroad bridge was split up and the freight train stopped and left a bolt or two and he was...he...he was in a gondola car and he was watching 'em put a stencil on the car...[indecipherable]... And he said to his buddy, he said, "By gosh, I think I'll just hop off and go over there and get a job" he says, "they don't know how to put stencils on" he said, "I'll get a job." And he rode on the train till it got to the main street down there on Franklin Street and he got off and he went to a hotel and...[indecipherable]...and he registered and he went down and uh, got all cleaned up and the next day he went out to visit Mr. Barker. He took...[indecipherable]...you know and he told Mr. Barker that he...he watched them stencil and he said, "You fellas are losin' money" he said, "I can do it...show you how to do it a lot cheaper." And he got the job and he stayed there and when he retired he was seventy-four and he told us at the gathering....and I took a picture of him and I got it...that he took out over five hundred thousand dollars from that car factory. Over have a million dollars as a painter foreman, cause we had to drive we'll say fifty cars a day and there wasn't...the paint that they bought those days would not dry and the railroads had a specification that you had to live up to and he could dry that paint. And I knew just as well as I know my mother and believe me he took and confided all the secrets with me cause he knew me and he liked me cause you had to paint the cars for me that I could photograph see. And uh, he had to do as I told him and the big boss told him you do as Charlie tells you. And we never fought. He'd always...and we agreed. And he actually told us that when he retired he had hardly enough money to pay his public service bill. He used up the money. He gambled. He smoked cigars night and day. He was a big guy. He was a nice guy. He never was drunk or nothing. But he knew how to dry paint. And he had uh, uh Hungarian. Most of his painters were Hungarians and they used to paint all by brush in those days you see. And uh, he said uh, well they used to say...

Interviewer: Did they pay their different nationalities for different jobs than they...[indecipherable]...

Lubke: No, they...they uh, the only differential they had was in the foundry, uh cause my Dad was a holder and I got to...[indecipherable]...in the foundry. You see, when they first started hiring the holders from overseas you didn't...we didn't...we didn't have to pay very good. We had to get young guys from Syria and Turkey and those places. None of those fellas ever wore shoes. There were guys who hired and went over there from New York and hired...[indecipherable]...us guys and bought...and furnished them shoes. They never had shoes on. And they came here and went to the car shop and they had...we had houses where they lived in and some of you almost lived in the foundry all the time cause it was warm there in winter you know. And they could bake their own bread where they made the cars and they made the cars. And uh, and uh, did but then...the first bunch they got were Turks and then they got probably a ship load of Syrians and they didn't get it wrong. And...or they got some Italians. And they...the different nationalities fought in the shop see. So as soon as they found that out they had these interpreters they just weeded out all those that fought they let go see. Then they'll tell you the Syrians were better guys that would get along they got more Syrians. And that's why we got lots of Syrians here. Syrians were good guys. I knew a lot of 'em. I like 'em. And there's third and fourth generations Syrians here now. They came here and they'd never wore shoes. And I used to teach them how to read and write. After the supper my Dad used to go to some of those fellas that worked in the foundry and I used to go...[indecipherable]... and they charged fifty cents and hour to learn out of the first reader and how to read to write. That's how they learned to read and write. And then they'd...they'd start in on the grocery after a while. Some of 'em moved over from Jackson, Michigan some of 'em moved up toward Detroit when Detroit started. I was in at the bottom of it. That was the way I made my spending money...teaching those three or four of 'em you know.

Interviewer: What did you do with your spending money...what did you do with, uh, most of the money? Did you live with your family and ...

Lubke: Yeah, I lived with my mother and father. There were seven of us kids see. And I...

Interviewer: What was it like to live in a family with seven kids? What...

Lubke: Oh it's fine...it's fine. We got a...we got...[indecipherable]...there was a real mother you know and she was tough you know and she'd just tell you to do something and if you didn't do it she'd just knock you down. And that's all there is to it. And that's the way you gotta do it. And my father backed her up on everything. We didn't have no trouble. I was...my sister was two years older than I was and I was the second oldest. And all my sisters and brothers grew up and they all had to just...none of 'em went to high school. We took correspondence courses. ...[indecipherable]...you know. And we learned to make drawings and we learned to read and write you know. And that's what most of the kids did those days because they gave 'em a job as soon as they was fourteen. But I didn't start till I was sixteen. And uh, and I was a kid that liked to travel and I was what ten or eleven years old there's a coal wagon went by and I didn't have nothing to do I'd climb aboard the coal wagon and I'd go where the coal wagon unloaded and I'd watch 'em you know. Then I'd...coming back I'd probably sit up on the seat with the driver and...[indecipherable]...there was...[indecipherable]... And then that way I got to

know the town see. And then after I got a license as soon as the bicycle was available I got a bicycle. There weren't many kids on a bicycle. Then I could buy groceries and run errands and I even charged to ride. I charged a dime to ride see. There was one guy...I was in the eighth grade and his name was Art ...[indecipherable]... and I remember him very well cause I knew him all his life. He always...he never had a bicycle and I had a good bicycle. He said, "How much to ride around the block." I said ten cents. I'd get his dime and he'd ride around the block and sometimes I wouldn't pay attention and he'd go around several times you know. And then in later years you know I had a...I got a car. I had one of the first cars in town...[indecipherable]... And then he used to tell the fellows at the club...we had a social club...he used to tell them we said, "You notice that guy Charlie? He's always got a nice car" he said, "I helped buy those cars" he said, "I paid him ten cents to ride around the block." I never got into fights with kids. My Dad told me that if they want to fight just walk away. But I could give orders. I could give orders. And I...[indecipherable]...you sure could give orders. I'd give 'em and two seconds after I'd say, "Did you hear what I said?" you know. I had girls work for me and after a while I ran the...[indecipherable]...department and I worked with engineers and I had girls that were junior draftsmen and they...they all worked for me. They came from all over. Mostly farm girls. But I worked with the real boss that hired the guy that kept 'em busy see. I'd say, "Put this away...put this I 94 right over there." Maybe half hour later I'd go over and see if it was there see. If it wasn't there I'd tell 'em, "Now the next time you don't put it there you just go down to the paymaster with you...with me." That's the end of you, see. That's the way we worked. And if you either disobeyed or talked back the boss would tell ya get your coat. They'd take you down to the paymaster and give you two weeks vacation pay and say goodbye. And that was the way we got good help. Everybody...nobody wanted to go to the paymaster. And that was...that was a good idea I thought.

Interviewer: Um, if you could bring some things back, what things would you like to see brought back?

Lubke: Oh, I think it was...when I retired it was just as good as when I started. I don't think that we even had a sweat shop or we didn't have...[indecipherable]...rules. Everybody followed that same rule that we had when I started. Everybody knew everybody else. Then we had an office maybe seventy-five maybe a hundred people. We all knew one another. And I can show you pictures that I got...groups that I took a hundred people on one floor and they furnished...the company furnished them food, drink, entertainment, everything and didn't charge 'em a cent. And a lot of 'em stayed even after midnight. And I photographed them and gave 'em pictures too, if they wanted. They never objected. If I didn't have the time to make it where we'd make it then give it to them that was all right. And everybody that retired if he wanted his picture taken in the cardboard vanity then we'd do it. And there was other guys always with 'em. I can show you dozens of them. I photographed hundreds of those. And their wives even met me years afterwards and said, "Gee you're the guy that took my husband's picture. You know that's the only picture....that's the best picture we ever had of him. He's dead now, but we're glad to get it" see. That was nice. I met my wife. She worked in the office. I met her there. She was looking for a man with a car. I told her I was the only guy that had a car see. She...she needed some transportation. And does she like to ride, boy. She...she'd be up all night. She'd hit the car and she'll be snoring for the first three or four hours.

Interviewer: Where were the types of places you went for a ride?

Lubke: Well I been all over this country.

Interviewer: No, I mean back then? ...[indecipherable]...

Lubke: Oh, uh, then we went uh...we went to Knox down to Knox. That's forty miles from here. And Bass Lake. I went there in 1911. To Bass Lake. And I go there now...pretty near every weekend. Except in real severe weather. And there's a place down there called Toto. I was telling these girls about it. When you go buy[indecipherable]... or cheaper. You ...[indecipherable]... and you could buy flowers and fruits and vegetables and furniture...it's only forty miles from here. It's on the...on number thirty-five. Take thirty-five. Right out of Michigan City thirty-five. And we've been down there...I've been there hundreds of times. Sometimes we'd take our lunch and sandwiches or ...[indecipherable]...coffee and biscuits or whatever you want. And there's nice boating there...oh it's beautiful. We...I think we spent four Sundays in a row there right under three or four trees. We just went there...got there about eleven thirty. We'd carry our own chairs and we'd sit right under those trees and when we'd get ready we'd eat and we'd watch the boats and we talked with people. My nephew he used to be Chief of Police here for fourteen years. He's got a place five miles from there where he goes. He's got his trailer there. They said they go on Saturday night and then Sunday night they come back. We'd never hunt around here. We never went down to the lake much. Because in the early days we did when they'd ride passenger boats. But after the uh, the what-they-call-it, the disaster in 1916 that was when the ...[indecipherable]...tipped over in the Chicago Harbor. That stopped that see. There was no more excursion boats after that. Before that everybody went to these parts and they didn't have all the wheels then either see. That's why they went here. But after that...after 1916 when the car started getting good then they all went other places like to St. Joe, Benton Harbor. And we had good roads around here.

Interviewer: What things do you miss about Michigan City that used to be but are not here now?

Lubke: We miss the boats. I think they should still run the boats. They should have passenger boats or flying boats that come from Chicago. Big flying boats that carry people. Cause we got the park and we got the place where they could land and we got the type of people here that greet everybody. They...it's a mixture here and we're not fifty percent colored or fifty percent Polish or we...we're nothing around here. We get...we get around good in this town. We get to marry...why you could read some of the registers at the churches and you could see that there're all kinds of people here. And they don't fight much here. And the...they got good cops here too. When uh, if you don't let him put the handcuffs on you he'll break your arm. That's the way they do it here. Did you read that in the paper? But that's how they do it. If you want to resist arrest you just resist they'll put the handcuff on it if the arm is broke. That's the way they gotta do it. And that's the way I do things. I'm tough that way you know. You do it or you don't. And that was why I got my good standing at Pullman's you see. I worked on that Barker too. I helped put that roof on that house. You...you know where that is.

Interviewer: Did the men from the car factory build that house?

Lubke: Pardon. No, it was...well our bricklayers that did it. Well yes, it was a free-for-all. Anybody that could work and do the job could work on it. But

it was a very modern house. It had...I built my house in twenty-five and that house was built in ten or eleven. And you know that those...the electric lights in that house...they had them...when I built my house in twenty-five...that was new on the market for me. But they had it in 1910 already. See that same switchboard and everything. So you see the millionaire he...that stuff was parceled out to him. The ordinary guy couldn't buy it. Those toggle switches and all that stuff that's in that Barker House...I couldn't get it until twenty-five. It wasn't on the market. It wasn't available. Things were different then. I think there weren't too many Jews twisting things. It was more Americans to...talking to another American. That's the way Mr. Barker was too. Here's a nice guy. And if you was a good workman, when he had a luncheon at his house he invited you to come. In his millionaire house. And you were damn nice.

Interviewer: He would have the average worker come to his house?

Lubke: No, no just the choice leaders.

Interviewer: Hmm.

Lubke: Like my father-in-law. He was a...a very friendly guy. And he'd say...he'd see Mr. Barker and say, "Good morning Mr. Barker." He was from Europe you know and he was a...respected Americans. And you know Mr. Barker invited him to his house for a luncheon. And that held the morale up in the shop those kind of guys...and they never cried for more money. They didn't have a union. They never had a union. If you needed more money why, uh, they'd say well, uh, maybe this you're a carpenter that you were at the highest rate as a carpenter. Maybe if you wanted to get into the foundry we will take you there because that rate is higher see. It's higher. And a lot of guys did that. And a lot of 'em wanted to go to where it was like handling lumber. They wanted...they were kind of poor help. And the doctor said you ought to get more outside air...you been in...confined too much. Then Mr. Barker'd say, "Well then you can handle lumber a couple months and see how you get along." Now that's the...that's...that's just like putting a horse in the pasture you know. Why it was wonderful. I'd go back to the car shop if I was there and I wouldn't go no where else. Cause I worked all over since I retired...I been at the Old Mexico and I been to Cuba and I worked in uh...in Old Mexico...I worked in those greasers over there. I took a leave of absence and worked as auto mechanic. I'm a good auto mechanic. I worked with them in El Paso. I just went right there and said, "I'm a mechanic" and they

Interviewer: How old are you now?

Lubke: Eighty-six.

Interviewer: Eighty-six. You're still very very active aren't you?

Lubke: Well I'm just a guy that drives as good as you can. Can...I never started backing out driving. I rode a motorcycle for seven years. I got two cars. I got a Nash that...[indecipherable]... like a ...[indecipherable]... And you're not gonna hold that thing back to no Model T. I always had two...three cars. I worked on cars. I like cars. Motorcycles, too. I like to do everything. Only thing is that when you get old you get stiff you know. You can't do everything. It's...it's with pain that you do it see. And I can paint and do all those things. But I never was a artist. But I knew a real artist.

But I can...I can paint the background out like with some pictures. And that's because I'm not...I'm not shaky. ...[indecipherable]... I'm not a bit shaky. Well that there you can see...

Interviewer: We're on tape ...[indecipherable]...we're shown a picture of St. Stanislaus Church.

Lubke: Yeah. Well that's...that there blocking out. That's done with a brush and with a ruling pen see. And uh, that paid good money. You could go to Chicago and get a job and ...[indecipherable]... And I did that for all...every car that I made. I took the background out. And you see here...here the background isn't out yet see. That's a different...[indecipherable]...

Interviewer: ...[indecipherable]...

Lubke: And they...that was...that was one of the reasons I got to be a photographer. The fellow that hired me he was a University of Michigan graduate and he was a photographer and he took be in the dark room after I was there a few days and he said...he had what they called a blocking out set...a big hood and a table and there was a table in the hallway and they had a light underneath 'em and a glass over the top and you lay that film on there you know and then you work on it with that ruling pen or with the brush take out the background.

Interviewer: Ummmm.

Lubke: And he stood over there over my shoulder in the dark room and watched me and he said, "I think you'll do all right." And he taught me that. And then he taught me how to develop, too. And he used to slap my fingers. "Don't do that again" he'd say. You know when you handle a negative you know a big negative like this you can't...you can't take it like that. Because the salt that comes out of your finger will make an imprint...a fingerprint. So you have to handle it like this see on the edges. ...[indecipherable] as well as the plate see.

Interviewer: Umm-hmm.

Lubke: And thing cost a dollar in those days. Well that was a lot of hard earned money you know. And you went out to take a picture you just took one picture. And you walked maybe three miles to get it before I had a car. And you developed that and you had a picture or else. And another thing he taught me was develop by inspection you see. I inspect when I develop. I don't work with color like ...[indecipherable]... I prefer black and white. Because I can sit in the dark and a certain number of minutes and after that I can see in the dark by the light of a very minute light see. Then I can tell...develop and I uh I...took a picture I got...I don't know if it's here...I don't think it is but I can show it to you sometime.

[Side two of tape ends.]