

Interview with Glen Binoneimi

IN: Alright, so basically this is a work history interview, so if you'd like to start with your first job maybe and work chronologically through whatever jobs you've held, and maybe to the best you can recall, what year, or what time period. Maybe any social events happening at the time and what changes you saw taking place in the workforce, whatever you find relevant.

GB: Is this thing on and working now?

IN: Yeah it's picking you up.

GB: Okay, I was born in 1936. They called us the last of the depression babies. The depression ended in 1936. My dad worked for a WPA in those days, it was called a Work Progress Administration, working on roads and everything like that. I grew up in a little town, I was born and raised in a little town called Clayton Mills, Michigan, up around the Houghton/Hancock area. My very first job... well when I was a kid I worked on a farm. The farm was half a mile away and we learned to drive tractors, and heard cows, and cut and bale hay. We also harvested oats and everything else. We also used to... we put up fence posts, we got 10 cents a post. Then we worked our way up to about 70 cents an hour, that's how much we got paid.

IN: How many years after you say you got started?

GB: When I was working there?

IN: Probably anywhere from 12 years old to... I graduated from high school when I just turned 17. Just before I went to Sumi College, I worked that summer on the farm basically by myself. The rest of the kids were off... there was four of us that always worked there, two of my cousins and another kid, and they were off somewhere else and I stayed working on the farm. Then when I went to Sumi College in 1954, I got a job in a fish factory for two weeks during the Smelt run, and I worked in this walk in cooler that was zero degrees inside, and it was really a nice day outside like today, 60 or 70 degrees, and I'd dress up in all of my heaviest winter clothes to go work in that cooler. They dumped these raw Smelt on the floor and I had to push them around with an ice scraper to keep them from sticking to the floor until they got frozen like icicles, and there was a bunch of women there that would box them up and ship them out to mink farms.

IN: What year do you think that was around?

GB: 1954.

IN: So was the women's rights movement in play yet?

GB: No, there was just a bunch of women working there.

IN: Did they hold like lower jobs usually?

GB: Eh, working in a fish factory is about as low as you can get, yeah.

GB: Yeah, two weeks of that, and then when I got out of Sumi College, my dad worked for Foley Copper Products, it was a copper rolling mill, and he said there was a job opening there, so I went down. It was

sort of a... they put it up on the bulletin board that anybody within the plant could sign their name on it for the job, and nobody did so I signed my name on it and got a job, and I think that was around the seventh of August, 1954. I got a job at the wire mill. And I was just scared stiff about that job. I'd have nightmares about that job.

IN: Why was that?

GB: What they processed was they'd get 210 lb. copper ingots, copper bars, on the railroad cars and they'd unload them and they'd put them through this furnace. This furnace would heat them up until they were red hot and then a guy would take them out of the furnace and it would go through... almost like the old-time washing machine rollers, but they were steel rollers... and every time it would go through the roller it would get smaller and longer. Anyway, we figured out about a four foot 200 lb. copper bar, the end product would be a 800 foot three-eighths in. rod that was coiled up. But my job was the catcher, and that rod would come through a machine and I had a set of metal tongs that were about 18 inches long, and I had to grab that red hot rod when it came through this pipe, and I'd have to swing it over my head and stick it into the machine, and somebody on the other side would catch it, swing it over his head, back up, and poke it through again, and then I'd have to catch it again, back up, and poke it through.

IN: And that was hot then?

GB: It was hot.

IN: Did you wear gloves or anything?

GB: Nope, bare hands.

GB: And it would be so hot in that plant that the boss would take a big firehose and he'd... the plant was like a cement block. Part of the walls, the roof, and everything else was sheet iron... and he'd spray this firehouse all over the rafters and the walls just to try to cool the building down.

IN: Would that cause a bunch of steam too?

GB: Yeah, and right outside across the parking lot the lake was there. There was motorboats going by on the nice summer evenings. I worked two shifts. I worked alternating day shifts that started at 7:00 am and ended at 2:30 pm, and then the afternoon shifts started at 2:30 pm and ended at 10:30 pm. So, the afternoon shift was kind of nice because you were able to do something in the morning, and then after work you got off early enough if you wanted to go out at night too you could.

IN: Were any of those jobs union?

GB: Is was a union, it was United Electrical Workers Union.

IN: Was that associated with the AFL?

GB: Yeah, AFL, and the main union was... we had an independent union. Almost all our union money stayed at our place, and we used to have picnics in the summer time, and big parties and union meetings. Actually, it was big drunks at union meetings, but most of the money stayed. It was a really good union. We never ever went on strike. I worked there for four-and-a-half years until the plant closed down in 1959.

IN: You didn't have trouble getting in there at all? There was like pretty easy admittance to the union?

GB: Oh yeah. I don't know if you had a probation period on the job, or if you could do the job then fine, you just had to work there for so many months and you were in the union. My top pay when I left that place in 1959 was \$2.15 an hour.

IN: And how did that compare to living costs? Was that good money at the time?

GB: Well, we had the second the second-highest paid place up in the Copper Country. There was another place called Atlas Powder Company, they made dynamite, when you could make dynamite, you can't make it anymore. But, anyways, that paid more, but we were paid next. And then there was Quincy Mining Company that had a stamp mill that we cleaned the tailings from mining, they paid a good wage too. Then the other place to work was [sounds like: Boringville]. I think the mines were still running too at that time. Some of the copper mining jobs were still running, but those jobs were hard to come by.

IN: Was it due to union shutout?

GB: Yeah, it's mostly fathers and sons. Well actually, at the wire mill I had three uncles, and my dad, and my cousin was my partner on the catching. So there was five of us that were related that were working there. One of my uncles was the boss on the opposite shift of what I was on, and my dad was what they called a rougher. They worked when the copper rod was still big, before it got squeezed out. And those roughers worked a half-hour on and a half-hour off all shift. They'd work for a half-hour and they'd go sit in the lunchroom and read books and magazines for a half-hour, and then they'd come back on for a half-hour.

IN: What was the work consisting of?

GB: Catching this... they had great big tongs... but they'd grab ahold of the end of it with big tongs and then they'd pull it out and let it drop down to a lower level, and then they'd push it through and the other guy would have to roll it over and push it through again. That was hot heavy work. That was when this great big bar was still red hot. By the time it got to our end it wasn't red hot anymore, but it was hot enough to burn if you... one kid got slapped up across the face with one and it burned a big... of course when I came I got one of those rods wrapped around my wrist. But before I worked there they had a different system. The end of the rod, the slack would go down in a pit below the floor. It would slide down a chute as it was going then I would come back up. Before that, they used to have a flat floor, and there was a guy called the hooker, and he had a big long rod with a hook on it, and he'd keep that loop going out, and one time that loop wrapped around his foot and it pulled his foot off, and he was running around. They had to tackle him because he was running around without a foot. They had to tackle him and knock him down...

IN: So did that like help change the way things were done there?

GB: Yeah, they changed it after that. They made these pits so that the rod would come out... and on the last pass, if this rod was coming with a tangle, we had an axe there, just a wood chopping axe, and we'd have to cut that tangle before that tangle went into the machine. Chop it off. But, they used to... they chipped copper... those copper ingots used to come in from copper in Arizona, some came from Wyoming, and then the finished product would get shipped out, so it got way too expensive to ship the

raw material to us, especially as freight prices went up. It just got too expensive and they couldn't do it anymore. They tried doing aluminum, but aluminum would cool off too quick, and it was too hard to handle. It got too brittle and when you grabbed ahold of that aluminum with a pair of pliers it almost took you with it. It wasn't pliable enough. Then the wire mill shut down. A lot of the guys from the plant started a mill in Marion, Indiana, and another one in Georgia, and a lot of the guys went to Indiana. Some of them stuck it out, but others said that that was enough, they came back home because they said it was too hot down in Indiana to work that kind of mill. Then, fortunately I was only off for... see the last day I worked I think was the second of February, I got drafted into the Army March 3rd.

IN: What year?

GB: 1959.

IN: How old were you?

GB: I was too young for the Korean War, too old... I just got out of the Army when the Vietnam War started. The Vietnam War was starting in January or February in 1961, and I got out at the end of February '61.

IN: Why'd they draft you?

GB: They had to draft then. Everybody got drafted.

IN: Oh, they just ran it even when...

GB: 18 years old. When you were 18 years old you had to register for the draft, and when your number came up you went in unless you had a really good excuse for not going in. Which I didn't.

IN: So you just registered then?

GB: Oh yeah, I registered when... I was 23 years old when they drafted me. They still had the draft.

IN: Okay, so they basically ran the draft even when they didn't need you for war?

GB: You got drafted all the time. Wartime or Peacetime you got drafted. I don't know when they did away with the draft. After the Vietnam War they stopped the draft?

IN: Where they...

GB: They were getting enough volunteers that they didn't need to draft anymore.

IN: Where tensions high about the draft situation around that time?

GB: No, it was just an accepted fact. You got drafted, you went in. It was no big deal. I guess looking back, and even now thinking about it, that was a good thing to happen, going into the Army. You got experience, I was never away from home before that, and I never did go overseas. I was stationed in Fort Riley, Kansas for six months and then I went to Fort Devens, Massachusetts.

IN: Did you learn a trade in the Army?

GB: I was in the artillery and I was an artillery wireman. So I monkeyed with the radios.... telephones and radios and stringing out wire out in the field. Just about all the while I was in Fort Riley, Kansas I drove a jeep for a black lieutenant.

IN: It was not segregated?

GB: No. And my outfit in Kansas was almost all college kids. A whole bunch of us had some college.

IN: Graduated though right? They didn't take them out of college or did they?

GB: I don't think they took them out of college. I went to Sumi College for a year and then I went to work for the wire mill, so I had college, but not full college. Then I went to Fort Devens, Massachusetts and I drove a three-quarter ton Army truck carrying communications equipment around all the time. Whenever they had a field problem, we'd both string out telephone wires... and were switchboard operated. You had a little portable switchboard just like you see the old type people. When somebody called you'd have to connect them with somebody. And they'd have you take a box all over, you'd have your switchboard down in there and sit there and transfer calls. Then when I got out of the Army I went to work for... an aluminum window and door guy, putting up windows and doors on houses.

IN: Like window frames?

GB: Yeah, the whole aluminum storm windows. So we'd put up those. I worked on and off. Come to find out he was an alcoholic, and sometimes his wife would call and she would say "You don't have to go to work today, the boss is sick." And one time she didn't call so I went in there. I went to his house and the wife answered and she said "Come and look at this." This guy was so drunk. He would never go out and get drunk, he'd have a taxicab bring his booze to his house. He was just, he didn't even look like a human. He was so drunk, and that was in the morning. But anyway, he ended up committing suicide, I guess he drank something, got ahold of something that wasn't liquor, and he died.

IN: Was that while you were still working there?

GB: No that was after. I was laid off then and the unemployment office got ahold of me and asked me if I wanted to come to school in Marquette, they said they'd pay me to go to school. We were the first class that went to the Jacobetti, what is now the Jacobetti Center, but it used to be in the old depot that's a doctor's office now by the Dell Theater entrance across the street there, and I trained to be a clerk typist. Then I went down in March, 1962, and the class ended July 7th, 1962, and then on August 6th, 1962 I got a job at the railroad. I started as a clerk typist at the railroad and then when they started getting computers, because I was one of the newest people there they trained me on computers. I learned to keypunch, and first, we had to program the computers. We had to wire a panel with all kinds of little plug-in wires. That was the program, wiring this panel. And you'd take this panel and stick it in the machine and close the cover, and that's what made the computer do what it was supposed to do.

IN: Were those... those really big old computers the size of half a room or something?

GB: Yeah, they were big ones.

IN: What was the computer doing?

GB: Well that particular... they had a separate computer to do calculations. Like a timecard would go in, a punched card, and the hours would be on the card and the rates would be on the card, and then these

cards would go in this... it was called a 602 calculating machine, it would calculate this card, multiply the hours times the rate, and it would punch holes extending it then. Extending the money each card. And it would take this card and flip it over like this stack it. They had an arm that would grab the card and flip it over. And to actually run a program you had to keypunch this program onto cards, and then you had to load the compiler in the machine first. It would be a whole deck of cards that was the compiler. Then you'd have to put your program on the top of the compiler, and all these cards would read through the machine and it would compile the program.

IN: Crazy.

GB: Yeah, I mean it was. We had tons and tons, I mean like one payroll would be like three or four thousand IBM cards that represented a payroll for the railroad. Then, if there was going to be a back pay or something, you'd have to take years' worth of these cards and sort them all down by one person's number, and then put them through the machine to calculate what their back pay would be.

IN: Did you have to write another program for that or?

GB: Oh yes, I mean I wrote programs for thirty-six-and-a-half years, I wrote hundreds and hundreds of programs.

IN: How long did that particular computer...

GB: That stage of it?

IN: Yeah.

GB: Let's see, the first computers they got were in 1964 and probably... computers were being so advanced so quickly that probably, a couple of years, two three years and you'd have to get a new computer because that one was obsolete. Then we kept getting new ones, and new ones, and new ones. Matter of fact, I just stopped down in Lasko, I've been retired seven years now, and they just abandoned there last IBM computer that I worked with. I can't even remember the name of it anymore. They called it the black box.

IN: Yeah, do you remember when the card program stuff stopped for programming, and you got to use more the keyboard?

GB: I'd say it was probably around 15 years ago, that completely got rid of cards.

IN: Around the 80's?

GB: Yeah.

IN: So, was that the last job you held?

GB: Nope, well, when they went into PC's, then I used to do stuff for banks. I don't remember what the name of it was called, but like when you go into a bank and they start filling out forms for a loan, they just go on a PC screen and they take it and key in all the information, and they just stick blank paper into a laser printer and the form will come out in all the right boxes, and that's what my last job was. Making sure that stuff that they keyed in there was the right boxes on that form. The X's went in the right little box, and all the money went in the right little box. That was called sales partner I guess.

IN: Is that like a different company?

GB: It was the same company, but our company at first was strictly railroad business. When they first started out with computers it was processing all the railroad payroll, accounts receivable, payable, and all that sort of stuff. All the freight, the ore dock, iron ore that was going over, and everything else processed. I wrote programs for processing all of that. And then they broke off into bank work, so they started processing stuff for banks. I just stopped down there today and they're processing stuff for at least 90 banks, but it's completely changed. They have a room that's all full of electronic stuff, and it's all servers. All these banks, their main server is Lasko. All the stuff comes through there and goes back out through the branches and stuff like that. We had so many machines and I knew how to run them all. They had check sorters. When you write a personal check the banks would bring them in in bags and boxes and we had a check sorter that would sort these things out, and it would actually, the girls had to key all this information in from checks. Then later we had a sorter that would read the little MICR, the funny little characters on the bottom of your check that gives you a call number and everything. And the banks just do MICR, and it's magnetic ink, the amount of money that the check was for. And the check reader would read this stuff, information about your account. One time we had a... we called them pizza trays or pizza something or other. They were great big disks about this big around, and there was five of them stacked. There was arms that would go in and read this material, and we had this whole big drawer, you'd pull out a drawer and you'd pull out a drawer and you'd have to lift this great big thing off. I might have one around here someplace, I kept one. And that was the predecessor of the little tiny CD's now, the little DVD readers, I mean these things were huge.

IN: How much did they weigh about?

GB: Oh, they must have been 10-15 pounds, and they couldn't... Of all the ones we had, we must have had about 10 of those drawers that had these things in them. Probably one CD now could...

IN: Take care of 10 of them.

GB: Yeah, all the information on one CD. And then we had to rotate, it would take three to run all the banks. So, the next day you used two days ago, they'd write open the stuff. And what somebody did, is every once and a while they'd write open the wrong one. So, instead of writing last night's work, they went and destroyed it, so you'd have to run their last days work all over again. Try to back up and... it would be a mess. When I was manager of operations... that one night I got 15 phone calls to go down there. I'd go down there and get everything straightened out and they'd call again.

IN: So you were basically on call?

GB: Just back and forth.

IN: Did you get overtime for that?

GB: No, I was salary.

GB: I figured out one time the overtime they owed me, I could have stayed home for six months, if they would have paid me. Sometimes we'd be down there, if we had trouble with the machine we'd be down there 36 hours.

IN: Without sleep?

GB: Yeah, trying to get the machine. Finally, they'd send us home and say "Go on home, you're no go to us." If you're tired you know?

IN: What time period was that around?

GB: Probably the 70's and 80's.

IN: Yeah, when it was still a really big computer.

GB: The big thing was convergence. In order to convert to a new system we'd have to take all of our information... one time we flew down to Rockford, Illinois on a private plane, took all of our stuff with us, and converted it to a new machine so that when we got our new machine we could run it on our machine. We went to Chicago one time.

IN: And these conversions are happening every three to five years?

GB: Oh, it was too often. For a while there it was just such a changing field that the programming languages, the equipment, the hardware was...

IN: Hard to get in a rhythm.

GB: I know, it was just...

IN: Was there a high turnover rate because of this?

GB: You know, there were some people that I didn't even know, that I never met, that worked for us. I was dayshift almost all the time and they said "There's a new person coming in tonight," I never got to meet the person. One person I know for sure worked there for like two hours and she quit. We used to do microfiche. I don't know if you remember going to an automobile parts store and they used to take these little microfiches and put them on the screen to look for your parts.

IN: We still actually have some records in microfiche in the library today.

GB: We used to make those, we had the equipment to make those. We used to put... like we'd have bank pinouts... reams and reams of paper, and they'd run it through this machine, and this machine would microfiche this stuff, page after page after page. And they'd put them on those fiche and they'd index the thing. We'd have to program that stuff to index so that you knew what one to look for.

IN: So basically, when you first started that job, the first 10-15 years it was still pretty physical labor.

GB: Oh yeah, and the physical part of just carrying boxes of paper, and boxes of IBM cards around, those boxes were like 50-70 pounds. I mean, women couldn't do it. One time I was carrying a box on my shoulder up the stairs of the LS& I building, it was like this stairway here, there was a doorway going outside, and when I got to the top I forgot that the stairway... and that knocked box off of my shoulder and that box went tumbling down and busted right through the door. I didn't know what to do I just thought "Oh man, I just broke their door."

IN: What did they say about that?

GB: They laughed, they fixed it, you know.

IN: Yeah, things happen.

GB: Some of those machines were so big they wouldn't even come in the door. I remember one time they had to get a crane. They lifted it up and they put it in through the window. They took the whole window frame out and had to put this machine through the window.

IN: How'd they get it out again?

GB: When they got it out they busted it up and... You know there's so much of that stuff that you think "Oh man, it's a perfectly good machine and they're just trashing it," but it's obsolete. No good anymore. Just like a computer nowadays it goes bad and you just throw it out. But there was a lot of gold in those machines I think. A lot of the circuitry was gold.

IN: Did they decommission them? Did they take them apart and salvage what parts they could?

GB: Yeah, some of them did. The only thing I ever salvaged I would salvage the casters because they had real heavy casters on those machines. I'd tip them over and...

IN: What would you use...

GB: I probably got a saw in my garage that has casters off of one those machines.

IN: Oh, okay so you just use them where you can.

GB: Yeah, I put them on tables or workbenches so you could roll the around. When I retired from the railroad, or Lasko, in 1998 I guess, '99, seven years ago, I worked for a sign shop. I worked for Signs Now on Wright Street. I built signs, put signs together, and it's all computerized.

IN: What's the place called?

GB: Signs Now. It's all computerized signs. They have a plotter cutter. You design your sign on the computer, send it to this plotter cutter, and it cuts the letters all out.

IN: How many people does it take just to do that one thing?

GB: There's five of us working there. My daughter Laura works there, and there's a gal called Lynn, and the boss Mark, and Randy. Randy is a designer, he's got a degree in designing from Northern. His professor told him when he got his degree is a sign shop (laughs).

IN: Does he own it?

GB: No. The boss that owns it has a master's degree in business administration I guess. He used to work for AT&T and he got tired of listening to other people tell him what to do so he... But I like it, I've been there for seven years. I work four half days a week. I start at 8:30 in the morning and when 12:30 rolls around I start looking for a way to get out of there.

IN: What's your job there?

GB: Pretty much application, putting the letters on to signboards. We have something called chloroplast and it's almost like a plastic cardboard, and we put it on MDO, it's plywood, and we do all kinds of them the mine, CCI, and that's on aluminum. We do car lettering, window lettering in stores.

IN: Mostly local businesses?

GB: Yeah, we've done some up in L'anse and in Munising, but mostly it's local. There's a lot of business, we make a lot of banners. We make graduation banners and banners for different businesses, opening soon banners, and sale banners. And that's pretty much my work history.

IN: Alright well, I kind of want to touch on some of the social issues that might have been going on around the time of your work history. Things that my generation would have no idea about really.

GB: Well I remember where I was when Kennedy was... I was working at the railroad when Kennedy was assassinated.

IN: Everybody knows that one. I know a lot of people ended up going home with their family that day. Was that...

GB: No I don't remember doing that, just pretty much... but other than that, how things change, before there was really a lot of boats, small ore carriers. Now they have these great big 1,000 foot ore boats.

IN: All in one?

GB: Yeah, the old ore boats were like 600 feet long, 500 feet long, and they'd use a lot more of them. Now there's a lot less but they're a lot bigger.

IN: Do you remember the feelings of co-workers of civil rights when desegregation became a big issue? I know up here it's a little...

GB: Uh... I don't think it was up here so much. When I was in the Army there was a little bit of segregation, but I think they say that the Army desegregated before anybody else. Still the blacks sort of hung around by themselves, or together in bunches, and I guess that we always felt that if you got one black person, a one on one was always fine. You know, you could get along with them, but if you got two or three black people and one white person then it was a different situation because they had all this jive talk and all that stuff. I think I got along fine with the black people, the ones I didn't care for that much, not that I'm against any particular race, is the Puerto Ricans, I didn't care much for the Puerto Ricans, because when they got together they wouldn't talk English. And you'd be sitting at a table with them and they'd be chattering away in Spanish, or whatever they talk. I didn't care for that. There was Hungarian freedom fighters in our outfit. When Hungary had sort of a civil war against Communism, a lot of those young guys skipped the country when the Communists took over.

IN: Did superior officers encourage that? Was there any effort to have volunteers to go over there for the cause?

GB: Oh, for... in Hungary?

IN: Yeah.

GB: No, the Hungarians came here! We had a lot of Hungarians in our outfit, we had a lot of German's that came from East Germany when East Germany was Russian, Communist. They skipped and they came and joined the Army in order to get citizenship here.

IN: Oh, was that an easy step to get citizenship at the time?

GB: Yeah, come get in the Army.

IN: Oh, okay.

GB: But I knew two or three guys from Milwaukee that were Germans and they were all really nice people. They seemed to be really thankful that they were able to do this, and they were good soldiers.

IN: So there was like a general acceptance?

GB: Yeah, a lot of the Sergeants in some of my outfits were Puerto Rican, because it just seemed like they had been in the military longer than anybody else, and that was the only place they could go I guess to get a good job was in the military, so they were a higher rank. Sergeants and stuff like that.

IN: Do you think that Americans/Immigrant relations were better when it was immigrants from Western European nations as opposed to Hungary?

GB: I'd say they accepted the Germans and the Hungarians because they're white. In those days, being white had its advantages. There was no female in the Army when I was there. Now women.

IN: Not even like...

GB: They might have been in separate units someplace, but not like they have nowadays where there's women mixed. There's pilots, Army, and everything else...

IN: There wasn't nurses or anything?

GB: I never saw any women at any of the bases I was at.

IN: Wow.

GB: I was down in Puerto Rico for four days. We tried to scare Castro when Castro took power. They sent 20,000 American troops down to Puerto Rico to give him a scare, but I guess he didn't get scared because he's still in power. But we spent four days down there.

IN: Was there any thought that there might be an escalation to conflict?

GB: I wasn't there... it was shortly after Kennedy took office that they had this missile crisis, so I was already out of the service. We did pack up one time to go to Lebanon when we were fighting in Lebanon. And matter of fact, they said they had a ship at New York Harbor waiting for us to board, and then they called it off so we didn't. We were a STRACK unit, and I can't remember what STRACK stood for, but it was a first line. We were the first to get called if there was a conflict someplace. We were combat ready. Ready to go.

IN: Was that constant training then?

GB: Yeah, we had ranger training and just all kinds of rough training. We were training all the time and we were ready to go.

IN: That must have been an experience.

GB: Yeah, I was in good shape in those days. I could do 100 pull-ups.

IN: 100 pull-ups?

GB: Yes, I don't know how many push-ups I could do and everything else. Every morning we'd have to run five miles.

IN: What about when the women's movement came along. Do you remember any push to get more women into wherever you were working... if there was ever any affirmative action placed?

GB: No, working 36 years in an office, it was women and men. I think in those days there was more sexual harassment then, and I remember, especially a buddy of mine, he was always teasing the women, and some of the other guys were always teasing the women. And it would amount to sexual harassment now, but in those days it didn't.

IN: Do you remember when that thing started to shift, when that wasn't acceptable anymore?

GB: Yeah, towards the end of my working days. And it's not too long ago when you had to be really careful with what you said and stuff like that.

IN: So you're talking like mid-80's that that happened then.

GB: Yeah, mid-80's, late-80's, yeah.

IN: When you started your first job... you said you were born the last of the depression babies... was there still ambivalence about the American economy and what it was like at the time?

GB: Well, right after the depression the Second World War started, so I remember gas rationing, sugar rationing, you couldn't buy tires for cars, you just had to keep patching the old inner tubes. People if they had to go and buy groceries, a whole bunch of people would get groceries ordered to one person. That one person would go down and buy all of the groceries because you couldn't buy gas. I was fortunate that I lived out in the country and my grandparents had... they didn't really have a farm, but they had enough property there. They had a couple of cows, and they had chickens, and they always raised a couple of pigs. We always had butter and milk and my mother used to make homemade bread all the time. And they always had a garden. My folks always had a garden. My mother had chickens so we had eggs and stuff like that.

IN: So you basically used the household to...

GB: But a cheap meal used to be hot dogs and boiled potatoes. There would be a lot of that. A lot fish, because we lived right by the lake and my dad used to fish, so we ate a lot of fish. Dad used to get two or deer every year, and we didn't have refrigeration, we didn't get electricity. I was born in 1936 and we didn't have power in our house until 1945, so we had lamps.

IN: Was that basically the whole UP?

GB: No, just around our area.

IN: I suppose you were removed from town when you had that...

GB: Yeah we were three-and-a-half miles away from Dollar Bay, which was the nearest town. Our house was wired for electricity, but we never had it. I can remember the first refrigerator we had, making ice cubes was just a treat.

IN: Making ice cubes?

GB: Yeah just having ice cubes. Yeah, they had to shop a lot, because you couldn't keep... When my dad got a deer, he used to smoke the deer meat, because that was the only way to keep it.

IN: Basically like jerky or?

GB: Anything like that you had to buy it and cook it right away, which in the winter time was fine but in the summer time you had to buy milk every day. I'd take my bicycle and I had a basket in front of it, and I'd go get some bottles of milk, a fresh bottle every day because you couldn't keep it without it souring.

IN: When the war ended... I know there was a lot of propaganda put out there by the government that things were going back to normal, as far as the rationing and what you're talking about. Does that go back as quick as...?

GB: Well I think, I always say that I grew up in the nicest time. When I was a teenager in the 50's. The Korean War was going on from '50 to '53, but the 50's were just the greatest. President Eisenhower was the president then, and he was a tough president. You knew he was tough. You had faith in the government then because Eisenhower was the Supreme Commander of the Allied Troops in Europe. And if he was the Supreme Commander of Allied Troops and he was President of the United States, nothing could happen to us. Things were just carefree. I had a speedboat, and a car, and a job and just everything was great. Rock and Roll started in 1954 with Elvis, and he was only a year-and-a-half older than me.

IN: Yeah, I actually saw a three hour documentary on Elvis on the History Channel actually. Did you ever notice that he was singing black songs? Do you know what I mean? Most of the songs he was doing had a black tone to them, with his voice.

GB: Well, I don't know. I didn't notice that. I just remember I had a '53 Chevy and I'd have the doors open in the summertime, and I'd be listening to the Hit Parade, it was from a Canadian station. We could get Canadian stations there, and Elvis would have like four songs on the top ten. And we had an ice cream shack, and on Saturday afternoons there was another radio station we used to listen to WKEAL I think, out of Duluth, Minnesota. And all afternoon on Saturday it was a request station. We'd hear names of people we knew requesting songs.

IN: All right.

[TAPE STATIC INTERRUPTS AUDIO]

IN: Can you think of something you want to add?

GB: Oh, I don't know...

IN: All right that should be good then. I appreciate it. (Laughs)

[END INTERVIEW PART ONE]

PART II

[Phone follow-up interview]

IN: All right, one was... why did you decide to stay in the workforce after you retired?

GB: Just supplemental income, making enough money with Social Security, and to have some extra spending money.

IN: Alright, of all those jobs you told me about, which was your favorite?

GB: Let's see... I think I enjoyed working at the wire mill.

IN: Yeah? Can you tell me why?

GB: It was just the atmosphere and it wasn't.... you had just a bunch of guys and when you left your job that was it, you didn't have to think about it.

IN: Okay, that's cool. Do you ever remember a period of your life where you were actually worried about finding a job or was there always an option out there for you?

GB: Oh, I guess after I got out of the Army.

IN: I was also wondering why you decided to leave the Army instead of reenlisting.

GB: I didn't like the Army that much, even though I'm glad I was in the Army. I could have went to officer training school, but to become an officer I'd have to stay in another year. I just wanted to get out and get back to hunting, fishing, and everything else I did.

IN: Yeah, just enjoying yourself.

GB: Even though it was scary, it was a scary time of my life getting out of the service, because everything was written down what you had to do; when you had to sleep, when you had to get up, when you had to eat.

IN: Yeah, and then you didn't have that.

GB: Then you were on your own.

IN: That's good. Let's see, I had a couple others...

IN: What was your opinion of Vietnam at the time it was escalating into a major controversy?

GB: Well, I guess...

IN: Having been in the Army and all that.

GB: Being in the Army as it escalated, we weren't getting any...

IN: Well no, I mean having had that experience, you know?

GB: Oh, I guess I would have liked to have gone.

IN: Did you feel bad for the way the soldiers were getting harassed at the time?

GB: Oh yeah, yeah. I feel that way now. Soldiers you know, they're in there fighting for you. They got a rotten deal. They were even afraid to wear their uniforms. When I came home on leave I was proud to wear my uniform.

IN: Yeah, alright.

IN: You had said in the beginning of the interview that your father had worked for the WPA, was that something that... did he really like that job?

GB: No he didn't but...

IN: It was the only thing he could get...

GB: Right after the depression and nobody was working until Roosevelt got signed in.

IN: Yeah.

GB: I think my dad got a job at the wire mill in 1941, so he probably worked three or four years at the WPA.

IN: During the time that FDR was in office how did you view his presidency? Did your family have good feelings about the White House like you said about Eisenhower?

GB: I don't think so. I don't know what my mother was, but I know for sure my dad was a Republican.

IN: So there were differences in the ideologies there. So there were clear Democratic/Republican lines even back then...

GB: Yes. It always seems like, my thinking anyways, and I think my dad's thinking, that the Republicans were for big business which gave jobs, and democrats were for the people which... and I don't really know, I don't really know which way the economy was better.

IN: Yeah, that's a conundrum in itself, I was just wondering on your thoughts on that, but that's good, thanks.

IN: One final question, how do you feel about the direction the workforce is headed in this generation, opposed to the 50's?

GB: Well, I think its headed way the wrong direction.

IN: Yeah, why is that?

GB: Because all our industry is leaving for third world countries. All we are is service people.

IN: Yeah, it's harder to find those jobs like the wire mill.

GB: Yeah, there's just very few, and it seems like it takes away from the American's ingenuity. I mean, you think about Henry Ford or some of these other people that built these manufacturing businesses and things like that. You just don't have that nowadays. It's all service related. There are so many construction companies around all that sort of thing, but very few manufacturing.

IN: Alright, well that pretty much wraps it up, but I really appreciate you following up with me a little here.

GB: Yeah, good enough. Take care.

[INTERVIEW ENDS]