SHOE WORKERS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
LEWISTON-AUBURN, MAINE

ROGER NADEAU **SWOH #09**
(Interviewer: Andrea L'Hommedieu) September 10, 2008

Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview for the Shoe Workers Oral History Project at Museum L-A. The date is September 10th, 2008, and I'm at the Museum L-A today with Roger Nadeau. This is Andrea L'Hommedieu. Could you start by giving me your full name?

RN: Roger U. Nadeau.

AL: And where and when were you born?

RN: I was born in Lewiston, October 10th, 1941.

AL: And did you grow up in Lewiston?

RN: I was born and raised here in Lewiston, always lived in Lewiston all my life, with an exception of nine years when I lived out in Fayette. We built what we thought was going to be our retirement home, and due to illness we came back into town.

AL: And what were your parents' names?

RN: My father's name was Meril, M-E-R-I-L, it's an unusual name, Meril, and my mother's name is Cecile. Her maiden name was Poussard.

AL: How do you spell that?

RN: Poussard? P-O-U-S-S-A-R-D. And then she married a Caron, he passed away after six months of being wed, and then she met my dad and they started their family.

AL: And were they both from Lewiston, or had they come from Canada?

RN: Dad comes from Lewiston, was born in Lewiston. Mom was born in Salem, Massachusetts. Her parents come from Canada, and my grandfather was a lumberjack. My grandmother, I understood, worked in the mills for a short period of time.

AL: In Massachusetts?

RN: I don't know where that was that she worked in the mills. And this is just recent

that I discovered that she had worked in the mills, because all the years I'd known my grandmother she was a housewife, she was a homebody and they lived on a farm and they raised animals and did a lot of gardening, and so I don't know her to have done anything else.

AL: Right, and how many brothers and sisters did you have?

RN: We're five boys. The oldest is like six years my junior, and the youngest is fourteen years, oh, I should've said, my senior.

AL: Oh, oh, yeah. Oldest is five years older than you?

RN: Yeah, he's six years older than I am, and the youngest is fourteen years younger than I am. All boys, and that was hell to pay for mother, as she raised us pretty much on her own because dad passed away when I was just a young man, I was nine years old when my dad passed away, but mom kept us together.

AL: That's wonderful. Did all you boys, did you play sports, or what did you do for fun growing up?

RN: Fun growing up? I guess, to say of myself, I probably did the least in sports, wasn't very athletically inclined, couldn't catch a ball, couldn't throw a ball, but I enjoyed going and supporting my friends, as a cheerer rather than a player. Didn't do much sports. Did some bowling, and that was probably the extent of it. I wanted to become a priest when I was a young man and so I was doing some studies, but that didn't pan out either. It was just a phase when I was really young, it was my early teens, and really thought that maybe I would go into the priesthood, but I got a new interests and the young ladies kind of took over, so that's kind of where it was.

My brothers, I don't believe, the oldest brother played hockey, so he was into sports, he played hockey and basketball. The others, I'm trying to think if there was, the youngest one, okay, so there was the oldest and the youngest that played some sports, and he played some softball, the youngest one played some softball, he did play basketball, and he went along and did some coaching in that as well. As for the other two, I don't think that they played any sports at all.

AL: Did religion play a role in your growing up, in terms of church?

RN: Well, we're Catholics and we go to church every week, it was something that, it was mandatory in the family, that we attend church services, Mass, and so we were devout Catholics, so to speak. And that's kind of where, as well, I was in a parochial school, the Holy Cross, and that's kind of where I got the idea of maybe becoming a priest. And as I said, that changed.

AL: Now, going from school, did you go directly into working in shoe shops?

RN: As a matter of fact, I quit school. I quit high school in my sophomore year. Just before taking the finals, I knew that I wasn't coming back and I quit in my sophomore year and I went straight to work. And that's where I went to work, was in the shoe factories, I started at Weymouth Shoe on Park Street, located where Oak and Park tenements are today, the factory was located in that area. But prior to that, I had done some work from the age of twelve, I was working at a fruit stand helping this woman that was Grover Cleveland's wife. I can't remember her first name now. She had a fruit stand on the corner of South and Lisbon Street, and they had these heavy doors that they had to push up, to lift, and I just happened to be walking by one day, and as a young man, I just asked if I couldn't help her to put that up and she let me, and they hired me to help stock up the shelves there that they had, the kind of shelves that they, the stand itself. And so I did that, and then I worked at Lavasseur's Steak House, which at the time was on Acadia and Lisbon Street, as a dishwasher and potato peeler, down in the cellar. And then I worked for a Bob Pelletier who was, he used to head the buses on the corner of Lisbon and Maine, he used to blow the whistle that would send all the buses that were going different directions. He had a little pizza shop on the corner of Webber Avenue and Lisbon Street as well.

So those were the kind of little jobs that I did while growing up, and I always had a paper route so I was pretty independent and flush with the few dollars that I was making then. But my career in the shoe industry started when I was sixteen, and that was at Weymouth Shoe. I was there for a couple of years, and then the son in law took over the company and he relocated down in Texas. So that was a blow, so to speak, that I lost the job. At the time there were many shoe manufacturing plants in the community. It didn't take long that I was working right down here at Bel Moc Shoe.

AL: And what were some of the first jobs you did?

RN: The first job that I did at Weymouth, I was a go-fer, I was what they called a go-fer, go for this, go for that. I used to pick up the racks with the uppers hanging on them and take them to the assemblers. I did setting up of the counters, and that's a fiberboard counter that's inserted into the back of the shoe. If you've ever heard your mother say, untie you shoes not to don't break the counter, well it's that back part that was inserted in the shoe that I used to set up for the assemblers. And then I started to learn to do the inserting of the counters, which is called assembling. But I would do only half of the operation, I would just insert the counter and the gentleman that I was working with would put it up on the last and assemble it, tack it down. And then I learned to do some innersole tacking there as well.

When I was only sixteen, I needed to be eighteen to work the machinery, it was kind of a no-no, but I was fortunate enough to get to learn to do the assembling, to do the full

operation, and I did that. And it's funny that, there was no room with the others, where they were set up, so I was further down into the department where I had to do a lot more walking to get my work and to set up my counters and all of this stuff. But I was hungry, I was hungry for the dollar, and it was all piece work. So, not to brag, but I was quite good at the assembling, I learned it quite fast, and some of the older gentlemen were upset at the fact that I was doing almost as much as they were, if not more, and they threatened to put a ball and chain on my leg so that I'd slow down a little bit.

I guess, understanding today, their concern was probably that it would cut their rates, you know, if somebody was doing more then they'd cut the rate and then they'd have to do more to get the same amount of money. So I can kind of relate to that now, but in those days I just wanted to make the bucks.

And then when I went to Bel Moc Shoe, I learned other trades there. I was doing innersole tacking and assembling, so I was kind of feeding myself. And then I learned to do some upright pulling, what they called pull over. I used to last the upper over the last itself, not only assembling it, but pulling it over. And I also did what they called butt tacking at the time, and that was tacking the counter and the lining with the upper onto the innersole. So I learned several of the tasks in the process, and I wanted to learn, I wanted to have a chance, that if I needed to go find work elsewhere that I was multi-skilled and had a better chance of making it.

I left Bel Moc for five cents and hour. I had asked for a raise, they'd taught me these other operations and I said, well, I think I'm worth a little more money, a nickle. Can you imagine? For a nickle. And they wouldn't come across with the nickle, so I quit. And from there, for the next several years I worked at several other factories in the area, in Auburn, mostly in Auburn. I did, another factory in Lewiston was Cress Shoe, which was back on Middle Street back then. Then I went to Panther Shoe, that was on Spring Street I believe, in Auburn, and then I went to Air Tread Shoe that was on Main Street. I went to Wood & Smith, Lown Shoe, and Clark Shoe, until I went into Shapiro's. Finally I got into a factory that needed somebody steady. The others I was just kind of helping out, and the jobs weren't full time, so to speak, so it was just enough to keep me going. So in '63, I believe, '64, I went into Shapiro's, and that's where after a couple of years I was drafted. I went in the service, I was gone for two years, served in Viet Nam for one year. When I came back – I'll take a step back.

Just before I left for the service, I was learning to become a supervisor in the lasting department, and so I was working with the department supervisor and doing the samples and the inspection of the shoes and so forth. And there, as well, I'd learned other tasks, I had learned how to do some side lasting, *(name)* side lasting, I had learned to do some toe lasting, which at the time was called bed lasting, so I pretty much knew all the operations of the lasting room, and that's where I started working under the supervisor, learning the trade to become a supervisor at some point in time. But Uncle Sam got a

hold of me, so, I was twenty-five years old, I'd been married two and a half years and I drafted in the army, served my time, and then when I came back to Shapiro's there was an opening for a supervisor, and so I was fortunate enough to get that position.

AL: Can I ask you some questions? When you came back, there was no job for you anymore, you had to come back and reapply?

RN: No, no. The job was there.

AL: But they had an opening also for a supervisor.

RN: Exactly, so when I first came back, when I first came back I went back into the production line, and I believe I was assembling and pulling at the time, and that's where there became an opening as supervisor.

AL: And so you became a supervisor.

RN: And so I became a supervisor. That didn't last very long, it lasted for about a year and a half, and they closed that department down. There was two departments at Shapiros, there was the Serena line, which was a high quality woman's shoes, and then there was the Edison line, which was a ladies pump shoe, and all around shoe that they were making, and that's the department that I headed. But they closed that department down, so then again we was out looking for work. I didn't know that, didn't feel I guess that I didn't have the skills to pursue the supervisory skill. I'd done it for about a year and a half but only in that type of shoe, so didn't know whether I should go out and pursue that.

So I'd gone out to help some of my employees looking for placement. In the year and a half that I *was* supervisor, I'd met other supervisors in other factories so I got to know a lot of people, and so I went out looking to help find work for the employees, the guys that were working for me. And in this process I'd go to different factories and I'd tell them that I was there, you know, looking to find work for these guys, and I would speak up for them. And so, and they would ask me, well aren't you looking for yourself? And they asked me again, what was I doing, and I told them what I was doing, and they said, well don't you want to find work? I says, I will, but right now, I says, I just wanted to get work for these other guys. And they didn't have the transportation, you know, some of those guys didn't have transportation and I did, so it was easier for them.

Well, the ones that I went out looking for, they found positions. And in that process one of the factories, Androscoggin Shoe, they're the ones who said, well, don't you think it time for you? I says, I will once I, I got to get these guys placed and I think I'm pretty well there, I says, I'll find something. And I found something at Dori Shoe, which is in the same building as Androscoggin Shoe was, but it was downstairs. I went back on the line,

I went back as an assembler. That was my main trade, that was the first job that I'd really learned and I was pretty good at it, so that's what I went back to doing.

But I had spoken upstairs, and the gentleman at Androscoggin Shoe knew the supervisor, the superintendent that was at Falcon Shoe. Falcon Shoe was a fairly new company at the time, they had started in '63 and this was back in early '69. So he says, there was this, and them talking, they said that there was this young man that came over and was looking for his guys, and they were looking to replace their lasting room supervisor. So Falcon Shoe gave me a call, and it just so happened that the gentleman who was superintendent, I didn't know at the time, was the brother-in-law to a good friend of mine. But you know, there was a big difference in age so I didn't know him as such. So I had, as a matter of fact, I had three interviews with Falcon Shoe, and they wanted to know my background and what type of work that I had done and what type of leathers that I had worked with. And in those days *(name)* and patina, there was fairly new stuff and it was quite difficult to work with, as it would break a lot, it would break apart. Man made stuff, you know, it isn't like regular leather. So they were asking, because they were thinking of starting to do that on the kids shoe. And so after a couple of interviews I got the job, and this was in May, I guess, May of '69, and for the next thirty years I was at Falcon Shoe

From there, I started as a supervisor there, I was hired as a supervisor in the lasting department. I was there for about, I'd say thirteen, fourteen years in the lasting department. The packing room supervisor retired, I was asked to take over the packing room. It changed, now instead of me giving the work to the packing room, I was getting it from the lasting room. The biggest issue there was, now I was working with women rather than men. I always had a few ladies working for me in the lasting room, but ninety nine percent was women in the packing room, so that was the major change. And from there I also went into management, I went into the HR, and so I was kind of coaching the packing room, converted the packing from a conventional, what they call a conventional packing room where you have one or two people doing all the tasks and they feed one another, into a modules, so where we cross-trained every individual. Well, they cross-trained themselves, the employees cross-trained everybody to learn everybody's operations, every job, and then we went into modules of six or seven member teams, where now it was something similar to the Just-in-Time concept, you know, the Japanese concept where, so now, and that was to me, that was a great benefit, because in the past when you have a conventional department you have one or two people doing one task to provide for all the other forty down the line. And so by cross-training each individual, it helped when we had absenteeism. Instead of losing fifty percent of our production if we had one individual out, we would have only one person of a team that was missing.

If you followed this it was, I didn't have to replace that half person with somebody else to try to keep up on some of that production. Now, oh, how do I want to say this, the individual that had to be replaced, I was cutting down some of the production from where I

borrowed, all right, see, if I borrow somebody from another task to come and help. So it was kind of difficult, we would lose more of the production. In the team concept, the modules, it was one of seven, but all the other six knew all the tasks, so we'd lose a lot less production. And so it was a big onset. Not that it was liked by everybody, because it wasn't. Then, you know, the conflicts were that, well, I'm doing more than he is or she is, and she's not pulling her weight, and there was a lot of issues, personal issues, the conflict type thing. But we had great training, the people, they cross-trained each other, number one, so that was good, that they learned from their peers, all right, it wasn't somebody that was hired to do it, they learned the tasks from their peers. But we also had a consultant come in to do conflict resolution, training, team building training. And so I liked it, I liked it very much, I liked the concept, and it wasn't easy but I liked the concept. Once I left, once I retired from there, the supervisor that took over, it wasn't his thing and they kind of went backwards, so to speak, and they went back to, not a totally conventional but, you know, there was some teams there, but not to the extent that I had. So that's kind of how that was.

As a supervisor, because at Falcon, we pretty much had the responsibility of doing what needed to be done, and do it a way that was good for the factory and good for the employees. So we had pretty much of a free hand to do what we wanted, as long as the end results would meet the standards, the quality standards, the production standards. And so we worked for a great man who empowered us to do what was right, and so I really enjoyed working for Falcon Shoe. Ted Johanson was the owner and CEO of the company.

AL: So you got to know him pretty well?

RN: Got to know him very well. When I went into management, doing the HR, you know, I took over the packing room and I took over some of the management in HR, I got to working with all the programs. You know, the programs that we had at Falcon, a lot of those programs are unheard of in the shoe industry. I mean from benefit packages to just benefits that the employees had. I mean we had a GED program, and this was, you know, me working with Ted and the other supervisors, but everything had to come from Ted. You know, we presented our ideas to Ted, and from there it seems like there was never a no. You know, he just wanted to understand the full concept of the program, the GED program.

We set up a first aid program where anybody that – I was doing the first aid as well, in the factory. Well, in the factory we got to a point where there was a lot of employees and it was tough for one individual to take care of any injuries, or if there was anything would happen. So we put it out to the employees that we were going to start a first aid team, so that we would have an individual from each department, and we got somebody in to train us, to do the training so that they'd be all qualified to do a first responder type thing, a first aider.

We had, like I said earlier, the GED program, where employees wouldn't have to leave work. You know, sometimes it's difficult for somebody to work all day, have to go home, and then go to school to bring up their education, you know, to help them in that respect. So what we did is, we contracted with the Lewiston Adult Education, they brought in teaches in the workplace so that the employees wouldn't leave, they wouldn't have to leave, and so they had their classes right there, and once they left, then they were going home for supper. You know, it was a point where they had to start back, and we wouldn't have had as many if that would have been the case, we wouldn't have had as many employees take part in the education program. I'd say we had well over forty individuals that went through our GED program – I say forty, it's a whole lot more than that. At the onset we had large classes, and we did everything that we could to encourage these individuals to go for their GED. As a matter of fact, some of those people that got their GEDs are running the plant today, and it all started at the factory.

And then something else that was unheard of in the shoe industry was a profit sharing, where in the early seventies Falcon Shoe started a profit sharing plan, a retirement plan, so to speak, and the employee didn't have to contribute anything to the plan. I believe at the time it was fifteen percent of the company's profits was turned over to the employees and they would get their share of that based on the monies that they earned. Like they would get one share of that pot based on each hundred dollars earned, one share for each year that they had been with the company, and that's kind of how they benefitted from that program. I believe the first year it was something like forty thousand dollars that was put into the plan. Now, that was a whole lot of money. You don't hear that, you know, this is, when this happened to us it was something that was just unheard of, you know, shoe workers getting a retirement plan, a profit sharing plan. And then we went on, and as they progressed they were making a whole lot more money, and there was years where they was two hundred thousand, a quarter of a million dollars that was put into the plan, so that grew quite fast.

Again, when the plan first started, you needed to be in the plan, you needed to work at Falcon for one year before you were vested, and then you would get ten percent of your vestment that would be applied to you. So after ten years you were fully vested, whatever had been placed into your account, after ten years you would have it. As the years progressed the program got better, and then the government got into that as well, where it was twenty percent, so within five years you were fully vested. And then it got to be where it was every year, you know, you were fully vested. Some of the people who had been there a long time, and Falcon had long term employees, we had, I think more than fifty percent of our employees had been there long periods of time, and I'm talking ten, fifteen years and so forth, so, you know, in the progress of the company. They started in '63, I started in '69, so, and then in the seventies is when this profit sharing came, so come the early eighties I'd been there eleven years, myself. The people that had been there when I started, they were still there. And so our turnover was next to nothing because of all these benefits.

We had a Green Committee, where they could bring their plants, you know, to make themselves feel at home. We had a Ergonomics Committee where, and this was all employees, so they would monitor what do we need to cut down on the work related injuries, and we provided arm rests for the stitchers to get some of the trapezius strain off their backs, we had chairs that were adjustable, and the swivel chairs. We had tilt stations to make the stitching position a lot easier, provided the mats. We looked at every operation ergonomically to see what else we could do to make it better for the employees.

AL: Was that really hard for a shoe company to do that in an era when shoe shops were closing all around them? How did they make it successful, I guess, is my question.

RN: I guess the reason that we were so successful is the man that was leading us, Ted Johanson, and the gentleman, Bruce Hanley, who was the plant manager, they were the two that started this factory. They had a lot of foresight, we were, the new machinery that was coming out, the new technology, they were part of that and they would experiment with that, bring in the new machinery. And the type of industry that we were at time was a kids factory, we were making kids shoes, and so that was from a size five, you know, what we called infants, and then we had a five to a twelve, and then a twelve to a three and a half, and then three and a half to seven, so there was the youths Jetson Boys, is what we called them. And so the imports had not affected us a whole lot, and so the technology, like I said, they had a lot of foresight as to what they wanted that factory to be, and so they experimented with all the new technologies that was made available.

AL: And they kept up with it.

RN: And they kept up with it, exactly. When I retired from Falcon Shoe in 1998, we were one of the most, if not the most, modern shoe manufacturing plants in the country. And we were all very proud of that, we had all worked very hard. I started there back along, like I said, in '69, I was twenty-nine years old. I don't know that there was a supervisor, yes, we had two supervisors that were what we would call elderly then, in their forties, and the rest were all young men, young women, who had ideas, and as I pointed out earlier, you had a free hand of putting out suggestions and not feeling like you were being put down or being ridiculed for your ideas. And so we were very proud as to what we had. When I left there I knew that I had left something big.

And Ted Johansen himself is probably four years my senior, so he was a young man. Bruce Hanley, the plant manager, has probably got a year or two above that. So we were a young team and very innovative, would try everything and anything. They'd say, you can't do this, you can't do that, and we would make it work. And that's the way it was. So we were very profitable. And for Ted to have done that, to share with his employees the way that he had, and the way that he did all the way through, is unheard of. So we had a

lot to be proud of.

AL: Now, is Falcon Shoe still in business?

RN: Falcon Shoe still exists. Falcon Shoe is now named Falcon Performance Footwear. It was sold. During the years that I was there at Falcon, the last years, one of our customers, Iron Age, acquired Falcon Shoe, Ted sold to Iron Age, which was a safety toe company, they manufactured safety toes, and we manufactured for them. And so they bought out, and Ted had given them five years that he would stay to run the company for them, and so he did. And I got out after four years, so he only had one year left when I left. And I lost where we was heading with this.

AL: Well, just if Falcon was still in existence.

RN: Oh, yes, and then again it was sold out. It was sold to Iron Age, and then we acquired Dunham Boot Makers, the name, through the banks. I guess they were going under and we had helped to keep their head above board, and then we acquired the name through the bank, and then we became Falcon Shoe, but Dunham Boot Makers as well where it was a men's work boot. We went from kids shoes, where literally overnight we transformed the factory into an athletic shoe factory, manufacturing plant. The kids stopped wearing the little dressy shoes to go to church and to go to school and it was all athletics, and so like I said, we literally transformed the factory into an athletic wear. That's all that we were making, was athletic shoes. From there we went into the men's shoes, the men and women's, through Iron Age and Dunham, you know, those were men's work boot products. And then we started making boots for L. L. Bean and Brownfield, I guess it is. I mean there's several names there. At the moment they escape me.

AL: That's okay.

RN: So we went with the times, we did what we needed to do to be successful. We were the fist plant to get into the polyurethane, a direct attachment, a polyurethane sole that is blown. So we've had a wide range of products that we manufactured, and we were successful in every one of them.

AL: I have a question. Why was it that the packing room was so female weighted and the lasting room was -?

RN: The lasting room, yeah, okay. So we have, there's the cutting room, and then there's the pre fit and stitching, and then there's lasting, and packing room and then the, packing room and finishing is pretty much the same, and then there was the shipping. Cutting room was pretty much a mixture. It's probably forty to sixty percent, you know, sixty percent men, forty percent women. Stitching room, the majority, and I'd say ninety

nine percent there was all women. This was sewing and stitching and assembling parts together, cementing. Basically, you know, a woman job. I don't mean to say anything nasty there in respect to that, I mean, but it was basically women that manned those departments. Lasting room was basically men. We had a few women that would do the cementing – not that they couldn't do the other task. I'm sure at some point in time there was some women that were doing those tasks, assembling, pulling, side lasting. It was more physical than it was in the stitching room. Not to say that it wasn't physical in the stitching room too, because working with the tough leathers, the women worked hard. But it's just the type of work that it was, so there was more men there. And now again the packing room, that was mostly women because it was tedious work. They did the repairing, the coloring, the cosmetic stuff, you know, if you had scratches on your leather or on your shoe, they either put tip wax or color crayons to, not that the product was not right, the quality wasn't there, but the blemishes, you know. And so it was more tedious work and men didn't have the patience, I would say, to do that. Although once we converted the packing room from a conventional to modules, I had more men at that point than I'd ever had in the whole packing room together. So, you know, there was probably one or two men on several of the modules, where before I wouldn't have had that many men in the packing room. Overall, it was basically all women.

AL: You touched on this earlier, can you talk about the leather? Did you have experience working with the leather and learning, I'm not sure what my question is, but I've heard people talking about it being a living thing and having to get a feel for it .

RN: Yes. And I guess to know that, you would have had to have worked in the cutting room to understand that. Because the cutters needed to know the stretch of the leather, they needed to know whether it was a toe to heel stretch. The parts that they would cut, some would have to have the toe to heel stretch, others would have that side stretch, and it couldn't be in excess because then the shoe would distort in the formation of the shoe, in the lasting room. If you had the wrong stretch, you couldn't hold your design, if you had a design on the shoe, so the cutters needed to understand that a lot more than anybody else. Although everybody worked with the same, the same types of leather, the stitchers, again, you know, had to be careful as to how they did their stitching or joining anything together, not to overstretch it. If you start with a piece and you start two ends together and you end up with one piece a lot longer than the other, that's because your tension wasn't right, or the leather stretched too much and it would distort the shoe. So it's, oh, how do I want to say that? It's based on someone's knowledge of the leather as to what they need to do.

AL: I find that interesting, really.

RN: It is. I mean, the shoe manufacturing process, it's too bad that it's lost. I mean we have very few factories left here. But would you think that a pair of shoes would go through seventy hands or better, you know, to form a pair of shoes? And that's what it

takes, from beginning to end, if not more, depending on the style of the shoe, the pieces that are in that shoe. The operations are, they said there was two hundred operations in making a hand sewn shoe, well that's probably a specific shoe, you know, that's a lot of operations. But overall, there's at least eighty that I would say, on every shoe, it goes through all these different hands, so it's quite a process.

AL: Now, what were some of the dangers for injuries in shoe making? I suppose anytime you're working with machinery, but what did you see, as a supervisor?

RN: What did I see? I saw some people, where they've had the tip of their fingers cut, doing some cutting. Again, we had to conform to OSHA, so there was a safety device on all these machines, and whenever there was something new that would come out, we made sure that it was available, you know, to cut down on the injuries. So the cutters, if they weren't careful, they could cut the tip of their fingers. I had a maintenance man one time repairing a, he was repairing a – it's gone, you know, my mind is a blank. A sole laying machine, all right, and we had activators on the sole laying machine, on that sole press, it was a sole press. And so he had to pull out the timer, there's a timer, so that as you activated the press there was a timer that would keep the pressure on to that sole and upper for, let's say, six seconds or eight seconds, whatever that amount of time was, you had enough time to set up another shoe and place it on the other side, your rights and lefts. And this particular time it was faulty, so we called the maintenance man over, he came over and he pulled out the timer. Inadvertantly, we didn't shut the power to the machine, all right. He went out, he worked on the timer and came back and placed the timer in, and as he placed the time in, it activated the pad and he got trapped between the pad, his elbow, the inside of his elbow, got trapped between the posts and the pad itself, so that was quite an injury.

The stitchers, they've had needles break into their fingers. Molding, it was hot, it burned, burn injuries. If it would spew, what they call a spew, either the nozzle wasn't clean and as it tried to inject there was no room for materials to go in, it would spew out all over, the chance of a burn injury was there. In the lasting room we had toe lasters that had hot melt cement, again, a chance for injury. Innersole tackers, you know, when they're taking innersoles, you'd have to be real negligent but I suppose it could happen. I was holding, my (*unintelligible*) had jammed, you know, the tacks, so I took out the part to clean where the jam was, and I placed the part back in, and instead of screwing it in, tightening it in, I held it with my fingers to see if it would clear, without thinking that the hammer came down and came down on my finger. Well, I guess you know, I knew, I got bit. So there were all kinds of, every task, every operation has some form of injury if you're not careful.

End of Side A
Side B

AL: We are now on Side B. And you were just telling me about some of the injuries.

Did I let you finish?

RN: Yeah, I think. I was saying, pretty much all of those have some form of hazard that you had to be careful for.

AL: And so because of all those different operations, that's why the first aid teams were put in place?

RN: Exactly, and those first aid teams, I mean, were very beneficial. They were the first responder. If they needed to go beyond their help, then they would be transported or taken to wherever it was that they needed to go to make sure that we took care of the injury. So it was a great program to have, it was a relief from my shoulders as being the sole first aider for quite a few years, but as we grew, so did the programs. And that's something else, you know, the programs, we had so many programs. We had the Employee Assistant program, we had that GED program, we had the Green Committee program, we had a Steering Committee program, we had the ergonomics team. To have all of those, and then the benefits that I mentioned earlier, it was the profit sharing plan. Then we went into quarterly profit sharing, where the annual retirement plan was one package and then there was another ten percent of the funds that were thrown in on a quarterly profit, because they couldn't take the retirement fund, all right, they couldn't touch that, and some people needed the money now. So they started a quarterly profit sharing plan where they would get those dollars based on their production and the quality of their production. And I'm sure I'm forgetting some, and I really didn't want to forget any of the programs that we had. The Employee Assistance program, it was for those who needed outside counseling of sorts, so that was established for them. And they still have those programs, you know, the programs that were started, I think the new buyers that came in continued a lot of those programs.

We had a Hat Day, there was a lot of festivities going on. During our 25th anniversary, the year of our 25th anniversary in 1988, all year long we had drawings of all kinds, vacations, radios, televisions, cameras, every week there was three or four items that were being raffled to celebrate the anniversary. Every employee on the anniversary date, when we did the party, the 25-year anniversary, every employee received twenty-five silver dollars, Susan B. Anthony dollars, that was in a little pack, plus one dollar for each that they had been employed. So if you had been there twenty-five years, you got the twenty-five plus the twenty-five, and there were some people that had been with us from the onset. I started six years later, but some people had been there the full twenty-five years. So there was a lot of emphasis on the employees, and to making sure that he was provided the right things.

As Ted's employee, in working with Ted with the programs, a lot of those things that were happening I felt, you know, because of the complaints, some people are never happy, and I would bring this up to Ted and I would say, why do we bother? Roger, we're not

doing it for those people, we're doing it for the ones that appreciate it. So, you know, his attitude was just, he was a great leader. And he helped me, he helped me progress and to think the way that he was thinking, you know, to try to think the way he was, but he was a lot softer than I probably would have been, or I wouldn't have offered so much. Because what they had, and a lot of people didn't see what they had until after they had lost it, didn't realize all the benefits that were there until they quit for whatever reason and wanted to come back, that they saw what they had and what they didn't have.

We had this GED program, teachers would come in. Well, they gave them an education. Some of those individuals felt that the shoe industry wasn't for them. They were going to go out and pursue, now that they've got their GED, they can go on to bigger and better things. Some people have. And we didn't fault them for that, you know, everybody has to look out for themselves. And we've had some that have come back, after they've gone into their field, they've come back and were happy to be back, you know. So they left, but we had no remorse for doing what we had done.

And then the retirement plan itself, the big package. I can't say enough, you know, for Ted, for having made this available to the employees, to the community. I mean, a lot of the stuff that the employees were doing as well was geared towards the community. We took on some families for Christmas – this was all done by the employees, you know, to give back a little of what they themselves were getting. But the profit sharing I would dare say, I won't dare say, but I would say that a whole bunch of people have retired from Falcon with well over a hundred thousand dollars. I mean that program, I for one, two years after they had started the plan, I was offered a position at another shoe factory that would have given me a hundred and twenty-five dollars a week more. We had just built our home, so this was I guess in '73 because I built my home in '71, and I was offered this position out of town for a hundred and twenty-five dollars a week more. I told the wife, why don't we go – we had just built our home. She said, we worked too hard to build our home, she says, if you want to commute go ahead, but, she says, I'm staying here. I said, well, you know what, I'm not doing that for me, I'm doing that for us. We had one child, we had adopted a baby back in '69, I says, I'm doing that for us. If you don't want to go – and that was the best thing that could have happened to me, was having my wife say, I don't want to go. I stayed at Falcon. And not that it was easy, you know, there were times where I felt like maybe I need to get out of this, but I persevered and I'm super glad that I did. I retired at fifty-seven, my wife was fifty-four, and she had worked for me in the packing room department when I was just a coach, after the modules. And so she was working in the department, she was fifty-four when she retired and I was fifty-seven, and today, ten years later, we've done well, you know. And so I'm just happy to have toughed it out.

And there's some people who have had a whole lot more than a hundred thousand. Some of the people that left, when they left and came back, if they came back within the year they hadn't lost anything, so it was just continued, the process of getting their shares

into that. And someday I'll let the museum know, before my demise, my share of that pot. I mean, it's something I wouldn't want to say. Maybe I shouldn't even be saying this.

AL: You were at a place that was very loyal to the employees, who as you said had a very high retention rate. Around you, though, you must have been aware of a lot of shoe shops closing and people losing their jobs in the shoe industry. What was that like, to be in that atmosphere?

RN: You know, I worked at a couple of factories that relocated, that moved, Weymouth Shoe being the first one, the very first company I worked for; Shapiro, closing down my department; and the other factories, I guess I wasn't paying much attention to what was happening. We were surviving, we were a different type of shoe, so we were just grateful for what we had. But we could see it, we could see it but not realizing what was fully happening, that the industry itself was disappearing, and how long were we going to survive, I guess that thought did cross our minds, but we were so grateful for what we had that we said, well, you know, had you come work for us.

And today, you know, what the museum is doing, taking these histories, it's hard to find somebody who did not cross our doors, who did not at one time or another work at Falcon Shoe. Falcon has been in existence since '63, so we're talking fifty, no, not quite fifty, forty-five years, and so a lot of these people, whether they were with us two years, three years, or fifteen years or twenty-five years, a lot of the people who's history you're going to be taking at one point or another might have crossed our paths. And so, and if they didn't stay, you don't know what you miss, you know, but the ones who were there and who have benefitted from the retirement plan, from the profit sharing plans, from all the programs that Falcon offered them, they know what it meant to them to have it. And for those that didn't, well, you know – I wish, some people say, I wish I had worked at Falcon sooner, or when Falcon acquired Knapp, they didn't have that, all the years that I worked at Knapp, if I'd have worked at Falcon, I'd have something today, you know. So they had five years or ten years with us and they saw what that five years gave them.

Some people retired, or left Falcon, with eight thousand or twelve thousand or twenty thousand, and they were tickled pink. Because where else would they have had that, nowheres. So they were tickled pink at that, but they don't know what the people who have had the long term history with Falcon, what they walked out of there with.

And this is something else, Ted Johanson being what he is, he wasn't going to toot his own horn. You know, I mean all of what he's done, what Falcon has done for the community, you know, the hospitals, you look throughout the community and there is something there that Ted has done. We had the baseball kids, we supported the teams, the baseball, the softball teams, the bowling leagues, all of these things, the hockey, these are all things that Falcon helped, was a sponsor of. He didn't want us to tell anybody. Or the charities that he would donate a certain percent, I guess they were

allowed only to give a certain percent of their profits to charities. He would always max that. But didn't want to let people know, you know, let's not say. Why don't we let our employees know what we're doing, Ted? You know, so that they see. No, it wasn't his thing, it wasn't his thing. And I think at the end we'd started, we had started to let the employees know what we were doing, for them to appreciate -

AL: Have some pride in it.

RN: Have some pride in what they do. And you say, have some pride, we had a sticker, "made with pride," you know, that we would put on our products, you know, "made in Maine with pride."

AL: Oh, nice.

RN: Yeah, it is. Never, never would I have imagined, I never would have been able to save for the retirement that I've enjoyed the last ten years had it not been for Ted Johanson and Falcon Shoe.

AL: Is there anything that I haven't asked you about, that I've missed that you think would be important to add to this history today?

RN: I tried to say all that I could think of, because there was so much, there was so much. You know, one thing that we did at the Green Committee is, we planted all the trees around the building, on the outside, all the trees that you see along the canal, that was a committee. We had raised, we was putting all our nickel cans in a bag, we would collect some funds, and then we bought those trees. And this is, not only benefitted the employees but the city, you know, the whole community, the environment, and made it, you know. We had meals that we would barbecue outside once a week, people would bring in the stuff and I would go down and cook for them, you know, the one day a week, people could come outside and have whatever they had brought over. I'd go down a half hour earlier and do the cooking, so they'd come down and their meal was ready when they come down for lunch. They only had a half hour for lunch, so.

You know, those are little things, but still, they meant a lot, they meant a lot. And so I don't know, I don't know that there was ever another company that did so much for its employees, for its community, and for themselves. You know, I mean I'm proud, I'm proud to have said that I had a part of that. And today it's not what it used to be, but it's still nice to know that they're still there. And, I think I mentioned earlier, that the GEDs, that some of those people are running the plant today. The CEO of Performance, Falcon Performance Footwear is a gentleman who went through his GED, he started as a young kid, cocky little guy, but nice kid, nice kid. And he went up the ranks and became a supervisor, then he went into the office, into management where he was purchasing agent, and then he became the CEO. As the changes were made, the new owners took

over, Ted had moved out after his five years, and Ted was his mentor, you know, he took Roland under his wing, and today Roland Landry is part owner, as well as Neil Hanley who is the son of the plant manager, Bruce Hanley's son. Bruce and Ted were the ones who started Falcon Shoe, and today we have Neil and Roland Landry who are running the show, and that makes us proud. And I'm sure that means a lot to Ted, too, I'm sure he still calls every day, still keep in touch.

AL: Great, thank you so much.

RN: Well, you're welcome.

End of Interview
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