

**SHOE WORKERS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
LEWISTON-AUBURN, MAINE**

Roland Landry
(Interviewer: Andrea L'Hommedieu)

SWOH #037
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Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview for the Shoe Workers Oral History Project at Museum L-A. The date is January 15th, 2010, this is Andrea L'Hommedieu, and today I'm interviewing Roland Landry. Roland, could you start just by giving me your full name?

Roland Landry: Roland Fernand Landry.

AL: And how do you spell the middle name?

RL: F-E-R-N-A-N-D.

AL: And where and when were you born?

RL: I was born August 21st, 1959 on Walnut Street in Lewiston, Maine.

AL: And did you grow up in that part of Lewiston?

RL: Grew up actually Lisbon Street, way-way down, almost on the Lisbon border. My dad owned Landry's Barbecued Chicken, we were the first barbecued chicken restaurant in the entire area.

AL: Oh, that sounds wonderful. What were your parents' names?

RL: My father's name was Fernand, like my middle name, and my mother's name was Miguelle (*sounds like*), so they're very French.

AL: Were they both born and grew up here, or did they immigrate from somewhere else?

RL: My mother's parents were from Canada, but my mother and father were both from Lewiston, so yes, they were both born in Lewiston.

AL: And now, your father, was he a restaurateur his whole career?

RL: Just about, just about. He went to Pratt Whitney Aircraft in Connecticut when he and my mother separated years ago, so he went to Connecticut. But then he got on to

manage some Kentucky Fried Chicken stores over there, about fifteen of them, so he was back in the chicken business very quickly.

AL: So chicken was something he really enjoyed doing.

RL: Yes, that's probably why I love chicken so much.

AL: Now, it was called Landry's Barbecued Chicken?

RL: Yeah, yeah, it's where the Black Stove Shop used to be, just until a year ago, by the church, that was a chicken coop, and we slaughtered our own chickens right there.

AL: So it was all done local, local and fresh.

RL: Yeah.

AL: And how many years was that, that he was in that business?

RL: I had to have been five, and I'm fifty so it was forty-five years ago.

AL: And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

RL: There's four Rs, Roland, Robert, Richard and Roger, all brothers.

AL: And did your mother work in the restaurant as well, or did she -?

RL: Absolutely, then she worked in shoe shops throughout the area, throughout her career.

AL: So you were growing up in Lewiston in the sixties and seventies, what was it like then? As you see it now, what was it like then, what was it like as a child, growing up?

RL: I thought it was a very exciting place to live. There was so much for kids to do. And I actually marched in a drum and bugle corps called Pine Tree Warriors that was located right on Lincoln Street here, and I did that for like twenty years, that kept me out of trouble. And to this day, I still love that type of thing so I hooked up with corps out of Boston and I march with them. But that was great for kids back then, there was all kinds of things going on back then for kids. And the businesses were thriving. I remember standing in front of the Bates Mill on Friday afternoons, waiting for my memere and pepere to get out. When they'd come out of there, there was thousands of people and you'd just keep looking and looking and all of a sudden you'd see them, hey, memere. Then you'd walk over to Kresge's on Lisbon Street and you had a fish dinner at lunch. So it was just exciting back then, I thought.

AL: And you could do a lot of walking through the town.

RL: It was all walking, all walking, which made it much more special. Now it's very fast-paced, there's a lot of, a lot of shopping, a lot of malls, that's about all I do.

AL: And so your memere and pepere both worked in the Bates Mill.

RL: All their lives, fifty-five, I think my grandfather hit sixty, sixty years in the mill.

AL: And what did they do in the mill, what were their jobs, do you remember or were you too young to -?

RL: I think I was too young. She worked on the weaving something, or something to do with weaving, which I'm not too familiar on the mill part, and my grandfather ended being like a machinist, he was fixing all the looms and all that stuff so he was pretty active. They both started out working for like twenty cents an hour, and standing in line for bread, so they've seen it all.

AL: And so you grew up in Lewiston, and how did you come to work in the shoe industry, and at what age?

RL: Well, when I was, I think I was thirteen, that's when my mother and father kind of split up, and I decided that I wanted to be with my father, because my father and I were pretty close, you know, I was with him all the time at the barbecue. So I decided to move to where he went after he left for Connecticut, because then he was really far away, he met a southerner and they moved down south to Alabama. So, you know, from Lewiston, Maine, spending a lot of time in Hartford, Connecticut with my dad, on weekends and coming back and this and that, to actually wanting to live in Alabama and go to school there. So I went to Alabama as a freshman, so I spent my freshman, sophomore and junior year there – they found out that I wanted to come home so bad. It was brutal down there, it was just miserably hot. We all want to get out of her during the winter, well I'll tell you, they want to get out of there in the summer. There was rattlesnakes in my front yard, there was fire ants that just eat you alive in seconds, there was flying cockroaches, forget it, I wanted to come home.

AL: Very different from Maine.

RL: So basically, I kind of just like got on a bus and ran away and came home, because my dad didn't want to let me go and I said, I'm leaving. So I finished my junior year in high school, straight-A student, left there, got on a bus, came home to Lewiston, Maine to live back with my mother. Immediately, within a week, I was looking for a job. The first place I went to was Falcon Shoe, in 1977, I walked up four stories and I said, I'd really like to work. And to this day – she still works for us, by the way – Pat Lindholm (*sounds like*) looked in my eyes and said, okay, I got something for you. Because at

first she said, there's nothing, and I felt like crying. Because it was my first attempt to get a job. But when she seen me, that I really wanted to work, in my eyes, she brought me a little computer sewing machine, and I said yes, I want to do that. So the next day I started work here at Falcon Shoe, August 17th, 1977. And I made my piece work the first day on the job, which back then was unheard of. It would usually take a month or two months for somebody to get their speed up, so I made my piece work that first day and I just set my mark and I just sent the message that I wanted to be here, and thirty-three years later I'm still here and now I'm one of the owners. So it was quite a journey.

AL: Right, now it hasn't always been in this location, though, has it?

RL: Always, always, I've been coming up these stairs, or that elevator, for thirty-three years, same floor. Of course we had fifth and sixth floor at one time. Like right now, we're getting rid of the fifth floor, we have space on the fifth floor we don't need no more, and we've shrunken down a little bit on the fourth floor, but basically the fourth floor was always our (*unintelligible*).

AL: Well coming up those stairs just has a special feeling to it. That's the first time I've come up that staircase. Very wide, and you can tell it was made for a lot of people to travel up and down.

RL: Thousands of people, yeah, thousands of people. And if you look at the stairs coming up, you'll see it's actually worn down about an inch in the areas where people walk, it's all rounded just nicely. It looks really nice when it's finished instead of painted, but (*name*) likes to be able to sweep it pretty good so she's having them paint it. It's quite an historic building. Although we're one of the few tenants left and we're getting a little scared on space, so we're looking for new facilities now.

AL: So you started here in 1977. And so talk to me about your work here and how it progressed over time, and how you came to become a part owner.

RL: Well in '77, of course, when I started here there must have been five hundred and fifty employees, there was three shifts producing about five hundred dozen a day, which is about six thousand pair a day. Just to give an example quickly, we're only doing a hundred and fifty pair a day right now, but we're very profitable at that, but back then it was six thousand pair a day, so you could see, there was a lot of people working here so it was pretty exciting. And basically, everybody had an opportunity to progress real quickly because it was all piece work, so the more you did, the more you got paid. And I was very money hungry, because I did not want to live with my mother, you know, seventeen, eighteen. Right now, kids live with their parents til they're thirty, I know, I got one, but back then it was get a car and get out of the house as quickly as possible. So I was very motivated money wise.

And I took this place on as a family. The people here are just wonderful, so they were

my family, so I really, really worked hard the first year here, and I actually advanced maybe two or three levels already in the first year. Then the second year the owner of the company back then, Ted Johanson, actually asked me if I wanted to be a machinist. And so, I never knew nothing about machines but I learned that so quickly too. But there again, I was fortunate again to have Ted send me away for training. Training was big back then, I mean if you wanted to excel, and wanted to go somewhere, you just asked, hey Ted, do you think I should take an electrical course. So I just kept going. I never went back to finish my high school because I liked this place so much during the summer, so in Alabama a junior, came here, worked for two or three months in the summer, and then just kept going to school, going to school, going to school, and every time somebody would, a supervisor would get done or whatever, get ill, boom, I would take over, so I learned every single department within a matter of like three, four years. It was just like so fast, so it kept me really in tune.

And then as the years went by, the business started going down and this and that. And Ted, all the training that he did for me I think really paid off, and it was funny because I'd go to learn something and I'd come back and try to teach Ted, or try to tell him, we should be trying to think about doing it this way, like reducing batch sizes of shoes in a case from thirty-six pair to, let's get it down to three, to make it go faster. And he just didn't (*unintelligible*) because it was the old way of making shoes. Well today, we're making one pair at a time. So I was able to keep that in my brain and I'd just forget the training. And then Ted knew, and he spent the last five years of his career here just basically training Neil Hanley, who I think you're going to meet, and myself, to be the future leaders. And he told us that, and when he told me that, that was it, I wanted to be a leader.

So then, that was my opportunity, and I've been through, the last five or six years it's been a nightmare, because we were owned by a corporate company, because Ted sold it, which was all investors, and of course the first they had me do, I was now the president of the company, right. No training on being a president either, but, you got to let go of fifty of your people, and you got thirty days to do it, and I want the plan in front of my desk week and blah-blah-blah, it was like, whoa. So I had to do that, so in the last five or six years I laid off about three hundred and fifty of my best friends, and we were basically on the verge of closing. I mean, we were down to like twenty-four employees, and everybody, including Ted Johanson, all the people that trained me throughout the years told me, get out of there now, it's not going to make it. And I said, I don't think so. It's going to make it, because I'm going to fight.

And I did, I fought and I fought and I fought, and I had a vision. I said, the only way we're going to survive is if we can hook up with a company that (*unintelligible*) about four years previously and been trying to get them to go into the footwear market, and that was a company Globe Fire Suits. So, Globe Fire Suits makes all the turnout gear for all the firefighters worldwide, they're number one in the world, and they're right out of Pittsfield, New Hampshire. They're a great company, a hundred and thirty years in the

making, family owned, so four generations. But I didn't have time to convince them. Still, four years of talking and they still weren't ready. So I said, we only got three months left, because I knew as of March, I knew their business plan, and I wasn't supposed to but I knew, we were next on the list to close.

So I said, we're going to sell to somebody else. So I got a couple phone calls to a company that I knew wanted to get into the military business, and we were pretty good at military footwear, and that company was Magnum High Tech. Well, I got them within two months to buy this factory from the parent company, R & H, that was going to close us. Within two months. I remember driving to Boston in a blizzard and at midnight, we signed the deal. So Magnum saved the company, and we grew for about a year, but we grew way too fast and they had us going out of control, they wouldn't listen. Because they're a very aggressive company, they don't make footwear, they just buy it from all over and they just sell it real fast. And I knew their sales force wasn't going to be able to sell a three hundred dollar pair of boots when they're used to selling at sixty dollars, (*unintelligible*) numbers.

So at the same time, I got that done, saved the company, and then absolutely went right back to work with Global Fire Suits. I said look, we've got a great company that just bought us now, Magnum High Tech, they're world known, and they can source the products or help us put together a product line for you. And they kind of just went, hmm, and they were ready, they were ready. Because Magnum did have a lot of good sourcing capability, so we got a plan together, we put a product line together, and we did it fairly quickly, and we got Globe convinced to introduce it to one of the biggest fire chief shows in the world, in Indianapolis, Indiana, and it was a hit. A huge hit. And we (*unintelligible*) on pair, it was all just samples. So Globe was locked in, because once Globe gets into something they don't get out. It's like a 3M or W. L. Gore, you know, what they do, they do it right. So they were locked in.

At the same time, Magnum's going nuts. We're losing our shirt here, because they got Marine Corps samples, Navy samples, Air Force, every single solicitation that was out beating the streets, and there was like a hundred of them, they wanted me to go after to try to get. And it was like, you know how much money that cost to get all these samples, the prototypes. So it was just money, money-money-money-money being spent for foolishness. And we never did get a contract. So the owner in England said, after about a year, sell the factory, that's it, I can't take no more losses.

So here we go. So now Globe's hooked, right. They can't get this product anywhere else right now, because China doesn't want to do it, China already said they did not want to do this project, it was too intense, there's too many standards to adhere to. So private meetings with Globe, help us buy this out, so Globe ended up having to put in quite a bit of money to purchase this factory, to keep it alive, and then myself and Neil and the president that we have now, Carl (*name*) are the four owners. One of the owners of Globe is one of the owners, myself, Neil and Carl, and we actually bought the

company from Magnum, very quickly for really rock bottom price, to keep it alive, and what we did is, we decided to do in this factory was, which I really, I wanted to do a long time ago but I didn't have a solid base, we were doing about three hundred different styles in this factory three years ago. We had probably twenty-five customers three years ago, each one of them wanted it their own way, dah-dah-dah. We had like twenty-five different leathers and materials galore for each specific customer. We just notified every single one of them, L.L. Bean, Brown and Bass Pro, every one of them, Cabella's, and said sorry, we can no longer manufacture for your firm name any longer.

So we got rid of all our customers, all of our styles, we focused just shrinking this factory down and streamlining it to do nothing but the Globe fire boot. And it's very interesting, because about three years ago when we did that, with the same amount of people we got now, which is about fifty, we couldn't even do sixty pair a day. We just couldn't do it, it was so hard and this and that. We've got less people now, we haven't let go of anybody, we just haven't rehired – we actually hired two people this week – but I mean with like ten or fifteen people less now, we're producing like a hundred and sixty pair a day.

AL: Because you can focus on just one thing.

RL: What a difference. And back in the day you couldn't do that because it was coming at you in every angle, and you were making money, you know, you were making money, but you didn't realize how much money, I think the old school of manufacturing didn't realize how much money they were actually losing, how much more they could have made and paid their people. Manufacturing would have been a twenty dollar an hour job instead of a five dollar an hour job back then. Because of this amount of waste that we had. To nobody's fault, you just, you lose it. But even today, right now, we've had a meeting for two hours with our plant supervisors and employees, we're going to streamline this even more now. We're reducing fifty-five thousand square feet in this building, so we're going to be really tight. But fifty-five thousand feet at, you know, three-something a foot is a lot of money.

And last year we made a profit, we gave our employees a raise, the first raise they've had in years, so it just goes to show how the old manufacturing of footwear was just mass production, as many as you can make, boom-boom-boom-boom, and everybody's making good money. But now it's like, we try not to waste anything, space, handling, everything.

AL: Does a lot of that have to do with the competition from places like China and Mexico?

RL: I don't even consider us able to compete with those countries anymore whatsoever.

AL: So your specialization has helped you survive, do you think?

RL: Yes, absolutely, that's a good point, a good question. The firefighter boots, as regulated by the NFPA, National Firefighters Protection Agency, now that agency sets all the guidelines for each different standard. See, there might be a standard for an ambulance driver, blood borne pathogens, NFPA 1999, chemical resistance, structural fire fighting, wildland fire fighting, each one of those has different sets of rules and different sets of tests that's got to be performed every single year. Like we have an auditor coming in next week, next week, and he is going to select fifty pair randomly, throughout the factor, seal them up in a box, and send them to the lab. They're going to perform all those tests to re-certify us for 2010. So, China doesn't like that, Mexico doesn't like that. A lot of the factories in China and Mexico don't want to be ISO 9000 certified. We have been for twelve years now, because the NFPA requires you to be certified by ISO standards.

So there's so many guidelines, strict guidelines and strict testing. The cost of testing just this one boot for our customer right now is \$25,000 a year. That's just for testing fees, for a little factory in Lewiston, Maine. So thank God for the rules, keep them coming. Because I can't compete, we cannot, I'll honestly tell you, compete with, I mean it was staggering yesterday when I heard of Haiti, what's happened there, and how much those people make a day. Did you see that on the TV? Average wage in Haiti is two dollars per day. And there's no water in Haiti, so they got to spend more than half of that money just to drink water every day. So I can't, if you set up a shoe factory down there, you couldn't compete. Mexico's the same way, I mean, so we don't even try to compete with them no more. We get calls all the time, can you do this, can you do that. Nope. Well yeah, we can do it, but it's this amount of money, and I already know it's sixty dollars more a pair.

AL: And so you, I mean you were here in Lewiston when the shoe shops all around Lewiston-Auburn were thriving, I mean we were a huge capital of shoe making for many, many years. And you were also here at the decline and it fell away, and you must have had a lot of friends in lots of different places around the town, in different shoe shops. I guess the question I'm getting to is, what did others talk to you about as the shoe shops started to close, what problems did it present a large part of the community whose livelihood depended on the shoe work?

RL: A lot of them went on. I mean, it was funny to see, the people I laid off, the day that I laid them off we were all crying, I mean I was in tears, I had to run away for a couple hours after, and I said, oh my God, what are they going to do. But it was shocking to me, though it was nice to see actually, you know, six months down the road, a lot of them had jobs. They were like working at Hannaford or Shop 'n' Save or doing something, but they were going to school because the government gave that re-education, if you lost your job, for foreign people or whatever, you were able to go to school. Almost all of our employees took advantage of that, which was good, it gave

them a little better self esteem. Not to say they got a job that was better than here, or a job that they liked better, but you know what, their face looked a lot healthier, because they were – if you would have seen me four years ago, I mean I was ready, honest to God ready to commit suicide, that's how bad it was. It was bad.

AL: Yeah, so much pressure.

RL: I had never had to face that in my life. I mean, I grew up with these people all my life, and I was the one to say, you have to go. And I had all my mentors telling me to quit, basically calling me a jerk for letting off these people, listening to corporate. Well, I had another vision in mind, save the company. And I did, I'm glad I did, but it was painful. But to answer your question, I think the people that left the shoe industry came out a little bit better mentally, there's no question in my mind, I really do.

AL: Yeah, because they sort of had the, on their shoulders that they were going to lose their job sometime soon, it was coming, it was coming.

RL: Every single day, yeah. Every day you'd come in here, you didn't know if there was going to be a padlock on the door and your green slip in, I mean you heard the stories, right, they were everywhere. So that's what was on our mind, I mean it was on our mind constantly. I mean, the parent company calling me up and say, well, (*unintelligible*) and everything, okay, so you got thirty days to do it, but guess what, forget the severance, we're not giving them severance. Are you kidding me? You can't do that. Yes, they can. I found out the laws, they can. So no severance was even required, so I had to fight for that. And I got them at least four weeks I think it was, or a year for every two years they were in service, which was good. Capped out at four weeks, the most they could get was four weeks, you know, twenty, thirty years of service. If you walk through the factory here, almost every one of our, I think our average age is forty-nine, and years of service here is like thirty-plus, twenty-plus.

But we're very, it's a very happy group right now, because we don't have that fear right now of not knowing, and that's what was wrong with the shoe industry in its decline. Because when it was very busy, you could quit Falcon Shoe right now, this moment, on the fourth floor, go down to the third floor and get hired by Dori Shoe. If they weren't hiring, you'd go upstairs and go to Etonic, or you'd go to Billings Shoe, I mean just in this building alone.

AL: Oh, they were all in this building.

RL: All in this building. And guess what, we would take you. Because we were busy, and then when we'd slow down you'd go somewhere else, you know, walk across the street. I mean there were shoe shops everywhere, so people weren't fearful of losing their jobs. So it was really weird to see it all evolve into where it's now. I mean, this is how shoe people really, really are, okay, once you're a shoe person – I don't know if it's like that in every industry – but in this, looking out my glass window right

now, I can name one, two, three, four people that drive more than fifty miles a day to come to Falcon Shoe to work. That's a hundred miles a day of travel. From Wilton, to Farmington, to Skowhegan, to Bridgton, it is amazing. I had a young couple, which really I felt good about, just moved from Biddeford, they worked here for about a year, and they decided to come and live here, just to work at Falcon Shoe. And these people are twenty years old, twenty-one. So I think the youth could get hooked again as this thing starts climbing. But I don't think we'll ever be as big as we were. And I don't want to be, there's more focus, so.

AL: Well I know, I grew up in Farmington and actually there was a lot of shoe, shoe shops supported the economy there, between Bass Shoe and Farmington Shoe and, oh, there were others too, Dexter, and so I can see somebody coming from Farmington, it really is a big part of the community. And I'm wondering if sort of, and I've talked to others who felt that when you worked in the shoe industry, you really were a family in some ways, the people who worked together socialized together. Did you experience that in your times, becoming friends outside of the shop?

RL: Absolutely, there's no question about it. In the shop, Ted Johanson, the founder of the company, his now wife Pat (*name*) who works for us right now, we have her as a consultant, she's the one that hired me, that to me, because of what I went through as a child with the separation of my mother and father, because back then that was unheard of, mothers and fathers splitting up. French people stayed together til the end, no matter what. But, you know what I mean, now it's different, everybody get divorced and remarried and divorced and remarried. But back then, so here I was, left without a family. So immediately I got attached to Pattie, and then Ted Johanson just took me on like a son. I remember when I bought my first house, because he put all the money in a 401k for us, back then there was a retirement plan, whatever. We didn't contribute, because I was a kid, I didn't know what that was, and I was able to buy a home, take out \$12,000 for a \$6,000 down payment in 1980 I think it was, that's when I bought my first home, and then he gave me his brand new lawn mower without his wife Pattie knowing. But I mean, it was things like that, that I wasn't getting from my mother and father because of the split up and everything that went on. And then me taking of on my dad and this and that, so I had no family. This was definitely my family.

And in here I met so many brothers and sisters that, yes, we did do things on the side. I mean, there was a softball league, there was bowling leagues, there was all kinds of things, trips to the Boston Bruins, and all the shoe factory people would get together and we'd just sponsor it. We had our own softball leagues, for Dori against Falcon one day, and it was just, it was family, it was great, it was awesome.

AL: And you talked a little bit about Ted Johanson. What do you think his, when you look at the long span of Falcon Shoe – now, was he the original founder of the original Falcon Shoe?

RL: Ted Johanson and Bruce Hanley, Ted Johanson came from his father's factory. Actually how it started was, Eagle Shoe in Lawrence, Massachusetts was getting run by Ted Johanson's father, and Ted was working at that factory. And Bruce Hanley, who's Neil's, one of my partner's father, was working for Ted, with Ted I mean. Ted and his father, something happened, and he said, oh yeah? So he got in the car, and he and Bruce found this building and said, let's start our own, and they called it Falcon. So it went from Eagle in Lawrence, to Falcon in Lewiston in 1963. But Ted was the original founder.

Today, I mean four years ago he was very angry with me, I think, because I was laying off all these people and he was telling me to quit, but I kept telling him, I'm not quitting. You gave me that poster that's on the wall, that I keep on my wall, that tells me I'm going to keep fighting til the end. And that's Ted. You taught me this way, you can't do that. And now, today, I think he is one proud, I think he's proud of me, there's no question, he's told me several times. Pattie tells me all the, which was unheard of back then, they wouldn't tell you things like that. So, yeah.

AL: Well, it's quite a success story, because everything else is just, you know, had such a hard time competing and falling away, and it sounds like you found a niche.

RL: Yeah, we found a niche. We found a great company to help that niche, I mean that. You know, without Globe, I don't think we could still survive. But the good thing about Globe is now we're able to take that product line, which is very unique, and take it into other industries, but not lower our cost. So if somebody wants a high end mining boot to go underground with, we've got it. It's fire retardant and electrical, everything, it's all safe, but you're going to pay just sixty-nine or a hundred and sixty-nine dollars, you're going to pay three hundred plus. And what's amazing is, especially in Canada because I'm doing a lot of traveling in Canada, I'm trying to develop business there, is their dollar's pretty good. They paying like nothing, I mean money's not an object when it comes to safety right now. So it's good, it's good, so we're able to look at other markets now. Sooner or later we got to outfit every firefighter out there. Maybe they'll be rebuying them hopefully, but it's been four years of non-stop production, and we still have not gotten one repeat order yet, which means every pair we produced here, well over a hundred and something thousand pairs, got a new customer. So we're on the right track.

AL: And is there anything that I haven't asked you that you think is important to add, that I may have forgotten to ask about Falcon Shoe, or the shoe industry in general, or the Lewiston community, that sticks out in your mind?

RL: Well, the Lewiston community definitely was probably the best shoe makers in the entire country at one time, it was between, I would say Lawrence, Massachusetts, which is basically like Lewiston, it's a mill town, was, they had a lot of shoe factories too, Massachusetts. But Maine, Lewiston, Maine was just incredible. And we, if you look at

all the big brand names that started out, like you just mentioned, Bass and Dexter, Sebago Shoe, what else was there -

AL: New Balance, or was that later?

RL: No, well New Balance, yeah, New Balance is still in Maine actually, so yeah. That's all good quality names that are still around, I mean, being produced other places now, but the quality of the, the workmanship of the employees is one of the things that the firefighters, when they visit this factory, spot right away. And the sincerity of them, it's just like everybody, you can't make them quit, you can't make them go on and better themselves, they want to be here, so that tells you something about this community, and the industry as a whole. It's just a great industry. I've seen a lot of people come and go, and every one of them says, I used to work at Falcon, I used to work here, I used to work there, so, but that's starting to fade away, we're starting to lose our, yeah, so.

AL: Yeah, so that's reason why this project is so valuable, to sort of capture those memories.

RL: Capture those memories as much as you can, yeah. Because right now, I mean I'm pretty fortunate to be fifty but have thirty-three years, but I don't think I can make it to sixty.

AL: That's a lot of years.

RL: Yeah, but I don't know what else to say.

AL: You wanted to add something about the shoe workers' reunion that was earlier this year?

RL: Yeah, that was a wonderful reunion. One of the things that really got me at that reunion and I actually had tears in my eyes was, sitting there eating, I kept staring at this little old lady sitting at the bench about four tables away, and I says, I know her, I know her. And then it dawned on me and I said, oh, my God, that's Val, that's the one that trained me in 1977, the first day I started at Falcon. So I went up behind her and I put my arms around her. She was so fragile, I mean she's aging, which is good that I've seen her at the reunion, but I said, so, are you going to cut my thread now, Val? And she was, who's this, who's this? I go, oh, you don't remember cutting my thread all the time when you were training me on that stupid machine, I was trying to make my piece work the first day and part of your job was to cut the thread and have me rethread the machine. And every time I got a new ribbon, you kept cutting it. She says, oh, my God, look at you. So we both hugged each other and started crying. Oh, it was just wonderful. So I hope they do another reunion like that again some day, because it was great. That was awesome.

Photo
of
Val

AL: Great, thank you so much.

End of Interview

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