Bradford, Judson T Oral History Interview:
Business and Industry in Holland

Anna Holt

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AH: This is Friday, June 25, an interview between Anna Holt and Judson Bradford. To begin can you just tell me a little bit of your personal history?

JB: I was born in Chicago, Illinois. My relationship with the Holland area began at a very early time in my life. My grandmother was widowed at the time I was born. Her sister and brother-in-law had a cottage at Macatawa and persuaded her to buy one. She would have my father and mother and brother and I up during the month of July and my uncle and aunt and their children up during the month of August. I think from age one and a half, I've spent some part of every year in the Holland area. My wife and I were married when I left college. We had a little one on the way and we moved to where she was from, which was St. Paul, Minnesota. I took a job in St. Paul as a management trainee with a refrigerator company that was subsequently purchased by Whirlpool in Benton Harbor. [I] thought at one point that I might be transferred to Whirlpool in Benton Harbor. I ended up taking a job with Pillsbury and was a budget accountant, then was persuaded by my father to come to Holland.

My father's father had been in the paper business in the Chicago area. My dad, as a young man, had worked for his father's company while he was going through school and then joined his father's business when he left the university. But, within a year, his father had died. He and his brother-on-law, with help from my
grandmother, bought out the other partner, who hadn’t intended to be in business with this twenty-three year old. That was the origin of W.J. Bradford Paper Company.

For the first twenty years of the company, my grandmother was the titular president. My father was really, from my point of view, the genius behind the company. His brother-in-law worked primarily in a sales capacity and his younger brother, Charles Bradford, joined him five years later. The three of them ran the business in Chicago through the Depression and through World War II.

Again, my father and his family and my uncle and his family were continuing to summer in the Holland area, and the business needed to expand in the boom following the war, in the late ’40’s. In 1951 they purchased a plant at Sixteenth and VanRaalte, which is currently the Vanderbilt School. There was a division among the three principals in the business from the very beginning. My father wanted to buy the building in Holland and move the company to Holland. My uncle, the brother-in-law, thought it was the craziest thing he ever heard of. Why would you leave the Chicago market when your primary customers were E.J. Brach and the other candy companies centered around Chicago? The younger brother, Charles, was ambivalent. He thought that they ought to go ahead and buy the plant in Holland, but he didn’t want to leave the Chicago area. What that meant was that the Holland plant really kind of started from scratch.

My older brother, William Jr., was the first manager in Holland. They’d sent over a technical person from manufacturing to be the lead production person, but their two personalities were incompatible. A lot of the men and women working in the
Chicago plant did not like the idea of the plant starting in Holland except for the fact that this particular individual would be leaving the Chicago plant. [laughter] My brother, this young twenty-five year old, ended up firing the production leader, who immediately went back and spoke with my two uncles, who rehired him. Then they seemed rather amazed when my brother announced that he would be leaving the company. He ended up alright however, he went back to Miami where he had gone to school, where his wife was from. [He] first took a job with a box company, then ended up getting a real estate license and was eventually hired by two men who had an idea for franchising their hamburger business and he became the first vice president of real estate for Burger King Corporation.

My dad came over here to Holland in 1953, the plant had started in '51, to fill the vacuum created by the leaving of my brother. Since we'd always lived in an apartment in Chicago, his equity for a home was his cottage at Macatawa, so he sold that and bought a home on Lake Macatawa. That kind of ended my Macatawa years. We did visit my dad and mother living on Lake Macatawa when my wife and little boys and I were living in Minnesota. Virtually from the time that my brother left, my dad made it clear that he wanted me to move to the business in Holland, Michigan. I declined until finally he said, "I have to have some help. I want you to know that if I hire somebody and they work out and you want to come later, you will be working for them." I talked it over to my friends in Minnesota, who gave me some advice that really isn't true. They said, "If I had a chance to going into a family business I would give my left arm." The advice that really wasn't true was
that, "You know, if you don’t like it and you want to leave, you can always come back here." As we know, nature abhors a vacuum and people who leave are replaced. I’m sure that wouldn’t have worked out.

My wife and little boys and I moved to Holland in 1956. We bought a frame house on Twenty-second and College Avenue. A little interesting side light into the buying of that house, my father had financed his first cottage through First National Bank. My dad seemed to think it was important that it was a national bank. They bought the plant and Sixteenth and Van Raalte through First National Bank. All our accounts were with First National Bank. When I came to town, I walked into the bank and didn’t announce myself. I just came in and wondered if I could get a home loan. They said they weren’t making any. So I walked down the street to People’s State Bank and was met at the door. I guess I was spotted as someone a little unfamiliar at least. I was spotted by Curly Dalman and he wondered, "My gosh, you’re not Bill’s boy are you?" "Yes, I am." "Well, I’m in Rotary with Bill, what a wonderful man. And by the way, where are you thinking of buying?" "Twenty-second and College." "You are? Why that’s right next door to my mother’s house. I watched that house being built. It was built by Martin VanDyke, he was a wonderful homebuilder. You know, he built the hospital out on Twenty-fourth and Michigan." "No I didn’t." "How much do you need?" "Well, I need ten thousand dollars." "Well you’ve got it." We’ve been there since 1956 and my wife and I still have our original account number at the bank. When we made the move to come out to Quincy street in 1975, again First National Bank, which now was owned by First
of America in Kalamazoo, wanted more personal guarantees regarding our new construction on Quincy street than we were prepared to give. So the company has been a customer of People’s State Bank/Old Kent Bank of Holland since then. I was privileged to serve on the board of Old Kent Bank of Holland from 1976 to 1991, I believe it was. That’s probably more than you wanted to know. [laughter]

AH: No, it’s interesting because I just interviewed Jerry Redeker the other day.

JB: Well, Jerry was my chairman. I think the world of Jerry. Jerry is such a straight shooter, always wanted to do the right thing, very much a servant of the community. I think of Harv Buter and Jerry Redeker as two of our communities finest public citizens. He exemplified those traits in his business life as well.

AH: He’s a very nice man...what year did you move up here?

JB: Started in ’56, the plant was going. We leased out half of the plant to H.L. Friedlan Company. This arrangement was made before I got here, but we didn’t need the space. Freidlan may have been headquartered in Allegan, I’m not sure, but they did have a plant on the corner of Thirteenth and Van Raalte, so it was kind of kitty-corner across Van Raalte from us. The manager of that plant, at least the person that I worked with, was Rudy Seats. We employed, when I joined the company, about twenty people. We made box partitions out of cardboard. We had specially designed machines, we called them slotter machines, at that time. The prototype came from our plant in Chicago, but I believe that the two machines that were used most often were built by a company called Service Machine. Service Machine was located around Sixth Street, just west of River Avenue, Hein VanderHeuvel was the manger
of Service Machine and had a son in the business. My brother and I had known his
daughter, Arlene, when we were growing up during our high school years in the
Holland area. Rudy Seats just passed away. We used the office and the east half of
the plant and then rented out the west half to H.L. Freidlan. Freidlan I think did
some sewing there.

Our typical market, different from the candy industry in Chicago, were
people who made zinc parts that would be chrome plated and possibly painted. On
automobiles they might be radio knobs, they might be little escutcheons on the front
of the car, they might be door handles. Die-casters were a large part of our box
partition market. Our cardboard box partitions were less bulky than corrugated
partitions and they were less expensive. West Michigan was really kind of a die­
casting headquarters for the auto industry in southeast Michigan. There were a lot of
die-casters in this area, as well as in northwestern Ohio that we also served. Around
late '73 early '74, came the OPEC Arab oil boycott. Suddenly gasoline was very
hard to get, with long lines at the gasoline pumps to fill your car up. A car isn’t
worth much if you don’t have gasoline in it. The auto industry embarked on a rather
serious attempt to downsize and to reduce weight. They were given goals, I think
some of those goals still exist although some of the cars made today are heavier than
ever. I guess you have to sell a certain number of lightweight cars in order to be able
to make them. What that did for our business was that suddenly some of the parts
that had been made in metal, not the smaller decorative parts that we were packing,
were now being made in lighter weight plastic. Where those heavier metal parts
needed to be packed in box partitions made out of heavier corrugated paperboards, they now could be packed in lightweight solid paperboards. We were still making the smaller partitions, but the sizes of the cardboard partitions for these plastic parts became bigger and that was a growth opportunity for our industry.

Within four to five years we received another warning sign, again this warning still isn’t completely in place. We received a copy of a letter sent out from GM that they would be eliminating all expendable packaging and going strictly to returnable packaging. Nothing much happened on that for a few years until they began the project in Flint at what is called Buick City. What GM had been doing is they had been taking their incoming boxes and other paper packaging and they had been compressing them, crushing them, compacting them and sending them back to paper mills which recycled them and made them into the kind of paper that we bought to make partitions out of. They made a great point that all of these compactors were being ripped out of the floor, taken out of their plants, that they were getting rid of them and that as of a certain date they wouldn’t accept anything in their plant that wasn’t in a returnable container.

The first product that we made to meet this need, working with GM in Flint, were partitions that were made out of sheet plastic. We would slot them and assemble them pretty much the same as we had solid paperboard but then we would wrap the corners around the ends and weld them so that they couldn’t disassemble and then they had a permanent partition that could be collapsed and returned.

The first tote box that we ever saw in this plant had come from Japan and had
been sent with some component parts. There was at that time a free trade zone in Battle Creek and there was a Nippondenso plant in Battle Creek. This tote box was picked up by one of our salesmen at Nippondenso. It was made out of corrugated plastic. It had solid plastic rail edges. It had solid plastic corners that were welded into place. It was built on an angle so you that could take a series of tote boxes and nest them into a stack, too compress the space for return.

We began then also making tote boxes. Our style was different. We developed our own tote box, out of plastic corrugated and then we would put our solid plastic partitions in that tray. Then we started making plastic corrugated partitions for bigger and heavier parts. Then we began making plastic corrugated partitions for injection molded tote boxes which came along. Their advantage was that they were less expensive; their limitation was in the beginning that there were very few sizes because the molds to make these injection molded tote boxes were quite expensive. In time, they kept building more and more sizes and that reduced the amount of specialty tote box work for us. But our business has continued to grow in this field and our paperboard partition business has really never dropped off very much. Our material handling and return business now exceeds our paperboard partition work.

In addition to that, there is another product that was really invented by my son Jud. If you can think back from high school physics, I don't know if they do this anymore, but they used to have two balls and they would turn a crank and create a spark that would arc from one to the other, static electricity. The closer you got the
two metal objects the less voltage you needed. The problem with microcircuitry is
that you can have a printed circuit board on something as small as the head of a pin.
The amount of voltage that is needed to arc across there channels is very, very small.
It’s almost infinitesimal. The problem was called electro-static discharge, ESD.
Electro-static discharge was ruining all kinds of chips and people who had
performance problems with their computers or other electronic devices didn’t
understand that the circuits had been damaged because of electro-static discharge,
even though the electronics industry knew it very well. We invented a paperboard
that had elements of carbon and other materials that was dissipative on the surface so
as not to generate a charge in contact, but if there was any charge it was conductive
in the middle of the paperboard and could conduct a charge to ground without
damaging the parts. We built a line of packaging for the electronics industry around
this concept of eliminating electro-static discharge. That’s kind of the third leg of our
product line today; the original solid paperboard partitions, the plastic returnable
packaging for the auto industry, and then the electro-static discharge packaging for the
electronics industry.

In the early ’80’s, the U.S. auto industry was kind of under attack by the
Japanese industry. Before that, throughout the ’70’s, every trade show we would
ever go to, whether it was in Detroit, or Chicago, or where ever, you would see
Japanese people there with their video cameras taking pictures of everything they saw
and speaking into recording devices as they would walk through these exhibits, the
state of the art of what the American industries were doing at that time. By the early
'80's the Japanese auto industry had now really made enormous in-roads into the market of the American manufacturers. They had really kind of pioneered this just-in-time, kan-ban theory of manufacturing in Japan, much of which has came out of the teaching of Dr. Demming, when I had the pleasure of hearing at Hope College, probably his last public speaking engagement. A number of business people were invited to hear Dr. Demming, and I was fortunate enough to be included. We'd always been lead to believe in the U.S. that quality was more expensive. If you really want to buy the best, it costs more. The Demming revolution was that quality is less expensive. The typical manufacturing process in the U.S. might be to run a die, or in our own case, to run a slotter, and run some pieces off until you get the pieces to just the right specification. Under the Demming profile, you line things up so you can use the very first one. You did things right the first time, you eliminated the time it took to make that run, and you eliminated waste. Tolerances became very tight. The Japanese had improved the quality of their automobiles using these Demming concepts and had been rewarded by business from the American public in the sale of their cars for so doing. The American manufacturers, to meet this threat, formed a group called AIAG - Automotive Industry Action Group. I'm proud that our company was the first packaging company to join AIAG. We joined so early that we were able to trademark the term "Just-in-Time Packaging," and that is a registered trade name of our company. We have been in this returnable/reusable packaging for the U.S. auto industry from the very beginning.

In 1990 we made a decision that we would start a second plant in the mid-
south, which was kind of the middle of where the Japanese auto industry was locating in the U.S. We located in a great little city, I like it very, very much. It reminds me in many respects of Holland, Holland with a southern accent. It’s called Gallatin and it’s outside Nashville. We have Toyota in Kentucky to the northeast. We have Nissan in Smyrna just southeast of us. We now have the German auto manufacturers in South Carolina that are due east on interstate 40. We have a Mercedes plant in Tuscalusa, Alabama, which is almost due south off interstate 65. Also, I might mention Saturn is located to the south in Spring Hill, Tennessee. Many of the Japanese supplier industries moving into the United States moved into the Mid-south, not only to serve these industries but also to serve the big three: General Motors, Ford and Chrysler.

Within the last couple of years, we’ve been obliged to begin Bradford de Mexico, which is in Monterrey, and we have a branch plant in Guadalajara. Monterrey is primarily to do "Just-in-Time Packaging" work for major suppliers of the U.S. auto industry which are located in Mexico. You may recall that recently the dollar had troubles in Indonesia and in the far east, Mexico is really not a third world country. If it isn’t quite as advanced as the U.S., it’s at least second world. Costs are much lower there. Guadalajara has become a real dynamic electronics manufacturing industry center. Our little plant in Guadalajara, which is a plant of Bradford de Mexico, is mainly there to supply the electro-static discharge packaging to the electronics industry that’s in the Guadalajara area. I must say that the staff that we have in Mexico are absolutely outstanding. They are just marvelous people.
They are extremely well-educated, extremely conscientious. They’re wonderful people. Every time our leader for that operation, Don van der Zwaag out of Holland, comes back he says, "Gosh, I wish we had those people here." That’s how much he thinks of them, and I think of them, and my son Tom - Tom is the president of Bradford Company today - thinks of them as well.

We do have wonderful people here. They’re the people who have really made Bradford Company what it is. The former employees that were here, that I worked with, many of whom are retired, and the present group today. I know you probably hear this from others, but I would not trade the people that we have at this place for any other company’s people anywhere. They are so talented and so creative and such good people. This company is really a company that they built.

AH: How many plants do you have now?

JB: We have those four. We also have a fifth facility that is in Wixom, Michigan. That is primarily a sales and design center, closer to the big three in southeast Michigan, although we do very little work for General Motors. I don’t know if you’re familiar with Dr. Lopez and his buying practices... twelve bids. We’re not a General Motors kind of company. We’re involved in trying to create savings for our customers; that takes thought, that takes engineering. However, we are a major supplier to Ford and also a major supplier to Chrysler for material handling products. I might add, our first sponsor really was Toyota. What we were doing fit what they wanted for themselves and for their suppliers better than what anybody else they could find in North America was doing. Chrysler then became aware that we were supplying
Toyota, and Ford likewise. Ford is our biggest customer today, Ford and Ford divisions.

AH: Who are your biggest competitors?

JB: Most of the competitors we have started out in the corrugated box business, kind of approaching it from that standpoint. We feel that packaging is designed from the inside out. There aren’t really too many big competitors. First off, it’s a very small industry. Take our box partition business for example, the original business. If you took all the box partitions that are sold for industrial applications, we don’t do beer bottles and pharmaceuticals, from Sault Sainte Marie to Louisville, and from DesMoines to Pittsburgh, it wouldn’t be as much business as corrugated boxes that are sold in Holland, Michigan. It’s a lot of little pieces of business. We do have competitors, we have one in Grand Rapids that’s not a significant competitor. There are some competitors in Chicago, but they tend to cover the metropolitan Chicago market. The box partition business is something that I don’t think anybody would want to get into if they really thought about it. It’s work. [laughter] The problem is that if you make an order, say of two thousand fifty cell partitions - which isn’t a very big order, doesn’t amount to a lot of dollars - but it packs a hundred thousand parts, unless you pack two parts back-to-back and then it packs two hundred thousand parts. There’s a limit to how many parts are made. We have our own computerized systems for designing our cells. We will enter twelve thousand orders for partitions a year, a thousand a month, forty a day, five an hour. At least a fourth of those are new designs that have to be designed from parts harvested from the market. The
designs have to be sampled and sent out and returned and individual set-ups made.

All our machines are designed to be flexible for set-up. It’s just an awful lot of work for a relatively small amount of business. I think that our advantage in doing it is that we do enough of it that we’re able to order truckloads of paper board in specific sizes and weights from our paper mills. We have long standing arrangements with them. We’re able to trim the paper mill. What that means is that, if the paper mill is a hundred and two inches across, we buy the entire width of the machine so that they don’t have waste or don’t have side trim they have to sell at a distressed price. [We] buy in full truckloads so that they don’t have to send out half truckloads. We try to buy in ways that are advantageous to the people that are serving us and other economies that allow us to be more competitive and pass the savings on to our customers.

I can’t imagine, if I was starting out in business, if the family business hadn’t been already doing this, it’s not what I’d do to earn a living. [laughter] Although it does kind of capture your attention. It’s been a lot of fun. I think in any job a large part of it are the great people that you work with, and the great people you sell to, and there are a number of great people that you buy from. It’s a learning process. You learn from what other’s are doing. When you’re selling a product to somebody, we’re in their plants, we’re talking with their packaging people and their production people and their purchasing people. That’s exciting. I often tell some of the people that work here, we make this small kind of insignificant product, but it’s absolutely necessary. We are selling the largest and most sophisticated companies in the world.
We have relationships with a company in Germany that does what we do. We have technology exchange with them. We have exclusive rights to certain materials that are made in Europe that are better than what are made in the U.S. and not available here that we’re able to offer our customers here. We have patents that we hold here that we license to companies in Germany that they can make for the auto industry in Europe, and pay royalty to us. We have an arrangement with a company in Malaysia that handles our electro-static discharge packaging for electronics manufacturers in the Far East. So here we are in Holland, Michigan, originally making these little box partitions for the local die-casters, many of whom are now out of business. Today people are flying off to Frankfurt, or they’re flying down to visit the plant in Monterrey, or their flying off to Singapore to meet with our licensees in the Far East.

[stop]

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[beginning of side B]

JB: I think that there are two driving trends. I think one has been on a back burner for maybe ten to twenty years. One is globalization, the other is ecology and the environment. It’s an issue that isn’t going to go away. It seems to be back burner-ed here in the U.S. at the present time, but the need to recycle, the shortage of landfills, the need to make parts - I know the Padnos people have been very instrumental in thinking in terms of automobiles that can be made where every single part in that automobile is recyclable. To me, these are really driving trends for the future.

We really see globalization happening now. What’s happening with
globalization, just to give you an example. They called it the Ford World Car, there may have been others, but it's the first one I think of, where every single part on the car that is made in Europe, every single one, is exactly the same as every part made on that same car here in the U.S. Well, what does that mean? That means then that a supplier of those parts in Europe can also supply them for the plant in the U.S., or vice versa. Or if you had, say a bigger supplier for those parts in Europe and a smaller one for the U.S., maybe part of the production from the European supplier would come to the U.S. plant, or vice versa. The point is, you're running an automobile plant, say in Dearborn, Michigan, and you have these parts coming in to put on your cars that you're building, and you don't want the same part coming in in two different packages. You don't want a part coming in from a U.S. supplier or a North American supplier that looks different, is packed different, than the part that's coming in from your European supplier. There is a need for conforming the packaging requirements. We're too small and our business is too specialized to operate in Europe, particularly with the good companies that are over there, but we feel that the need to carry out exchange and discuss approaches that, in effect, they can do what we can do, or we can do what they can do, so that, as this whole world concept grows and continues to grow we will be able to supply exactly the same packaging to suppliers for these industries whether they are in Europe or in North America. I just think that is a growing trend. We think of Mexico, for example, as a major parts supplier for automotive production in the United States. And they are, but I don't think very many people are aware of how many parts the Mexican auto
supply industry are supplying to car companies in Europe. I think that is going to
grow. My oldest grandson is going to be a senior in college and he has focused very
hard over many years in learning to speak Spanish, and I think he is very wise. I
think that Latin America just has enormous opportunities for growth and business
potential. If the people that we work with in Mexico are any indication, they are
every bit as talented and able and capable as people that we deal with in the States or
in Canada. They’re really moving. I think that’s good for North America, and I
think that’s good for the world in general. Well, those are my crackpot ideas.

[laughter]

AH: When did your son become president?

JB: He became president about four years ago. I have two sons in the business. One
son, Jud, is the one that invented our strata-shield product line. He’s our senior vice
president for business development. He also is the chairman of our board of
directors. The other son, Tom, became the senior vice president of sales when I was
still president, then he seceded me as president. I stayed on as chairman until last
December when my other son, Jud, became chairman of the board. I don’t know
how familiar you are with corporate structure, but typically the stockholders elect the
board members and the board members hire the officers. Our stockholders
- incidently we are an ESOP company, ESOP stand for Employee Stock Ownership.
So a part of our employees retirement accrual is in the stock of Bradford Company,
through an employee stock ownership trust. Incidentally, there are no owners of any
shares of stock in Bradford Company that are not employees of Bradford Company.
All employees own some shares of stock through the ESOP, the family owns the controlling interest and there are some other officers of the company who are also shareholders. There are no outside shareholders. That's just the way that is set up.
At any rate, while my son Tom is president of the company, and he's a member of the board, he serves at the pleasure of the board, which is chaired by the other son.
That's about the best way I could figure out to do it.

AH: Do you think that you're going to have the next generation of Bradford's involved in the business?

JB: I doubt it. My wife and I had three boys. I discouraged all three of them from coming into the business. Our oldest son did not, he went to medical school and he's an anesthesiologist in practice in Kalamazoo. Jud, the one that's the board chair, and incidently he's the immediate past chairman of the Holland Area Chamber of Commerce, last year was his year, he had worked through the chairs of the chamber. He likes things like good wine and good food and he likes to cook. He took kind of a hotel and restaurant management curriculum at State and was managing a Mr. Steak restaurant in Okemos, which is just outside Lansing, met his wife there. His wife was also a student at State, in fact her father - retired now - is a professor emeritus of from Michigan State. One day, at a Father's Day brunch, Jud looked at me and said, "You know Dad, if you ever have an opening at the company, I would be interested in hearing about it." So I talked to a young man here that was our vice president of sales at the time and said, "I don't know if you want to take him on. That's all up to you." But he did. This fellow, Bob Kimber, was a very good trainer. He now is
the general manager of our Gallatin facility in Tennessee. He took Jud on. That’s worked out well.

Two years later, our son Tom was graduating from Hope. We did what we thought were the right things. Our company for years has used outside industrial psychologists to evaluate people that we’re hiring. Also, if we have problems, like in wondering where a person’s at or an employer/employee situation is a little bit out of kilter, we find it better to send these situations off to our private industrial psychologists who are professionals rather than having some amateur here muddy up the works. Anyway, we had sent Tom to our industrial psychologists and they’d done a profile of interests and all these things that he should look into. He left Hope in mid-May, and it’s now getting to mid-June and he isn’t out making the calls. Finally my wife came up to me one day and tears were rolling down her cheeks and I said, "What’s the matter?" She said, "You know, you’re killing him." I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "You know it’s the only place he’s ever wanted to work...and you’re saying no." So we hired him, gave him to Bob Kimber, put him out on the road. He did a good job and now he’s our president.

AH: Much is said about the work ethic in Holland, do you think that’s had a lot to do with your success here?

JB: Yes, very much. People here expect to work. I think that people here know that they’re happier working. Everyone looks forward to vacation and we all need a vacation, we need a break. But I think people need the stimulation of working and the creativity of working. Everybody here, if they’ve been here very long, everybody
here can do their job better than anybody else in the company. There isn’t anybody here who isn’t needed. This is what I tell people here, “We absolutely need you. If we didn’t need you, you wouldn’t be here. Because we need you, if you’re ill or if you’re on vacation, we miss you. Something isn’t getting done, or done as well as it would be if you were here.” I think that’s people’s dignity. I think that’s people’s sense of self-worth. It’s always nice when somebody tells you you’ve done good job. That’s really nice, and that’s really important, but you have to know yourself you’re doing a good job. It’s nice to leave work at the end of the day and you’re tired and you go home, but you knew you did the best you could. You did all you could, and you’d do more but you can’t, you’re just out of gas. [laughter]

I think we just have wonderful people here that are fulfilling themselves and I think it’s management’s responsibility to continue to make opportunities available to people who want them. I say ‘want them’ because you have to bear in mind that some people want a job and some people want a career. I don’t know how young women do it today, I really don’t - to get up as early as they get up, to make sure their children are placed or safe for the day, to do their job at work, to do the shopping, to make dinner, to put the kids to bed, to make sure that the laundry’s done and over the weekend the house is cleaned. I don’t know how they do it, my hat’s off to them, it just amazes me. A lot of those people in that situation, they’re not ready to say, take a seminar course on how to advance - some of them are, but they’re going to need a different level of help, or maybe their children are going to need to be in school for a longer period of the day or whatever. I think it’s really
important for the management of the company to try to sort out and find the people who want careers and want to grow and want to continue learning, want to learn outside the business and bring that knowledge back into the business, to continue to develop our people. The development of our human resource is really the development of the company.

Mentioning this problem that so many women have, we had our day shift and then we had a second shift. A number of people on our second shift, which was say, three thirty to maybe midnight with maybe, a half an hour out for dinner, or something like that. They wanted to work a third shift. We said, "We can't do that." They said, "Why not?" We said, "Sometimes a machine goes down. We can bring a maintenance person in to fix a machine maybe from eight to nine at night, but we can't wake him up at two-thirty or three in the morning." They said, "Well just let us try it." So we did and it's worked because they've made it work. Here's the routine. They might leave work at seven, get home, they make sure their children are awakened and dressed and fed and off to school. Then they sleep, but they're there when the children come home from school, make supper for the children, put them to bed and then come to work. How they do it, I don't know, but for many, that is easier for them than say, the afternoon shift when they're leaving for work when the children are coming home. I just don't know how, I guess you have to be young, but I think when I was young, I don't think I ever had that much energy. [laughter] But gosh, such a wonderful group. When I was twenty years old my summer job was at a steel mill in south Chicago, but that was always the graveyard
shift at that hour of the night. I remember just struggling to stay awake and being refreshed by the dawn coming up that suddenly my eyelids weren’t closing as much as they were. I don’t know how they do it. They not only do it, but they have a great camaraderie, great feeling for each other. They appreciate that they’re not always being interrupted by as many phone calls or as many ideas as somebody on the staff might have to ask them about. They kind of work unimpeded. They do quality work and get the job done and enjoy it. How they have the energy to do it still amazes me.

AH: What do you see as the future of Bradford Company?

JB: That’s a tough one. Here’s what we’ve been facing and I think it will continue. This globalization process, you can go back to say fifteen years back, twenty years back, when the consultants were studying the Japanese auto industry, just before the formation on this AIAG, Auto Industry Action Group, to improve American automotive productive performance and quality. When they studied Toyota and they compared them with GM, they found that GM had three thousand suppliers, Toyota had two hundred and fifty. Since that time, there has been a tremendous amount of reduction in the number of suppliers to General Motors, Ford and Chrysler. In our business for example, Ford has cut their number of packaging suppliers, now I may have the number wrong but I believe it is like, maybe one hundred and twenty or something like that, they cut it down to eighty, and now they’ve cut it to forty. See that blue Q1 flag out there? That’s Ford’s highest quality designation, and I’ve got to tell you a little story about that too. Next, they may cut it to twenty. You either
make the cut or you’re out of business. On the other hand, why are we in Mexico? Was that our great idea? Did we do all the things you’re suppose to do? Did we study the market? Did we say, "Gee, there’s an opportunity"? Did we say, "Gee, let’s go down and develop this"? Ford came along and said, "We really need a company like you with a branch in Mexico. We desperately need you." So we went. Well, is Ford going to cut us? No. On the other hand, when they cut somebody else who is doing business in southeast Michigan, they have to give it to the people who are left to do it. So now we have the sales office and design center that I mentioned in Wixom, because we have more business from Ford in southeast Michigan. Our people, when we started our little plant in Gallatin at the beginning of the decade, immediately the rumor started circulating in the plant that we were closing the plant in Holland and we were moving to Gallatin. We said, "Gosh, what we need to do is have some people from Holland go down there, help them get set up, help them do what they’re doing." Which we did. When they came back, they were absolutely assured that there was no possible way this plant in Gallatin, which is maybe one fifth of the size of the plant here, could do the work that the people are doing here. Now we have a regular group of Hispanic business people from Bradford de Mexico from Monterrey coming in and doing business. Again, "Gee, we’re going to close the plant in Holland and move it down to Mexico, rather than Gallatin, Tennessee." We ask our people, "Didn’t we send some product down to Guadalajara?" "I guess we did." "Didn’t we make some stuff that we shipped to Monterrey?" "Yes, we did." "Did we used to do that?" "No, we didn’t." [laughter] "So you think there’s some
connection between having them down there?" "Gee, maybe there is." "Is our employment down here?" "No, it's up." "Are we working fewer hours?" "No, I guess we're not." "Well then, gosh, do you really think we're..." "No, I guess we're not." [laughter]

I have to tell you about our Q1, and I wasn't here so I can take absolutely no credit for this, but it is a sizeable achievement to earn a Q1 award. What it does is it brings in people from packaging engineers not only from Ford, but different Ford affiliate plants, major suppliers. It brings in the purchasing people, it brings in not only the people you're dealing with, but maybe a level or two above. People whose names you've heard but you haven't had the pleasure of meeting. It brings in quality people, people that you know of because the people you work with tell you - they work for so and so - but you haven't met them. There's a sizeable group here. The first thing they did is they had a luncheon with the Ford people and everybody in our plant. This hadn't been done before. When the Ford people would go to a Q1 presentation, they'd be taken off to the local country club with the top brass of the company. Everybody was there. The Ford people, they weren't so sure about this. We heard about this later, one of them asked one of our employees, "This must be pretty special for you to be having lunch with the bosses." And our employee said, "Oh no, we do this about four times a year." Another one, they picked out a young man and said, "How about you? It's kind of nice for you to get together with Tom and Jud, isn't it?" "Tom and Jud? They're on my volleyball team!" [laughter] One of the Ford quality people near the end of the day went to one of our people and said,
"You know, I've been to fifty of these. This was the first one I was ever emotional about." That, I think, gives you a little flavor for what Bradford Company is about. It's a different kind of company. It's a neat place to be a part of.

AH: Thank you so much.