

Interviewer: Gordon L. Swartz III

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**FORMER SHOEMAKER MINE EMPLOYEE
DISCUSSES JOB RETRAINING THROUGH THE CLEAN AIR ACT**

INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT VICTOR MARCHLENSKI

GORDON SWARTZ: First of all I want your name and the date.

ROBERT MARCHLENSKI: The name and the date. My name is Robert Victor Marchlenski. The date is 5/30/95.

GS: Tell me a little bit about yourself. Start when you were born, if you want to. A little personal background.

RM: A little personal background. Okay. I was born in North Wheeling Hospital, November 6, 1953, and, from what I can remember, I can't remember too much about where I lived when I was younger. Let's see, I lived out East Wheeling most of my life. I think we moved out there when I was about four years old. Let's see, I went to Cathedral Grade School, then, after that, went to Wheeling Central Catholic High School, and I graduated in 1972. Let's see, after that I joined the army, the United States Army, July 16, 1972. I was discharged from the army July 16, 1975. After discharge I got me a job with Allied Chemical which only lasted for about nine months, then I went to Miner One School to see if I could get a job in a mine, which I did eventually, and I worked off and on in the mines for, oh hell, let's say, about eighteen years. I'm on my third layoff at this time. So.

GS: Did you get laid off at Allied Chemical?

RM: No, I quit. I just quit, downright quit there, because I didn't really like the chemical plant. This is going to be wild, but the gas, too much gas. I was gassed a couple of times, and I just said, "This was it." I was tired of it, and I wanted to make more money too, so I went to the coal mine. Even now, it doesn't make any difference whether I would have worked there or at the mine, because now that place is down, shut down now for good. So, it doesn't make any difference, but now I'm back in school trying to get me a degree, so I can get me a job somewhere.

GS: I don't think you said. When did you start Shoemaker?

37 **RM:** I started, okay, Shoemaker, February 8, 1977. My first layoff was in May of '83. Got called back in December or, let's see, when was it? January of '85.

GS: About seven months.

RM: Yeah. Got laid off again in December of '85. I was called back in September of '89. Got laid off again in. What was it? Ninety-three, wasn't it? Yeah, '93. So. It's been touch and go ever since.

GS: That was right at the end of '93, wasn't it? Like December, wasn't it?

RM: Right after the strike, yeah. So that probably would make it '94 then really. So, okay, I've been going to school for Building Preservation. It's more or less, they teach you how to restore and to preserve old Victorian, Queen Anne homes, and how to do all the inside work, outside work, the cornices, the fascia, all the brackets that go on outside, the brickwork. Interior would be plasterwork, how to do the cornices up around the ceilings. If they're all plaster, how to redo all that stuff.

53 **GS:** They use hands-on training.

RM: Everything is hands-on just about. A lot of history stuff too, a lot of history, a lot of hands-on. I hate history with a passion. Not with a passion, that's a little deep, you know. They teach everything there is about the history, Frank Lloyd Wright, Ruskin, all those great architects back in the 1700's, even further back, that once all this stuff got started, they were the big names, the guys that designed all this work and stuff, and we're just being trained to preserve that, to try to keep our heritage going.

GS: So you restore it in it's original condition?

RM: More or less in original condition, it's restoration. Of course, restoration, that's a broad term too, because, when you restore something, that's putting everything back to it's original, and today's, and today you can't really do that, because that means every nail. There's no real such thing as restoration, complete restoration, so. They've been doing a pretty good job at it so far. I hope I can find some work doing it, maybe get in, you know, something myself.

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GS: What I was just talking about, that might be a place to go, right there, right in Wheeling, the Victorian.

RM: Well, I've got a couple of quarters to go yet, so we'll see what happens, you know. I'd like to get something going myself, because I told myself I'd never work for somebody else again after this, you know, and I don't know. It's hard to say.

71 **GS:** You're doing great here. You're getting ahead of me.

RM: Okay.

GS: Let's see. What about Shoemaker Mine? What did you think of working there? We'll go back a little bit? Then we'll catch up.

RM: Okay, okay. Well, I like Shoemaker. I mean I like working with the guys, and it was the kind of place where you had fun. I mean you worked hard, but it was fun in a way, you know, but it was tough work. There's days I would just wish to God I had never seen the inside of a mine, but it paid well, real well for this area, and I kind of wish I was back there right now, you know, because I have a house back there that needs finished.

GS: If they would have called you back, you would have gone with no questions.

RM: I would have. No questions asked. In a heartbeat, I would have went, yeah. Just like Applegarth did. He said he wasn't ever going back, but he, as soon as they called him, he was gone, you know. It's understandable though.

82 **GS:** I talked to Rich Kellner. He said that that was a hard decision for a lot of them to make, but nearly everybody came back.

RM: Oh, yeah, what the heck, a hundred and fifty bucks a day, what are you going to do, you know?

(Break in tape.)

GS: I always thought that I could go back to Shoemaker.

RM: Yeah.

GS: But it looks like I'm not going to be able to.

RM: I don't know. That's what I said. We'll have to wait and see.

GS: I could be working right now. July is supposed to be the end of it.

RM: Maybe. They told us guys not to worry about it.

GS: Yeah, yeah. I've been hearing that.

89 **RM:** So.

GS: I'll edit all this.

RM: Oh, okay, okay, ah heck.

GS: So you can just talk, and I'll see what they need, really, you know.

RM: Well, you didn't go to the last union meeting, did you?

GS: No.

RM: Well, they said, Denny said everything's looking pretty good. He said they wanted everybody to go out with petitions, you know, go out, you know, and get people to sign it. I guess Byrd and Rockefeller told them to ease off. Don't do nothing. We'll take care of everything, and they told them. They said the modeling's going good, that they're doing with computer to simulate, I guess, the stack, the dispersion of the emissions, and stuff like that. Everything's going good, the way it's supposed to go.

GS: They've got a new stack, you mean?

97 **RM:** No. It's the old stack. They're just trying to prove to the EPA that it's working, that it's doing its job, you know, it's supposed to, so. He said they got the money for the beltline. He said they got the money for the new portal. Statler and his cronies are out looking for another. There's another coal company. I can't remember, some oddball coal company name that they're going to try to buy out to get the contracts. So, I'm looking at the first of the year myself, but it may be sooner. I don't know. For me, I don't know. For the other guys, I think there's a good chance they'll keep working.

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GS: I hope that you get your training done, and then you've got such a good business going you don't even want to go back.

RM: Oh, if I got, yeah, if I got a good business going, I'd just tell them forget it, you know, but it takes a long time to build a business, too, so. Plus, you need capital. I figure if I went back to the mine. I can get the house done, plus I can get the tools and stuff I need, because I know it will probably happen again, if I ever did get called back.

GS: You know. It's a merry-go-round.

RM: Yeah. So.

GS: Okay, now we'll move on a little bit. What made you decide to go into preservation? I think it's a great choice.

112 **RM:** Well, really, when I got started back to school. This is my, I already have a degree in electronics. I don't really know a lot about electronics. The book work I did. The hands on stuff I wasn't good at.

(Interruption.)

RM: Okay, back to electronics. Like I said, I was good at the book work. I got A's and B's, but, as it come down, when I went to take a test to get a job or something, I really didn't know the oscilloscope.

GS: Where did you get this degree?

RM: West Virginia Northern. I don't know if they're, maybe it's a lot better now than what it used to be, but it just wasn't my cup of tea, but that's when they called me back to the mine. I was grateful for that, and I went back.

GS: You took this while you were laid off at the mine?

RM: Well, I started school really in '83, but like, off and on, taking little courses here and there, refresher courses, math and English, and stuff like that.

124 **GS:** What do you think about this Clean Air Act money? Is that a Godsend?

RM: Oh, yeah, I think it is, yeah. If it wasn't for that, I don't know how I could, you know, could survive. I'd be working for my brother-in-law again, you know,

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and he really didn't pay a lot. As for getting a job in this valley, I don't know. It just would have been tough. It would have been real tough.

GS: Yeah, that's one of the things, one of the things I'm trying to find out. Is this, these retraining programs, are they actually accomplishing anything?

RM: Now the jobs, for this kind of job, I don't know about around here. Like what I'm into, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, places like that. They're really hot and heavy into preservation, Virginia, you know. I could probably, well, Wheeling's just now getting started up, but they, they need some time yet. They're still working on it, but I know if I would, you know, type up a resume or something and send it down to them and stuff, I'd probably get a job, you know. Say, come on down, you know, or whatever.

GS: How many people are in that, or how many other coal miners, too?

137 **RM:** Well, I really don't know. There used to be a bunch of us, before they all got called back. There was probably about fifty guys in that, I would say.

GS: Wow.

RM: Close to it.

GS: Yeah.

RM: And now there's only like. There was Applegarth. Now he's been called back. I think I'm the only one from the mine that's in this program, from our mine, that's in this program right now. There's some other guys from up.

GS: Other miners.

RM: Some from Windsor. There's some from ah, oh, ah, the mill. What's the steel mill out here? Blaw Knox.

GS: Okay.

RM: Okay, yeah, Blaw Knox, guys from Blaw Knox.

144 **GS:** I interviewed a guy from Blaw Knox now, come to think of it.

RM: Yeah. My brother-in-law worked there, and I still can't remember it, but Blaw Knox. You know, they're into it, too, and they like it. They're really getting into it, and we've got a lot of hands on work this quarter, so.

GS: Do they have refrigeration, electricity, and electronics over there?

RM: Well, they've got an electronic course. I was talking to a guy. I was going to give him, I asked him if he wanted an old microwave to work on. He said, well, they don't get into that stuff anymore. They're getting into how to repair computers now, so. That's all they're going to teach over there. So, there's a refrigeration/air conditioning, let's see, yeah, refrigeration/air conditioning. Let's see, well, they have welding. That's just not your certificate. This is your degree in welding. I mean this is what they have over there.

GS: If they're putting all these people out, they're going to come out the same time, there's not going to be jobs here at least, is there?

RM: Now I don't know, for the welders, but the new mill's coming in. They were going to build that new mill over in Martins Ferry. There's a good chance some people might get called in over there or be able to apply over there. They're talking about building a new mill up around Weirton some where, but then you suppose they'll pull a hundred people, but I don't know about that yet. Just hearsay right now, so, it's going to be tough. You've got to leave the area. There's no doubt, and the refrigeration/air conditioning. There's a crapload of people taking that, you know. Every quarter, every quarter.

161 **GS:** Northern's full of them.

RM: So you have to move out of the area to do any good, so.

GS: Is retraining? Everybody's unemployed. So everybody's getting retrained. I think some of the politicians think that's the answer. Do you think it is?

RM: No. If there's, like, a few places here and there you want to, you know, retrain somebody, maybe somebody on Welfare that needs a job or something, yeah, but we had a job. Now EPA took it off of us, just like that, you know.

GS: What, okay, that leads into, how far do we go to protect the environment? Is it necessary to close these mines? This is opinion.

171 **RM:** Yeah, why, I don't think it's necessary. We have the technology to clean up the coal as it's being burned. I mean it's just politics. Everybody's just too cheap or worried about the, I don't know.

GS: It could be the politics, but it could be the big companies.

RM: Well, it's big companies. They don't want to put out the money. That's all. They say it's going to cost too much, but then they have Ormet down here who said they can do it for half the cost of what the power plants can do it, to clean up the air, put scrubbers on the Mitchell Plant down here, and yet you'll be hearing nothing about that now. It's all hush, hush, so. Yeah, let's see, I don't know what else I could say here. Probably all kind of stuff I could really say, if I want to get into it, get vulgar.

GS: Well, I'm going to interject what I've been seeing here. You've got the environmentalists on one side, and you've got the industry on the other side. They're just fighting all the time.

RM: Yeah. I agree.

GS: There's got to be somewhere. They've got to get together sometime.

RM: Yeah, but the government's not helping out neither, you know. They're just letting these guys go ahead and roam the countryside. See a little target, put the crosshairs on it, and "bang," you know, it's gone, you know. Something like that, but.

187 **GS:** That's good. That's good.

RM: You like that. Well, it's true, you know.

GS: Yeah.

RM: It's like they're bored. They don't have nothing else better to. We do need EPA for certain things, but now they're just out looking for jobs so they don't get canned themselves, you know. That's about it.

GS: That's good.

RM: That's all it is. They're covering their own butts, and they don't care who else they hurt as long as they keep their job and do what they want. Then you've got the, of course, then you've got the Greenpeace guys, who don't have jobs at all.

GS: I've run into them in this course that I'm taking over here. They're radical.

193 **RM:** Oh, I know, they're just, you know, they have no jobs, nothing else to do with their life, except harassing to throw people out of work. That's all there is to it, but they do have a point sometimes, but I think they get carried away just like the EPA does too. They don't care who they hurt in the long run though.

GS: This is real good. Okay, one little thing I have down here. Do they have a job placement service over there? At Belmont?

RM: Yes, they do. Yes. Oh, it's just like Northern, you know. You fill out your little forms, you know, you say this is what I've got my degree in, blah, blah, blah, and you send it in to them. I had the thing filled out and stuff, but I never gave it to them yet, so. I filled it out two quarters ago, but they, if people need something like what you're into, then they'll, yeah, they can probably get you a job. Northern, I never did get anything off them, except once, I think. They told me about a job, and that was the last I ever heard of it, you know. So, I just said the heck with it. I'll take care of it myself, more or less.

GS: This is a two year course you're in.

RM: Yeah, I've been in a year now.

209 **GS:** Would you recommend anybody else going into that?

RM: Oh, yeah. If that's the kind of stuff you like. If you like hands on, woodwork, stuff like that, yeah.

GS: My son is out of a job. He's on Welfare, and they said there's retraining money for him. He's looking for something. That might be.

RM: Well, if he likes doing stuff like, you have like an old house, or.

GS: He's been remodeling houses. That's what he's been doing.

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RM: Well, then, maybe that's what he ought to get into. It's going to be a lot of work though. It's not just, it's just not your little, a lot of papers to write, and they make you do everything, but, in the long run, I think it will help him, if that's what he's into, so. It's expensive, but, if he's got the money to do it, do it. Tell him to do it.

GS: It seems like this Clean Air Act is a pretty good deal, but are other workers getting this, or have you heard. They're not getting the Clean Air Act money.

221 **RM:** Well, the guys, I think just the guys from the mine, but they're.

GS: Ohio Edison got something.

RM: Yeah. I haven't seen any. I don't know if those guys are over there yet or not. I've seen some new faces there, but I couldn't swear if that was them or not.

GS: I talked to one guy from Ohio Edison. He's going to Belmont. Butch Walker's his name.

RM: Butch Walker. That sounds familiar. We've got a lot of people.

GS: He's in computers.

RM: Oh, well, okay.

GS: That's right. I forgot.

RM: I don't know if the guys from Blaw Knox. I think they're just getting JTPA money. I don't know if it's under the Clean Air Act or not. I don't think it is. I think just the guys that has to deal with the coal mines or power plants, I think.

GS: Evidently, when they have massive layoffs, there is money being made available. It's not necessarily the Clean Air Act.

231 **RM:** Yeah, it's something different though. Different, another grant or something.

GS: Yeah, different grant.

RM: I'll have to talk to them about that.

GS: It seems like that's their solution is to retrain you. I don't know if that's going to be a solution.

RM: Yeah, but you're going to have all these guys, thousands of guys, retrained, but who's going to hire us, you know. Look at how, I'm 41 years old, and I'm young compared to some of the other guys that are laid off and stuff.

GS: Oh, yeah. You get a 55, 60, 60 or 65-year-old man and retrain him. Who's going to hire him?

RM: Nobody. Look at this guy, you know. Insurance? So, I don't know. It's just going to be touch and go right now. I'm trying to wait and see what the mine's going to do, and I'm just going to keep going to school until next spring, because that's when my money runs out. I can graduate in the fall or summer.

GS: Okay, if you would get recalled, and you said you'd go back, would you still continue with this course, or try to?

244 **RM:** It's almost done. I'm just taking, right now. I know I won't be called back until, for a while, you know. So I can go probably another quarter, and I can more or less take all the courses I want to take and really say heck with it if I wanted to, but the only thing I need to really graduate is speech and chemistry, and that's two courses I don't really want to get into right now. So that's why I'm taking this other. I'm taking masonry next quarter, and what they call a practicum, where you come up with a project that you have to build yourself, or maybe work someplace and get credit, you know. That's what you do that quarter for that class.

GS: That's kind of what I'm doing now.

RM: Basically what you're doing here, yeah.

GS: They call this a practicum.

RM: Yeah, yeah, that's what I said. If I want to build cabinets for my house, I could do it as long as I paid for the material, but that would be my grade for that, but they have me going to do some stuff with a couple of houses they own, so. I

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want to build a window and a front entry door for them, I think, what they were talking about.

259 **GS:** I interviewed one fellah at Ohio Edison that said that these retraining programs were a Godsend. He said there's guys that would have blowed their heads off if they didn't have them.

RM: They probably would have. There's no doubt, no doubt in my mind.

GS: At least it's something coming in.

RM: It's some money, yeah, and I'm glad I'm not married and had kids. I probably would have blowed my brains out, you know, so. I don't know. I don't know. It's tough.

264 **GS:** I know people filing bankruptcy.

RM: Yeah, but you always make it, no matter what. You always do. You always make it. So.

GS: That's all the questions I had.

RM: Okay.

GS: Unless you want to expound a little bit.

RM: I don't know. I don't know what else though. You want to go see my house.

GS: I didn't realize you were building one back there.

RM: Yeah, right there, yeah.

GS: Okay, we're done then.

(Break in tape.)

271 **RM:** World War II.

GS: Did you actually take a history course?

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RM: "History of American Architecture." So that was just strictly ..., Jefferson, and everything else. You talk about him and start from there, because he was into preservation and stuff like that, and just went on to Frank Lloyd Wright, Pullman, Ruskin. There was a slew full of names. I really can't remember.

GS: There's a lady that conducts those tours over at Wheeling. Her name is.

RM: Pat Meeker?

GS: No. Her name's Pat, Pat Dudley.

280 **RM:** Pat Dudley. That's right.

GS: Pat Dudley.

RM: Yeah, she's in a couple of my classes, yeah.

GS: My boss interviewed her.

RM: Is that right?

GS: And I sat in. He was trying to teach me how to interview. She's seems real sharp.

RM: Oh, she is sharp. She's a smart girl. You get her in those houses, boy. She knows exactly.

GS: She was answering questions.

RM: ...Don't walk there.

GS: She has a history major or something though. She told me. But she likes the preservation.

RM: But she's over taking it, yeah. She's only in a couple classes a quarter, I guess, something like that.

288 **GS:** I think she's doing a great job over there, and she'd like to hire some people, but they won't give her the money see.

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RM: That's the only thing. It's like that house. I said how often do they work on that house, one house. I think it's that first house right beside where the old Red Cross building used to be, well, where it still is, but it used, Red Cross used to own it, I think.

GS: Up in Wheeling, you mean?

RM: Yeah, by the Fort Henry.

GS: Okay.

RM: Okay. You're not too familiar.

GS: I've got to get familiar with Wheeling, but I'm not yet. Of course, I know where the bridge is.

RM: I guess this house they had up there, this lady that owned it before had, I don't know, thirty cats and thirty dogs that lived in it with her, and they said it stunk to high heaven when they went in there. They said the only way they got rid of most of the stench was to strip everything, just strip it, you know. She said the staircases had dog hair matted on the balusters, you know, on the railings of the stairs, and they had to get the knife and scrape the corners to get the dandruff out of the corners and stuff. It was nasty, she said. I don't know if you ever seen in the papers, a few months back, where they had that guy restoring a lead glass, or stained glass window. It was a, it had that on top. That's in that house. You ought to see that. That's something, how he did that. It's in four sections, but the big one's something, you know.

306 **GS:** Could you restore some, lead glass, or something like that?

RM: Oh, that's one of the classes I took, right there, so. That's one of the projects we had to do, so, make our own design, but, yeah, they teach that over there. They have decorative finishes, where you learn different paints and how to do different kind of paint techniques. Then you've got your plaster, where they teach you how to make the knives to, if you need to make a molding or a cornice around the top of your ceiling. They teach you how to do that a little bit, and how to plaster walls. They teach about plumbing and electrical work. They don't really get hot and heavy in one item, you know. It's just a little bit of everything.

GS: Evidently they've got, the way you've been talking, you think the professors are pretty good.

318 **RM:** Oh, they're not bad. They learn some stuff off us too. They like us coal miners, old guys. They say we're easy to teach. We take things seriously, you know, and, plus, we also help out, and we also teach them a little bit of stuff too, you know. They're architects, all of them, all except. There's two that are architects, one's not. He teaches decorative finishes, and I can't remember the other class he teaches right off of that, but these guys, they learn off us a lot, you know, and we learn off them.

GS: Just the experience of working that many years is something.

RM: Yeah, like the book says, history book says, architects are arrogant, and some of them. One is.

GS: Okay.

RM: So, but these English. He's from England. I can't. What was the name of it? I can't remember the name of the town he was from over there, but he's an ol' citizen now, so. He's married to an ol' American girl, have a family and stuff over here. Simon Herbert, so. He's a pretty good teacher. He's not bad. Then there's Dave Murtz. You have to put that in there, and Jeff Gotz. I think that's the only two, only three that really teaches everything over there in that preservation field. They take care of everything.

338 **GS:** I'll let my boy listen to this tape. I'll see if he'd be interested in all that stuff.

RM: He might be. You never know. Tell him to get off his duff and do it.

GS: He's interested in engineering. He wants to design, or something, I don't know.

RM: I'm taking AutoCAD II over there. That AutoCAD drawing with the computer, computer assisted drawing.

GS: Yeah.

RM: That's interesting. I mean, if he likes to get into stuff like that, that's the place to do it, you know. That's what I was going to go for, engineering over there, but then I changed over to building preservation. That's more my speed. That's

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what I want to do, and my math isn't that great for engineering, so. You've got to be a real whiz to do it.

GS: That's what I told him. I didn't think, I don't think he's that good at math either.

RM: Well, he can always learn though. That's the thing, you know. One way to find out. If that's what he wants to do, then tell him to go for it. If it doesn't work out. Like they say, everybody has to find their niche, so.

GS: So you want to show me your house.

RM: Yeah.