IVA DIMITROVA: Okay. Today it is July 4, 2015, and I am currently in the office of my grandfather, Ivan Dimitrov. I am Iva Dimitrova, and today I am conducting an interview. Good morning.

INTERVIEWEE: Good morning.

IVA DIMITROVA: So to begin, can you introduce yourself with your full name, when you were born, and where you were born?

INTERVIEWEE: Alright. My name is [name of interviewee]. I was born on [date of birth] in the village of [name of village].

IVA DIMITROVA: And could you describe a bit more about your childhood? How was it during that time, what do you remember?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, my parents worked in agriculture, and the entire population of the villages here in the Karlovo region worked in agriculture. And so, I come from an agricultural family. We were three children: two sisters and me. I completed the rest of my education in [name of village] and then we learned that in Sopot there was the Plant Manufacturing School, or the school for the preparation of workers for VMZ-Sopot. At that time it [VMZ] was called Plant 11. And from [name of birth village] I come to the manufacturing school, I enroll, and I graduate from the school in three years. In that school, you choose a specialization, and I chose to specialize as a machine turner. I begin working in 1953 as a machine turner, on June 25th. And that's what I work as for two and a half years, three, until I went into army training at the end of 1955, in December. I spend three years in army training, and I finish in 1958. At that time it was the law—can I take a sip. You are recording this, right? Later you can delete it?

IVA DIMITROVA: Yes. You can drink if you want to.

[sound of interviewee drinking water]

INTERVIEWEE: I finish in 1958. At that time, they kept a position at the plant for whoever had worked there and had then gone off to army training. And within one month you have to start work again. And so I started working again as a machine turner.

IVA DIMITROVA: Can you explain what a machine turner is, because I can't understand.

INTERVIEWEE: A turner is a universal machine that cuts out parts made of steel.

IVA DIMITROVA: Okay.

INTERVIEWEE: So, it can make an axle, it can make a shaft. Do you know what a shaft is?

IVA DIMITROVA: No.

INTERVIEWEE: An axle. Do you know what an axle is? This is an axle. [illustrates with an object in the room] It moves the shaft, do you understand, of the machines that turn. It can make a threaded shaft. A bolt, let's say, has a cylindrical part, it has a threaded shaft, and then it has the head. Do you understand? Screws.

IVA DIMITROVA: So, small parts?

INTERVIEWEE: Exactly. And so when I returned, that's where I worked until 1962, as a machine turner operator in the repair shop. In the repair shop parts are manufactured for the machines in the manufacturing line. The machines that used for production. After working for a year, they [the machines] become old and some parts need to be replaced. And there is the repair shop, we fix the parts. And I work on the turner making these parts for the machines that need them. And that's where I worked until 1962.

IVA DIMITROVA: And then what? Did you move somewhere else?

INTERVIEWEE: I moved. Should I say where?

IVA DIMITROVA: Yes.

INTERVIEWEE: [laughs]

IVA DIMITROVA: If you can please explain.

INTERVIEWEE'S WIFE: Talk about the technical high school.

INTERVIEWEE: No, I'll talk about—during that time there were, we called it Quality Control, Quality Control Gauges. You understand? Or the instruments with which we measure—the gauge, you know what that is? A gauge? You know what a micrometer is. With those you measure the parts or with the calibers that you use to measure mass-produced parts. For example, do you know what a diameter gauge is? A diameter gauge. A diameter gauge is made, let's say, a ring through which you pass the parts that are produced. It has a plus/minus allowance. So that it [the part] is able to go through on one side, and it doesn't go through on the other. So that's what it is. And that's where I worked until 1962.

After that, from 1962 to 1965, I became—during that time until 1965 I had graduated from a technical school in Plovdiv. It was called "Karenin." After the manufacturing school, I graduated from the technical school. And after that, in 1965 when I was already working in quality control, I transferred to the department that made "special production" and there was a change in management.

IVA DIMITROVA: What year was that?

INTERVIEWEE: 1965. They changed—there were product line. You know what product lines are, right?

IVA DIMITROVA: Yes.

INTERVIEWEE: And let's say, do you know what an explosive is? Your grandfather has to have shown you at least a hundred times what an explosive is. And there they produce explosives. I become a supervisor in that department where the explosives are assembled. An explosive is just an explosive. And so I stay there until—I have a work team, a production unit of 200 women. The heaviest one weighed 60 kilograms, the oldest was twenty-five years old.

IVA DIMITROVA: The oldest one was twenty-five?

INTERVIEWEE: Exactly.

IVA DIMITROVA: That means they were all young women.

INTERVIEWEE: Young women on my work team. The name of my team was "Seagull."

IVA DIMITROVA: So, work teams as I understand them—

INTERVIEWEE: A lot of people come together and they have to—when there are a lot of groups of people, they have to—I'm talking about in manufacturing, of course. There has to be Team Seagull, Team Black Sea, Sunrise, and so on, to differentiate one from the other. And so, that's how I started work in manufacturing. We were a separate department, good production line, new production line. We manufactured, they would award us. We would go on excursions, they would give different cash prizes. This is good to take note of. When I switched between the collectives—as a supervisor I received a monthly salary of 155 lev. Whereas the twenty-one year old girl, who was entry-level received 140 lev. Do you get it? It depended on how much she produced, they would split it like that.

IVA DIMITROVA: So, if more was manufactured, the higher their wages were.

INTERVIEWEE: Yes.

IVA DIMITROVA: Exactly. So when you were the supervisor you were around twenty-something, right? 1965?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, I born 1935—

IVA DIMITROVA: So 30 years old—

INTERVIEWEE: I was thirty years old, yes. And I led this work team for five years. After that, in 1970 METALHIM moved to Sopot. The National Economic Alliance (NEO).

IVA DIMITROVA: Can you explain more about that?

INTERVIEWEE: About what?

IVA DIMITROVA: About METALHIM.

INTERVIEWEE: Hold on, I'm coughing. Stop the recording for a bit…

[PAUSE IN RECORDING]

IVA DIMITROVA: Okay.

INTERVIEWEE: METALHIM is a merger. Before there was METALHIM, it was Directory Number 7. It was in Sofia, and they relocated it to Sopot. NEO-METALHIM merged all of the military plants. I'm talking about the military plants that were part of civilian production, in civilian life. Whereas the others that were part of the army they also had "special production." There were other plants besides these ones. Then the NEO becomes the largest entity in the country that produces ammunition. It is the hat, as you say, that

heads the production. There are 27 plants. In these 27 plants, like in Sopot, there are at least 10-15 smaller sectors that are attached to it. The other plants are in Kazalak, Laskovitz, Charven Bryag, and so on, where at that time there were—those were the big ones. I won't distract you.

IVA DIMITROVA: When METALHIM relocated to Sopot—

INTERVIEWEE: Since METALHIM had one representative from the Party's Central Commission (CC) [note: governing body of the Communist Party], whose name was Chaburov, Dimitar Chaburov who was in Sofia. And how did they decide it? The Party decided it that it would be better if the NEOs in Sofia relocated to places that were closer to manufacturing. And that's how METALHIM comes to Sopot in 1969. And since I worked in the assembly department, and those who came from Sofia didn't want to stay here, they want to go back home to Sofia—

IVA DIMITROVA: Because—

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, their families are there. And now your grandfather goes, they take him on at the NEO before me. He starts at the NEO. And there was—manufactured explosives from Sofia would come to me. There was this guy Savdos, may he rest in peace. He came and was looking for a replacement explosives-expert who was also in manufacturing. And it so happened that I was the youngest, and only time would tell, it wasn't like I was some kind of God—and so that he could leave earlier, they took me on in his place, do you understand? They hired your grandfather there, you understand, also as a manager for explosives. The both of us started working there. He became a manager. In his place came another manager from the explosives department. Whereas your grandfather became the office manager. The office has a couple of departments, four or five departments. And so, he became the manager. I remain as a explosives specialist, you understand—that is my job from 1970 to 1996 when I retired. There is nobody beneath me, I am—

IVA DIMITROVA: An expert.

INTERVIEWEE: The lowest-ranking. Call it a specialist. I didn't have any subordinates because I was always a subordinate. I worked under your grandfather. And so the plans are made here at the NEO, and then they are distributed to the other plants. I would go as a specialist to inspect quality control in manufacturing. Let's say in Laskovitz, where our products are manufactured. I spent thirty years there and then the time came to retire. Should we continue filling the [unintelligible] [note: I think it is an idiom]?

IVA DIMITROVA: Well, before beginning to talk about retirement, can you describe more about everyday work life? What did you like, what didn't you like?

INTERVIEWEE: At that time?

IVA DIMITROVA: Yes. For example, at METALHIM.

INTERVIEWEE: Look, I can tell you about the manufacturing job as well. I can tell you about it. Because I specialized in working on the machine turner. I was an eighth-level machine turner operator. I can carve

steel on the machine, do you understand. An upper-level. Let's say we're making repairs to some machine because it's been damaged. They give it to you with the blueprints, and you make it.

IVA DIMITROVA: And it was like that every day, doing similar things?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, every day like that until I move to the other job. In my other job with Quality Control, I would check on the measurement calibers. But it lasted two years, since new production plans came in. New plans for explosives, and they were looking for specialists. Since I was a machine turner operator, and I had gotten tired of always working on my feet, doing heavy work. And when I started working there [at the NEO], they gave me my own room, nobody had the right to bother me, only to [unintelligible]. It seemed like heaven to me. I didn't want to leave, the department manager and the Quality Control manager, and they said, you and you, alright. And I became a shift manager. New production was implemented. We gathered, like I told you, all young, nice girls. Since there was competition for production, they gave money. In manufacturing, when you produce a lot of parts, later you have to sell them by the function of each part, by these predetermined criteria. Whoever is familiarized with this knowledge, there is nothing complex about it. That's how it functions, that's the responsibility of the manager, whether it be me or somebody else who has to carry it out. There are production plans. You receive these plans every morning from the management office. You pick up a secret briefcase, carry it to the department, and you instruct the people who will be working on it. Even though they know what they will be doing every day, but you still do it because it's the law.

IVA DIMITROVA: Yes. So the little briefcase contained all of the information for the day?

INTERVIEWEE: A suitcase. A suitcase, not a briefcase. A big suitcase that has all of the production plans for one product. One product, not just one part. This product is made up of twenty parts. Every part is part of an assembly. Two, three parts make up an assembly. There are other cases in which a single part makes up an assembly, and when it is pressed [untranslatable]. Do you understand me? [laughs]

Okay, Ivche. And I worked there until—I already told you about the manufacturing. A good job. Two, three conveyors worked, around 200 women, like I told you, pretty girls. When you have hired young, hard-working and capable workers, and you get a part to manufacture—since there aren't parts that often—when parts come from the welding department, because we wait on the welding department, you understand. You gather them [the workers], you turn on the conveyors, and when they are well-rested, they start and they complete the production plan, and they take home their money. We used to manufacture ready-made products. When the product was ready [unintelligible], they would be paid. If not, repairs would start to isolate the cause [of imperfection], and so on.

And so, the NEO arrived in 1969. Your grandpa was already there, but they had recruited him from the Technical HQ, whereas I was working below in manufacturing. But that person who was responsible for the explosives, Savdos was his name, he was in a hurry to go back to Sofia, and so who [did they choose]? Since he knew me, they knew me from—since your grandfather had graduated in the Soviet Union and had worked in the Technical HQ, but his knowledge was in explosives. And so they come to me and say, "Can we make a group of the people who work with explosives, and let's invite a couple more people". "Alright, welcome," and that's how your grandfather and I met.

And so when that person who's from the NEO in Sofia [Savdos] moves way, they need an explosives expert. Who? Oops, I'm the chicken up for slaughter. They took me on their team. Whether I wanted to or not, that's how it was. And I became—in actuality, your grandfather's helper. Your grandfather was department manager, but after a year, they promoted him because a new line of production arrived. Guided or non-guided—you might not be familiar with those: arrows, [unintelligible]. And so he got promoted, and I remained working with the explosives. And I stayed there in the NEO for thirty years.

IVA DIMITROVA: How was it, from the beginning to the end?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, from the beginning to the end—there is no going up in the NEO. What you have already learned, you take with you to the other plants, do you understand. NEO-METALHIM is the directing body which has 28 sectors, or plants, do you understand. You are in charge of your division—let's say I'm in charge of explosives, I have to work with Laskovitz and constantly travel there. In manufacturing there is always a lack of something. Either there isn't a machine, or there aren't materials, or there aren't people. And at that time, for certain municipalities, like Stara Zagora and Veliko Turnovo, there weren't enough people [to work]. And so, the management arm of the Party and of the country get together, from Stara Zagora or Veliko Turnovo, let's say the Party secretaries. Not let's say, but that's the way it was. And they have to help find people to send to work at the plant in Laskovitz or in Kazanlak so that production can continue. That's how it was.

IVA DIMITROVA: So the organization of the—

INTERVIEWEE: The organization was—

IVA DIMITROVA: The distribution of—the distribution of machines, of people.

INTERVIEWEE: Of people, yes. That's your job to monitor who manufactures where. Let's say when a plant director calls you up or you go and see in person that there is no machine. For you to get a machine, you a have to call the Ministry of Engineering. They are the ones who design them, do you understand, and buy them because at that time those big machines were bought in dollars. [You called the Ministry] so that they could lend you the money.

IVA DIMITROVA: And how was it working with your colleagues in the NEO?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, look now. We were four departments: explosives, shells, the foundry, the chemicals department, and the one for the bearings was also part of us. So let's say our explosives department consists of two people, me and your grandfather. Your grandfather is the manager, and I am the subordinate.

IVA DIMITROVA: And only the both of you in this department—

INTERVIEWEE: Well, look now. When you begin an order for materials, I'm telling you at that time everything was shipped in from the Soviet Union, I'm talking about materials. Whether it be steel, or explosive materials, or other raw materials, all of these were received from there, and we manufactured them according to their designs. Here, you can't make anything new, whatever it is. So first of all, you

make an order so that it can arrive, which takes about a year or two. The whole plant has to have started planning for it. And so, should I explain more? I'm talking here about materials.

IVA DIMITROVA: Yes, and that's—

INTERVIEWEE: After that, the machines. There is the Ministry of Engineering. It has to gather from all of the NEOs these big, six-spindled machines, or one-spindled. You know what those are, a mandrel [note: a spindle in a lathe to which material is fixed while being turned] and it passes over the part only one time. Well, here you have six mandrels, and you have parts that are made without any mandrels. However, they are for Western companies and they have to be—at that time the currency was in dollars. And your grandfather goes to negotiate. He would go to Switzerland, he would go to here and there. He's been a little bit of a capitalist even since then. Are you writing this down?

IVA DIMITROVA: And so—what was the hardest part of your job for you?

INTERVIEWEE: Manufacturing is always hard because you are always lacking something. If there are machines, then there aren't any workers. If there are workers, there aren't any materials. If there are materials, since the part goes through many manufacturing processes. Like a cold treatment, after that it passes through a galvanizing treatment, after that through a thermal treatment, and after that it receive a zinc coating, a copper coating, [unintelligible] coating, oxidation, and all of these are monitored until they come together to form an explosive, let's call it what it is. And all of these [parts] have to meet these criteria. An assembly of parts can have three, four different explosive materials, they are called ingredients. When one of them begins to burn, it has to really quickly light the [unintelligible]. Has to catch it on fire really quickly. During that time, the other explosive ingredient has to burn more slowly. A certain amount of time between four to ten seconds. And after that, it has to pass on this flame to the central capsule with a really big force, so that it can absorb the [unintelligible]. You get it? And all of this is found within one part and in this part…but you don't have—all of this is set off and does its own job from [unintelligible] force. When the shell launches, it creates a force of inertia—when it goes forward, this part moves backwards. And where there is a little space with a small capsule and a spring, and a striker, when the capsule goes back it hits into the striker, it explodes, it catches on fire, and it begins spreading this flame. Well I have to give some [explanation]— [laughs] [referencing my lack of technical knowledge]

IVA DIMITROVA: Can we begin talking a little bit about—I am also interested—besides the manufacturing and the organizational structure, about the social life. How was it—in actuality METALHIM was—

INTERVIEWEE: It was the head, or—

IVA DIMITROVA: The management was also within the plant?

INTERVIEWEE: Every plant has its own leadership.

IVA DIMITROVA: Where were you located?

INTERVIEWEE: We were in a separate building.

IVA DIMITROVA: Where? On the outside of the plant, towards the end?

INTERVIEWEE: On the outside, yes. Haven't you seen it? I should show it to you.

IVA DIMITROVA: Can you explain it to me?

INTERVIEWEE: I will explain it to you. From here, when you pass by the center, the little square, there is a street that leads to the plant, the most direct one. You've gone there—

IVA DIMITROVA: There, towards the end of the city?

INTERVIEWEE: No, here, here by the central square.

IVA DIMITROVA: Ah, that one that turns on an angle and goes by the kindergarten.

INTERVIEWEE: Exactly. Where the kindergarten is, METALHIM is below that. The building is still there, the fenced-in yard and everything, but when it came time to sell it off—they took it, bought it by private owners, and some guy bought it for 400,000 lev. No part of it works now, but the building is still there. And so. Ask me more.

IVA DIMITROVA: And how was it—explain to me when you go in the morning to work, what would you see? Were there people?

INTERVIEWEE: Look now, the organization—the organization of the NEO was at a very high level. You feel like a person from Sofia, do you understand? I'm talking about the NEO. The people who work there are treated with authority, because they know more than those who work in the plant, do you understand. Because when you enter the plant, they won't ask you what's going on in Sopot, why that product isn't being manufactured, why this and why that, what should be helped out. You have to be—you can't go before them and embarrass yourself by saying that you don't know. But in the plant it was a collective type of work. The plant [VMZ] is subdivided into smaller plants within. There is Plant #1 which makes the equipment. It makes the equipment for all the machines that will manufacture some type of part in the plant. And it was called Plant #1 like that, the equipment plant. All types of equipment, from large ones, to let's say a small cutting blade, are made there—

SPOUSE OF INTERVIEWEE: Talk about how you would enter into the plant. Through how many gates.

IVA DIMITROVA: Yes, that would be interesting.

INTERVIEWEE: Hey, I will talk about it. Look now, after that you have Plant #2. Plant #2 manufactures the body of the missiles, do you understand. And that's why it's called Plant #2. There is a Plant #3 that makes the parts for the explosives. That's how they are designated by name. Plant #4 which is the explosives outfitter, and so on, until you can see the missiles, you can see its launch.

IVA DIMITROVA: Dad has explained it to me.

INTERVIEWEE: Or a bomb. If it's a bomb, or some kind of mine, an 82-mm mine, there is a 120-mm one. Your grandfather should show you one. He has a few display ones from Kintex. And they advertise them to the whole word to buy.

IVA DIMITROVA: What is Kintex?

INTERVIEWEE: Kintex is the trade firm in Sofia.

IVA DIMITROVA: And what does it produce?

INTERVIEWEE: It doesn't produce anything. It sells. Kintex sells to the Western market. It sells weapons to the Western countries. Do you understand? And it sells to the socialist countries. Also weapons. Your grandfather knows it very well. Nobody goes out without him.

SPOUSE OF INTERVIEWEE: Talk about how you enter into the plant.

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, how would you enter into the plant and how—was Plant #1 the first one constructed?

INTERVIEWEE: No, it's just a manufacturing plant. You enter into all the plants through one way.

[PAUSE IN THE RECORDING]

IVA DIMITROVA: Okay, so—

INTERVIEWEE: So first of all, about the entrance. Like every secret place, the plant is also secret. And you enter with a special ID. This ID card is issued by the plant's administration. In order to enter, you have to meet some kind of criteria: whether you are loyal to Bulgaria, to the Party, to the country. Because they didn't hire Turks or other ethnicities. Are you writing this down? There we go.

What would the order be of [unintelligible]? When you have this document you can enter into the plant, and when the plant is divided into sub-plants, like I told you, #1 will make manufacturing equipment, Plant #2 will make shells, #3 will make explosives, Plant #4 will outfit the shells with explosive material. And in that way, everything comes together and produces one finished product, do you understand this? And then they send it off to the army or to aid our allies.

IVA DIMITROVA: Was it beautiful within? How did it look?

INTERVIEWEE: Within the plant?

IVA DIMITROVA: Yes.

INTERVIEWEE: Let me tell you.

IVA DIMITROVA: Were there lanes, or something like that?

INTERVIEWEE: Of course. They maintained absolute cleanliness. There were little grassy areas, like here in front of you [the apartment building]. The entire plant, from when you enter at the central gate to

when you get to the smaller sectors, everything is asphalted. On both sides there is a grassy lane, and these lanes have linden trees. And some of those lanes had cherry trees.

IVA DIMITROVA: Could you pick from them?

INTERVIEWEE: You could pick however much you wanted, as long as—are you writing this down? When I worked as a machine turner, there was a young, healthy man that work there, they called him Mitcho the Pole, he had come from Poland. He couldn't speak Bulgarian, but he learned, and he learned how to work the machine turner. And there was a cafeteria about two-hundred, three-hundred meters away from the repair shop. And when he worked the early shift, and when it got to be time—the others hadn't even come in to work yet because the regular shift started at eight. So we would go to that cafeteria there to eat. They would serve soups, stews, whatever you wanted. When we would head back around this time, there would be ripe cherries. There would be [a type of] cherries. But they always had worms. But he didn't know that, and I wouldn't tell him. He picked them, ate them. He liked those cherries. There were cherry trees, until the plant's farm production grew and developed. They first raised livestock, and used it to supply the cafeterias. How many cafeterias were there in all? One, two, three, four, five, six cafeterias. They would feed thousands of people, do you understand? Another activity that there was—now, how was the collectivization of work within the plant? I am talking about where I worked. There was a work team. In the work team you gather the necessary people in order to carry out the work plan. One person cleans, another collects, a third presses, a fourth loads the conveyor, and at the end, you make a finished product from the parts assembled. Whatever product it may be, it doesn't consist of more than twenty parts, or ten or whatever. And when the work team has already been formed, it is led by a brigadier. Or a [unintelligible]. Otherwise, there is one paid group manager, like me—not a group manager, but rather a shift manager, let's say. I represent my work team—there are two hundred women who work there. Some of them work on the machine presses. In one room, there are three presses, but three women work on each press, that makes nine. When you schedule them between three shifts, and you have one working on quality control, and one who cleans them off, you end up with five working at one machine. Three times five, fifteen. When you schedule them between three shifts, there are sixty-people per shift. I'm talking about—

IVA DIMITROVA: Did you go—I've heard about work teams from the plant, for example, doing work outside the plant, like farm work, those kinds of things. Did you use to go? When you were still working in manufacturing?

INTERVIEWEE: Look now, people would go, but not workers from manufacturing.

IVA DIMITROVA: So then who would go?

INTERVIEWEE: The technical departments would go. The technical department here in the plant, had two, three thousand people. Thousand. I'm not talking about two hundred, three hundred. And these people, let's say the draftsman, the mechanist, the technician, when there is a new line of production, they have to implement it. A new product arrives from the Soviet Union, they have to file the documentation, it has to be sent down, manufacturing equipment and instruments have to be made, technical equipment, you have to find a place to house the machines. All of this requires people who can

design and implement it from the smallest bolt to the largest machine. Whereas the organization of the manufacturing itself—

IVA DIMITROVA: So, they were the only ones who worked? What was the reason?

INTERVIEWEE: The reason was because they didn't work in manufacturing. They are salaried. Not all of them have to go. Those who are doing work at the moment or in the near future, whereas those who have already finished and their work can do without them. They gather together about fifty people from about 15,000, and nobody is going to feel their absence. Even if you take one hundred people, it's still nothing. And so [work brigades] were for those people, and not the others. What does "work brigade" mean? When they help out with the farm production. The workers can neither reap—at that time you reaped with a scythe—neither can they dig with a hoe because they don't own a digging hoe. They can only go help harvest the grapes or pick the roses. If the work brigade goes out to pick roses, and there are those who are greedy like me, who from the age of twelve went to pick roses until the age of sixty. I only had a break and didn't go [pick roses] when I was a soldier because they paid well. I was needy—a poor man. And I would bring along [name of wife] as well, you can ask her. My parents. The children.

IVA DIMITROVA: Yes.

INTERVIEWEE: When they would come with me, we would go pick roses all day. Roses, man.

IVA DIMITROVA: Besides these work brigades, were you involved in any cultural activities?

INTERVIEWEE: All of them. Every work team from the plant—like I'm telling you, I was in charge of two hundred people. When they work, when they finish the product and submit it on time, we are rewarded. They reward you, they give you money. And this money adds up. When you carried out an order of ten thousand, twenty thousand parts on time, they would give you 20 or 50 lev, or even 100 lev. And this would be every month. So when you would make two orders, you would get 100 lev. And so they would add up [unintelligible] and they would be kept track of. And after some time, we would organize a banquet. I've planned a 1,200 lev banquet.

IVA DIMITROVA: Really?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, in Karlovo, what was the name of that largest restaurant? Moscow. Three hundred people. Anything and everything that people want to eat and drink.

IVA DIMITROVA: So you're saying that this money from manufacturing that they give you as a reward goes towards paying for these cultural events and banquets?

INTERVIEWEE: Excursions, excursions.

IVA DIMITROVA: Where have you travelled to?

INTERVIEWEE: There's nowhere we haven't been. I was sick and tired of going to the Rila Monastery.

IVA DIMITROVA: That often?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, that often and since there were many people, you can't all go out there at the same time, you have to go with two buses and you have to have someone to oversee. And I was the only man. [laughs] There was this Sevso Perika who repaired the machines. There wasn't anybody else. There is no way that you can't go, as the supervisor you have to with them, do you understand. We've gone to all the places, the Rila Monastery, the Bachkovo Monastery, and to Russe.

SPOUSE OF INTERVIEWEE: To the sea.

IVA DIMITROVA: Ah yes, there were vacation posts, right?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, the plant owned vacation posts. A vacation post that was twenty stories tall. Here, they gave out vacation cards.

IVA DIMITROVA: I've also read that there was a newspaper published by the plant?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes there is. Factory Battle [note: name of newspaper, in Bulgarian, *Zavodska Borba*].

IVA DIMITROVA: Did you read it?

INTERVIEWEE: Constantly, since it was distributed free of charge. And what did it report on? Life within the plant. It would report on the number of plants, the production, new equipment and innovations. "In this plant they added a new machine in Plant #3", news about your grandfather traveling to Switzerland. Do you get it? How many machines would be produced—

IVA DIMITROVA: So, it was all of the news related to the plant—were there other things?

INTERVIEWEE: Everything related to the plant. The plant had a very accomplished choir. It had an accomplished dance ensemble. There were sports: volleyball, football, wrestling, weightlifting. And all of them were high-ranking. Because at that time there were funds that were funded from the completion of the work orders. So let's say, one of the funds would be for sport. Money would be set aside for sports. They were specifically for that—there were vacation funds that supported the maintenance of the vacation posts. There were travel funds, there were funds for mountaineering—whichever sport needed it—

SPOUSE OF INTERVIEWEE: The plant also built the lift.

IVA DIMITROVA: Yes, I've heard about that. Okay, can I ask about the explosion that happened in 1978?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, you can ask me.

IVA DIMITROVA: As my first question, what do you remember when it happened?

INTERVIEWEE: On the morning of December 19th, on my way to work, the person who was our first deputy general director, he was called Ivan Kolev. He had a son who was in primary school, in class or whatever, and he asked one of our colleagues to go do something [untranslatable]. Some guy says did you see what happened in Bogdan, and so I go in, and that's when it exploded for the first time, early in the morning still around eight o'clock. And I see workers from the technical department lined up cleaning

up broken glass from that area. And I went back to the NEO—since this guy, Ivan Kolyo, had come up from Gabrovo, and we knew each other and I meant to—and I'm going up the stairs, and there was the explosion, it got me right as I was going up the stairs of the NEO. I was wearing a fur coat at that time, and it still has holes to this day.

IVA DIMITROVA: It has holes?

INTERVIEWEE: It has holes from the glass that hit the back of the coat, but they didn't hurt me. But on the other hand, I had a colleague there in the room and since the door wasn't open and everything was closed off in the office where we usually work, and during the explosion, there was a drop in the room pressure, and the glass from the window had cut up his legs. I'm talking about the NEO, about our experience. There were others, but there weren't any casualties. It exploded, and that was it. The more interesting part was searching for the children. All of the children had been evacuated from the schools and from the kindergartens. Somebody had taken care of it beforehand to evacuate them.

Now, what caused the explosion? It was negligence. Because they had started to move out the explosive materials to Iganovo. And so what remains is the body of the shell, and they become just the outfitting department. And since they are moving out, nobody bothers to clean the air ducts that take out the dirty air, [unintelligible], the ventilators that clear out the vapors. And nobody cleaned them, and so it piled up, and the ducts catch on fire. And when they catch fire, the explosive material catches fire too—not the gunpowder but the TNT. And when it explodes, so do the shells that they've manufactured and already outfitted. And from the shells, the fire flies over to the outfitting area. There you find [unintelligible] quantities of hydrogen. Hydrogen is also an explosive substance, but even more so. So it [a flame] falls from the roof. It catches it on fire and then the explosion happens.

IVA DIMITROVA: And so—one moment.

[PAUSE IN RECORDING]

IVA DIMITROVA: Okay, now let's talk about the democratic transition.

INTERVIEWEE: The democratic changes, the transition.

IVA DIMITROVA: Yes. What do you remember before it happened—I know that on November 11, 1989 is when the government officially changed, but what do you remember before that? Was there something noteworthy going on?

INTERVIEWEE: Look now, during every transition, during every development in humanity, some good comes out of every period. Now whether people like it or not, for whoever is in power, it will be good. For whoever is further away from power or doesn't have any, then it won't be so good. That time was a time of development according to me. I grew up in a village where nobody had seen a tractor or a truck, there just weren't any. There is an oxcart with a wooden plough attached, and nothing else. And when it finally comes, this period in 1944, when the socialist government comes in, that is when it really is the government of the ordinary people, of the working people, of the agricultural workers. Because it makes it better for them. It gives them bread. Up until that time there wasn't bread. Do you know what it

means for there to be no bread? No, you don't know, you can't understand. And you won't understand. At that time, in [name of home village], my mother would make bread from potatoes. From potatoes, since they were harvested earlier than wheat. When the wheat was ready to harvest, I would go with her. We had one acre, you know what an acre is, of wheat. After harvesting in the middle, she would lay down a rug, and with a wooden stick, she would smack it to get the wheat to fall off. She would dry the wheat and from there—there weren't sacks, there were only [untranslatable]. And when she would put ten, fifteen kilograms and take them to the mill and grind them, she would bring them home, again on her back, and she would make a loaf of bread. There wasn't bread you could buy, do you understand. That's how it was. During that time, my father was always a soldier. He was always a reserve soldier in the army. Since his father was killed, one of the sons had to go in the army, the other had to work. That was the order of things in the family. During that time, the mother is left to take care of things. But what can one woman with three children do? When the socialist transition comes, until recently there wasn't any bread, we would go—one loaf of bread cost 90 lev. A small loaf of black bread cost 90 lev, at the time. Even a bowl of bean soup cost 100 lev. It was either 90 or 100 lev. I'm talking to you about that time.

IVA DIMITROVA: The 80s?

INTERVIEWEE: No, I'm talking about 1952 or -53. The money was exchanged during the second year. Four to one thousand. 25 lev became 1 lev. 100 to 4, this happened in 1952. After that, during the second change, what years was it, 1952 or 1962, the money was changed again by a 10-fold increase. My salary as a machine turner was initially 150 lev, then it became 1500 lev. Do you understand, but the amount of what you could buy was still the same. But there wasn't anything to buy.

SPOUSE OF INTERVIEWEE: Talk about how co-ops were founded, and how they dismantled them later.

INTERVIEWEE: Which co-ops, the agricultural ones? She already remembers that, how could she not remember? Cooperative agricultural land. That happens in 1956. The state government tries to form agricultural cooperatives. But they couldn't form a cooperative because the first ones to sign up were only the poor who didn't have land. But the rich didn't want to. And from 1944, let's say, if there is a cooperative for five years, I'm talking about the agricultural cooperative in [name of home village]. But there aren't any poor people. At that point, the state makes a decision to massively require everyone to enter into the co-op. No longer a free choice, and the wealthy people enter into it and they give up their lands to the co-op. But when they give up their land, they are given rent on it, and they are very pleased because until 1962, they were collecting rent for three years. From this property, the owner collects sacks of wheat and cheese without working.

At that time, they would give out things according to the [size of the] property you used to have, not the current [size] [note: I think this is what he is saying]. Whereas the worker would get twenty-five stotinki [note: Bulgarian coin currency] for the work day, do you understand. And finally in 1963, they abolish the rent. At that time, Anton Yugov was Prime Minister. After that, Anton Yugov is replaced, and Todor Zhivkov takes on the two roles. It was a political—And there is no more rent, and now the wealthy people, and from about 1945 they have already selected those who were older, like me. They had given

different responsibilities to the younger ones, and they had established themselves. I was older, around twenty, twenty-five. I didn't participate at all, I was a soldier. At that time, in order to get you to join the co-op, they would tell your father, either you join the co-op or you had to quit high school. You didn't—

IVA DIMITROVA: So, either in the co-op, in school, or in army training?

INTERVIEWEE: Exactly. Well, not the army training. I'm telling you that I was already in army training. I didn't participate [in the co-op]. But if I had been a high school student, and I hadn't joined the co-op, I would have had to leave high school, do you understand? It was coercive.

IVA DIMITROVA: So then, after a couple of years?

INTERVIEWEE: After time, after 1960 arrives. This is a poor country, you don't even understand what it means—you don't and you never will. Your grandfather knows what kind of poverty it was. You don't even have an idea of the kind of poverty there was until 1956 when there is finally bread. There is bread. Nobody talks about anything else but the bread. And then, after 1956, these tractors are shipped in from Russia. Russian tractors, there aren't any others. When the tractors arrive, they replace manual labor because before then, everything was dug by hand. My village, 1500 people. My father, who was sixty at that time, would come down from the rose fields, and go dig beans with his hoe. Beans were dug by hand, corn was dug by hand, everything was done by hand. And with the horse, or with [unintelligible]. And when the tractors arrive in 1950, 1960 they replaced this manual labor and people became freed from agricultural work, and so they began to industrialize. And that's why these people came here [note: I assume he is referencing VMZ]. [Name of spouse] can tell you, how they wouldn't let her—she lived in [name of village] and they wouldn't let her work at VMZ because she was needed for agricultural work. Look at how you're laughing.

IVA DIMITROVA: In order to enter the plant, you need a note from the agricultural co-op that you are free to leave?

INTERVIEWEE: No, she became a resident in Sopot. In order to start work at the plant—you can ask her.

IVA DIMITROVA: Yes, you have to live here. So, how did you respond to the changes that happened after 1989?

INTERVIEWEE: Look now, how should I say this? After 1989, I knew it would be like this.

IVA DIMITROVA: Really?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes.

IVA DIMITROVA: What kind of signs were there?

INTERVIEWEE: They were the same signs as during the period before 1944 that I lived through. And I saw what capitalism was. That's why I'm telling you know that whoever doesn't know—. At that time, the most you could hope for your children to work was a sharecropper. Do you know what sharecropper means? As a sharecropper, you go to a landowner and he takes you on as a worker, and you do all of the

work for him without him paying you a single lev. And at the end of the year you receive some kind of portion. One or two buckets of wheat, nothing else. You don't even sleep in the house, but instead with the animals. And so when [1989] comes, it won't be exactly the same way as it was before, the poverty, because now you can't feed yourself from a bucket—food that's thrown away, crudely said. You could go to the city, but you can't stay in the village because how could this way of life continue there? What can he do? He can't work twenty, thirty acres with only one mule. And when he harvests it, what will he do with it? At the moment, a kilogram of wheat is thirty stotinka. It's better if I produce three hundred kilograms from three hundred acres.

IVA DIMITROVA: So what you're saying is that it's become like how it was before 1944, that's how it began—

INTERVIEWEE: That's how it starts. It may sound a little—. When you pass by the Karachu, as we call it, it is deserted. There's nothing there. Everything is deserted, it's weeds and bramble, do you understand, there is nobody to work the land. One place has these glass things, what do you call them? And there is nothing else. There is nothing planted, no crops, a garden, vineyard. In reality, what are they waiting for? They are waiting for people like me to die off. My father's land, nobody is going to go out searching for him. Somebody is going to buy it on the cheap. And when these people die off, only then will people become landowners. They will consolidate the land, tame it, and they will buy up land on the cheap, the same as it's happening all over the world. Do you understand?

IVA DIMITROVA: What other signs were there that these kinds of changes were coming? You mentioned signs.

INTERVIEWEE: That was the change from 1944. I'm talking about us, a middle-class family from [name of birth village]. We had a thirty acre property, and now it's twenty-nine and half. From this property, we would plant eighteen acres only with wheat so that we could have enough to feed the family. The rest was left as a meadow so that you could feed your livestock. We had couple of acres of vineyards. We didn't have anything else. And we had grapes so we could make wine.

SPOUSE OF INTERVIEWEE: How many years ago was that?

INTERVIEWEE: She's asking about 1944.

IVA DIMITROVA: And after 1989, you mentioned some that there were some kind of sings that changes were coming. What were these changes?

INTERVIEWEE: The changes after 1989 were—

IVA DIMITROVA: But what suggested to you that—

INTERVIEWEE: The return of capitalism in a new state of development. Because like I told you, at that time there weren't tractors, but now there are. There is mechanization.

IVA DIMITROVA: Which year are you talking about?

INTERVIEWEE: We're talking about 1989. There are no small landowners now. Around Dobrudzha [note: agricultural region], there are people who own more than 1000 acres. [At that time, you could only have 200?] From what I've heard on the radio, there are people who have many acres of wheat. They get the wheat, export it abroad, collect the money, and the European Union still gives them 43 million dollars in subsidies.

IVA DIMITROVA: Therefore, the discrepancy between—

INTERVIEWEE: Between the ordinary, let's say, hereditary landowner, who has three hundred acres. From these three hundred acres, none are being used.

IVA DIMITROVA: So, the discrepancy becomes multiplied.

INTERVIEWEE: Somebody will buy up these three hundred acres and consolidate them towards their property, and will begin producing [more crops], just like that.

IVA DIMITROVA: Did you have any hope that things would get better after 1989, 1990? Or the opposite?

INTERVIEWEE: Look now, I didn't get that worked up over it, because I am at that age that I don't hope for some kind of improvement or whatever—

SPOUSE OF INTERVIEWEE: For you, yes, but what about for your children?

IVA DIMITROVA: Yes, what about—

INTERVIEWEE: What about my children? Capitalism isn't good. Capitalism means a lot of wealthy people and a lot of poor people. Like comparing me and your grandfather. Remember what I've told you.

IVA DIMITROVA: But did you know this when all of the changes began happening? Did you have that sense?

INTERVIEWEE: We didn't have this sense. Ask your grandfather. He didn't know where he was either. Do you get it?

IVA DIMITROVA: So you knew what was going to happen?

INTERVIEWEE: We didn't know, but the people who orchestrated these changes knew it. For me it was clear, because they first changed the money. They destroyed the poor people's money. They took it. [The rich people] exchanged their money into dollars, and then the dollar became—one dollar became three thousand lev, it obliterated your money if you had any. It became again [unintelligible]. But those who had exchanged their money into dollars, when the dollar increased in value during this period, they became richer. They could start a business, trading. The rest, they had nothing.

IVA DIMITROVA: How was the plant affected?

INTERVIEWEE: What, during these years?

IVA DIMITROVA: Yes, the plant. Were there changes that affected your job in the NEO?

INTERVIEWEE: Look now, in those years, we're talking about state-owned. Since it is state-owned, it is centralized. That is the difference between a command economy and a free-market economy. At that time, it was a planned economy. In order to be produced, it had to be planned for. This year, this and that will be manufactured. The other thing is, that when it's centralized, it's collective. The money is provided by the state. And it can move it around. So in this kind of economy, the manager goes from one place to the other and supports the different sectors as needed. Whereas now, when it becomes privatized, when the owner has begun to develop an industry, he tries to make as much profit as possible from wherever he can.

IVA DIMITROVA: So the plant didn't experience that many changes in the first couple of years? What about after that?

INTERVIEWEE: What kind of changes?

IVA DIMITROVA: I have heard that there was a period in which people were laid off, and the worker population decreased. Later on, it grew once more.

INTERVIEWEE: No, when it is state-owned, there was an massive disruption at the state-level. There was a period of time in which there was talk of closing down the plant. There were a lot of eager people who wanted to shut it down. The more dilapidated, the less valuable it was, so that somebody could buy it on the cheap. And it became a big battle. But the state came out on top again, saying we're going to keep it: the plant will be state-owned. And so it quieted down again. Whereas, the worker is just a worker, he's nothing. The worker represents a room—do you know what clay pots are? They're made from sand that is shaped into a form. When they are lined up here, and when there is wooden stick and it crashes, they all fall to pieces—That's what they represent. The people have never been a factor in any time period. The people have been the weakest link. The founding of May 1st [note: Labor Day holiday in Bulgaria] was just a fairytale. It only lasted until capitalism came into power. Once it becomes realized, the rich won't give to the poor, it just won't happen. Would you give me your money and go barefoot? Huh? (laughs)

IVA DIMITROVA: Did someone else from your family work?

INTERVIEWEE: Everybody in our family worked.

IVA DIMITROVA: In the plant?

INTERVIEWEE: In the plant, yes.

IVA DIMITROVA: Really?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, yes. There are work teams within the plant. There was work, people were paid, not a lot. A little. But in comparison with the period they had come out of, they were better off. Let me give you a concrete example. I am from [name of village], and I have a thirty acre property, and some worn out shoes. I can't do anything with thirty acres, three kids, I can't at the least feed them, do you

understand. And so when the agricultural co-ops were formed, and they created the new heavy industries, you have to go work in industry. Industrial work pays. However much it may be, it still pays. In agricultural work, you work all day and you get twenty stotinka. What can you do with twenty stotinka? Do you know what it means—? (laughs) In industrial work, you are paid five dollars for the day, in addition to ten dollar in wages. That's a big deal. And that's why the plan grew in size. But it is a state-owned company. In the years that it was growing and developing, the plant in Kazanlak, it manufactured bullets. Whereas VMZ manufactured missiles. When the war [WWII] ended, the state decided that it had to make a plant that specialized in missile production. We already said that Kazanlak manufactured bullets, whereas here [at VMZ] they manufactured missiles. And so they chose to make this plant specifically for that production. To make a missile body, you have to have the explosive, you have to have the case, you have to have this and that, and these were all manufactured here.

IVA DIMITROVA: Do you have daughters or sons?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, I have two daughters.

IVA DIMITROVA: And you said they both also worked at the plant.

INTERVIEWEE: No, only one worked there. The other didn't. One of my daughters even now works there.

IVA DIMITROVA: Where did your daughter work? Does she ask about how it used to be?

INTERVIEWEE: Which one?

IVA DIMITROVA: Your daughter that didn't work there. Is she interested in knowing how it used to be?

INTERVIEWEE: What should she be interested in? She can't take interest because she doesn't have a higher education. She doesn't have a higher education, she has technical education. She graduated with engineering from the Institute in Gabrovo. After that she married. The son-in-law is from [name of village], but they move to Plovdiv. And in Plovdiv, she finishes a mathematics degree.

SPOUSE OF INTERVIEWEE: A second degree, economics.

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, economics. Since math comes naturally to her. And she begins to work there as a—

SPOUSE OF INTERVIEWEE: Accountant.

INTERVIEWEE: And after there was such high unemployment in those years, she couldn't find a job.

IVA DIMITROVA: Which years were these?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, after 1989. Yes, she was an accountant in this plant in Plovdiv called Izgrev [translation: Sunrise]. The son-in-law was the head engineer.

IVA DIMITROVA: What do you think young people now understand about the plant's long history and what its significance is to the region? Because now when I am learning that people would come work

here from Kalofer, Klisura, and even further away. It shows it was important not only for Sopot but also for—

INTERVIEWEE: No, it was important for the district, for the country, for the region. People wouldn't only come from the Plovdiv district, but they would also come from Stara Zagora. There is a lot of manufacturing work here.

IVA DIMITROVA: Do you think that this is understood fully by the new generation?

INTERVIEWEE: They can't understand it. The new generation can't think critically.

IVA DIMITROVA: Who can't think critically?

INTERVIEWEE: The new generation.

IVA DIMITROVA: Why?

INTERVIEWEE: Because they has been left up in the air. Nobody is taking care of them, when you start off with the school, there should be mandatory primary education. High school education, higher education. Who will give it to them? Will the plant hire them? The plant isn't hiring, do you get it. At all. Now they've been talking about it, but what will happen? They can only hire someone unqualified, like how they used to do, and then train them at the technical schools. They would send them off to Russia, Czechoslovakia, Germany to study at the institutes. After that, they would come back. There was an intelligentsia here, there was development. Now there is nobody to do anything. I've already had my share, so has your grandfather.

What is left at the plant now? It used to have all of these cultural activities, like I told you, the choir, the dance group, they would go abroad, [unintelligible]. The camaraderie between people will never grow old. The country may change, the political order may change, when you go you can see [untranslatable]. Whereas, life inside the plant—I think the time is coming, because to my understanding, it's the only remaining one that is still unified. And now they will get married, and somebody will buy it up, and they will make it into whatever they want. Who will allow Russian parts to be manufactured here around so many people? [Manufacturing] may be split up into many different parts, but according to me, and I'm a God when it comes to predictions, Sopot as one whole, as a city, is gone. It will remain a historical place, like Bozhentsi. Do you know where Bozhentsi is?

IVA DIMITROVA: I have heard of it but…I think that we've passed through there.

INTERVIEWEE: There we go. What was the name of that mayor that went there?

IVA DIMITROVA: I don't know.

INTERVIEWEE: You know, you just can't remember.

SPOUSE OF INTERVIEWEE: Where? What?

INTERVIEWEE: Right here, this place in the Rodopi Mountains. [unintelligible]. One of them was Galich.

IVA DIMITROVA: I don't know what you're talking about.

INTERVIEWEE: Maybe it was your sister that went. Who went on a vacation to Galich?

IVA DIMITROVA: Okay, let's finish this interview and we can talk more about that afterwards. Before finishing up, would you like to add anything else?

INTERVIEWEE: What?

IVA DIMITROVA: Add anything.

INTERVIEWEE: To add something?

IVA DIMITROVA: Something that I haven't asked about that you want to say?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, what should I add? What can I add? I can include about how I worked…

SPOUSE OF INTERVIEWEE: End with something nice.

INTERVIEWEE: With what?

IVA DIMITROVA: You've already talked about a lot of things. I just wanted to ask if there was something new—

INTERVIEWEE: Like I told you, our region during those years, 1952, 1953, everything was deserted, and there was nothing.

SPOUSE OF INTERVIEWEE: And now?

INTERVIEWEE: Now is maybe the best period. Don't look at us. There are people here who have one hundred acres of roses. At the moment, they have a hundred and more acres of vineyards. They join together, enter into a co-op, and invest their money. And let's say, from a hundred acre vineyard from which you can pick 50 tons of roses, when you sell them at three, four lev, that's 200,000 lev. Can you even imagine what it means to make that kind of money? He [the land owner] can invest those 200,000 lev and all of sudden, the land is consolidated. Production is mechanized, the fertilization, the harvesting, all of this becomes—whereas the poor person, I've seen them in Sweden and the Netherlands how they walk with a large basket on their backs harvesting the grapes. You've seen it, right?

IVA DIMITROVA: What are you asking about?

INTERVIEWEE: How in the Netherlands they harvest the grapes with a [unintelligible]. A basket on their back.

IVA DIMITROVA: But, what are you tying this in with? With the roses?

INTERVIEWEE: Well yes, there they harvest the grapes like that, the specialized varieties separately—

IVA DIMITROVA: Okay.

INTERVIEWEE: And so—

IVA DIMITROVA: Okay, let's conclude.

INTERVIEWEE: What should we conclude with? With a song?

IVA DIMITROVA: I want to say thank you, your answers were very informative.

INTERVIEWEE: If you didn't like it, we will redo it.

[END OF RECORDING]