

**Clayton Stevens discusses his career and experiences at the Fisher Body plant
in Lansing, MI as a contracted Heating and Air conditioning worker
and as Commander of VFW Post 6132 near Fisher Body**

Doug Rademacher: We are the Fisher Body Historical Team, and today we are interviewing a neighborhood establishment. We're going to interview Clayton Stevens, and he is, uh, the commander of the VFW 6132 Post. [0:22] Clayton, would you please tell us your name and spell it?

Clayton Stevens: Clayton Stevens. C-l-a-y-t-o-n S-t-e-v-e-n-s.

Doug Rademacher: [0:36] Thank you. And where do you live? What is your address?

Clayton Stevens: Uh, 348 South Alger Street, Lansing.

Doug Rademacher: [0:46] Okay. And would you tell us a little bit about how long you've been with the Post and what is your position here?

Clayton Stevens: I'm the commander, and I've been here 16 years. I've been the commander for 13 years.

Doug Rademacher: [1:09] This tape is going to be heard and, uh, the information will be used by students. Could ya tell me – a lotta people, youngsters, may not even know what – what is the VFW?

Clayton Stevens: Uh, VFW is, uh, the VFW stands for Veterans of Foreign Wars. Uh, we help disabled veterans, uh, veterans on active duty, includin' the National Guard, and, uh, we provide, uh, guidance to them for their health insurance, uh, life insurance, and just about any, anything that they need.

Doug Rademacher: [1:44] This particular post, it has a name, and can you tell me a little bit about that?

Clayton Stevens: Uh, the name is Douglas McDonald VFW. Douglas McDonald was a, uh, pilot in World War II, and he was the one that started the post about 85 years ago.

Doug Rademacher: [2:08] Okay. Thank you. Um, and again, would you share the address of this post?

Clayton Stevens: Uh, 3104 West St. Joseph's, Lansing, Michigan.

Doug Rademacher: [2:19] How far would you say it is from the Fisher Body po-, feedback plant from here?

1 Clayton Stevens: I would say probably between a half and three-quarters of a mile.
2

3 Doug Rademacher: So fairly close.
4

5 Clayton Stevens: Yes.
6

7 Doug Rademacher: [2:34] Would you tell us about – when did you – you live in a
8 neighborhood nearby the Fisher Body plant?
9

10 Clayton Stevens: Yes I [inaudible 2:40].
11

12 Doug Rademacher: [2:41] Okay. Would you first share a little bit about that as, uh, did you
13 raise a family here?
14

15 Clayton Stevens: Yes. I have, uh, two daughters that I raised here in Lansing, um, on
16 Muskegon Street, which is just, uh, maybe a mile and a half from Fisher
17 Body.
18

19 Doug Rademacher: [2:59] Can you tell us please what did Fisher Body mean to you growing
20 up and what did you do for a living first?
21

22 Clayton Stevens: Well I was in heating and air conditioning, and we were subcontractors
23 into Fisher Body, uh, doin' the air conditioning and heating work. Uh, this
24 was back before they had their own, uh, people doing it. And, uh, we just,
25 we got a good many hours outta there.
26

27 Doug Rademacher: [3:33] So that had an impact on your livelihood...
28

29 Clayton Stevens: Oh yes.
30

31 Doug Rademacher: ...to raise your family?
32

33 Clayton Stevens: It, it had an impact on the companies that I worked for, the, uh,
34 subcontractors, like the plumbers and stuff. It had a big impact on it. So...
35

36 Doug Rademacher: [3:48] Can you tell me what it was like to grow up by an automobile
37 assembly plant? Was it, uh, did ya enjoy it? Was there things you didn't
38 like about it?
39

40 Clayton Stevens: No, I always enjoyed it. I didn't, uh, it was a factory that employed people,
41 and I never had no [problems 4:03] about nothing on it. Uh, you know,
42 you go by there and you could see the guys goin' in to work, and it was
43 part of the economy and it never bothered me.
44

45 Doug Rademacher: Okay.
46

1 Marilyn Coulter: Clayton, did you ever...
2
3 Doug Rademacher: Marilyn Coulter.
4
5 Marilyn Coulter: [4:21] Marilyn Coulter from the team. When you used to go in to work in
6 the factory on the contractor job, did you ever have any interaction with
7 any of the employees with inside the facility?
8
9 Clayton Stevens: Oh yeah. [laughter] A lot of'm.
10
11 Marilyn Coulter: [4:31] Can you tell us a little bit about that?
12
13 Clayton Stevens: The mechanics, we always, of course, you would, you would have to be
14 escorted in to where your work area was. And we never had a problem. It
15 was, uh, you know, we always talked, and I had a lotta friends in there. It
16 was in maintenance, you know, at that time.
17
18 Marilyn Coulter: [4:54] Was the line ever going while you were there?
19
20 Clayton Stevens: Oh yeah.
21
22 Marilyn Coulter: [4:58] Whadya think about watchin'm build cars?
23
24 Clayton Stevens: It was amazing because [laughter], uh, I had never been around anything
25 like that before. But it was, it was amazing how people, that [inaudible
26 5:08] cars can come down the line and people doin' different things and all
27 of a sudden a car comes down all put together [laughter] at the other end.
28 So...
29
30 Marilyn Coulter: Hm. That is [inaudible 5:19].
31
32 Doug Rademacher: Gary Judy. Didn't have a question there? Okay. I do wanna say that, uh, at
33 the start of the interview I failed to mention where we're located, um, and
34 the date. Today is February 20, 2006, and I meant, I failed to mention the
35 members of our teams. So if we go around the table real quick.
36
37 Gary Judy: Gary Judy.
38
39 Earl Nicholson Sr.: Earl Nicholson.
40
41 Cheryl McQuaid: Cheryl McQuaid.
42
43 Marilyn Coulter: Marilyn Coulter.
44
45 John Fedewa: And John Fedewa.
46

1 Doug Rademacher: And I'm Doug Rademacher. Thank you. Um, as I look in here, I see that
2 you have, uh, some military background.
3

4 Clayton Stevens: Yes.
5

6 Doug Rademacher: [5:58] Can you tell us about that?
7

8 Clayton Stevens: I was in the Navy for 10 years. Uh, you want what I done? I mean, uh...
9

10 Doug Rademacher: If you'd like to share.
11

12 Clayton Stevens: Well, uh...
13

14 Doug Rademacher: You are the commander here.
15

16 [laughter]
17

18 Clayton Stevens: I was in the last atomic bomb test, uh, in '57, and my last tour was in
19 Vietnam. And, uh, I was in – a machinist mate aboard the ship, that was
20 heating and air conditioning. I enjoyed it, but I just couldn't take another
21 10 years to retire, so I just got out. I had a wife and family and I came
22 back to Lansing. So...
23

24 Doug Rademacher: Okay.
25

26 Gary Judy: [6:40] Gary Judy. What was your last year you served in the military?
27

28 Clayton Stevens: What?
29

30 Gary Judy: [6:44] What year did you get out?
31

32 Clayton Stevens: I got out in '67. March of '67. So... But there was a period between my first
33 enlistment and second enlistment that I was here, you know, in Lansing.
34 And then, uh, you know, the gas crunch hit, remember that? And it wasn't,
35 you know, all, all the plants were pretty well down, slowed up. So I went
36 back into the military. So...
37

38 Gary Judy: [7:09] So did you, uh, did you belong to this VFW at that time when you
39 came back from the military?
40

41 Clayton Stevens: No. I belonged to 7309 in Mason. And they had some problems there and
42 a couple a the members came and asked me to come in and help'm out,
43 and I've been here ever since. So...
44

45 Gary Judy: [7:36] So you didn't – did you know any veterans from the plant, from the
46 Fisher Body plant?

1
2 Clayton Stevens: Oh yes. Tons them. Tons of them. So... Because when I came here, there
3 was, uh, they would all stop in here either on the way to work or comin'
4 back from work, you know, and the guys, you know, and the guys that was
5 on the night shift would come in because that's their day. They would have
6 a quick one and then go home and, you know, they was hangin' out all the
7 time. So...
8
9 Gary Judy: [8:03] Do any employees stand out, uh, in your mind that you, that you,
10 that you can think of from the plant that...
11
12 Clayton Stevens: Oh yeah. There was, uh, [Con Vergen, Kenny Lentz 8:13], who is still
13 with Fisher Body or wherever he's goin' next. He was with Fisher Body.
14 Uh, [Jerry Brisby 8:29]. Um, and there's a couple more but I can't...
15
16 Doug Rademacher: [8:36] Doug Rademacher. Clayton, you mentioned, uh, Kenny Lentz.
17 Have, um, is your experience with, uh, the positions you've held and the
18 military background, did you have, uh, opportunity to help any of the
19 Fisher Body employees personally with either a problem they had, uh,
20 something to do with, uh, any of their benefits or things that – were you
21 instrumental in anything that was goin' on?
22
23 Clayton Stevens: Well it was three or four of'm we helped get medical benefits, but it's been
24 quite some time back. I couldn't tell ya their names, but, uh...Kenny could.
25 I couldn't, you know, 'cause see a lotta times like Kenny would bring'm to
26 here and we would file the paperwork out. Some of'm you'll see again and
27 some of'm you won't. You know.
28
29 Doug Rademacher: Well I know that over the years I've had some wonderful meals, uh, and
30 they were prepared right here in this facility.
31
32 [throat clearing]
33
34 Clayton Stevens: Right.
35
36 Doug Rademacher: [9:44] Kenny Lentz. You mentioned his name. Could you explain, uh,
37 what I'm talking about? Could you share that with the people listening to
38 this?
39
40 Clayton Stevens: Well, on every Friday, we put out, uh, uh, two meals. [Fish is 9:54] every
41 Friday. The second meal could be hot pork, steak, or ribs. And Kenny,
42 what he does is take orders from Fisher Body and calls'm in ta us and then
43 we deliver'm to Fisher Body. And – go 'head. [laughter] And he was, uh,
44 they just supported us beyond anything I can explain, you know.
45
46 Marilyn Coulter: Clayton.

1
2Doug Rademacher: Marilyn Coulter.
3
4Marilyn Coulter: [10:26] Yeah. I just wanted to know, how did that all come about as far as
5 you deliverin' meals to Fisher Body? How did that go? Can you tell us
6 about that process? You know, when did it start, how long had you been
7 doin' it?
8
9Clayton Stevens: Oh well, for the last 16 years that I know of. Uh, how it got started, some a
10 the guys from, uh, the main plant started comin' in and askin' us if we
11 would, could prepare the meals, you know, and get'm to'm. And that's how
12 it started out. Then we – Kenny got it at Fisher Body and it just kind of
13 exploded, you know. And then we was doin' some a their Christmas
14 parties and stuff like that, they would ask us ta send food down for them.
15 So...
16
17Marilyn Coulter: [11:15] So is, am I right in understanding that you did a lot of the different
18 General Motors facilities...
19
20Clayton Stevens: Oh yeah.
21
22Marilyn Coulter: ...in the area?
23
24Clayton Stevens: We've done'm all. [laughter]
25
26Marilyn Coulter: [11:21] On an average, when you made dinners, how many dinners would
27 you say you made, like for Fisher Body?
28
29Clayton Stevens: From Fisher Body?
30
31Marilyn Coulter: [11:27] On a Friday?
32
33Clayton Stevens: Anywheres from 80 to 125.
34
35Marilyn Coulter: [11:33] And so that's for Fisher alone. So for the site in total, did you do
36 that for – did you pick different Fridays on which you fed the different
37 facilities?
38
39Clayton Stevens: No.
40
41Marilyn Coulter: [11:40] Or you did all the facilities.
42
43Clayton Stevens: We fed'm all at the same time.
44
45Marilyn Coulter: [11:43] So how many...
46

1 Clayton Stevens: At 7:00 at the main plant, we used to send 85 meals just at 7:00 at night.
2
3 Marilyn Coulter: Really.
4
5 Clayton Stevens: So...
6
7 Marilyn Coulter: [11:50] So you, both day and night shift then?
8
9 Clayton Stevens: Yep.
10
11 Marilyn Coulter: Oh [inaudible 11:54].
12
13 Clayton Stevens: No I think that was at 10 after 7 and that's when we closed the kitchen, but
14 we wouldn't close until that night, uh, shift was fed. So...
15
16 Marilyn Coulter: [Inaudible 12:06].
17
18 Gary Judy: So...
19
20 Doug Rademacher: Gary Judy.
21
22 Gary Judy: [12:11] So what impact has, has the closing of Fisher Body had on you?
23
24 Clayton Stevens: Well not only in the meals, we, we're probably losin', uh, \$150 to \$180 a
25 week, but [coughing] the thing that we miss the most that we could go to
26 the gates at, at the GM plants and sell poppies, which are for our disabled
27 veterans because, as you know now, you know, there's a lotta stores you
28 can't stand out in front and sell'm. And, uh, GM always backed us on that.
29 They never give us a complaint, and that has dropped way off. In fact,
30 before Fisher Body closed, I think they're usually sold in May, April and
31 May, and we sold over \$1600 worth, and this year it was about \$200
32 because Fisher Body was pretty well tore apart. So...
33
34 Doug Rademacher: [13:13] Do you still, uh, there's still a couple plants left open in the area.
35 So you still supply those plants?
36
37 Clayton Stevens: Uh, the, what is it? The little S...?
38
39 Interviewer: SSR truck.
40
41 Clayton Stevens: Yeah. SSR truck that we don't get orders from them. Sometimes...
42
43 [throat clearing]
44
45 Clayton Stevens: ...we'll get a order from, uh, [Stankin 13:25] plant is it?
46

1Interviewer: Yes.
2
3Clayton Stevens: In [Inaudible 13:29]?
4
5Interviewer: Mm-hm.
6
7Clayton Stevens: Yeah.
8
9Interviewer: [13:34] How about the Lansing Grand River? [Inaudible 13:31] Cadillac...
10
11Clayton Stevens: Yeah, Cadillac, uh, we're averagin' anywheres from 15 to 40 meals down
12 there on a Friday. And now last Friday we started gettin' some orders from
13 the Delta plant.
14
15Marilyn Coulter: [Inaudible 13:48].
16
17Clayton Stevens: So I don't know.
18
19Interviewer: That's great.
20
21Interviewer: Well we're hopin' to increase that for you.
22
23Doug Rademacher: [13:55] I see here that, um...
24
25 [coughing]
26
27Doug Rademacher: ...you were born in Onaway, Michigan. How long did you live there?
28
29Clayton Stevens: Uh, 16 years.
30
31Doug Rademacher: Sixteen years.
32
33Clayton Stevens: And then I come to Lansing.
34
35Doug Rademacher: [14:08] I hate ta ask, but how old are you and what...
36
37Clayton Stevens: 67.
38
39Doug Rademacher: [14:10] And what year did you leave there then in, uh...
40
41Clayton Stevens: Oh God, I don't think – 39. What's 16 to it, that would be...
42
43Interviewer: 55.
44
45Clayton Stevens: 55.
46

1 Doug Rademacher: Okay. There happens to be a place just outside of Onaway, Michigan,
2 called the Black Lake UAW Educational Center.
3

4 Clayton Stevens: Yeah.
5

6 Doug Rademacher: [14:31] Are you familiar with that at all?
7

8 Clayton Stevens: Yes.
9

10 Doug Rademacher: [14:33] Do you still go back to Onaway?
11

12 Clayton Stevens: Oh yeah.
13

14 Doug Rademacher: And, uh...
15

16 Clayton Stevens: I'm one a the guys that put the air conditioning in up there.
17

18 [laughter]
19

20 Clayton Stevens: In fact, I was there when Walter Reuther died there, and, uh, they locked
21 us right up. I mean, you know, they locked the whole placed down, but no,
22 I helped put the air conditioning in up there.
23

24 Doug Rademacher: [14:86] Now you just mentioned Walter Reuther. You say they shut it
25 down. You were working there then?
26

27 Clayton Stevens: Yeah. They locked the gates because I – I don't know what the deal was,
28 they – you know, wasn't it a plane wreck or somethin'...
29

30 Doug Rademacher: Yes.
31

32 Clayton Stevens: ...[inaudible 15:07] and...
33

34 Doug Rademacher: Yeah. Plane crash in Onaway.
35

36 Clayton Stevens: Yeah. They locked everything up. [Inaudible 15:12] in Pellston.
37

38 Interviewer: Pellston was it?
39

40 Clayton Stevens: Pellston I think is where the plane came in to. And my sister was, uh, goin'
41 with his bodyguard, and they was both, uh, but they did. They locked the
42 place down until they made sure everything was okay.
43

44 Doug Rademacher: Wow. So did the, uh, with...
45

46 [coughing]

1
2 Doug Rademacher: [15:35] ...with knowing about Onaway, Michigan, does UAW have an
3 impact up in that part of [inaudible 15:39]?
4
5 Clayton Stevens: Tremendous impact up there. [laughter] They provided jobs up there with
6 [inaudible 15:45] when I was growin' up, there wasn't nothin' up but cuttin'
7 pulpwood and cedar boughs, and I'll tell ya, [laughter] it's made a huge
8 impact up there. So...
9
10 Doug Rademacher: It's interesting that you, uh, were familiar with it...
11
12 Clayton Stevens: Right.
13
14 Doug Rademacher: ...in your childhood and you and growing up and now you're still active
15 with it...
16
17 Clayton Stevens: Right.
18
19 Doug Rademacher: ...in a different capacity...
20
21 Clayton Stevens: Right.
22
23 Doug Rademacher: ...but it's still part of your life. Marilyn Coulter.
24
25 Marilyn Coulter: Oh no, I was...
26
27 [laughter]
28
29 Marilyn Coulter: [16:14] ...but since I am back on the [inaudible 16:12], Clayton, what I
30 wanted to know is you, I'm still awed by the number of meals you used to
31 make. How many of your volun-, well how many people did it take to
32 make the meals, and did you have to pay these people or were they
33 volunteers?
34
35 Clayton Stevens: No. They were volunteers, members, would deliver. I cooked all the meals
36 and they, uh, they would get together and we would serve'm out of the
37 kitchen and the guys would deliver. But I was the only cook.
38
39 Marilyn Coulter: [16:41] You were the only cook. And so you had to get started cooking
40 like what time of day to do it [inaudible]?
41
42 Clayton Stevens: Thursday. I start cookin' on Thursday. See, what you do is like if you have
43 ribs or chicken, you pre-cook'm on Thursday.
44
45 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.
46

1 Clayton Stevens: You know, and then that way they're fresh and ready to go no Friday
2 'cause there's no way you could start out from raw meat on Friday and
3 have'm done. Now the steaks, we always do them, right, we got a 6-foot
4 grill out here and I'd be out there cookin' and they'd be bringin'm in here
5 [laughter] puttin'm in the to-go trays and... Once you get set up, it's not
6 hard to do it.
7

8 Marilyn Coulter: No. I see, as we're in the room, there's tables around here, and I see you
9 have burgers on Thursday.
10

11 Clayton Stevens: Right.
12

13 Marilyn Coulter: [17:25] So do you also serve other people in the community here?
14

15 Clayton Stevens: Oh yeah. Yes. And one thing we do do is, uh, needy families or somebody
16 that ain't got it. Uh, senior citizens and stuff, we deliver to them.
17

18 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.
19

20 Clayton Stevens: That's at no charge, no nothin'. So...
21

22 Marilyn Coulter: [17:47] Um, it was said earlier that we had a big impact on you, and that's
23 quite a big impact with us leaving right now. How are you able to make it
24 right now? How are you able to raise the funds to do the wonderful work
25 that you do?
26

27 Clayton Stevens: It's, uh, it's hard, but I'll tell you what, we've been blessed. For some
28 reason, we're skimmin' by, you know. Uh, with Cadillac, it had, had
29 Cadillac went down, we, we, we would be pretty well, you know, dead in
30 the water, really. And that's, you know, and without GM in this area, we
31 would've never made it. And that's the God's honest truth.
32

33 Marilyn Coulter: [Inaudible 18:22].
34

35 Doug Rademacher: Okay. Earl Nicholson.
36

37 Earl Nicholson Sr.: [18:28] Um, so this is, this is not considered a non-profit? I mean do you
38 pay taxes on this building, you know?
39

40 Clayton Stevens: No, we don't pay. We pay a sales tax and all other taxes but the property
41 tax. We have ta pay anywheres from 38 to \$45 for, uh, your 911 and some
42 other couple a things there that...
43

44 Earl Nicholson Sr.: [18:52] So basically most of the money that you've taken in for meals
45 you've turned around and, and...
46

1 Clayton Stevens: And donated [inaudible 18:58]...

2

3 Earl Nicholson Sr.: ...back to the community.

4

5 Clayton Stevens: ...um, the rule is you, you've gotta expend at least two-thirds of your

6 money that you take in back in community service. We have, uh, benefits

7 for [inaudible 19:11] done for, uh, Make-A-Wish, uh, individuals who

8 have had cancer and just if they're in need, we'll have a benefit for'm. We

9 get with, uh, well a lotta the guys from GM has donated, you know, an

10 item to raffle off and stuff like that, and that's how ya do it. So...

11

12 Gary Judy: [19:34] Gary Judy. Do you get any federal funds or...

13

14 Clayton Stevens: No.

15

16 Gary Judy: ...for the, from the headquarters, VFW, uh, headquarters?

17

18 Clayton Stevens: None [inaudible 19:38] like that.

19

20 Gary Judy: It's all local funds...

21

22 Clayton Stevens: It's all local supporting.

23

24 Gary Judy: So, so GM does have a very large [impact 19:45].

25

26 Clayton Stevens: A lo-, that's what I'm sayin' there, it's just, uh, GM has just been

27 outstanding, you know.

28

29 Earl Nicholson Sr.: [19:56] Earl Nicholson. Is that, is it possible that you guys would consider

30 moving closer to our factory, to the new factory in Delta? [Inaudible

31 20:03]?

32

33 Clayton Stevens: Well that would be, uh, the post is governed by the membership, and if

34 that's what the membership wanted to do, they would do it. You see what

35 I'm sayin'? But it takes the majority, you know, to vote for that. But that

36 would be up to them. Yeah. [laughter]

37

38 Doug Rademacher: [20:23] Is this, uh, Doug Rademacher. Clayton, is this particular building

39 paid off?

40

41 Clayton Stevens: Yes.

42

43 Doug Rademacher: [20:26] So it wouldn't – it would not be advantageous to put it up for sale

44 and try to find property [inaudible 20:31] out there because of the, the cost

45 of property out there is outrageous.

46

1 Clayton Stevens: Yeah. The cost of property, if you, if there ain't a, a somethin' goin' up
2 there that's related to GM, it's gonna be expensive [laughter] so... Yeah.
3

4 Doug Rademacher: [20:50] Now Clayton, you said that GM has been a great help to this, but
5 is it GM itself? Do they donate, or is it the United Auto Workers and the
6 members?
7

8 Clayton Stevens: No, I'd, that's, uh, it's the United Auto Workers. For the last two years, uh,
9 the United Wato-, Auto Workers have, uh, donated enough money through
10 the food, uh, in tips, through the food to provide the Christmas, uh, and
11 Easter, Halloween, all the parties for the kids. And that money all came
12 from the UAW members that work at GM. And like I say, then when
13 we're allowed, when we sell poppies, without'm, I mean it's a big drop.
14 You can't believe it, you know? And that's what you have to do to support
15 the Post and, uh, and the, uh, disabled vets is within poppies and donations
16 and stuff like that [inaudible 21:45]. So...
17

18 Doug Rademacher: Clayton, I've lived here in Lansing since I was five years old. Uh, that's 41
19 years now. I've driven by this place. Not being a veteran, I didn't know
20 anything about it. I see you've got like a watchtower out front...
21

22 Clayton Stevens: Yeah.
23

24 Doug Rademacher: [22:09] ...and, and I've seen rallies and things that were conducted. Can
25 you talk about what you've done as far as rallies here and do ya, have you
26 made walks on the Capitol and again, do our members participate in such
27 things?
28

29 Clayton Stevens: Your membership participate but we have never marched on the Capitol,
30 we just do our own little marches around to make people aware of it. But,
31 um, we'd like to stay away from the political side of it. You know, do it
32 and make things known what you're trying to do but don't go messin' up
33 with the political, you know, it's just not a good idea, or we don't think it
34 is. You know.
35

36 Doug Rademacher: [22:54] So just try to, uh, get public support but not, not [inaudible 22:55].
37

38 Clayton Stevens: You see now [throat clearing] one way we do it is, uh, we support, uh, the,
39 uh, Cub Scouts, uh, Little League Baseball, and everybo-, all a the people
40 that's involved in that, when they're in here, we explain everything what
41 we do and what the [tower 23:15] stands for and, uh, of course, the sign
42 out there on the Agent Orange was prevalent in Vietnam, you know, a
43 lotta guys got poisoned from it, you know, because it was sprayed on the,
44 the jungle to kill the leaves and stuff, but, uh, that's so well-known
45 anymore that, uh, you know, it pretty well speaks for itself. And you will

1 be, you will hear about Agent Orange or somethin' on the TV at least
2 twice a month, you know, and, uh...
3

4 Doug Rademacher: [23:51] Were you directly impacted with Agent Orange?
5

6 Clayton Stevens: No. Not that I'm aware of. I mean unless it come in with the helicopters or
7 somethin' like that, I wouldn't...
8

9 Doug Rademacher: You said you spoke, uh, earlier when I spoke to you to line up the
10 interview, you mentioned...
11

12 [coughing]
13

14 Doug Rademacher: [24:15] ...talking to a friend of yours that has another business in this area.
15 Uh, obviously he'll have his own story, but can you share what other
16 business owners have shared with you about the closing of the Fisher
17 plant?
18

19 Clayton Stevens: Oh you're talkin' about, uh, um...
20

21 Doug Rademacher: Gus.
22

23 Clayton Stevens: ...Gus. Yeah. Uh, Gus is a good friend of mine and he comes in here and
24 he's just, uh, he's just goin' crazy because his business has dropped off so
25 much. First he's gonna sell and then he's gonna stay open [laughter] and,
26 uh, it really has, uh – and other one, not the Shot Stop but the, uh...
27

28 Interviewer: [Inaudible 24:45].
29

30 Interviewer: What?
31

32 [coughing]
33

34 Interviewer: West [Inaudible 24:51].
35

36 Clayton Stevens: [West Haven]. They are, their business has dropped off. Uh, their b-, well,
37 and I'm sure Harry's has dropped off. Had to have dropped off. And then,
38 uh, over on Willow there, I, uh...
39

40 Interviewer: Willow [inaudible 25:08].
41

42 Clayton Stevens: Willow [Bar 25:09] what the pizza I mean, everybody in that area is just
43 devastated already. It is. It's, you know, they're havin' a hard time. So... No
44 I talked to the guy from the, uh, oh, what is it, the [inaudible 25:26]...
45

46 Interviewer: Irish Pub.

1
2Interviewer: The Irish Pub.
3
4Clayton Stevens: ...oh yeah, Irish Pub, and his business has dropped off. Everybody in this
5 area is dropped off. So...
6
7Doug Rademacher: [25:41] Well you know the Fisher plant closed and you, you grew up here,
8 what's the feeling about the talk of the plant being leveled? Does that do
9 anything to ya?
10
11Clayton Stevens: Yeah. I'll tell ya. Ta see that building come down, uh, I don't know, it's
12 taken away from the history a Lansing, honest to God. I would rather see,
13 see it renovated or something and let that building stand. But maybe,
14 maybe it'll never happen. So...I think, I think, I really think people are too
15 worried about what's gonna happen to it. It's not hurting anything there.
16 And if, it's a part a Lansing. It's, you know, it's just there.
17
18Earl Nicholson Sr.: Ahhh...
19
20Doug Rademacher: Earl Nicholson.
21
22Earl Nicholson Sr.: ...I believe, uh, that they were talking about preserving at least some part
23 of the older structure...
24
25Clayton Stevens: Yeah.
26
27Earl Nicholson Sr.: ...but I'm not completely sure of that, but that's something that I had heard.
28
29Clayton Stevens: Well I tell ya I'd like ta see that. Honest to God, I'd, it might be just me,
30 but it's just so much a Lansing. You know, when they renovated
31 downtown there on Grand, you know, the main plant, that was, you know,
32 it's just parts a Lansing that's comin' up missin' and you don't see anymore.
33 You know? And you can drive around the city and there's too much a that.
34 I mean, I don't know. I, maybe I'm crazy. I don't know.
35
36Doug Rademacher: Oh I doubt that. Clayton, Lansing...
37
38 [coughing]
39
40Doug Rademacher: [27:30] ...has been called the Capital of Quality, and you've worked inside
41 that facility helping with the air conditioning and subcontracting, do you
42 have any idea, in your opinion, why would Lansing be called the Capital
43 of Quality?
44
45Clayton Stevens: Well I think it's the UAW members that's puttin' these cars together. Uh, I
46 think anything that was derogatory about GM came from their design and

1 not the way that the, you know, the product was put together. You know,
2 such as the diesel engine. That was, you know what I mean?
3
4 Doug Rademacher: Yeah.
5
6 Clayton Stevens: And, uh, but no, the, the way the cars were assembled has always been
7 topnotch, you know.
8
9 Doug Rademacher: Earl Nicholson.
10
11 Earl Nicholson Sr.: [28:08] So what – my question is when people ask you about Lansing, I
12 mean about the cars that are made in Lansing, you know, do, do you
13 generally have good things to say about it?
14
15 Clayton Stevens: Oh yeah. Right. I do. I mean, I, if you go back the, the cars, like I said, are
16 built top quality. It might be a, an error in design or somethin' that's if
17 there's somethin' wrong with the vehicle, I mean, it's, you know...
18
19 Doug Rademacher: We appreciate that, and it's true. I believe the Lansing workforce is the
20 best on earth, and if we're given a proper product...
21
22 Interviewer: Right.
23
24 Doug Rademacher: ...and tools, we can build, we'll build and continue to build the topnotch
25 product. You mentioned the plant...
26
27 [coughing]
28
29 Doug Rademacher: ...this is Doug Rademacher. The, you said you're starting to get some
30 business at the Delta plant.
31
32 Clayton Stevens: Yeah.
33
34 Doug Rademacher: Now Fisher Body's closed and, and the workers of Fisher Body have been,
35 uh, blessed by their performance in quality and productivity to receive a
36 brand new assembly plant that's worth \$3.1 billion. And you said you're
37 starting to deliver some meals there.
38
39 Clayton Stevens: Yeah.
40
41 Doug Rademacher: [29:23] Tell me about the hopes for the future.
42
43 Clayton Stevens: Well I hope we [laughter] I hope we get back where we're takin' a hundred
44 meals out there a Friday. I – and, uh, and you know that's another thing,
45 uh, the UAW members that work at GM have just supported us so much
46 and we never had a complaint on the meals and, you know. Uh, we're

1 lookin' forward to it. And I think that, uh, if people will just slow down
2 and look at the economy in Lansing, in the next year or so you're gonna
3 see it boomin' again. I really do. So...
4

5Doug Rademacher: I think so too. Cheryl McQuaid.
6

7Cheryl McQuaid: [30:06] At one point you said that you live on South Alger Street?
8

9Clayton Stevens: Yeah.
10

11Cheryl McQuaid: [30:10] Do you live their now or did you used...
12

13Clayton Stevens: Yeah.
14

15Cheryl McQuaid: ...to live there?
16

17Clayton Stevens: It's just around the corner here.
18

19Cheryl McQuaid: Yeah. It's right near the, the plant.
20

21Clayton Stevens: Yep.
22

23Cheryl McQuaid: [30:17] Do many of your neighbors, were they GM employees or...?
24

25Clayton Stevens: Yes. There's a lot of'm. Uh, I know three of'm that ride bikes to work
26 [laughter] instead of [inaudible 30:26].
27

28Cheryl McQuaid: [30:30] Did, um, how long have you lived at that address?
29

30Clayton Stevens: Uh, 15 years.
31

32Cheryl McQuaid: Fifteen?
33

34Clayton Stevens: Hm.
35

36Cheryl McQuaid: [30:38] Has much changed in the neighborhood in the 15 years you've
37 lived there?
38

39Clayton Stevens: No, not really. No. Uh-uh. You know, ev-, everybody was, I don't know,
40 the guys worked GM and everybody else just stayed put. They wasn't, you
41 know what I mean, they didn't move. So... most a them, uh, I only know of
42 about six or eight rentals down in that area, most of'm have owned their
43 homes for years, you know.
44

45Cheryl McQuaid: [31:12] And did you notice any problems with the environment, the smells
46 in the air, the paint?

1
2 Clayton Stevens: No. And, uh, I had a brother-in-law that lived right behind the party store
3 down there right on Saginaw, and there was, you know, I never could
4 detect this odor or whatever the environment they said it was. I, and I
5 mean, I been here for years. You know, and I been around Lansing and I, I
6 never, I didn't actually know what they was talkin' about. No, honest to
7 God, I didn't.
8
9 Cheryl McQuaid: Hm.
10
11 Clayton Stevens: I, I, I couldn't...
12
13 Doug Rademacher: Marilyn Coulter.
14
15 Marilyn Coulter: [31:48] Clayton, I, I've been a life resident of Lansing also, and being in
16 Lansing, there were certain smells, certain sounds that you heard. Living
17 that close to a factory, I know that there's some who said the sound of the
18 factory was almost like the, their bedtime music or anything. Were there
19 any kind of memories that or sounds that you used to hear from the plant
20 that you used to hear from the plant that you no longer hear anymore and
21 it kinda makes it different for you?
22
23 Clayton Stevens: Yeah. Just everything. It's, you know, it's dead quiet. I mean [laughter],
24 you know? Uh, there's just not – you don't hear the trucks takin' off, you
25 know, or nothin'. It's just dead silence, you know? And when you drive by
26 it, you can still see it there, but there's, I mean it's just gone. You know?
27 It'd be like goin' to a housing project and they just have everybody move
28 out. I mean [laughter], you know, and it's sad. It really is.
29
30 Earl Nicholson Sr.: Earl Nicholson. It's like the ghost of Fisher Body. You drive by and
31 there're just so many memories there that you...
32
33 Clayton Stevens: Right. Right. And why, I, I, I do hope they save part of that because, uh,
34 God, the memories that I, I had goin' in there and workin' and **change of** [
35 **builders** 33:09] and workin' with the guys down in maintenance [laughter]
36 and, uh, then I got to know the guys when they had the rail head out there.
37 Uh, it was, it was just fun, you know, it was enjoying. So...
38
39 Doug Rademacher: [33:27] Doug Rademacher. Clayton, when you were inside, I don't know
40 how many years ago that was, but do you recall seeing robotics or did you
41 see robots and where, in the areas where you worked, did you see things
42 that were like you'd never seen before?
43
44 Clayton Stevens: No, uh, not really. Not robotics. I didn't, uh, because that was back when,
45 uh, they was comin' out with the, uh, smog controls and stuff and before

1 that. So...I think about the only robotics I seen was a welder someplace in
2 there where it would weld, but that was about it.
3
4 Doug Rademacher: Okay.
5
6 Clayton Stevens: You know, it w-, everybody was on the line puttin' it together, and I don't
7 like robots anyways [laughter].
8
9 Marilyn Coulter: [34:21] Clayton. Marilyn Coulter. Um, you lived in Lansing, and you've,
10 uh, been inside. Did you ever own any of our products, and if so, which
11 was, did you ever have one that you liked best?
12
13 Clayton Stevens: I've owned, uh, Chevys and Oldsmobiles. Um, I don't think there's any
14 particular one that I liked best. You know. Because it was all good
15 product.
16
17 Marilyn Coulter: Oh. Thank you.
18
19 Clayton Stevens: So.
20
21 Doug Rademacher: Okay. Um, go 'head. Earl.
22
23 Earl Nicholson Sr.: So I believe we're comin' up [inaudible 35:01] close to the end of the
24 interview here and we'll probly get into some of a little more personal
25 questions.
26
27 Clayton Stevens: [Inaudible 35:07].
28
29 Earl Nicholson Sr.: [35:08] Well what, what would be, what would be your saddest moment
30 concerning, you know, the Lansing area and Fisher Body for you,
31 yourself? What, what would you consider your saddest moment over the
32 last 15 years.
33
34 Clayton Stevens: You mean up to now?
35
36 Earl Nicholson Sr.: Yes.
37
38 Clayton Stevens: It's just seein' the plant done away with or, you know, closed down
39 because, uh, and the sad, what's gonna be sadder is that, like I said, if they
40 tear the building down. But no, just to see the, uh, no activity in the
41 building and no activity, you know, even the traffic around town is
42 dropped way off, you know what I mean?
43
44 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
45

1 Clayton Stevens: Uh, the truck traffic and stuff like that. Now maybe the normal people
2 don't pay attention to that...
3
4 [throat clearing]
5
6 Clayton Stevens: ...but...
7
8 Earl Nicholson Sr.: I think that in a community, I think we all feel it. And, um, and she's a
9 good old girl, that old building...
10
11 Interviewer: Yeah.
12
13 Earl Nicholson Sr.: ...and it's a shame to see her to be torn down like this.
14
15 Clayton Stevens: Right.
16
17 Earl Nicholson Sr.: [36:10] But, uh, there were a lotta really good memories to come outta
18 there. Could ya tell me what would be one a your happier moments?
19
20 Clayton Stevens: I don't, I, I don't know if there's one particular moment. I always felt good
21 and happy when I drove by there and everybody was workin', you know,
22 and, ah, and I, like I said, I used ta do work in there. I was elated when I
23 had to go over there and work, you know what I mean, 'cause it would
24 [inaudible 36:38] the camaraderie was, uh, just amazing, you know. So...
25
26 Doug Rademacher: [36:46] Doug Rademacher. Clayton, was there a particular fundraising
27 event or something that stands out above all where it was, it was such a
28 great success, uh, [that you, that you 36:55] recall that one was special?
29
30 Clayton Stevens: Yes. When we, uh, [throat clearing] had the, uh, fundraiser for Make-A-
31 Wish, uh, that was right there, uh, we put it on, but because 701 VFW is a
32 lot bigger, we put it on over there. Uh, we done all the cookin' and took
33 everything over there. But the UAW support from that was just, uh, it's
34 just amazing, you know? And then we had one veteran here that, uh, is,
35 lives up in the [U.T. 37:29], and, uh, he really had Agent Orange, you
36 know, the diseases from Agent Orange, and, uh, again, UAW members
37 and everybody got together and donated stuff and it was just a huge
38 success. Uh, so. And that's what kind a hurts now. It isn't so much the
39 business but the guys, you don't see them familiar faces much anymore,
40 you know? If they're in town, you know, the ones that's laid off and stuff
41 are, uh, they're not in town, you don't see'm as much. So...
42
43 Doug Rademacher: [38:19] Well Clayton, it's been wonderful interviewing. I'm, I'm gonna ask
44 is there anything you'd like to share that we haven't asked of you? You got
45 anything you'd like to share? Is there maybe a closing comment you'd say

1 to a student that might be reading this some day or listening to this CD?
2 What would ya say to young people? What's your closing message?
3
4 Clayton Stevens: I guess it would be to, uh, listen to these tapes and study the history a
5 Lansing and, uh, drive around some a the areas that's bein' closed down
6 now and look, uh, you know, what it was about, where it started because
7 the automobile industry has kept Lansing goin' for years and there's so
8 much history here that the young people can learn from. You know, how it
9 got started and... And the little companies that was around GM, you know,
10 that are now gone. And I guess you can call it progress, but in some cases,
11 it isn't progress, you know. Um, that's the only thing I would tell'm, ah,
12 you know, get into it and study it and see what Lansing is all about, you
13 know. We've always taken a back seat to Detroit, uh, because they got a
14 bigger port and all that stuff, but this is where it was at. The automobile,
15 bile industry was here. So.
16
17 Doug Rademacher: That's a beautiful story. I appreciate all you've done. And, uh, anybody
18 else? Well thank you very much, Clayton.
19
20 Interviewers: Thank you, Clayton.
21
22
23