

**Connie Swander discusses her career as a production worker,
skilled trades electrician, and UAW Local 602 financial secretary
at the Fisher Body plant in Lansing, MI**

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6John Fedewa: [0:15] Good morning. Today is August 31, 2005. It's approximately 9:55
7 a.m. I'm John Fedewa, part of the Fisher Body Historical Team, and I'm
8 here today to interview Connie Swander. Connie, could you please state
9 your name and spell your name?
10
11Connie Swander: My name's Connie Swander. C-o-n-n-i-e S-w-a-n-d-e-r.
12
13John Fedewa: [0:24] And your address is?
14
15Connie Swander: Oh, my address is 6313 Carlisle Highway, Charlotte, Michigan 48813, and
16 my phone number is 543-1131. Area code 517.
17
18John Fedewa: [0:37] And your gender is?
19
20Connie Swander: I'm a female.
21
22John Fedewa: Okay.
23
24Connie Swander: Last time I checked.
25
26John Fedewa: [0:44] Single? Married?
27
28Connie Swander: I'm divorced.
29
30John Fedewa: [0:47] Divorced. Okay. Any children?
31
32Connie Swander: I have 2 chil-, grown children.
33
34John Fedewa: [0:51] Okay. Uh, how 'bout your national origin?
35
36Connie Swander: It's pretty mixed.
37
38John Fedewa: [0:54] Pretty mixed? Is it...
39
40Connie Swander: Um, on my mother's side, I probably am Irish and English, and on my
41 father's side, I am Indian and, um, German. Oh, and I forgot. On my
42 mom's side also, my grandmother is, um, Jewish, so I guess I'd be Hebrew
43 too. I would – my mother's father was Irish and English and my mother's
44 mother was, uh, or is – she's still living – um, she is a Russian Jew.
45
46John Fedewa: Okay.

1
2 Connie Swander: [throat clearing]
3
4 John Fedewa: [1:26] What date did you hire in at Fisher Body?
5
6 Connie Swander: The second time that I hired in to Fisher Body when I came in on skilled
7 trades was, um, April 8, 1985. I worked here, um, once before I, uh – I
8 worked here in 1972. I hired in in May.
9
10 John Fedewa: [1:44] Okay. Where did you work at in 1972?
11
12 Connie Swander: I started out in Sanitation during a changeover and worked Sanitation
13 sweepin' the line for a while, and then I worked in 3X Trim on the small
14 line...
15
16 John Fedewa: Okay.
17
18 Connie Swander: ...settin' seats.
19
20 John Fedewa: [2:00] Okay. When did, uh – and you said you were laid off...
21
22 Connie Swander: [throat clearing] [Inaudible 2:02].
23
24 John Fedewa: ...back in '72 or...
25
26 Connie Swander: No. I was actually laid off, I guess it was the end of '72 that I got laid off.
27 Um, I was back and forth, in and out, laid off. And then I finally quit in
28 June of '73 because I had just had a baby, and it was a miserable baby and
29 nobody'd babysit and so I couldn't work and bring her in here too.
30
31 John Fedewa: [2:31] And when, so – you say you hired in the second date, which was...
32
33 Connie Swander: And that was in '85, April 8th of '85.
34
35 John Fedewa: [2:36] [throat clearing] And where did you work?
36
37 Connie Swander: Um...
38
39 John Fedewa: [2:39] The second date you hired in?
40
41 Connie Swander: Body Shop, skilled trades.
42
43 John Fedewa: [2:43] Okay. So you hired in on the skilled trades?
44
45 Connie Swander: Correct. Correct.
46

1 John Fedewa: [2:47] Okay. So where did you get your training? What – actually, what
2 skilled trade are you at?
3
4 Connie Swander: I'm an electrician, and I served my apprenticeship with Tennessee Valley
5 Authority in Muscle Shoals, Alabama.
6
7 John Fedewa: [2:58] Okay. So you got your training...
8
9 Connie Swander: [throat clearing]
10
11 John Fedewa: ...down in Alabama and then came up here?
12
13 Connie Swander: Correct.
14
15 John Fedewa: [3:05] So you were, you were in the Body Shop when you started Skilled
16 Trades?
17
18 Connie Swander: Right.
19
20 John Fedewa: [3:11] Okay. That was 1985. What was it like back in 1985 hiring in on
21 skilled trades rather than working here and then going in to skilled trades.
22 What was it like coming in from the street on skill trade?
23
24 Connie Swander: Comin' in for me, it was a real [throat clearing] shock because I had just, I
25 was just comin' off the apprenticeship program, and I had served my
26 apprenticeship doin', um, substation maintenance, which was all strictly
27 high-voltage [inaudible 3:37], um, the smallest thing we ever worked on, I
28 ever worked on was [13A KV] and, um, so I come in here and see robots
29 and other things. And 'course after I was here about half a day, I thought,
30 "What the hell am I doin' here?" I had to drag up and go back what I
31 know. But because I had a son with special needs and I couldn't get those
32 met in Alabama, um, for his education and I could here and I had already
33 shipped him up here to be with my mom to get him enrolled in school, um,
34 I came up here lookin' for a job to follow him. So I found a job here and so
35 I decided to stay, you know, stick it out and fig-, you know, add another
36 apprenticeship basically.
37
38 John Fedewa: [4:23] Okay. Were there very many women on skilled trades when you
39 hired in?
40
41 Connie Swander: There wasn't very many women then, and there isn't today.
42
43 John Fedewa: [4:30] Okay. How did you f-, how did you feel about that?
44
45 Connie Swander: Um, it's their choice, you know. It doesn't bother me. [throat clearing]
46

1 John Fedewa: [4:38] But how, okay, how do the people feel?
2

3 Connie Swander: The guys really treated me pretty good. Um, they weren't – there was a
4 few of 'em that were jerks, but that comes with the territory. But overall,
5 most of the guys were pretty decent guys. And, um, you know, the, the
6 hardest thing was is that because I had never been in industrial-type setting
7 as an electrician, there were a lotta things that I had to learn. So
8 immediately they just figured that I was another pretty face and dumb.
9 That I wasn't, you know, really trainable and that I was like a token. So it
10 took 'em a while to figure out that I, you know, knew anything. So they'd
11 shove me in some meaningless jobs, but it all worked out in the end.
12

13 John Fedewa: [5:29] Okay. Let's see here. When you hired in on skilled trades, you said
14 you were in the Body Shop.
15

16 Connie Swander: Correct.
17

18 John Fedewa: [5:33] Correct. Have you ever worked anywhere else in the plant?
19

20 Connie Swander: Um, yeah. Shortly after I was – I hired in here, they put me in Paint for 3
21 months.
22

23 John Fedewa: [5:42] Okay. Was there – that a big difference from the Body Shop, or did
24 you like workin' the Body Shop better than Paint or?
25

26 Connie Swander: Well I'd like workin' anywhere better than Paint. I don't like Paint.
27

28 John Fedewa: Okay.
29

30 Connie Swander: It stinks and it's up there where everybody sticks together. So, um, I was –
31 they – I don't know why they put me up there. They thought that they were
32 gonna give me training for Paint, but I didn't have enough seniority to hold
33 it, you know, so it was really stupid on Management's part to begin, to
34 begin with [inaudible 6:09] puttin' me up there and gettin' me trained for 3
35 months 'cause as soon as they had a shift in area of preference, I was
36 rolled right back to the Body Shop.
37

38 John Fedewa: [6:19] So were you ever laid off skilled trades?
39

40 Connie Swander: Yes. I spent 5 months on the street.
41

42 John Fedewa: [6:24] First date – what dates was your layoff?
43

44 Connie Swander: I got laid off on February 13, and I came back on July 13, same year, '87.
45

1John Fedewa: [6:32] '87? [throat clearing] Okay, what, what, what do you mean by stick
2together in Paint?
3

4Connie Swander: Paint. Sticky.
5

6John Fedewa: Just sticky or that's the people or that's...
7

8Connie Swander: No. The paint. Stick together.
9

10John Fedewa: [6:54] Oh. Sti- – oh, that's what you meant by stick together. Okay.
11[laughter] So now when you first – when you were laid off, it was only for
125 months.
13

14Connie Swander: Mm-hm.
15

16John Fedewa: Okay. So you actually pretty much had a call-back date.
17

18Connie Swander: No.
19

20John Fedewa: You did not have a call-back date.
21

22Connie Swander: No. It was – I was 1 of 40 laid off, and I was 1 of 4 that came back.
23

24John Fedewa: So you were actually 1 of a few out of that group that...
25

26Connie Swander: Eventually there were 2 more that came back...
27

28John Fedewa: [throat clearing]
29

30Connie Swander: ...[inaudible 7:11] back after me, but there were 40 of us that were laid off.
31That was – they had done all this hiring, and they were gonna have all
32these AGBs out in Trim, and it didn't work out. It was after the big change
33in '84. And, uh, they hired all these skilled trades people that they thought
34they were gonna need, and then when push came to shove, they didn't
35need'm. So they started – they laid off millwrights, um, pipefitters,
36electricians. Electricians were the last ones to go. Everybody else went
37before Christmas. And but because Management had some EITs that
38needed to be tapped out, and if they laid us off before the EITs tapped out,
39they had to lay them off and they were protectin'm because they were
40somebody's kids and some real, you know, so they kep' us until, uh,
41February 13, 13th. I think it was the 13th, or maybe it was the 14th.
42Maybe it was Valentine's Day we got laid off.
43

44John Fedewa: [8:03] Okay. Do you have any, uh, family members who have ever
45worked here?
46

1 Connie Swander: Yeah. I'm 4th generation to work here. My great-grandfather retired outta
2 this plant...
3
4 John Fedewa: [throat clearing]
5
6 Connie Swander: ...in 1952.
7
8 John Fedewa: [8:12] Okay. Explain to me what an EIT is.
9
10 Connie Swander: An EIT is, um, a person trained to be a skilled trades. They don't have the
11 schooling. It's like on-the-job training and you do it for 8 years.
12
13 John Fedewa: So that's until you actually...
14
15 Connie Swander: It's an a lieu of...
16
17 John Fedewa: I guess what I...
18
19 Connie Swander: ...an apprenticeship.
20
21 John Fedewa: [8:31] ...wanna know is what, what's the difference between EIT and a
22 journeyman?
23
24 Connie Swander: Okay.
25
26 John Fedewa: Like you said, you got your journeyman training [inaudible 8:36].
27
28 Connie Swander: An EIT is on-the-job training strictly. They might have a class or two here.
29 I'm not positive but on the outside it's strictly, um, on-the-job training
30 where an apprenticeship program is schooling and training and it's 4 years.
31 EIT is 8, takes 8 years.
32
33 John Fedewa: [9:18] What was the difference between when you hired in on a – as a line
34 worker and skilled trades? What's a major difference between that?
35
36 Connie Swander: Well the major difference I would have to say, when I worked here in
37 1972, people really took care of each other. I mean, it was absolutely a
38 whole different program than it was when I came back in '85. In '85, I
39 didn't see the camaraderie on the line that – because I worked directly with
40 the people workin' the line even bein' in skilled trades – that I did in, in,
41 um, '72. I, it was more cutthroat. Um, I'd get out there and talk to the
42 people about the union and different things, and they'd tell me what the
43 company gave'm, and I'd tell'm "bullshit, my grandma walked a picket line
44 for that. Company didn't give ya nothin' unless the union demanded it."
45 But, um, as far as comparing between skilled trades and production, it's
46 ha-, kinda hard ta compare it. I mean it's apples and oranges. I mean

1 production you're humpin' that line 24/7 so to speak and whereas skilled
2 trades you're not doin' a whole lot unless the line's broke down and then
3 you work until it works, until it's back up, you know, it's, you know,
4 otherwise you're sorta babysittin' the line. But I mean it's kinda hard to
5 compare'm.
6

7John Fedewa: [10:48] Okay. When, when did you get – ever get involved in the local
8 union?
9

10Connie Swander: Um, almost as soon as I hired in.
11

12John Fedewa: [10:55] Okay. What was your first, first part, when you took part in?
13

14Connie Swander: I just started goin' ta union meetings...
15

16John Fedewa: [throat clearing]
17

18Connie Swander: ...because that's, you know, Gramma – my grandmother was very involved
19 in the union, and so it kinda sucked me in, you know? I mean I grew up
20 bein' union. My grandfather was a teamster, and my grandmother was
21 UAW and, and my, um, uncles before they got – my one uncle got hired in
22 ta General Motors, I mean, they were construction unions. My one uncle,
23 my other uncle [inaudible 11;26] nev-, well he hired in but he left 'cause
24 he couldn't stand workin' the line. He was an ironworker, so he was in the
25 Ironworkers. I come out of a pretty much union family so it was a matter
26 of gettin' involved, you know, do something. I had teenagers. I was –
27 ended up bein' a single parent [throat clearing] right after I hired in. My
28 ex-husband now, that time husband, we split up. And so I had teenagers
29 and so it was pretty hard to, you know, take a position. So I just attended
30 union meetings and listened until the kids got old enough, and then my
31 first position as a union member was a skilled trades delegate.
32

33John Fedewa: [12:05] Okay. You say there was 4 generations of you at General Motors.
34

35Connie Swander: It was my great-grandfather, my grandmother, and then my mother and
36 my uncle, um, both worked for General Motors. Uh, my mother never
37 worked in this plant, but my uncle did. Everybody'd but my mother
38 worked in this plant. And then myself. So I'd be the 4th generation.
39

40John Fedewa: [12:29] Okay. Let's go back to – so I guess, uh, let's expand on a delegate
41 works. A skilled trades delegate.
42

43Connie Swander: Skilled trades delegate. You go to the conferences for skilled trades and
44 take in the demands, you know, you put the, you're entering the demands
45 that people want for their contract and you hear, you know, what they're

1 offering and bring back. It's pretty much like the big con-, um, Con-Con,
2 you know, it's just smaller for skilled trades. [throat clearing]
3
4 John Fedewa: [12:59] And Con-Con is what?
5
6 Connie Swander: Um, where you – everybody goes and they talk about what the new
7 national contract's gonna be about.
8
9 John Fedewa: [13:08] Okay. Now is, is, uh, where did you go from there?
10
11 Connie Swander: Um, then I became a trustee, and I was a trustee for 3 terms, which is 9
12 years, 2 of which I was the chairman of the trustees. And then I became
13 financial secretary for 1 term. I also in between there, um, was a s-, I
14 stopped bein' a skilled trades delegate and then I ran again and was
15 reelected [in there 13:39].
16
17 John Fedewa: Okay. So...
18
19 Connie Swander: I was also on committee as a alternate committee person, but I served as a
20 full-time committee person in all of this. And I can't remember all the
21 years and dates...[throat clearing]
22
23 John Fedewa: Okay.
24
25 Connie Swander: ...because of serving as a full-time committee person was because the
26 committee person that I was the alternate for, um, ran and became a
27 district shop and so, and we were second shifters and he was always on
28 day shift and so I'd always have to cover him.
29
30 John Fedewa: [14:16] So where [sighing] – okay, let's see. Where did you, uh, so you got
31 elected to those positions?
32
33 Connie Swander: Yep.
34
35 John Fedewa: [14:21] What was it like bein' a woman in one a those positions? Say as a
36 trustee or as a skilled trades delegate? Or a committee person?
37
38 Connie Swander: Um , you know, I'm not a real good one ta ask those kinda questions
39 because I try to make it not be any different, you know, and I, I don't think
40 that it was a whole lot different as far as in those positions, um, other than
41 maybe – and I don't know if this was a, because I was skilled trades or if it
42 was because I was a woman – when I was financial secretary it seemed
43 like that, I, hm, I was scrutinized a lot more than I was in ever any position
44 I ever held.
45

1John Fedewa: [15:07] Ok. So they treated you okay but, or you felt okay but they t-, they
2scrutinized ya a lot bein' in those positions?
3

4Connie Swander: No, only as financial secretary. I don't think I was scrutinized when I was
5on committee and I don't think that there was any problem when I was a
6trustee as far as [throat clearing] as bein' scrutinized. But once I became
7financial secretary, I feel like that there were a lotta people that, you know,
8I used to get information, people would come to me and say, "Well this
9person wants ta know why you're doin' this and why you're doin' that," and
10I felt like I was scrutinized more than any other prior financial secretaries
11that I've dealt with when I was a trustee.
12

13John Fedewa: [15:49] So were you the first woman financial secretary.
14

15Connie Swander: Absolutely not and I cannot tell you the woman's name that was there
16prior to me but it was enough years ago that most people today don't
17remember who it was.
18

19John Fedewa: [16:03] Okay. So let's go back to skilled trades for a minute. Uh, what
20makes skilled trades a tight-knit group?
21

22Connie Swander: You know, I can't tell ya what makes'm that way, I just know they are.
23They take care a their own. It's kinda like the police or the fire. It's like a
24little fraternity. You're part a that group and, you know...It's not as tight in
25here as it was on the outside when I worked on the outside but it's still
26there. You know, they still stick together.
27

28John Fedewa: [16:34] Is that outside work too or just as an employee of here?
29

30Connie Swander: Mostly as an employee. I mean some people become friends and chum,
31but I mean, that's like, you know, today they're talkin' about all this team
32build and all this team crap that they got and [laughter] they're puttin'
33together. And I say crap because skilled trades we were doin' that long
34before. You know, we would work as a composite crew. If the line was
35down, you worked together and you got it up. Then when it came, you
36know, the line was runnin', don't come ta me and want me to do millwright
37work or pipefitter work and me as an electrician, you know. It's time they
38do their own job. But I mean, we've always pulled together as a team...
39

40 [throat clearing]
41

42Connie Swander: ...and got the line runnin'. That's all that matters, the line ran and, you
43know, the job out the door.
44

45John Fedewa: [17:24] So was that just, they're all the trades like that or just electricians
46or the entire...?

1
2 Connie Swander: All the trades are that way.
3
4 John Fedewa: [17:33] All the trades are like that? Okay. Now you were sayin' that, uh,
5 you ever been on a strike before?
6
7 Connie Swander: Uh, hm, a mini strike that we had here when, over the wagons. I mean, I
8 walked the picket line one day. My shift.
9
10 John Fedewa: Okay.
11
12 Connie Swander: I mean that was a real mini [one 17:48]. How many days were we out?
13 Three?
14
15 John Fedewa: [17:57] So I guess, I guess I need to know what a wagon is. What wagon
16 is. You say you struck over that.
17
18 Connie Swander: The wagon was the break that the, uh...
19
20 John Fedewa: [throat clearing]
21
22 Connie Swander: ...they would bring a wagon around and you could buy, you know, edible
23 products off a this wagon that was in all the plants years ago and we held
24 ours longer than most.
25
26 John Fedewa: [18:16] And that'd been around for years?
27
28 Connie Swander: Um, as far as I know. It was here when I got here.
29
30 John Fedewa: Okay.
31
32 Connie Swander: It was here back in '72 when I was here. [laughter]
33
34 John Fedewa: [18:26] Okay. How has workin' here been good for you and your family?
35
36 Connie Swander: It's provided a good living for me. Benefits. Um, you know, all the things
37 that go with bein' a union shop.
38
39 John Fedewa: [18:41] Okay. Why don't ya, why don't ya expand on the benefits a little
40 bit?
41
42 Connie Swander: Well I've had good medical, dental, um, prescription coverage. I mean, my
43 daughter had braces. Um, just, you know, it was there. I paid out [throat
44 clearing] a couple a thousand dollars for my daughter's, the beginning a
45 my daughter's braces before I went to work here, and when I came in, I

1 had to pay some co-pays. I don't remember exactly what it amounted to. I
2 mean, she's 32 today and this was when she was 10.
3
4 [laughter]
5
6 Connie Swander: So, um, it, I, you know, I don't remember what – I had to pay some co-
7 pays, but it wasn't, you know, I put out a couple a thousand dollars prior to
8 hirin' in here because of the insurance I had and dental wasn't very, well it
9 wasn't all that good. Get cleanings.
10
11 John Fedewa: [19:39] Okay, Connie, how was – what was the difference between, say,
12 the benefits and your hourly wage in Alabama or say in the South and the
13 – when you came up here to hire in?
14
15 Connie Swander: It's pretty hard to say the South, but you can say that Alabama for me
16 'cause I worked for probably one a the biggest outfits and the most
17 prestigious as far as benefits and stuff goes would be TVA, Tennessee
18 Valley Authority's in the South. I mean, that's probably some of the best
19 jobs you can get down there. Um, so I was makin' like \$12 as I topped out
20 'cause I had just topped out for them, um, as an electrician. As a matter of
21 fact, I did, uh, a few months as [throat clearing] they pushed me into a 5th-
22 year apprenticeship because if they would have topped me out
23 immediately, they'd a had to terminate me. There was no job positions
24 opened. Um, they, uh, I was makin' \$12.40 an hour, which down there
25 was, that was really a good wage at that time.
26
27 The benefits were pretty fair for the area. I mean, you know, I had major
28 medical where I didn't have to pay anything if one of us went into the
29 hospital or emergency room. Um, doctor's office. It's pretty much
30 traditional type of insurance. Um, we went to the doctor's office, you paid
31 for that, and you had to pay, um, for your prescriptions, uh, quite a large
32 chunk. And then, um, you'd get some reimbursement. You'd hafta pay
33 for'm and then file and give ya a few dollars reimbursement on'm. So
34 when I came here, um, I got involved with the HMO program because I
35 had kids, and that was ideal because you didn't have to pay for any office
36 calls, you could just take'm in and be treated at the HMOs. At that time,
37 there was no co-pay. Today we do have a co-pay. Um, and prescriptions,
38 you know, there was only a co-pay on prescriptions. At that time, it was
39 \$2. So you got any prescription you wanted for \$2. So, um, and as far as
40 dental, the only thing I had down there for my dental was, um, they did
41 cleanings, 2 – they would do 2 cleanings a year. And, um, that was about
42 it. Everything else you had to pay for. That was about all...
43
44 [throat clearing]
45
46 Connie Swander: ...dental there was.

1
2John Fedewa: [22:02] So the difference between there and here was...
3
4Connie Swander: Was pretty...
5
6John Fedewa: [22:07] ...what'd you think the difference when you hired in here? What
7 was like the wage you hired in at here compared to there?
8
9Connie Swander: Well the wage I hired in here was \$14.90. It wasn't a horrific couple a
10 dollar difference. Almost \$3. But – or 2½. But I mean that part, the
11 benefits were better. The security was better. A course, my job there I as
12 gon-, I would be terminated. They were doin' a reconstruction and I had
13 like, with Tennessee Valley, my seniority was, um, well, 5 years. I had
14 about 5 years in and I as low seniority. I was competing with people with,
15 um, the most, the least was like 16 years seniority. See one a the, it's a
16 subsidiary of the government, and one a the things that worked against me
17 was bein' a female, um, I didn't have any military time. And you got to
18 count your military time as – toward seniority. So any, um, most all the
19 guys had had military time, so they got to use that for seniority. So that
20 gave even – then when I went on the apprenticeship program, there was 12
21 of us total that went on. There was 5 women and, um, 6 men. No, 7 men.
22 And, um, and all 7 were black. They hadta hire minorities. And so they put
23 on 7 black men and 5 women. And none a the women were black.
24
25 And, um, [throat clearing] when we ended up toppin' out, I don't know
26 what happened with any a the guys. I don't know if they got offered jobs
27 or not. But I know that outta the 5 of us, only 3 topped out. Um, 2 ended
28 up quittin' in the middle of their apprenticeship programs, and, um, 1 quit
29 immediately after toppin' out, um, because she got married. Quit. And that
30 left 2 of us. Um, Marta and I. And then I quit and came up here, so there
31 was only 1 left. It was, it was a tough job in reality, the substation
32 maintenance electrician jobs were a tough job. The one gal that did top out
33 and quit, she really couldn't do the job. They carried her, the guys had
34 pretty much carried her, uh, 'cause there was a lotta heavy work. And, um,
35 she ended up gettin' married and quittin' and she got on the program
36 because she was some boss's daughter. But, you know, uh, comin' up here,
37 it was a lot easier here than it was in the South. You know, down there,
38 um, I, I got – had a supervisor that came in that I trained under the whole
39 time in my apprenti-, well most a the whole time in the apprenticeship. I
40 was about 2 months in when he came there. And the statement, he didn't
41 make it to me, but he made it to the other guys there that he wasn't workin'
42 no niggers and no women.
43
44 [laughter]
45

1 Connie Swander: And the only black guy that we had in the crew had just topped out, and I
2 had replaced him as the apprentice. And he wasn't long and he transferred
3 to another crew. I stayed and made, made it through and topped out.
4

5 John Fedewa: [25:38] Okay. Do skilled trades respect the line workers here?
6

7 Connie Swander: For the most part, I think they do. Ya have a few that probably don't, you
8 know, but I think for the most part they do.
9

10 John Fedewa: [25:52] Okay. How 'bout, uh, friendships. Have you made any close
11 friendships working here?
12

13 Connie Swander: I've made quite a few...
14
15 [throat clearing]
16

17 Connie Swander: ...close friendships workin' here. Some people are still here and some
18 people are gone. Um, a lotta of the close friends I made are gone. Terry
19 Brummel, um, she was probably one a the first real close friends that I
20 made here. She took the first original buyout. She lives in Chicago now.
21 She works, I think, for Nabisco. Um, then there was Roy Hartwick. Um,
22 he's no longer here. He put in 15 years and quit. He's out in California now
23 workin' for a water works. Uh, we still stay in touch. And so Terry and I.
24 And then I, there's Carla Gates. And there was [Inaudible 26:37] who
25 came here, worked here 9 years. She was out of, uh, Fisher plant in Flint.
26 She since went back to the Swartz Creek plant and, uh, we still stay in
27 touch. We got, we were close friends. Um, Carla – she's still here, you
28 know, there's – I have other people here that I've been close friends with. I
29 have a couple of production people that I'm pretty close friends with. Um,
30 I – you know, yeah, I've made friends here over the years.
31

32 John Fedewa: [27:09] Okay. What's, uh, what's some a your favorite memories about the
33 plant?
34

35 Connie Swander: Um, it's pretty hard to say. There's a lot of'm. Uh, I guess one a my
36 favorite is, one of'm is Jardo. Al Jardo was an electrician here who, he was
37 an alcoholic [throat clearing] probly still is, I'm not sure. But he'd, uh,
38 drink his Texas tea in the afternoon after lunch. He worked the weld line.
39 He trained me when I – well he actually worked the arc booth. And he
40 trained me. I was on second shift, and he was on days. And, uh, trained me
41 by notes. Taught me how to build, make [whips up 27:52]. And sometimes
42 when we'd get to see each other, uh, between, you know, comin' between
43 shifts. The day shift worked long enough for us ta run into each other
44 'cause that was line time even for us at that time. And, um, he, uh, he was
45 nuts. And he'd get to drinkin' his Texas tea, and you could hear'm hollerin'

1 all over the plant. And the guys used to pull lots of pranks on him like put
2 him in a barrel and roll him down and aisle and...
3
4 [laughter]
5
6 Connie Swander: ...[laughter] just do all kinds a thing to poor ol' Al. Duct tape him. He'd
7 pass out in his chair and they'd duct tape him to his seat and he couldn't
8 get out and go home and you'd hear him yellin', "You sweet sons a
9 bitches," all over the plant. Um, anyway, one a the fondest memories I
10 have [laughter] is I was mad at the time, but when I look back at it, it was
11 a pretty big hoot. We had these 2 bosses, and we went – I went to my boss
12 on second shift and said, "I really need some more training on these MIG
13 guns, woulda send," – it was during a downtime, you know, and no
14 production was workin' – "will ya let me go to days and work with Al?"
15 And he said, "Well, not a problem." So then Monday – this was like on a
16 Friday – Monday I just showed up on days. I didn't know that I had to
17 clear it with anybody else. [laughter] My boss said it was okay, so I went.
18 I showed up here Monday morning, well Al's boss was mad. "You just
19 can't do this [inaudible 29:24]."
20
21 So instead a lettin' us work on the MIG guns for him to teach me – that
22 was back when we had the old Cincinnati's, and I don't know if any of you
23 people will remember them or not, but – and they were nasty, oily, greedy
24 robots that, that were hydraulics. And they'd have leaks and there'd be oil
25 everywhere. And all their motors and stuff were up overhead and they
26 were filthy. I mean layered. It's thick, greasy dirt. So he made Al and I
27 climb up there and take putty knives and blower hoses and scrape those
28 motors off with the putty knives, you know, and then blow'm off with the
29 blower. And we were, I mean just greasy black from head to toe. You'd
30 have to take a shower to go to lunch. And Al always went to the bar for
31 lunch and he'd always want me to go and I only went one day because
32 after he had a couple a drinks, he announced – and Al was not probly the
33 cleanest person in the world, but he was, God bless him, a wonderful...
34
35 [coughing]
36
37 Connie Swander: ...human being – he told the waitress there that "this is the only sweet son
38 of a bitch ever gave me two blow jobs in the morning" because I had to
39 blow him off with the air hose.
40
41 [laughter]
42
43 Connie Swander: I would not go to lunch with him anymore 'cause I didn't want anybody to
44 even to begin to think – she just roared and laughed, but Al was awful. But
45 anyway, um, yeah, that was a whole week but nothin' but grime. On
46 Friday in the afternoon, [throat clearing] the boss said that he could show

1 me, so we'd had, if we had our stuff up there all done, he could show me
2 some things on the MIG guns. But the problem bein' on Friday afternoon
3 was Texas tea time, and there was no time for Al to show me anything on
4 Friday afternoons. So that was probly a pretty fond memory.
5
6John Fedewa: [31:28] Okay, uh, how did you get to work?
7
8Connie Swander: Drove.
9
10John Fedewa: [31:31] Okay. Did you live close to the plant or...?
11
12Connie Swander: Never.
13
14John Fedewa: [31:35] Where did you grow up at?
15
16Connie Swander: I'm originally from out around the Charlotte area, and, um, when I came
17 back, that's where I went back to is the Charlotte area. For a while I lived
18 in Bellevue, so I drove from Bellevue, but that was too far so I moved
19 back slower to Charlotte. So I always drove, you know, in.
20
21John Fedewa: [31:49] Did you carpool or drive yourself or...?
22
23Connie Swander: No, I didn't carpool. I don't like to carpool. I wanna be able to go when I
24 wanna go.
25
26John Fedewa: [32:00] Okay. What did you do for lunch? You already expanded on some
27 a that but...
28
29Connie Swander: Well eventually mosta the time go to the bar...[laughter]
30
31John Fedewa: [laughter]
32
33Connie Swander: ...and have a few drinks with the boys and after work do that too
34 but...yeah.
35
36John Fedewa: [32:13] Okay. I think that's...okay. Connie. Ah, you said you had past
37 generations that worked at this plant. Ah, can you expand on those? Did
38 they tell you stories about the plant before you came here? Good stories,
39 bad stories? Where did they work in the plant? Ah, how they felt workin'
40 here.
41
42Connie Swander: Um, I guess probably I didn't hear a whole lotta stories. Um, my great-
43 grandfather, I don't have any idea where he worked in the plant. Him and I
44 did a lotta talkin' but I – it wasn't a time when I was old enough to
45 understand that there was different areas in the plant. I mean, I just knew
46 he worked at Fisher Body. He retired in April of 1952. He hired in right

1 after the Fisher brothers took the – it over. He [inaudible 33:02] was, it
2 had originally been the Durant plant. And, um, when it became, uh, Fisher,
3 he hired in here. He came up, he, uh, from Illinois. That's where he was
4 originally from. And, um, he had kids that, um, were up here that had
5 already grown and come up. He was older when he hired in. And I think
6 maybe, um, he had 2 daughters workin' here maybe at that time or maybe
7 they came in later, I'm not – yeah, they had to've come in later because
8 they retired years later.
9
10 But anyhow, um, he worked here and retired. I don't remember him tellin'
11 me stories much a, about the plant itself. And then at some point in the
12 40s, which was before me, my grandmother, in the late 40s, my
13 grandmother hired in here. And she was a real hard worker and she really
14 didn't talk about things that happened here in the plant, stories. I mean,
15 she'd have to talk to her directly, but it wasn't somethin' that she told me
16 about, you know, other than that I knew that she did her job. She was very
17 meticulous about doin' her job and very proud that she did her job. And I
18 know when she got ready to retire in '79, they asked, the supervision asked
19 her not to retire and she was a good...
20
21 [throat clearing]
22
23 Connie Swander: ...uh, intermittent relief person at that time. I guess they, you know, didn't
24 want to lose her. Then my uncle originally, um, worked at Plant 2, hired in
25 in 1960. And then when Plant 2 went through all of its changes, he ended
26 up here at this plant, at Fisher, and he retired outta here with about 40
27 years total with, between Plant 2 and here. He was an electrician. And then
28 I hired in in '85. He came over here in '83, and I came in in '85. So the
29 only time from, I think from the beginning of the plant, pretty close to the
30 beginning of the plant opening up that there hasn't been somebody in my
31 family working was from '79 when my grandmother retired till '83 when
32 my uncle came here from Plant 2.
33
34 John Fedewa: [35:17] Okay. What was your grandmother's job?
35
36 Connie Swander: She was, she worked in Paint, uh, in [Bond Right 35:22]. That was a part
37 of Paint back then. And, um, I don't know what all she did except for I
38 know when she retired that she was an intermittent relief person at the
39 time of her retirement. I'm sure that she did many other jobs prior to
40 getting there, putting 30 years in 'cause she retired with 30 years.
41
42 John Fedewa: [35:42] Okay. So what is Bond Right?
43
44 Connie Swander: You know, I can't begin to tell ya. It's just part a Paint. I didn't work it and
45 sh-, I never ask her. So...
46

1 [throat clearing]
2
3 Connie Swander: ...you'll have to ask her that.
4
5 John Fedewa: [35:54] Okay. What is, what is intermittent relief?
6
7 Connie Swander: That's the person that gave you your can calls if you had to go to the
8 bathroom or you had to go on medical or, um, if you needed to be took in
9 the foreman's office or t'anything, you know, that was the person that, you
10 know, got you your gloves and took care a those kinda things. Did relief.
11
12 John Fedewa: [36:15] Okay. Would you want your children to work for GM?
13
14 Connie Swander: Sure, if they want to. My son would love to work for General Motors. My
15 daughter not so much. She's not – she would work for'm but she's not
16 really factory oriented. But my son would – that's all he ever talked about
17 is he wanted to grow up and work for General Motors.
18
19 John Fedewa: [36:36] Okay. Let's – who's your favorite boss?
20
21 Connie Swander: Oh gosh, I don't really know that I had a favorite boss. [throat clearing]
22 I've always been able to work fairly well with most people and so most a
23 my bosses I got along pretty good with. Um, I really liked Dick [Metcoff
24 36:55] and – in the end; I didn't like him so much in the very beginning.
25 Um, Doug Patrick. Most people didn't like Doug Patrick. He's like the
26 little, you know, big pain in the butt. But I found out how to manip-, you
27 know, get around him and manipulate around him, and he ended up bein' a
28 good boss for me. Um, I don't know, I just, I, [Frizz, Carl Taborski 37:17].
29 He was a great boss, you know, I, I, you know, I don't know. I can't really
30 pinpoint one boss that was the best...
31
32 [throat clearing]
33
34 Connie Swander: ...that I was workin' for the best, you know? They each have their plusses
35 and their minuses. [laughter]
36
37 [laughter]
38
39 John Fedewa: [37:38] Okay. I guess if you can't pick a best boss, who would you say
40 your worst boss, one of your worst bosses?
41
42 Connie Swander: Um, Pat Finch. [Inaudible 37:45]. And I didn't really dislike him, but he
43 made me mad. He lied on me. [laughter] Between him and [Leslie Gladdy
44 37:52]. Um, bad story. I can tell ya the story. I, um, worked line time.
45 Most a the skilled trades was on three 8-hour shifts. And I always ended
46 up in an area where I was on line time. Well I was havin' problems with

1 the kids at home, and I really needed to be on 3 till 11:30. I had to be on
2 second shift from 3 to 11:30. That way I could be home in time to make
3 sure they were in bed by at least midnight and the house was cleared out.
4 So I'd been off on, um, medical leave because I hurt my leg in here. I got
5 caught on one a the overhead carriers, and I'd been out 3½ months waitin'
6 for it to heal. And I'd lost my job and the art booth because they called me,
7 a boss, one a the boss I had called me and said that so and so would really
8 like that job.
9

10 And, um, they were, you know, I coulda had it when I came back, and I
11 told'm no, if they wanted it to go ahead and I would go to the, um, if, in
12 classification, everybody hated Underbody, I would go to Underbody
13 instead of makin' him go to Underbody. So when I came back, I went to
14 Underbody. That gave me the 3 to 11:30 that I needed and wanted. And I
15 was out there for a little while and, um, probably the one person that
16 worked for General Motors here at Fisher Body as an electrician that I
17 absolutely couldn't get along with was Charlie Jones, and we did not like
18 each other and, and we ended up bein' partners. So it's not a functional
19 situation. And he would go to Pat Finch and tell Pat Finch all kinds of lies
20 about me. And of course, [throat clearing] I would get mad and because he
21 was a rotten partner, I would do rotten things. And if he wanted to say the,
22 lie and say I was doin' these things, I'd live up to'm, and so I'd do'm just
23 for him. [laughter]
24

25 [throat clearing]
26

27 Connie Swander:

28 So they needed somebody back on the front ends, and Leslie came to Pat
29 and wanted me for the front ends 'cause they knew I knew, that's where I
30 had been for a long time and I knew the jobs, I knew how to make the art
31 booth run, I could run the MIG welders and all that kinda stuff. So she
32 went to Pat and asked him and Pat said, "Yeah, you can have her." So he
33 come out and told me that I had to report to the front end sheet metal on
34 line time at such and such a time, and I went and told him no that he
35 couldn't do that to me that, you know, I needed to stay here in the
36 Underbody and would he please just leave me here. And, um, between
37 him and Leslie, they lied and said no, but I really wanted to be, um, on, in
38 the front end sheet metals. And so I was angry and I said some things that
39 were pretty colorful to Pat, such as, "if I had my very own dick, you
40 wouldn't do this to me." And, um, called Committee on him. So the guys
41 the next day brought in, hmm, a dildo for me to hang out my coveralls and
42 go in and tell'm that I had my own dick could I stay now.
43

44 But I didn't do that [throat clearing] and I ended up back on the front ends
45 on, on, uh, line time even though I went over his head to a higher boss and
46 talked to'm and tried to get it stopped, and I couldn't get anything done
through Committee because they had...

1
2 [throat clearing]
3
4 Connie Swander: ...the right to put ya wherever they want ya as long as you're in the area
5 that you're in for, which I was, Body Shop. So lo and behold, I went back
6 on line time and, uh, made it the best I could and survived it. But after
7 that, I had little respect for Pat Finch 'cause he lies. You know, I did not, I
8 told him I wanted to be on 3 to 11:30, not on line time.
9
10 [throat clearing]
11
12 John Fedewa: [41:47] Okay. Uh, let me ask you, what, what was your most appreciated
13 bargained benefit in all the time you've worked here?
14
15 Connie Swander: Most appreciated bargained benefit. Oh there's so many of'm. Um, the
16 benefits that I get, the benefits, you know, that, uh, I utilize all the time.
17 Medical benefits. I, I, you know, how do I pick from that? And pay, you
18 know, I make a great wage. I mean who woulda ever thought that a poor
19 white girl from the wrong side a the tracks would make this kinda money
20 someday? [laughter]
21
22 John Fedewa: [42:28] Well you're lookin' at just the whole package. There's a not a
23 particular one that you utilized over the years?
24
25 Connie Swander: Yeah, I mean without the...
26
27 John Fedewa: [42:33] [Inaudible] one a the best ones.
28
29 Connie Swander: Yeah. I mean...
30
31 John Fedewa: [throat clearing]
32
33 Connie Swander: ...it's, they're all great. You know, the UAW is – what I don't like, I can
34 tell ya what I don't like that the, that the UAW negotiated for us is January
35 7, 1985 date.
36
37 John Fedewa: [42:55] Okay and, and...
38
39 Connie Swander: Well that's pushed me down the seniority list many times because I hired
40 in in April of '85, so anybody that comes here, brings January 7th of '85
41 with'm, they go ahead of me in seniority. I mean I just, it's kinda funny. I
42 hired in, um, in '85 and I was somewhere around I don't know [well 43:16]
43 I was on the bottom of the pack for a long time, but when I figured it out
44 that, um, after I had been here like nearly 20 years, which I've got, I'm
45 goin' on 21 years now, um, I was still in the same position on the seniority
46 list because even though people have retired and whatever and I've been

1 here longer, because of that January '85 date, people comin' from other
2 plants pushed, just held me right there. I didn't really go up or down. And
3 in retrospect, with the amount of electricians we had when I hired in to the
4 amount of the electricians that we have today, I've held just about the
5 same spot. Finally, I've started to move a little bit more, I noticed when I
6 seen the last seniority list. But for many years, I held same position. I
7 couldn't move. And they usedta tell us that it would take 10 years for that
8 January 7th of '85 date to go away, well that's bull crap. It takes 30 when
9 that date becomes non-existent.

10

11 [laughter]

12

13Connie Swander: So yeah, that's the only one I can...

14

15 [throat clearing]

16

17Connie Swander: ...really say that I, I think sucked.

18

19John Fedewa: [44:24] Okay. Okay. You said, uh, you were on medical leave for a while.
20 How were you treated when you returned to the plant?

21

22Connie Swander: I was treated fine. Nobody gave me any problems. They just brought me
23 back in, put me back to work.

24

25John Fedewa: [44:40] So you didn't have any trouble from anyone comin' back from
26 leave?

27

28Connie Swander: No.

29

30John Fedewa: Okay.

31

32Connie Swander: I didn't have any trouble gettin' my workman's comp either.

33

34 [throat clearing]

35

36John Fedewa: [44:50] Okay. Ah, let's talk a little bit about safety. You were injured as a
37 skilled trades person. How has the safety of skilled trades gotten better
38 over the years?

39

40Connie Swander: Well sometimes it's so good you can't hardly troubleshoot your jobs
41 [laughter].

42

43John Fedewa: [45:04] Well I'm sayin' say...

44

45Connie Swander: [Inaudible 45:07] want ya to lock things out, you gotta be able to have it
46 operate in order to know what it's doin' wrong.

1
2John Fedewa: [45:15] Say from 1985 till now.
3
4Connie Swander: Oh it's horrendously more. Like I said, sometimes it almost hinders you
5 from doin' your job 'cause they want ya to lock everything out. Well how
6 are you gonna be able to, to see what's wrong if you can't make it operate?
7 If you can't see the operation, be in there checkin' things, you know? Ya
8 can't hardly tell what's wrong. That's why sometimes it...
9
10John Fedewa: [45:42] Okay. Explain what a lock-out procedure is.
11
12Connie Swander: Where you lock the machine down where it doesn't do anything.
13
14John Fedewa: [45:49] Okay.
15
16 [throat clearing]
17
18Connie Swander: Take the air off a it. Take the electricity off it. Hydraulic. Whatever.
19 Power. Whatever kinda power that makes it move. You lock it down so it
20 doesn't move.
21
22 [throat clearing]
23
24John Fedewa: [46:04] Okay. What do you hope for in the future?
25
26Connie Swander: Um, I hope that General Motors continues to stay in business and that the
27 UAW continues to represent the people. I hope that, um, you know, that
28 we can keep jobs here in Lansing and that somebody else in my family'll
29 get ta come to work here, like my son. You know, I mean, is that what
30 you're lookin' for here?
31
32John Fedewa: Yeah.
33
34
35/kj