

**Karel (Frizz) Taborsky discusses his career as a UAW skilled
trades electrician and a GM maintenance manager
at the Fisher Body plant in Lansing, MI**

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5
6 Doug Rademacher: [laughter] Hello. This is the Lansing Fisher Body Historical Team. I'm
7 Doug Rademacher. Today is Ape-...
8
9 Female: March...
10
11 Doug Rademacher: March...
12
13 Female: ...15...
14
15 Doug Rademacher: ...15, 2006. The time is about 10 minutes after 1 in the afternoon, and we
16 are at the UAW Local 602 Frank Dryer Greenhouse. First, we'll introduce
17 the team.
18
19 Cheryl McQuaid: Cheryl McQuaid.
20
21 John Fedewa: John Fedewa.
22
23 Gary Judy: Gary Judy.
24
25 Earl Nicholson: Earl Nicholson.
26
27 Josefina Martinez: Josefina Martinez.
28
29 Jerri Smith: Jerri Smith.
30
31 Doug Rademacher: And Doug Rademacher. Today we are interviewing Karel Taborsky.
32 [0:37] [tsk] Would you please state your name and spell it for the record?
33
34 Karel Taborsky: My name is Karel Frank Taborsky II, spelled K-A-R-E-L, Frank as normal
35 people spell it, Taborsky T-A-B-O-R-S-K-Y.
36
37 Doug Rademacher: [0:52] [tsk] And, uh, what is your address?
38
39 Karel Taborsky: My current address is 2311 Cumberland Road, Lansing, Michigan.
40
41 Doug Rademacher: [0:59] [tsk] Are you married?
42
43 Karel Taborsky: No.
44
45 Doug Rademacher: [1:02] Do you have any children?
46
47 Karel Taborsky: Yes.

1
2 Doug Rademacher: [1:05] And what do you have, sir?
3
4 Karel Taborsky: I have a 26-year-old daughter from a previous marriage.
5
6 [sniffing]
7
8 Doug Rademacher: [1:13] Where were you born and raised?
9
10 Karel Taborsky: I was born in Flint, Michigan, and I lived there probably for 3 years, uh,
11 lived up on Pingree Street by the old brewery by, uh, I-75 there. I don't
12 know if you guys are familiar with that, but we lived back in that, that
13 neighborhood area. My grandfather had a store there and lived there for,
14 for a while. And then we moved to Ypsilanti, Michigan, and where my
15 father attended Eastern Michigan – not – no, that's Michigan State Normal
16 College at the time. And we lived there for, oh geez, till I was about 4 or 5
17 and then we moved to Holt for a half a year, and I attended school there. I
18 don't remember what – the Elliott School. And then we moved over on,
19 uh, Butler Street, 320 North Butler, and lived there for 4 years with my
20 Dad taught at Sexton High School. I attended Tennessee Street School
21 until the 4th grade. Then we moved over to the house, uh, on, uh, South
22 Tennessee Street, uh, between the summers of 4th and 5th grade and, uh,
23 that's where I spent a lotta time until I took off on my own after the
24 service got ahold of me. And then I moved to my cur-, well, I actually
25 lived several places out in East Lansing and all the good party, party spots
26 to live. And that's where I lived and then I, uh, uh, bought a farm. Well,
27 actually, uh, Ho-, on, uh, uh, [mount 2:45]...
28
29 Doug Rademacher: [Holmes 2:46].
30
31 Karel Taborsky: ...yeah, [Holmes 2:47] [cheap]. Holmes Road, where we, uh, friend a
32 mine, Doug Rademacher, helped me work on my house and we rebuilt
33 that. And then I moved – then I, uh, got married and bought a farm all on
34 in Bath and was there until I got divorced. And then I moved to the, uh,
35 Lansing Towers Apartments, lived there for seven years. And then I
36 moved over onto Cumberland Road where I've been since, for the last 10,
37 15 years. I don't know. Time flies when you get old.
38
39 Doug Rademacher: Thank you. [3:16] Um, were you in the military?
40
41 Karel Taborsky: Yes, I was. I was a draftee, uh, as I, as I told one of the gentlemen here
42 today that I don't go anywhere unless I'm invited and Uncle Sam was
43 happy to invite me. [laughter] I went, uh, I went, uh, down to [coughing]
44 Fort Knox for my basic training and, uh, and then I was, uh, I went to, uh
45 – and for my advanced [inaudible 3:39] training, I ended up in Fort Sill,
46 Oklahoma, as an artillery trainee. And, uh, got my month of leave and

1 then I went over to Vietnam, and of course, they put me in a, a target
2 acquisition section, counter mortar, counter rocket radar. And I had a lotta
3 fun there. I extended so I wouldn't have to spend any more time in the
4 service. I spent 14 months over there, probably no more than, no more
5 than a mile off the Cambodian border most a the time, on the Highway 13.
6 Uh, wherever, wherever the, wherever stuff was happening, that's where
7 they put the radar section, um, to, you know, [tsk] do our thing and, and
8 locate the, uh, mortars and rockets that were being fired at us, etc., etc.
9 Engaged in a lot of, lotta combat, awful lotta combat. Probly, probly 60 to
10 70, uh, [tsk] times in that, uh, particular time, and many times for 2 to 3
11 days. Uh, it was, s-, it was very frightening at the time but, you know,
12 [stammering] as, as minds do, they, uh, they just, uh, uh, forget the bad
13 and you remember the fun parts, which you used to do, go over the mortar
14 platoon, have some fun, you know, this kinda stuff that we won't talk
15 about on tape.
16

17 Doug Rademacher: Okay. Um, you shared about your grandfather in Flint, had a store. [5:02]
18 What did your parents do for a living?
19

20 Karel Taborsky: Well, my mother was a housewife and my, my father, uh, was a very
21 highly respected, uh, instructor right down here most a the time at J.W.
22 Sexton High School. He, uh, he taught automo- shop, auto shop, uh,
23 general mechanics and metal shop. And there, doing that, uh, and I'm – in
24 essence as a child, I spent a lot of time workin' with my dad over at the
25 school when he'd be gradin' papers and I'd be runnin' the machines. Uh,
26 I, I, could run just about any machine there, the lathe, mills and everything
27 by the time I was seven or eight years old, which gave me a, a great
28 appreciation for mechanical things.
29

30 Doug Rademacher: [5:39] Now, just to put some feeling into it, where exactly – how, how,
31 close was your parent's home to the Fisher Body Plant?
32

33 Karel Taborsky: Well...

34
35 Doug Rademacher: [5:48] And where was the, uh, Sexton High School you speak of?
36 [coughing]
37

38 Karel Taborsky: Sexton High School sat, uh, just to the, the extreme, uh, south end of
39 Fisher Body. In fact, the, one of the fields that we used for like football
40 and, and the track field, uh, faced, uh, well, building 3X. But that used to
41 be a parking lot before they put that stuff in. I watched that bein' built. Uh,
42 my parent's house was, um, probably less than a half a block from the
43 plant proper. I used to kind of joke that I had to – when I lived at home
44 and worked at the plant, that I had – I walked further from the front door
45 of the plant to where I worked in the plant than I did from my house to the
46 front door of the plant. [laughter]

1
2 Doug Rademacher: [6:35] Could you share, Karel, would you share a little bit about growing
3 up next to an assembly plant?
4
5 Karel Taborsky: Well, it was interesting. Uh, we, we, used to watch the guys back before
6 they blanked off all the windows and we used to harass'm and pick on'm a
7 little bit. Uh, Fisher Body was always a, a, tremendous neighbor, uh, for,
8 for our neighborhood. My, my mom, uh, quite a forceful person. There
9 was problems back in the old days because the, the [Bonderite 7:02] and
10 the paints ovens and the paint shop was on the, uh – it would be the, the
11 east side of the plant. And there was a lot of paint fumes from the
12 weekends, you know, uh, from the stale water that, that they used to, uh,
13 c-, collect the overspray of the paint. And when they'd start the ovens up,
14 it was, uh, probly one of the more interesting smells you'll ever smell, uh,
15 kind of a cross between a dead horse and a rotten egg. I mean literally.
16 And my mom would call and then they would, they'd come to some sort
17 of remediation, uh, for it.
18
19 Um, they were always, always very solicitous of the neighbors, well, if
20 they had a problem. Um, I don't understand why people, you know, uh,
21 move next door to Fisher or, or, uh, whatever we're called now, and then
22 complain about them, you know. If you move next door to a pig farm, it's
23 gonna smell, so don't move next door to a pig farm. But Fisher Body's not
24 a pig farm. They – in fact, when they built the new part of the plant [tsk],
25 I, I, went through some records lookin' for some stuff and, uh, GM
26 actually spent \$250,000 to build a model of the plant as it would be with a
27 new paint shop, with a new paint shop and wind tunnel tested it to check
28 for, for, for inversion and stuff like that. So, this, this, uh, the fumes and
29 whatever wouldn't, wouldn't affect the neighborhood.
30
31 Doug Rademacher: [8:28] Do you have any stories that you remember of the trains, of the
32 trucks – um, any of the things that you did around the plant and, uh,
33 maybe there was a somethin' that resembled a coach out front?
34
35 Karel Taborsky: There was – out in front of the – and that's somethin' that always just
36 fascinated me as a child – was that, uh, they used to have the, uh – what do
37 they call that, [guys 8:49]? Well, anyway, they used to – they had a large
38 Fisher Body floral display, if you wanna call it, with the Fisher Body
39 coach right out on the – what would be the, the north, northeast corner. It
40 was a large thing. Uh, the guy that – the gardener – they actually had a, a
41 full-time gardener in those days. They'd lay him off during the winter and
42 he worked during the summer taking care of the – it's almost like topiary.
43 Uh, he'd, he'd, he'd clip the, clip the f-, uh, flowers and it was just, it was
44 just fascinating. I would just, used go over there and look at it all the time.
45 It was, was pretty cool I thought.
46

1 Doug Rademacher: Um, there's a place called Harry's Bar, Harry's Place...
2
3 Karel Taborsky: Yeah.
4
5 Doug Rademacher: [9:31] ...did that, was that an intricate part of your growing up at all?
6
7 Karel Taborsky: Well, it was kinda fun because – I don't remember if it was Mario or Art,
8 but old la-, old lady – we used to call her Mrs. Harry and Mr. Harry, uh,
9 used to live, used to live on the second floor there. And as kids, we used to
10 play, you know, play baseball in the vacant lot, which would be to the si-,
11 it'd be to the east of the plant. And we used to hit the balls up on the top of
12 his roof and he, of course, he didn't really, he really didn't care for that too
13 much. And we also used to pick up the beer bottles that the, uh, that the
14 factory folks would set – when they'd, they'd just leave in the parkin' lot.
15 And then, you know, two cents was two cents back then. And we kids
16 would go get and of-, quite often get chased out of there because we, we
17 were running off with their money in essence. And that was always big
18 fun, you know.
19
20 Doug Rademacher: Yes, I do. [laughter]
21
22 Karel Taborsky: Yes, you do.
23
24 Doug Rademacher: Um, okay, well, we'll move on. [10:29] Why did you hire into Fisher
25 Body?
26
27 Karel Taborsky: Well, I got outta the service and I went back to my job at Daimler Tool
28 and Die. And at that time, uh, the tool and die industry, uh, uh – in fact the
29 American auto industry was really startin' to, to feel the pinch of the, the
30 early '70s – the uh, uh, gasoline and all a this stuff. Plus, the
31 manufacturing methods were, were, uh, changing a lot. There was a lot
32 more computer stuff goin' on, uh, very, very primitive stuff. So anyway,
33 basically, I got [coughing] laid off. And so, I went drag racing. That's the
34 first thing you do when you, when you go, when you get laid off. A couple
35 friends and I, uh, we put together a, a race car, a '69 Camaro 427
36 automatic. And we went what we thought was pretty professional racing.
37 We did that for, oh, couple, th-, [inaudible 11:31] – well, actually the
38 whole thing was about five years. But in the interim, that – my
39 unemployment ran out. And my dad bein' a teacher brought home a piece
40 of paper and he says – uh, he told me basically, "Boy," he says, "you take
41 this test. You're gonna get a job. You're not goin' racin' for a living." So I
42 went over and took the test because I was told to. 'Cause I've always been
43 a very good child. [laughter] And, um, so I didn't worry about it. I went
44 racin'.
45

1 Well, the lady next door to me, uh, uh, Elizabeth Curry, she used to be the
2 plant controller. And so, fair-, my folks were pretty friendly with her. And
3 she came over one day and she says, "You know you better get Karel over
4 there to get his apprenticeship, uh, you know, check on his apprenticeship
5 because they can't put any apprentices until – on until he shows up." Well,
6 you know, that piqued my interest, so I went over and I talked to, uh, [R.J.
7 Cushman 12:29], who was the apprentice coordinator at the time. And I,
8 uh, uh – he and I had a conversation. He was very glad to see me because
9 at the time, you could sign up for all of the trades, whatever trade you
10 wanted. And I didn't, I didn't sign up for any of 'm. But I had scored high
11 enough on the apprenticeship test that by the, uh, by the process by which
12 they selected apprentices, me being the highest, I could have any
13 apprenticeship I wanted. So they couldn't hire any in-plant people until
14 they put me someplace. So I got there and I said – they asked me what I
15 wanted to be. I said, "I wanna be a tool and die maker." And he says,
16 "Well, we don't have that." I says, "Well, what's the closest?" He says, "A
17 tool maker." And I said, "Well, I'll be a toolmaker."

18
19 And they said, "Well, you don't wanna be a toolmaker because we got
20 toolmaker apprentices laid off. One's been laid off for two years." And I
21 says, "Well, fine. [throat clearing] What's a millwright?" I figured a
22 millwright ran a mill. Because I had a, a, a, tool and die background, I ran
23 a lotta machines. And uh, one of the machines I ran was a mill, so I
24 figured they ran a mill. He says, "No, no, those guys are lift and carry
25 basically and, uh, weld and move stuff around. I says, "Well, what one
26 pays the most?" And they said an electrician. And I says, "I'll be an
27 electrician." And that's how I got in.

28
29 Doug Rademacher: Okay. That's interesting. [13:49] Uh, when did you hire in to Fisher
30 Body?

31
32 Karel Taborsky: The 6th of July in 1971. And I knew that I was gonna like this job 'cause I
33 hired in, worked for a week and got laid off for a week. [laughter] And I
34 thought this was gonna be the best job in the world, workin' half time
35 because that wouldn't interfere with my racin' activities. But later I found
36 out it was just a way to, to the 6, to the 4 guys who came on as electricians
37 with me, so they could have a date of entry earlier than mine. Because
38 they were plant people. And that didn't bother me a bit. So that's, that's
39 why, that's why my seniority date's the way it is.

40
41 Doug Rademacher: Okay. [14:30] Did you have any other family members that worked in
42 Fisher Body?

43
44 Karel Taborsky: No, not that I'm aware of. My dad worked for Kaiser-Frazer, but that
45 doesn't count, does it?
46

1 Doug Rademacher: Not at this point, but...
2
3 Karel Taborsky: Okay.
4
5 Doug Rademacher: ...it's important. [14:44] Um, how old were you when you hired into the
6 plant?
7
8 Karel Taborsky: I don't know. How old am I now? I think I was, I think I was 23, yeah 23.
9 I woulda been, I woulda been, I think I woulda been 23 or 24 on that next
10 October after that July that I hired in.
11
12 Doug Rademacher: [15:05] And what shift and department did you hire into?
13
14 Karel Taborsky: Well, the maintenance department, hired in right off the street as an
15 apprentice, as I've said, as an electrician. And, uh, [coughing] I started out
16 in the, in this – well, what we call now the central maintenance area.
17 [sniffing] Uh, but back then, basically, uh, all of the trades, with the
18 exception of the [WEMARs 15:26] that worked out in the body shop –
19 that's a welder, welder equipment maintenance and repair. They worked
20 out in the body shop and the rest of the calls, uh, were taken, uh – any
21 trouble calls were taken from the central shop. You know, [inaudible
22 15:38], like a bunch of, uh, Keystone Cops and hang off [throat clearing]
23 the side of it and go off and take care of the, take care of whatever the
24 problems was, were.
25
26 Doug Rademacher: Well, you seem like a very qualified guy...
27
28 Karel Taborsky: Oh, I'm qualified.
29
30 Doug Rademacher: ...for what you, uh – you took the test. You were tops in the scoring and
31 you got to pick your, your choice. [15:58] Now, tell me, can you
32 remember your first day on the job? And what was it like knowing that
33 you grew up across the street? You walk in this building. Where'd they
34 take ya? What'd they do with ya that day?
35
36 Karel Taborsky: Well, another fella and I – Kenny Eichelberger. Kenny Eichelberger hired
37 in off the street as an apprentice also. Uh, the first – we were the first 2
38 guys that were hired off a the street, into the trades, on the apprenticeship,
39 probably in, in 10 to 12 years. And as it turned out, it was another 12 or so
40 years before they hired anybody else in off the street. So I figured that had
41 somethin' to do with the, the quality of people that we were. My first day
42 on the job, we, we walked in the, uh, the front entrance. Uh, we walked
43 down the steps past plant security, uh, rather apprehensive and went up
44 there and – it wasn't Jerry Brooks. I can't remember the name of the guy
45 that interviewed me but just basically, uh, you know [stammering], just a
46 few, a few questions and, uh, determined my suitability for the job and off

1 I went. And my first, my first supervisor was Al Jackson, bless his heart.
2 Just an absolute Superman, as far as I'm concerned. One of the finest
3 gentlemen I've ever known. He's since passed. So we – he showed me
4 around and he says, "Glad to have ya pullin' sparks with us." That's what
5 this – that's the first thing he said to me. And went around and met the
6 fellas and got assigned to the, probly the grouchiest old journeyman that
7 they, that they could. They're gonna test the kid. Well, I came in there
8 with virtually no electrical knowledge other than, uh, some minor wi-,
9 minor house wiring.

10
11 And I worked with this guy and he was totally convinced that I was
12 unsuitable for the job because I didn't know anything. And I informed him
13 that of course, I don't know anything. I'm an apprentice. I'm here to learn.
14 Teach me something. So that day he went to Al Simpson, who was the
15 apprenticeship, uh, union rep at the time, and told Al that I should be taken
16 off the apprenticeship because I don't know anything. His name was –
17 what was his name? His name was Ted, guess I can't remember his last
18 name right off hand. But he was a gnarly old guy and I, I, and I, f-, always
19 kinda prided myself as gettin' on the good side a everybody at least once.
20 So I worked pretty hard with him and, uh, we ended up bein' pretty good
21 partners after a while. And I found that, uh, actually he didn't know as
22 much as I did. I thought it was justice.

23
24 Doug Rademacher: Well, you've shared your first boss and you're first, uh, partner. [18:38]
25 Can ya share a little about what did you think of the plant and the people
26 and what was goin' on? Had ya – I know you'd peeked in the windows as
27 a kid, but had you ever really put into perspective the assembly line?
28

29 Karel Taborsky: No, I was absolutely amazed when I went in there and saw all those
30 people standing along this, uh, conveyor line, especially up in the old trim
31 shop on the second floor. At one time, this plant has hed-, held many
32 records in its time. But at one time, this plant had the longest continuous
33 conveyor line in the world, at well over a half mile long. And that was
34 amazing. Going down in the body shop, in, in, uh, what they used to call
35 the jungle, which [stammering] we're kinda comin' back to a little bit.
36 Back there at the last part, where you hand-held the manual guns, you
37 could literally have trouble passin' through these guns if you tried to cross
38 the line. It was dirty. It was smoky. It was loud, sparks goin' all over the
39 place from the weld guns. Um, big, uh – well, well, they were, body, body
40 building pallets at the time, uh, weighed probly 2500, 3200 pounds on this
41 big chain. And they'd go in and they'd go down a hill and they'd
42 disappear from sight. They'd go through a tunnel and they'd come out
43 someplace else. And a big machine would put, uh, put parts on there and
44 I'm just, I'm just flabbergasted. I'm goin', "I never thought anything
45 would be like this." You know, I never thought about buildin' a car,
46 except racin'.

1
2 But, uh, it was, it was qui-, it was really – it was a little scary, you know.
3 And I was at Nam. You know, I didn't think anything could faze me but
4 that – I mean this was, holy Christ, you know, somethin's gonna,
5 somethin's gonna hit me. Somethin's gonna knock me down. But after a
6 while, you gain a, you gain a certain – you get a, you get a third eye. And
7 you get a very good sense of where you are and where you're standing.
8
9 Doug Rademacher: So you, uh, remember the guy you hired in with. [20:35] Did he – is he
10 still with us? Does he...
11
12 Karel Taborsky: Oh yeah.
13
14 Doug Rademacher: ... continue to work?
15
16 Karel Taborsky: Oh, yeah, Kenny, Kenny works over at, uh, plant 2. He might be a good
17 candidate for, for that [throat clearing] and for this kinda interview if
18 you're interested in him. We have the same seniority [inaudible 20:48],
19 same time and he's just younger. So he gets to work a little longer than
20 me. But we, we kinda teamed up, just bein' the new kids on the block. He
21 was a millwright. I had a trade. I was an electrician.
22
23 Doug Rademacher: [21:01] Thinking back, were there any new-hire initiations or pranks that
24 were done to you or did you get to reciprocate?
25
26 Karel Taborsky: No. [laughter] They, they didn't mess with me. I was, I was probably just
27 about a half a bubble off comin' out of Vietnam. I had, uh, I had a lotta
28 attitude, uh, and uh, I had a lotta hostility. And, you know, that kinda
29 conflicted with tryin' to get along with everybody. But, uh, and they, uh,
30 they didn't goose me or anything 'cause I'd probly had broke their arms. I,
31 I did hurt a couple guys a couple times and then basically, they just kinda
32 le-, left me alone. I didn't, I didn't do it to anybody and they didn't do it to
33 me. And that's just fine.
34
35 Doug Rademacher: So there was no prank. You just kinda hurt somebody.
36
37 Karel Taborsky: Yeah.
38
39 Doug Rademacher: [21:52] Um, did you have – can you give a physical appearance? Did you
40 have, uh, long hair back then?
41
42 Karel Taborsky: When I hired in, I got outta the service in Jul-, June, no, uh, January, late
43 January of 1970. And from that time on, I had decided I wasn't gonna get
44 my hair cut. Uncle Sam could tell me to cut my hair. He could shoot me
45 for not doin' it but I figured there's nobody in this world gonna tell me
46 how to wear my hair anymore. I earned my right to do what I wanted to.

1 And for that time, until I hired in, uh, about a year, year and a half, I grew
2 my hair. And when I came in, Mr. Cushman says, "You're gonna have to
3 cut your hair." And I says, "Sir, I refuse to cut my hair." And he said,
4 "Well, it may be an issue later. Uh, we don't want long hair around here."
5 And I told him that, uh, if he didn't want long hair around here, he could
6 talk to my lawyer and so, they hired me. And so, went in there and the
7 guys would fool with it a little bit, once. And, uh, I, I just outta spite I
8 guess after a while, I let my beard grow almost down to my navel and my
9 hair the same length too.

10

11 And for – and when I had worked, I'd, I'd wrap it up and I'd stick it under,
12 stick it under my shirt and put, put the hair under my hat. And they found
13 that a guy with hair and a beard could actually do things. And I think I
14 gained their respect and I know I respect them.

15

16 Doug Rademacher: You have a nickname. [23:22] Um, could you share that and is it
17 connected at all?

18

19 Karel Taborsky: Yeah, I have a nickname. Um, that nickname came about – uh, I was
20 probly about, oh I don't know, maybe, maybe the third year of the
21 apprenticeship. And, uh, we had gone out one afternoon and uh, had a few
22 cocktails. And then we brought a few cocktails back in with us 'cause it
23 was so much fun. In retrospect, it was stupid but it was fun then. Well,
24 anyway at that time, uh, as I said, I generally wore my hair up under a hat
25 and my beard inside my shirt. Well, as the night progressed, my hair
26 became more and more disheveled and uh, fuzzed out and everything. And
27 one of the, one of the fellas, Al Peacock, looked at me and he says,
28 "You're all frizzed out." And he laughed and he giggled and he says,
29 "Frizzby!" And, and the name stuck. I kinda liked it. I kinda like not
30 havin' my real name when I'm in any group of people anyway. And this
31 one, this one worked out good. Uh, they had a lot of fun with it over the
32 years. And I, and then as, then as I got more and more cocky and more
33 sure of myself, I became not only Frizzby but I became 'the mighty
34 Frizzby.' [coughing] And I am still, to many people, the mighty Frizzby.
35 And of course, I play that for all it's worth. It's fun.

36

37 Doug Rademacher: Well, you shared a little bit about, uh, going out [sniffing] and coming
38 back in. [24:54] Can ya share what it was like, uh, in the old days takin' a
39 lunch break? They were...

40

41 Karel Taborsky: I...

42

43 Doug Rademacher: ...they were a little longer than, than they are now, correct?

44

45 Karel Taborsky: No.

46

1 Doug Rademacher: No?
2

3 Karel Taborsky: No, it was a half hour. We had a half hour. Uh, basically, what I did, I, I
4 was – uh, my parents, as I said, lived, uh, lived across the street. And most
5 generally, during lunch, when I was on days especially, I would, I would
6 just go home, fix a sandwich. You know, my mom might fix somethin' for
7 me 'cause, you know, as I said, I was livin' at home. And as, and as I
8 moved out and moved out to East Lansing and, uh, that – after I got out of
9 the service – I didn't move out 'cause I was living in East Lansing before I
10 went in the service.
11

12 Female: Mm-hm.
13

14 Karel Taborsky: But as I, um, got, it got harder and harder, you know, as I moved further
15 away. I'd, I'd bring my own lunch. I very seldom went to the bar.
16 [coughing] Uh, because I know, that my proclivities are – I generally get
17 in trouble, somehow, if I have too much spare time or anything like that.
18

19 Gary Judy: Frizz, Gary Judy. Uh, you hired in as a apprentice. [25:57] Can you tell us
20 what that involves and how long you, you have to be an apprentice to get
21 your journeyman's card?
22

23 Karel Taborsky: Well, it's, uh, it's a, it's a pretty, uh, um, structured thing. There's so many
24 hours you have to spend bending conduits, so many hours you have to
25 spend, uh, repairing this. We were working on at the time, it was 12-volt
26 or high-cycle stuff, uh, um, and working on various machines and, and
27 doin' this – a lotta repair, a lotta troubleshooting. Very rigorous, very, uh,
28 by the hour, 800 hours of this, 200 hours of this. Until you get around, I
29 don't know, 70 – I'm a apprentice coordinator now and I don't even know,
30 uh, 'bout 7200. Let's say 7300 hours' worth of on-the-job training. Plus, at
31 that time and it's still this time, you had to fulfill, uh, certain educational
32 requirements. And, uh, those were, those were laid out. For example,
33 electrical p-, uh, blueprint reading, uh, trigonometry, geometry and that
34 stuff. Um, in, in my particular apprenticeship, uh, I had gone to school. I
35 had a lot of that, uh, stuff up front and they used to pay you by the hour to
36 go to school. And for every hour you were in a class, you got paid your
37 hourly rate, which by the way was \$4.06 an hour when I started. And
38 when I started, I told those guys, "I'm not workin' for less than \$4 an
39 hour." The \$4.06 minimum fell right into that one. [laughter]
40

41 But, uh, we, we did that and they, they – you'd buy your books. And, and,
42 and then they would, uh, they'd give you, they'd give you your hourly rate
43 to go to school, which wasn't bad. I mean it was not bad for me. And, uh,
44 uh, unfortunately, I, I took that as meaning that if I went to school for 6
45 hours a week, then I'd work for 34 hours a week. Because I understood
46 that, uh, I was required only to be there 40 hours. And so, I did that for

1 quite some time. Uh, my supervisors didn't particularly care for I didn't
2 work weekends because most of those weekends, I was drag racing.
3 [Inaudible 28:06] was, – I was quite a professional at the time. I was
4 actually quite good. Our car ran, at that time, it ran 0.3 under the national
5 record, which was pretty good. So I, you know, there came to be a point
6 where one of my supervisors, Jack Smith, a retired, uh, colonel outta the
7 army, who kinda took me under his wing, realizing that I was a, a veteran
8 and that I, I'd, I didn't come out with a lot – I ca-, came out with a few
9 bruises. Let's put it that way.

10
11 And he, he kinda took me under his wing and he informed me that, "Uh,
12 Frizz, while I appreciate the fact that you're a, a, you know, almost
13 professional racer, you've got to make a choice here, son. Are you gonna
14 be – are you gonna race or are you gonna work here? You have to commit
15 to one or the other." He says, "Be sorry to lose ya if you, uh, go racing."
16 "But," he said, "we'd be more than happy to keep you on." And that was –
17 I was pretty close to losin' my job because a that. And so, I weighed my,
18 my options. And I went, well, I got insurance. I got dental. I got this. I got
19 a good job and a great bunch of people to work with and I'm havin' a lot
20 of fun. So I guess I'll back off on my racing career, which I did do. And,
21 you know, but I still raced.

22
23 Earl Nicholson: [throat clearing] Earl Nicholson. Frizzby, you're, uh, skilled trades and,
24 uh, skilled trades, um, they handle a lot of emergencies. [29:31] Is there, is
25 there, is there any special emergency that you, that you were called to that,
26 what, that's memorable? Was anybody hurt?

27
28 Karel Taborsky: I, I, in, in a lotta ways, I was lucky in, in not having anyone, uh, severely
29 hurt that I had to, uh, pull outta trouble. Uh, actually, more of the, uh, stuff
30 like that, that happened was recently, you know. I mean back when, uh,
31 when the, when the plant was still runnin'. When we had the power
32 failures and stuff. I got to be, uh, I guess, thought of as being pretty much
33 the guy, the go-to guy when anything went screwy. And I always was on
34 nightshift because I liked it better there. And when somethin' went bad,
35 you'd have power failures. You'd have, um, conveyor breakdowns. A
36 chain would break. Cars would come out of the ceiling over there in
37 building 23, off that big decline. They'd always call me to kinda run the
38 show. I guess I had a, uh, pretty good feeling for the building, where
39 everything was, how to do all this stuff. And it was, it was, it's kinda fun.
40 It's a, it's a good feeling to do a good job. And one a my part, part of my
41 job was also keeping management away from my fellas, even as a
42 manager. I was just gettin' them outta there, not botherin' my fellas when
43 they're tryin' to concentrate on what they're doing. Uh, there's a lotta
44 good feelings in that, makes me feel actually confident.

1 Doug Rademacher: Well, you just went from, uh, sharing that you were an electrician and, and
2 learning the trade. Now, you've, you've said that you've – were keeping
3 management away from your guys. [31:11] So would you please lead us to
4 where, uh – how long were in the trade and, and what decisions did you
5 make to, to move forward?
6

7 Karel Taborsky: Okay. Well, excuse me – I was – actually I'm k-, I think I carry about 10
8 years actual tool time, full-time tool time. And then I, I got delusions of
9 grandeur. Uh, one day, I basically just, I, I, kinda got, uh, fed up with the
10 style of management that they had at the time. Uh, back in those days, uh,
11 you know, when you consider that I hired in in '71 – in '38 – '38 they had
12 the sit-down strike, am I correct? That's only, you know, that's only 30
13 years. And they went from shootin' people – uh, these blessed union
14 people. I'm tellin' ya, the union made this country great. They've, they've
15 raised the c-, uh, the [stammering], uh, level of living for these guys. And
16 these guys died for this. Well, anyway the management style there was
17 pretty, uh, authoritarian. Pretty much, "I have you under my thumb and
18 you do what I say." And I got tired, of, of the supervisors comin' around
19 and just jumpin' in guys, uh, just gettin' on'm for, for no, what I
20 considered no reasons. So I, I went out one day and just cut my hair off
21 and uh, uh, signed up for supervision. And they thought it was a joke.
22 They thought I was just doin' somethin'. I guess I had kind of a reputation
23 of being a little off-kilter at some times. You know, not harmful, but just
24 looked at things differently. And they asked me if I wanted to, if I was
25 serious.
26

27 And I says, "Yes." And they said, "Why?" I says, "I'm tired of the way
28 management's runnin' the place. I wanna do what I can. [laughter] I
29 wanna subvert, I guess." [laughter] And they took me on and I don't think
30 they've been unhappy. But, uh, I have a, I have a very proprietary
31 relationship with my guys. Uh, I love my guys. I love my people that work
32 for me and work with me. It makes me feel good to, to s-, to take a, to take
33 an employee that may have a little problem and coach and counsel him
34 and watch him, just watch him blossom, you know. When I was a
35 tradesman, my hand tools were my tools. Now, my people are my, are my
36 tools, the things that I need to aid me and get my job done.
37

38 Doug Rademacher: Karel, would you, uh – Doug Rademacher. [33: 44] Karel, would you –
39 you just shared a little bit about the union – go a little further. Did you
40 consider your union as serving you well? Did you consider running for a
41 union position prior to going on salary?
42

43 Karel Taborsky: I figured the union did as well as it could under the circumstances. Uh, but
44 as in any organization, I feel you get three people and you got politics.
45 You know, you got two people that get along. Three people means
46 politics. I didn't think I could change, the change – make the changes I

1 wanted if I, if I was a actual union guy. I, I k-, I tell the guys kinda
2 jokingly – I may have even said it to you. I was – I’m a better union man
3 now that I’m on supervision than I was when I was – you remember it –
4 when I was, when I was hourly. Uh, because I, I appreciated what they
5 did. While I was – I never made a committee call. You know, I’d always
6 get busted for somethin’ but I’d set myself up for it, [laughter] you know.
7 But when I was on hourly – but, you know, that was just my normal hell-
8 raisin’ nature. But, uh, you know, I think, I think the union’s done a, a
9 wonderful job, you know.
10
11 Cheryl McQuaid: Cheryl McQuaid. First, there’s been always a lot of talk about the hourly
12 and the skilled-trades arenas not getting along very well. [35:03] How did
13 you look at the hourly on the line? How did you, uh, view them?
14
15 Karel Taborsky: As a tradesman, they really – it was like, um, like goin’ to the mall. You
16 know, you see a lotta people there. You can tell what they’re doin’ kinda.
17 But it really, it never really impacted my life. Uh, when I was out on –
18 when I was in the body shop –which ended up bein’ a truly interesting
19 thing for me –uh, running an area, uh, having people working, you get to
20 talk to the people. You get to learn a little bit about’m. You get to learn
21 their quirks. You get to learn what makes them happy. And I always tried
22 to keep my area runnin’ right. ‘Cause as I said before, I’m pretty lazy. And
23 I figured that if you go out and do everything you need to do, you know,
24 uh, take care of it, the people won’t be gnarly. You know, the, uh,
25 [inaudible 35:55]. And if you say, “I’ll get to it,” they believe you. You
26 know, I always liked to – I have a lot of credibility with the, with the
27 production folks and as, and as well as in my trade, with my trade
28 brothers, you know.
29
30 Cheryl McQuaid: [36:06] Did any production person ever ask you to do, uh, government
31 work for them? And if so, what kind of government work did you do
32 for’m?
33
34 Karel Taborsky: Yes, they, uh – I would, I would help them do just about anything they
35 asked. I’d do anything for’m, they, that, that I could do. Uh, there’s, you
36 know, there’s that, uh, that dichotomy there as, uh, as, as you know. Are
37 you, are you stealin’ from the company? Well, you know, uh, uh, many of
38 us kinda overlooked that in a way. It’s not right. It takes money. But on
39 the other hand, it’s called people-pleasin’, you know. A guy that, that has
40 trouble doin’ stuff, he brings, he brings his chainsaw in and say, “Hey
41 Frizz, can you get, can you get a screw for this or make this up?” I just
42 made that man’s life very happy. You know, he, he’s happy now. You
43 know, he s-, sends a little ray of sunshine in the world. I, I helped’m out.
44 I’ll do anything I can for the guys, most the time. Some guys would, uh, of
45 course, would try to take advantage of it and they got shut off.
46

1 Doug Rademacher: Doug Rademacher. Now, you just described something. Um, Cheryl asked
2 you about a government job. [37:18] Can you desc-, what does that mean?
3 I mean if we're talkin' to students that have never worked in the auto
4 industry, what is a government job?
5

6 Karel Taborsky: Well, a government job is a euphemism for, uh, doing, doing work or a-,
7 acquiring things for folks that they wouldn't normally have. If a guy wants
8 a handful of nuts or bolts and he wants'm put together on somethin', and
9 your boss comes in and asks you what you're doin'. Rather than say,
10 "Hey, I'm workin' on Cheryl's, uh, uh, lawnmower here." Um, very hard
11 to get a lawnmower in but that's the first word that came to my mind.
12 [laughter] Um, I'm fixin' it for her. Um, I'm doin' a little government
13 work, you know, for Uncle Sam. It, uh, just, just a way to say it's not
14 directly connected to your, uh, assigned work.
15

16 Doug Rademacher: Okay, then, so that means you would, you would be allowed to do that but
17 if something came up...
18

19 Karel Taborsky: Oh yeah.
20

21 Doug Rademacher: ...prior to...
22

23 Karel Taborsky: Well...
24

25 Doug Rademacher: ...was the, uh, [inaudible 38:17].
26

27 Karel Taborsky: ...you, you know, [stammering] there, there was, as in anything, there's
28 different kinds of people. Uh, there was some supervisors you didn't
29 wanna, you know, let in. Uh, you didn't want'm to have anything on you.
30 You didn't want'm to have any leverage over ya. So you, you know, if
31 you're – you just play it smart, you know. You're not gonna sit there and
32 advertise that fact. Then again, you didn't really hide it either.
33

34 Earl Nicholson: Earl Nicholson. Uh, Frizz, um, you hired in, in 1971. You went right to
35 skilled trades. [38:46] Uh, were there many women or minorities in the
36 skilled trades at that time?
37

38 Karel Taborsky: Ah, [tsk, tsk] no women and me as a minority. 'Cause I was the first
39 hippie in the maintenance department. [laughter] Uh, there was, there was,
40 uh, uh, let me see, 1, 2 – there was probably, there were probably 6 to 8.
41 And I could be wrong on that. If you showed me the seniority list for then,
42 I could tell who was what. Probly 6 to 8 Black men in the millwright
43 trade. Um, a couple of Hispanics. One, one that well –yeah, one Puerto
44 Rican that I can think of in, in the tool repair [sneezing] trade. And we had
45 several different trades. We had quite a few more, uh, than we got
46 nowadays. Uh, the, in, on, in the – on the whole, there was probably less

1 than 5 percent of, uh, of minorities and women. Uh, I can think of 1, 2
2 women that were, that were in the, in the tool repair trade and that was it.
3

4Earl Nicholson: [40:05] So can you, can you remember the first woman to come in and to
5 become an electrician? She never worked...
6

7Karel Taborsky: I'm thinkin...
8

9Earl Nicholson: ...for you?
10

11Karel Taborsky: I'm thinkin', I'm thinkin' that might've been [Linda Day 40:19]. No, she's
12 not – there was, there was, t-, I'm kinda mixed up. There's [Terri
13 Brummel 40:27]. She hired in as an apprentice because we were really
14 gettin' hammered for EEO jobs, EEO, uh, requirements.
15

16Doug Rademacher: [40:37] What is EEO?
17

18Karel Taborsky: Equal Employment Opportunity. Uh, GM was, uh, very, very, uh, out-of-
19 norm for what the government, uh, would say that, that, that the proper
20 percentages would be. Um, I think Linda Day, I think was the first, was
21 the first one that I can remember.
22

23Earl Nicholson: [41:02] Could ya, could ya...
24

25Karel Taborsky: And she was in [EIT 41:03].
26

27Earl Nicholson: ...could ya tell us, uh, what it, what it, what was it like for her? [41:09] I
28 mean was it difficult for her? Did the guys give her a hard time?
29

30Karel Taborsky: Well, as, as, as Doug pointed out earlier asking about the pranks and the –
31 you have to go through a certain rite of passage. Everybody, uh, takes it in
32 a different way. Uh, Linda did very well. She, she, she could bark back.
33 She, she had a backbone. She just didn't hide in a corner and bat her
34 eyelids. Uh, she really tried to do a good job and that, that was good. And
35 she was accepted by, you know, anybody that had a brain in their head, as
36 a, as a good person. And, and that's kinda the way any – actually, uh, I
37 didn't, I never really perceived any discriminatory stuff, you know, in this
38 way with, "Don't talk to anyone who's Black. Don't talk to anyone who's
39 a woman." I never really – of course, maybe my mind overlooks it
40 because I don't do it at all, myself. It doesn't make any difference to me.
41 But I don't, I don't recall s-, hearing much of it, you know. The – most of
42 the discrimination was – at that time, was aimed at hippies.
43

44Earl Nicholson: Wow, hippies.
45

46Karel Taborsky: Oh, yeah.

1
2Earl Nicholson: Right. I'd like to go slightly, slightly in another direction here.
3
4Karel Taborsky: That's a good call. [laughter]
5
6Earl Nicholson: [42:23] I'd like to, I'd like you to tell us how was your relationship with
7 the power, with the powersh-, the Powerhouse guys. I, I heard that they
8 could be a pretty arrogant group of people.
9
10Karel Taborsky: I never had any problem with those guys. In fact, I was in the Powerhouse
11 with [Cliffy Ashelby 42:38] and that was basically, uh, kind of a, a – they
12 were orphans, if you want to call it that. I mean, they, they were left to
13 their own. They had to loot and steal 'cause their, you know, supervision –
14 their, their management really wasn't competent enough to, to, uh,
15 nevermind. They weren't really competent and so, if we wanted anything,
16 we had to go find it ourselves or whatever. And they were, they weren't
17 arrogant. They were just, they were unloved. You know, just like, just like
18 a dog [laughter] you leave out in the backyard and never give a bone to,
19 you know. They just got, they got gnarly. But I never had any problem
20 with'm.
21
22Earl Nicholson: [43:12] Did you have a lot of respect for those guys because that
23 Powerhouse that they were managing was like, uh, built back in the...
24
25Karel Taborsky: 1922, I got prints, 1922. That's when a lotta the plant was put up, a lotta
26 the big plant 'cause there used to be the Durant plant. And that, that, that
27 brick façade on there is the same brick façade as the one down on the
28 corner there at, uh, lan – what is it, the bedding store, B&L, whatever it is,
29 right across the street from the old pub. That used to be the Durant
30 showroom [whispering]. And if you look at it, you'll see the beauty of, of,
31 the, that actual brickwork in that place. I just – it has always amazed me.
32 They were good guys, you know. They were misunderstood. [laughter]
33
34Doug Rademacher: [44:01] Um, since we got to the minorities and the women, did you, you –
35 [throat clearing] after having them brought on board and the numbers, did
36 you ever feel that was unjust or did ya feel like – was it long overdue and
37 did ya, and did it...
38
39Karel Taborsky: I think, I think that...
40
41Doug Rademacher: ...ever impact the quality?
42
43Karel Taborsky: ...in, in my mind, if you can do the job, you can do it. The only thing that
44 I've noticed with the exception of one, uh, female millwright – strong as
45 an ox – the, the ladies physically weren't able to do a lotta the, the heavy
46 overhead work. But, and, and, and I'm gonna say that most of'm didn't

1 stay in the background. I mean it takes, it takes a lot of guts to d-, to
2 decide you're gonna be a, a tradesperson in a basically, a man's
3 environment or what's perceived as a man's environment. They did, they
4 did pretty well. Uh, some of'm, uh, you know, just like anybody, I thought
5 they were a number. And that's probably as unkind as I've ever thought
6 about it. But in the main, they, they, they were pretty dedicated. They
7 tried, at least the first ones, you know. They tried. The ones I really
8 worked directly with, they tried very hard to, to make a place for
9 themselves and be, y-, be considered competent.

10

11 Doug Rademacher: [45:23] Doug Rademacher. Karel, did you have any brothers and sisters
12 when you grew up?

13

14 Karel Taborsky: Yes, I do. I have two younger brothers and if you put us together, we'd be
15 triplets.

16

17 Doug Rademacher: [45:33] My question to you then is, did there come a time working inside
18 the Fisher Body plant that the workers became your brothers and sisters?

19

20 Karel Taborsky: I have very few friends, uh, through the plant. Uh, I have many close
21 relationships with the guys when I'm at work but I don't see'm after work.
22 Um, I, I compartmentalize my life a lot. When I'm at work, I'm at work,
23 you know, and I'm playin', playin' with my friends. When I go home, I'm
24 playin' with my other friends. They don't mix too much.

25

26 Earl Nicholson: [46:14] So tell us – uh, Earl Nicholson – tell us, Frizz, uh, you were, you
27 were talking about, uh, supervision here a while ago. You were saying that
28 you wanted to, to make a change. Um, would, could you, could you tell us
29 what, what, what's a good s-, what was, what made a good supervisor and
30 what made a bad supervisor?

31

32 Karel Taborsky: Well, I think you could answer that, Earl. I think all a you folks sittin' here
33 at the table have your own, have your opinions on, on what makes a good
34 supervisor. But I allow my people – I work very hard at allowing my
35 people to have integrity. I work very hard at respecting my people and I
36 expect the same from them. I tell'm, I don't lie, cheat or steal to them. Uh,
37 if they want somethin', I'll give it to'm. I'll give – do the best I can and
38 when I ask for somethin', I better have it. It's a very much of a give-and-
39 take thing. So I think a good supervisor is, has a backbone. He's willin' to
40 go the go the wall for his boys, his people. Uh, all, even my women are
41 boys as far as I'm concerned. They're my boys, my guys and I will
42 back'm. And like I tell my, my fellas, I says, "Don't lie to me because
43 then I can't lie for ya. You gotta always tell me the truth." And they do.
44 And there's a, there's a, uh, uh, a certain, uh, thing that, you know, that
45 develops, in, in – for that, you know. We're all in this together. It's not,

1 you know – I mean if you’re wrong, I’m gonna tell ya you’re wrong. If
2 you did wrong, you’re gonna pay.
3
4 But basically, you do it to yourself. I don’t do it to ya. I’m not after ya.
5 You’re just not, you’re just not fittin’ into what, what we’ve agreed, what
6 I’ve agreed that the working conditions or the, the, uh, con-, code of
7 conduct is. And these guys do very, very well with that ‘cause they know
8 that I’ll take care of’m.
9
10 Doug Rademacher: Doug Rademacher. Karel, you wanted to make a change. You didn’t like
11 the way management ran. [48:28] Does anything stand out that you were
12 instrumental in changing that you, uh, hold dear to your heart?
13
14 Karel Taborsky: Nah, nothin’ I can think of other than I’m just an absolute wonderful
15 person and people, people actually clamor to work for me. Uh, I – and that
16 makes me feel very good. That makes me feel really, really, uh, you know,
17 almost self-serving in, in the fact that I, I get such a good feeling out of it.
18 Uh, you know, the folks on the line, you know, they, they like me ‘cause,
19 you know, “Hey, Frizz!” I always have time for’m. Why? It’s my job, you
20 know. If you’re steppin’ on a, if you’re steppin’ on a, a platform that has
21 plywood on it and, and, and the plywood’s up an eighth of an inch – you
22 know, at first, I was thinkin, “Geez, what a dumb thing to do.” And then I
23 started thinkin’ back in the days we were runnin’ 70 jobs an hour and
24 you’re workin’ 9½ hours a day. Well, 720 jobs, 720 times you’re trippin’
25 or stumblin’ over that. And you feel it through your shoes. And it drives
26 ya nuts. I always used to think, “You know, do what a dog would do.
27 Walk around it.” But that means that people aren’t as smart as a dog. And
28 then I realized, “Hey, put yourself in their place. Watch’m, you know.”
29 So, you know, you go out and you take care of this stuff for the people and
30 it’s so they’re happy.
31
32 They don’t have –they don’t fall down. They don’t have an achin’ back or,
33 uh, sprained ankle or somethin’ because they’re dodgin’ the bad spot.
34 That’s the kinda stuff that I like to see. That’s the kind of change that I
35 think I made. I look at my paint shop, where I’m workin’ now at L.D.T.
36 My manager worked very hard at assembling a crew of people that
37 actually, uh, kinda have the same beliefs – that, work, work code that I do
38 and I think they’ve done a wonderful job so far. I always wait and see.
39 But, uh, in the, in the main, at least in the paint shop, everybody loves
40 everybody. I mean, there’s, there’s a lot of camaraderie. That’s what I
41 want. I’m not your boss. My job is to give you a job.
42
43 Doug Rademacher: Sounds like you are very concerned for your workers. Working at a
44 factory is, um, like you said, when ya, when you hired in, uh, the feeling
45 was that you, you’re in here and you’re mine. You know, and you’re under
46 my thumb. [50:54] Did, uh – it sounds like you recognized people’s

1 problems. Did you have anyone where you were able to help them through
2 a trying time, uh, so they didn't lose their job or...
3

4Karel Taborsky: There was, there was several. And I'd prefer not to go into that. Uh, when
5 I see somebody gettin' dealt a bad hand, I stand up for'm, even if it's an
6 hourly guy. It wasn't right, you know. I'd, it wasn't unusual for me to go
7 right up to personnel and say, "Hey, guy's getting' a bad shake." You
8 know, I'd put myself out for'm; however, they didn't know it. I'd never
9 tell'm. And that's the way it is. You gotta take care of people. I don't have
10 to like everybody but I certainly have to take care of'm.
11

12Doug Rademacher: There were many different plant managers...
13

14Karel Taborsky: Mm-hm.
15

16Doug Rademacher: ...from the time you hired in.
17

18Karel Taborsky: Old "high pockets."
19

20Doug Rademacher: [51:46] Anybody hang, uh, anyone, uh, [laughter] – you could run through
21 a few of'm but anyone, uh, stand out as being a great person to work for
22 and with people?
23

24Karel Taborsky: Well, there was [Tom Weithorn 51:57]. He was always fun. I just, just
25 enjoyed watchin' the man walk. Uh, they called him high pockets. He
26 probly stood about 6 foot 6, white-haired, very distinguished, very slim
27 gentleman. And then there was [Leonard Redborma III 52:10] and he was
28 the, uh, director of plant engineering around that time. And it always just
29 used to, just give me the – I'd just watch'm walk down the aisles together.
30 And uh, let's see, there was, uh, Don Chenoweth. He was in there and then
31 there was Buckmaster, uh, Dick Buckmaster. He was a production
32 manager after – and he was, he was quite a character. I, I really enjoyed
33 Dick the whole time he was workin' there.
34

35 He just – for some reason, he and I just, uh, formed a bond. And as an
36 early supervisor, uh, he would actually call down to the maintenance area
37 and say, you know, or have, uh, you know, just, "Where's, where's
38 Frizzby? Tell him to come down. He's got a meeting with the manager,
39 meeting with the plant manager." And we'd go down and we'd discuss
40 things. He used me as a sounding board for some of his stuff.
41

42 I found him a man of great integrity. He was also somebody you'd never
43 want to cross. Uh, uh, they all, they all, they always used to laugh about,
44 uh, him. If you – if Buck got on ya, it would be, be, be, uh – you'd been
45 buckarooed. And when you got buckarooed, you didn't particularly care
46 for it. He was, he was a very good man, also had a lotta [inaudible 53:43].

1
2Earl Nicholson: [53:45] Well, that you bumped heads with – that you didn't like or that
3you didn't get along with or didn't respect or...
4
5Karel Taborsky: I probably bumped heads with just about everybody. I have a – I don't
6know if it's a powerful personality or I'm just a gnarly son of a bitch. But
7I, uh, most people it seemed, worked really hard at not doing their job or
8getting out of it or sloughin' it off to somebody else. My work ethic when
9I grew up with my dad, uh, uh, that was not allowed. You, you take, you
10take your job. You shoulder your load and you do it. And many of the
11times when we bumped heads, it was because of my perceived feeling that
12they were unwilling, to, to, to do their share.
13
14Earl Nicholson: [54:45] So, tell me, um, uh, the, the, you know, what the main change, uh,
15with, uh, with Fisher Body and, uh, BOC and, uh, and...
16
17Karel Taborsky: I didn't know what part of the alphabet I was in. [laughter] Uh, we were
18Fisher Body. And then as we became one with [Chassis 55:04], uh, I was
19early in supervision at the time. And Fisher Body people, the Fisher Body
20organization was not oriented, uh, toward, uh, construction, etc. I mean it
21wasn't, it wasn't into time studies. You didn't get an eighth of a man for
22this; however, at Chassis, there was a whole different culture over there,
23snooty SOBs, I always thought. I really had nothin' to do with'm. I didn't
24care for the Chassis. I didn't care for the way that they always had a, they
25always had a procedure for this. They always had a rule for this. They
26always had a way to do it. It was all done on paper. They lived in a paper
27world. Fisher Body, at least with the maintenance crew, we do it and talk
28about it later.
29
30Female: Mm-hm.
31
32Karel Taborsky: Let's get the job done. We'll pick up the pieces. We'll figure out how
33much it costs. We'll figure out how to – these guys would, they would
34analyze things to death. And they wouldn't do anything. But they were
35always better than us and that just kinda irritated me.
36
37Male: Chassholes. [laughter]
38
39Earl Nicholson: So tell me, Frizz...
40
41Karel Taborsky: I thought I thought of that. [laughter]
42
43Earl Nicholson: Tell me, Frizz, you, you, you, uh, you've worked in the old factory and uh,
44you, uh – I believe that, uh, you're one of the people responsible for
45setting up the new factory. [56:19] Can ya, can ya tell us the difference
46between where they – we were at with the old factory in terms of quality

1 and where we're moving in the new world with the new factory that we've
2 got coming?
3
4 Karel Taborsky: As I said before, I'm not a book guy. You know, I, it, I, I, I've worked
5 really hard at making my job so I don't have to write reports, etc. In the
6 old, in the old plant, I had everybody scared of me, so they didn't have me
7 do this. In the new plant, I do see that, uh, you know – it was – who was it
8 somebody said, you know, if ya – those who don't study history are
9 condemned to repeat it. And in the new, new dawn, they have a lot more,
10 um, book-work documentation. They're not, and I'm actually [inaudible
11 57:08]. This, this shows that I must be getting senile 'cause I actually
12 support some of that. Because there's a [line 57:13] in today's automotive,
13 uh, uh, marketplace. Uh, you know, a lot of these folks are eatin' their
14 lunch. And, and that makes me sad. Because you got a great bunch of
15 people that actually if you really considered about it – the automotive
16 industry had a lot to do with making America great – that and the satellite
17 stuff: the steel industry, the plastic industry, the rubber, uh, the software,
18 you know, computers and all of this stuff. This all comes from the cars if
19 you really look at it, you know.
20
21 And America bein' the way it is, and uh, so, so disjoint-, so, so, uh,
22 decentralized, having an automobile is, uh, somthin' you need. And I, I
23 really, you know, and I think, I think that we're doin' a good job. We're
24 getting' a lotta, we're getting' a lotta trouble. [coughing] We're gettin' a
25 lot of, uh, people lookin' at us and I think that we got a good thing goin',
26 if we can just keep it goin'. I like what Randy did, inverting the, uh, the
27 structure. Instead of a pyramid, we got a funnel. And you know where,
28 where stuff goes when it goes in the funnel? It goes right to the bottom.
29 And that's where Randy is. He's the guy that's supposed to be able to take
30 care of the problems. As they say in the GMS trade, (a little theme music
31 here) you know, you tell us what you need to do your job and we'll do the
32 best we can to get it. I don't want'm to lose sight a that. That's what
33 brought me into this organization. I'm wavin' a flag. I, if I wouldn't a said,
34 "Pick me, pick me," I could have been retired at 97 percent, I find out
35 later. But I, I believe what we're tryin' to do is a good thing. And I believe
36 that empowering, empowering the folks to, to actually make decisions and
37 stick with'm is, is the best thing.
38
39 Earl Nicholson: So, um, oh, okay...
40
41 Josefina Martinez: I wanna – I, I've been – Josefina Martinez – I've been through the GMS
42 training. [59:08] One thing that, uh, stands on me are, is, is the reason that
43 we have this oval shape, like you said, instead of the pyramid – is it
44 because General Motors finds its, um, it finds its, uh, it finds its way in the
45 stages that it's at? You know, the bankruptcy and the resourcin' and all

1 that, that they finally give, um, some of that knowledge for us, the labor
2 people...

3

4 Karel Taborsky: Uh...

5

6 Josefina Martinez: ...or the production people? [59:39] Do you feel that that might be a
7 change...

8

9 Karel Taborsky: ...I'm gonna say that – I don't think it's, it's – I think it's perceived power
10 that is not relinquished easily by management. The real power in the
11 whole organization are the people. Um, having, uh, someone, uh – the
12 GMS, uh, it's – that was set up a long time ago. That little arrow goin' in
13 the target, you know, you saw that stuff a long time ago. That's when it
14 started. And that also started when, pretty much when they got rid of the –
15 a lotta the good old boys. And this is my, this is my perception. They got
16 rid of the good old boys on the, on the board, got some outside people and
17 they says, "Hey you guys, you're too rigid. You gotta flow. You gotta be
18 able to adapt to the marketplace." And they came up with the GMS idea.

19

20 I think Randy took it one step further in, in actually co-, codifying it and
21 saying, "This is the way we're gonna try to run the organization." I think
22 he's the first one. Maybe he isn't. But I sure like it and the people like it.
23 They like to, they like to be able to, you know, feel that what they say will
24 be taken, uh, will be taken, uh, as a valid input. And there's a lot of
25 frustration. And that's, you know – I was frustrated when I was there. I'm
26 still frustrated. What do you think of a guy that's got 25 years as a flippin'
27 supervisor and he hasn't been promoted? Well, that's the kind of trouble I
28 make for myself. But now, in this new organization, hey, I'm one row
29 from the top. [laughter] I like that.

30

31 Doug Rademacher: That's interesting. [laughter]

32

33 Josefina Martinez: Thank you.

34

35 Karel Taborsky: Welcome.

36

37 Earl Nicholson: So, uh, Frizz, um, I know that the hour is late and, uh, you've, as you've
38 said before, you're bouncing, uh, 7 different projects now all at the same
39 time...

40

41 Karel Taborsky: Oh yeah.

42

43 Earl Nicholson: ...we have, uh, uh – I'm so happy that we finally got you and got you in
44 here to, uh, to, to tell us your story about – but Doug Rademacher...

45

1 Doug Rademacher: Yeah, well, it sounds like you're tryin' to close and I wanted to find out as
2 you, uh, drive by here today and you see – we'll call it the Fisher plant...
3

4 Karel Taborsky: It, it makes me sad.
5

6 Doug Rademacher: I see that already. [1:1:57] Would you share a little bit about your life here
7 and, and...
8

9 Karel Taborsky: Well, it just makes me sad, you know. I'm almost crying. But, you know, I
10 mean I have a lot of emotion. But in five minutes, I'll be okay, you know.
11 It's just – I've been everywhere in that plant. I watched, I watched
12 building 3X get built. I watched 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 get built.
13 I remember as a child, when plant security was there, riding our bicycles
14 down through where the old cushion room used to be before they built the
15 building 17 and 16 and havin' the plant security guys chase us. I mean
16 that's my history. I used to look down where the marshaling area used to
17 be by [inaudible 1:02:47] plant security is, through the windows and
18 [coughing] [inaudible 1:02:50]. And that's where the cafeteria used to be.
19 I remember lookin' at these guys sayin', "No goddamn way in the world
20 am I gonna work at an automotive plant and no way in the world am I
21 gonna be an electrician." I wish I would've decided not to be somethin'
22 else, you know. But I ended up bein' this way. And I sure, I sure enjoyed
23 it. I got a lotta happy memories, some of'm fuzzy. But hey, you know,
24 [laughter] that's life. And it, it's a good, it's a good place to work. And I
25 like knowin' everything about that place.
26

27 Earl Nicholson: So tell me, Frizz...
28

29 Karel Taborsky: Thanks for crackin' me up. [laughter]
30

31 Earl Nicholson: ...yeah, so tell me, Frizz...
32

33 Karel Taborsky: [Inaudible 1:03:28].
34

35 Earl Nicholson: [1:03:29] ...did you ever climb the smokestack?
36

37 Karel Taborsky: [laughter] Yes, I did. I climbed it 'cause I was scared to death a heights. I
38 went up there and, and that was before they had the, uh, uh, fa-, fall
39 restraints on it. And I went up there. I went up there and, and looked. And,
40 and, you can see, you can see a long ways from up at the top of that stack.
41 And it took me 2½ hours to get down because I was so scared. [laughter]
42 And I, you know – and that, and that's the thing, you know. You gotta
43 challenge yourself. You gotta take yourself outta your, your shell, your
44 envelope. I would never do this for anybody else but you guys.
45

46 Earl Nicholson: So...

1
2Karel Taborsky: You got, you got more out of me in this last hour and 20 minutes than
3 anybody has. It's because I love my plant.
4
5Earl Nicholson: So here we are, Frizz. We're, we're – I, I am assuming we're coming up
6 on the close here. As I look around the room, there are no more hands up.
7 Um...
8
9Karel Taborsky: Everybody's sleepin'. [laughter]
10
11Doug Rademacher: No, no.
12
13Cheryl McQuaid: No, no [inaudible 1:04:27]. [laughter]
14
15Earl Nicholson: Um...
16
17Karel Taborsky: Ha, ha, you weren't, huh?
18
19Earl Nicholson: ...and as you know, this – all this information is for the Michigan State
20 Labor Studies Program. Uh, someday very, very soon here in the future,
21 that factory will cease to exist and I mean physically. [1:04:41] As we
22 know, they're tearing it down. Uh, are there, are there any memories or
23 words, uh, any insights, any warnings to the future for the people who are
24 in the Labor Studies group that are going to, to view this tape?
25
26Karel Taborsky: No. But I'm gonna tell you somethin'. I asked my dad, who is 83 years old
27 now and lives about four – lives in the same home that we – uh, that I
28 grew up in 1955 or '54. He's 83, and I says, "Papi," I said, "what are you
29 gonna do? What do you think you're gonna do when that plant's gone?"
30 And he says, "Well, boy," he says, "I don't know." And I says, "Well, I
31 know what you're gonna get from'm when the plant's gone." He says,
32 "What?" I says, "You're gonna get some sunsets." 'Cause we lived so
33 close to the plant, we never got to see the sunset, which is interesting.
34 What's gonna be there next?
35
36Doug Rademacher: Well, I just wanna...
37
38Female: [Inaudible 1:05:34].
39
40Doug Rademacher: ...think back to one quick moment. Since this is on yours, and I, I played
41 ball on that back field behind your parent's home. And uh, sometimes,
42 we'd, we wouldn't put the balls up on top of Harry's Place. We'd put'm in
43 your backyard and...
44
45Karel Taborsky: Yep, you went after those arched windows.
46

1 Doug Rademacher: [1:05:47] ... there was a fear back there because, uh, what did you have
2 over there? It looked like a, a beast.
3

4 Karel Taborsky: Well, it was a boxer. [laughter] But that dog wouldn't hurt anybody. Uh, I
5 know that the, the kids, that sometimes – 'cause we used to have windows
6 in the, in the little addition that Pop put on at the back of the garage. And
7 that was, uh, quite a target. 'Cause I was a little older then and I wasn't –
8 and as we graduated from the field down to Verlinden – because you
9 could hit the balls further. Harry didn't particularly care for it either when
10 you'd put one out in the middle of the parkin' lot and bust somebody's
11 windshield. [laughter] We all thought that was kinda funny. But as we
12 graduated, we moved away from the little field, the little postage stamp
13 field. And I was, I went out there the other day. And you could still see
14 where home plate was. There was a – you see, still see that rock right,
15 right by second base that you were always scared to death you were gonna
16 hit and, and brain yourself. It's still there. And a lot of it's still in my
17 brain, too, 'cause I remember that.
18

19 Doug Rademacher: I remember it well, too. [1:06:51] Is there, um – he said, is there anything
20 that you would say to people in the future, people that are coming after us?
21

22 Karel Taborsky: Well, today's society, uh, seems to be pretty much, uh, throw away. Uh,
23 we don't build for substance. We don't build for heritage, it doesn't seem.
24

25 Female: Mm-hm.
26

27 Karel Taborsky: Uh, I look at the way this new plant's put up and it's nothin' but, uh,
28 cardboard and, and clothes pins as far as I'm concerned. I don't see that
29 place bein' there for, for how long? Nineteen...
30

31 Doug Rademacher: It was 1897, wasn't it?
32

33 Karel Taborsky: ...well, no, that was, that was down [inaudible 1:07:28]. But like I said,
34 most of the place was built in the, in the early '20s and Billy Durant, uh,
35 whenever his Durant, whenever he was doin' that. That plant there, you
36 know, has style and substance, you know. It's an old, it's an old veteran.
37 And you're not gonna see it in the throw away stuff we got now.
38

39 Female: Hm.
40

41 Karel Taborsky: And I guess that's what I wanna pass on. Uh, regardless of what, um, what
42 kind of environment you're in, it's, uh, it's, uh, people, people like the
43 union, people like GM, that, uh [stammering] – you can't keep a building
44 forever but you can sure try to make a heritage and, uh, uh, you know, and
45 pass, pass that kinda stuff on, the kinda thoughts and the kinda work ethic
46 and all a this stuff. We're losin' a lotta that. As an old son of a bitch, I can

1 look back now and, you know, I'm gettin' to be – [I know I was 1:08:21]
2 the old man saying, "You know, these kids nowadays, they don't know
3 how to make change. They don't know how to address an envelope. They
4 don't know how to do a waltz with a girl." We all used to do that in grade
5 school. That was part of it, you know. That was part of your socialization.
6 I think America is forgetting socialization of the young folks in our God-
7 almighty rush to, to make sure that we're all doing algebra by the time
8 we're out of 6th grade. Those kinda core values, at least where I was and
9 where I'm at – and most of you probably are – uh, I think they're, they're
10 not being addressed. You know, that's – I guess if that's [inaudible
11 1:09:01] pass that on.
12
13 Doug Rademacher: Sure.
14
15 Karel Taborsky: You know, don't be afraid to have a history. Don't be afraid to, uh,
16 inculcate some kind of heritage.
17
18 Earl Nicholson: Well, thank you, Frizz.
19
20 Gary Judy: Thanks, Frizz.
21
22 Cheryl McQuaid: Thank you.
23
24 Doug Rademacher: Thank you.
25
26
27/hms