

**Denny and Maggie Cox discuss their involvement in labor union activities**

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4 Cheryl McQuaid: This is Cheryl McQuaid with the Lansing Fisher Body historical team.  
5 We're at the greenhouse. It's January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2006, approximately 9:30 a.m.  
6 We're preparing to interview Denny and Maggie Cox. First, let's, uh,  
7 announce the rest of the team.  
8  
9 John Fedewa: John Fedewa.  
10  
11 Jerri Smith: Jerri Smith.  
12  
13 Marilyn Coulter: Marilyn Coulter.  
14  
15 Cheryl McQuaid: Um, Denny, let's start with you. [0:25] Could you state your name and  
16 spell your last name?  
17  
18 Dennis Cox: Dennis Cox. Last name is C-O-X.  
19  
20 Cheryl McQuaid: [0:33] And Maggie?  
21  
22 Margaret Cox: Given name is Margaret, but I'm known as Maggie Cox, C-O-X.  
23  
24 Cheryl McQuaid: And, we're gonna start with Denny, which I know your name is Dennis  
25 and I've always called you Denny.  
26  
27 Dennis Cox: Uh, I go by Denny.  
28  
29 Cheryl McQuaid: [0:50] Could you tell us what your address is, please?  
30  
31 Dennis Cox: 15595 Park Lake Road, East Lansing, Michigan, 48823.  
32  
33 Cheryl McQuaid: And, you're both married. [1:02] Do you have children?  
34  
35 Dennis Cox: We have, uh, 2 children.  
36  
37 Cheryl McQuaid: [1:08] Denny, where were you born?  
38  
39 Dennis Cox: Lansing, Michigan.  
40  
41 Cheryl McQuaid: [1:14] What side of Lansing?  
42  
43 Dennis Cox: It'd be the, uh, Sparrow Hospital, which would be on the, uh, north side.  
44  
45 Cheryl McQuaid: [1:28] And could you give me a little bit about your educational  
46 background?  
47

1Dennis Cox: I, uh, graduated from, uh, Bath High School in 1963. Other than that, I  
2 have no, I didn't go to college or anything like that.  
3

4Cheryl McQuaid: [1:46] Were you in the military?  
5

6Dennis Cox: No, I was not.  
7

8Cheryl McQuaid: [1:50] What did your parents do?  
9

10Dennis Cox: My dad by trade was a welder and my mom worked at a, uh, place called  
11 Michigan Press, which she read, uh, papers.  
12

13Cheryl McQuaid: Hm. [2:09] And did you know about Fisher Body before you came to the  
14 plant to put in an application?  
15

16Dennis Cox: As a matter of fact, I did a little bit because I had a, uh, uncle, uh, who  
17 worked at the plant and, uh, with his help is how I got into the plant.  
18

19Cheryl McQuaid: [2:28] So, uh, uh, so you did apply at the plant, ...  
20

21Dennis Cox: Yes.  
22

23Cheryl McQuaid: ... it wasn't at, like, Michigan Employment?  
24

25Dennis Cox: No. No. At that time, we just came right straight to the plant and, uh, put  
26 our applications in at the plant.  
27

28Cheryl McQuaid: [2:43] Was there a big hiring?  
29

30Dennis Cox: Yeah. Back in them days, you could hire in Fisher Body today, quit it, go  
31 to Oldsmobile the next day, quit Oldsmobile and come back to Fisher  
32 Body the next day. [chuckle]  
33

34Cheryl McQuaid: [2:57] Now, what is your seniority date?  
35

36Dennis Cox: October of 1963.  
37

38Cheryl McQuaid: Okay. [3:09] Why did you hire into Fisher Body?  
39

40Dennis Cox: Heh, hired re-, mostly because I needed the job. Uh, I was married. We  
41 got married right out of high school. And, uh, I worked at, uh, Demmer  
42 Tool and Die when we got married. Actually, I worked at a, uh, cleaning  
43 service when we, when we were going together in high school, and right  
44 after I graduated, I went to Demmer Tool and Die and, uh, that looked like  
45 it was kind of like a dead-end job, so I left there and went to, uh, Fisher  
46 Body, and everybody at Demmer told me, says, "Don't go to Fisher Body,

1 don't go to Oldsmobile because every year you're gonna get laid off for  
2 changeovers." I loved it.  
3  
4 Cheryl McQuaid: [4:00] What is a changeover?  
5  
6 Dennis Cox: Changeover was when they, uh, changed, went from one year, model year,  
7 to the next. They would take the, uh, cars that was, well I would say like a  
8 '63 and they went from '63 to 4, '64. It was a, they brought in the new  
9 models.  
10  
11 Cheryl McQuaid: So, Marilyn Coulter.  
12  
13 Marilyn Coulter: Um, Denny, you said that you grew up here in Lansing. [4:29] What was it  
14 like growing up in a factory town?  
15  
16 Dennis Cox: Actually, I grew up in East Lansing, which basically, my area that I grew  
17 up in is out of Lansing. Uh, it's, was considered at that time bein' livin' in  
18 the country. Uh ...  
19  
20 Marilyn Coulter: [4:52] So, what did people think about factory working back then?  
21  
22 Dennis Cox: Actually, back then I don't really think, uh, that it was, it wasn't a bad  
23 thing to work at a factory but it was a good thing to work at a factory  
24 because it was a steady income, uh, other than the fact that, like I say,  
25 when I worked at Demmer, them guys over there says, "You don't wanna  
26 go over there, you're gonna get laid off every year." Well, laid off every  
27 year was like 2 weeks to 3 weeks at a time, you know, then we went right  
28 back to work and we started the, the next model run.  
29  
30 Cheryl McQuaid: [5:29] So bein' laid off was not a problem for you?  
31  
32 Dennis Cox: No. No, matter of fact, it was like a vacation.  
33  
34 Cheryl McQuaid: [5:36] Do you remember the first day you walked, once you got hired, that  
35 you walked into those doors? What it, what were your thoughts?  
36  
37 Dennis Cox: Oh, man, when I walked into that plant and I got up on the, uh, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor,  
38 all I could see, as far as you could see, was nothin' but a row of, uh, lights.  
39 There was just one light, florescent light, after another. And I'm thinkin',  
40 boy, does, does it come to an end down there somewhere or not, you  
41 know? And it was just, it was so long, you know, I'm thinkin' wow,  
42 what'd I get myself into, 'cause when I come from Demmer, Demmer you  
43 could see from one side of the plant to the other. Well, when you got into  
44 Fisher Body, you didn't know – back when I got up to where they took  
45 me, I didn't have a clue where I was at. And all I'm thinkin' is how am I  
46 gonna get outta here, and once I get outta here, how am I gonna find this

1 place tomorrow? You know? I mean, it was just like, it was like, like I say,  
2 it was just one row of lights after another and as far as you could see and,  
3 and it was just unreal.  
4

5Cheryl McQuaid: [6:46] And on that first day, where did they take you?  
6

7Dennis Cox: Trim.  
8

9Cheryl McQuaid: [6:49] Trim?  
10

11Dennis Cox: Yep. I worked in the, uh – I went in on the dayshift and I believe that they  
12 brought everybody in on days at that time and broke them in on a job for  
13 like 2 weeks and then after that 2 weeks, uh, I got shift to nights. Uh, I  
14 worked – I don't remember having a steady job. Uh, the job that I did was  
15 I was a absentee replacement person. In other words, what I did was, uh,  
16 my supervisor had 25 jobs; my, my responsibility was to learn all 25 of  
17 them jobs. And I loved that because I never liked being stuck on 1 job day  
18 after day after day. So, every day that I went in, [inaudible 7:50]. I didn't  
19 know what job I was gonna go to, which that was great for me because I  
20 didn't like bein' stuck on 1 job. And then after a few years of that, then I  
21 went and I was a, uh, [chuckle] I can't think of what those, I, I took  
22 people's jobs, I was the, uh, can't think of what the ...  
23

24Margaret Cox: Relief?  
25

26Dennis Cox: Relief man, yes. I was a relief man for a lot of years, and then after I left  
27 the relief man job, I went to a repairman, and I liked that too because, uh,  
28 even though that was a steady job of, of doing repair, it was always  
29 somethin' different that you had to repair and had to look for because you  
30 never knew what was comin' down the line at ya that you had to repair.  
31

32Cheryl McQuaid: Let's take a pause.  
33

34Dennis Cox: When I, I was on repair for quite a few years, uh, at Fisher Body.  
35 Occasionally, we would go over to, uh, Oldsmobile and, uh, repair some  
36 of the work that, uh, left our plant that wasn't done. Uh, that, that was  
37 quite a, quite a lot of overtime on that job. Uh, when I left that job, I went  
38 to, uh, alternate committeeman, then from alternate committeeman I went  
39 to full-time committeeman, and from committeeman I went to, uh, job  
40 placement coordinator.  
41

42Marilyn Coulter: Denny, Marilyn Coulter. I just have 1 question. You said when you were  
43 doing repair, you did quite a lot of overtime. [9:53] What's quite a lot?  
44 What, 9 hours, 10 hours? How many hours did you probably put in as a  
45 repairperson?  
46

1Dennis Cox: When I, when we would, when we was on the repair, if we went over to  
2 Oldsmobile, we was workin', uh, 10, 12, 14 hours a day. Saturdays,  
3 Sundays, uh, it was a lot, there was a lot, lot of overtime and a lot of repair  
4 that had to get done and with the amount of people that we had doing  
5 repair – we didn't have a lot of people. I mean, we're talkin' maybe 6 or 8  
6 people that was doing the, uh, the repair work.  
7

8Marilyn Coulter: Hm. That's a lot of time.  
9

10Dennis Cox: Yeah, it was a lot of overtime. Which was good because the paycheck was  
11 good.  
12

13Marilyn Coulter: [chuckling]  
14

15Dennis Cox: And, uh, but anyhow, I, from the repair I went to, uh, well, the 2  
16 committee jobs and, uh, then I went from committee to job placement  
17 coordinator, which, uh, that job was the last job that I done while I was in  
18 the plant. Uh, that was a union-appointed position and I had, uh, an office  
19 with a management person [throat clearing], and our job was to try and get  
20 the people who was out on workers' comp back to work, find them a job  
21 so that they had a steady, uh, income.  
22

23Marilyn Coulter: [11:25] So, when would you say – Marilyn Coulter – when did you get  
24 involved with your union?  
25

26Dennis Cox: [throat clearing] I could tell ya why I got involved with the union.  
27

28Marilyn Coulter: Okay, start with the why.  
29

30Dennis Cox: Okay. The reason why I got involved with the union was because, at the  
31 time, our committeemen was very hard to find. You couldn't find'm if you  
32 put in a call. Sometimes it took ya maybe 2, 3 days before you got your  
33 call answered. [throat clearing] At that point, I decided that I'm gonna get  
34 involved and people are not gonna have to look for me, they're gonna see  
35 me 'cause I'm gonna go to the floor 2 to 3 times a day, walk from one end  
36 of my department to the other every single day at least 3 times. [throat  
37 clearing] Uh, that way, not only did the people see me, but they couldn't  
38 complain because I wasn't available. Also, because of the way that I did it,  
39 I knew what was going on before anything got out of control.  
40

41Cheryl McQuaid: Cheryl McQuaid. [12:43] Denny, what shift did you hire into and what  
42 did, what shift did you spend most of your time on?  
43

44Dennis Cox: I hired in on the dayshift and was trained for 2 weeks and then put right  
45 straight to nights at that point. I worked nights for, I believe, 11 years.  
46 And, uh, at that time, I bumped back to days, and when I say bumped back

1 to days, I found someone on the dayshift that had less seniority than I did,  
2 so I was able to go from the nightshift to the dayshift. I was real lucky in  
3 that aspect because once I hit the dayshift I never got bumped back to  
4 nights.  
5

6Cheryl McQuaid: [13:29] Maggie, I'm sorry, but what was it like bein' married to a man on  
7 the 2<sup>nd</sup> shift puttin' in all those hours? What was it like for the family?  
8

9Margaret Cox: Um, very difficult. [throat clearing] Our daughters, uh, we have 2  
10 daughters. Um, they were 15 months apart, and it was, they would be in  
11 bed by the time, you know, they'd be in bed, daddy was at work, then  
12 during the daytime we had to spend time outside a lot so he got his sleep.  
13 Um, he didn't get to participate in a lot of the activities that went on at the  
14 school, when the, when the girls were in grade school – the Christmas  
15 programs, any of their sports or anything like that. But he did make up for  
16 it after he got on days.  
17

18Dennis Cox: [throat clearing] I remember when I was on nights, uh, the only part that I  
19 liked about it was I didn't have to get up in the mornin'. But, on the other  
20 side of that coin was I would get up long enough to eat my dinner, get in  
21 the vehicle, go to work. Come home, go to bed, sleep; a half hour before it  
22 was time to leave to go to work again. It was a lot of sleepin' and I think  
23 probably a lot of that was that, uh, was a lot of the overtime, uh. The other  
24 thing that was, was hard on me – bein' inside. I'm an outdoors person and  
25 bein' inside the plant for 9, 10 hours a day, uh, not knowing what the  
26 weather's doin' outside, not knowing, uh, you know, basically not  
27 knowin' what's goin' on outside. Uh, it was, it was difficult bein' what I  
28 cons-, I always used the term locked inside, you know, but it, you know,  
29 but I didn't, I didn't like nights. I did not like nights at all, but I couldn't  
30 get on days 'cause I didn't have enough seniority to get on days. Uh, like I  
31 said, I was very lucky that once I got on days, I was able to maintain and  
32 stay on days.  
33

34Cheryl McQuaid: [15:57] Could you tell us a little bit when you first hired in what the plant  
35 was like as far as, um, uh, both lines were on the same floor, when that  
36 changed, some of the changes when you first came in there?  
37

38Dennis Cox: Our line was on the outside. When I say on the outside, we had the, uh,  
39 our line was on the, it ran, ran around the outside of the walls. The, uh,  
40 that's a B line. The A lane, A line ran on the inside. I always figured we  
41 was more fortunate bein' on the B line because, at that time, Verlinden  
42 Avenue had windows and you could go over to the windows and look out  
43 the windows, or while you was working right there you could look out the  
44 windows. Well, after a few years, they boxed them windows up. They  
45 closed'm right up and you couldn't see out at all and that refers back to  
46 what I was talkin' about was you didn't know what was goin' on outside.

1 It was somebody come up with this, uh, idea that, uh, if you could see a  
2 green wall, uh, you're a lot better off no knowin' what's goin' on outside.  
3 Well, I disagreed with that right away because, you know, you wanna  
4 know what's goin' on outside, you know. I guess what the thing is, what  
5 you can't see, you really wanna know what you can't see, you know, and  
6 – the difference in the two lines. That was always, uh, that was always  
7 somethin' that stuck in my mind was I was real, real glad that I never had  
8 to work on the A line.  
9

10 The reason why I was, that I felt that way was ma-, mainly because of the  
11 supervisors that was on the A line. I didn't know'm real well but the ones  
12 that I did see, the way they reacted and stuff like that, I was thankful that I  
13 wasn't workin' over there because there was a few of'm that was in the  
14 higher status, uh, bracket that probably that if I worked on the A line, I  
15 probably wouldn't have been still, I wouldn't have made my 30 years.  
16 You know, that, that just, it was just, it was unreal the way that the 2  
17 departments, the A line and the B line, I'll use that, you know, department  
18 was the, wrong callin'm departments. It was just so much different.  
19 Difference between day and nights, the way the 2, the 2 groups ran their  
20 own line.  
21

22 You know, the, the line that I was on, we knew everybody from the  
23 higher-ups to right on down. They would come down our line and they  
24 would talk to us. They didn't, you know, if you went by and said hey, they  
25 answered ya back. Uh, the A line, uh, guys that was over there, it was like  
26 they didn't acknowledge their people, you know? And I'd always, I  
27 always wondered why. You know, it was always, uh, to me, it was, it  
28 wasn't right to be treated that way and, like I said, I'm very fortunate that I  
29 was able to stay on the B line 'cause I don't think I'd have made it  
30 otherwise.  
31

32Cheryl McQuaid: [19:22] Did you find it very strange to have such a difference in  
33 supervisory management practices within the same walls just because of  
34 different lines? Did you ever find out why?  
35

36Dennis Cox: I never really did find out why. I, I did have to, in, in later years when I  
37 worked as a committeeman and more so when I went to the job of, uh,  
38 placement coordinator, that was the last job I was on was the placement  
39 coordinator job and, at that point in time, a few of the older higher-ups had  
40 moved on, and things went back to what my opinion was would've been  
41 more normal people to work for or work with. It was just, there was just a,  
42 a few people, the superintendents – I, I think they were superintendents –  
43 that really pushed the fact that: Do not mingle with your workers. I had a  
44 different view of that. My view was that my supervisor put his pants on  
45 the same way I did, you know? And I had no problem, uh, I used to run  
46 around with, uh, before I went on committee, I used to run around with a

1 few supervisors on the outside. And when I went on committee, I was told  
2 that I could not associate with these supervisors on the outside. And I said,  
3 "Well, here's the deal. You're not gonna tell me what I'm gonna do on the  
4 outside." They were told, supervisors were told point blank that they could  
5 not associate with the workers on the outside. Well, we did it anyhow.  
6

7 Uh, at one point in time, while I was on committee, I went out west with a  
8 supervisor, or basically he went out west with me. I did the drivin'. It was  
9 my vehicle and he rode, he wanted to go and I said, "I don't have a  
10 problem with it but I'm gonna tell ya point blank, we are not gonna  
11 discuss work. Work, if you mention work, you're gonna be walkin' back  
12 from Wyoming, 'cause I'm not gonna discuss work. It has nothin' to do  
13 with bein' on the outside." Well, I took a, I took a pretty good gamble on  
14 that because a lot of people sa- - in the union, union, uh, workers, not, I  
15 mean, union position guys told me that you'll never win your election if  
16 you go out west with a supervisor. I said, "Well," I says, "as far as I'm  
17 concerned, it has nothin' to do with, with my ability, how I do my job or  
18 whatever." So, I was a little concerned about that when I got back and, uh,  
19 I don't recall anyone that I represented that had a problem with the fact  
20 that I went out west with a supervisor.  
21

22 Uh, shortly after that, there was an election. I had an election. And, uh, I  
23 had 1 person run against me. And, uh, you know, and you always wonder  
24 what's it gonna be like, you know? You always went, well, am I gonna  
25 win again or am I not gonna win again or whatever and, and due to the  
26 fact, like I say, I just got back from bein' out west with, uh, a supervisor.  
27 Anyhow, as it turned out, this other person got 2 votes. Uh, so, I went to  
28 the guys that was on committee at that point in time and I said, "Here's the  
29 results of my election and you guys told me that I wouldn't win again." I  
30 says, "You know," I says, "I don't feel that the committee job is a  
31 popularity contest or anything like that." I said, "The bottom line is you  
32 need to have your people see you." I could tell you committeemen that sat  
33 in the committee office and never left that office unless they had a call and  
34 they didn't know their people. You can't know your people, you know  
35 what I mean? I, I was, I don't know if I was an exceptional type person,  
36 uh, bein' on committee or whatever but I just felt that my job, I was  
37 elected by the people, I need to be seen by the people.  
38

39 Uh, the A line committeemen, uh, I thought they had a harder job because  
40 of the fact that they had to deal with the type of supervisors that was on  
41 that A line. Uh, we had a couple of supervisors that, on our line also, that,  
42 uh, should've been on A line.  
43

44Cheryl McQuaid: [24:51] Do you have any memories of those supervisors? Can you tell us a  
45 little bit about the type of supervisor that should've been on the A line that  
46 you didn't want on the B line?



1  
2Dennis Cox: The type of supervisors that I'm talkin' about is that, no matter what, they  
3 was always looking to keep things stirred up in their department. They did  
4 not want a smooth-running department. They wanted their department to  
5 be in a total turmoil on a consistent basis, and I never understood that, why  
6 they would want that. I went to upper management and they said, "That's  
7 the kind of supervisor that we like." Well, that's not the kind of supervisor  
8 we liked to deal with. Um, and don't get me wrong, there was some good  
9 supervisors on the A line but far and few between.  
10  
11Cheryl McQuaid: [25:41] Could you tell us a little bit about what made a good supervisor,  
12 and do you have any good memories of some of the, the better  
13 supervisors?  
14  
15Dennis Cox: Yes, I do. As a matter of fact, uh, what I considered a good supervisor was  
16 one who would set down with the person who had a problem and try to  
17 talk it out with'm versus takin' the role that "I'm right, you're wrong,  
18 we're not gonna talk about it." Uh, I don't know, I had a, kind of had a  
19 way with, with words, I guess, that, uh, could sometimes turn'm around  
20 from bein' that type of a supervisor. Uh, we had one individual in  
21 particular that no matter what you tried with him, uh, he would not listen  
22 no matter what. And that type of supervisor, in my opinion, always – his  
23 department always ran, uh, rough. I spent a lot of time walking through his  
24 department just to, uh, antagonize him and let him know that I was there  
25 knowin' what was goin' on because of the fact of the way that he was.  
26  
27Cheryl McQuaid: [27:04] Do you remember any of the people that you worked by, and did  
28 any of them have a influence on your life or do anything for you that  
29 would, you'll just never forget them, or ...?  
30  
31Dennis Cox: I remember – the one thing that really, really, really sticks in my mind is  
32 this guy named, we called him Whitey. Uh, he was an older gentleman  
33 and, uh, when he retired – him and I used to talk every day, every day we  
34 used to talk, and when he retired, it was like he took a part of me with him  
35 when he left. It was a sad day. It was a sad day for me because I'm  
36 thinkin' wow, I'm not gonna get to talk to, you know, get to talk to Whitey  
37 every day like I was, you know? And, uh, it was just kind of difficult right  
38 there. Um, that's the only one that I really remember, uh, like I say, when  
39 he retired, it took a part of it with me, took a part of me with him. But  
40 there was so many, uh, people in that plant. I really don't think that  
41 anybody affected the way that I was or the way that I turned out.  
42  
43 Uh, I really, I, that's a hard question to answer because I have, I still have  
44 a lot of friends from the plant. Uh, and the 2 jobs, the 2 jobs that I was on,  
45 and especially the last job, I got to know pretty much everybody from one  
46 end of the plant to the other. Uh, to this day, I can't go anywhere without

1 someone sayin', "Hi, Denny," and it's terrible because I cannot remember  
2 their names. I know the face, I can say, I can, well, I, you know, you  
3 worked on the A line or you worked on the B line or you worked in trim,  
4 you worked in paint, uh, that I can do. But to come right out and say what  
5 the person's name is [chuckle].  
6  
7 Well, I guess, I was very fortunate because when I retired, they took up a  
8 list on both lines throughout the whole plant. These people signed these,  
9 uh, my retirement card, which retirement card was a, uh, about 10 inches  
10 wide by about 12 inches high, and I have 2 of them and there's just nothin'  
11 but solid hand names on this card. And I have that up as – when you walk  
12 in our house, them 2 cards are right there. I will go home after I see  
13 somebody at the mall or somewhere and I'll go to that card, both of them  
14 cards and I'll start goin' down – oh, that was Cheryl that I just seen, you  
15 know? And that, that's really helped me to, to figure out what some of  
16 these people's names are 'cause, you know, they only had to remember 1  
17 name. I had to remember 5,000, you know, and it was kind of hard.  
18  
19 Uh, when the A line – I knew a lot of people from the A line when the 2  
20 lines were together. I knew a lot of them 'cause, uh, we were, you know,  
21 we was close enough where we could talk with'm, joke with'm and stuff  
22 like that. When they took the A line and moved it downstairs, uh, I didn't  
23 like it for the fact that there was a lot of people that I was friends with that  
24 was down there and when you went down to visit them, they would say,  
25 "Hey, you're out of your department. Get back to your department." Uh,  
26 so, you lost a few friendships there. I mean, not friendships, but contacts  
27 there because of the fact that they was ...  
28  
29 Interviewer: We're gonna stop.  
30  
31 Dennis Cox: Okay, anyhow, we ended up with, uh, if I seen somebody and couldn't  
32 remember what their name was, I would go home and find it on my, uh,  
33 retirement card.  
34  
35 Cheryl McQuaid: [31:50] Denny, do you remember any of the new hire pranks or initiations  
36 or just some of the, the stuff that would happen on the floor to kind of pass  
37 time?  
38  
39 Dennis Cox: Oh, yes, I do. I can tell ya some war stories that you won't believe.  
40  
41 John Fedewa: [laughing]  
42  
43 Dennis Cox: We, [chuckle] I guess one of the biggest things [throat clearing] was if we  
44 had a new hire that hired in around Thanksgivin' or somethin', we'd  
45 always tell him, uh, him or her, to go down to the office and see so-and-so

1 and get your turkey. We sent'm down there to get their turkey. Well they  
2 come back, "There, there wasn't no turkey."  
3  
4 Cheryl McQuaid: [laughing]  
5  
6 Dennis Cox: And I can remember that, uh, we used to tell'm, say, "Hey, go over there  
7 and ask, uh, John about, uh, his dad. His dad's a dancer." And he says,  
8 "He's a dancer?" "Yeah." So, he'd go over, and he'd say, "Hey, John," he  
9 says, "I hear your dad's a, a dancer." John would say with a straight face,  
10 he says, "You know, I, I don't think that's very funny and my dad lost a  
11 leg in the war."  
12  
13 Cheryl McQuaid: [laughing]  
14  
15 John Fedewa: [laughing]  
16  
17 Marilyn Coulter: [laughing]  
18  
19 Jerri Smith: [laughing]  
20  
21 Dennis Cox: Oh yeah. We used to pull some good ones. I mean, the, uh, we'd say the  
22 turkey, the, the, and we'd say, you know, that the, set him up with the, the  
23 guy was a, uh, his dad was a piano player and, and now his dad lost his  
24 arm, you know, and stuff like that and, but, yeah, we'd just do it so serious  
25 that, you know, we [laughing] – but, uh, we had a good time, you know,  
26 and new hires, uh, I was one of'm, you know, at one time and the pranks  
27 all got pulled on me, but I was, uh, pretty good at pullin'm back, so.  
28 [throat clearing] Oh yeah, we used to take and, uh, sneak up behind  
29 somebody and pick'm up and throw'm in the trunk and throw the key in  
30 there with'm. Uh, [chuckle] oh yeah. Pick'm up, put'm in a barrel. Just  
31 different, just different things. Uh ...  
32  
33 Cheryl McQuaid: [33:59] And how would these people get out of the trunk?  
34  
35 Dennis Cox: Yeah, the, they could send the key through the, from underneath the, the  
36 seats weren't in'm yet and ...  
37  
38 Cheryl McQuaid: Oh, okay.  
39  
40 Dennis Cox: ... they could, uh, or they could hand it back out by the, where the, uh,  
41 taillights went. They'd get back out. But, uh, we used to have fun with it.  
42 Uh, I remember, [throat clearing] I remember some of the times when we  
43 had some people that, uh, liked to drink in the plant. And I remember one  
44 time the supervisor, a supervisor came down there and one of the guys had  
45 a bottle of, uh, Boone's Farm wine and he just happened to get caught

1 takin' a drink. Supervisor said, "I told you to get rid of it," and the guy  
2 said, "I'm gettin' rid of it as fast as I can." [laughing]  
3  
4 Cheryl McQuaid: [laughing]  
5  
6 John Fedewa: [laughing]  
7  
8 Dennis Cox: Oh yeah. Them were the days. And I can remember guys would hold the,  
9 uh – [throat clearing] we'd have a cracked windshield and they would hold  
10 the window open that went along the side of the plant. They would come  
11 at that window with that big windshield in their hand, we'd hold the  
12 window open, they'd throw that glass right out the window, and we had  
13 one that, uh, went over the fence, hovered a little bit and sat right down on  
14 the, uh, road and, uh, pretty quick, uh, here come Plant Protection.  
15  
16 And we thought oh boy, that guys in trouble for throwin' that glass out the  
17 window. Plant Protection pulled up their with their little station wagon,  
18 loaded that, uh, didn't even break the glass, well, the glass was already  
19 cracked, the window was cracked, but the windshield – and it didn't  
20 shatter or nothin', it just hovered and sat right down on the road. He  
21 stopped, picked it up, put it in the back of his, uh, station wagon. And  
22 we're thinkin' wow, you know. Well, come to find out, what they thought  
23 was, they thought it fell off of one of the, uh, trucks that hauls stuff over to  
24 Simon's, so, but – eh, it just, and guys would, would take bottles, uh,  
25 whiskey bottles or whatever and set it on top of a car and let it go down  
26 the line and when it get down, then they'd go around this way and be  
27 down there at the supervisor's desk talkin' and, but when the bottle got  
28 down there, they'd say, "I told them guys not to do anymore drinkin'."  
29 He'd go over and take it off the car and throw it in the wastebasket. He's  
30 the one who put it up there.  
31  
32 Cheryl McQuaid: Yeah [laughing].  
33  
34 John Fedewa: [laughing]  
35  
36 Dennis Cox: But, uh, you know, I just, there was a lot of things, there was a lot of  
37 things that was done that I didn't agree with. Uh, you know, there'd be  
38 busted, uh, busted windshields and stuff like that and, uh, we'd have to  
39 take a hammer, bust'm up smaller so they would go in the gondola, uh,  
40 just so that they didn't have to write up, uh, that they had 15 busted  
41 windshields and, uh, a lot of the windshields got broke, uh, in shipping  
42 and I always thought they should've just sent'm back and let the, uh,  
43 company, uh, pay for'm.  
44  
45 Cheryl McQuaid: Which they did finally end up doing.  
46

1Dennis Cox: Yeah. Oh yeah. Finally they ended up doing that, but there was a lot of, lot  
2 of stuff that was kind of what I figured under the table stuff, but we had a  
3 – and there was a lot of, not a lot of guys, I’m gonna say there was a few  
4 people, maybe 1 or 2 in each department that, uh, didn’t want to get along  
5 with the rest of the people deliberately. Uh, them kind of people you just,  
6 you just kind of learnt to ignore’m. You know, they didn’t wanna be part  
7 of the group. Uh, we didn’t push’m, let’m go.  
8

9Cheryl McQuaid: [38:32] When you were a committeeman, Denny, [throat clearing] what  
10 were some of the problems when people called you? What, what type of  
11 problems would they call you on?  
12

13Dennis Cox: I would get called on [throat clearing] pert near everything from “this  
14 person’s radio’s too loud,” “this persons got the fan on, I don’t want the  
15 fan on,” uh, you pretty much – if I would get a call from a certain  
16 supervisor, uh – our, our calls came [throat clearing], our calls was called  
17 down [throat clearing], excuse me, to the repair area and so I’d stop and  
18 look at the book and they’d say okay, uh, supervisor so-and-so has a  
19 committee call. Now, I knew before I even got to that area who had the  
20 call in. They didn’t put the person’s name down, but I knew who that  
21 person was before I even got to that department. You’d, you’d, you learnt  
22 to know who’s gonna, who’s callin’. You’ve got, you had, uh, probably  
23 out of 10, out of 10 calls, probably 2 of’m was legitimate calls. The rest  
24 of’m was, was nitpickin’ calls, uh, because of so-and-so, uh, started his  
25 relief too early or he give this person 5 minutes more than he gave me, uh,  
26 [chuckle] it was, some of’m, you know, it was ex-, an experience, uh, and  
27 you learnt how to, you learnt how to deal with it but, uh, there was, there  
28 was some calls when you got’m in an area that [sigh], “I wish my alternate  
29 was on so he could take this call ‘cause I’m done with this guy.”  
30

31Cheryl McQuaid: [laughing]  
32

33John Fedewa: [laughing]  
34

35Marilyn Coulter: [laughing]  
36

37Jerri Smith: [laughing]  
38

39Dennis Cox: So, that type of stuff. But it, I tried not to take it home. Uh, I’m sure at  
40 times I probably did. Uh, I would not discuss what had happened at, at  
41 work, but I’m sure by my actions, uh, that my wife knew that I didn’t have  
42 a very good day. Uh, I know my wife got real jealous. Uh, I had a lady on  
43 the nightshift opposite me and she would call every night. Every night she  
44 called and would ask me, “What do I do about this? What do I do about  
45 that?” And I would tell her, I said, “Well, if I was dealin’ with it, this is  
46 what I’d do.” “Okay.” And, but that happened a lot, gettin’ called at home.

1 Uh, the legitimate complaints was fairly easy to take care of. Uh,  
2 management made a big mistake when they taught me how to analyze the  
3 job when it come to time studies. I spent like 2 days working with one of  
4 the time study guys and he showed me how they time studied the jobs and  
5 how they came up with their figures, and I learnt that well.  
6  
7 Cheryl McQuaid: [42:37] What is time studying a job?  
8  
9 Dennis Cox: Time study is when they take a time, a time clock and they, they check ya  
10 out to see how long it takes you to take, uh, this 2-inch bolt to screw it into  
11 the door. Uh, the time study – each aspect of your job, if you put a bolt in  
12 a door, you put a seatbelt on a floor, uh, you put a regulator in a door, you  
13 put a window in a door, the [throat clearing] – they had a time study of  
14 exactly how many seconds or, it'd have to be seconds, uh, how many  
15 seconds it took you to do each portion of your job. Well, [throat clearing] I  
16 learnt that real well and I had my own stopwatch and I could, uh, time  
17 study the job and knew exactly what the time study on that job was  
18 supposed to be, so when management would come out with a new time  
19 study, I could just tear it apart. And, uh, like I said, they made a big  
20 mistake when they, when they taught me how to do that.  
21  
22 And I had other committeeman that would have me come to their areas  
23 and, uh, show'm what, you know, how to time study some car, the jobs  
24 and stuff, but it was, uh – I would have to say the experience that I learnt  
25 from bein' a committeeman, how to deal with each individual. Once you  
26 got to know that individual, you could really, you could help'm out  
27 because you knew what they was lookin' for, you knew what they wanted.  
28 Uh, like I said, I spent a lot of time with the people that I represented so  
29 that I knew, I knew'm, you know?  
30  
31 Cheryl McQuaid: [44:43] Denny, could you explain a little more about time studying a job?  
32 Was that calls that you would get from people, that their job was, job was  
33 bein' time studied?  
34  
35 Dennis Cox: Uh, I would get calls because their job got time studied but the main, the  
36 main thing was that they would say, "I've got too much work. I can't keep  
37 up with the amount of work that I have." So, uh, I would show them  
38 exactly, uh, I would tell them, say, "Yeah, you do have too much work.  
39 We'll write a grievance and we'll get some work taken off ya." Uh, or I  
40 would show them, "Look, this is, this is how long it takes you to do this,  
41 this and this, and from this point where the car enters your workstation to  
42 where your car, this car leaves the workstation before the next car enters  
43 your work station, and you're doin' this amount of work and then also  
44 you're over here playin' Chess, uh, or reading the paper, uh, you know,  
45 and I would be blunt with'm. I would say, "Look, I can't do anything for  
46 you." I said, "If you are tellin' me you've got too much work, I'm tellin'

1 you, get rid of the paper. If you can't keep up in a reasonable amount of  
2 work," and then, you know, I'd tell'm point blank you don't have a, you  
3 don't have a grievance, uh, you know, I [throat clearing], I know some,  
4 [throat clearing] I know some people didn't want to hear that.  
5  
6 I remember the time I wrote a, I wrote a job up and I told these 2 guys,  
7 'cause they read the paper constantly, I told'm, I said, "I'll tell ya right  
8 now," I says, "I'm not gonna write this up if you're gonna read the paper."  
9 "We won't read the paper." "Fine." I wrote it up. Lloyd Cain was the  
10 international rep. At that point time, we was, we was close to, uh, a  
11 contract and, so, Lloyd Cain came, Lloyd Cain came in. We didn't tell  
12 these guys that we were comin' up, and I didn't know it, that we were  
13 gonna go up and look at the, the job. We went up and when we rounded  
14 the corner, both of'm was readin' the paper. I turned to Lloyd and, before  
15 Lloyd could even speak, I said, "I'll take care of this one." I walked up to  
16 the guys, I had the grievance in my hand. I said, "Guys," I said, "right  
17 there's..." and they says, "Lloyd Cain?" I said, "Yep." I says, "Your  
18 grievance just got tore up." And they didn't have a, you know, they knew,  
19 you know. Uh, it was just different. You know, some guys would, uh,  
20 push things farther than others but, uh, you just never know.  
21  
22 Cheryl McQuaid: [48:06] Did you ever, um, well it sounds like if you have time to read the  
23 paper, you have time to do the job. Was there any that were just so  
24 overworked that you had to get them help immediately, or was that  
25 somethin' you were even able to do?  
26  
27 Dennis Cox: Depending on the supervisor, yes. If there was, if they had too much work,  
28 uh, you could, I could go to the supervisor and say, "Look, come here.  
29 You can see that this person does not have time to do this, this and this." I  
30 says, "Let me do it." I said, and I did that many times. I would do the  
31 person's job. I would learn that job. At, when I was on committee, I would  
32 have that person teach me their job, I would physically do their job, and,  
33 uh, a lot of times I couldn't do the job either. And there's times that I  
34 could do the job but I also said, "There's no way I can do this job 8 hours  
35 a day, you know, there's just, there's way too much work." I says, "You,  
36 you do it." And I told the supervisor, I said, "You do the job." Well, no,  
37 they wouldn't do it. You know, he says, "Or you'll write me up for  
38 workin' on the line."  
39  
40 Cheryl McQuaid: [laughing]  
41  
42 Dennis Cox: [chuckle] I said [inaudible 49:25] I said, "I won't write ya up for workin'  
43 on the line." But I said, you know, we don't expect to have somebody, we  
44 didn't expect to have somebody not to have time to read the paper.  
45 Nobody wants to go into that plant and be stuck on that line, bench to car,  
46 bench to car, bench to car, bench to car. You have to have a little time in

1 there to read a book, read a pamphlet, read somethin'. Do somethin', have  
2 a moment to at least if somebody stopped by to visit with ya, you had  
3 time, you know, you needed to have time to visit with'm. You couldn't  
4 just go and say, "Well, he's got time to visit, he's got time for more  
5 work." That's not the way it worked, you know, it couldn't work that way.  
6  
7 Cheryl McQuaid: [50:19] So, did you enjoy bein' a committeeman?  
8  
9 Dennis Cox: Probably about 99 percent of the time, yes, I did. Uh, there was probably  
10 about, uh, there was times that I knew in my mind this was not right. What  
11 you're doin' with this person. It is not right. And when they wouldn't back  
12 off and you couldn't get anything done no matter what you did – you  
13 could write a grievance, you could send the grievance up, you know, go  
14 through the process – uh, it didn't matter what you did, you, uh, you  
15 couldn't help the person. And them are the times that I didn't like. I didn't  
16 like them times. Uh ...  
17  
18 Cheryl McQuaid: [51:16] Did you ever see any racial or harassment-type issues in the plant?  
19  
20 Dennis Cox: I don't know, I really, I don't think I could say anything racial. Uh, I do  
21 remember one individual case where the supervisor – I don't wanna use  
22 the word harassed this lady, but it was like anything and everything she  
23 did that was not up to par, he pushed her on it. Always pushed her on it.  
24 And some of it she had comin'. Some of it, he should've overlooked but  
25 he didn't overlook. And I remember the time that, uh, I was, and it just  
26 happened to be that this lady was a black lady, and I remember that, uh, he  
27 took her to the office, and during the interview she jumped up and  
28 punched him.  
29  
30 Cheryl McQuaid: Whew.  
31  
32 Dennis Cox: And I had to pull her off him and take her out of the office. I told her, I  
33 said, well, I says, "I guarantee ya, you know, you're gonna be fired," uh,  
34 "sign this grievance," uh, and they did fire her. It took me probably about,  
35 uh, 3 to 4 months I got her job back for her. Uh, I took quite a bit of  
36 harassment over that deal because they told me you should've let her kill  
37 him [laughing], you know? So, but I, you know, and, uh, I did get her job  
38 back for her but she had to go to the other line, which, you know, but [first  
39 53:21] was the job, you know, you take what you can get. Uh, but I'd, I  
40 really don't, tryin' to look back at, at it, I, I don't s-, I don't remember any  
41 harassment. I, I just, this one particular case, you know, sticks in my head  
42 but, as far as – I would say probably more harassment from individuals  
43 versus management versus the individual. I would say more harassment  
44 from employee to employee.  
45  
46 Cheryl McQuaid: [54:06] Denny, did you ever see anybody hurt in the plant?



1

2Dennis Cox:

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Not that I remember, uh, but when I, when I went from committeeman to job placement, uh, job placement, our job – I would work with a management person; we had an office together – our job was to find jobs that fit these people's restrictions, and by that I mean if the person got hurt in the plant – let's say that they picked somethin' up and ended up with a back, uh, back problem. My job as a union rep for the job placement was to make sure that management just didn't say, "Well, this guy can do it no matter what." Uh, my job was to make sure that, in my mind, that I knew the person could do it. What we did was many times we would videotape the job and take it to a doctor and have the doctor make the decision of whether or not this person could do the job.

I worked with 2 different people, uh, 2 different ladies as a matter of fact. One of'm was a black lady. Her name is, uh, Annie, and to this day her and I still keep in contact. Uh, she was a nurse, so she had the medical background of knowing what the restriction meant. Uh, if I had any question about what it meant, I would go out and I would talk to the plant doctor and ask him, "Just exactly what does this mean?" We would also take videotapes to an outside doctor and have him look at this job and say yes, the person can and no, the person can't. Uh, [chuckle] we learnt real quick there was some people that always played games. We learnt real quick.

[Inaudible 56:26] the – this one guy in particular called me almost every day. "I gotta have a job. I gotta have a job. Get me back in. Get me back in." Well, we finally found a job that fit his restrictions. Called him on the phone and said, "We found this job." "What's the job?" So, I told him. "Oh, I know that job." Two hours later he calls me back and says, "I can't do that job. I just went to the doctor and got another restriction." So, at that point in time, we learnt real quick don't tell'm what the job is [chuckle] [inaudible 57:02] bring'm back in and then let'm go from there because, like I say, some people want the job, some people didn't want the job.

Uh, that job was interesting because, uh, you really wanted to get the person that wanted back in back to work. And, uh, there was – the only bad part about that job was you had to disrupt somebody who had been on that job and basically, if this person had the seniority, they would knock this person off that job. You didn't like takin' a job away from somebody. Uh, but this person had the right to go there because they had the seniority, so therefore you, you had to, you had to do that. At times, I know I wasn't very well-liked because I had to disrupt the person, but out of the hundreds of people that we got back to work, I don't recall anyone complaining after they got taken off that job to me.

1 Cheryl McQuaid: Denny, this has been such a great interview and I kind of want – [58:17] is  
2 there anything that we’ve not asked you that you would like to share with  
3 us?  
4

5 Dennis Cox: The only thing that I’d like to, uh, say is 2 things. The one thing I’d like to  
6 say is General Motors and the UAW has definitely been good to me. Uh,  
7 my wife and I went through a bunch of, uh, memorabil-, -bilias stuff that I  
8 have collected over the years. Uh, different things that was giving, given  
9 to me at certain times for certain things that happened in the plant. Uh, one  
10 thing I did take, I, I had a 5-year tie pin. I took the tie pin and, in the plant,  
11 there was this guy that would, uh, silver solder your tie pin on a ring, and I  
12 made the ring out of a piece of, uh, stainless steel pipe and I believe that I  
13 took the, uh, in fact, I’m pretty sure I did because the pin would only take  
14 so much heat and there was a guy in there, and I can’t remember what his  
15 name is for sure, but he would take an silver solder the pin onto rings and,  
16 uh, I wore that ring until I almost wore the [wheels 59:58] off of the, the  
17 ring and I’m donating that ring to, uh, MSU.  
18

19 Cheryl McQuaid: Well, thank you very much. [1:00:10] Maggie, is there anything that you’d  
20 like to say?  
21

22 Margaret Cox: Yeah, actually, the only thing I’d like to say I’m, I’m grateful to Fisher  
23 Body, General Motors. Um, not only did they give Denny, I mean, Denny  
24 kept his job through them, the benefits that we’ve received through our  
25 union have been wonderful. When you raise children, um, you’re goin’ to  
26 the doctor, you’re goin’ to the dentist, you’re goin’ to the eye doctor and  
27 stuff. All of those benefits were very, very helpful to us. Um, I’d like to  
28 thank’m for all the wonderful friends that we’ve met, with me working at  
29 the union hall as a replacement secretary. Um, I started when Terry Ward  
30 was president and we have met so many wonderful people who are still  
31 involved in our lives through all these years, and we’re grateful for that.  
32 Right?  
33

34 Dennis Cox: Right. One thing, one thing I’d like to mention, uh, wages. I believe that  
35 when I hired in in 1963, I was making 2 dollars and 70, it was either \$2.74  
36 or \$2.87 an hour when I hired in. I think it was \$2.87.  
37

38 Cheryl McQuaid: [1:01:24] And was that a good wage then?  
39

40 Dennis Cox: Yeah, it was a good wage. That was back when, uh, gas was only like 20  
41 cents a gallon and, uh ...  
42

43 Cheryl McQuaid: [laughing]  
44

45 Dennis Cox: ... you know [chuckle], like stuff like that, but, uh, yes, it was very good.  
46

1Cheryl McQuaid: Well, thank you both very much.  
2  
3John Fedewa: Thank you both.  
4  
5Marilyn Coulter: Thank you.  
6  
7Jerry Smith: Thank you.  
8  
9Margaret Cox: You're welcome. Thanks for havin' us.  
10  
11  
12/kd