

**Amer H. Brooks discusses his career as a production worker
and UAW member at the Fisher Body plant in Lansing, MI**

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4
5Amer Brooks: 'Kay. I, I was born s-, July 17, 1929, Hancock County, Tennessee.
6
7Doug Rademacher: H-, hold on there just a moment. I am Douglas Rademacher. I'm here with
8 the Lansing Fisher Body historical team, and we are going to interview...
9
10Doreen Howard: Amer.
11
12Doug Rademacher: ...Amer Brooks today. It is October 24th. It's 12 noon, and we are at the
13 Union Hall, 602. Uh, good, good afternoon to you. [0:34] Would you
14 please state your name, spell your last name, and give us your address for
15 the record?
16
17Amer Brooks: My name is B-R-O-O-K-S, Amer Brooks.
18
19Doug Rademacher: [0:42] And where do you reside?
20
21Amer Brooks: In Lansing. 901 [Lorner 0:44] Street here in Lansing.
22
23Doug Rademacher: [0:48] Are you married?
24
25Amer Brooks: Yes.
26
27Doug Rademacher: [0:52] Do you have any children?
28
29Amer Brooks: Yeah, I have a son and a daughter. Son's name is Daniel, and uh,
30 daughter's name's Sue. She lives [inaudible 1:01] Missouri.
31
32Doug Rademacher: [1:07] M'kay, and, what is your national origin?
33
34Amer Brooks: What do you mean, religion or what?
35
36Doug Rademacher: No, your, are you...
37
38Doreen Howard: Ethnicity.
39
40Doug Rademacher: [1:16] ...what is your ethnicity, where did your parents come from and
41 your grandparents, where...
42
43Amer Brooks: They... [lived in 1:19] Tennessee.
44
45Doreen Howard: Okay, mm-hm.
46
47Doug Rademacher: [1:23] Okay, and, uh, what is your education background?

1
2Amer Brooks: Uh, eighth grade, and I didn't go to college or no-, high school.
3
4Doug Rademacher: M'kay. [1:31] And did you have any military service?
5
6Amer Brooks: Nope.
7
8Doug Rademacher: Okay, Amer. What I wanna know next is a little bit about the history at
9 Fisher Body. [1:43] Would you please tell me your hire-in date?
10
11Amer Brooks: May the 26th, '53.
12
13Doug Rademacher: 1953. [1:52] And do you remember which department you hired into?
14
15Amer Brooks: I hired into Fisher Body on a cab line.
16
17Doug Rademacher: [1:59] On the cab line?
18
19Amer Brooks: You know what the cab line is?
20
21Doug Rademacher: [2:00] The what line?
22
23Amer Brooks: Cab line.
24
25Doug Rademacher: The cab line. No, I'm not familiar with that.
26
27Amer Brooks: We built convertibles.
28
29Doug Rademacher: Okay.
30
31Amer Brooks: Uh, Chevy, Pontiac, [inaudible 2:09].
32
33Doug Rademacher: [2:11] And it was called the cab line, they were convertibles?
34
35Amer Brooks: Yes, yep.
36
37Doug Rademacher: Okay. [2:17] And do you remember which shift you hired into?
38
39Amer Brooks: I worked end-of-day shift. We had three shifts, and we, I mean, we, uh,
40 worked three days weeks, and three days nights, that time.
41
42Doreen Howard: [inaudible 2:33]
43
44Doug Rademacher: [2:35] S-, would you, uh, think back, and do you remember walking into
45 Fisher Body for the first time?
46

1Amer Brooks: Yeah.
2
3Doug Rademacher: [2:42] Could you share that with us?
4
5Amer Brooks: Well, at that time, I w-, w-, uh, lived, uh, was down at Indiana workin' on
6 a farm. My brother got a job here, and he, he wanted to know if they could
7 find anybody work, you know, he come down and got me. And I walked
8 into Fisher Body and, uh, had my papers already filled out, and, uh, they,
9 uh, gave me a five-minute physical. I had to bend over and touch my toes,
10 check to see if I had [inaudible 3:18], and they wanted me to go to work
11 that day, and I said no, I'm gonna wait 'til tomorrow and go to work. And I
12 hired in as a spot welder. They said, we need somebody as a truckin' job,
13 th-, uh, that's not drivin' a big truck or nothin' like that, it was truckin'
14 quarter panels to the, over to the assembly line where they put'm in a buck,
15 they had bucks in. And, uh, they, uh, put'm in there, and they put'm
16 together, and then they raise'm up, and they had the same four trucks, just
17 about it 'til you've had all these years, they've never changed them that
18 much. They would clamp'm in, and then they would, uh, put the bars
19 across'm and go down and they'd put the [rough 4:04] on.
20
21Doug Rademacher: [4:08] But they did this all manually?
22
23Amer Brooks: All manually.
24
25Doug Rademacher: So you're calling that a buck. Can you, can you describe...
26
27Amer Brooks: Yeah, that's what they called [inaudible 4:13]...
28
29Doug Rademacher: [4:14] ...what that looks like? What's a buck look like?
30
31Amer Brooks: It was just a, a rack where they put this, the parts in, and then they, they
32 didn't have hoists, and, they, they had just a [inaudible 4:27] bouncers, not
33 very many, you know, a bouncer'd hold a spot while [the gun's up 4:30].
34 Most everything was done by arc weldin', and, uh, or, uh, uh, let's see,
35 [inaudible 4:40] arc, brings welders in and call'm [inaudible 4:44] arcs.
36 And, uh, they, uh, they could spot-weld the guns, they'd spot-welding the
37 floor pans together. They had a big pipe, about that big, had this much
38 foam rubber on it, had one guy on th-, one side of line, oth-, other. They
39 had three of those. When it come down, he'd er-d, pipe over to him, he'd
40 put it on his shoulder, [inaudible 5:08] about that long, and weigh, oh 200
41 pound, and they weld the floor pan together.
42
43Doug Rademacher: So the pipe was a good inch round. [5:16] Was that...
44
45Amer Brooks: Oh, yeah. [inaudible 5:18]
46

1 Doug Rademacher: ...solid cast?
2

3 Amer Brooks: Yeah, I don't know, it was st-, st-, steel...
4

5 Doug Rademacher: Solid bar, though.
6

7 Amer Brooks: ...no, uh, it, uh, it was a pipe. It heavy, something like that, you know,
8 about 2 inch. Heavy enough to hold 200 pound, uh, and weld, uh, a floor
9 pan together. And, uh, wire brackets, they had a dummy welder. He'd put
10 this thing on the floor pan and then, uh, spot weld it like that. And, uh,
11 [floor brackets 5:50] was all welded arc welders seat brackets.
12

13 Doug Rademacher: Now, you said that wel-, that welder gun was, what, close to...
14

15 Amer Brooks: Yeah, long enough to reach all the way floor pan.
16

17 Doug Rademacher: ...close to three foot long, then.
18

19 Amer Brooks: Yep.
20

21 Doug Rademacher: Okay. [6:08] That was, uh, – now you said you told'm you couldn't work
22 that one day, you came in the next day? That's...
23

24 Amer Brooks: Yeah.
25

26 Doug Rademacher: ...they took you down to the body shop, then.
27

28 Amer Brooks: Yeah, that's where I signed in for spot welding.
29

30 Doug Rademacher: [6:15] So how long did you do the spot welding job?
31

32 Amer Brooks: Uh, first 8 or 9 days I did a truckin' job, trucked, uh, wheel housin's over
33 to the assembly line t'where they put'm in the buck and...
34

35 Doug Rademacher: Now you say truckin'. [6:30] Was that uh, a h-, a manual push-truck?
36

37 Amer Brooks: Yeah, it was a rack could hold about 10 or 12 wheel housings.
38

39 Doug Rademacher: Okay. So you, uh, fed the line with these...
40

41 Amer Brooks: Yeah.
42

43 Doug Rademacher: ...all day long. [6:45] That was, uh, not a bad job compared to the guys
44 grabbin'm and weldin'?
45

1 Amer Brooks: I [inaudible 6:47] job. I had 10 people that broke in, I only finally got 1
2 guy, a great big guy, [laughter] Polish guy [laughter]. He, he took a job
3 over [inaudible 6:55] spot weldin' in.
4

5 Doug Rademacher: [6:57] Oh, so the welding was the better job?
6

7 Amer Brooks: Yeah.
8

9 Doug Rademacher: Yeah. [7:02] So h-, you did that for, you said, about 9 days? Where'd you
10 go after that?
11

12 Amer Brooks: I went on the spot weldin' job where I hired in.
13

14 Doug Rademacher: Okay.
15

16 Amer Brooks: Buildin' wheel housin's.
17

18 Doug Rademacher: [7:10] And how long did you do that?
19

20 Amer Brooks: Oh, I done it for years. [laughter]
21
22 [coughing]
23

24 Doug Rademacher: [7:19] Kinda took ownership of it? Is that what you mean? That, that
25 became your job?
26

27 Amer Brooks: Hah, well, they transferred me around where they needed. Then they put
28 me on, uh, breakin' people in. Uh, I could learn a job in 20 minutes, so
29 they got me breakin' people in, gettin' new employees. When I hired in
30 there, they had a little over 5,000 people. And you know what? We've had
31 the last few years, uh...
32

33 Doug Rademacher: Well, we're definitely halfa that by now. [7:57] When, um, you were in the
34 body shop, did you ever go to any other department?
35

36 Amer Brooks: I went on, uh, drivin' a fork truck for a little while, then I was on
37 supervision for about a year. [chuckle] I don't 'member the dates on that.
38

39 Doug Rademacher: [8:11] How many years did you work at Fisher Body?
40

41 Amer Brooks: Like, a little bit workin' 40 years.
42

43 Doug Rademacher: 40 years. Takin' a moment about all the different jobs you did. [8:26]
44 What was the best job you ever had at Fisher Body?
45

1Amer Brooks: Well, in '94, au-, October the 1st, '94, I got in an accident. I, uh, had my
2 leg caught in the shuttle and almost lost the leg. After that I didn't, I didn't
3 do any hard work. I just mostly stayed in office and answer phone. [Hafta
4 break in supervision 8:48]...
5
6 [coughing]
7
8Doug Rademacher: [8:52] Which department was that shuttle in?
9
10Amer Brooks: Auto body shop.
11
12Doug Rademacher: That's, uh, sounds tragic. I'm glad to see that you're still all in one piece.
13
14Amer Brooks: Yeah, I almost lost my leg, but I survived.
15
16Doug Rademacher: You were here a lotta years. [9:12] Were you ever laid off?
17
18Amer Brooks: Uh, I was on strike one time. I don't remember what year. We was on
19 strike for about 5 or 6 weeks, and I was laid off one time not too long after
20 I started work here. They had uh, in, uh, Willow Run they had uh,
21 [inaudible 9:32] transmissions [inaudible 9:35] for about 4 weeks.
22
23Doug Rademacher: [9:41] Without those parts we couldn't run at Fisher?
24
25Amer Brooks: Yep.
26
27Doug Rademacher: [9:48] You say you, do you know what the cause of the strike was?
28
29Amer Brooks: Eh, d-, s-, co-, co-, a new contract.
30
31Doug Rademacher: Okay. [9:59] And did you share, how long, you said the one time you were
32 laid off how many weeks?
33
34Amer Brooks: Uh, 4 weeks. I drew unemployment.
35
36Doug Rademacher: [10:10] Was there strike pay at that time?
37
38Amer Brooks: No.
39
40Doug Rademacher: [inaudible 10:14]
41
42Amer Brooks: They didn't have strike pay. All we had is just a little unemployment.
43
44Doug Rademacher: 'Kay. [10:21] How did you feel about goin' out on strike?
45

1Amer Brooks: Well, it didn't bother me that much. I – had somethin' we, we need, you
2 know. We needed to go on strike to get a, get our contract, you know.
3 Every once in a while you gotta go on a strike to get somethin' done, you
4 know.
5

6Doug Rademacher: [10:42] So you supported the union in, in their decision?
7

8Amer Brooks: Oh, yeah. I've always supported union.
9

10Doug Rademacher: Doreen Howard?
11

12Doreen Howard: Um, going back to the body shop area. [10:57] D-, um, did you retire from
13 the body shop area?
14

15Amer Brooks: Yes, yes, ma'am.
16

17Doreen Howard: [11:03] 'Kay, um, can you describe some of the changes that took place in,
18 in the body shop over your time frame that you were there? Just sort of
19 what it looked like and some of your surroundings that you had.
20

21Amer Brooks: Well, every two, three years it would change 'til finally after they got away
22 from that buck system they went to a gate system. I don't know, you might
23 remember the gate system, eh, we had that for a lotta years.
24

25Doug Rademacher: [11:24] And what was the difference?
26

27Amer Brooks: Well, they had the gates that go around, and then they put the parts in
28 there and weld them in the gate and then...et-, uh, jobs got easier, I guess,
29 'cause they got more modern equipment. They got bouncers – s-, when I
30 first went in there, they didn't have bouncers for all the guns, and just a
31 few of the spot-weldin' guns you had to pick'm up and do the weldin'. All
32 the repair shops and everything, they, they had to pick'm up off the floor.
33

34Doreen Howard: [12:02] Can you describe what, what is a bouncer? Wha-, is that
35 something...
36

37Amer Brooks: That's a thing clos-...

38

39Doreen Howard: ...that hooks onto the welder and onto, like, another...
40

41Amer Brooks: ...bouncers...
42

43Doreen Howard : ...apparatus that helps, pulls the welder up?
44

45Amer Brooks: ...pulls the spot welder up.
46

1Doreen Howard: Okay. [12:15] So it makes it easier for the person using it t-, to move it? Is
2 that what it's for?
3
4Amer Brooks: Yeah, yeah.
5
6Doreen Howard: Okay.
7
8Amer Brooks: They had there – when I first went in there, they, uh, roof welders. They,
9 they, arc, uh, raised'm, you know. [inaudible 12:31] raise the acetylene,
10 and th-, and then they grind that down a little bit, and it went in the solder
11 [booth 12:39]. They would solder those rough seams, and then it went into
12 a grindin' [booth 12:45] where the guy just had to wear hoods on account
13 of lead poisonin', and, and they'd go on down the line to, uh, wet sand, go
14 through that, and, uh, they'd sa-, sand it, the autobody down, and, it, it, it
15 w-, went to a bonderizer, and it went upstairs, and they did their thing
16 upstairs.
17
18Doug Rademacher: Doing their thing. [13:10] You mean painting?
19
20Amer Brooks: Painting...
21
22Doug Rademacher: Yeah.
23
24Amer Brooks: ...trim work, seats.
25
26Doug Rademacher: So you referred to it as solder, but that solder was actually lead.
27
28Amer Brooks: Lead, yeah.
29
30Doug Rademacher: Mm. [13:25] Did you ever have to have yourself tested for lead?
31
32Amer Brooks: No, 'cause I didn't work in that area. That was after we got through the
33 weldin' area, we went into the...
34
35Doug Rademacher: In the...
36
37Amer Brooks: ...had the guys that, uh, after the solder people didn't have to take a lead
38 test, but [inaudible 13:47] went in to these grindin' booths where they
39 ground the solder down, and, uh, they had to wear hoods.
40
41Doug Rademacher: ...Doreen?
42
43Doreen Howard: Were you giving, given any type of protective equipment at all in the jobs
44 that you did?
45
46Amer Brooks: Oh, yeah, I had to wear a hood.

1
2Doreen Howard: Mm-hm.
3
4Amer Brooks: Then I got into MIG weldin', MIG weldin' come along, and that took away
5 from all the abrasion and most all abrasion and arc weldin', all that stuff
6 was eliminated then.
7
8Doreen Howard: Now what's the difference between the one type of, um...
9
10Amer Brooks: MIG welder's just a welder with a small wire runs through it, and, uh, and
11 you just hold it. MIG welder, um, weldin', abrasion, and arc weldin'.
12
13Doug Rademacher: ...'Kay. [14:40] Has any other members of your family ever worked at
14 Fisher Body?
15
16Amer Brooks: Yeah, my brother, one of my brothers worked there for about a ye-, 2
17 years, and then he quit. I brought 6 other people up from Tennessee here,
18 and the-, they only worked a few month it was too hard for'm. [chuckle]
19
20Doug Rademacher: [14:57] Did they go back to Tennessee or did they stay...
21
22Amer Brooks: They went back to Tennessee. [chuckle]
23
24Doug Rademacher: ..did they.
25
26Amer Brooks: When I first hired in there, they was hiring 50 people a day, and about half
27 of'm or more of'm would quit. People just wasn't used to hard work.
28
29Doug Rademacher: Linda Johnson?
30
31Linda Johnson: Amer, how much money did you hire in at. [15:17] Was it a good wage
32 compared to where you were from, or...?
33
34Amer Brooks: \$1.97.
35
36Linda Johnon: [15:23] Was that considered good money back then?
37
38Amer Brooks: Back then it was pretty good money. We was workin' 10 hours a day and
39 workin' Saturdays, and we get, we did get double time, ah, about time and
40 a half.
41
42Doug Rademacher: [15:37] What wage were you making when you left Tennesee? What
43 made you leave Tennessee or come to Fisher Body?
44
45Amer Brooks: Well, uh, I'd, I'd worked on a farm, a dollar a day. That was [made 15:52]
46 money when I was a young ts-, teenager. And I work, after that I went into

1 lumberjack, workin' sawmills and workin' timbers. And after that I come
2 to Indiana, work a couple years on a farm down there. Then found out
3 about Fisher Body, and th-, that's where I spent the rest of my life.
4 [chuckle]
5

6Doug Rademacher: [16:17] Can you tell me, when you were in Indiana and heard about the
7 hiring in Lansing at Fisher Body, how did you get up here?
8

9Amer Brooks: My brother, my brother works here 'fore I did, and he come down, pick me
10 up, drop me up here.
11

12Doug Rademacher: [16:27] Kinda car was that back then? [chuckle] Didja have a truck or a
13 car, your brother?
14

15Amer Brooks: First car we had was a '34 Ford. [chuckle] [inaudible 16:36] truck, a car.
16 Door open in front.
17

18Doug Rademacher: You said you spent a little time on supervision. [16:50] Can you share that
19 experience?
20

21Amer Brooks: I didn't like it. They s-, we just, after I had my accident, they sent me to
22 school and gave me a lotta trainin', but it didn't soak in much. I didn't care
23 about it, and I, we worked, uh, done pretty good the first year, and then a
24 bottle change come up, and they, uh, all the supervisors go 'round sent to
25 jobs upon how many people they needed, you know, and I had my
26 department all set up, and they said, well, you've got 5 people too many. I
27 said, well, you take your job and shove it. I don't want no more part of it. I
28 said, I've worked with these people all these years. I'm not gonna work'm
29 to death.
30

31Doug Rademacher: [17:37] Amer, would you share with us; when you hired in, were there
32 many women in the plant, and were there any minorities?
33

34Amer Brooks: No. They was only, when I hired in there was maybe only a, a dozen
35 women the whole shop. In the body shop they wasn't any. We, uh, we had
36 our own lockers out there, and we'd change our clothes right out there, put
37 our coveralls on, take our street clothes off. But after we got women, we
38 had, they goes the locker room, yeah.
39

40 [laughter]
41

42Doug Rademacher: [18:11] Were there many minorities?
43

44Amer Brooks: Well, yes, we had a lotta, uh, African American people and a few Spanish
45 people, not too many.
46

1 Doug Rademacher: Doreen Howard?
2

3 Doreen Howard: [18:28] Um, h-, how did – what was the perception of the women and
4 when they came in – how did, how did the pe-, the men that were there
5 once the women started coming into the work force, um, how did they
6 react when...?
7

8 Amer Brooks: Well, they had to wear coveralls, if that's what you're talkin' about, hoods
9 if they welded, same as the men.
10

11 Doreen Howard: Mm-hm. [18:54] Were they treated any differently? Or were they treated
12 the same?
13

14 Amer Brooks: Well, they was treated the same, and i-, i-, no-, there wasn't any
15 discrimination in the shops, I know the – that's something that [inaudible
16 19:05] wouldn't allow.
17

18 Doreen Howard: Mm-hm. So they, they were working just as hard as, as the male [inaudible
19 19:12].
20

21 Amer Brooks: Yeah. They was workin', they had to work just as hard as a man.
22

23 Doug Rademacher: [19:19] What were your plans before you hired into Fisher Body?
24

25 Amer Brooks: Well, I was always a mechanic, and I was gonna work a few years there,
26 and I was gonna go back home and start a little garage on a home place
27 down in Tennessee. Uh, we had 50 acres down there, land, and I was
28 gonna have a garage and a little store or somethin' down there. And I got
29 married, and, so, that was it. I stayed in Michigan. [laughter]
30

31 Doug Rademacher: [19:48] So your wife is from Michigan?
32

33 Amer Brooks: Well, my first wife was. And I was – first wife, after 11 years we
34 divorced, and I remarried, and, uh, the other wife, she was from Arkansas,
35 but first wife, she, she liked to go into the bar every night, and I couldn't
36 do that. So we divorced.
37

38 Doug Rademacher: [20:16] And you're still married today?
39

40 Amer Brooks: Yessir. Good woman. [chuckle]
41

42 Doug Rademacher: You hired in to the body shop. [20:28] You remember your first
43 supervisor, and how did he treat you?
44

45 Amer Brooks: Well, he trea-, I never had any problems with a s-, supervisor or
46 superintendent, every once in while when he'd come around and try to get

1 us to – when we worked off line, we had some production to build, so
2 many each hour, so many per day, you know, and, and, uh, the
3 superintendent come around and say, well, I need you to build a few extra
4 this week, and he'd tell us how many. And no, that was a no-no. After we
5 did that for a week or so and then we had to do it all the time then.
6 [chuckle]
7
8 Doug Rademacher: [21:17] Kinda played you once but not twice, right?
9
10 Amer Brooks: No, that's right.
11
12 Doug Rademacher: Have you – over those, that many years, you've seen, uh, different
13 supervisors. [21:23] Has the supervisor's technique changed and how they
14 work people or treat people?
15
16 Amer Brooks: Well, they, they had to treat'm pretty right, and they'd get wrote up. Had to
17 be pretty nice to'm. Uh, all the years I've been there I, I've never had a
18 reprimand. I had sick days, but over 40 years there, I think I was, 4 days I
19 was late.
20
21 Doug Rademacher: I'm curious about the environmental conditions. When you hired in, in the
22 body shop, wasn't it, uh...
23
24 Amer Brooks: It was always [environment 22:06]. Smoke – and, we didn't have air
25 conditionin'...
26
27 [cough]
28
29 Amer Brooks: ...at all, at all. They had fans that'd blowin' the smoke around and –
30 summertime, it was so hot.
31
32 Doug Rademacher: [22:20] Every day, even if it wasn't hot outside it was oven-like inside?
33
34 Amer Brooks: Inside, too.
35
36 Doug Rademacher: [22:24] Now that smoke – could you see very far? With all those welders
37 goin' on?
38
39 Amer Brooks: Oh, yeah, you could see, but, you know, uh, uh, smoke from the welders
40 and stuff like that, you know, you, uh, you get quite a bit of smoke, and it
41 just blowin' around in there. They had vents, but it wasn't takin'm all out.
42
43 Doug Rademacher: [22:45] So before you retired, did you notice a change in the conditions in
44 which ya, you were able to work?
45

1Amer Brooks: Well, it, uh, it never changed much when I left in there in '92, it just still –
2 a lotta pollution in there. Lotta, lot of people that worked in there, uh,
3 they, uh, lotta my friends died right away after they retired. Uh, a lot of'm
4 died with lung cancer and stuff like that. It wasn't a healthy environment
5 in there. But it was a good payin' job. [chuckle]
6

7Doug Rademacher: M'kay.
8

9Amer Brooks: I was makin' about 18 dollars an hour when I retired. That was a big, big
10 jump from a dollar ninety-seven.
11
12 [throat clearing]
13

14Doug Rademacher: From a dollar a day on the farm to...
15

16Amer Brooks: Yeah.
17

18Doug Rademacher: ...2 dollars an hour on the line...
19
20 [coughing]
21

22Doug Rademacher: ...to about 20 when you left, huh.
23

24Doug Rademacher: Doreen Howard?
25

26Doreen Howard: [23:42] Um, I had – want you to kinda backtrack a little bit and talk about
27 the accident that you had, and, um, can you tell me a little bit of what
28 happened there?
29

30Amer Brooks: Well, we'd, uh, had, uh...
31

32Doreen Howard: Did they...
33

34Amer Brooks: ... model change...
35

36Doreen Howard: Mm-hm.
37

38Amer Brooks: ...and a contractor's supposed to put up little – at all stations they
39 supposed to have a, uh, [inaudible 24:06] you know, so high so anybody
40 couldn't get in there.
41

42Doreen Howard: Mm-hm.
43

44Amer Brooks: And that morning I went and got a new shop coat and a, it's this, uh, uh,
45 it's a sealer stations where the guy puts sealer on the quarter pounds and
46 the, then the sealin', and I repaired the sealer guns, that was my job,

1 keepin'm runnin', and, uh, he blew the whistle. We had whistles. He blew
2 the whistle, and I come up, and he said my sealer gun is not puttin' out
3 hardly any sealer at all. He put it 'cross the line, I cleaned the sealer up,
4 hand it back to him, and that shuttle come back, caught my shop coat, and
5 there's a little post about that high, and it come down and took 'bout that
6 much flesh off from up to my hip down to my knee.
7

8Doreen Howard: Oof. Wow. [24:57] Now after that happened, did they institute any type of
9 measures from the factory so that that wouldn't happen again?
10

11Amer Brooks: Well, they, uh, they finally got a ambulance to come in. Took me to Saint
12 Lawrence, and, uh, they, uh, did, uh, took the, the skin and stuff off, um,
13 and they done skin graft, and I was off 11 weeks. Dr. Black, [inaudible
14 25:37] I don't know if he's still around or not, he was the skin specialist,
15 and he took the skin offa my hip over here and done skin graft.
16

17Doreen Howard: Right, there. [25:55] W-when you returned back to work was there any
18 safety precautions that were put in place because that?
19

20Amer Brooks: Oh, yeah. They shut the plant down for that day. [chuckle] First time it
21 had ever been shut down for all day. They got the contractor back in there,
22 and they did their safety work, but they were supposed to have done
23 before. But Fisher Body kinda give me the shaft. They try to say that I was
24 w -tryin' to cross the line. Anybody cross that line, that thing goin' back
25 and forth like that. The shuttle would pick up and go to one station, and
26 then it'd pick up the parts there and transfer it to another station. And
27 anybody with the right mind wouldn't try to cross that thing with it runnin'.
28 But my shop ca-, coat caught in the thing that sticks up like that, and
29 pulled my leg right behind it. [inaudible 26:38]
30

31Doug Rademacher: And you say Fisher Body blamed you rather than...
32

33Amer Brooks: Yeah, they...
34

35Doug Rademacher: ...the contractor they had to call back in to fix the, uh, to make it a safe
36 environment.
37

38Amer Brooks: ...that's the first time they had ever been shut down all day for [chuckle].
39

40Doreen Howard: [inaudible 26:54]
41

42Doug Rademacher: Well, we're sorry it was at your expense there.
43

44Doreen Howard: I'm glad to see that they – I'm sad to see that something happened to you,
45 but, um, it's a good thing that the company recognized that there was a
46 problem there and made, changed it for the future.

1
2 Doug Rademacher: Cheryl McQuaid?
3
4 Cheryl McQuaid: [27:16] Amer, did you ever see anybody else get hurt in the body shop?
5
6 [throat clearing]
7
8 Amer Brooks: Oh, just minor, uh...one time I got, uh, myself, one time I got a, a spot of
9 expired [inaudible 27:29] under my glasses, and it went in my eye a little
10 bit, and I seen people get, uh, a lotta bruises. I'd seen the people that kinda
11 use shears to cut their tabs off their [rough 27:45], so one time I seen a
12 guy, he had to climb up in, uh, in the trunk of the car and cut those off, and
13 that thing caught and come back and hit him in the head.
14
15 Doug Rademacher: [27:55] Stitches, right?
16
17 Amer Brooks: But they had mostly pretty safety stuff, you know.
18
19 Doug Rademacher: [28:07] Do you remember time clocks?
20
21 Amer Brooks: Oh, yeah. We had our little badges still, you know, when, uh, when we
22 first went in there. Little silver badges. We had those for years, and then
23 we got rid of those, and we got the time clocks. We, we always had time
24 clocks. But it, and it got to we didn't have time clocks and didn't have
25 badges or nothin'. We just had cards; we'd go out and punch in and out.
26
27 Doreen Howard: So, they...
28
29 Doug Rademacher: Doreen Howard?
30
31 Doreen Howard: [28:40] ...the-, they only way you could get in and out of the plant was...
32
33 Amer Brooks: Show'm your badge.
34
35 Doreen Howard: ...and your badge had, like, a number on it that represented you?
36
37 Amer Brooks: Yeah. They had numbers on'm.
38
39 Doreen Howard: [28:50] How did they know that you were the person...
40
41 Amer Brooks: Well, they didn't check that much...
42
43 Doreen Howard: ...they didn't care. [chuckle]
44
45 Amer Brooks: ...they just – anybody had the Fisher Body badge, you know.
46

1Doreen Howard: Mm-hm. [29:00] And over time, you said that changed from that system to
2 a punch card system? With, like...
3
4Amer Brooks: Yeah. Yeah, well we always had a time clock we punched out.
5
6
7Doreen Howard: ...they'd have some-, something set up on the wall or something where
8 you'd...
9
10Amer Brooks: Yeah, it was right out 't the gate where we go out.
11
12Doreen Howard: ...and pull your card out and put it in the slot and you'd punch it.
13
14Amer Brooks: Yeah. Pull it out here, then punch it and put it in the rack on [the other side
15 29:23].
16
17Doreen Howard: [29:25] Okay. And you were here until the change that they made with the
18 electronic system?
19
20Amer Brooks: Oh, yeah. When they put the robots in. They had the robots in when I got,
21 uh, my leg, leg ener-, injured. They'd had'm in for a couple of years. They
22 first put them in they had so much problems, those robots, and they didn't
23 have anybody knew how to fix'm [inaudible 29:50]. Those things were
24 dangerous, robots.
25
26Doug Rademacher: Yep. The robots were – they had, uh, they came from Japan, from
27 Germany, and they didn't know how to work'm.
28
29Amer Brooks: They had a mind of their own. They had'm programmed, and you'd better
30 stay outta their way when they makin' their swings and weldin' the parts.
31
32Doug Rademacher: [30:18] Whadja do for lunch?
33
34Amer Brooks: When I had a lunch, when I was on supervision [inaudible 30:22], had to
35 do up and set with the supervisor, and I hated that.
36
37 [laughter]
38
39Amer Brooks: They had their special, special room for supervisors, [chuckle] and any
40 other time I'd take a brown bag and, and my coffee, and I'd get a piece of
41 cardboard, and I'd eat and lay down and sleep during lunch. [inaudible
42 30:45] with the boys. [laughter] [inaudible 30:48]
43
44Doug Rademacher: [30:49] Do you remember your breaks?
45
46Amer Brooks: Oh, yeah.

1
2
3 Doug Rademacher: [30:52] And what, what did they have here for a while that made taking a
4 break –
5
6 Amer Brooks: They, they had a coffee wagon, they called, come around twice a day for
7 breaks. And they had cafeteria, that belonged to the cafeteria, they'd had
8 milk and had their coffee, and, uh, all kinds of [inaudible 31:17],
9 cupcakes, and, uh, sweet rolls, and all kinds of stuff like that. Juices.
10
11 Doug Rademacher: [31:30] Would you share, if you can, what is your best memory of Fisher
12 Body?
13
14 Amer Brooks: Well, [chuckle] I don't know. I enjoyed Fisher Body the whole time I was
15 there. I'd – when I retired, I, I really didn't want to retire, but my wife
16 wanted me to retire, and, uh, I don't know. I, uh, I enjoyed the whole time
17 I was there. I was – everybody treated me pretty nice. I was nice to
18 everybody, and, even the supervisors, they treated me nice. Most of'm
19 didn't know much. They didn't know how to run a place. I, uh, last few
20 years there, I broke supervisors in. They didn't know how to call
21 millwrights, and, and, uh, pipe fitters and stuff like that. We had
22 millwrights and pipe fitters and, and, uh, people to come out and repair
23 stuff, you know, and, uh, [inaudible 32:21] repair, and I had to do all that.
24
25 Doug Rademacher: [32:24] So you were, you were definitely needed to keep them lookin'
26 good, right? You knew who all the contacts were?
27
28 Amer Brooks: Yeah. I'd get a supervisor broke in, and then they'd bring a new supervisor
29 in for me to break in. [chuckle] Those was the last few years I was there.
30 I'd mostly sit in an office, and they didn't make me do any work after I had
31 my [inaudible 32:50] after '84 to '92.
32
33 Doug Rademacher: Doreen Howard?
34
35 Doreen Howard: [32:57] Was there any initiations or anything when you first came in that
36 they did, anyone did to you? Or can you recall any pranks that were pulled
37 on you...
38
39 Amer Brooks: Oh, yeah.
40
41 Doreen Howard: ...or that you pulled on other people?
42
43 Amer Brooks: Oh, yeah.
44
45 Doreen Howard: Can you tell me?
46

1 Amer Brooks: We pulled pranks on people all the time. Back when I first started, I
2 [inaudible 33:13] had that heavy arc. These guys had, uh, welding seams
3 and these quarters, and, uh, he sat on a pail. We'd take those tissues
4 [inaudible 33:26] and go to the water fountain. When he got up to put
5 another quarter panel in there, we'd set it down on it. [laughter]
6
7 Doug Rademacher: [33:39] Sit down on the wet towel and get all wet?
8
9 Amer Brooks: [laughter] Yeah. [chuckle]
10
11 [laughter]
12
13 Doreen Howard: Stick to'm.
14
15 Amer Brooks: And we'd done a lotta [inaudible 33:46] pranks, you know, done some
16 danger – for inst – we had one guy, he's always hammerin', hammerin',
17 hammerin'. Ever-, every time he picked up a part, he'd hammer on it. And,
18 uh, and I'd take a cigarette butt and put it in his coveralls rolled up about 4
19 or 5 times. Put that [laughter] cigarette butt in the cuff of his coveralls.
20 That wasn't very nice, but... [laughter]
21
22 Doug Rademacher: Pretty soon he found out that it was in there, didn't he.
23
24 Amer Brooks: Start smokin' after a while. [laughter] All we did [inaudible 34:20] mean
25 tricks.
26
27 Doug Rademacher: [34:23] Did anyone ever do one to you?
28
29 Amer Brooks: Yeah. One time I was, uh, in a 50, '55 or '56, those Chevys, those
30 wheelhousin's. They had a gun about that long, and we had to take a spot
31 welder and go back in there, and they had a seam on the inside, and weld
32 that. Somebody filled a milk carton up with 'cetylene. I was weldin', and it
33 blew right out in my ear.
34
35 Doug Rademacher: [34:58] That doesn't – scary? Or was it dangerous?
36
37 Amer Brooks: That was dangerous. I almost lost my ear.
38
39 Doug Rademacher: [35:04] You were burned?
40
41 Amer Brooks: No, I wasn't, just, uh, blood run outta my ears. It damaged my ear.
42
43 Doreen Howard: Oh, boy.
44
45 Doug Rademacher: [35:14] And that person didn't ever admit to that one, did they?
46

1Amer Brooks: No, s-, supervisor took everybody into the shop, and he offered a reward
2 for anybody to tell who done it, and he was gonna can'm same time.
3

4Doug Rademacher: Yeah, I think you...
5

6Amer Brooks: And they would put, uh, those, uh, d – guys that did [abrasion 35:32] stuff,
7 they would put 'cetylene in the rocker and somebody start weldin', and my
8 superintendent, that was 'fore he went on superintendent, he was weldin'
9 on the line, and blew up, almost blew his leg off. The whole rocker
10 [inaudible 35:51].
11

12Doreen Howard: Hmm.
13

14Amer Brooks: They done a lotta dangerous things around there.
15

16Doug Rademacher: All for a joke.
17

18Amer Brooks: Yes, a joke. I was guilty for the cigarette thing. [chuckle]
19
20 [chuckle]
21

22Doug Rademacher: [36:09] Um, did you view your coworkers as brothers and sisters?
23

24Amer Brooks: Yeah.
25

26Doug Rademacher: [36:18] Can you explain that family atmosphere?
27

28Amer Brooks: Well, we was all, we was all pretty close. Course, I didn't have that many
29 women workin' my department, even when I retired outta there, I think we
30 had, uh, oh, 25 or 30, and we had 5 or 6 women. They had, uh, women,
31 more women workin' upstairs [inaudible 36:48] trim, and places like that
32 than they did downstairs.
33

34Doug Rademacher: [36:55] Did ya ever walk through the whole plant or did you just show up
35 at Body and go out?
36

37Amer Brooks: I didn't dare to go too many places. I knew my way around, you know, but
38 I just didn't have time to run through the whole plant. Every so often we'd
39 go to, we'd get a bad vendor. We had a lotta bad parts, and we'd go to
40 [inaudible 37:15] and places where they made those parts, and we'd take
41 those misstamped parts and show it to'm, and they'd deny it was theirs, and
42 we'd say well, it's got your brand right on it, [laughter] I don't think you
43 understand... [laughter]
44

45Doug Rademacher: Just don't charge it back to us. I can understand that. [37:36] Amer, did
46 you ever participate in any of the small groups of people in the plant that,

1 some of'm played music at lunchtime, some of'm had Bible studies. Did
2 you ever...
3
4 Amer Brooks: I didn't, I didn't [inaudible 37: 49] any of that.
5
6 Doug Rademacher: ...didn't get involved in anything like that.
7
8 Amer Brooks: A lotta our people in our department. I wasn't involved in really, when I
9 was workin' there, anything like that. We had people that'd bring their
10 Bible out, and they would read, and they, they would sometimes miss part
11 of their work, you know, and let it go down the line, and finally they got
12 into trouble like [inaudible 38:15] read the newspapers while he was
13 workin'. Finally they made him to stop it. In the bathrooms they had a lotta
14 drawn dirty pictures. A lotta people would draw'm, and [chuckle]...
15
16 Doug Rademacher: Yeah, that was...
17
18 Amer Brooks: ...it wasn't like home sweet home, but it was good money.
19
20 Doug Rademacher: ...yeah, oh yeah. [38:48] Didja smoke?
21
22 Amer Brooks: I smoked. I quit about 27, 28 years ago. I quit drinkin' the same time. I
23 used to be a pretty heavy drinker. Weekend drinker.
24
25 Doug Rademacher: [38:58] So you'd already quit before they banned smoking in the plant?
26 Did you know they'd banned smoking...
27
28 Amer Brooks: Yeah, they was still smokin' in there when I quit in '92.
29
30 Doug Rademacher: 'Kay. [39:09] Did you ever have a friend in skill trades that made
31 somethin' for you for inside the plant?
32
33 Amer Brooks: Uh, oh, I, I guess I never had anybody make anything for me.
34
35 Doug Rademacher: No lockers or somethin' special for you.
36
37 Amer Brooks: Yeah, right. I didn't wanna try to bring somethin' outta the shop and get
38 fired for it.
39
40 Doug Rademacher: Mm, 'kay. [39:34] Did you attend your union meetings?
41
42 Amer Brooks: Yep.
43
44 Doug Rademacher: [39:39] How often?
45

1Amer Brooks: Well, uh, quite often. I, I wouldn't hear of a time they had a union
2 meeting, but I was re-, stayed with the union pretty good. I knew how bad
3 we need the union.
4

5Doug Rademacher: [40:01] Did you ever run for a union office?
6

7Amer Brooks: No.
8

9Doug Rademacher: Doreen Howard?
10

11Doreen Howard: [40:09] When you hired in, the union was already in place at that time?
12

13Amer Brooks: Yeah. Union was in place, but it wasn't too strong. When I hired in there,
14 they was just startin' the credit unions, too. Just startin' the credit unions.
15 Had people in there that was talkin' to people and startin' the credit unions.
16 It wasn't very strong. They just had a little building somewhere to serve as
17 the credit union.
18

19Doug Rademacher: [40:38] So wh-, on your first you hired in, were you approached by the
20 union?
21

22Amer Brooks: Nope. We knew who our committee man was, and I never, hardly ever,
23 ca-, all the years I was there I probably only had to call the committee man
24 2 or 3 times.
25

26Doug Rademacher: Doreen Howard?
27

28Doreen Howard: [41:04] When you hired in, uh, did you have to wait your 90 days, eh,
29 when you hired in? In order to be represented by the union? Was that
30 somethin' that came later on?
31

32Amer Brooks: Well, I think in 30 days.
33

34Doreen Howard: [41:15] In 30 days?
35

36Amer Brooks: Yeah, I think in 30 days.
37

38Doreen Howard: [41:21] And when you hired in, did you receive the same amount of pay as
39 everyone else or was it on a graduated pay scale when...?
40

41Amer Brooks: It was, uh, accordin' to what your job was. On-line job paid 10 cents more
42 than, uh, off-line work did.
43

44Doug Rademacher: [41:40] Amer, did you develop any friendships that have carried on
45 outside of the Fisher Body plant into your life?
46

1Amer Brooks: No. Not, uh, well, eh, I, I had a lotta friends that worked there, and I –
2 but, uh, after we left the plant, it was just, you know, I was a good friend
3 to everybody who was in there, you know, I didn't have any trouble with
4 anybody. But, uh, it's mostly my family. Then after, uh, after I married my
5 second wife she was real religious, and after 25 years or so I had to quit
6 drinkin', smokin' and started goin' to church with my wife.
7

8Doug Rademacher: Okay. [42:30] What is your most appreciated bargain benefit that you...
9

10Amer Brooks: Health insurance.
11
12 [laughter]
13

14Doug Rademacher: [42:43] ...have you used the tuition assistance ever to go back to school or
15 to do anything?
16

17Amer Brooks: No.
18

19Doug Rademacher: No. Doreen Howard?
20

21Doreen Howard: Um, you say the health insurance was one of the better...
22

23Amer Brooks: Yep.
24

25Doreen Howard: ...benefits. [43:01] Um, I'm assuming that you, that you used that benefit
26 quite a bit?
27

28Amer Brooks: Yeah. Every once in a while I'd have a little trouble with my insurance,
29 and I'd come over here and [inaudible 43:10].
30

31Doreen Howard: Mm-hm.
32

33Doug Rademacher: Uh. [43:22] Do you participate in the elections of the local union? Do you
34 still vote today and did you back then?
35

36Amer Brooks: Yeah. I didn't always vote the way they wanted me to. [chuckle] But I, we
37 got a big election comin' up now, mayor. [chuckle] We need a new mayor.
38 I think if we'd had a mayor what's comin' up, I think we mighta kept this
39 plant, I don't know.
40

41Doug Rademacher: Linda Johnson?
42

43Linda Johnson: Amer, you said you had, um, skills to, for a shop, a mechanic shop.
44 [44:03] Do you, did you ever use those skills outside the plant?
45

1Amer Brooks: No. I didn't do it outside the plant. I helped my neighbors do things, and
2 I did work on my house and stuff like that. That's about the only skills I
3 ever had. I had the opportunity when I was workin' there to go to, to, um,
4 skill grades, millwrights, and, uh, stuff like that, but I'd – they worked all
5 weekend, and I didn't want to work weekends, so I didn't take 'at.
6

7Doug Rademacher: Doreen Howard?
8

9Doreen Howard: During the time that you worked there, you saw different name changes
10 happen. [44:55] Can you tell me your reaction to the different name
11 changes?
12

13Amer Brooks: Well, every time they had a model change, they had change in the
14 building, and they lost people. As they got more modern, they lost people.
15 All the automation comin' in, and they were cuttin' people out. Robots
16 [inaudible 45: 19] really slice'm out.
17

18Doreen Howard: [45:29] When, when the company changed – when you first hired in, it
19 was called Fisher Body at that time?
20

21Amer Brooks: Yep.
22

23Doreen Howard: And then it, it changed to...
24

25Amer Brooks: EOC.
26

27Doreen Howard: ...EOC? [45:40] Did you have any reactions personally to, to those
28 changes?
29

30Amer Brooks: No, I don't care what they call it. Long as I still got my benefits and my
31 check. [chuckle]
32
33 [laughter]
34

35Doreen Howard: [45:52] Um, now that the facility has closed, um, what's your reaction to
36 the closing of the plant?
37

38Amer Brooks: It kinda broke my heart to see Fisher Body close down. Uh, that was my
39 home for 40 years. Second home.
40

41Doreen Howard: Mm-hm.
42

43Doug Rademacher: [46:15] What do you think about the new plant that's going up? The
44 people from Fisher Body being given another opportunity to build another
45 product?
46

1 Amer Brooks: I'm proud they gonna – I'm proud they still General Motors. I guess they
2 gonna be General Motors, ain't it?
3
4 [laughter]
5
6 Doug Rademacher: Yes, at this time. It's, uh, a big investment they put here. If you had
7 some...
8
9 Amer Brooks: I hate [inaudible 46:39] on account of taxes for Lansing and stuff like that.
10
11 Doug Rademacher: Amer, they hired a lotta people in about 1995. They got 10 years in.
12 [46:53] What would you say to that group of people that's got at least 20
13 more years to work? You got anything – words of wisdom or something
14 you'd share?
15
16 Amer Brooks: Well, I don't know. It, uh, hope the best of luck for'm. Hope they can stay
17 and work for General Motors. Cadillac might help their business here in
18 Lansing. They workin', still workin' good. That's good [employment
19 47:25].
20
21 Doug Rademacher: Doreen Howard?
22
23 Doreen Howard: [47:30] Did you ever drive any of the vehicles that you built over at the
24 time that you worked there?
25
26 Amer Brooks: Yeah, I always had General Motors vehicles.
27
28 Doreen Howard: Mm-hm.
29
30 Amer Brooks: I first hired in there, I had, uh, I bought a Ford car. That was 'cause my
31 uncle was a salesman for Ford back in Tennessee, and, uh, the rest of the
32 time I had General Motors cars, cars and truck.
33
34 Doreen Howard: [47:52] What was your favorite vehicle that you purchased?
35
36 Amer Brooks: I liked the General Motors vehicles a lot better than I did the Ford.
37
38 Doreen Howard: Mm. [47:59] Any particular model that you liked more than another one?
39
40 Amer Brooks: I had a '80, '88, '87 or '88, '88 Olds red convertible. I loved that car.
41
42 Doreen Howard: Ahh.
43
44 Amer Brooks: I [inaudible 48:19] women that.
45
46 [laughter]

1
2Doreen Howard: Yeah, red convertible. Mm-hm.
3
4Doug Rademacher: Amer, you've shared a lotta stories. [48:31] Have you got anything you'd
5 like to share that we failed to ask you?
6
7Amer Brooks: Well, I just hope General Motors can keep goin' and hope we can keep our
8 benefits. I don't know how many we've lost here in this last contract, last
9 contract thing. I hope we can keep all our benefits. I hate to start to have to
10 pay'm ourself. 'Cause, I mean, that [dialysis 48: 54] right now, and I, I
11 have to have insurance for that. I've got my Medicare and Blue Cross, and
12 so far it's been payin' all that.
13
14Linda Johnson: [49:04] How many times a week d'you have to do that?
15
16Amer Brooks: Three times a week, 4 hours a day. Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays.
17
18Doug Rademacher: [49:15] But you're still grateful for your job?
19
20Amer Brooks: I'm grateful. [All I did. 49:18] [chuckle]
21
22Doug Rademacher: [49:20] Do you attend the picnics? The union picnics?
23
24Amer Brooks: No, I didn't, I, I come to the union w-, hall when they held things over
25 here for a few years, and then after I become a Christian I didn't – around
26 people that drink very much. [inaudible 49:37] social or here, but, uh, I
27 just, yeah, it was my thing to stay away from the people that drink, you
28 know.
29
30Doug Rademacher: Doreen Howard?
31
32Doreen Howard: [49:50] Are you involved with the retirees at, at the shop here?
33
34Amer Brooks: No.
35
36Doreen Howard: In the union? No.
37
38Amer Brooks: I, we'd do a lotta at the shop. I mean, with the church, uh, I help do
39 maintenance work and stuff with the church.
40
41Doug Rademacher: 'Kay, Amer. It's been a wonderful opportunity to learn about you, and we
42 appreciate your interview.
43
44Amer Brooks: Yeah.
45
46Doug Rademacher: Thank you very much.

1
2Cheryl McQuaid: Thank you, Amer.
3
4Linda Johnson: Thank you, Amer.
5
6Amer Brooks: Okay.
7
8Doreen Howard: Very nice.
9
10
11
12/hj