

**Donald and Doreen Brown discuss their careers as production workers  
and UAW members at the Fisher Body plant in Lansing, MI**

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2  
3  
4  
5 Cheryl McQuaid: This is Cheryl McQuaid with the Lansing Fisher Body History Team. We  
6 are at the UAW 602 Union Hall in the Conference Room. It is December  
7 14, 2005, at approximately 9:15 a.m. We are preparing to interview Mr.  
8 and Mrs. Brown, Don and Doreen Brown. First, we're gonna go and state  
9 the rest of the people in the room.  
10  
11 Michael Fleming: Mike Fleming.  
12  
13 Doreen Howard: Doreen Howard.  
14  
15 John Fedewa: John Fedewa.  
16  
17 Dough Rademacher: Dough Rademacher.  
18  
19 Jerri Smith: Jerri Smith.  
20  
21 Cheryl McQuaid: Um, Mr. Brown, we're gonna start with you.  
22  
23 Donald Brown: All right.  
24  
25 Cheryl McQuaid: [0:43] Could you please state your name and spell your last name for us?  
26  
27 Donald Brown: Don Brown, uh, B-R-O-W-N last name.  
28  
29 Cheryl McQuaid: [0:49] And what is your address?  
30  
31 Donald Brown: 6003 Coulson Court, C-O-U-L-S-O-N, uh, Lansing, south end.  
32  
33 Cheryl McQuaid: [0:58] And educational background?  
34  
35 Donald Brown: Uh, 11<sup>th</sup> grade. I went, um, I went to Holt High School.  
36  
37 Cheryl McQuaid: [1:05] And did you serve any military time?  
38  
39 Donald Brown: No.  
40  
41 Cheryl McQuaid: No?  
42  
43 Donald Brown: Uh-uh.  
44  
45 Cheryl McQuaid: [1:10] And Mrs. Brown, Doreen, could you state your name and spell your  
46 last name?

1  
2Doreen Brown: My name is Doreen Brown. D-O-R-E-E-N B-R-O-W-N.  
3  
4Cheryl McQuaid: And ...  
5  
6Doreen Brown: Did I spell it correct?  
7  
8Cheryl McQuaid: [1:24] ...same address because you're both married? Correct?  
9  
10Doreen Brown: Yes. Yes.  
11  
12Cheryl McQuaid: [1:27] Do you have children?  
13  
14Doreen Brown: Yes. We have 3.  
15  
16Cheryl McQuaid: Three children. [1:31] Mr. Brown, do you remember the first day you  
17 walked – why did you go to Fisher Body for employment?  
18  
19Donald Brown: Well, I was, I worked construction mostly when I was, you know, a young  
20 guy, 17 and 18, and there ain't much construction goin' on in the winter so  
21 usually I looked around for a job to put in 3 or 4 months in the winter and  
22 then back on – back then you could hire in just about anywhere, you  
23 know.  
24  
25 I first hired in Fisher Body I think it was in 1950, around there. I only  
26 worked 2½ days and I walked in there and they put me up in hardware,  
27 you know, where hardware, rough hardware? Puttin' ge-, uh, glass  
28 channels in the doors? And I had a rough time with that job, you know.  
29 Oh, I tried it for 3 days, well 2½ days. The 3<sup>rd</sup> day I come in I told the  
30 boss, said, I said, "I don't mind workin', I'll work whatever job you got  
31 but, man," I said, "I just can't do this." I was cut from wrist to elbow, you  
32 know, puttin' in them holes in the doors, that metal cuts. Of course, the  
33 boss at that time said, "You ain't gettin' another job 'til you cut this one,"  
34 so I said, "Well, then you, you best be lookin' for somebody to cover this  
35 job" 'cause" – it was about 11:00 in the mornin'. We were 'bout ready to  
36 go down for lunch. I said, "At noon I'm punchin' out, you know, you can  
37 put whoever you want out here," which I did. I went from there over to  
38 Olds and hired in there same day.  
39  
40 But, um, I never, so I never got seniority. I worked the Olds a winter and  
41 went back out on construction, truck drivin' and things like that. But I  
42 guess, and I hired in in January in Fisher in '54. I went to Flint lookin' for  
43 a job before I come back to Fisher Body because I figured every job in  
44 there was like the job they put me on the first time I come in, you know.  
45 So [inaudible 3:21] I had to have a job so I thought well I'll go in and take  
46 my chances, so when I hired in the second time they, um, they asked me

1 what I did, you know, and I said, "Well I've been tr, truck drivin'." I used  
2 to drive for [Hall Black's out at standard block 3:34], you know, as a, um,  
3 subcontractor deal. We owned our own truck and, er, yeah, I drove for it.  
4  
5 But anyway, I told'm I was a truck driver and they said, "Well, how'd, uh,  
6 we got a truckin' job, would you like that?" And I said, "Yeah." I figured  
7 they were gonna' put me on a lift truck or fork truck or somethin', you  
8 know, er, um, tow truck. Took me up to building 5, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, and I'm  
9 standin' there and I'm lookin' around, man this don't look like a material  
10 [chuckle] department. I said, "Where's the truck?" They said, "Right  
11 there. The body's a [inaudible 4:08] you're, you're truckin' from one line  
12 to the next. You can grab bottom and pull'm over and swing'm around and  
13 then [laughter], so that was a truckin' job. I worked that for quite a while.  
14 Uh, that wasn't bad. They had 2 of us doin' it so 1 on the front, 1 on the  
15 back, and, uh, so that's what happened on the first day I went to work at –  
16 so you want me to keep goin'?" [laughter]  
17  
18 Michael Fleming: Um, you said you, you, you pulled from one line to the next. [4:38]  
19 [Inaudible 4:38] was this like a little thing you get on and you had to get  
20 off and take parts off of it? What did, what did you say ...  
21  
22 Donald Brown: No, no. You know, the body sat on, they sat the body on this body truck.  
23 It's a big iron deal where the wheels come down the track?  
24  
25 Michael Fleming: Mm-hm.  
26  
27 Donald Brown: When it come to the end of the track, well then you just pull it off of that.  
28 That's probably as big as this, bigger than this table, you know, the body  
29 truck itself was, then the body sat on that.  
30  
31 Michael Fleming: Okay.  
32  
33 Donald Brown: When you'd pull it off one line and just head it down another.  
34  
35 Michael Fleming: [5:08] Okay so you were taking the dawgs off the, off the line. You called,  
36 their dawgs, that's what their called and they took them, you, you're  
37 takin'm off the line to the next line to the next line?  
38  
39 Donald Brown: Yeah.  
40  
41 Michael Fleming: When they ran out of, when they ran out ...  
42  
43 Donald Brown: If it was a good job but if it was a re-, if it was a [rerun 5:22] we'd have to  
44 ship it the other way, send it back down the repair line. If it was a, if it  
45 was, the job was bought out, then we'd ship it down to final shipping.

1 That's where she worked was on – and they washed the windows and  
2 cleaned it up and [shoved it to Olds 5:34], you know.  
3  
4 Michael Fleming: [5:35] So those had to be right around 24 feet by probably 10 feet wide?  
5  
6 Donald Brown: Oh, they were, they were big, big heavy dut-, yeah. Well you imagine  
7 what a tire – these, these were completed body now. I mean they got the  
8 seats and everything in it, everything but the hood and the front end on'm.  
9 They were settin' off ...  
10  
11 Michael Fleming: [5:51] Mr. Brown, you said that, uh, you had, um, 3 children?  
12  
13 Donald Brown: Mm-hm.  
14  
15 Michael Fleming: [5:55] Do you have any grandchildren?  
16  
17 Donald Brown: Three, 4, 4. [laughter] Three or 4. [laughter]  
18  
19 Michael Fleming: [6:03] Any of your children, um, work for General Motors at all?  
20  
21 Donald Brown: Yeah. Scott, my son, does.  
22  
23 Michael Fleming: [6:10] Does he work for, which division? Do you know?  
24  
25 Donald Brown: He, oh he works for Fisher.  
26  
27 Michael Fleming: [6:13] He works for Fisher Body?  
28  
29 Donald Brown: Uh, he did. I don't, they don't call it Fisher no more but that was Fisher  
30 when we worked there.  
31  
32 Michael Fleming: Okay.  
33  
34 Donald Brown: Um ...  
35  
36 Michael Fleming: Go ahead.  
37  
38 Donald Brown: He's, um, he went in in 1980, wasn't it? When did he hire in there?  
39  
40 Doreen Brown: He, he went in in '81.  
41  
42 Donald Brown: Eighty-one, around there. Um, he's off on this, what'd he call it? Um ...  
43  
44 Doreen Brown: [Inaudible 6:36]  
45  
46 Donald Brown: Final, end of the, end of line repair or whatever where they're ...

1  
2Michael Fleming: Yes. The end of the line ...  
3  
4Donald Brown: ...training on – he's out now goin' to different plants, learnin', um...  
5  
6Michael Fleming: That's a very good opportunity, which is our end of the line repair where  
7 we picked up those jobs when we became a complete facility to complete  
8 cars from one end to the other.  
9  
10Cheryl McQuaid: [6:57] Doreen, could we find out about your first day?  
11  
12Doreen McQuaid: Well, I went in in August of 19...  
13  
14Donald Brown: Don't look at me, I wasn't there.  
15  
16Doreen McQuaid: [laughter] Nineteen Fifty. And I come from a small town and I had never  
17 seen such a big place in my life. And noisy. It was really noisy. And the  
18 reason I went there was I worked at, at St. Lawrence as a nurse's aide and  
19 I made 55 dollars a week, 5 dollars a day. I had 1 weekend off a month, 1  
20 day off a week. And when you go work at the plant, you made a dollar 47  
21 an hour and that was good pay, so that's why I went to Fisher.  
22  
23Cheryl McQuaid: [7:50] And do you remember the employment process getting into the  
24 plant?  
25  
26Donald Brown: You better tell'm.  
27  
28Doreen Brown: [laughter]  
29  
30Donald Brown: [laughter] She had a sweetheart deal there.  
31  
32Doreen Brown: Um, the man that was superintendent of the trim department, I roomed  
33 with him and his wife and ...  
34  
35Donald Brown: Their son worked in the ...  
36  
37Doreen Brown: And their son worked in the employment office. I don't know if anybody  
38 knows Nate Smith or Jim Smith?  
39  
40Interviewer: No.  
41  
42Doreen Brown: He worked in the, so, and they got me in there. He didn't think he was  
43 going to because I only weighed 98, 95 pounds, but they did. [laughter]  
44  
45Donald Brown: Mother told him to.  
46

1 Michael Fleming: [8:36] What was the first job you had when they came in?  
2

3 Doreen Brown: Um, went right up to the paint department and I worked relief believe it or  
4 not.  
5

6 Michael Fleming: [8:47] Do you remember what you did as a relief operator?  
7

8 Doreen Brown: Well, I had to stock the line and then I, uh, ended up relieving the window  
9 washers and, uh, clean up and stuff like that. And then eventually I ended  
10 up on, uh, window wash.  
11

12 Michael Fleming: [9:06] Back then, um, when you came in, were there very many women  
13 that came in? Did you notice very many women at all working in the  
14 facility?  
15

16 Doreen Brown: Yes. There was a lot of women. But then didn't have – I think they had 1  
17 in the body shop. Most of 'm were in trim and, and paint...  
18

19 Donald Brown: Pushin' around the cut and sold.  
20

21 Doreen Brown: Yeah, cut and sold. Cut and sold was still in there then. And, uh...  
22

23 Michael Fleming: [9:27] How long was it you, that you were in the – did you stay in the  
24 paint shop until you retired?  
25

26 Doreen Brown: Yes, I did.  
27

28 Michael Fleming: [9:34] How long was it before you began to get involved into, uh, the  
29 union activities. Were you, you, you – talk about, did you pay dues, uh,  
30 where, where did you start with the union side of it?  
31

32 Doreen Brown: Well, Don [Stare 9:50] and Charlie Pope, you probably don't remember  
33 them, but they were, 1 was president and 1 was chairman of the  
34 Bargaining Committee and they worked in the paint department. And  
35 when they come in they got you to join. You paid 5 dollars to join and 2  
36 dollars and a half union dues per month. And, of course, they didn't have a  
37 closed shop. You didn't have to join the union. But they talked a lot of us  
38 into it and we really enjoyed it. So ...  
39

40 Michael Fleming: [10:22] Now, when, when you joined, were you ever involved in any  
41 strikes or anything like that?  
42

43 Doreen Brown: Oh yeah.  
44

45 Michael Fleming: [10:30] Could you talk about some of those?  
46

1Doreen Brown: I think he would be better to do that.  
2

3Michael Fleming: [10:37] Mr. Brown, can you remember any of the strikes that ...  
4

5Donald Brown: Oh yeah. I remember the – seemed like we used to strike about every  
6 contract, you know ...  
7

8Doreen Brown: We did.  
9

10Donald Brown: ...for around, uh, but the big one, one when I was on the Bargaining  
11 Committee, um, on zone was 1970. That was a long one. We was out, I  
12 think, like 70 days, er, it was a quite a while we were out. And that's when  
13 – of course we worked on a night shift and the contract expired on  
14 September 14<sup>th</sup>, which it always did back, back then. And, uh, so that  
15 meant at midnight we had to shut it down. We had already taken a strike  
16 vote, then we knew General Motors, uh, UAW had already notified'm that  
17 they were gonna shut down GM and so we had to get'm, uh, we had to  
18 make sure that they got an orderly, you know, just shut down, don't tear  
19 up nothin', just leave the place, you know. So we went around and we  
20 talked to, you know, most of the committee men and shop guys and other  
21 union reps or, you know, people that's, you know, walkin' throughout the  
22 plant and gettin' the people, just put your tools away and walk out, you  
23 know. Which they did, no arguments nowhere, you know, people wanted  
24 to get out of there.  
25

26 So when, once, once you got out it was, um, then we had to go outside and  
27 make sure that we had – most of'm come over to the hall to sign up for  
28 picket duty but we had to get initial groups on the gates, you know, and  
29 that's when we, um, we had put, you know, any, any port of entry or any  
30 place they'd get in, even the railroad tracks, you know. And on top of that,  
31 it was rainin' like the dickens that night. [laughter]; it down poured. But  
32 anyway, uh, the girls, um, well the ones that she was with were out in the  
33 north parking lot and, of course, they had that railroad track comin' in  
34 there and, uh, so we told'm, said, "Well, you gals watch the track." I,  
35 nobody figured that after midnight there's gonna be a train comin' in  
36 anyway, you know? So they said okay. But they were sittin' in the car but  
37 they had their picket signs, you know. They sat in the car to get out of the  
38 rain. And we checked all the other gates. We had to have everybody, you  
39 know, everything manned up and everything goin' good. They went over  
40 there and here comes some switch engine down. I guess you'll have to  
41 tell'm what happened on there 'cause I wasn't there at the time you  
42 stopped the train but ...  
43

44Doreen Brown: Well they asked me to get a group of girls, or boys or whoever, men, you  
45 know, to go out and that was my duty. So we got out there and the train  
46 come in and we got out and waved our hands for'm to stop, and they stuck

1 their head out the window and they said, "What's goin' on?" and I said,  
2 "We're on strike." I said, "You can go in and unload but you cannot take  
3 anything out of the plant." And they said, "Okay, we aren't even goin' in."  
4 So they backed up and left.  
5  
6Donald Brown: He said nobody's, nobody's, somebody should've notified us that you  
7 [laughter] were goin' on strike. [Right 13:39], we should've.  
8  
9Doreen Brown: That was [bad 13:39] [laughter].  
10  
11Donald Brown: [Laughter] I mean somebody should've told them.  
12  
13Doreen Brown: [Laughter] I didn't lay on the track or anything, I just told'm ...  
14  
15Donald Brown: Teamsters, you know, we do it when they want trouble with the  
16 Teamsters, uh, a Teamster sees a picket sign he just keeps truckin', you  
17 know, but I wasn't sure about the railroad people. I was workin' that night  
18 with a, uh, the strike, uh, captain, or strike chairman, and I was, should've  
19 been his job, you know, to notify them.  
20  
21Michael Fleming: [14:01] Mr. Brown, do you remember back then what the strike pay was  
22 for when you went out on strike if you were out for [7 days 14:08].  
23  
24Donald Brown: Um, I didn't draw. Well I drew it but I was, um, in negotiations all the  
25 way through this thing but, I don't know, it was like, what'd we get, 25  
26 bucks a week or something?  
27  
28Doreen Brown: I think a married couple got 25 and a, and a single one got 15 or  
29 something like that.  
30  
31Donald Brown: It wasn't very much.  
32  
33Doreen Brown: Yeah, didn't get very much.  
34  
35Michael Fleming: [14:32] Do you remember where you had to sign up or where you picked  
36 up, where the people picked it up at?  
37  
38Donald Brown: I don't remember.  
39  
40Doreen Brown: Yeah, you had to come over to the union hall.  
41  
42Donald Brown: Yeah, I guess that's what it was and then ...  
43  
44Doreen Brown: And, uh, we had tables set up and as you come in you went to a person  
45 and they scratched your name off and then they made sure you got your  
46 money.



1  
2 Cheryl McQuaid: Doreen Howard.  
3  
4 Doreen Howard: Um, Don, you said that were you in the process of negotiations at the time.  
5 [15:03] Uh, what function did you, or what union position did you hold at,  
6 at that time?  
7  
8 Donald Brown: Oh, I was a zone committee man.  
9  
10 Doreen Howard: [15:12] You were a zone committee man?  
11  
12 Donald Brown: That's what they called'm. I had 25 percent, er, I, well 50 percent of the, 1  
13 shift was under me.  
14  
15 Doreen Howard: [15:19] And how long were you on zone committee at that time before this  
16 strike occurred.  
17  
18 Donald Brown: I went on zone in 1965 I believe.  
19  
20 Doreen Howard: [15:34] Okay, so you had, uh, quite a long background of [inaudible  
21 15:40].  
22  
23 Donald Brown: Oh yeah, well I was the beginning of it. I, I stayed on zone until I retired.  
24 So that was in '84, so I had 19 years really on, well the last 6 years as  
25 chairman of the Bargaining Committee, er, the shop committee, whatever.  
26 Um, but yeah it was – I went on, uh, I'd been in negotiate-, well I met, you  
27 know, weekly. We used to have weekly meetings over grievances but, uh,  
28 we was in contract negotiations and then we went into, uh, uh, in '70 when  
29 we was on strike, but we was in, I don't know, we was in probably 2 or 3  
30 strikes after that, but uh ...  
31  
32 Doreen Howard: [16:22] Um, also I wanted to know, um, you said you were in the, in that  
33 for 19 years, and in, in the beginning when you first, uh, got involved with  
34 the union, um, Doreen said that it was not, um, mandated to, to join?  
35  
36 Donald Brown: Yeah, well that changed in, I'm trying to figure, let's, I think around late  
37 '50s I think they changed that. I went in district committee man, I was  
38 district committee man for 3 years. Um, back then we had a district  
39 committee election every year. I had 15 hours a week to negotiate, er, to  
40 represent the people and a foreman kept your time, you know, so you ca  
41 imagine – that's the reason I run for committee man.  
42  
43 I called it – a foreman jump on me every Wednesday and every  
44 Wednesday I'd put a call in from the committee man and every  
45 Wednesday you'd be out of time. I said man there's somethin' wrong with  
46 this system [laughter], you know. And he had to come all the way from

1 the end of the plant down to us, you know, he worked up in 3X too and I  
2 was down in building 13 on the north end and, uh, so it was a long way  
3 down it, but anyway that's why, some guy said, you know, I started  
4 complaining about it, can't ever get a committee man and – if you had a,  
5 a manpower grievance, a paragraph 78 we used to call'm, that was, you  
6 know, too much work. Or a health and safety, you could call'm and that's  
7 supposed to bring'm down. Sometimes I'd call on one of those pretenses.  
8 They'd want to know what's, what's unhealthy here and I said, "I'm  
9 fallin' over, stumblin' over this rug I got on the floor here," [laughter] or  
10 whatever, you know. Just so I could get'm down there to tell'm what the  
11 problem was, you know. But anyway, that's the reason, uh – and a lot  
12 of'm up there, I worked a polish line then and, you know, and, um, a lot  
13 of'm were disgusted with, you know, not so much with the committee man  
14 as where the system was being handled so...  
15  
16 Doreen Howard: I got a couple other questions. [18:25] Um, in the beginning, since it  
17 wasn't something that you had to join the union, what, what prompted you  
18 to join?  
19  
20 Donald Brown: When I came in, I had to.  
21  
22 Doreen Howard: Okay.  
23  
24 Donald Brown: In '54. Um, but I had, you had to join within 90 days, I think. You's on  
25 probation during that period anyway, you know, the ...  
26  
27 Doreen Howard: So between ...  
28  
29 Donald Brown: ...the company could fire ya or do whatever they wanted for 90, first 90  
30 days.  
31  
32 Doreen Howard: [18:50] So somewhere in between '50 when you originally, when Doreen  
33 hired in in '54 when you came in ...  
34  
35 Donald Brown: Mm-hm.  
36  
37 Doreen Howard: ... the union ...  
38  
39 Donald Brown: They started that but evidently they didn't go back and make the ones that  
40 didn't originally sign up join at that time because I was workin' beside  
41 guys that, uh, you know, that didn't belong to the union, still collectin' all  
42 the benefits but wasn't, and they'd laugh and joke about it, you know.  
43  
44 Doreen Howard: I, I guess the other that I had would probably be more pertinent to Doreen,  
45 then. [19:21] Um, how many people were involved with the union at that  
46 time if it wasn't somethin' that they had to join?

1  
2Doreen Brown: I don't think I could answer that.  
3  
4Doreen Howard: [19:32] You don't know how large of a group that it was?  
5  
6Doreen Brown: No.  
7  
8Donald Brown: I think the, a lot of them were 'cause they had a lot of people really  
9 involved in gettin' the place organized in the first place, you know, they  
10 were still around, the guys who originally organized 602. So they, they  
11 had a quite a drive on, you know, and, um, them old timers, you know,  
12 they could, they could, back then they'd get ya to join, you know  
13 [laughter]. But a lot of them just didn't want it, some'd holler that's  
14 against their religion or whatever, you know, well use any excuse they  
15 could but, um ...  
16  
17Doreen Howard: One last question. Um, this is for either one of you. Um, actually, I forgot  
18 what I was gonna ask [laughter].  
19  
20Cheryl McQuaid: It'll come back to you. Michael Fleming.  
21  
22Michael Fleming: Um, elections. Seeing how it was, you had 15 hours to represent the  
23 people when you finally did become a shop committee person, talk about  
24 the election. [20:30] How did you run a campaign? How did you get  
25 elected? And, and your first election, what was that like?  
26  
27Donald Brown: Um, the first one, that'd been in '62. Um, I'd go on my relief break. I'd  
28 just, 'cause I didn't know too many people in the paint department except  
29 the polishers I worked with, you know. I knew up in building 5 'cause I  
30 worked up there 'fore they moved me down to, but that was all polishing.  
31 They just moved me from one polishing area to another. But I didn't know  
32 down, the sprayers, the guys on wet sand or seal area. So I'd go down. I  
33 this, uh, kid I worked with, ol' Willie McDaniel, and he said come on – he  
34 was my campaign manager, you know [laughter]. He thought that, uh, we  
35 gotta get Brown elected, we got, you know, we had to put a stop to some  
36 of this crap.  
37  
38 But anyway, um, so I'd just take my, uh, you know, my relief time and hit  
39 what I could. And uh, I guess it surprised a lot of'm because a lot of'm  
40 never, you know, like I say, they didn't know me, and then when I run  
41 against this guy named Don Stewart, he'd been committee man for like 4  
42 or 5 terms or whatever, and, uh, I guess I really smoked him, you know, I  
43 took about – 90 percent of the vote went to me, you know, so even as  
44 alternate, he run for alternate, the alternate got elected and he'd been  
45 working for it, he said, "Hey, I didn't know you was runnin'." [laughter]  
46 But anyway, he was my alternate then.

1  
2 Michael Fleming: [22:02] Um, after your elections and you'd been there for a while, did you  
3 ever, um, run for a con con, constitutional convention?  
4  
5 Donald Brown: Oh yeah.  
6  
7 Michael Fleming: [22:12] Um, can you talk about, that's a plant-wide election. Can you talk  
8 about that and, and how you had your first con con election and how that  
9 went?  
10  
11 Donald Brown: I, um, the first one was I think in '65, '65 or '66, or back in there. It was  
12 right after I got elected zone. Um, I got elected and we went to Van Nyus,  
13 California, at that one. Uh, that's where I met Caesar Chavez, uh, the  
14 farmworker, the president, after we walked the picket line with him out  
15 there on the, on the big supermarkets, you know, for the great pickers.  
16 Everybody's on strike, you know, they were on strike for about 10 or 12  
17 years [chuckle] I think, for a long time.  
18  
19 Michael Fleming: A long time.  
20  
21 Donald Brown: Anyway, they came to the convention hall and, uh, Walter Reuther was, of  
22 course, you know, president then and he introduced, oh, you know, the  
23 president of the farmworkers and he said he liked to walk with Walter. He  
24 said, "And we walked the picket lines or put on demonstrations with  
25 Walter Reuther, they never threw him in jail," you know [laughter]. If  
26 he said otherwise he'd be by himself with just his, his, uh, farmworkers.  
27 He said they'd always figure out some reason to arrest him but, anyway,  
28 they wanted us, they asked us if when they took a break if we'd go down  
29 as, to this big ol' supermarket. It covered a whole city block, you know,  
30 and the whole, it sat right in the middle of this block and, uh, they asked if  
31 a few of us would go down there and give the pickets a hand, you know,  
32 and we said, "Sure, why not?"  
33  
34 So I think about 2,000 of us went down there. We had 2 lines going one  
35 way and 1 going the other. We had the place completely – when we went  
36 down there the parking lot was full. Nobody would come in. We let the  
37 cars out but that place within a half hour was – you had motorcycle cops  
38 on every corner, you know. I'd never seen so many [laughter] pickets and,  
39 I don't know the cops [inaudible 24:02] that big a crowd but, anyway, it  
40 worked out pretty good and they took up collections for the workers and,  
41 uh...  
42  
43 Michael Fleming: [24:10] Did you ever get the chance to meet Walter personally or Owen  
44 Beiber or any of those guys?  
45  
46 Donald Brown: Oh yeah. I met'm all.

1  
2 Michael Fleming: [24:15] Can you, do you have any stories to tell about those guys?  
3  
4 Donald Brown: Um, oh, Walter, you know, of course, you could go on forever on him but,  
5 uh, back then, that was the convention where he got back late, he got, the  
6 Constitution agreed to, uh, you know, vote it in to have Walter build this  
7 Black Lake educational center up there, at, up north there. And then, but  
8 he had to do some swappin' to do that. He had to, uh, 'cause a lot of the  
9 older guys wanted to put somethin' in Florida, too, you know. So he  
10 agreed to that big ol' trailer park he had down there, you know, where if  
11 you were interested in gettin' your retirement and you wanted to go down  
12 to Florida and spend a month and look around, you'd go down there and  
13 take one of those trailers, you know. It cost ya, I think it's 300 dollars a  
14 month, which was a pretty good deal, you know, back then.  
15  
16 Anyway, um, so Walter thought that was, you know, kind of foolish. It  
17 was a lot of money, you know, 'cause you bought like, you bought around  
18 the same, I think at St. John's River. That's a beautiful park. And he put in  
19 like a hundred of these great big long trailers, you know [chuckle]. You  
20 signed up, or anybody in UAW could sign up and go, and they'd take'm  
21 by, take'm at random, I guess. And you could spare the month down there  
22 and shop around. But that was – they had to trade. They said, "We'll go  
23 along with your Black Lake thing if you go along with this," you know, so  
24 they started, so they negotiated this with Walter and Walter said, "All  
25 right, you got it," you know. But since then, they've done away with that  
26 thing in Florida but, um, I don't know if people just lost interest in it or  
27 what.  
28  
29 Michael Fleming: [25:49] How about Owen Bieber?  
30  
31 Donald Brown: Owen Bieber, um, yeah, I, I never personally got involved. Doug Frasier  
32 was one that, uh – we were over in Detroit and me and Bob, you might  
33 remember, I don't know if you remember Bob, uh, [Somers 26:02].  
34  
35 Michael Fleming: [Somers 26:02].  
36  
37 Donald Brown: Uh, he was president here at the time. I was chairman. And we was over in  
38 Detroit doin' somethin' and we was sittin' in a coffee shop havin', you  
39 know, breakfast, a doughnut and a coffee or somethin' and ol' Doug come  
40 walkin' in and, of course, we had the UAW jackets on and he come over  
41 and said, "Do you guys mind if I sit down?" We said, "Nah, have a seat."  
42 He sat down there. We shot the breeze, you know, and talked. He was a  
43 real friendly guy. Well Walter was too but, you know, he was, he was a  
44 little bit different, I guess.  
45  
46 Michael Fleming: [26:31] Um, you were shop chairman for how long?

1  
2Donald Brown: Six years.  
3  
4Michael Fleming: Now, you went from committee man, zone committee man to shop  
5 chairman. [26:40] Tell me about your, your, your first case and your best  
6 and your worst of those. Which would you consider, you know, your very  
7 first case that you had, if you ...  
8  
9Donald Brown: Oh, man, I couldn't [laughter]...  
10  
11Michael Fleming: Don't know if you remember the, uh ...  
12  
13Donald Brown: No [laughter].  
14  
15Michael Fleming: [26:53] How about, how about ...  
16  
17Donald Brown: I was [inaudible 26:54]  
18  
19Michael Fleming: {26:55} Can you remember [inaudible 26:56]?  
20  
21Donald Brown: Well I remember – let me put it this way: I told you about the reason I  
22 ran?  
23  
24Michael Fleming: Yes because of the 15 hours.  
25  
26Donald Brown: Because of the 15-hour thing, you know. So when I, uh, when I went,  
27 maybe for about 2 or 3 months, and they forming these – he had a guy  
28 sittin' on a bench doin' nothin' until I got a committee call and they come  
29 and they tell the guy to take Brown's place, he got a committee call, and  
30 so the guy'd take my – and he started the clock runnin' on me then, see;  
31 and then I'd walk down, I'd go to whoever called, you know, whichever,  
32 and I had 3 different floors to cover, one end of the plant to the other.  
33 National Agreement said we should've had in the neighborhood of 250. I  
34 had about 400, you know, so there wasn't no way I, you know, I was  
35 gonna do any justice of this but..  
36  
37Michael Fleming: [Inaudible 27:43]  
38  
39Donald Brown: Anyway, uh, I'd be runnin' out of time, so I finally went to the  
40 superintendent and said the [inaudible 27:46] was the superintendent then  
41 on that shift. I told him, I said, "Man you're, you're foremans are hustlin'  
42 me on my time." I said, "I could take a call and they'd tell me go sit on the  
43 bench and I'll get him off as soon as they can. I might have sit there for 20  
44 minutes, you know, now that's takin' a lot of time away from me." And I  
45 said, "I'm losin' all this time, then I gotta walk from one end of the plant  
46 to the other," so he kept tellin' the foreman, "Give him a little more time.

1 Give him a little more time.” I had, um, I was thinkin’ Frank [inaudible  
2 28:19] but it wasn’t, it was, I think it was Ron Fox was the foreman up,  
3 my foreman at the time. Anyway, um, Ron got a little p’d. He said, “Keep  
4 your own time.” That’s like tellin’, tellin’ the kids, you know, stay out of  
5 the candy store, so from then on, I didn’t run out of time.  
6  
7 Michael Fleming: [laughter]  
8  
9 Donald Brown: I was out there, I’d be down their office raisin’ hell and jumpin’ on people  
10 [laughter], and, uh, they’d say, “Ain’t ya gonna reach, you’re about out of  
11 time.” I got about 3 hours left, you know. I never did mark it down.  
12  
13 Michael Fleming: [28:50] How long before it became a full-time position?  
14  
15 Donald Brown: Um, probably about 2 or 3 years. I was out of there by then but some of  
16 the other ones started workin’ the same system in there. Lloyd Cain, who  
17 was also a, was, wound up president, he was committee man with me on  
18 the night shift, and Bob, who’s, was president here, um, but they had  
19 things, they started workin’ up the same system. So we were all workin’  
20 pretty good and, uh, so then when they didn’t negotiate it in Detroit, I  
21 think they gave’m 35 hours or somethin’. They were supposed to work the  
22 first hour or somethin’ and then have off but, and then that got to be such a  
23 hassle that they just let’m stay off all the time, you know, they report to  
24 work and then we take their calls but, you know.  
25  
26 Michael Fleming: [29:35] What was the best thing that you’ve felt that you achieved for the  
27 membership?  
28  
29 Donald Brown: Oh, jeez, I don’t know.  
30  
31 Michael Fleming: [29:43] Nothing significant you can think of?  
32  
33 Donald Brown: No.  
34  
35 Michael Fleming: Okay.  
36  
37 Donald Brown: We just had, we had to fight for everything we got, you know. We used to  
38 battle over who’s gonna get coveralls for god’s sake, you know, and the  
39 guys workin’ in the pits and, uh, like you said [chuckle] down underneath.  
40 There, they furnished a few of’m, but even in the body shop they wasn’t  
41 furnishin’m all coveralls or in skilled trades, you know, on the plumbers or  
42 the pipefitters or those guys, they weren’t, uh, just a few of’m got, uh, you  
43 know, and the rest of’m had to rent’m. So we figured that, you know, we, I  
44 could, and that was one of the biggest issues we had and they were back at  
45 that one negotiation. Ol’ Ed Voorhees, he was supervisor over the Labor  
46 Relations and he come in and kicked a waste basket from one end of the

1 room to the other and said, "You're nickel-and-dimin' us to death 'cause  
2 you had to get another 6 pair of coveralls off [laughter], you know. We  
3 said, "Nah, we're here for the, for, we're gonna be here for a long time  
4 because, you know, we're gonna carry on [inaudible 30:35]  
5  
6Doreen Brown: Can I say somethin' too?  
7  
8Michael Fleming: Sure. Go ahead, Doreen.  
9  
10Doreen Brown: Okay. He, he also walked at one of the conventions when they got the 30-  
11 and-out because then we were, us girls went with them, well the wives,  
12 and we were up in the balcony and Walter was down there sayin' "Okay,"  
13 – they all marched around the floor – he said, "Okay," and they kept goin'  
14 and he said, "Now you can sit down." He must have marched for a half  
15 hour.  
16  
17Michael Fleming: Wow.  
18  
19Doreen Brown: And he kept sayin', "Okay, we'll look into it. Okay, we'll look into it.  
20 Will you sit down?" And none of'm would sit down until he promised us  
21 he would do it. And that's how you got your 30-and-out.  
22  
23Donald Brown: Well, yeah, but what he did is called a knife session or convention.  
24  
25Doreen Brown: Yeah. But you guys walked a long time.  
26  
27Donald Brown: Oh yeah. And he said, so he told us, you know, "Now these are the voting  
28 [inaudible 31:18]." The spouses and anybody else wasn't in this meeting.  
29 He said, "You guys are askin' for a 30-and-out." He said, "That's gonna  
30 be a tough..." – he said, "I get it," he said, "but you guys gotta be,  
31 understand there's gonna be a price to pay for it." He said, "If you guys  
32 are willing to, to stand up," you know, we had a plant in Detroit and we  
33 had a mall, you know. All the areas locked in on this, so we told him sure.  
34 Walter said, "We ain't kiddin'. We want it, by god, and if you go forward,  
35 we'll back you a hundred percent." So that's how we got it but he, uh, he  
36 wasn't sure at the time that he could even swing it, you know. He said,  
37 "You guys are askin' quite a bit on this one." We said eh, but they ain't  
38 nothin' to what they got after that, you know, I mean [chuckle], the guy's  
39 all – I got a son-in-law that'll probably get laid off to under 2 years now  
40 and drawin', still drawin' the job bank money, I don't know, you know.  
41 Back then we used to get 25 dollars a week but for what, 26 weeks or so,  
42 but you's out of business then, you was...  
43  
44Doreen Howard: [32:27] Um, for those who don't understand, what do you mean by 30-  
45 and-out? What, what does that term represent?  
46



1Donald Brown: That's a retire-, 30 years of service or credited service in working. You  
2 could have, you might have to go longer than that to get your time. Back  
3 then you had to put in like, I think it was 1700 dollars a year to get, when  
4 they first got it, to get, to get a, you know, credit. Uh, but it changed after  
5 that, then they started whittlin' down but, um ...  
6

7Doreen Brown: When the women were in the shop and they were pregnant or anything,  
8 you know, and, or anybody that took a sick leave, then you lost your credit  
9 in the service, all the time you were off ...  
10

11Donald Brown: Well your time. They wouldn't count that as ...  
12

13Doreen Brown: ... your time, you wouldn't count it.  
14

15Donald Brown: The seniority, your seniority'd go on but ...  
16

17Doreen Brown: You might have 20 years but maybe you were, been on sick leave for quite  
18 a while, maybe you only had 19 for, or a little less than that, for your  
19 credit of service. And then they went in and got it so that, you know, when  
20 you went on sick leave and things, you didn't lose your credit of service.  
21 And some of us got part of our, got the service that we lost when we were  
22 off.  
23

24Donald Brown: That's why she went, all the girls ...  
25

26Michael Fleming: [33:37] Doreen, while you're on that subject, can you talk about  
27 bereavement and when people passed away in your family, what did you  
28 do?  
29

30Doreen Brown: Do you remember?  
31

32Donald Brown: Well, they didn't have bereavement pay.  
33

34Doreen Brown: No, they didn't have any of that.  
35

36Michael Fleming: [33:51] You had to take vacation time?  
37

38Donald Brown: No, you didn't, you were just lucky to get excused to go to the funeral,  
39 you know [chuckle], you know. You'd just take it off if you had, but back  
40 then you had to put in 40 hour, that's when it's 40 hours 'fore your  
41 overtime would kick in. So if you took off, say, on a Thursday to go to a  
42 funeral, you took the day off and they was working Saturdays, uh, you  
43 worked Saturday at a certain time because, well, you didn't have your 40  
44 hours in, which that, of course, changed. It was, went to 8 hour a day,  
45 anything over 8 hour of a day was, but, uh, back then you had to do the,  
46 uh, so, bereavement, you know, that made quite a bit of difference for,

1 especially if you had to travel out of town and things. But UAW, you  
2 know, came a long way with the, um; in fact, they still, in fact, they  
3 [chuckle], I think they maxed out, you know, now [laughter] it's give back  
4 time on a lot of stuff but, uh ...  
5  
6 Michael Fleming: [34:45] What do you feel about the recent changes that we've had with the  
7 healthcare and our retirees and our current workers taking, um, which took  
8 a pay cut to help the retirees to make sure that we had, um, our retirees  
9 taken care of – what do you think about those recent changes we just had?  
10  
11 Donald Brown: Well, I, they're blaming us on the high cost, you know, the, my opinion,  
12 you know, and that's only one thing 'cause I can just speak for myself but,  
13 um, I think a lot is management, the way they're managing in their  
14 business, you know, I've watched them 30, well it's about 31 years I had  
15 in there when I went out, because I wasn't gonna retire 'fore the next  
16 contract came up and I was like 9 months away from that. But anyway,  
17 um, I've watched it go up and down back, back when ol' Roger Smith  
18 was, you know, headin' the GM. You know, we took a nosedive. He was  
19 all new ideas, he was gonna mix Fisher and main plants together and, and  
20 the bottom fell out, you know. Um, he admitted when he got, after all of  
21 the, you know, up in smoke, said, "Yeah," he said, "I guess I was wrong,"  
22 you know, while [Wagner 35:54] ain't done that yet, you know [laughter].  
23  
24 But, uh, he said, "Why are we payin' too much and the guys on Wall  
25 Street are sayin' they're payin' too much for insurance and things for the  
26 people?" When we first went there, they had, we never got, we never had  
27 insurance, you know, back when they got the UAW started here and this  
28 was before my time, but this is what I learned through the conventions and  
29 the things that ol' Walter Reuther, um, was gonna – it was during wartime,  
30 you know, when there was World War I, er I, World War II, and, uh, you  
31 couldn't strike 'cause they were building wartime material. I think we  
32 were makin' airplane parts or somethin' at Fisher. Olds was making gun  
33 shells, they were, you know, there was no automobiles being made but  
34 there were, and, of course, it was, you know, against the law, federal law,  
35 to shut down one of those facilities, but ol' Walter threatened to do it to  
36 General Motors, you know.  
37  
38 So they went to Washington, General Motors did, and said Walter Reuther  
39 said he was gonna shut us down. So FDR called in General Motors and  
40 UAW and had a set-down with'm and Walter said, he said, "The only  
41 thing I'm askin' General Motors to do is, is spend a little time, a little  
42 money, and set up a group insurance program that our people will pay for.  
43 All General Motors has to do is administer it, you know, if it's 2 bucks at a  
44 week or a month or whatever for each worker, the workers will pay it."  
45 Which we did when we first hired in but, um, General Motors said, "No,"

1 they said, “we don’t mess with it.” Well FDR said, “I think that’s a good,  
2 that don’t sound so far reaching,” he said, “why can’t you do that?”  
3

4 So he more or less, you know, put it to’m and they came back and ol’  
5 Walter got what he wanted. He wanted to get his foot in the door, you  
6 know. If you knew Walter, that was [chuckle] – he’d say, he said he used  
7 to stand outside of that GM building and look up at the 13<sup>th</sup> floor and  
8 they’d look out and see ol’ Walter lookin’ up at’m [laughter]. He said he  
9 was just tryin’ to figure what he can get out of’m next, you know, but –  
10 then I went to, when I hired in there, he cut it down to where employees  
11 would pay half and General Motors pay half so, um, I was payin’ half  
12 when I come in; that was for life insurance and the Blue Cross Blue  
13 Shield. And, uh, and Walter said, “I thought it was about time,” that he  
14 give’m a break. He said, “There ain’t no sense you doin’ all this  
15 paperwork. You people just take care of the whole thing,” you know.  
16

17 But then back then it was only like maybe 5 bucks a month, you know. It  
18 wasn’t like 150 or whatever they’re payin’ now, you know, to, to have  
19 Blue Cross but, uh, I think, gettin’ back to why I think it’s bad shape like  
20 this, I don’t think it’s, these things as it is, you know, the way they  
21 designed – to pay a consultant, man, to pay a building chief, and there  
22 might be some a little bit cheaper than we, than the American guy, but  
23 they got better ideas. You know, they got, they’re makin’ cars that, we put  
24 on all kinds of demonstrations about buyin’ foreign material and foreign  
25 cars or foreign anything, you know, buy American. But I don’t see that  
26 around so much anymore but we went out to ol’ Sawyer Olds, put a picket  
27 line around his place when he started sellin’ Datsuns or whatever, you  
28 know, along with his Oldsmobiles [inaudible 39:10] they tried to run over  
29 us out there [laughter].  
30

31 Cheryl McQuaid: Doreen Howard.

32  
33 Doreen Howard: Um, I would like you to go back to the Fisher Body plant and, um,  
34 describe the changes that you saw from when you first hired in to the  
35 facility to when you retired from the facility. [39:31] What was some of  
36 the things that occurred within the facilities?  
37

38 Donald Brown: You want me to go on and hit on it, er?

39  
40 Doreen Brown: You start.

41  
42 Donald Brown: One of the things that, some of the biggest things back then when I first  
43 noticed were, of course, you talkin’ about the, there’s a lot of women back  
44 then but they came in during the wartime, see, and they had a seniority  
45 established so when, when the war ended and the guys come home, a lot  
46 of guys that had returned, right, so I guess they came back to work but the

1 women had seniority too and they could stay on if they wanted to. That's  
2 how they got the females in the plant. [throat clearing] But when I hired in  
3 there in January '54, I don't think there was a dozen black guys workin'  
4 there. They were just – if they were, they were either doin' custodial, you  
5 know, office cleaning or, they had elevators 'cause they didn't have the  
6 ramp then to get us material from one floor to the other so they had, uh, a  
7 black guy would run the elevator, run the trucks up and down, but they  
8 wouldn't give'm no line jobs, you know, not, there wasn't a one workin'  
9 the line.  
10  
11 And then, uh, I think Bob Sanders, he was a committee man in paint and,  
12 uh, that's when they started with a, you could transfer between depart-,  
13 you know, you could put a transfer in for, and this one guy, he used to do  
14 some work down around the wet sand line and he wanted to get on the wet  
15 sand but, a colored guy, and they, they told him no, so he put a transfer in  
16 for it. Well then Bob Sanders took it, he run it all the way up through the  
17 mill, grievance mill, and he got, got this guy on as a wet sander down  
18 there. But, uh, they still wasn't hirin', you know, new ones, very many.  
19 We never got the, the bulk of the guys that came in was in probably late  
20 '54 and '55, that's when we were workin', we worked every [inaudible  
21 41:19] we could, you know. Back then the women could only work 54  
22 hours a week. That was federal law or whatever, state law, I don't know.  
23 [throat clearing] But anyway, uh, so that gave us a break, you know, they  
24 couldn't work us, you know, 12 hours a day in 7 days a week because they  
25 had so many females workin' in there that they couldn't operate  
26 without'm but ...  
27  
28 Doreen Brown: We couldn't work over 10 hours a night either.  
29  
30 Donald Brown: Yeah, they could work 10 hours ...  
31  
32 Doreen Brown: They work 11 hours, the men had to come take our places.  
33  
34 Donald Brown: Another thing was, uh, the holidays. We had to come in 4 hours on  
35 Christmas Eve if it came up during the middle of the week. New Year's  
36 was the same way.  
37  
38 Doreen Brown: Mm-hm.  
39  
40 Donald Brown: We got half a day off, you know, on New Year's or Christmas Eve. Um,  
41 now you get, you know, all that finally wound up from Christmas to New  
42 Year's, you know, or past [chuckle]. But, uh, yeah, they were, but they  
43 worked us all the hours they could give, you know, so even Christmas Eve  
44 we'd be in there workin', you know, um, but they brought in, like I say, a  
45 lot of the black guys came in then and, and, and the ladies too. They put it,  
46 they didn't ever have no women down in the body shop; they started

1                   puttin' some down in there, um, some on skilled trades. Before my, before  
2                   I left, there were skilled tradeswomen. They had a tough time with that,  
3                   you know, and this, I'm talkin' about in the '70s now, you know. We had  
4                   a journeyman, he wanted, uh, he was a journeyman, um, [inaudible 42:49]  
5                   I think. Uh, and they had a heck of time gettin' him on in the trades but  
6                   they did, you know, but they were, it was nasty in here, you know, back  
7                   then. Fisher Body wasn't a pleasant place to work, you know, but it was  
8                   livin' is all, that was ...  
9

10Michael Fleming:   [43:06] So how long do you think it'd really taken when you there for it to  
11                   get a little better as far as equity between gender and race?  
12

13Donald Brown:     Um, I think it was probably, well it wasn't manage-, I guess management  
14                   went along with once they found out, you know, they couldn't operate  
15                   without'm, you know, that was what – it wasn't, they was goin' down to  
16                   Tennessee with speakers on trucks, you know, callin' the [chuckle] people  
17                   up in mountains to come to work, you know. Uh, and they had a whole  
18                   work force right here, you know, they could just bring'm in. These guys  
19                   wanted to work, you know.  
20

21Michael Fleming:   Yeah.  
22

23Donald Brown:     So back then it seemed to work pretty good, uh, these guys, they didn't  
24                   move up in the ranks but then they started puttin'm on supervision, uh,  
25                   you know, and they put'm on skilled trades and, uh, even on plant  
26                   protection, uh, so – they used to laugh. I remember a sergeant come down  
27                   and said, "They put a black guy on Labor Relation." I said, "What're you  
28                   laughin' about? [Inaudible 44:05] one of them uniforms 'fore long." He  
29                   said, "Nah." I think it was 2 months later there he come again [laughing].  
30                   See what I mean? [Inaudible 44:12] What was his name? Uh, Clark.  
31

32Michael Fleming:   Jerri Smith.  
33

34Jerri Smith:        Yes, I was wondering back in, you know, when I've worked in the plant,  
35                   we've had dinners and, uh, all the people get together and have parties and  
36                   stuff. [44:27] Did you do this when you first started or did it work up to it  
37                   before you retired or...?  
38

39Donald Brown:     I don't remember any.  
40

41Doreen Brown:     I think they kind of had'm in the groups. Like the, the window wash  
42                   would have, might have a little party.  
43

44Donald Brown:     I don't remember'm ...  
45

46Doreen Brown:     And if somebody retired, in later years ...

1  
2Donald Brown: In later years but not ...  
3  
4Doreen Brown: ...they used to have them for the retirement, they always took up a  
5 collection. Or if someone had a baby and their husband worked there,  
6 they'd, like the sealer room when I worked down there, we used to take up  
7 a collection for'm and get something. But ...  
8  
9Jerri Smith: [44:58] You had, did you have like Christmas parties and, you know, have  
10 dinners or anything at Christmastime and ...  
11  
12Doreen Brown: Well, yes, yes.  
13  
14Jerri Smith: [45:04] Now did this happen in the early years or was it later?  
15  
16Doreen Brown: No, no, it was later.  
17  
18Jerri Smith: Later.  
19  
20Donald Brown: It was probably around 1980 or ...  
21  
22Doreen Brown: In, in the early ones, we usually, like the window washers got together and  
23 went out and there was probably 10 or 12 of us on that, on that group. So  
24 everybody didn't do it?  
25  
26Jerri Smith: No.  
27  
28Doreen Brown: No.  
29  
30Cheryl McQuaid: Michael Fleming.  
31  
32Michael Fleming: Um, Mr. Brown, let's go back and you were talkin' and we were talkin'  
33 about equity. [45:29] Was there any differences in pay that people  
34 received be it woman, man ...  
35  
36Donald Brown: Women got a dime less an hour doin' the same job. Um, I can't, I'm tryin'  
37 to think of what year that – that's the way it was when I hired in. She was  
38 makin', uh, less an hour than ...  
39  
40Doreen Brown: I made a dollar 47.  
41  
42Donald Brown: Yeah, I used to relieve her and got a dime more an hour but that was 'fore  
43 we even had the utility, you know, that was just, I was just doin' the  
44 window washin'. Um, so, uh, yeah, they brought that up, uh, that was one  
45 of the things that, uh ...  
46

1 Michael Fleming: [46:05] How long did it take before you noticed that it kind of caught up,  
2 do you know?  
3

4 Donald Brown: That was probably in, um, I'm gonna say late '70s. It, um, even seniori-  
5 they had separate seniority, uh, [tests 46:18] for the woman than the men.  
6 They used to have 'm posted on, you know, on the wall, but they'd have  
7 female and the males and, uh, of course, we had all these different work  
8 groups then, you know, and they had ...  
9

10 Michael Fleming: Cheryl McQuaid.

11

12 Cheryl McQuaid: Mrs. Brown, you hired in before your husband did. [46:38] When did the 2  
13 of you meet? Was that a shop romance, um, do you got a story to tell me?  
14 [laughter]  
15

16 Doreen Brown: I worked on window wash and he worked on the polish line and, I don't  
17 know, we just kind of got together. [laughter]  
18

19 Cheryl McQuaid: [laughter] [46:54] What year?  
20

21 Donald Brown: I told her if she wasn't so old I'd take her out and she said, "If you weren't  
22 so damn young, I'd let ya." [laughter]  
23  
24 [laughter]  
25

26 Cheryl McQuaid: [47:01] What year was that?  
27

28 Donald Brown: I don't know, '55 I guess.  
29

30 Doreen Brown: Yeah.  
31

32 Cheryl McQuaid: [47:05] And then you were married in '55?  
33

34 Donald Brown: Fifty-seven.  
35

36 Doreen Brown: Fifty-seven.  
37

38 Cheryl McQuaid: Fifty-seven. [47:08] So you dated a couple years?  
39

40 Doreen Brown: Mm-hm.  
41

42 Cheryl McQuaid: [47:11] What was it like dating in the factory?  
43

44 Doreen Brown: Like anything else, I guess. We both worked the same shift and same  
45 department and ...  
46

1 Cheryl McQuaid: [47:25] And when the two of you got married, did they have a party for  
2 you?  
3

4 Doreen Brown: They took up a collection and gave us a coffee pot.  
5

6 Cheryl McQuaid: Aw. Michael Fleming.  
7

8 Michael Fleming: Um, you worked there for quite some time. First, I want to start with you,  
9 Mrs. Brown. [47:46] Were you, were the, were women at that time, and  
10 how long did it take before you were involved in what they call  
11 changeovers? Did you get the chance to work the changeovers at the, in  
12 the plant?  
13

14 Doreen Brown: Work a changeover? Nobody worked changeovers.  
15

16 Michael Fleming: [48:00] No one worked changeovers?  
17

18 Doreen Brown: No one worked changeovers.  
19

20 Michael Fleming: Talk about ...  
21

22 Doreen Brown: The plant was down.  
23

24 Michael Fleming: Talk about the changeovers. [48:04] What did, how did they change over  
25 if you didn't work, what did you do?  
26

27 Donald Brown: Oh, they, the women never worked. They didn't work no, they just had  
28 some people that sign up, you know, to work, they, none, of course, the  
29 foremans or somebody would pick who they wanted to, I guess. Um, but,  
30 uh, as far as working the changeovers, that's, they subsidized, you know,  
31 from the lines – if skilled trades needed help, they bring in some guys, you  
32 know, to do the boil work for'm or whatever they were ...  
33

34 Michael Fleming: [48:33] But no women ever had a chance to work, they wouldn't allow  
35 them to do it?  
36

37 Donald Brown: I don't remember seein' any of'm do it.  
38

39 Doreen Brown: I don't remember anybody working. I mean ...  
40

41 Donald Brown: I don't think the woman wanted it, they wanted the lay-off. [laughter]  
42

43 Doreen Brown: The lines weren't working so ...  
44

45 Michael Fleming: Well, as a supplemental, um, Mr. Brown was saying they were  
46 supplementing the skilled trades, uh, and ...



1  
2Donald Brown: And material, you know, they moved a lot of stuff around and ...  
3  
4Michael Fleming: [48:54] How long did it take before they allowed women to become  
5 supplement help, do you know?  
6  
7Donald Brown: Oh, I couldn't, uh ...  
8  
9Michael Fleming: [49:00] A little while?  
10  
11Donald Brown: I don't know if any women ever did sign up to work changeovers but ...  
12  
13Doreen Brown: [Inaudible 49:07]  
14  
15Donald Brown: If they did, but they had a right to, you know, and certainly in the '80s and  
16 probably in the late '70s and ...  
17  
18Cheryl McQuaid: Doreen Howard.  
19  
20Doreen Howard: Um, going back to the paint department, you both worked in the paint  
21 department. [49:22] Um, can you describe the environment, um, in the  
22 paint department when you first hired in there? What was ...  
23  
24Donald Brown: Uh oh.  
25  
26Doreen Howard: Uh oh?  
27  
28Donald Brown: How you do's, Doreen?  
29  
30Doreen Brown: I do think ...  
31  
32Cheryl McQuaid: Well, it's dark in here but we're still tapin'. [laughter]  
33  
34Doreen Howard: You can still talk. [laughter]  
35  
36Interviewer: I can't see to write.  
37  
38Jerri Smith: Um, do we want to, do we want to stop or do we want to continue?  
39  
40Interviewer: You better stop it.  
41  
42Jerri Smith: Yeah, we can't see...  
43  
44Doreen Howard: Well, yeah, how do I stop it when I can't see the buttons to push?  
45

1 [49:56] Um, I'm interested in finding out how, uh, being a married couple,  
2 how working together, um, in working in the plant, how did that affect  
3 your family life and the struggles that you had with, with just general  
4 family issues that most families would go through? Sick times? Um, when  
5 your children are growing up or, or, um whether you had opportunities for  
6 maternity leaves or, or any issues surrounding the family – how did you  
7 deal with those type of issues in your earlier years?  
8

9Doreen Brown: Well, when you got pregnant you only got paid for 6 weeks and the rest of  
10 it was nothing. And for a long time, well for some of the time, Don and I  
11 worked, worked, you know, together and then when he went on the  
12 committees and things, and then he went to days, and then he was  
13 chairman, er, before that, and I was on, I stayed on nights so we could  
14 watch the kids like that, and that one time when my son got hit I called  
15 him and he wanted me to come home and I, so I went in and told the  
16 foreman, I said, "I've got to go home. I gotta take my son to the hospital."  
17 Well he just didn't know how he was ever gonna get me off that line, but  
18 one of the other foremans come up and want to know what was goin' on  
19 and he found me somebody. I, I told'm, I said, "You might have to shut  
20 this whole plant down but I'm goin', or else you, you get yourself on, on  
21 my job here because I'm leavin'." But then the other foreman got someone  
22 to take my place.  
23

24 That's the way they were in there. They, they never wanted you to have a  
25 day off. And if you had 3 days off, you know, like 1 this year and 1 next  
26 year and 1 the other year, you had to bring in a doctor's statement. Now  
27 how many people run to the doctor if their kids are sick or you're sick or  
28 something like that? I don't know if they do that anymore or not. Do they  
29 still do that? You have to have a doctor's statement?  
30

31Doreen Howard: Yes.  
32

33Doreen Brown: So.  
34

35Donald Brown: Well, they got so many sick days you can use now or somethin' or can't  
36 you draw and just say I want one of my ...  
37

38Doreen Brown: Yeah, we never had that.  
39

40Donald Brown: [throat clearing] We put a stop to a lot, though. The foreman used to do a  
41 lot of work in there. We put the [inaudible 52:15] to that.  
42

43Doreen Brown: Well. [throat clearing]  
44

45Michael Fleming: [52:19] So, what happened with the foreman [inaudible 52:20]  
46

1 Cheryl McQuaid: Mike Fleming.  
2  
3 Michael Fleming: Thank you.  
4  
5 Donald Brown: Um...  
6  
7 Doreen Brown: You called the committee man.  
8  
9 Donald Brown: I'm tryin' to think, we had, that used to be, yeah, that was one of our main  
10 calls when I first went on committee was once we found out they had a  
11 committee man to write grievances [chuckle] I'd burn up about 2 pads a  
12 day you know. A lot of'm was just on foremans doin' hourly-rated work,  
13 you know, they'd load up the job so high the person couldn't get it;  
14 instead of the foreman let'm, you know, he'd go down and catch what  
15 they were missin' because he didn't want his bosses jumpin' on him, you  
16 know, and, uh, of course, then the people got mad. They said, "Well if we  
17 can't do it, you know, he ain't suppose to be doin' it." So they called me  
18 and they had paragraph 215 then that, uh, you know, for supervisors doin'  
19 hourly-rated work, so they started runnin' out grievances on'm.  
20  
21 Well we changed plant managers, I'm tryin' to think, was it Emerson? I  
22 think it was Harry Emerson that came in from some other place and he  
23 talked to the, the top committee, he said, you know, when he first come in,  
24 introduced himself and said, "Uh, what you got, what's your main  
25 problems here?" He said, "Our main problem is can't keep the damn  
26 foreman from workin' the lines." He said, "What're you talkin' about?"  
27 And he said, "They're out there overloadin' jobs and doin' the work  
28 themselves." So he said, "Well I'll get back with you guys." Well the next  
29 day he took a tour. He got a scooter and went all around the plant. And he  
30 came back and he said, "I couldn't tell a foreman from the workers." He  
31 said first thing he wanted to do was put white shirts on'm so he could  
32 identify'm [chuckle], you know, and you know, so he could tell who's a  
33 foreman and who isn't. He said they come to work dressed, you know,  
34 come dressed to work. So then he told'm, he said, "I don't want to see no  
35 more foremans." He said, "The plant I come out of, I never heard of 215."  
36 He said, "When I came here, there was probably about 3,000 grievances  
37 layin' throughout the mill somewhere," you know, just from all  
38 departments and, and, uh, so he said, "I'm puttin' a stop to it."  
39  
40 And he meant it, you know, I mean he was, he wasn't all that well-liked as  
41 a plant manager but you could take him for his word. So her foreman  
42 down there, ol' Harol-, Harold [inaudible 54:25], he was a, he was always  
43 doin' this. He was on, he, he couldn't walk without doin' something on a  
44 car. So some of the gals down there said well then get, then ol' Harold,  
45 we'll get him in trouble. So they just called me and I'd write and say,  
46 "What was he doin'?" and they'd tell me and I'd write him up. He'd deny

1 the violation. It didn't matter whether he denied it or not, that, that  
2 grievance still went to the superintendent, you know, and then it went  
3 from there to Harry, you know, the plant manager.  
4  
5 So about, after about a dozen of them, ol' [inaudible 54:56] come to me  
6 and man, I mean he had tears in his eyes. He said, "You can't write me up  
7 no more." I said, "Why not?" He said, "Harry told me the next time I get a  
8 215 to bring my lunch bucket 'cause I'm all done." He said, "Now I got  
9 family and I got," you know, and I said, "[Inaudible 55:10], if you expect  
10 me to abide by the plant rules, you're gonna have to abide by the  
11 contract." I said, "It's spelled out in the National Agreement. The man's  
12 just tellin' ya to do what's, what's been agreed to." Well, he still had a  
13 hard time doin' it but he's, he finally tapered off quite a bit, but, um, oh,  
14 they were, them foremen, had some up there in building 5, repair  
15 foreman. Hell, they had more paint and dust and polish dust and stuff  
16 on'm than the workers did, you know. They were in there doin' all that ...  
17  
18 Michael Fleming: Mr. Brown, um, Mike Fleming. [55:44] Um, you wanna talk about some  
19 of the good things that the people did, and Mrs. Brown as well, as far as  
20 the GM family and the groups of people they got together in certain areas  
21 to help others when they were in trouble or if they had some financial  
22 problems?  
23  
24 Doreen Brown: They usually took up a collection for'm in their own group, you know,  
25 like you've got a, like the poly science; now they might take up a  
26 collection for, for somebody that was ill or they lost their spouse or they  
27 lost somebody or they've had a baby or something like that. It wasn't a  
28 plant-wide thing. It was just, and you did it on your own, you know,  
29 somebody would just say ....  
30  
31 Donald Brown: We never, we never even had, you know, like you have the annual picnics  
32 and things now. There wasn't any of those. They did, I think, back when  
33 they first started they used to have management and the union had ball  
34 teams and they used to go out here and they had [inaudible 56:45]. Well  
35 body shops here now down at Michigan and [Verlinden 56:48].  
36  
37 Michael Fleming: Mm-hm.  
38  
39 Donald Brown: But it used to be a big parking lot, but before it was a parking lot it was a  
40 ball diamond. And they used to bring in guys – General Motors would hire  
41 guys and put'm on Labor Relation or somethin' that could play ball, you  
42 know, just so we could beat the [laughter] hourly-rated guys. But that used  
43 to be like every Sunday or whatever, you know, and each department had  
44 their own ball teams and so they used to get together that way but that was  
45 management, but that went down the tubes too after a few years, I guess,

1 and that was 'fore I even hired in. I remember talkin' to a lot of guys that  
2 did it, though.  
3  
4Michael Fleming: Cheryl McQuaid.  
5  
6Cheryl McQuaid: You mentioned that when the new plant manager came in, that he started  
7 having the supervisors wear the white shirts.  
8  
9Donald Brown: Mm-hm.  
10  
11Cheryl McQuaid: [57:30] When, do you remember when the executive dining rooms  
12 started? Was that already going in where salary ate in a different  
13 lunchroom than the hourly did?  
14  
15Donald Brown: I, they always had the executive dining room, I think. I don't know where  
16 it was, back ...  
17  
18Cheryl McQuaid: [57:48] They didn't eat downstairs when [inaudible 57:48]  
19  
20Donald Brown: Right when I hired in there, they had the hospital and the employment  
21 office and the cafeteria was all in the basement. You'd look up overhead  
22 and see all these big ol' pipe, drain pipes and all that, they had those  
23 swing-out seats you could pull out and set on'm, but I think, uh, the  
24 salaries come down in there and eat, the office help and some of them. But  
25 I never seen no big shots ever comin' down in there.  
26  
27Cheryl McQuaid: Mm-hm.  
28  
29Donald Brown: But when they went upstairs, they built the cafeteria where it was, you  
30 know, when I left, uh, uh, then they built that executive dining area in  
31 there where all the supervisor's eat and, but, uh, I don't know when that,  
32 that was back in, I don't know, that must've been in the early '60s maybe.  
33  
34Cheryl McQuaid: Doug Rademacher.  
35  
36Doug Rademacher: You two have been here for a long time and you've said you were here  
37 when it was, it wasn't a closed shop, you didn't have to belong to a union.  
38 So you saw the birth of local 602. [58:51] Can you talk about originally,  
39 um, I know you shared with me about, uh, purchasing a brick and building  
40 this hall, this [inaudible 59:02]  
41  
42Donald Brown: That was even ...  
43  
44Doug Rademacher: [59:06] Can you talk first about the meetings and where ...  
45  
46Doreen Brown: He didn't buy a brick.

1  
2Doug Rademacher: ... can you talk about where the meetings were held before it came ...  
3  
4Donald Brown: They were building this place when I hired in.  
5  
6Doug Rademacher: ... to, uh, to the local 602? Where were the original meetings held for the  
7 union?  
8  
9Doreen Brown: I can't really tell, it was down at St. Joe and it was in a storefront and ...  
10  
11Donald Brown: [Inaudible 59:22]  
12  
13Doreen Brown: ...we always had meetings after work. Well, I don't know if they have  
14 them after work now but anyway, you know, for the night shift, and they,  
15 they had that. And then they bought this land and, and they sold bricks for  
16 a dollar, you could buy a brick.  
17  
18Donald Brown: And that brick went into ...  
19  
20Doreen Brown: I've got my, my card that they gave but I couldn't find it today, I ...  
21  
22Donald Brown: It's a building club card, yeah.  
23  
24Doreen Brown: And so I decided I wanted my brick back when I [inaudible 59:51].  
25  
26Donald Brown: [laughter]  
27  
28Doreen Brown: No, but I don't know which brick's mine but anyway that's, that's how  
29 they built this, they sold bricks at the plant. I think they were a dollar. I  
30 think Dorothy said they were 5 but I don't remember paying that.  
31  
32Donald Brown: No, they were a dollar.  
33  
34Doreen Brown: Five dollars was a lot of money then, and I think they were a dollar but  
35 I'm not sure.  
36  
37Donald Brown: Yeah, you'd make, you wasn't makin' a buck and a half an hour I don't  
38 think and they ...  
39  
40Doug Rademacher: [1:00:11] Can you tell me, do you remember how long it took to build and  
41 did the workers help build the plant, uh, the union hall? Did you, did you  
42 hire a company or do you remember helping in, as workers that came over  
43 and helped in the development of it?  
44  
45Doreen Brown: I have no idea.  
46

1Donald Brown: I think it was all contracted out.  
2

3Doreen Brown: Yeah, I think it was too.  
4

5Doug Rademacher: Something else I wanted to know was, going back to you, Doreen, you  
6 were saying that you roomed originally with some people. [1:00:40] Can  
7 you tell me where you came from, what town you're from?  
8

9Doreen Brown: I'm from Chesaning, Michigan. And when I rented my room, I paid 5  
10 dollars a week.  
11

12Doug Rademacher: [1:00:49] And so why did you, your room because it was too far to go  
13 home?  
14

15Doreen Brown: Well yeah.  
16

17Doug Rademacher: [1:00:55] And you didn't have a vehicle or you ...  
18

19Doreen Brown: I didn't drive. I, my girlfriend came down here and she worked at St.  
20 Lawrence and she got me a job there, or I come down and got a job there.  
21 And then they were hiring at, at Fisher and I went there. So then, no I  
22 didn't want to go back home, I couldn't walk [laughing]. So anyway, so I,  
23 I went and got a room and that's what we paid with 5 dollars a week.  
24

25Doug Rademacher: [1:01:22] Now did the group that you lived with, did they come from ...  
26

27Doreen Brown: There was only, only 2 of us.  
28

29Doug Rademacher: Okay.  
30

31Doreen Brown: And they came from Chesaning too, yeah.  
32

33Doug Rademacher: [1:01:30] So did you travel home together on weekends or once a month  
34 or did you just, you had come to Lansing to stay, huh?  
35

36Doreen Brown: Maybe once a weekend I'd, I'd go home, and I had to ride the bus, and  
37 then I'd come back on – I'd left Saturday and come back Sunday.  
38 Sometimes I stayed here.  
39

40Donald Brown: They took the bus to Owosso and then ...  
41

42Doreen Brown: Yeah.  
43

44Donald Brown: [chuckle] ... from Owosso to ...  
45

46Doreen Brown: Then change in Owosso to Chesaning.

1  
2Doug Rademacher: [1:01:54] And, and where are you from?  
3  
4Donald Brown: Oh I'm [inaudible 1:01:58] Lansing.  
5  
6Doug Rademacher: [1:01:58] All your life?  
7  
8Donald Brown: Well I was born in East Tawas but, uh, most of the time, most of my life  
9 was here in Lansing area.  
10  
11Doug Rademacher: Mike Fleming.  
12  
13Michael Fleming: [1:02:10] Um, well, while you were talking about vehicles and  
14 transportation, I just kind of wanted to ask you all, uh, did you own any  
15 GM vehicles throughout your time? Do you remember what type of  
16 vehicle you had?  
17  
18Doreen Brown: The first one I bought was a '53 Chevrolet. Mustard and mayonnaise is  
19 what they called it [laughter]. It was yellow and white.  
20  
21Michael Fleming: Okay.  
22  
23Doreen Brown: Run it through the plant.  
24  
25Michael Fleming: It was made right here in Lansing. [1:02:34] What else did you, did you  
26 have any other vehicles?  
27  
28Doreen Brown: And then I had a '55 black and white 4-door hardtop, first one off the line.  
29 I mean, not the first one off the line but the first year they made it. Yeah.  
30 And that run through. And if you knew somebody, they would follow your  
31 car all the way through the plant and make sure you had a little extra eye  
32 on it. [laughter]  
33  
34Michael Fleming: [laughter] [1:02:57] Anymore, did you?  
35  
36Donald Brown: Oh yeah. We bought mostly GM, uh, products.  
37  
38Doreen Brown: GM cars.  
39  
40Donald Brown: We had the Vista Cruiser, remember that station wagon that they ...  
41  
42Doreen Brown: Yes.  
43  
44Donald Brown: ... they built over there and ...  
45  
46Doreen Brown: We took that to Canada and everybody looked at us.



1  
2Donald Brown: They was wondering what the windows were doin' on the roof [laughter].  
3  
4Doreen Brown: Because the window was on top and they couldn't figure out what kind of  
5 a funny-looking car that was.  
6  
7Donald Brown: I went to buy in the company used, you know, back then they, 3 months or  
8 3,000 mile, whichever came first, so I got a lot of them that had, or not a  
9 lot of'm but a couple of'm that didn't even have 3,000 mile on'm. I think  
10 the first Ninety-Eight I bought was a, that was in '74, uh, for 2700 dollars,  
11 a 4-door hardtop luxury sedan.  
12  
13Michael Fleming: Mm-hm.  
14  
15Donald Brown: And a [inaudible 1:03:42], you know, from the plant was the guy that  
16 drove it. They told me, Labor Relation told me, they said, "If you want to  
17 buy a company used, get his because if he hears a squeak he runs it right  
18 over to Olds and makes them take care of it." He said it's like ridin' in a  
19 hearse. He said you can't hear a thing in it. So I bought it, that was a good  
20 car.  
21  
22Michael Fleming: [laughter] [1:03:58] Anything else, any other kind of vehicles throughout  
23 the years.  
24  
25Donald Brown: Oh yeah. I'm drivin' Buick now. I, I can't understand why they got rid of  
26 the Oldsmobile but, um ...  
27  
28Doreen Brown: Nobody else can either.  
29  
30Donald Brown: Um ...  
31  
32Michael Fleming: [1:04:07] How did that make you feel when they got rid of Oldsmobile?  
33  
34Doreen Brown: Terrible.  
35  
36Donald Brown: I don't, it seemed like it was just bad business decision to me but I  
37 remember Olds pulled'm through, you know, a lot of bad periods, uh, you  
38 know, and GM was down in sales and Olds a lot of time was workin'  
39 overtime, you know, puttin' out the product but, um, we had our bad years  
40 too but, uh, you know, a lot of times they bail'm out. You don't take a  
41 company that's been in business for a hundred years or longer and say  
42 well they can't build a car, you know, or they ain't buildin' the right kind  
43 of cars ...  
44  
45Michael Fleming: Doug Rademacher.  
46

1 Doug Rademacher: Well I'll follow on that. They said it was, uh, they weren't, uh, having  
2 enough market, uh, Oldsmobile Sales, that's what, they tried to place it on  
3 that but, um, I was curious. Lansing's been known as the capital of  
4 quality.  
5

6 Donald Brown: Mm-hm.  
7

8 Doug Rademacher: It's had a reputation worldwide. [1:05:01] Could you both take a moment  
9 and share why is Lansing the capital of quality and, uh, give me, give me  
10 some ideas – what do you think created that entity?  
11

12 Doreen Brown: Well I think a lot of people, you know, when you go in there you form  
13 friendships, and, and you work hard in there and you take pride in your  
14 work and so on and when you have, if somebody's not doin' their job then  
15 you're just kind of [inaudible 1:05:31].  
16

17 Donald Brown: I think they helped each other out.  
18

19 Doreen Brown: Yeah.  
20

21 Donald Brown: I used to, if a guy up ahead of me is havin' a little trouble with his polish  
22 wheel, you know, he'd get a half down, I'd finish it up for him, you know,  
23 they'd do the same thing for me but it was all, you know, people worked  
24 together on – I'm sure they still do that but, but, uh, get into quality, you  
25 talk about quality work life. They had, I had a meeting with – it was after a  
26 meeting – that's when I was chairman, and they kept sayin', "Brown," he  
27 said, "We gotta get some kind of a quality" – I guess Detroit was on'm,  
28 somebody was because the, the local plant manager wasn't interested in it,  
29 you know, but, uh, and that what time was old Tom Wiethorn and, um, so  
30 this went, they kept callin' me, you know, about tryin' to do somethin' on  
31 the quality, you know, set up some kind of program. Olds had it and all,  
32 the plant had it and everybody had it but 602 didn't have it, you know, and  
33 I said, "Hey," I said, "until they get somebody here that's serious, why,  
34 why waste the time of sittin' down with these people?" you know.  
35

36 So Labor Relation, they kept houndin' me. So I said, "I tell you what," I  
37 said, "I'll have a meeting. You set it up and," – I got Lloyd down at, Cain  
38 then was our service rep from International, Rob was the president and I  
39 was chair, and I said you bring in your, you know, the people and we'll –  
40 so they set up a thing down at Jim's, um, it was a nice restaurant  
41 downtown on Michigan Avenue there and we had a private dining area,  
42 went up and had a meal.  
43

44 Old Tom Wiethorn, he sat there, you know, and they said, "Well," they  
45 said, "we ought to talk about this quality of work life." I said, "Yeah, I'm  
46 interested in it." I said, "I think it's about time that some of the workers

1 had some input to what, you know, a lot of times they're doin' things that  
2 they know is damaging a car but they're followin' orders, you know, and  
3 they, there's easier and better ways of doin' things, you know." So I said,  
4 to me, you know, if they wanna talk about employees that have an input,  
5 I'm, I'm interested. So I asked old Tom, you know, I said, "Mr. Wiethorn,  
6 what, what, what're you expectin' to get out of his quality work life?" He  
7 said, "I expect these people to show up on time to be to work, not to be  
8 takin' days off to do this." I said, "This is over." [laughter] I said that's all  
9 he wants. He don't care what's wrong with these people or what they're,  
10 you know, they're input, he just wants them on the job and sweatin', you  
11 know. Well we called that meeting off. We never met again and they  
12 never talked to me for 2 or 3 years until Don Chenoweth came in. I don't  
13 know if you remember him.  
14  
15 Interviewer: Yeah.  
16  
17 Donald Brown: And ol' Don, of course, I never got along with him when he worked here  
18 before, you know, when he was a foreman in, uh, uh, inspection  
19 department, quality control. [throat clearing] And I used to, you know, he  
20 was kind of a smart ass [laughter].  
21  
22 Doreen Brown: He can walk the line [inaudible 1:08:12].  
23  
24 Donald Brown: Yeah but, um, when he came back, I don't know, somebody either washed  
25 him in brotherhood or somethin', bathed him, because he come back, he  
26 was a, as a plant manager a few years, quite a few years later, and he  
27 started talkin' to me. And I said, "You been drinkin' or what? What's the  
28 matter with you, boy? You don't [laughter], you don't sound like the same  
29 guy, you know." And he said, ah, he said, "Man," he said, "I know you  
30 gotta get, we gotta get along." He said, "There ain't no sense to all this,  
31 you know, rantin' and ravin' and all this carryin' on." I said, "Man, I hope  
32 you're serious, you know, because it's been a long time comin'" and, uh,  
33 so anyway that's when we got – he wanted to set up a meeting so he took  
34 every union elected, you know, you got everybody, you know, that held a  
35 union office. We went out and all top management saw Labor Relations  
36 and went off and had a big ...  
37  
38 Cheryl McQuaid: Okay, hold it.  
39  
40 Donald Brown: Okay, so, uh, so they set up a meeting on the south end. They had a big  
41 conference out there. It was a 3-day meeting with, uh, all the union, uh,  
42 you know, officers and, uh, management from every, even labor, er, the  
43 protection was even there, some of them guys. But, uh, we went through a  
44 3-day, you know, like a work class type of thing and sat at tables.  
45 Everybody was intermixin', you know, with management and union reps  
46 and, and, um, so after we got through it, well then we put it, we decided

1 we, you know, they didn't give us, they all left the room and just all the  
2 union guys were there. So, um, I told'm, yeah, I said, "I don't" – being  
3 chairman that was my job to, you know, see how they wanted to handle  
4 this thing, so I had probably bothered a hundred people there, you know,  
5 different ones from, 'cause we brought in the whole benefit reps, the  
6 whole section, everybody, you know, and, uh, I said, "Well, uh, I'll do  
7 whatever you decide, you know." I said, "We ought to think about it and  
8 talk about it" and so we did and so if these guys were sincere and really  
9 want to do, you know, let the worker have some input, then I think it's,  
10 you know, a step in the right direction.

11  
12 And, uh, they, most of'm all agreed to it, you know, so after about an hour  
13 discussion on it, we took a vote and with the exception of 1 vote it passed,  
14 you know. So, um, that's when – well prior to this [chuckle] – let me get  
15 to this part – we was over to Dearborn, they was holdin' a similar meeting  
16 over there but it was just the presidents, the chairmen and, uh, personnel  
17 directors and head of Labor Relation departments and, uh, Don  
18 Chenoweth was, um, the plant manager here. Well he was, when he come  
19 into these meetings he always sat with us guys, you know, and, uh, so this  
20 went on for, you know, a couple days and [Emery's 1:11:06] last day  
21 there, you know, there was, they kind of had a, oh like a cocktail hour or  
22 whatever, you know, in this big conference room and they were servin'  
23 drinks and whatever, you know, have coffee or a beer or whatever you  
24 wanted. And, uh, they asked – that went on for like an hour and then most  
25 of everybody left.

26  
27 We were still sittin' there and Chenoweth looked across the, the room, you  
28 know, and he said, "You know them guys over there?" And I said, "Yeah,  
29 them my buddies out of Flint." He said, "You know'm?" I said, "Yeah, I  
30 know'm." He said, "You think they'd care if we come over and talk  
31 to'm?" I said, "Nah, they won't care." So I got over there, you know, and,  
32 and, uh, well I knew'm because of all these conventions and sub-council  
33 meetings and all this stuff I'd been, you know, and, uh, even old [Ruben  
34 1:11:51], you know, he was there [chuckle], you know, [Ruben Merck  
35 1:11:53] and them guys, you know, that was his clan back then and – so  
36 anyway, well Don sits down, you know, and he buys a round of drinks and  
37 he said, "Oh, who's that?" I said, "That's Don Chenoweth, he's from our  
38 clan."

39  
40 So, uh, they're all sittin' there and they're, I think they were from Chevy,  
41 Fisher 2 and Buick, and, uh, we got, after about a drink or 2, and then he  
42 said, "What, what's, uh, Chenoweth doin' there?" I said, "Oh, sorry I  
43 didn't introduce him." I said, "He's a plant manager there." Their mouth  
44 dropped open and they looked and said, "You're kiddin'?" "Nah, I ain't  
45 kiddin'," I said, "he's the plant manager." I said, "I wouldn't even let him  
46 sit with us but," I said, "he came off the line, you know, he was an old

1 [inaudible 1:12:34] guy. He used to be a handle knocker. He put door  
2 handles [laughter] on the cars up there in trim. And they said, "You're  
3 kiddin'." They'd never met a plant manager, you know, they worked on  
4 the lines, so that was a big deal with them, they, so they sat there. Then  
5 after the thing closed and Don took them over – they had a bar in that  
6 same complex – he took'm over and bought'm another drink I guess and,  
7 but they got a big kick out of that, that, uh, you know, our manager sat  
8 down and, you know, acted like one of the guys, you know, that, uh ..  
9

10Doreen Howard: Um, going back to Fisher Body, um, I'm interested in some of the culture  
11 aspects that happened when you first came in. [1:13:15] Um, was there,  
12 um, drinking during work, drugs, or people taking naps, or, what was  
13 some of the things that happened on a daily basis in there?  
14

15Donald Brown: [laughter] Never no drinkin' in there. [laughter]  
16

17Doreen Howard: [1:13:29] I know it wasn't condoned by management or anything like that  
18 but did those things, did any of that stuff occur during, during the earlier  
19 years?  
20

21Donald Brown: Oh certainly. Yeah. There was – I imagine that, but it wasn't just the  
22 hourly rates. You had supervisors in there that was hittin' on the bottle just  
23 as much as, you know, anybody. Uh, drugs wasn't that big of a problem  
24 way back then, you know. I think when marijuana started, and that was  
25 probably in the '70s, early maybe '70s, a foreman come to me and he was  
26 up in 3X trim or worked right at the bottom of the ramp, comin' down out  
27 of 3X, and he said, "You gotta get me some help." I said, "What?" He  
28 said, "I gotta get these fans turned around." I said, "Why?" He said, "I got  
29 so many pot smokers up there," he said, "these fans are blowin' all that  
30 smoke down, they're gonna hit the front office 'fore long," he said  
31 [laughter], he said, "I'll lose my whole crew." And I said, "Man, you  
32 better get out there and put a stop to that stuff." So, he, you know, but he  
33 did get some fans turned around. He said, "Man, this is goin' all the way  
34 down to the hardware department." He said, "Man, guys are gettin' high  
35 down there just smellin' the smoke." [laughter] But I, I mean I wasn't, that  
36 wasn't really the kind of energy you wanted, I guess, but that's what  
37 happened, you know, that's factual.  
38

39Doreen Howard: Can you tell me some of the things that were ...  
40

41Donald Brown: But there were supervisors. I knew one guy – they filled a bucket – the  
42 foreman used to drink out of the whiskey bottle with a guy, and so they  
43 had a hiding place in the restroom, the mens can there, you know, and, and  
44 they'd get tired of this old foreman always hittin' on their bottle, so they  
45 filled one up with water. They go shootin' in there and he gonna run in  
46 there and pull out the cork, took a great big pull on it and spit it out, went

1 out, they were gonna fire the whole bunch.[ laughter] He was one of the  
2 pay department foremen. But they, uh, a lot of guys, the foremans used to  
3 go out and drink with the guys on lunch breaks and things, you know, but,  
4 um, there was drinkin' goin' on. I imagine there still is, um, probably  
5 won't be out there because you're so far from, uh, unless you're carryin'  
6 your own. Well let me tell you about this drinkin'. On Christmas – we  
7 used to work the Christmas Eves and New Year's Eves. The only thing  
8 that got filled up, any barrels up there was whiskey bottles or, you know  
9 [laughter], so they didn't really get a whole lot of work out of them people  
10 when they worked them 4 hours, you know, that, uh ...  
11  
12Doreen Brown: The dayshift worked 4 hours and then the night shift come in at noon and  
13 worked 4 hours, so I don't know what they gained but [laughter] must  
14 have gained somethin'.  
15  
16Donald Brown: [Inaudible 1:15:58] used to complain about all them bottles they had to  
17 haul outta there.  
18  
19Doreen Brown: They used to say don't buy a car that was made on Friday.  
20  
21Michael Fleming: [1:16:09] Um, when you're talkin' about the drinking and some of the  
22 things they did together in there, was there, um, football games that went  
23 on next door, um, at the high school, and, uh, were there any, any  
24 gamblin' in the plant; did you notice any gamblin'?  
25  
26Donald Brown: Football pools. Yeah, they were, but nothin' heavy, you know. Five  
27 bucks'd probably be the most a guy'd ever bet when, you know, on a  
28 square. You could win a couple hundred dollars if you hit but, uh, no, back  
29 earlier you couldn't even have a radio, you know. We used to try to listen  
30 to the Tigers, you know, on the transistor. We had general foreamans walk  
31 through the area and make you shut'm off. They'd pick up the newspaper.  
32 They didn't want ya readin' the newspaper. They threw'm in a trash  
33 barrel, you know. So it was, it was like the bull in the woods, man. I think  
34 we had more than our share over there back then but...  
35  
36Michael Fleming: [1:17:06] So no one ever got a chance to watch Sexton football games at  
37 all that you know of?  
38  
39Donald Brown: Uh-uh. We used to watch'm from the roof. [laughter]  
40  
41Michael Fleming: That's what I mean, yeah. They'd come up on the roof. Talk about that.  
42 [1:17:13] Did they go up on the roof?  
43  
44Donald Brown: Oh, some of'm did. A lot of tradesmen, you know, 'cause they weren't  
45 tied to the chain but, uh, they'd figure out somewhere to get a job, roof

1 job, that night and go up there and watch. I used to sneak by once in a  
2 while and see what the score was but, um ...  
3

4 Doug Rademacher: Doreen, you wanted to talk about the name change. [1:17:37] It's, it was  
5 Fisher Body when you hired in and what's your feeling about that change?  
6

7 Doreen Brown: It'll always be Fisher Body to me and all my friends and anybody that  
8 worked there then. And, when they moved out, everybody I talk to feels  
9 bad. 'Cause, you know, they spent their whole life in, well not their whole  
10 life but a good many years in there and meet a lot of nice friends and  
11 everything and it feels like just losin' part of your family when they  
12 talked, when they told us that plan.  
13

14 Doug Rademacher: [1:18:08] Now, you're talkin' about closing the plant or just the name  
15 changes?  
16

17 Doreen Brown: Both. Well when they shut the plant, when they shut Fisher down,  
18 everybody felt real bad about it. They couldn't believe that they shut  
19 Fisher down.  
20

21 Doug Rademacher: [1:18:20] Can you tell me what year did you retire, what year did your  
22 husband retire?  
23

24 Doreen Brown: I, I went out in '81.  
25

26 Doug Rademacher: Okay.  
27

28 Donald Brown: Eighty-four.  
29

30 Doug Rademacher: Eighty-four. [1:18:29] So you were able to see your son hired?  
31

32 Donald Brown: Yeah. Well she was there when he went in.  
33

34 Doreen Brown: Yeah.  
35

36 Donald Brown: [throat clearing] But on that name change – they had this, uh, that was  
37 another problem I had with'm. That's when they were gonna switch over  
38 to this – I knew they were gonna come out with that new model, that '85  
39 model, you know, so they's gonna, and that's when they were gonna  
40 eliminate the Fisher, you know. And so there was gonna be quite a bit of  
41 training goin' on, you know, in there, and I told, I got with Labor Relation.  
42 I asked'm, I said, "You know I got a lot of guys and gals in here that's got  
43 30 years or more that if you'd, we'd work out some kind of an agreement  
44 where we can go out on, take a lay-off, you know, with SUB pay and  
45 short, you know, the SUB pay and unemployment. Um, but, uh, I could  
46 probably sign ya up some. You wouldn't have to be layin' off these young

1 ones," you know, 'cause they were goin' into a lay-off situation at that  
2 time. I said, "If I could save ya, you know, you could get, you're gonna  
3 need to train these people." I said, "Now why would you train somebody  
4 that's eligible for retirement and probably will retire after the next  
5 contract, which is comin' up that fall," you know.  
6  
7 Well they didn't know. They thought that was, you know, just, I was tryin'  
8 to get somethin' for nothin', you know. And I said, "Well," I said, "I'm  
9 tryin' to save you guys some bucks but if you don't want it, fine, you  
10 know, forget it." I said, "If you wanna do double break-in, you know  
11 [chuckle], that's up to you." So they said, "Well we run a [inaudible  
12 1:19:52]. Well they did in Detroit and said to grab it, man, don't mess with  
13 that. He said, "If we can get rid of the older ones and get the young ones  
14 all trained before the new model starts up." So they laid these guys off.  
15 We took the lay-off in I think back in February, March, somewhere in  
16 there, and we stayed off until October and we drew unemployment, you  
17 know, SUB pay and unemployment up until 1<sup>st</sup> of October, then we went  
18 on retirement. Um, but they wanted to do battle over that and I said, "Man,  
19 you people are hard to get along with. You just won't listen." [laughter]  
20  
21 Doreen Howard: Um, Doreen, I wanted to go back to, um, the topic of women's issues in  
22 the plant. [1:20:40] Can you talk about, um, some of the difficulties that  
23 women had in the beginning when you first hired in versus maybe the  
24 changes that occurred, um, when you, when you left as far as just general  
25 facilities and the harassment possibil-, that type of issues that women had  
26 to deal with and just, um, in the plant? How, how has that changed from  
27 when you first hired in to when you retired?  
28  
29 Doreen Brown: I don't think where I worked there was any harassment at all. I don't know  
30 [chuckle].  
31  
32 Doreen Howard: [1:21:22] You didn't, you didn't see any of that with the, the men and the  
33 women, um, during your time there.  
34  
35 Doreen Brown: We, we didn't make as much money as, an hour as the men did but then  
36 they finally got that goin' but, um.  
37  
38 Interviewer: Cheryl McQuaid.  
39  
40 Cheryl McQuaid: [1:21:46] Did either of you know, hear of or see any fatalities in the plant?  
41 Um, near misses? And health and safety issues – how much did they  
42 improve from when you hired in to when you retired?  
43  
44 Doreen Brown: It probably improved a lot because they said if you're gonna die, don't fall  
45 on the track 'cause they gotta shut the line down, and that would make'm  
46 mad.



1  
2 Cheryl McQuaid: I had always heard when I hired in in '78 that if somebody had a heart  
3 attack on the line, they wouldn't even stop the line, they'd pull'm out of  
4 the way and let it go.  
5  
6 Donald Brown: Punch'm out. [laughter]  
7  
8 Cheryl McQuaid: Yeah. [1:22:20] Is there truth to that?  
9  
10 Doreen Brown: Well punch the timecard, though. He don't mean hit'm out, he means p, p,  
11 punch their timecard, yeah.  
12  
13 Donald Brown: Well they don't have timecards anymore but back then they used to, we'd  
14 tell this one foreman, uh, he just, you know, or, [inaudible 1:22:34], I  
15 don't know if you ever heard of him, ol' A.J. [inaudible 1:22:36] just rattle  
16 his trim for, hardware for'm at about, "No, I don't wanna work for you."  
17 He said, "Hell, if I drop dead up there," he said, "you'll be draggin' me off  
18 the line and hollerin' for my partner to go punch me out," you know, stop  
19 the pay, stop the pay. [chuckle]  
20  
21 Michael Fleming: [1:22:51] It's my understanding back then whenever the line stopped there  
22 was an array of foreman, general foreman, and everyone right there tryin'  
23 to figure out exactly why the line stopped, is that true?  
24  
25 Donald Brown: Um, I think so. Our biggest problem was paint department never really  
26 done this and then, uh, but we worked, we worked in building 13 and we  
27 dumped right into building 1, tr-, er, hardware department. Every time  
28 they'd either run a gap or they'd run, the line'd go down, the foreman  
29 come over with a armload of brooms and tell these guys to start sweepin',  
30 you know, clean your areas. They just tried that once in the paint  
31 department and told him put the broom away, man, if you need more  
32 sweepers, go hire'm but we ain't doin' it. We're polishers, we ain't  
33 sweepers, [we ain't here to do that 1:23:33]. Then I got on the sw-, the  
34 sweepers started complainin', you know, so, um, Ted [Hardwin 1:23:42]  
35 he was the president but he was committee man over the sanitation guys in  
36 there at, at that time and those sweepers were complainin' because hourly  
37 rate, you know, the line workers were doin' sweepin', so we run a  
38 grievance; we put a stop to a lot of it [chuckle]. We said you either pay the  
39 sweeper the line rate or put more sweepers on so they can handle their job,  
40 you know.  
41  
42 Michael Fleming: Doreen, um, when you were, um, doing your time, um, were – Mike  
43 Fleming. [1:24:13] When you were in your time, what did you do, uh,  
44 were you ever elected to anything? Wh, wh, what, did you do anything  
45 after you, in the, with the union?  
46

1Doreen Brown: Well, I was elected, um, chairman of the elections committee. And at that  
2 time we had 8 ...  
3

4Michael Fleming: [1:24:31] Eight people?  
5

6Doreen Brown: ... on the election committee. And when you had a 24-hour vote, you  
7 stayed 24 hours.  
8

9Michael Fleming: [1:24:41] How was the compensation? Did they pay you for the 24 hours?  
10 Did you, did you guys, what did you do within that 24 hours, 'cause not all  
11 that was, people were in there were they?  
12

13Doreen Brown: Yeah. All, all your 8 people had to be in there at the same time.  
14

15Michael Fleming: What, what I mean, the population wasn't voting continuously ...  
16

17Doreen Brown: Oh. Yeah.  
18

19Michael Fleming: [1:24:55] ... so when you had downtime, what did you do?  
20

21Doreen Brown: Well you kind of take, rested a little bit, tried to. [chuckle] And, uh, I don't  
22 know, I can't remember [laughter].  
23

24Michael Fleming: [1:25:06] What was the biggest election that you can remember, most  
25 important?  
26

27Doreen Brown: Oh, that swing shift.  
28

29Donald Brown: [laughter]  
30

31Michael Fleming: Talk about that.  
32

33Doreen Brown: They were lined up clear to the plant to get in.  
34

35Michael Fleming: And swing shift, um...  
36

37Doreen Brown: That's how they got rid of the swing shift.  
38

39Michael Fleming: [1:25:28] Wh, what was swing shift?  
40

41Donald Brown: Four weeks on, 4 weeks on days, 4 weeks on nights and [inaudible  
42 1:25:35] Swung you back and forth. Your foreman go right with ya, you  
43 know, it was, you had the same foreman.  
44

45Doreen Brown: I guess they didn't know about that.  
46

1 Michael Fleming: [1:25:42] Do you, do you – no, we didn't know – do you, do you want to  
2 talk about, do you remember when they got rid of that?  
3

4 Donald Brown: Oh yeah. I liked the swing shift. [laughter]  
5

6 Doreen Brown: I did too.  
7

8 Donald Brown: I thought everybody got treated alike, you know. A lot of people liked to  
9 work days, you know. Uh, but, if you were stuck on the nightshift, the  
10 lower seniority, if you didn't have enough seniority to get to days, then  
11 you were on nights forever, you know. So, um, I figure, well, even though  
12 it's a strain on some weekends, you know, you can work Friday night and  
13 then back in Monday morning, uh, that was a short weekend but, uh, still  
14 you had, you know, you had the dayshift, you know, for 4 weeks.  
15

16 Doreen Brown: So you could be with your families and do whatever. If you were young  
17 and you had families and you were on nights, they, they, well you still are,  
18 so.  
19

20 Donald Brown: They were, they had a lot of division within the committee and on things  
21 like that in the union, you know. Like, I was opposed but 'course all those  
22 dayshift committee guys [chuckle], you know, the high seniority ones,  
23 they, oh, they thought straight shift, you know, that's the only way. I guess  
24 probably after a while they got the ...  
25

26 Michael Fleming: Jerri Smith.  
27

28 Jerri Smith: [No, I had a question 1:26:51].  
29

30 Doug Rademacher: Um, you've both them, uh, fortunate ...  
31

32 Cheryl McQuaid: Doug Rademacher.  
33

34 Doug Rademacher: Oh, I'm sorry. Doug Rademacher. Now you've both been fortunate  
35 enough to have retired from the Fisher Body facility. [1:27:11] What is  
36 your most appreciated bargain benefit?  
37

38 Donald Brown: Um, well, um, the benefits, I think is, you know, the healthcare, uh, and  
39 the pensions, um. I ain't got much of a raise in the last 20 years but  
40 [laughter], you know. I still get my pension check, which is, which is  
41 good, but, um.  
42

43 Doreen Brown: The 30-and-out.  
44

45 Donald Brown: We never, of course, with both of us, you know, when you get 2 people  
46 that's drawin' pension checks and social security now, you know, uh, that,

1 that adds up pretty good, you know, and we, we've been fortunate enough  
2 to – of course, we owned our own home and we purchased probably 3 or 4  
3 new cars, at least 1 new car since we've been, paid cash for'm, uh. I got a  
4 Pontiac, er I got, she's got a Pontiac fancy name ...  
5  
6Doreen Brown: Grand Am.  
7  
8Donald Brown: Grand Am, you know. I got, it's, uh, 5 years old but she's got 12,000 mile  
9 on it [chuckle]. I got a Buick Park Avenue, so we, you know. You know,  
10 we always, we – after we quit workin's when we got the 2 cars.  
11  
12Interviewer: Doreen Howard.  
13  
14Doreen Howard: [1:28:28] Um, I'd like to go back to the plant and, um, when you hired in,  
15 did they have any particular pranks that they would pull on new hires or  
16 was there any pranks that you tended to, to do to other people or, or fun  
17 things that, that used to, um, help pass the time, things that you would do  
18 to, for entertainment?  
19  
20Doreen Brown: While you were working?  
21  
22Doreen Howard: Yeah.  
23  
24Doreen Brown: You didn't have time for that. [chuckle]  
25  
26Doreen Howard: Like me, you, you, so you said you couldn't have the radio, was there ...  
27  
28Donald Brown: No radio. No newspapers.  
29  
30Doreen Howard: [1:29:06] But at lunchtime was there ever anybody that would, you know,  
31 have music or, or play cards or ...  
32  
33Donald Brown: There probably was. I can't recall but I'm sure that they...  
34  
35Doreen Howard: Well they used to play cards on there. See, we used to have 45 minutes  
36 and, and you could go out, like to go to a hamburger joint or some place  
37 and get something and bring it back. And then they put it down to a half  
38 hour so ...  
39  
40Michael Fleming: [1:29:38] Um, do you remember when they had the wagon? Can you talk  
41 about when we had the wagon, what it was, and when you lost it? Or was  
42 it gone ...  
43  
44Donald Brown: We had it when we left [chuckle].  
45  
46Michael Fleming: You had it when you left. Talk about the wagon.

1  
2Donald Brown: Um, they, um, the wagon, a lot of people probably didn't know this. Uh,  
3 they were, they stayed out extra. After Olds and everybody was settled,  
4 Fisher Body stayed out for, I think, 7 or 8 days just to get the wagon. And  
5 when they got it, and this is the part a lot of people didn't know, that the  
6 union had to give management make-up time for the wagon. In other  
7 words, for that 6 minutes they're down they could increase the line so that  
8 the body count at the end of the shift would be the same as it would be,  
9 you know. So, um, they, that wasn't a freebee, you know, they got, they  
10 got it back. I didn't know that until [chuckle], you know, 'cause they had  
11 the wagon when I went in there but I found this out later. [Usta Land  
12 1:30:29] I think told me about it. And, um, but the wagon was good.  
13  
14 I remember they had a, I was up in building 5 workin' then and they raised  
15 the price of coffee from 5 to 7 cents and we went on a boycott, said that's  
16 ridiculous, why pay, you know, because they wanted – the union was  
17 askin' to put black coffee on with the creamer, you know, where people  
18 wanted cream, they could pour their own cream. So they wouldn't do that,  
19 you know, they said, well we'll just put it all, we'll make, we'll pour  
20 cream in the big ol' coffee pot and you pay a nickel, you know. So I think  
21 it went back to the nickel but they made you take the coffee the way they  
22 wanted to serve it then. So if you wanted black coffee, you just didn't get  
23 it, you know. No vending machines. They had candy machines in there, I  
24 think. But, uh, they had sandwiches, rolls, and you could get, you know,  
25 get a snack off of it.  
26  
27 I always enjoyed the wagon. I think most people did. And it broke up the  
28 morning, you know. It come through twice a day and halfway through the  
29 shift you'd, uh, in the morning and you could go off and have a cup of  
30 coffee and a doughnut or a sandwich and, but, um, no, they still had – they  
31 went after that wagon hard. They wanted us to give it up every negotiation  
32 we went in. But I couldn't understand why because they wasn't losin'  
33 anything. They said that they didn't want to shut the lines down. Um, but  
34 then we beat'm on some of that too, I guess, you know, we can't, 'cause  
35 we had agreements on, in the paint department on the polish line that the  
36 whole line was settled on 1 agreement as based on manpower plus line  
37 speed. So whenever the line went up, manpower was added, you know,  
38 they, they had the manpower. So, um...  
39  
40Interviewer: Doreen.  
41  
42Doreen Brown: One time they wanted to get rid of, um, the wagons and they put in those,  
43 uh, what were those things? They had sandwiches in'm and doughnuts and  
44 all that.  
45  
46Donald Brown: Oh, those big, big, uh ...

1  
2Doreen Brown: Big vending machines, you know, where you go in...  
3  
4Donald Brown: They put'm all over our plant with microwave ovens and ...  
5  
6Doreen Brown: And, 'cause they thought that people'd just love that.  
7  
8Michael Fleming: [1:32:34] So nobody really wanted that?  
9  
10Doreen Brown: Nobody wanted that.  
11  
12Michael Fleming: They wanted the wagon.  
13  
14Donald Brown: Well, I said, they kept on me for ...  
15  
16Doreen Brown: Well they kept puttin', everything got old in there and, besides, nobody  
17 wanted'm. I mean and they, they wanted their time off to go in the  
18 smoking area and sit down and relax for 6 minutes. So that didn't last very  
19 long. They got rid of that.  
20  
21Donald Brown: They asked me, um, management was comin' [inaudible 1:32:55] the  
22 committee about changin', you know, convertin' over. They said we know  
23 of the membership, said we'll build such beautiful satellite areas, you  
24 know, where we can put in all kind of vending machines, we'll make sure  
25 there, we'll give you in writing these things will be maintained,  
26 microwave ovens, they can have soup, they can have anything they want,  
27 you know, the hot drinks, any kind of sandwiches, you know. Said that'd  
28 be a lot healthier than these little coffee wagon being pushed throughout  
29 the plant, you know [laughter].  
30  
31 But I said the people ain't gonna give you that wagon. And they said,  
32 "Well you ain't let the people, you're doin' the talkin' for the people." I  
33 said, "That's what the people elected me for." And they said, he kept  
34 hollerin' at me and I said, "I'll tell you what. You set these in." I said, "Let  
35 me talk to the shop committee first and if they agree, you set up these  
36 satellite areas with all these goodies you're talkin' about..." and that's  
37 when they showed that big film – I don't know if he was there then or, but  
38 they got a, they made a big film. They spent tons of money promotin' this  
39 and they said they were gonna, you know, they showed the old cafeteria  
40 where the guys'd get a half a watermelon, you know, and the big meals  
41 they were givin'm down there and all that. Really made it look good, you  
42 know, what they, how they were switchin' out from the old days and I  
43 said, "Well," we'll tell, they, we had to tell'm we'd take a hands off on it,  
44 just, you know, "you put out your program and we'll take it to a vote."  
45

1 So they did and after the people had about a month, you know, lookin' it  
2 over and tryin' it out and, and I guess it worked good in some areas; some  
3 areas it wasn't so good but, anyway, when we took it to vote it was turned  
4 down like 90 to 1, you know [laughter]. That's 90 percent to 10 percent.  
5 And I said, they come back – that night, they must've, I don't know who  
6 they had in there but they cleaned all them machines out over 1 weekend.  
7 It took'm about 3 weeks to get'm all set up but they took it out in 1  
8 weekend. Said they don't want'm, get'm out, they ain't havin'm, they  
9 ain't gonna use'm no more. [laughter] I said, "I told ya they wouldn't buy  
10 it, but..."

11

12Michael Fleming: Mr. Brown, one more question while you're talkin' about – [1:34:53]  
13 How, how large was the population in the plant?  
14

15Donald Brown: Uh, I think the highest during my term in there was like 6,000. Um, that  
16 may have varied a little over that, over or under but, um, it run, it run  
17 pretty good.  
18

19Michael Fleming: That's a big plant.  
20

21Interviewer: Cheryl McQuaid.  
22

23Doreen Howard: [1:35:17] What was it – this is Doreen Howard – uh, what was the  
24 population when you retired?  
25

26Donald Brown: That must have been around 5,000 I think. That's in '84 and this is when  
27 they were gettin' ready to switch, you know, over to the, what do you call  
28 it, the Lansing Tire Assembly or some – they took the sign down about a  
29 month after I retired. [laughter] The Fisher Body coach, you know, on the  
30 end of the building down there. But um, it was, must have been around, it  
31 was probably between 4,500 and 5,000 I think in there.  
32

33Cheryl McQuaid: [1:35:52] Is there anything that we haven't asked the two of you that you  
34 would like to share with us?  
35

36Donald Brown: I don't know. I can't, uh ...  
37

38Doreen Brown: I can't think of anything. I'll probably think of it when they get out.  
39

40Michael Fleming: I've got 1 more question that I want to ask Doreen. Mike Fleming.  
41 [1:36:07] Doreen, ...  
42

43Doreen Brown: Yeah.  
44

45Michael Fleming: ...do you remember the flowers that were out front that, uh, made up  
46 Fisher Body?

1  
2Doreen Brown: Mm-hm.  
3  
4Michael Fleming: [1:36:13] Were they out there too? What did they look like? What was that  
5 like?  
6  
7Doreen Brown: Well they had the Fisher Body, er, the coach out there and it was really  
8 pretty. They had that out there. And I understand that the coach that they  
9 had, they had an open house and some of us were there and they had that  
10 big coach that was made in there? And we had our pictures taken in, with  
11 the coach. And I understand that that has fallen apart or something fell on  
12 it and they put, and it broke. So it's gone.  
13  
14Michael Fleming: Okay.  
15  
16Doreen Howard: Um, Don, you talked about the, um, Fisher Body coach, the emblem that  
17 was on the side of the building.  
18  
19Donald Brown: Mm-hm.  
20  
21Doreen Howard: [1:36:55] Can, can you talk a little bit more about – what was your  
22 feelings when you saw that coming down off the building?  
23  
24Donald Brown: Uh, it looked like the end of an era, you know. I didn't, I figured Fisher  
25 Body would be there as long as Oldsmobile was runnin', you know. Um,  
26 but, um, Oldsmobile, of course – Fisher Body started in Olds. If you go  
27 back far enough they used to, when they started Fisher Body was in the  
28 Olds plant over there on Olds Avenue and, uh, Logan. But, uh, and then  
29 they bought Durant building, Durant, the guy that started General Motors,  
30 and made 'em all incorporated. They got it all runnin' and then they fired  
31 him. [laughter] But he used to build cars in there, the Durant car, you  
32 know, 'fore Fisher came in, um. But, uh, no, I hate to see Fisher go. It was  
33 finally gettin' like a kind of respectable place to work, you know. That  
34 was known for years as a sweat shop, you know. They used to take 'em over  
35 and point out the window, you know, they guy in line, you know, do their  
36 job or that guy'll have it, you know, and those are, the guys had told me,  
37 you know, where guys that, they actually done this to, so, uh...  
38  
39Doreen Brown: They used to call people workin' there shop rats. I don't know if they still  
40 do or not.  
41  
42Interviewer: Oh yeah.  
43  
44Doreen Brown: But a lot of them, you know, that I've talked to, they say, "Gee, I wish I'd  
45 have worked in there now." I mean, you know, you build, a shop, shop rat



1 and here you're a secretary or a teacher and you're kind of up here and  
2 you're down here.  
3  
4Donald Brown: Well, there've been a lot of improvements ...  
5  
6Doreen Brown: Oh yeah.  
7  
8Donald Brown: ... you know, they come a long way. Now that they're back in, we got  
9 people that, a lot of people, for whatever reason, never got the education.  
10 A lot of'm couldn't even read or write, you know, and, uh, in fact, I used  
11 to stand in line down there and fill out their unemployment papers for'm  
12 and things, you know, some of the, you know, worked with me. Um, and  
13 then I had, I had an alternate committee man that was a college graduate  
14 out of state. So, you know, you had one level to the other in educational  
15 things, but they all worked the same jobs, you know, so um ...  
16  
17Doreen Brown: People say well you're lucky, look what you got. You got your insurance,  
18 you got eye care, you got this, you got that...  
19  
20Donald Brown: Well it has come a long...  
21  
22Doreen Brown: But a lot of'm do-, you know, don't have that. So I think the shop rats  
23 have come up a little further.  
24  
25Donald Brown: Well, when I hired in, when we hired in, um, you didn't have any of these  
26 – you didn't have eye care ...  
27  
28Doreen Brown: No.  
29  
30Donald Brown: ...hearing, um, prescription – we bought all our own prescriptions – uh ...  
31  
32Doreen Brown: Paydowns. I, I paid my own insurance when I went in.  
33  
34Donald Brown: Well so did I.  
35  
36Doreen Brown: My life insurance, I paid, and my Blue Cross and stuff like that.  
37  
38Donald Brown: Yeah but it was, it was like a buck and a half a month or somethin'. It  
39 wasn't all that ...  
40  
41Doreen Brown: It cost a lot to join the union, 5 dollars. [laughter]  
42  
43Donald Brown: I'm not sure you're right on that but I ain't gonna, I ain't gonna debate it.  
44  
45Doreen Brown: I get it. Yes, it was. I paid it. Yes I did.  
46

1 Doug Rademacher: We have pictures that show that a place called Harry's Place ...  
2  
3 Donald Brown: Mm-hm.  
4  
5 Doug Rademacher: ... it's, uh, it's been known as a shop bar.  
6  
7 Donald Brown: Social club. [laughter]  
8  
9 Doug Rademacher: [1:39:55] Can you share any story about Harry's Place?  
10  
11 Donald Brown: Oh, Harry's was always there. We used to go over there and get some  
12 bologna sandwiches, you know, [laughter] so I ate bologna sandwiches  
13 and he had hard-boiled eggs. You could buy a couple of eggs and get a –  
14 he didn't have no bar stools, you know, everybody stood up, because you  
15 get more at the bar that way, you know, they'd be 3 deep at the bar but  
16 they had to do this within like 20 minutes or whatever so, you know, and  
17 the shifts, when the shifts would let out, body shop would just be leavin'  
18 and the paint department would be comin' in, you know. And then, of  
19 course, the skilled tradesmen worked different shifts. They'd come in and,  
20 you know, so, uh, they, they really done a bang-up business there at  
21 Harry's, you know, but, they go in there and if you drank 3 drafts, you  
22 know, that was 'bout as much time as you get, you know, that's fast as  
23 they could wait on ya, really, with all the people there.  
24  
25 Michael Fleming: [1:40:42] What was he, what did it look like in there? Was the floors  
26 wood, wood?  
27  
28 Donald Brown: Oh yeah, yeah. It was, it was pretty nice. Now we went in there here a  
29 couple weeks ago.  
30  
31 Michael Fleming: [1:40:51] What did it look like then?  
32  
33 Donald Brown: Back then it was just [chuckle] a bar.  
34  
35 Doreen Brown: A shop bar.  
36  
37 Donald Brown: Shop bar. It was a ...  
38  
39 Michael Fleming: [1:40:58] Does it look about the same now?  
40  
41 Donald Brown: No...  
42  
43 Doreen Brown: No.  
44  
45 Donald Brown: ...it's changed a lot. They got it fixed up now, yeah. He didn't serve, the  
46 only thing he served was he served sandwiches, um – that was Harry; now

1 I'm talkin' 'bout when Harry was there. When Art, I remember when Art  
2 came over here, Harry put Art to work. Art and Gus, well Gus wo-, Gus  
3 worked at Fisher for a while but he couldn't cut it so he went to work for  
4 Harry, or Art hired him, you know, over there at Harry's. And he got his  
5 own place over here but, um. Ol' Gus he just couldn't, he come in early;  
6 that's why he quit, I guess, 'cause [inaudible 1:41:33] kept gettin' on him.  
7 He'd come in and, like an hour early, and start building his stock up 'cause  
8 he had, the job was so heavy he couldn't do it, you know, keep up. And he  
9 wouldn't write a job up, you know. So [inaudible 1:41:44] foreman. He  
10 said, "You let that guy work you're gonna pay him." He said, "Well I told  
11 him not to start until the whistle blew but he won't listen to me." He said,  
12 "You stop him or you're gonna pay him 'cause you know about it and  
13 you, it's job to stop him." [Far as I know 1:41:58], Gus, he got mad and,  
14 you know, he walked out of there then. But um, that was stupid, you  
15 know, why he [chuckle] if you can't do the job [chuckle] you get  
16 somethin' wrong with it.  
17  
18 Michael Fleming: Well, Mr. and Mrs. Brown, we want to thank you all for comin' in and  
19 talkin' with us.  
20  
21 Interviewer: It's been a very interesting and, uh, rewarding experience.  
22  
23 Donald Brown: Oh yeah.  
24  
25 Interviewer: We appreciate your time.  
26  
27 Interviewer: Thank you very much.  
28  
29 Donald Brown: There are a lot of things that we, we remember or, you know, things we  
30 forgot probably more than what we remembered but ...  
31  
32 Doreen Brown: You want to give me that phone number, or your phone number or who  
33 you want me ...[audio ends 1:42:32]  
34  
35/kd