

1 **Harold E. Brown, an African American, discusses his career as a production worker**
2 **and UAW member at the Fisher Body plant in Lansing, MI**
3
4

5 [shuffling papers]
6

7Marilyn Coulter: Fisher Body Historical Team, uh, interview with Harold Brown, um,
8 [throat clearing] Workers' Compensation Chair at UAW Local 602, uh,
9 first interviewer, Marilyn Coulter.
10

11John Fedewa: John Fedewa.
12

13Linda Johnson: Linda Johnson.
14

15Kathryn Berry: Kathy Berry.
16

17Cheryl McQuaid: Cheryl McQuaid.
18

19Michael Fleming: Mike Fleming.
20

21Doug Rademacher: Doug Rademacher.
22

23Doreen Howard: Doreen Howard.
24

25Marilyn Coulter: [0:22] Um, Harold, can you please state and spell your name for us,
26 please?
27

28Harold Brown: Harold E. Brown, H-A-R-O-L-D, middle initial E, Brown, B-R-O-W-N.
29

30Marilyn Coulter: [0:35] Can you give us your address, please?
31

32Harold Brown: 1525 Peirce Road – that's P-E-I-R-C-E – Lansing, Michigan 48910.
33

34Marilyn Coulter: [0:45] And your gender?
35

36Harold Brown: Male.
37

38Marilyn Coulter: [0:48] And your national origin?
39

40Harold Brown: Black.
41

42Marilyn Coulter: Okay. [0:52] Um, are you married?
43

44Harold Brown: Yes.
45

46Marilyn Coulter: [0:55] And children?

1
2Harold Brown: Four kids.
3
4Marilyn Coulter: [0:58] Uh, boys, girls or...?
5
6Harold Brown: Two boys and two girls.
7
8 [thumping]
9
10Marilyn Coulter: Okay. [1:01] Uh, your education background?
11
12Harold Brown: Um, high school diploma, [thumping] various classes, Lansing
13 Community College, various classes, United States Military as well as, uh,
14 uh, UAW GM classes.
15
16Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm. [1:15] How long did you serve in the military?
17
18Harold Brown: Four years.
19
20Marilyn Coulter: All right. [1:19] Um, as far as your history here at Fisher Body, do you
21 remember when you hired in?
22
23Harold Brown: Yes, I do.
24
25Marilyn Coulter: [1:24] And that date was?
26
27Harold Brown: It was 1994, January.
28
29Marilyn Coulter: Nineteen-...
30
31Harold Brown: Excuse me, uh, yes, 1995, January.
32
33Marilyn Coulter: [1:36] And now is that your Lansing Fisher Body plant or in General
34 Motors period?
35
36Harold Brown: Uh, no. My original seniority is May 28, 1985.
37
38Marilyn Coulter: [1:47] And that started where?
39
40Harold Brown: At GM Service Parts Operation here in Lansing.
41
42Marilyn Coulter: [1:55] And what made you come to Lansing Fisher Body?
43
44Harold Brown: Well I had, uh – in 1992, I had to take a – what you call a 96 Move, a
45 transfer to Service Parts Operation, SPOGM [in 2:12] Pontiac...
46

1Marilyn Coulter: Hm.
2

3Harold Brown: ...and my 96 Move came through, uh, in December. Uh, we was out on
4 Christmas, uh, shutdown and my 96 Move came through the mail, so
5 starting January of '05, I was to report to Fisher Body.
6

7Marilyn Coulter: Okay. [2:30] Can you tell us, uh, what a 96 Move is for those who don't
8 know?
9

10Harold Brown: 96 Move is anytime your work leaves your original plant you have the
11 opportunity to transfer with that particular work. We had work here, here
12 in Lansing that left and went to, uh, SPO-Pontiac.
13

14Marilyn Coulter: [2:47] And SPO means?
15

16Harold Brown: Service Parts Operation.
17

18Marilyn Coulter: [2:50] So you went from parts plant to an assembly plant?
19

20Harold Brown: Yes.
21

22Marilyn Coulter: [2:54] Uh, what was the big difference for that and what was your first day
23 like here?
24

25Harold Brown: Well the big difference was, um, in the parts warehouse, it's like, uh, best
26 way to describe it would be like putting sparkplugs in boxes, uh, very –
27 well very nonlabor intense and clean and [clanking] and quiet and
28 everything that a assembly plant is not.
29

30Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm. [3:21] So in 1994, you come to Lansing Fisher Body?
31

32Harold Brown: Yes. I arrived at the North gate and a particular supervisor met me there at,
33 uh, North gate and escorted me to [M 3:36] Trim and I was on 5 jobs in 3
34 hours.
35

36Marilyn Coulter: Five jobs [chuckle] in three hours. [3:48] Now do you remember who the
37 supervisor was who escorted you to your job?
38

39Harold Brown: Yes, I do. His name was Don [Lee 3:52].
40

41Marilyn Coulter: [3:55] And so how did you happen to do that many jobs in such a short
42 period of time?
43

44Harold Brown: Well I initially came into the plant, he put me on a job in the [M 4:04]
45 Trim and kept me there for approximately a hour and came to the
46 consideration that I was too tall for that job, so he put me on another job

1 and it went on that for about another 3-4 more jobs [clanking] and finally
2 he came to me and asked me – on my last job, I was putting in a piece in
3 the, uh, glove compartment box and he asked me that, uh – if I have gotten
4 that job yet and I thought he was joking and I finally realized that he was
5 serious, that – and he said that, uh, the person that did this job prior to me
6 was 50-some-year-old lady and I shoulda had that job by now. So I finally
7 figured out that he was for real and not joking and that’s when we had a
8 conversation.
9

10 Marilyn Coulter: [4:54] Was it a pleasant conversation or a heated conversation?
11

12 Harold Brown: Well I told him since he was scrutinizing me doing my job that now I had
13 the opportunity to scrutinize him doing his and he asked me what do I
14 mean. I say well let me explain it to you. I said, first of all, from the time I
15 walked into this plant you have not showed me any safety. You not have
16 told me where – when breaks are. You have not told me where plant
17 medical was. You have not gave me any of the prerequisites to bring me
18 into the assembly plant and at that particular time we was nose and nose
19 and toes to toes and everybody on the line said call the committeeman and
20 I said that’s all right, I can handle him myself and, uh, the material
21 supervisor, Wayne Roberts, separated us and that was my first day and at
22 that particular time, Wayne Roberts took Mr. Don [Lee 5:55] off to the
23 side and told him everything that I had told him he was supposed to do as
24 a supervisor and he had to come back and do everything that I told him
25 that he should've did initially and from that point on, I worked for Mr.
26 Don [Lee 6:09] 1 day.
27

28 Marilyn Coulter: [6:11] You – that was the 1 day that you worked [there 6:13]?
29

30 Harold Brown: That was the 1 day I worked for him. Next day, I, uh, Barry came and got
31 me. I forgot Barry’s last name.
32

33 Marilyn Coulter: [6:19] Barry Robinson?
34

35 Harold Brown: Right. Barry Robinson came and got me [clanking] and, uh, said, uh,
36 Wayne said, uh, you'll probably work better for me, so [chuckle] – and me
37 and Barry still [primary 6”20] friends right now today so. [laughter]
38

39 Marilyn Coulter: [Inaudible 6:31]. Now I know he said your height. [6:33] How tall are
40 you?
41

42 Harold Brown: 6’5”.
43

44 Marilyn Coulter: [6:37] Eh, being 6’5”, was that a hindrance for you in, in the assembly
45 plant...
46

1Harold Brown: Um...

2

3Marilyn Coulter: ...or was it a help?

4

5Harold Brown: Very much so in Trim versus Body Shop because of all the bending and so forth and so on that you have to take in order to get inside the car.

6

7

8Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.

9

10Harold Brown: I think the first job I did was, um, [shuffling papers] putting in carpet retainers, which had about 9-10 screws from front to back and, uh, that was, uh – and, uh, so I had to bend at a 45-degree angle to put in those, uh, screws all day, so that was very hard.

11

12

13

14

15Marilyn Coulter: [7:11] So a carpet retainer...

16

17Harold Brown: Yes.

18

19Marilyn Coulter: ...just holds the carpet down?

20

21Harold Brown: Yeah. It just holds the carpet down. Mm-hm. So it took – at that particular time, it took about 7 screws. Right now today, they're just snapping'm in but at that time, they was screwing'm in and that was my job. That was my first job at – consistent job at Fisher Body. Forget the other 4 jobs [laughter] I did prior to.

22

23

24

25

26

27Marilyn Coulter: [7:32] So once you started working for Barry Robinson...

28

29Harold Brown: Mm-hm.

30

31Marilyn Coulter: ...um, how long did you work for him?

32

33Harold Brown: I worked for him approximately probably about 6 months to a year and I think at that particular time eventually I came with the idea that if I transferred to the Body Shop, it was easier on me being 6'5" because the chances are in the Body Shop you can stand straight up and you don't have to get inside the car and, sure enough, that was, uh, a great idea on my part [laughter] for me. Okay?

34

35

36

37

38

39

40Marilyn Coulter: So coming from 2 particular plants, you had SPO and then you had Fisher Body before then. [8:17] Those are the only 2 places that you've worked or you worked...?

41

42

43

44Harold Brown: Right. Well a-, at SPO Lansing, SPO-Pontiac and then Fisher Body, so I was driving 180 miles roundtrip every day from Lansing to Pontiac and I did that for 2 years, from '92 to '94.

45

46

1
2Marilyn Coulter: Oh.
3
4Harold Brown: Mm-hm.
5
6Marilyn Coulter: [8:35] So you had a chance to work in 2 other plants along with Fisher
7 Body?
8
9Harold Brown: Mm-hm.
10
11Marilyn Coulter: [8:40] What would you say it was like as far as people?
12
13Harold Brown: Um, people, uh, in general, uh, basically people at Fisher Body was – they
14 some of the greatest people I ever worked for, uh, in general because, uh,
15 like I said, we have one of the most educated workforce. You got people
16 in here that's got degrees, so forth and so on, so, uh, my experience at
17 Fisher Body has been great. I have learned a lot from the members that's in
18 here and, uh...
19
20Marilyn Coulter: [9:15] So during your time here, have you ever inquired any layoffs or
21 strikes here at Lansing Fisher Body?
22
23Harold Brown: Uh, yes. We had a strike in, uh, the strike of 1998. It wasn't here at Fisher
24 Body but it was in Flint, so I had an opportunity to participate in a strike,
25 uh, which was one of the greatest experience. I believe a prerequisite to
26 any UAW person is walk the picket line. I think it's a good experience so
27 we can basically get what our forefathers did for us. Uh, so that was a
28 good experience in 1998, was go to Flint and walk the picket line but far
29 as a strike here personally at Fisher Body, no, I have not experienced it.
30
31Marilyn Coulter: [9:53] So you've been very supportive of strikes here and in the Lansing
32 area and Flint?
33
34Harold Brown: I – the one at Flint, yes. That was the only one I had really in my GM
35 history that – in my 20 years that I have had a chance to be a, a part of.
36
37Marilyn Coulter: [10:08] So, um, do you have any other family members that work here?
38
39Harold Brown: I have a brother-in-law that works in the body shop. His name is [Lewis
40 Dixon 10:15]. He has approximately about 28 years right now and he was
41 my, um, um, I guess, uh – history of General Motors was that my brother-
42 in-law – me and my wife, we've been together for, oh, 29 years and so I've
43 known [Lewis 10:33], uh, just about that long and he's worked in Fisher
44 Body for 28 years now. I think he's got approximately like 28 years.
45

1 So when I was in the military, um, and I was communicating with him via
2 Fort Benning, Georgia, uh, and I was contemplating of what to do after I
3 finished my time in service, he, uh, basically communicated to me and
4 said well, go ahead and get out an I'll – you know, Fisher Body is taking
5 applications or General Motors is taking applications and I proceeded to
6 get out of the military November 3rd of 1984. I drove, uh, 12 hours
7 straight through from Columbus, Georgia, and when I got here on the
8 West side because my brother-in-law stayed here on the West side, uh,
9 gave my wife a kiss and she told me they're taking applications out at, uh,
10 um, unemployment office. The line started at the front door of the
11 unemployment office and it went on the corner of Cedar and Jolly
12 [clanking] and the end of the line was somewhere like [Pickway 11:35].
13 That was the end of the line, so I proceeded to get in line and, lo and
14 behold, I had military preference because I was prior military and I got
15 picked, [laughter] you know.
16
17 Marilyn Coulter: And you got picked. [11:48] How long would you say [clanking] you
18 stood in line?
19
20 Harold Brown: Oh, probably about at least a hour, hour and a half at least, you know.
21
22 Marilyn Coulter: [Inaudible 11:56].
23
24 Harold Brown: [Mm-hm 11:57].
25
26 Marilyn Coulter: [11:57] So, um, when you hired in here and you went in the Body Shop,
27 um, what's the biggest difference between Body and Trim?
28
29 [clanking]
30
31 Harold Brown: Well as I stated earlier in reference to the noise level. Um, you can't wear
32 shorts in the Body Shop and you can wear'm in Trim but far as the work
33 intensity, honestly, I feel like [thumping] the work in the Body Shop is
34 better work, less intensive as Trim because, uh, 1) uh, with all the robots
35 and so forth, chances are it was gonna break down and you was gonna get
36 a break. In Trim, it don't break down.
37
38 Marilyn Coulter: [12:47] So in, um, in, in – how were your breaks in the Body Shop versus
39 the Trim Shop?
40
41 Harold Brown: Uh, the Body Shop, uh, much better because chances are that the
42 technology of the robots would, like I said before, it would break down
43 and you would at least get able to rest your body for, you know, 15-20
44 minutes. Sometimes you get a big gap [clanking] in there and it could be a
45 hour or 2-hour gap depending on where it broke down...
46

1 Marilyn Coulter: [13:17] So what...
2
3 Harold Brown: ...[inaudible 13:17].
4
5 Marilyn Coulter: [13:18] During those breaks, what did you and your co-, coworkers do?
6
7 Harold Brown: Wow. Um, basically conversate, um, visit, so forth and so on and, uh, that
8 basically was it. You know? I wasn't one to go out to the bar or anything
9 like that. Some people, you know, they would go outside eat lunch,
10 whatever the case but me, myself, I just sit there [chuckle] and wait.
11
12 Marilyn Coulter: [13:40] Through your conversations and, you know, having lunch with
13 some of your coworkers, did you develop any friendships?
14
15 Harold Brown: I think that, uh, here at Fisher Body or any assembly plant, um, it's kinda
16 hard to develop relationships in general because you're isolated to that one
17 particular spot or your area, so you basically conversate with or build
18 relationship with people that's in your particular area. I've ran into people
19 around town and met'm and they say oh, yeah, I work at Fisher Body and
20 I've never seen'm before in my life, [chuckle] you know, but they do work
21 here. Uh, it may be in a different area or whatever, so I think from a
22 relationship standpoint, you build relationships in that particular area.
23
24 Marilyn Coulter: [14:24] So do you mean like different areas meaning Body, Paint, or Trim
25 or could it be a different part of Body or a different part...
26
27 Harold Brown: Um...
28
29 Marilyn Coulter: ...of Trim?
30
31 Harold Brown: ...pretty much, uh, even itemize it out to your specific – whether it may be
32 frontend sheet metal. You may work in frontend sheet metal and you
33 never meet anybody over in underbody. That's how big of a distance it
34 could be sometimes, you know?
35
36 Marilyn Coulter: Yeah. [14:46] So, um, [shuffling papers] during your time here, is that all
37 you did was build cars?
38
39 Harold Brown: No. In 1990-, I wanna say – let me look at my notes here [shuffling
40 papers] 'cause I got notes. Uh, 1998, um, they had a election here for
41 unemployment workers' comp rep and, um, it was a special election that
42 was held because the previous election, the person had to resign or they
43 got fired or I think it was, uh, last name was [Lowe 15:27]. That's all I
44 remember, Joe [Lowe 15:29] or something like that and he got fired, so
45 therefore, they had to have a special election, so at that particular time,
46 [clanking] I had, uh, considered running for workers' comp

1 unemployment rep because prior that that, my first position, I had ran for
2 was a Sergeant of Arms. I had, uh, ran for that prior, uh, to that, uh – in
3 that same particular year and, um, so when the special election came back
4 around, I considered, uh, running for workers' comp unemployment rep,
5 so a lot of people's telling me what a workers' comp unemployment rep
6 did and none of it was lining up with what was actual. So I came over and
7 talked with, uh, Jerry Taylor, uh, and, uh, basically at the particular time, I
8 didn't really un-, really know that I was really basically interviewing for a
9 particular job and if I was gonna run for a job, I wanted to find out what
10 was the particulars. People was telling me oh, yeah, workers' comp
11 unemployment rep, oh yeah, they make, uh, \$100,000 a year, you know.
12 That's how far the [laughter]...

13
14 [laughter]

15
16 ...some of the rumors went, so, uh, so I came over and talked with Jerry
17 and me and him sat down for oh, a good hour and, uh, he told me all the
18 particulars of the job and, uh, and, uh, so I, uh, considered – I say, um,
19 okay, I think it's something I – I'll run for.

20
21 In the prior, uh, election, uh, a guy had ran – a guy named [Derek 16:52]
22 Harris had ran for it also too, and he said well, he was gonna run again too
23 in the special election, so I had met him out in the, um, aisle and told him
24 that hey, I was considering running for workers' comp unemployment rep
25 and I just wanted to serve him notice that – give him enough respect to let
26 him know that I was considering it also too and, uh, and it may have sound
27 somewhat arrogant or cocky or whatever you wanna say but I told him, I
28 said chances are I'm going to win and I said reason why because I had just
29 ran for Sergeant of Arms and had lost in a runoff to Don [Willams 17:30]
30 and, um, that surprised me in my first election at, uh – my first election at
31 Fisher Body and had only been here 2 years, it took a runoff to beat me
32 and I remember Don [Willam 17:43], which I give him a lotta credit
33 because I always tease and say he the one taught me how to campaign,
34 you know, because once, uh, it got to a runoff, I actually felt within my
35 mind that I could actually win this thing, you know, me being a Michigan
36 fan and everything. You know, we're kinda arrogant. Uh, [laughter] you
37 know...

38
39 [laughter]

40
41 ...I actually thought I could win this thing, you know, and, uh, so I, uh –
42 running for Sergeant of Arms to the runoff and I f-, was like wow, maybe
43 I can win this thing and so, um, I didn't take any vacation time. I was
44 working on the line and I remember my, uh, team leader, which, um, real
45 good guy name a Bill, Bill would, uh, gimme a couple extra minutes on
46 break so I could go campaign up in Trim and I'll run back and do Parts and

1 campaign on break. Lo and behold, Don end up beating me, you know,
2 and, uh, but that experience in itself had taught me so much because 1) uh,
3 if you're gonna run for election in, in this plant, it's a must, you must take
4 vacation time. That's the only way to walk that big monstrosity [chuckle]
5 in there is to take vacation time, so, uh, I learned that from Don. I did not
6 know the layout of the plant or anything when I was campaigning but, but
7 after I lost to Don, that's why I went to [Derek 19:02] and told'm chances
8 are I'm going to win it because now I know how to campaign. I know I
9 gotta take vacation time. I know to get my literature, so forth and so on,
10 but Don [William 19:12] taught me all of that. [chuckle] He really did.
11
12Marilyn Coulter: [19:16] So was this the first time you had ran and, and y-, did you run in
13 any of your other facilities for any offices?
14
15Harold Brown: No, I did not. I d-, had not ran for any. I had been involved. I was, uh, a,
16 um, Ergonomic Monitor at SPO Lansing as well as, uh, Ergonomic
17 Monitor at SPO-Pontiac, so I had been involved also at, uh, SPO Lansing,
18 I was, uh, a unempl-, uh, no, excuse me – Job Developer/Instructor at the
19 Human Resource Center.
20
21Marilyn Coulter: [19:47] So you, you ran and you found that a – running an election in here
22 is a lot like running a campaign outside Fisher Body?
23
24Harold Brown: Very much so and, and time and money, wow, you know. People, um,
25 consider – they don't itemize the cost and believe me when I went back to
26 my wife and told her I have to have more literature made up, she was like
27 what you mean more literature; you just spent \$200 and now you gotta
28 spend another 200? Honey, that's how – that's the rules of the game. You
29 can't just whiteout a date here and write a different date in there. People
30 look at that as being nonprofessional.
31
32Marilyn Coulter: [20:30] How much literature would you say you passed out?
33
34Harold Brown: Wow, well in, um – I would say – I would always go get, if it was a 3,000
35 person membership, I would at least get 2,000 leaflets, uh, and that's,
36 that's a given. I mean I – that did it on demographics of what the
37 membership was on a plant election...
38
39Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.
40
41Harold Brown: ...so you took the demographics of how many – what you're membership
42 was and you went from there.
43
44Marilyn Coulter: [21:04] When you did your campaigns, did you primarily do all your
45 campaigning on your own? Did you get a team [clanking] of people?
46

1Harold Brown: Uh, primarily – first time, definitely on my own. Um, the second time
2 [clanking] because I did not necessarily know [background speaker] the
3 layout of certain areas like, uh, Paint – I have never worked in Paint. I
4 worked in Body Shop. I worked in Trim but I never – I remember the first
5 time I went up in Paint and it was like the supervisor came up to me and
6 asked me what type of cologne I had on and I thought it was smelling
7 kinda good or something and he wanted to get some of it himself.
8

9Marilyn Coulter: [whispering]
10

11Harold Brown: Mm-hm. [clanking] Yeah, the first time a supervisor asked me what type
12 of cologne I had on, I thought he wanted that same cologne but he ended
13 up explaining to me that they was getting bubbles in some of the cars and I
14 may have been the cause of it, so that alone scared me to death and I turn
15 around and left out of Paint immediately, so the next campaign, when I
16 went to Paint, I had a – somebody to direct me and tell me where to go and
17 so forth. I remember, uh, uh, one guy, [Derek Quinny 22:15] helped me
18 out tremendously. Uh, [Derek 22:18] took me up in Paint and, uh, took me
19 in every area, took me in the booths and so forth and so on and that was,
20 you know – I'm very thankful to him for, uh, doing that for me because I
21 didn't know anything about that particular area because some areas in that
22 place you could be lost forever. [chuckle]
23

24Marilyn Coulter: [22:36] So you want to tell'm a little bit about what you have to do to go
25 in, go into the Paint Department because it affects our quality?
26

27Harold Brown: Yes. Well basically my limited knowledge of paint and because I'm pretty
28 much body shop and trim, so in reference to once the air quality changes,
29 that have a tendency to disrupt the equation of the paint. I mean that's as
30 expert as I got right there, [laughter] you know, but, uh, that was my
31 understanding of it.
32

33Marilyn Coulter: So basically what happens, when people are campaigning, they have to get
34 what's called crater testing to find out if they're body is gonna damage the
35 paint.
36

37Harold Brown: Yes. Yes.
38

39Marilyn Coulter: And they blow air on them and see how it's gonna effect the paint.
40

41Harold Brown: Yes.
42

43Marilyn Coulter: So you've done this and for all of those people who don't understand, you
44 were running for Workers' Compensation Chair. [23:28] What does a
45 Workers' Compensation Chair do?
46

1Harold Brown: Well...

2

3Marilyn Coulter: [23:30] What is that job?

4

5Harold Brown: ...I always put a slash in there – unemployment/workers’ compensation –
6 because in between unemployment that slash and workers’ compensation,
7 it's like a million miles because 1) first of all, you gotta know all the rules
8 of the State of Michigan in reference to unemployment and there’s a
9 million rules and, uh, my job as just – the first part of it is unemployment
10 rep is to try to have the membership or educate the membership in
11 reference to some of these rules of the State of Michigan because it will
12 affect their livelihood very much so if they do not apply by the rules to the
13 State of Michigan. A lotta people in reference to unemployment come to
14 me and ask me and say what is the problem; the State of Michigan knows
15 that we're laid off; give me my money and I have to explain to them that
16 the rules – unemployment rules for the State of Michigan, everybody have
17 to adhere to them, General Motors, Ford, Chrysler, Delphi, everybody and
18 we must abide by those rules or it can affect you tremendously. One rule is
19 you must call MARVIN on your scheduled time Monday, Tuesday or
20 Wednesday, alternative days Thursday and Friday, um...

21

22Marilyn Coulter: [24:49] And MARVIN being?

23

24Harold Brown: MARVIN – Michigan Automated Response Information Network. Um,
25 you must – and that’s a touchtone system that basically that we have to
26 call to apply for our [clanking] unemployment and once we are awarded
27 our unemployment, that system automatically mates with our
28 supplemental benefit, which is supp pay, and approximately that, uh,
29 unemployment is \$362 and the supp could equate up to 450 to 500 bucks a
30 week, so for 1 call, it's going to basically get you \$800-\$900, so that’s why
31 I'm so very much – very critical on people applying by the rules and so
32 that’s my job, is to try to communicate to approximately 3,000-3,500
33 people the same information so they will not be deprived from their, uh,
34 benefits, unemployment as well as supplemental benefit and then you get
35 into the slash, which is [thumping] workers’ compensation [squeaking]
36 and that right there is a whole together different set of, uh, state laws,
37 okay, and to educate the membership in reference to [squeaking] state
38 laws to advocate, um, to go down to the Workers’ Compensation Bureau
39 and advocate for them in reference to their workers’ compensation or refer
40 them to a attorney, also to advocate unemployment, also too if you d-
41 break any of these rules, you have to go before a, uh, administrative law
42 judge with the State of Michigan in order to, uh, prove your case and I can
43 do that as a, uh, union rep.

44

45 I can advocate for them, uh, in reference to unemployment as well as
46 workers’ compensation. When it gets into medical issues, then you bring

1 in doctors, so forth and so on, then the best thing for you to do is to refer
2 them to a attorney. There's only 2, uh, unemployment workers'
3 compensation reps that I have run into in my limited time as being a, uh,
4 UAW member and that was me as well as, uh, Russ Emmons at 652,
5 which I have – he have taught me a lot also, too, by working with my
6 counterpart Russ Emmons over at 652, um, but workers'
7 compensation/unemployment rep is a pretty interesting job.
8
9 Marilyn Coulter: Hm. [27:14] It is, um, a benefit that you think that, um – a benefit and a
10 union position that a lot of people don't quite understand?
11
12 Harold Brown: I truly do believe that. Um, I also wanna back up and, and go reference to
13 my predecessors. One of'm I [note 27:33], uh, is Jerry Taylor and some
14 before me, uh, Doug [Fee 27:37], uh – what's his name now? [Fee 27:40]
15 or something but I d-, don't know all of'm but in reference to whoever
16 came up with the idea to have a unemployment workers' compensation
17 rep was some out-of-the-box thinking because right now in the year 2005,
18 if we didn't have a unemployment workers' compensation rep at this
19 particular point in our, uh, journey as far as UAW members, it could be
20 devastating to our membership right now and I – I've been – talked to a
21 lotta other locals. I've been at – to conferences where the president was the
22 unemployment workers' compensation rep. The president was the
23 workers' compensation rep, the benefit rep, all of that. They handle
24 everything that I handle. Some presidents did at some of the other smaller
25 locals you would go to. Um, another counterpart, Joe [Sagee 28:37] over
26 at, uh, UAW 1618, he's a benefit rep but he also handles unemployment.
27 He also handles workers' compensation when he have to.
28
29 Marilyn Coulter: [28:47] So all unions don't have workers' compensations reps?
30
31 Harold Brown: I have to say this – I have never ran into another...
32
33 Marilyn Coulter: [28:53] And it's not a mandate...
34
35 Harold Brown: ...besides...
36
37 Marilyn Coulter: ...[through 28:54] International?
38
39 Harold Brown: No. I'm not sanctioned by the International Union. If you bring up, uh,
40 workers' compensation to the International Union, they will f-, refer you
41 quickly to a attorney...
42
43 Marilyn Coulter: Oh.
44
45 Harold Brown: ...fast and quick, so the only one I have ran into was Mr. Russ Emmons of
46 UAW 652.

1
2Marilyn Coulter: Hm.
3
4Harold Brown: We're the only 2 that I know of. Uh, I'm not saying that it's not others out
5 there but [knocking] in my limited time, I have not ran into any other
6 unemployment workers' compensation rep, so whoever thought about this
7 probably way before I was a UAW member, I give them kudos because it
8 was – every UAW local needs a unemployment rep as well as workers'
9 compensation rep in my opinion again.
10
11Marilyn Coulter: [29:47] Did you have a question? So, um, that means 602 once again, you
12 know, sets the tone and makes the pace. [29:57] Um...
13
14Harold Brown: [Inaudible 29:57].
15
16Marilyn Coulter: ...what are some of the most, um – being the fact that you've been union
17 active, um, are there any other committees or, um, union organizations
18 that you belong to?
19
20Harold Brown: Well I'm a, um – I do mentoring with the LAMP program. I used – this is
21 the first year I have not [clanking] mentored...
22
23Marilyn Coulter: [30:21] And LAMP is?
24
25Harold Brown: ...since it – uh, Lansing, uh – it's a partnership between Lansing
26 Intermediate School District and the General Motors as well as UAW to
27 basically teach, uh, high school seniors in reference to the manufacturing
28 arena, um, also teaches them about labor history and basically the
29 automotive industry. Basically to train up a skilled workforce, you have to,
30 first of all, start at the school level, um, how young but we're starting at
31 the high school level and basically there's a program that mentors high
32 school students and we do what you call job shadowing and, uh, that
33 means that they come in and they follow you around the job and see what
34 you do and kinda [clanking] get a, a hands-on experience of what the
35 automotive industry is really, uh, about versus hearing from their parents
36 or seeing it on TV and so forth. So I've been involved with that probably
37 ever since it originated 7-8 years ago.
38
39Marilyn Coulter: That's great. [31:30] Um, even though you are basically a benefits rep in
40 the sense, uh, what would you say would be the most appreciative, uh, a-,
41 appreciated bargain benefit that we have?
42
43Harold Brown: Uh, you know, I like to clarify because I have a tendency to, uh – my wife
44 and everybody will say a benefit rep and I do not, uh, necessarily consider
45 myself a benefit rep because we differentiates between our, um, uh,
46 benefits that's negotiated via vacation via, uh, holiday pay, [clanking] so

1 forth and so on, medical, legal and so forth. I basically am a
2 unemployment workers' compensation rep versus dental with benefits. As
3 far as the question in reference to me just as a regular UAW member, I
4 think one of the most right now, uh, the benefit that's, you know, above
5 and beyond any, uh, organization that I've run across right now is supp pay
6 and reason why because I know, uh, the President of Local 724, Dean
7 Poggiali, and I've talked with him and I know that when his people got
8 laid off at Lear, they get 26 weeks unemployment and no benefits in
9 general, so the supplemental benefit as well as our medical benefits, I
10 guess, is the 2 most critical areas right now in this day and time...
11
12Marilyn Coulter: [Oh 32:58].
13
14Harold Brown: ...in my opinion again.
15
16Marilyn Coulter: [33:00] Um, since coming here in 1994...
17
18Harold Brown: Mm-hm.
19
20Marilyn Coulter: ...what would you say is your best memory of working at Fisher Body
21 Lansing?
22
23Harold Brown: Wow. That would be a hard one. In, in reference to in general to, um,
24 being a opportunity to, to serve as a union rep is a great job. Uh, people
25 ask me, say well how do you do that job. For some crazy reason, I like it.
26 Uh, maybe it's the opportunity to serve people. Maybe it's the opportunity
27 to pick up the telephone and help a person get \$1,500 that they was trying
28 to pay they house note or something gives me chills to help people and so
29 being in a position to, um, serve other people, I believe the law of
30 reciprocity, uh, what you do is gonna come back to you positive or
31 negative, so, [chuckle] you know, um, I just look at it as, uh, doing a great
32 thing being able to help people, uh, um, with their livelihood in reference
33 to workers' compensation, unemployment, whatever. I mean, it gives me
34 thrills to know that this person has enough money to go to the grocery
35 store and feed their family.
36
37Marilyn Coulter: Okay. [34:25] Given the, the – that you've had an opportunity to [tsk]
38 work in different facilities...
39
40Harold Brown: Mm-hm.
41
42Marilyn Coulter: ...what would you say are the key elements that keeps Lansing Fisher
43 Body...
44
45Harold Brown: Wow.
46

1Marilyn Coulter: ...workers [of capital] [inaudible 34:38] quality?

2

3Harold Brown:

Well, you know, I, I, um, thought about that question a while ago, so one thing that in reference to, uh, Lansing, I've t-, had the opportunity to talk with this lady that came from Detroit that, um, uh, she has [to 34:55]. She's a psychologist. I don't know if you guys talked with'm but they came in and so everybody keeps saying that Lansing has one of the best workforces. You know, we hear it all the time but I had the opportunity to question her that – 'cause she stay outside of Lansing – in reference to is this true and she told me, she says we're the talk of GM headquarters when they hold a meeting [zipping] that Lansing always [wave 35:19] they got the best workforce. So I thought about that in reference to, uh, why do Lansing have the best workforce. In general, I guess I kinda came up with my own theory. You have, um, Lansing itself, which is the hub, but if you look, uh – we was talking about it earlier today – where so many people from outlying areas come into Lansing and a lot of those people come from outlying areas, which is totally different culture than per se the City of Lansing.

In other words, you have a lot of farm – people that farm. I got friends work up in Trim that work, work an 8-hour day or 9-hour day and then go home and jump on the combine 'til 12 at night and I've sat and talked with this guy and said well, what is the thrill of going and jump on a combine 'til 12:00 at night, you know, and so he talked to me and just, man, I just, I just like to do it, man. I'm like okay. Well and my theory, again, I just think it's the p-, point of people with work ethics coming into an area and just – it's like a melting pot. Uh, Fisher Body's like a melting pot. It's like you got peoples of different, uh, race, different cultures and we all come together for this 8, 9, 10-hour day with the same focus in line and I truly believe that that's an asset to, um, Fisher Body. That – that's a asset to Fisher Body. I've worked at Pontiac and it was a different culture in Pontiac. Okay? Um, wow, I mean it was just different. I guess the best positive way to say it was different.

35Marilyn Coulter:

[36:59] When you say different, how was it different? It was just the way the people communicated with each other? Is it the way we communicate with each other? What's different?

39Harold Brown:

I think it was the way of, uh, the work ethics in general or just – I mean, me personally myself, I'm so thankful that [clanking] I can have a high school diploma with a few college classes here and there and make the type of money I have. Um, I put 2 kids, so far, through Michigan State University even though I'm a Michigan fan. We'll talk about that later.

Anyway, [laughter] uh, just in general is that it's just the work ethics. I remember working in Pontiac and a supervisor telling me, uh, saying well

1 because I was driving 180 miles every day and we was scheduled for
2 Saturday, I would go to the supervisor and say I can't make it because I'm
3 driving all week. I haven't seen my kids. I was on second shift, so when I
4 went to work, my kids were still in school and when I came home, they
5 were asleep, so I would say I can't work Saturday and he said well,
6 Harold, go ahead and, um, you know, go ahead and take off, you know,
7 even though it was mandatory Saturdays. You know, he says – he told me,
8 he says you're more than the people that work here in Pontiac and I was
9 driving 90 miles one way to get to work, so I think it's the work ethics that
10 Lansing has. Uh, I think it's the attention to detail as far as, uh, wanting to
11 build a quality product. Uh, I've heard people say if they could bottle this
12 up and sell it to the rest of General Motors, we – they would be rich. So
13 what is it specifically? I don't know. [chuckle] Uh, just my own theory.
14

15Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm. [38:46] Do you think that having, um – well I guess actually
16 working in the Body Shop, did they have a good gender mix in the body
17 shop?
18

19Harold Brown: You know, I...

20

21Marilyn Coulter: [38:59] And did that make a difference at all?
22

23Harold Brown: I don't think it really made a difference and I really didn't pay that much
24 attention to it because, um, far as I'm concerned, it was like you had
25 females to do the same jobs that the men did. I've never seen a job that
26 was said, you know, specifically that a man had to do or specifically that a
27 woman had to do, uh, so I never really been able to tell any difference.
28

29Marilyn Coulter: [39:27] If you were to speak with new hires or a person thinking about
30 coming in to work at Lansing Fisher Body UAW Local 602, what would
31 you tell them?
32

33Harold Brown: I would tell them to get a mentor, find somebody that's from a positive
34 side to duplicate. I mean somebody that's has a good work record,
35 somebody that's on time and to duplicate. Uh, if this person got 25 years
36 and never missed a day or whatever the case, I mean, uh – or from a
37 quality standpoint, I would basically, if it was my company, I would
38 appointment a mentor specifically to that new hire because I've seen'm
39 come in and I've seen'm be infiltrated with negativism or I can't do this,
40 this is hard, so forth and so on versus just throwing them to the wolves
41 because I've seen'm go to the wolves [thumping] and I've seen people –
42 I've seen the h-, uh, new hires either in 1995 or 1997, I seen'm come in
43 and I've seen'm quit.
44

45Marilyn Coulter: [40:42] What would you say to the young people about the UAW Local
46 602?

1
2Harold Brown: I guess I would say to the point of be willing to sacrifice. Pay your dues.
3 Uh, seniority has its privileges. I was in the military, same thing. Rank had
4 its privileges. Um, be willing to sacrifice. Uh, I feel like the person that I
5 am right now, uh, I would not be unless I drove that 180 miles roundtrip
6 every day. Believe me, it brought some humility to me, uh, to the point
7 that I learned to appreciate 'cause when I bought my house 1989 after I
8 hired in 1985, I bought it on the South side of Lansing and I was 5 minutes
9 away from my house and, lo and behold, 4 years into my GM career, I was
10 driving an hour and 15 minutes every day, so that had a tendency to bring
11 some humility to me and learn-, taught me how to appreciate what I have
12 versus, uh, wishing it was better, I guess you would say, so.
13
14Doug Rademacher: [41:58] Harold, you worked for 3 different local unions then with the, uh,
15 2 SPO facilities and, uh, the Fisher Body facility, can you tell me the
16 difference between the union representation? Was it the same at all the
17 facilities or was there, uh, something special about Local 602's, [clanking]
18 uh, representation at the Fisher Body plant?
19
20 [background speaker]
21
22Harold Brown: Well I'll go back to my original plant, which was Local, um, UAW 1753.
23 Um, I give UAW Local 1753 the credit for me even getting involved. Um,
24 a guy by the name of Mr. Rick Graham was the, um – he wasn't the
25 president at the time but he was the president prior at 1753. In that
26 particular time, he worked at the Human Resource Center and I was in the
27 job bank and, um, they asked for volunteers and I volunteered to go work
28 at the Human Resource Center, which Rick was the – it was a joint
29 program between General Motors and UAW and Rick Graham was at
30 UAW side and a lady by the name of Sandy [Noback 43:12] was the GM
31 side and worked at the Human Resource Center for laid-off workers and,
32 uh, I started out doing a phone survey to call laid-off workers and to make
33 them aware of some of the benefits that was available to the laid-off
34 workers whether it was via resume writing, job developing, so forth and so
35 on and so I did the phone survey and then I did that for a while and then
36 Rick gave me an opportunity to interview as a job developer instructor
37 where I actually taught employee ability skills workshop class and
38 basically I taught'm how to get a job, taught'm interviewing skills, um,
39 videotaped'm, so forth and so on and critiqued'm but by me getting that
40 job, Rick told me he says there's 1 criteria, that if I pick you for this job
41 you must do and I said what's that, Rick.
42
43 He say you must attend union meetings and from that point on, I've been
44 going to union meetings. Then I transferred to Pontiac, which was kind of
45 hard to drive up there on Sundays and go to union meetings, so I didn't –
46 wasn't too active as far as Pontiac was concerned because of the mileage

1 but I was involved as far as ergonomic monitor or whatever but the
2 representation in general, uh, 1753 pretty good local representation, uh,
3 not on the basis of numbers-wise. We had about 1,200 people at the time
4 but, uh, 653 was my local in Pontiac and that was amalgamated, so a little
5 bit different politics involved when you're in amalgamated local versus a
6 non-amalgamated. Um, it was pretty much, uh, you presented your caucus
7 653 and e-, either your caucus was accepted or not accepted, simple as
8 that. Wasn't no if's. Wasn't no ands. Wasn't no buts.
9
10 But when I came to Local 602, which was [clanking] totally different. It
11 was a non-caucus based local and somebody like me that had only been at
12 Fisher Body for 2 years to run for an election and take a runoff to beat me
13 spoke loud and clear that this place was a place of equal opportunity and
14 that stood out tremendously to me because, [knocking] you know, I had
15 friends in here because I was from Lansing but at the same time from a
16 local standpoint of Fisher Body knowing me, nobody knew me. I had just
17 came from Pontiac and I had only been here 2 years but, uh, the
18 representation in general, um, 602, um, boy, we really lay it on as far as
19 information-wise and I'm not just saying this because I'm a part of the
20 leadership but I know personally myself if I needed help in any area I
21 could call from the president to the chairman to committeemens to zones,
22 um, it's not just me as a unemployment workers' compensation rep, it's to
23 people that support me, uh, via the president all the way down to the
24 committeemen on the line to the people in the plant, so, uh, good local for
25 representation. Uh, I've heard other people say it but I've experienced it.
26
27 Marilyn Coulter: [46:40] Harold, when you say leadership, can you tell how the leadership
28 of Local 602 differs from other local unions?
29
30 Harold Brown: Um, in general because most of my union experience has been right here
31 at Local 602, um, very open-door policy. Uh, if you got a problem, uh, it
32 won't be a I'll get back with you, okay...
33
34 Marilyn Coulter: [Inaudible 47:06].
35
36 Harold Brown: ...and never get back with you. Their point of, uh, trying to, uh, uh,
37 answer your question for you, if not, uh, get it to you fast, quick...
38
39 [clanking]
40
41 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.
42
43 Harold Brown: ...or they will get back with you, so.
44

1 Marilyn Coulter: [47:22] So as a [sigh] Unemployment Workers' Compensation
2 Chairperson and being part of the leadership, do you get to make decisions
3 on what Local 602 does?
4

5 Harold Brown: Um, [knocking] in reference to unemployment worker's compensation,
6 um, I have been pretty much with my particular office – I'm kind of like,
7 you know, a man out on the island. You know, whatever I say is [shuffling
8 papers] gonna go, uh, [clanking] to the point where the leadership, I have
9 brought some things to the leadership and they probably [thumping]
10 scratched they head like well what is this guy [shuffling papers] coming
11 up with and, uh, but they've supported me. I came up with the, um – I
12 remember years ago, my predecessor, Jerry, he used to pass stuff down the
13 line and he would come in the plant and pass it down the line, where me, I
14 came up with the bright idea, look, if I cover all gates, I can cover – I can
15 communicate to 99 percent of everybody 'cause everybody's coming
16 through 1, 2, no more than 3 gates, so therefore, I can get close to 100
17 percent as possible in order to communicate the same information and,
18 again, um, I'm afraid to take credit for it myself because I had a lotta help,
19 uh, Dock 46'ers, uh, uh, committeemen, so forth and so on that that's
20 willing to, uh, support me in me communicating the correct information to
21 the masses and say that's, that's the task, is that and I always tease people
22 and say one thing we make m-, more at Fisher Body more so than cars is
23 rumors and that's what I try...
24
25 [laughter]
26
27 ...to [dispel 49:07] [laughter] is, uh, any type of rumors by coming up
28 with that as well as the [Berma 49:12] Board, which is g-, uh, I came up
29 with that one via, uh, the management also gave me the opportunity to
30 start communicating stuff across that board over there in reference to
31 when to call MARVIN and when to turn in your paperwork and so forth.
32

33 Marilyn Coulter: [49:28] And the [Berma 49:28] Board is, for those people who don't know
34 what the [Berma 49:30] Board is?
35

36 Harold Brown: Uh, electronic board, uh, communication system inside the plant that
37 communicates both on this side right here as well as [chassis 49:38].
38

39 Marilyn Coulter: [49:39] But now as far as [throat clearing] because you're an elected
40 position and being a part of the leadership, do you not set on the executive
41 committee...
42

43 Harold Brown: Yes, I do.
44

45 Marilyn Coulter: ...for Local 602?
46

1Harold Brown: Yes, I do sit on the executive board.
2
3Marilyn Coulter: [49:52] And is that a position that is common for local unions?
4
5Harold Brown: Hm. I don't think it is in reference to my position but, again, my position
6 is, like I say, I've only run into one other one. Mm-hm.
7
8Marilyn Coulter: Okay. All right. Um, all right. Thank you for your time.
9
10Harold Brown: Wow. Okay, [chuckle]
11
12
13/lo