

1                                   **Gus Caliacatsos, a Greek immigrant,**  
2                                   **discusses his life in Greece, his days in Fisher Body plant, Lansing, MI,**  
3                                   **and his career after leaving the automobile industry**  
4  
5

6Cheryl McQuaid:       [recorder clicking] This is the Lansing Fisher Body Historical Team.  
7                                   Today is February 22, 2006. It's approximately 9:45 a.m. We're at Gus's  
8                                   Bar. First, we'll introduce the team.  
9

10John Fedewa:           John Fedewa.

11  
12Jerri Smith:           Jerri Smith.

13  
14Earl Nicholson:       Earl Nicholson.

15  
16Gary Judy:            Gary Judy.

17  
18Cheryl McQuaid:       And this is Cheryl McQuaid. Uh, we're with Gus. [0:25] Could you  
19                                   please state your name and spell?  
20

21Gus Caliacatsos:       Gus Caliacatsos, G-u-s C-a-l-i-a-c-a-t-s-o-s.

22  
23Cheryl McQuaid:       And what is the name of your business and – I'm sorry. Wait a minute.  
24                                   [0:45] What is your address? Where do you live?  
25

26Gus Caliacatsos:       2712 East Grand River, Lansing.

27  
28Cheryl McQuaid:       [0:52] And the name of your business and the address here?  
29

30Gus Caliacatsos:       It's Gus's Bar. It's 2321 West Michigan Avenue, Lansing.

31  
32Cheryl McQuaid:       [1:03] Gus, could you give us a little bit of your background? Um, do you  
33                                   live in Lansing?  
34

35Gus Caliacatsos:       Of course.

36  
37Cheryl McQuaid:       [1:10] And how long have you lived here?  
38

39Gus Caliacatsos:       From 1962, the end of 1962 until today.  
40

41Cheryl McQuaid:       [1:19] And in 1962, where did you come from?  
42

43Gus Caliacatsos:       Actually, I was born in Greece and then after I go to service there too and  
44                                   get out of the service. I go to Germany and I worked there for two years  
45                                   and from Germany, come to Canada, Montreal, Canada and from  
46                                   Montreal, Canada come to Lansing, Michigan.

1

2Cheryl McQuaid: [1:51] What brought you to Lansing, Michigan?

3

4Gus Caliacatsos: Actually, I was the black sheep of my family. I wanted to go see places  
5 around the world.

6

7Cheryl McQuaid: So you were just traveling.

8

9Gus Caliacatsos: Traveling. And the time I was in, uh, Germany I happened to work into  
10 the Canadian embassy inside and me – and I was working outside and  
11 fixing anything in the embassy. It's a big story, big, big story how did I  
12 get here. I was, uh, working for a company [inaudible 2:32] do carpeting  
13 work in the interior, everything inside, so my company [inaudible 2:41]  
14 hired from the Canadian embassy to do the whole Canadian embassy and  
15 'cause I was, uh, the foreman or I don't know how you say the, from the  
16 group, [throat clearing] [coughing] from the group there, I was met the  
17 consul man. And because we did so much work I asked my boss if there's  
18 any way we can fix him a chair for his office because I would like to do  
19 that, so the boss said you take the best material and do it and we'll give it  
20 to him. So I [inaudible 3:26] Saturdays and one Sunday and I make the  
21 beautiful chair and I take it to the, to the consul in his office and I  
22 represent it, so he asked me what he can do for me. And I said to him my  
23 dream someday is to head to, go to America. So he don't say nothing  
24 much. He take me that night go out for dinner and he says to me what I  
25 can do, what I can do. And I say to him that's my dream.

26

27 So three days later he told me to have a test for that, to bring it to him, so I  
28 bring it to him. He take me inside to an office. The doctor come and  
29 examined me and he says to me anytime you want to go, I'll send you to  
30 Canada, Montreal, Canada, and there is my friend in the American  
31 Embassy in Montreal Canada. And I said to him what [inaudible 4:38] in  
32 Canada or in America? He says to me hold that, so. And he says to me  
33 my friend there will send you to America, the American Embassy  
34 [inaudible 4:52].

35

36 So two weeks later he buy all my tickets, go to Amsterdam, he put me to  
37 the boat and sent me to Canada, to Montreal, Canada, so at the same time  
38 he write me a letter, but I have to present it to the American ambassador  
39 [inaudible 5:16] Montreal. And the time I come to Montreal, I go to the  
40 American Embassy, but I cannot get in because I don't know any English,  
41 I just have German, I was speaking German. And I got the letter and  
42 found it the first day. I was going every day and the [inaudible 5:37] day  
43 they let me go in after they saw the letter, but I cannot give it to them  
44 because he told me to give it to him in person. So they call on telephone  
45 and he would know that I was going to be there, they let me in, and they  
46 give me another letter and told me okay, I got you a job here in Montreal

1 in [inaudible 6:03] Montreal, it's behind from Montreal a little. I don't  
2 know if any of you know Montreal. Uh, six months later you can come  
3 back to me and I will send you to America. That's what happened.  
4  
5 Six months letter, I get the letter from him and I go to him and he sent me  
6 to America. So he asked me where do you want to go to America. And I  
7 say, well, where is the most jobs so I can find a very easy job. He says  
8 [inaudible 6:36] Michigan is right now booming, uh, because of the cars,  
9 uh, we're building right here. And, uh, I asked where about in Michigan.  
10 He says to me Detroit. And I say is that the capital and he says to me no,  
11 it's Lansing, Michigan is the capital. So I said I wanted to go to the  
12 capital, because I was thinking the capital is bigger than Detroit is. So he  
13 sent me to Lansing, Michigan, so I come right here.  
14  
15 I started to find some Greek people who I can speak to because I was not  
16 speaking any English at all. I don't know even the yes what that means.  
17 So I go to a Greek restaurant that was right across from Oldsmobile, uh,  
18 the [inaudible 7:32] there was a [Region 7:34] Café. I don't know if any  
19 of you know. [recording clicked] So I started working there pretty much  
20 every day cleaning tables, washing dishes, and as soon as I get a little bit  
21 free time with my dictionary, I write down I need a job.  
22  
23Female: Do you want to stop?  
24  
25Gus Caliacatsos: [recording clicked] So I opened up my dictionary and I write down on a  
26 piece of paper and it says I need a job and I go right across from the  
27 Region Café there was the office where they do the hiring. And I go  
28 pretty much every day and I show this piece of paper to the window and  
29 they are talking there, but I would not know what they're talking about.  
30 So one week later because I was going every day there asking for a job, no  
31 speaking any English, nothing, so then one day one guy come out and  
32 wave at me, come with me. So I get into his car and he take me right to  
33 the front of Fisher Body. And in Fisher Body was, uh, a Greek fellow was  
34 working there and apparently [inaudible 8:54] said to me tomorrow 8:00  
35 you have a job and they put me and I was working on body wire. Every  
36 other car I was jumping in and put the body wires [throat clearing] on the  
37 car. [coughing] And every day sitting there and reading, try to learn some  
38 English. I have a Mexican guy where he was very, very good guy, tried to  
39 teach me English and apparently he hanged himself and I was the first one  
40 with my foreman see him hanging in his...  
41  
42Male: Hm.  
43  
44Gus Caliacatsos: ...barn.  
45  
46Cheryl McQuaid: [9:36] Do you remember approximately what year this was Gus?

1  
2Gus Caliacatsos: 1963 it was, but I don't remember what, uh, what [inaudible 9:46] exactly.  
3 And the last name I don't remember the last name but the, the first name  
4 was [Josh 9:51]. And apparently he go home and find his wife with  
5 somebody else. He was [inaudible 9:57] and then the next day he write a  
6 letter. He told me tomorrow you open up the letter. And tomorrow he  
7 don't show up and inside the letter, I give it to my foreman who read it,  
8 [high-pitched noise] he's going to end his life and he told us in the letter  
9 where it is. So the foreman and I, because I was visit him in Sunfield,  
10 Michigan, he lives way out [inaudible 10:25] and I would know where his  
11 house was because he invited me to his house for a few times, and we go  
12 there and we find him hanging from the neck and that's what happened.  
13  
14 But then I was working in Fisher Body. I was very extremely happy  
15 because I was having the first check was \$58 and I thought that was a lot  
16 of money, even I have 44 hours and that was a lot of money at that time  
17 for me. I can buy some [chuckle] clothes for me because I was not having  
18 too many with me.  
19  
20 So I started working at Fisher Body there and I see around and I saw  
21 things where a lot of people was doing there with the screwdriver where  
22 they try to do the screwdrivers to put screws and all those things and in  
23 Germany at the factory where I was working there, there was the  
24 [inaudible 11:37] factory in the beginning, I saw how they were doing  
25 that. So after [inaudible 11:43] my job, I stay there, tried to tell them how  
26 to do it. There was like 20 people, 9 people on this side and 9, I mean 10  
27 people on this side, 10 people on the other side was doing that with the  
28 screws and I told them how to do it. And they give me the machine and  
29 all of a sudden the [inaudible 12:09] machine lot better than what they try  
30 to do and they put me to work and then the one person can do on one side  
31 and one person on the other side and they issued me \$10,000. Matter of  
32 fact, they asked me if I wanted \$10,000 or two pennies each car going,  
33 going by as long as Fisher Body or GM is there, but the money to me was  
34 more [inaudible 12:37] than anything else.  
35  
36Cheryl McQuaid: So that was kind of their suggestion program at that time.  
37  
38Gus Caliacatsos: I don't know what they call it [inaudible 12:43]. That's the way. And  
39 then, uh, the union was getting very upset at that time and they going out, I  
40 have a little Volkswagen and they busted my car. [coughing] They busted  
41 my wheels and I don't have a car, but so GM would send [inaudible  
42 13:05] and fixed my car. They take my car and they fix it again. And  
43 couple weeks later they told me if I see anything else, so they take me out  
44 to the line and going around to see what else I can see where they can do  
45 things, so [inaudible 13:23] tried to, to tell them more things [inaudible  
46 13:28] time no other place [inaudible 13:31].

1  
2 I remember that there was I think George was the president, but I don't  
3 remember the last name, and there was couple of other friends, [inaudible  
4 13:45] was one [inaudible 13:47] he busted the car. Uh, so and there was  
5 th-, those things, so I told my foreman, uh, I cannot live with them busting  
6 my car every other week, so I'm going to quit and he says to me no, we're  
7 going to send you to the community college so you start learning a little  
8 bit more English and we're going to take you, send you to Detroit to the  
9 other factories, nobody knows you. And then two days later on my door  
10 on the house where I was living there write with red letters you're going to  
11 be dead if you don't get away from GM and that's the time I quit. And I  
12 go right across to Harry's Place and he hired me and I was working there  
13 as a bartender for 8 ½ years. And also I was doing construction work  
14 outside of Harry's Place doing, buy some used houses and, uh, remodeled  
15 and fixed them, sell it and become partners with Art Arvanites from  
16 Harry's Place and most of the time I working outside and he was working  
17 [inaudible 15:12] and at night I go help him back to the bar, so actually my  
18 time was constantly occupied with doing things.  
19

20 Then, there was time for me to move on, uh, because my family was  
21 getting, growing up, [coughing] so I have to, to do something different  
22 because there was not enough for me, uh, as a bartender to work there. and  
23 [coughing] [inaudible 15:40] a license. A friend of mine from, up from  
24 the Mackinac Island there was the license there and, uh, that license was  
25 [throat clearing] a resort license because it was from, for the Grand Hotel  
26 there to open a casino. Uh, that was 25 years ago. And 25 years ago, um,  
27 my friend there who was supposed to be the, the big guy there to open the  
28 casino, um, he have a problem with his wife and also at the same time in  
29 Mackinac Island to the Grand Hotel there were six people died from a fire.  
30 I don't know if any of you if you recall that and the fire department is right  
31 across and [inaudible 16:35] time for them to go there, so they stopped the  
32 license, they cannot open casino because of the no fire department and no  
33 enough police in Mackinac Island to protect, so they stopped to open up  
34 the casino. So the guy says to me you want the license. And I said yes,  
35 okay. And I kept this place right here, all I did was buy this place right  
36 here and I bring the license from there here because a resort license can go  
37 anyplace in the state of Michigan and I'm right here now for 25 years.  
38

39Cheryl McQuaid: [17:16] So approximately what year did you open Gus's Bar?

40  
41Gus Caliacatsos: 1962, I mean 1982, I'm sorry.

42  
43Cheryl McQuaid: '82.

44  
45Gus Caliacatsos: 1982. February 20.  
46

1 Cheryl McQuaid: [17:230] Did you pick this location because of the plant being right across  
2 the street?  
3

4 Gus Caliacatsos: Yes, because I know the people, I serve them for 18 years. I was  
5 extremely happy with all the customers that was coming to Harry's Place  
6 and, and I come right here because I thought this was the place to make, to  
7 making a living with my education. I was wanting to work to make a  
8 living and I did, come right here, fix the place myself, the whole place,  
9 and [inaudible 18:06] right here and I remove it and come and they give  
10 me the license and [inaudible 18:13] and I'm still here today.  
11

12 Cheryl McQuaid: [18:17] Did you maintain any of your friendships from working in the  
13 plant?  
14

15 Gus Caliacatsos: Oh yes.  
16

17 Cheryl McQuaid: [18:21] To the present day?  
18

19 Gus Caliacatsos: Oh yes, oh yes. [Inaudible 18:24], yes, yes. Every, everybody very  
20 friendly, very, very comfortable, very happy with [inaudible 18:33], yes.  
21

22 Cheryl McQuaid: And, um, [throat clearing] pause it please. [recorder clicking] [18:47]  
23 Gus, could you tell us a little bit about the business and the GM employees  
24 that came in here? [clicking] How did you feel about them?  
25

26 Gus Caliacatsos: I feel they were excellent customers. I don't have any, [throat clearing]  
27 any problem with anybody. I try to avoid it to let them get too long, try to  
28 help them to go back to work and I [inaudible 19:09] the best customers I  
29 can say in the state of Michigan because I was so happy and they treat me  
30 like I was their father and everybody would know I was working there  
31 also, they must have been [inaudible 19:27]. I was extremely happy.  
32 There is no, no any doubts in my mind of any [inaudible 19:37].  
33

34 Cheryl McQuaid: [19:40] And now that's the plant is closed, how do you feel about the plant  
35 closing?  
36

37 Gus Caliacatsos: I feel bad.  
38

39 Cheryl McQuaid: [19:48] Has it had any impact on your business?  
40

41 Gus Caliacatsos: Tremendous, tremendous. I'm almost 75% down, maybe more [coughing]  
42 it went down, but now I start picking up a little bit from the neighborhoods  
43 and I start building little bit back up now. And still Fisher Body  
44 employees they come on in and they see me, a lot of those guys, and  
45 they're very happy with me. And I'm happy because they can, they can  
46 serve themselves, like they're in their own house and this is where they

1 make me feel very, very good. Also my wife they like her so much.  
2 We're, we're very, very happy. And I cannot leave these people to go  
3 back to my [inaudible 20:40]. Because I was ready to move back to my  
4 country, but I feel like I'm obligated to, to these guys and I still stay here  
5 [inaudible 20:51] try to, to [inaudible 20:55] my last days.  
6  
7 Cheryl McQuaid: [20:58] Did any of your immediate family work in the plant?  
8  
9 Gus Caliacatsos: Uh, my brother-in-law he was [inaudible 21:06] 30 years there.  
10  
11 Cheryl McQuaid: Oh wow.  
12  
13 Gus Caliacatsos: [Jim Pappas 21:12]. You want to know his name? It's Jim Pappas.  
14  
15 Cheryl McQuaid: Does anybody else on the team have questions for Gus?  
16  
17 Earl Nicholson: Uh, yeah, I got – this is Earl Nicholson. Yeah, I've got a few. [21:25]  
18 Um, how about, um, how do you feel about buying American?  
19  
20 Gus Caliacatsos: How did I feel about buying...?  
21  
22 Earl Nicholson: Buying American products. [throat clearing]  
23  
24 Gus Caliacatsos: All my years I buy almost 13 cars from GM. What else I can do? I don't  
25 buy anything else. But the first car when I come to this country there was  
26 a little Volkswagen that was used and I paid \$250 just to get back and  
27 forth, but then from there on my cars was all Oldsmobile cars.  
28  
29 Earl Nicholson: [22:04] Was there ever a project that your business was involved in where  
30 a GM employee offered to help?  
31  
32 Gus Caliacatsos: [Inaudible 22:12] the time I was building right here? Yes. There was  
33 quite a few of them that come in and help. And special lady was working  
34 there and she as soon as she finish her work she come right here and she  
35 passed away and we used to call her Mama Goose. Maybe one of you  
36 know her.  
37  
38 Cheryl McQuaid: Mama Goose, nope, I don't think I've heard of her.  
39  
40 Gus Caliacatsos: [Lynn, Lynn Cole 22:37].  
41  
42 Cheryl McQuaid: Lynn Cole?  
43  
44 Gus Caliacatsos: Cole. Her husband was working there also [throat clearing] [inaudible  
45 22:44]. And she have cancer, passed away, and she was coming every  
46 single day [inaudible 22:52] help me [inaudible 22:53] to build it, the bar

1 right there [inaudible 22:56] so I can cut it and build everything. She was  
2 come right here just as long as the end chair down there would be hers if  
3 she coming over for a drink. That's her chair.  
4  
5 Cheryl McQuaid: So that chair was always reserved for...  
6  
7 Gus Caliacatsos: Yes.  
8  
9 Cheryl McQuaid: ...her.  
10  
11 Gus Caliacatsos: Nobody can sit there. Everybody [inaudible 23:17] know. [coughing]  
12  
13 Earl Nicholson: So, Gus, uh, Earl Nicholson again. [23:23] Did any GM employees ever  
14 pull any pranks on you?  
15  
16 Gus Caliacatsos: No.  
17  
18 Earl Nicholson: No?  
19  
20 Gus Caliacatsos: [Inaudible 23:28].  
21  
22 Earl Nicholson: No jokes, no pranks.  
23  
24 Gus Caliacatsos: Jokes, well, always you joking, but nothing for to harm me or to...  
25  
26 Earl Nicholson: To make fun of you.  
27  
28 Gus Caliacatsos: ...to make fun of me.  
29  
30 Earl Nicholson: Okay. [23:43] Um, what was your reaction to all of the name changes  
31 over across the street? Now for me personally, I've always considered  
32 Fisher Body, the Fisher Body plant.  
33  
34 Gus Caliacatsos: This is, and I still today I cannot say [inaudible 23:58]. I call it Fisher  
35 Body. That's [inaudible 24:01] because that was my first job was at  
36 Fisher Body and that's what I call it even today, Fisher Body.  
37  
38 Earl Nicholson: So, uh, I, I think we're probably coming up on close here, um, so I'm  
39 going to ask you [24:20] what would, what would be your, what would be  
40 your, your happiest moment and what would be [throat clearing] your  
41 saddest moment?  
42  
43 Gus Caliacatsos: Right here the happiest was the time I opened up when I would serve all  
44 the employees from GM and the saddest was the time I see the place close.  
45  
46 Earl Nicholson: Now you're probably coming up on retirement at the ripe old age of...



1  
2Gus Caliacatsos: 70.  
3  
4Earl Nicholson: ...and are you going...  
5  
6Gus Caliacatsos: March 3 I'm going to be 70.  
7  
8Earl Nicholson: Congratulations to you, sir.  
9  
10Gus Caliacatsos: Thank you.  
11  
12Earl Nicholson: [24:55] Um, do you plan on staying here in America or do you plan on  
13 returning home or?  
14  
15Gus Caliacatsos: Well, I have one son here in America and I have one in Greece. One was,  
16 he was born here and he moved back to Greece because he liked it so  
17 much there to be with his cousins and he moved back. Now, I have two  
18 grandsons there and I have one boy here in Detroit, he's an architect in  
19 Detroit, so I'm splitting it back and forth and I will continue to do that. I  
20 will go visit my other son and come back [inaudible 25:34] my time come  
21 over.  
22  
23Gary Judy: Gary Judy. Gus, uh, you mentioned to me the other day that you have  
24 another business over in Greece. [25:46] Could you tell us what that  
25 business is?  
26  
27Gus Caliacatsos: The business there is olive trees.  
28  
29Male: And, uh...  
30  
31Gus Caliacatsos: I have some olive trees, I have some orange trees where the ranch is ready  
32 to, to die and I'm going to sell the place, property for building apartments.  
33 [throat clearing] But the olive trees is the ones where I get some income  
34 and that's the income [inaudible 26:17] there because I cannot bring the  
35 money here. I build my house. [Inaudible 26:24] see my house, I can  
36 show it.  
37  
38Cheryl McQuaid: So you have a home in Greece and here in Lansing...  
39  
40Gus Caliacatsos: Yes.  
41  
42Cheryl McQuaid: ...area also.  
43  
44Gus Caliacatsos: Yes.  
45  
46Gary Judy: Very beautiful home in...

1  
2Gus Caliacatsos: Yes.  
3  
4Gary Judy: ...Greece from what I've heard. I've, I've heard it's just gorgeous.  
5  
6Gus Caliacatsos: Yes, it is.  
7  
8Earl Nicholson: That's fantastic Gus. Uh, I think we appreciate it. [Inaudible 26:44].  
9  
10Cheryl McQuaid: Yes, thank you so much for sharing your memories.  
11  
12Male: [Inaudible 26:47].  
13  
14Gary Judy: Thank you, thank you Gus.  
15  
16Cheryl McQuaid: Thank you.  
17  
18  
19/mlc