

**Roberta Cannon, an African American, discusses her career  
as a production worker at the Fisher Body plant in Lansing, MI**

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5 Marilyn Coulter: Fisher Body Historical Team interview. Today is Thursday, January 19,  
6 2006. We're at UAW Local 602's conference room. Uh, first, we'll go  
7 around and do the – and name the interviewers.  
8  
9 Jerri Smith: Jerri Smith.  
10  
11 Cheryl McQuaid: Cheryl McQuaid.  
12  
13 Doug Rademacher: Doug Rademacher.  
14  
15 Mike Fleming: And Mike Fleming.  
16  
17 Marilyn Coulter: [0:21] And Marilyn Coulter. Today, our interviewee is Ms. Roberta  
18 Cannon. Roberta, will you please, uh, say your name and spell your last  
19 name?  
20  
21 Roberta Cannon: Roberta Cannon. C A N N O N.  
22  
23 Marilyn Coulter: [0:36] And your address, please?  
24  
25 Roberta Cannon: 1202 Fairway Lane, that's Lansing, Michigan, 48912.  
26  
27 Marilyn Coulter: [0:46] Um, and you're – are you married?  
28  
29 Roberta Cannon: Yes, I'm married. Been married for almost 40 years.  
30  
31 Marilyn Coulter: [0:53] Um, do you have any children?  
32  
33 Roberta Cannon: I have three children, three grown children. Two girls and one boy.  
34  
35 Marilyn Coulter: [0:59] Uh, national origin?  
36  
37 Roberta Cannon: They – [laughter] African American.  
38  
39 Marilyn Coulter: And your...  
40  
41 Doug Rademacher: [Inaudible 1:11].  
42  
43 Jerri Smith: I didn't stop it.  
44  
45 Doug Rademacher: Oh, sorry.  
46

1 Marilyn Coulter: [1:14] And your education level?  
2

3 Roberta Cannon: I have [inaudible 1:18] completed high school education and [I have  
4 like 1:21], um, I think, eight months of home interior decoration. I will have  
5 my degree in home interior decoration and design.  
6

7 Marilyn Coulter: [1:32] Uh, any military service?  
8

9 Roberta Cannon: No.  
10

11 Marilyn Coulter: [1:36] So Roberta, um, are you originally from Lansing?  
12

13 Roberta Cannon: I'm originally from Tennessee, and I moved from Tennessee to Lansing  
14 after high school.  
15

16 Marilyn Coulter: [1:45] Oh, and what brought you to Lansing?  
17

18 Roberta Cannon: My husband.  
19

20 Marilyn Coulter: Oh.  
21

22 Roberta Cannon: Uh, he got employed with, uh, he come to Michigan after high school and  
23 moved to [Albion 1:56] with his, um, uncle. And after that, we got – we,  
24 we're high school and boyfriends and girlfriends. And, uh, he moved, uh,  
25 from Tennessee to Michigan. And after, um, a year, we got engaged. And  
26 he got employed. He was employed with GM. And, uh, after that we got  
27 married. And, of course, I followed him.  
28

29 Marilyn Coulter: And you followed your high school sweetheart...  
30

31 Roberta Cannon: Yes.  
32

33 Marilyn Coulter: [2:27] ...husband here. Now, and was he- is he employed also at Fisher  
34 Body?  
35

36 Roberta Cannon: He's employed with Fisher Body. Uh, he retired, uh after 36 years.  
37

38 Marilyn Coulter: After 36 years.  
39

40 Roberta Cannon: Mm-hm.  
41

42 Marilyn Coulter: [2:40] And, um, uh, you, you are retired too now?  
43

44 Roberta Cannon: I'm retired also.  
45

46 Marilyn Coulter: [2:43] And how many years of service did you have?

1  
2 Roberta Cannon: Twenty-five.  
3  
4 Marilyn Coulter: Twenty-five.  
5  
6 Roberta Cannon: Mm-hm.  
7  
8 Marilyn Coulter: [2:47] So when did you hire in?  
9  
10 Roberta Cannon: 1997. No, no. I'm sorry. Excuse me, it's 1987.  
11  
12 Marilyn Coulter: You hired in in 1987?  
13  
14 Roberta Cannon: Mm-hm.  
15  
16 Marilyn Coulter: [3:02] So, um, what brought you into the plant?  
17  
18 Roberta Cannon: Uh, [throat clearing] excuse me. Actually, I wasn't lookin' for a job, I must  
19 say. Uh, they were havin', um, interview – well, they was takin' apps at  
20 Fisher, the old Fisher Body. And, uh, my sister-in-law wanted to, um, me to  
21 go with her to put in for a job. And I said, "Okay," because I had just had a  
22 baby. Uh, my son. And, um, so, uh, after that, I went with her. I said,  
23 "Okay. What the heck." So I went with her. And the funny thing about it, I  
24 got hired and she didn't. I felt really bad. But that's what brought me, and I  
25 really wasn't lookin' for a job because, like I said, I just had a s-, my son,  
26 and I was a stay-at-home mom.  
27  
28 Marilyn Coulter: [3:54] So Roberta, when they hired you in, were you at – did you have to  
29 wait in line at the plant? Were you at a hiring agency? What was that day  
30 like when you...?  
31  
32 Roberta Cannon: Well, and – lemme go back. I guess, I can – lemme see if I can remember.  
33 We – when the – we went to put in for application right down in the lower  
34 lobby, they had tables set up. And you sat there and you put in the  
35 application. They said, "We'll call ya." I got called about four or five days  
36 after that. And, uh, that went on.  
37  
38 Marilyn Coulter: [4:23] So, um, do you remember the department that you hired in at?  
39  
40 Roberta Cannon: Trim.  
41  
42 Marilyn Coulter: Trim.  
43  
44 Roberta Cannon: And I've always stayed in trim.  
45  
46 Marilyn Coulter: [4:29] And so were [throat clearing] you in day shift, night shift?

1  
2 Roberta Cannon: Well, see, that was the problem 'cause I wasn't for sure if I wanted to take  
3 the job because, um, I didn't have a baby sitter. I'm the only – I didn't really  
4 have family. It was just Harvey and myself. And so, and I didn't know –  
5 really know anybody. And they – and I wasn't sure [inaudible 4:52]. They  
6 hired me, course, they said new hires, you go in on night shift. And so  
7 Harvey had enough, um, seniority where he could switch around. So that's  
8 what happened. But luckily, at that time, I was hired in on night shift and he  
9 was already on days. And so, he was the baby sitter. And I was work.  
10  
11 Marilyn Coulter: Mike Fleming.  
12  
13 Mike Fleming: [5:16] I, I – Roberta, talk about when you came in, ask you some questions  
14 about that, how intimidating was that for you, coming to work in a factory?  
15 Sure, it was the first time you came to work in a factory, [isn't that 5:29]  
16 right?  
17  
18 Roberta Cannon: Yeah. Yeah.  
19  
20 Mike Fleming: Talk about was it intimidating for you? Or was it...  
21  
22 Roberta Cannon: No.  
23  
24 Mike Fleming: It wasn't?  
25  
26 Roberta Cannon: No, it wasn't because if it was, I wouldn't – I would quit. Because, like I  
27 said, I wasn't lookin' for a job anyway. So I wouldn't've stayed. It wasn't  
28 intimidatin'. In fact, when I was hired in, the, the people were very nice to  
29 me. Um, in fact, I think, again, at – I was hired in on nights, but I stayed on  
30 nights short time, and I did a flip. They put me back on days. And so I left  
31 – Harvey had to switch back to, uh, uh, nights. And, um, but the people – I  
32 was luck-, I was hired in the trim department, and the people were very nice  
33 to me. Um, so I didn't – it, it wasn't intimidating. I wasn't intimidated by  
34 anyone at that time.  
35  
36 Mike Fleming: [6:14] So the population of the plant was right around 5000 people at that  
37 time, do you know, 3000, 4000 around?  
38  
39 Roberta Cannon: Mm-hm.  
40  
41 Mike Fleming: Was it five – around 5000 maybe?  
42  
43 Roberta Cannon: Was it five or s-...?  
44  
45 Mike Fleming: Four or five thousand.  
46

1Roberta Cannon: Yeah.  
2  
3Mike Fleming: Okay. Um, and you were in trim.  
4  
5Roberta Cannon: I was in trim. And I was in – I was doin' door locks.  
6  
7Mike Fleming: [6:32] Where did you go when you went to day shift?  
8  
9Roberta Cannon: Uh, I went to the same department but somebody bumped me. So that's – I  
10 stayed on that job, you know, I did-, I didn't switch. I stayed always in uh,  
11 um, in door locks, stayed there.  
12  
13Marilyn Coulter: [6:48] Uh, Marilyn Coulter. So Roberta, um, if I may, how old were you  
14 when you hired in the plant?  
15  
16Roberta Cannon: Um, see, you're messin' me up here because, uh, I was 30.  
17  
18Marilyn Coulter: In – 30?  
19  
20Roberta Cannon: Thirty.  
21  
22Marilyn Coulter: [7:03] So coming into the work environment at 30, were there many people  
23 your age? Were they younger? What was in that – I mean, what was it  
24 like?  
25  
26Roberta Cannon: Um, it was people there, I think, my age, but I worked with a old group, uh,  
27 of people my a-, uh, around my age. It was a young people there, but, um, I  
28 worked – the area I was in, they were mostly my age.  
29  
30Marilyn Coulter: More mature people?  
31  
32Roberta Cannon: Yeah. The – one of the guys, uh, they called him Junior, and he was from,  
33 um, Brighton. He was the oldest one that was on the job.  
34  
35Marilyn Coulter: S-, so what was, um, you said that everyone treated you nice?  
36  
37Roberta Cannon: Yeah. I, I...  
38  
39Marilyn Coulter: [7:45] What, what was your thought...  
40  
41Roberta Cannon: [Inaudible 7:47].  
42  
43Marilyn Coulter: ...when you – what was the thought on your first day when you walked in?  
44  
45Roberta Cannon: Um, um, I'm sayin' what will I – what am I gonna do here? What's – 'cause,  
46 you know, you have all these, these cars goin' and nothin' – everybody's

1 doin' their job and, and I'm sayin', "Can I keep up? Can I keep up?" So, uh,  
2 that was my concern, if I can keep up and hope they don't give me nothin'  
3 hard [laughter]. That was it.  
4

5Marilyn Coulter: [8:18] So because you had a husband who already worked here, what did he  
6 t-, was it – what he told you, was it what you had envisioned?  
7

8Roberta Cannon: Mm, no. Not really, he – 'cause I really – he said just go in and, you know,  
9 do your job and do it the best you can. If you can't do it, you gotta right to  
10 call your committeeman and if you get hurt, you know, he kindly walked me  
11 through it. And he says but, um, you may get a hard job, you may get a easy  
12 job. And he said, "If you can't handle it, you can't handle it." And, um, he  
13 said, "We'll survive." So – 'cause, actually, I thought at the time, mainly is  
14 because I just went in because I used the money for my children education.  
15

16 That's basically what I did with the money is for education. And after – and  
17 that – really, I didn't feel guilty comin' out because, um, I had got my kids  
18 through – we had got our kids through college. My last son, I come out  
19 when my last son was in college, and I felt, you know, we had a, we had  
20 some, you know, made it and had enough that we could put him through  
21 college without doin' a lotta financial aid.  
22

23Marilyn Coulter: [9:33] And so you have three children, and your children do what?  
24

25Roberta Cannon: I have three children, and my oldest daughter is a doctor. She's a OBGYN.  
26 Um, and they're five years apart. [laughter] Um, and my second daughter is,  
27 um, is a pharmaceutical rep.  
28

29Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
30

31Roberta Cannon: And my son is a elementary educations teacher.  
32

33Marilyn Coulter: So it's work well spent, right?  
34

35Roberta Cannon: So the money's [well 9:58] worth spent.  
36

37Marilyn Coulter: Cheryl McQuaid?  
38

39Cheryl McQuaid: [10:00] Roberta, you said that your first job in there was, um, door locks?  
40

41Roberta Cannon: Yes. Yes.  
42

43Cheryl McQuaid: [10:07] And how long did you do that job?  
44

45Roberta Cannon: I did that job for about a year.  
46

1 Cheryl McQuaid: [10:11] Could you kinda walk me through that job? How, how did you  
2 install a door lock?  
3

4 Roberta Cannon: Well, um, it was – you – I did the back door locks. And you just take a lock  
5 and – the door lock itself 'cause, you know, they had the one that, you know,  
6 still pulls out and you insert – go in, open the door and you go stick your  
7 hand down inside and you put the rod in, insert the rod. And you clip the  
8 rod to the door lock so that it could pop up. And that was basic-, basically  
9 it. As – and then the next person would tighten it down.  
10

11 Jerri Smith: [10:47] So was it a pretty easy job to do?  
12

13 Roberta Cannon: That was – to me, it was a easy job. Much easier than what I see some of'm  
14 were doin'. In fact, um, which we were doin' illegal stuff, we was workin'  
15 each other's' job at lunch time. You know, I – we could fix – had to fix that,  
16 uh, we could move fast enough, we'd go from one side to the other, uh, to  
17 help out the other person, um, if they needed help or if they got down the  
18 line because, you know, we didn't want to get down the line.  
19

20 Jerri Smith: [11:18] So if there was a two-door – you worked on the back door...  
21

22 Roberta Cannon: [Inaudible 11:22].  
23

24 Jerri Smith: ...if there was a two-door...  
25

26 Roberta Cannon: I'm mean, I'm sorry, a two-door. I'm sorry. Excuse me. I did say two-door.  
27 It was a four-door, and I worked on the back door. They were four-door  
28 cars. I did...  
29

30 Jerri Smith: [11:30] So if a two-door...  
31

32 Roberta Cannon: ...every four-door.  
33

34 Jerri Smith: ...came down the line...  
35

36 Roberta Cannon: Mm-hm.  
37

38 Jerri Smith: ...what did you do to the two-door? Did you – it was a just a free job? Or...  
39

40 Roberta Cannon: That was a job, the job for the next person, um, to do because I think – my  
41 mind clear, you didn't have to do any tighten down, so that left me free and  
42 the other guy had to do it. I'd just stick – stuck a rod down in, and he put the  
43 lock in and tighten it down. Because you put your door lock in and it was a  
44 little plastic thing you just – it was like a coat hanger, and you stick, stick it  
45 through, and it locks it down. So when you did a four-door, you, uh, put,  
46 um, the rod in and the other guy put the lock in and it was something

1 different we had to do. Both of'm, the front door's a little bit different from  
2 back door.  
3  
4Cheryl McQuaid: [12:21] Okay. And then what was your next job after...?  
5  
6Roberta Cannon: My next job, mm, I hated it. It was, um, [laughter] puttin' in the, um, the  
7 deadeners, I think they were called, the deadeners inside the car to sound  
8 proof it before they put in the headliners. And you had to climb up in the  
9 car and you got this like, you know, they sprayed it. You were all sticky.  
10 Uh, it was a mess. I hated it because I was too short for the job, really.  
11 And, and you had to climb somethin'. Men could easily do it because they  
12 could stand out on the floor and just pop it up, do the deadener up in there.  
13 But I was short, and I had to climb up in the car to make sure I got it up in  
14 there, especially. It was very hard for me to do the, um, two-door, two, uh,  
15 two-doors 'cause I had to climb up in there.  
16  
17Jerri Smith: [13:14] Roberta, how tall are you?  
18  
19Roberta Cannon: I'm 5'5 ½".  
20  
21Jerri Smith: Continue.  
22  
23Marilyn Coulter: [13:26] Um, Marilyn Coulter. Roberta, um, during your time working in  
24 trim, are there any special memories that you have?  
25  
26Roberta Cannon: I'd – like, like I said, I had – have always worked in trim. Um, so when I  
27 had to go, um, went out on sick leave and had, uh, to go – come back in, uh,  
28 on, um, a sp-, had come back in and I had to – couldn't do my job, so they  
29 would send me upstairs in 3X, and I did, um, inspection. And I did  
30 inspection in the body shop. So, like I said, I have no, um, bad memories,  
31 really bad memories about jo-, uh, all my jobs. They were pretty, um, I was  
32 pretty well satisfied 'cause I was a crybaby. No, I wasn't really a crybaby  
33 but, um, I guess, Lord was on my side. I was lucky. I was lucky this far  
34 with some of'm.  
35  
36Marilyn Coulter: [14:27] In your coworkers, what types of things did you, did you do for  
37 lunch?  
38  
39Roberta Cannon: Well, well...  
40  
41Marilyn Coulter: [During 13:2] breaks? What types of things did you do?  
42  
43Roberta Cannon: Yeah, um, we used to have at lunch – one of my favorite, uh, supervisors  
44 was Doug [Stott 14:42]. And so at that time, if you wanted, uh, anything  
45 special, feed him. So [laughter] all we had to do is bring him some lunch.  
46 Uh, we would have, um, dinners in our areas, you know, not only holidays,



1 uh, we would bring – have – doin' – it wasn't no special time. Like if I  
2 would do barbeque chicken, my friend Debbie [Norris 15:08] and China  
3 Wilson, we all worked down there. We'd all bring somethin' in. And we  
4 would feed Doug and so that would make our night because if next week we  
5 wanted a time off to go to our kids' basketball game or somethin' like that,  
6 he would, uh, fix it so we could do that, so we can bless him again next  
7 week with some food. [laughter]

8  
9 But, uh, um, I used – I would usually go home for lunch because, um, like I  
10 said, I had three kids at home and I wasn't too far from home. Uh, if I had,  
11 um, about 30, um, 30-mintues break, I could, uh, zip home and, um, look at  
12 my kids, make sure they were okay and come back. And, uh, so, uh, I  
13 would – or else I would just stay in my area. Me and my friends, we'd sit  
14 there at the table and have lunch or go to a cafeteria. Um, that was, you  
15 know, I didn't ever do a lot of runnin' out 'cause if I didn't go home, I would  
16 call the kids and make sure that they were okay. [coughing] And that was at  
17 the time when, uh, my daughter was in high – my oldest daughter was in  
18 high school. And she, um, was good. We could depend on her also, uh,  
19 when Dad wasn't there 'cause Harvey – it was at a time when Harvey had to  
20 – we were both on the night shift. And, um, and she was – thank God, that  
21 was when she was at high school.

22  
23 Um, Like I said, my kids are five years apart, so, um, they basically – they  
24 still talk about Freddy give'm a hard time because, uh, he was the baby.  
25 And, uh, they would, uh, you know, be the watch over him. But, um, I, I  
26 was pretty well – I was pretty lucky. I basically stayed in. We just, um...

27  
28Marilyn Coulter: [17:01] I seem to remember you tellin' me a story about the [Buckmaster  
29 17:04] sons. Can you, can you share that with us?

30  
31Roberta Cannon: Yeah. I worked with, um, a Bob [Buckmaster] and – on door locks. He was  
32 on one side and I was on the other and along with the, the older gentleman,  
33 uh, we called him Junior. And, um, uh, Roger, uh, I can't think of Roger's  
34 right name right now, last name. But, uh, we would help at lunch time, uh,  
35 and when I was on days. At lunch time, uh, we would, uh, have Bob go  
36 down – his dad was a, a plant, uh...

37  
38Marilyn Coulter: Assistant supervisor?

39  
40Roberta Cannon: ...assistant supervisor. And, you know, they – their car could be pulled  
41 inside the garage. So we would work – when I was speakin' about workin'  
42 each side of the job, each – goin' from one side a the line to the other  
43 workin' jobs, well, that was a time when we would do Bob's job. And so he  
44 could go to McDonald's for us and get us – he would go down – our car, our  
45 job was right where he – at the time, where he could zip down the steps,  
46 jump in his dad car, and, uh, go to McDonald's and be back by, uh,

1 lunchtime, by the time the line'd go down. So that was, um, exciting thing.  
2 We got McDonald's every now and then when we complained about the  
3 food in the lunch room.  
4

5 And another time [throat clearing] was when, um, again, when I didn't get  
6 any sleep and my son was sick, you know, at night and I'd stay up half the  
7 night with him sick, I would come in and Junior would go to the bar every  
8 day. That was Junior's – he, no doubt, he would go to the bar every single  
9 day and, uh, so I would sleep. And, uh, I would tell Junior, "When you  
10 come back, Junior, open up – wake me up." I would climb up on the, um,  
11 the door locks was in a- the big, the big, uh, big container. And I would  
12 climb up in the, the container and lay down on a piece of cardboard and  
13 sleep until, um, 12:30. That was a big booster for me. I didn't need – just  
14 that, just energized me. So, um, he would wake me up. So that, they helped  
15 me out. They really helped me out a lot. Um, let's see, what else. I can't  
16 think of anything exciting. Uh...  
17

18Mike Fleming: [19:25] Roberta, Mike Fleming. Uh, throughout all this, as, as you were  
19 workin' in the trim department, did you happen to have a, a boss, supervisor  
20 or even a general foreman that, uh, you liked better than another one? Or  
21 did you have [throat clearing] problems at all with any management before?  
22

23Roberta Cannon: You know, ame-, um, it's amazing how lucky because Doug [Stott] was  
24 basically, was on one shift and Dale [Tolliver 19:53]. Um, Dale [Tolliver]  
25 was one. And, um, and the other – I can't think right now of other  
26 supervisor, but those are the two that stuck out in my mind, uh was Dale –  
27 'cause they worked opposite of each other. And Dale [Tolliver] was a quiet  
28 supervisor. He was a great – he was great. And I can rem-, I can remember  
29 one incident that we pulled on Dale [Tolliver]. All you had to do was, uh,  
30 feed Doug, [laughter] and he was, he was great. But Doug was great  
31 anytime. He would – and in fact, he, um, rem-, was – I think I was the  
32 oldest one that he remembered my social security number by heart. Uh, so I  
33 guess I – somethin' about me that excited him, but I think it was the food  
34 though. [laughter]  
35

36 And Dale [Tolliver], when it was his birthday, we used to celebrate the  
37 supervisor's birthday and so, you know, how quiet Dale was, you know, he  
38 was quiet, easy goin' guy. So we had it all planned up where he need  
39 excitement. So on his birthday one night, we had a belly dancer to come in.  
40 [laughter] And you sh-, and you know, he doesn't take much for him to get  
41 red anyway. Man, was his face red. We, uh, it was one of the, um, girls in  
42 there, I'm not for sure if it was Jackie [Romanaugh 21:21] or who, but she  
43 had a friend that did belly dancin'. And so we sneaked her in through the  
44 basement, up the steps. And we were still down on the end where we could  
45 get her up the steps from [the H line 21:33]. And here come this lady across  
46 the hall, across the aisle, with – and everybo-, I – the line almost stopped

1 'cause when we had it, I had him – had him come in – had her come in about  
2 lunch time.  
3  
4 And this lady come in and everybody was lookin'. And then she had her  
5 radio and her music went off, and we had Dale right there. And it was, it  
6 was amazing. Everybody come around and Dale, I tell ya, that was great. I  
7 will never forget that. It was funny. It was really funny. And one a my  
8 favorite pickup guys was, uh, [Nelly 22:09].  
9  
10 Jerri Smith: [Nelly Cox 22:12].  
11  
12 Roberta Cannon: [Nelly Cox]. [Nelly Cox] was my – was one of the great pickup person that,  
13 uh, I enjoyed.  
14  
15 Marilyn Coulter: [22:21] Roberta, can you please explain what a pickup person is?  
16  
17 Roberta Cannon: Oh, I'm sorry. Uh, when we get down the line and, um, and I'd miss a job,  
18 or we mess up a job, we would holler pickup. And that – he was a repair  
19 guy. I guess I should re-, he's a repair, our repair per-, he was our repair  
20 person in our area. And so when we got down the line, we would holler  
21 pickup, and [Nelly] was our pickup person. He would come and do it. Um,  
22 or if you had – need to go to the bathroom before you – before time come  
23 for your break or the pickup man to give your break we would call. So  
24 [Nelly] was a good person. He was always there. He didn't have an excuse  
25 or nothin'. But the, uh, my biggest crybaby person was Roy [Plumber  
26 23:08]. [laughter] Roy [Plumber] was – I – but I, but I, I was a person that  
27 had a big mouth. And I threatened his life because he was – I felt – I was  
28 [older 23:21]. [laughter] And he was the, you know, they were the bunch a  
29 young guys  
30  
31 And, uh, so, uh, Roy come up with some kinda excuse, especially after  
32 lunch and, "Don't come here with no mess, Roy. Come on, give me my  
33 break," you know. "I'll be back, I'll be back." "No. Now." So, um, some  
34 of'm, uh, I treated'm like my kids, uh, for when [inaudible 23:46] but, uh, it  
35 was a lot of'm I treated like my children in there. You know, Larry Johnson  
36 was one. Uh, I think Larry Johnson still owe me about \$50 [laughter] 'cause  
37 he, he stayed broke. But, uh, I would – I had some pretty good times.  
38  
39 Also, one thing that I – person I remember was Gary [Barnett 24:10]. Mm,  
40 he was our past, uh, president here. Uh, Gary was in our area. And, um,  
41 that was the time I was puttin' in, uh, gas doors. And, uh, Gary was  
42 supposed to leave the area, and he was gonna go down in – they was – they  
43 wa-, he got bumped and they w-, he had to go j-, down in the b-, uh, A – on  
44 the A line. At that time, it's called A line, uh, to do a job. So we were goin'  
45 to give Gary [Barnett], um, a dinner. And they had me do turkey and  
46 dressin' and I think he had figured out and I, I did everything. And what

1 happened? Gary no show up. Gary stays home that Friday night. [laughter]  
2 And he won't let me forget that either. Every time I see'm and he said, "I  
3 know, I know." And like to this day, when I see'm in Detroit, uh, at, um,  
4 he'll say, "I know, I know." And he said, "That was one big one I pulled,"  
5 and he said, "But I really hated that because you know how I like your  
6 food." "Ah, it's too late. I'll never cook another thing for ya." [laughter] But  
7 that was on of the nice thing I remember also. That was funny.  
8

9 Doug Rademacher: [25:27] Roberta, it's Doug Rademacher. You're talking about [coughing],  
10 uh, helping each other on the assembly line. You had, uh, where you'd help  
11 each other. If someone got down the line, you'd take, uh, initiative. Did  
12 you consider your work, uh, people in your work area your, your brothers  
13 and sisters? And what was the – what is that family relationship that they  
14 talk about?  
15

16 Roberta Cannon: Yes. Um, that was a time when I think all of us enjoyed coming to work  
17 because we had good time. We could – we had good times also. We could  
18 mix the work with play. I guess I put it that way. And I considered all of'm  
19 brothers and sisters. We could say anything, you know, and to help out each  
20 other and nobody – we all enjoyed helpin'. It was – we come together when  
21 someone needed help. And, um, I considered that we were all friends and  
22 neighbors, um, away from home. Brothers and sisters away from home.  
23 And it was a happy time. It was a happy time. Like I said, I enjoyed it but,  
24 um, [coughing] I guess, uh, as we grow older and the young peop-, young,  
25 young generation come in, they don't realize, I guess, I, I [paper ripping] it's  
26 the up-, I think it was the upbringin'.  
27

28 Doug Rademacher: [26:50] And what do you think's lost now?  
29

30 Roberta Cannon: Um, I think what's lost now w-, the – like I said, the young generation, um,  
31 it's the upbringin' that they come in that they think they can do everything  
32 with to – by themselves. I can do this, and I don't need your help. Um,  
33 where that – back then, we could do it, but we help out each other to make  
34 our jobs easier. And the young generation think they don't have to [has  
35 27:30] anybody. They c-, they make the job harder by not communicatin' to  
36 myself, my – that's my, uh, theory on it.  
37

38 Mike Fleming: [27:30] Mike Fleming. Roberta, um, there was, uh, name changes  
39 throughout the times of the facility. Um, there were name changes  
40 throughout the facility from LCA to BOC to, uh, um, what – and, and, and  
41 whatever the other one was I don't quite remember. What did you feel about  
42 the changes in the name of that facility? Do you – what, what, what did you  
43 call it? What, what would you call the facility?  
44

45 Roberta Cannon: Um, they, you know, they had different names, specified different areas and  
46 everything but [laughter] at the time I was in there, I considered, uh, none of

1 this name changin' really didn't come around until, I think, after I had, had  
2 gone out. I had, uh, retired, I was outta the plant. Um, I was out of the plant  
3 on a disability leave for a couple years with my back, so lotta this change  
4 come around – before I retired, I was in and out on a sick leave. Uh, my  
5 base thing, I was also at the plant a EPG leader in my area. Um, that was  
6 the, uh, Employees, uh...  
7  
8 Doug Rademacher: Participation [Leader 28:51].  
9  
10 Roberta Cannon: Yeah, Employee Participation. And I was the EPG leader in the area. And,  
11 um, and I tried to help everybody, and if they had problems, I did the lay  
12 work. I was the gopher, you know. Um, and I think go back to, um, and I –  
13 lemme kinda revert back. That comes in when you got a person, uh,  
14 [inaudible 29:19] one you try to help somebody in the area, you know, some  
15 of'm don't want – the young people don't want your help, you know. They  
16 think they know everything. But at that time, I was a EPG leader before  
17 they start [categorizing 29:32] everything in each area. And, um, and I tried  
18 to help everybody, got all the information I could, you know, and that – I  
19 felt that was my job to, um, help the people in our area.  
20  
21 And at that time, I did, uh, have – a couple people was, uh, Frank [Lily  
22 29:50]. He was a Cuban, and he couldn't speak very, uh, English very well.  
23 And, um, and Freddy [Smitz 30:00]. He was a person, um, didn't, you  
24 know, he, he come on his job. He would not leave his area unless he go to  
25 the bathroom and, and he wouldn't, uh, really talk to anybody, so you had to  
26 befriend him. He wasn't a unfriendly person, but he was, I would say, the  
27 shy person. So you make it a point to go up and down the line, let people  
28 know who you are, speak to'm every day and, um, see if there's anything  
29 you could do for'm. Even if I wasn't off the line to do my EPG work, I'd  
30 still, uh, focus on the people that I thought they had, um, that needed help  
31 and, and try to clarify [throat clearing] stuff.  
32  
33 Mike Fleming: Roberta, they, they changed the name of plant from, um, DOC to LCA but it  
34 was Fisher Body to start with. What do you call that place over there?  
35 What, what, what does it mean to you?  
36  
37 Roberta Cannon: Um, uh, Fisher Body. It was Fisher Body to me. And, um, and it's still  
38 Fisher Body to me because I was hired in as Fisher Body. And I was a  
39 Fisher Body person. So, you know, and I think that's what everybody think.  
40 A – I don't care what you – what you call it. It's always gonna be Fisher  
41 Body because it was Fisher Body when I come in. You can name, name it  
42 50 names, but it's always gonna be Fisher Body because you – reflects back  
43 to the Fisher Body days.  
44  
45 Mike Fleming: [31:23] Mm-hm. When you, um, worked in trim, did you experience any  
46 type of, uh, accidents, fatal accidents? Did you see anyone like get hurt

1 really seriously? Possibly anyone – did you ever see anyone get killed in  
2 the plant?  
3

4Roberta Cannon: No. Thank God I didn't. And the trim department, I think, was a pretty safe  
5 area. The department I was in. So, uh, no, I did not experience any heart  
6 attacks or, or nobody – a car hittin' anybody or anything. So, uh, I think it  
7 was a pretty safe place.  
8

9Jerri Smith: Go.  
10

11Marilyn Coulter: [32:00] So you said as an EPG, um, group leader, you used to take care [of  
12 your 32:05] people, were you able to be involved in other type programs?  
13 And what were some of the differences that you noticed in the plant once  
14 employees started getting involved, involved in the processes?  
15

16Roberta Cannon: I think it, um, helped when the employees got st-, uh, got involved because  
17 it, um, I think it let them know that they were tryin' to hel-, was gonna make  
18 a difference. Uh, they were tryin' to make a difference, um, within their  
19 workplace. It wasn't all, uh, management. The management allowed them  
20 to, um, voice their opinion and to help out.  
21

22Marilyn Coulter: [32:46] So, um, Lansing was always called the Capital of Quality. We were  
23 all at the top of the – we were always at the top of the list. What do you  
24 attribute that to?  
25

26Roberta Cannon: I contribute that to, um, solidarity. Working together. Uh, pulling together.  
27 And employees, um, understandin' where they were and where they tryin' to  
28 get to and how to make things, uh, better for them in order to keep their job.  
29 And in order to keep you job, you got to, um, do a good job. And I think by  
30 doin' that, uh, that's what, um, we're – it'll bring you to the top.  
31

32Marilyn Coulter: [33:30] And you said that Doug Scott and, um, [Tolliver] were good  
33 supervisors. What were some of the things that made a bad supervisor to  
34 you?  
35

36Roberta Cannon: Um, I – and, you know, you would have these little other y-, guys come in,  
37 um, like – I know it's...  
38

39Doug Rademacher: Contract.  
40

41Roberta Cannon: Yeah, the contractors come in. And to, uh, to take over. Um, not take over  
42 but thinkin' that they know, you know, more than you and they couldn't even  
43 do your job. Uh, they didn't even, [you know, attempt 34:04]. You would  
44 tell'm, uh, I need this on the job. This is botherin' me; I need to go to the  
45 hospital. Why is this – you know, why is that doin'? You can't go to the  
46 hospital because you – that's, that's simple. You could do that. How can –

1 how do know you can – I can do that when you haven't stood there and  
2 watch me and, and you, you – they couldn't do the job. So if you can't do  
3 the job, don't tell me what I should be doin'. Um, or how I should do it or  
4 how it should affect, affect me. So it was the contractors, I think, um, put –  
5 left, um, a bitter taste in some of the people's, um, uh, their employees' job.  
6

7Marilyn Coulter: [34:44] You spoke earlier about your husband sayin' if there was problem,  
8 call your committee man. Um, tell me, how'd you feel about your union?  
9 Were you active in your union? Wanna tell us a little about that?  
10

11Roberta Cannon: I was – I, I was active in my union. I attended the union meetin'. Um, but,  
12 um, I never had a problem where I had to call my committeeman. Um, but I  
13 did have a great committeeman when I needed to call him. I – and one  
14 person stands out more than any was Ron Perry. Ron Perry was, um, um, a  
15 caring person, and he cared about his people in his area. Um, but, um, I, I  
16 was lucky. I wasn't a person that called my committeeman every time I  
17 turned I around, every time a problem come. I tried to talk to my supervisor  
18 first and tried to work it out through my supervisor, and if I couldn't get it  
19 [throat clearing] through my super-, you know, work it out – anything with  
20 my supervisor, then I would, um, call my committeeman.  
21

22 But, um, usually, um, with a good understanding, uh, with my supervisor,  
23 we kinda worked it out. And I think, uh, most of us in that area, you know,  
24 by me bein' the EPG leader, we tried to – the area I worked in, we tried to  
25 work it out with the supervisor without interfer-, getting' a mil-, another  
26 person involved. But myself, I, um, talked with my supervisor, but I would  
27 call my committeeman and we'd kinda get things straightened out, um, uh, if  
28 I had a problem.  
29

30Marilyn Coulter: [36:15] So, uh, you said you attended your union meetings. Were you ever  
31 active on any committees? Did you ever hold any offices? What kinda  
32 things did you do in your [union meetings 36:23]?  
33

34Roberta Cannon: I didn't hold any offices because, um, but I was active. I worked with the  
35 Women's Committee, and I worked with the [Recreation 36:31] Committee,  
36 and, um, what else? Um, I, uh, worked with the, um, Civil Rights.  
37

38Marilyn Coulter: [36:44] So can you tell me, um, how did that impact the people in the plant?  
39 The things – the committees you did?  
40

41Roberta Cannon: I wasn't, uh, I, uh, when you get involved with, uh, something with the  
42 union, you go back and you tell the other people in your area what you doin'  
43 and they will, "How you get to do that? How you get off the line?" You get  
44 involved with the union. You get involved with the union, then you know  
45 what's goin' on and if somethin' come up, a job or somethin' come up or  
46 open come up for the committee, um, then you, um, you can, uh, put up dibs



1 in for that. I – and I'd say why they ask, "So how you get that job? How  
2 you get off the line?" was, um, I worked with Andy [Graham 37:39] on, uh,  
3 employee, uh EPG and, uh, I worked with Rudy, uh, on – I was, um, on the  
4 community service and I was cochair of United Way.  
5  
6 Uh, and they wanted to know, "How you get off the line?" You know, you  
7 just go to the union meeting. You listen, and if there's a openin', you find  
8 out who, who's chair of this and you say, "I'd like to get on your committee  
9 if you have an openin'." Uh, and, and by doin' that but, "I don't wanna go to  
10 the union meetin'." Well, if you don't go to union meeting, you won't know  
11 what's goin' on unless somebody come back and tell ya, and I'm comin' back  
12 to, you know, I'm comin' back to tell ya. So, um, it was mostly, you know,  
13 it.  
14  
15 Marilyn Coulter: [38:14] So, um, with the United Way, how did the union work with that?  
16 What was that?  
17  
18 Roberta Cannon: Um, and in fact, I'm a, I'm a person that loved to work in the community.  
19 And, um, and to try to help people and to try to give back. I feel that I've  
20 been blessed, and I think that's why I keep sayin' I been blessed, the reason  
21 why my children are where they are today by givin' back and tryin' to help  
22 somebody else and bring them along with me. And, um, doin' United Way  
23 and helpin' other, other, other people, uh, tryin' to convince'm how great it is,  
24 um, by just not bein' selfish. You gotta give sometime. And, um, you'll,  
25 you'll see. You're – you'll, you'll see that it might not come when you want  
26 it but, uh, it happens. It happens for you. So, um, that affect me and I just  
27 try to take that back to the plant, you know, and United Way, um, felt that  
28 was a time – place that I could do it. By sitting down, talkin' to people,  
29 lettin'm know how good I, I've been blessed and what I've done in order to  
30 get here and what I've seen done and what I know can happen.  
31  
32 And just let them know 'cause you talk with people, uh, I've found out when  
33 I did United Way and I was cochair of United Way, that you go and talk to  
34 people – a lot a people have problems and they didn't know how to solve the  
35 problem. And, and you – it, it'll make your day when you know if you can  
36 help one person. And so that how I en-, uh, enjoyed doin' that by goin'  
37 through the plant, just talkin' to people, and findin' out things. And if I  
38 could help'm, then fine, I'll do that.  
39  
40 Marilyn Coulter: [39:53] And so – and that was part of some of those programs that got  
41 employee involvement because it went from supervisors doing the soliciting  
42 to allowing the community service representatives...  
43  
44 Roberta Cannon: Exactly.  
45  
46 Marilyn Coulter: ...to do that and talk one-on-one with...



1  
2Roberta Cannon: Family.  
3  
4Marilyn Coulter: ...other employees.  
5  
6Roberta Cannon: Your, your friend. Um, supervisors doin' that, they – all they do is just lay  
7 the card down, "Have that signed when I get back." They don't talk to you  
8 and explain to you what this money's gonna do for you or your family  
9 member or somethin'. They just sayin' this is what you need to do, sign it,  
10 and go on and I'll pick it up. [throat clearing] And they don't have time to  
11 talk to ya.  
12  
13Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
14  
15Roberta Cannon: Where as if you have a employee, your sister or your brother doin' it, they  
16 can have time to stop and 'splain things to you if you have a question. If  
17 you have time that – right then, I [usually 40:38] say, "Well, I don't have  
18 time right now, but I'll be back." Make sure you go back. Make sure you  
19 go back, and I did that.  
20  
21Doug Rademacher: [40:47] Roberta, it's Doug Rademacher. You sound like you have been a  
22 caring person and, and tried hard to help others. Was there ever a time  
23 when you felt that you were – that there was any racism or sexism as a  
24 woman in the workplace? Was there – were you ever treated poorly? Your  
25 attitude shows that you stayed [throat clearing] positive. Did you have any  
26 trouble in the plant?  
27  
28Roberta Cannon: No. I didn't have any trouble in the plant with racism or, um, sexism or  
29 anything like that. Um, the people were at – like I said, when I was in there,  
30 the people were very friendly, but I'm sure it was, but I just wasn't there in  
31 [laughter] I didn't pick up on it, uh, and, uh, people complainin'. I, I can't  
32 tell you that I had any bad, uh, time or someone approachin' me with a  
33 attitude about what's, uh, racism, sexism, or nothin' like that. I didn't – and  
34 I, and I, like I said, I, I also worked with – I worked with a lot of the young  
35 people, uh, younger than I was.  
36  
37Mike Fleming: [41:57] Roberta, Mike Fleming. Um, I'd like to ask you, what, what do you  
38 consider your, your most, uh, or, or appreciated bargain benefit by the union  
39 for, for yourself? What do you think is the best thing that they've done as  
40 far as negotiating benefits for you?  
41  
42Roberta Cannon: Uh, medical. Medical and health. The health benefits. Uh, that is a big  
43 plus. Not only for me, and I think it was, uh, the medical benefits a plus for  
44 everybody, uh, because, um, like I said, back into the community and health,  
45 you find, um, out that lotta people have health problems. They were – they  
46 have kids that's born with health problems. And if it wasn't for the health,

1 uh, our health benefits, uh, they don't know – they probably could've lo-,  
2 they would've lost their child or, uh, something like because they would not  
3 have the monies because today you see where children have health benefits,  
4 adults have health benefits, and they don't have – they, uh, still can't afford  
5 medication and stuff like that. There's still a problem out there.  
6  
7 So, um, again, the community – your community service, United Way, uh,  
8 stepped back in because your health, uh, coverage covers so much. And  
9 then, if it's gonna be a lifetime sickness for your child or for you, uh, it's  
10 gonna run out. So you gonna have to pick up from someplace else.  
11  
12Marilyn Coulter: Robert-, ...  
13  
14Mike Fleming: [43:40] Robert-, um, Roberta, when you – just – and I'll be done right quick.  
15 When you, you talked about, you know, you did a lotta cooking and how  
16 you all get along very well in the departments that you worked in, um, can  
17 you remember when you were – in your departments, has anyone came  
18 across a hardship and you all took up a collection or does anything re-, that  
19 you remember that you helped out someone within your department? Uh, or  
20 d-, was that something that you all did in your [inaudible 44:05].  
21  
22Roberta Cannon: Um, we took up collection mostly of death, um, people losin' their family  
23 member or, um, people, um had, um, problems with – like I said, sickness  
24 with their child or somethin'. We did, uh, collection, uh, mostly with death  
25 or sickness. Um, our – and people would pour their heart out for somebody  
26 – somethin' like that. And I think they still do. They still do. Uh, but, uh,  
27 all you have to say is somebody need this and they're sick and then, "Oh  
28 yeah, I know." And they would give their last penny outta their pocket in  
29 order to try to help this poor soul. I found that again in our plant as brothers  
30 and sisters, uh, we was a given family.  
31  
32Marilyn Coulter: [44:56] Uh, Roberta, you did a lot of community service while you were  
33 working. Um, were there any types of organizations that you were  
34 participated in that extended outside the plant?  
35  
36Roberta Cannon: Um, yes. I – and I think this was, uh, maybe I started from – I participated  
37 in feedin' the homeless. I participated in, um, mentorin', um, young  
38 mothers, um, and their children. I was the wa-, I took people, um, oh, elder  
39 people to their doctor's appointments. Um, uh, I, uh, cook and made meals  
40 for, uh, families that just come home from the hospital when they were sick,  
41 and we had a group of people that we would get together and make sure  
42 they had dinner. We would do it for a week. And then somebody else  
43 would do it for a week. So, um, at some of my ac-, uh, outside activities  
44 and, uh, worked with the church funerals and things like that.  
45  
46Marilyn Coulter: [46:02] Did your union...

1  
2 Roberta Cannon: Family.  
3  
4 Marilyn Coulter: ...did your union activities extend outside the plant as far as any  
5 organizations that were union based?  
6  
7 Roberta Cannon: Yeah. Um, we did, uh, out, uh, union activities. The Women's Committee  
8 have done, uh, activities, helpin' the homeless. Um, helpin' the Heart  
9 Foundation. The – we did, um, fundraisers, fundraisers to help the, uh,  
10 Heart Foundation. Um, cancer, we donate, make money, donate to the  
11 cancer and to the homeless. Uh, we have, um, [inaudible 46:39] at  
12 Christmas time, we, uh, take up mittens, caps, and, uh, and donate it to, um,  
13 Krista Ray, the children at Christmas time. We – Thanksgivin', we donate  
14 food and Christmas we donate food. So it's, uh, um, outside things and  
15 that's the union has taken part in and still do.  
16  
17 Marilyn Coulter: [47:03] And you're also part of the [inaudible 47:05] groups also, aren't you?  
18  
19 Roberta Cannon: Yes. Yes. I – like I said, when come to mentorin', I was, um, Greater  
20 Lansing Chapter Jack and Jill. Uh, we, uh mentored teenagers. And, uh...  
21  
22 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
23  
24 Roberta Cannon: ...also, we mentor, uh, I was in a organization where, um, the cotillion,  
25 debutantes, um, the young ladies [coughing], um, we mentored them and  
26 taught them how to eti-, no, dance. Stuff like that.  
27  
28 Marilyn Coulter: [47:33] Mm-hm. You also hold offices in Coalition of Labor Union  
29 Women, yes?  
30  
31 Roberta Cannon: I am the treasurer of Coalition of Labor Union Women. I, uh, am a trustee  
32 on the Region 1C women's organization. I am, um, [laughter].  
33  
34 Mike Fleming: [Executive Committee 47:54]?  
35  
36 Roberta Cannon: And I'm on the Executive Committee of...  
37  
38 Mike Fleming: [Inaudible 47:59].  
39  
40 Roberta Cannon: ...NAACP. Uh, so I am involved with a lot of, uh, outside communities  
41 now. In – with the help-, uh, helpin' other people.  
42  
43 Marilyn Coulter: [Inaudible 48:12].  
44  
45 Roberta Cannon: And all those, uh, committees is...  
46

1 Marilyn Coulter: [48:14] Even though you've retired, you continue to do...  
2  
3 Roberta Cannon: Yes.  
4  
5 Marilyn Coulter: ...your union activities?  
6  
7 Roberta Cannon: [Inaudible 48:17]. Right.  
8  
9 Marilyn Coulter: [48:22] And your activism? Roberta, is there anything that, um, you'd like  
10 to share with us that we haven't touched base on?  
11  
12 Roberta Cannon: I think you guys have done a real good job on that. Uh, um, you know,  
13 touchin' base on, um, a little bit of everything, uh, that, uh, we have, uh, that  
14 I've done. And I still continue to do that in – although I have retired. I still  
15 try to stay involved with my union and, uh, and keep busy, uh, and try to,  
16 um, attend the, uh, retirees' potluck and, uh, stay involved and get involved,  
17 uh, with them and, um, still try to help the people. I guess, right now, I  
18 think I'm the youngest one that's retired that attend the retirees. And so, um,  
19 they need a cup a water, I try to get up and get a cup a water. And – or take  
20 their plate to the trash and, and, um, so forth. So I, I, I keep busy. And I  
21 think that it helps me. I, I think I receive my blessin' if I could just help  
22 someone each – do something good for somebody.  
23  
24 Marilyn Coulter: [Inaudible 49:30].  
25  
26 Roberta Cannon: Maybe once a day, uh, I receive my blessin'.  
27  
28 Marilyn Coulter: You do well.  
29  
30 Roberta Cannon: Thank you. Doug Rademacher.  
31  
32 Doug Rademacher: [49:35] Doug Rademacher. Roberta, the Fisher man-, Fisher Body plant is  
33 closing, and we have, uh, uh, you've retired and we're moving on to a new  
34 chapter in Lansing, Michigan with the Delta plant. To someone that's going  
35 to listen to this and read this someday that's never been in the auto industry,  
36 what would you say to the young people, uh, about work and, uh, work  
37 ethic?  
38  
39 Roberta Cannon: Um, yeah. It's – things, uh, are changin' and they're changin' every day.  
40 Um, our labor force is, um, seems like it's ex-, nonexists sometimes and I  
41 get – and it's, um, very depressin' when you see how we made it and how we  
42 come up. Um, I stress up on the young people to, um, continue to – if they  
43 are in the labor force and, and the new plant's comin' along, uh, try to make  
44 it, um, a bigger and better place to work in and try to – the work you're doin'  
45 every single day tryin' to make it a numb-, your number one, um, top. So  
46 that – I feel that when we were number one, Fisher Body still, even though

1 it'll be Delta, um, we made it number one. And it took hard work. It took  
2 solidarity, and you can't do it by yourself. It takes a group a people. And  
3 you have to learn to work, um, not only with, uh, employees within yourself,  
4 your union, you have to work with management also.  
5  
6 And I think if you, if you work as one as a group, you can better yourself  
7 then to be, uh, pull apart, pull apart from each other. So it's still  
8 togetherness anyway you look at it.  
9  
10Marilyn Coulter: Okay.  
11  
12Doug Rademacher: That's wonderful. Uh, I wanna thank you for your time today. And we've,  
13 uh, enjoyed your interview very much and all you've given to the local  
14 union and to the workplace.  
15  
16Marilyn Coulter: And what you continue to do. Thank you.  
17  
18Roberta Cannon: Thank you.  
19  
20Jerri Smith: Thank you.  
21  
22Mike Fleming: Thank you, Roberta.  
23  
24Roberta Cannon: Thanks. [throat clearing]  
25  
26  
27/tl