

**Marilyn Coulter, an African American, discusses her career
as a production worker and union activist
at the Fisher Body plant in Lansing, MI**

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6Doreen Howard: This is Doreen Howard. It's November 22nd, 2005. Um, today we will be
7 interviewing Marilyn Coulter at UAW Local 602. Um. [tsk] Also present
8 is...
9
10Cheryl McQuaid: Cheryl McQuaid.
11
12Doreen Howard: Okay. [0:21] Um, Marilyn, could you please, uh, state your name and spell
13 your last name for the record? And your address.
14
15Marilyn Coulter: Uh, Marilyn, uh, M-A-R-I-L-Y-N Coulter, C-O-U-L-T-E-R. Address is
16 P.O. Box 80334, Lansing, Michigan, 48908.
17
18Doreen Howard: Okay. Um. [tsk] [0:46] Have you always lived in Lansing, Marilyn?
19
20Marilyn Coulter: Yes. I was born at Sparrow Hospital.
21
22Doreen Howard: Sparrow Hospital. Okay. Um. [tsk] [0:54] Are you married? Do you have
23 any children?
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25Marilyn Coulter: I'm single. No children.
26
27Doreen Howard: 0:58] Okay, and, um, do you have any, um, extended education or military
28 service?
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30Marilyn Coulter: No military service. Some college.
31
32Doreen Howard: Okay. Um, [tsk] I'd like to start out with, uh, your recollection of your first
33 day of coming to Fisher Body. [1:19] What is your seniority date and, um,
34 explain your very first day coming in to the plant.
35
36Marilyn Coulter: Well, um, actually, I – I'd like to start back a little bit farther.
37
38Doreen Howard: [Inaudible 1:29].
39
40Marilyn Coulter: I remember when I stood in line to hire in the plant. It was back in 1978. I
41 graduated in '78 and left high school and came to the plant. And I
42 remember my day 'cause the line seemed like it went from the front door,
43 seemed like all the way down Verlinden as far as you could see. It was a
44 hot summer's day. And the bees were out chasin' us and there was some
45 guy that was sellin' pop and I ended up workin' right with, um, with, uh,
46 [Denise Vanalstine 1:56] who was right in line with me. And we got in. I

1 didn't get hired immediately because I was not yet 18 and, um, they – I got
2 the phone call to come in to work and I went in, took the physical, and then
3 they, you know, told me to report to work. And I came in to work and I
4 started out on the day shift. And [sighing] they had us in this little room,
5 then they took us out and I saw this big dirty building and then we fe-, I
6 actually felt like a herd a cattle because [laughter] ya just felt like a piece a
7 meat because you came through and then different supervisors would come
8 up to the group and pull, you know, people out as they needed'm.
9

10 And I still remember – um, I'm 5'10" and I still remember a supervisor
11 who's name was [Manuel Herotta 2:43]. He said give me her because he's
12 tall. Now, granted, at that time, I was tall but I didn't weigh squat. So he
13 had me bolting. My very job down was, um, bolting down front seats and I
14 had to bolt down front seats, put on [track 3:03] covers, put in trash can, put
15 in a trunk lighter. And my utility person, who's a person who covers the
16 jobs, uh, when you're absent, broke me in. His name was Ken. The laziest
17 [laughter] man I ever knew [laughter] 'cause he showed me that job and he
18 just let me go. And I thought this is insane to work that hard. And I was
19 workin' and runnin' and workin' and runnin'. And, you know, e-,
20 everybody was kinda nice and – you know, 'cause it was – there were no
21 other women around where I was at and, uh – but the men, you know, they
22 were like – let me do my thing. So I did that and I remember I didn't have a
23 car, so I walked home 'cause my grandmother, um, didn't live too many
24 blocks away from here. And I walked home and I remember walkin' in and
25 I said I don't believe people work like that. And I – parts of me hurt that I
26 didn't know I had parts of.
27

28 And I remember that day because I was so tired and my body hurt so bad,
29 when my mom was downstairs cooking dinner, I went up to take a bath and
30 she found me in a bath tub of water that was cold and I was sound asleep.
31 And I told her I can't do this. And she said sure you can. So I went back in.
32 But there was a big fight 'cause my father didn't want me to work in the
33 plant anyways. So I did that for a few days – for about a week and then
34 Herotta – his name was Manuel Herotta but he wanted people to call him
35 Herotta. He said well, I just wanted to see if you could do it. I'm gonna put
36 you in a easier job. Okay. That easier job was on a curve w-, and workin'
37 on the outside curve is harder. And it was a s-, it was a called C – [C90
38 4:42] was the option I had to look for. And on that job, you had to put in the
39 door handle covers, run a press, uh, punch out – punch these square holes
40 out, take that out, put another bracket in, and then stock both sides a the line
41 plus install that stuff. And I'm runnin' and I'm workin' and I'm runnin' and
42 I'm workin' and [sighing] I still remember, it was the first time, uh, the line
43 stopped and I saw smoke and I [inaudible 5:11] – all I knew was it was a
44 break and I got to sit down, so I was enjoyin' it.
45

1 It happened the first time and then it happened the third time, then it
2 happened a second time. And Herotta walks up to me, he says how you
3 doin'? I say I'm fine. I said I don't know where these little breaks are
4 comin' from but I sure do appreciate'm. [laughter] And he says well, you're
5 burnin' up the cars. [laughter] And what it was was I wasn't pushing – I was
6 supposed to push door wires back and then run a screw and I wasn't pushin'
7 the wires back far enough. And I was running the screw [laughter] right
8 through the wire, so when they went to go connect the – up to the power
9 source, the doors'd start on fire. [laughter] I burned up...
10
11 Doreen Howard: [laughter]
12
13 Marilyn Coulter: ...3 doors.
14
15 Marilyn Coulter: Ooh.
16
17 Marilyn Coulter: So I thought I was in fear of getting fired.
18
19 Doreen Howard: Hm.
20
21 Marilyn Coulter: And, um, they had initiations and they were puttin' some a the young kids in
22 trunks and lettin'm ride in the circuit over to the repair hole. And I'm
23 claustrophobic, so I'm like please, I'm gonna lose my job [laughter] if you
24 put me in this trunk, so that didn't happen to me. Because it was a big play
25 house. I couldn't believe – I had just got outa high school and I couldn't
26 believe how much they played. I mean, they pass – I mean, it was fun.
27 Once you learned your job and stuff, it was cool but, you know, it was – I
28 couldn't believe some a the stuff that they did. And, um, they'd throw glove
29 balls and they'd hang tails on p-, each other and have water fights and all
30 that stuff but I was workin'. I couldn't do that. And that was just insane.
31 And I...
32
33 Cheryl McQuaid: [6:34] Could you explain what's a glove ball?
34
35 Marilyn Coulter: A glove...
36
37 Cheryl McQuaid: [6:37] What's a tail? Uh.
38
39 Marilyn Coulter: Well, the tail is just plain and simple as they take strips of tape, 'cause we
40 use tape on everything. And they'd take strips of black tape and maybe
41 they'd put tissue paper to it or whatever and just walk behind ya and stick it
42 on your butt and you'd have a tail.
43
44 Cheryl McQuaid: [laughter]
45

1Marilyn Coulter: And [laughter] that's what they did and, you know, they'd get a kick outa
2 seein' how long you could walk around without noticin' ya had a tail.

3
4Doreen Howard: Hm.

5
6Marilyn Coulter: So they did that [sighing] and the glove ball is that – um, when I hired in, we
7 had safety equipment. You had to wear glasses and gloves primarily. D-,
8 b-, well, you wear gloves dependin' on what your job was. Gloves were
9 optional. And they'd take the gloves and roll'm up and then throw'm like a
10 ball. And that's what a glove ball was and you might get popped in the head
11 with one. Or else sometimes people had different little disc or somethin'
12 that might be part of stock or somethin' that'd be turn into a frisbee. Ya
13 might get bumped in the head with one a those. Nothin' that would hurt but
14 you'd see stuff flyin' every now and then. And, um, or you get screws
15 inside your gloves, which was always fun. And, uh – but it was a hard job.

16
17 And I was in fear of losin' my job after, um burnin' up the job and Herotta
18 was a short man. He was, he was a, he was a, he was – actually, with
19 Herotta, his – he was a Hispanic man. And he's about oh, I'd say maybe
20 about 5'4" maybe, if that tall. He was short. And he wore green glasses,
21 which were – they used'm in the body shop for light, so they were dark
22 green. And he'd come and he'd stand with his legs spread apart and his
23 arms crossed and just starin' at me. So I never left the plant and he k-, he
24 followed [laughter] me to my dreams. 'Cause I thought I was gonna get
25 fired. And then along comes another man and then here he is standin' one
26 day just watchin' me and watchin' me and watchin' me and I was scared.
27 I'm like oh, my god, who is this person? And then all of a sudden, my
28 supervisor walks down and this man starts cussin' up one side and down the
29 other of him because this is in '70s, late '70s and people still handled stuff
30 the old hard way. And his name was [Curly Jones 8:40] and come to find
31 out, he was my committee man. And I still remember him saying what are
32 you tryin' to do, kill this kid? And I didn't know who he was but he was my
33 godsend because I had somebody to fight for me and he got that work off
34 my job.

35
36 So I did that for a while and there were a few other ladies that I worked with
37 but this job is pretty – you know, I was still kinda scared and real naïve. I
38 remember I only went – I took all my breaks on my job and I would go to
39 the bathroom and come right back. And I slept every chance I got because I
40 was just exhausted from workin' that job. And I remember I slept – we had
41 a 6-minute wagon. Wagons are a 6-minute break you got before lunch and
42 afterward. And after – in the afternoon, and it was – people from the
43 cafeteria came with a metal cart and it had treats and goodies on [it 9:31]
44 and I didn't want the treats and goodies but those 6 minutes, oh my god, to
45 [chuckle] have 6 minutes I could sleep. So [laughter] it was fine and it got
46 better after he got the work off my job. And then because I didn't have

1 much seniority, I got bumped to night shift. And that was whole nother
2 world because first of all, there were young people. [laughter]
3
4 Doreen Howard: You started to talk a little bit about the wagon.
5
6 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.
7
8 Doreen Howard: [9:56] What was the importance of the wagon other than – uh, that's
9 somethin' – when I came in, it wasn't – no longer in the contract. When
10 was that taken away?
11
12 Marilyn Coulter: Oh, wagon was taken away in early '80s.
13
14 Doreen Howard: In '80s?
15
16 Marilyn Coulter: In the early '80s.
17
18 Doreen Howard: Okay.
19
20 Marilyn Coulter: And then it was just – and then that time was actually just rolled over into
21 wash-up time, I believe. And it just went that way and that way, they didn't
22 have to shut the line down so there wouldn't be those and, you know, those
23 are 6 more minutes that they could go ahead and – 'cause you got 6 minutes
24 in the mornin', 6 minutes in the afternoon. That's all it was.
25
26 Doreen Howard: Oh.
27
28 Marilyn Coulter: A little break. And 6 minutes doesn't sound like a lot but when you're not
29 workin' 6 minutes, it makes a big difference. You can recover. You can
30 run to the bathroom in 6 minutes. You know.
31
32 Doreen Howard: Hm.
33
34 Marilyn Coulter: [Inaudible 10:39] just a little break.
35
36 Doreen Howard: [Inaudible 10:41]. Okay.
37
38 Marilyn Coulter: [Inaudible 10:43].
39
40 Cheryl McQuaid: So you were sayin' you went to the second shift.
41
42 Marilyn Coulter: I went to the second shift and it was better. It was...
43
44 Cheryl McQuaid: [10:46] What job?
45

1 Marilyn Coulter: Oh, I did what was called cowl panel extensions and what that was was – it
2 was, um, right at the top a the hill goin' into [3X 10:55], uh, when that was
3 on the second level. [tsk] And it was the first job coming up on the second
4 level. And, uh, [sighing] we put in – it was a – it's a piece a trim. Y-, I
5 worked what was called soft trim, which was interior trim. And you put it
6 on the door right in the door hinge – where the hinge is right by the dash and
7 you had to run a screw in the top a that and then just put the garnish
8 moldings, which is just stuff to make it kinda pretty, tuck in the carpet and
9 stuff. And I did that but the only thing about it was guess what, there were
10 people that were my age [laughter] and they were kids and we played music
11 and – everybody had a radio. We used to have radio wars. Some people
12 had big radios, some people had bigger radios, and s-, everybody had it on
13 the same station and stereo sound and you were young. And we had a good
14 time because we were kids and we were workin' and night shift and we
15 weren't gettin' outa work till – we workin' 9 hours a day, 6 days a week and
16 we had a good time.

17
18 But when I first went there, it was like oh, my god. The only bad part about
19 it was I had just met everybody on day shift and got comfortable and as soon
20 as I got comfortable on day shift, I got bumped to nights and boom,
21 [inaudible 12:02] I don't know anybody anymore. So nobody knows me, I
22 get broken in, and I'm gettin' to know the job. And, um, it's hard workin'
23 [inaudible 12:14] the line somethin' like that 'cause you were attached to a
24 air hose. And I remember when I did that, I didn't know anybody [tsk] but
25 that particular night, I was workin' for a man by the name of [Gordy Hessler
26 12:24] who was like a nervous Nellie [sniffing] and I broke 2 windshields,
27 which also caused the line to be stop. It also caused my [laughter]
28 supervisor to come down [laughter] to me and tell me – um, he gave me 30
29 minutes to almost an hour off the line and he said I want ya to get yourself
30 together but when you come back, we can't have this. You can't break
31 [inaudible 12:46] – you can't, um, be breakin' windshields and shit rolls
32 downhill and you're at the bottom. So it was basically get my act together
33 or I was gonna be fired, so. But needless to say, that night, walking out to
34 the parking lot, everybody knew me. And so [laughter] after that night, I
35 was no longer a stranger to the people on the night shift. So that's what I
36 did. Workin' nights. Um, but I did a lotta different jobs in the tor-, course a
37 my – course a 20-some-odd years with workin'.

38
39 Doreen Howard: Hm. Doreen Howard. Um. [tsk] [13:20] Were you ever laid off during your
40 time [in here 13:23]?

41
42 Marilyn Coulter: [sighing] Yeah. We were – I was laid off a couple a times, um, [tsk] for
43 various reasons. We had one time – I think it was during the oil embargo or
44 whatever. We were laid off for a long time and it was fine by me because
45 we got unemployment and SUB pay and SUB pay is something that helps to
46 supplement whatever you don't get in unemployment to help give you close

1 to 95 percent a your pay. [tsk] So it was fun for me because I was goin' to
2 school and livin' at [clunking] home, so it didn't really bother me when I
3 was laid off for that. But often times – but I always did level back in and
4 that means that you'll take whatever job is available and so nobody with
5 more seniority than you can work in the plant – less seniority than you can
6 work in the plant if you're willing to do that job. So then I leveled into paint
7 shop and that was horrible [laughter] because I, um, sprayed paint. 'Cause
8 once again, being 5'10", people grab you for whatever and, um, I did door
9 jams and deck lids and I spread – sprayed primer. And, uh, [sighing], you
10 know, biggest thing with that is you don't wanna have sags but you had to
11 wear protective clothing. You had to wear coveralls. You had to wear
12 boots. You had to wear breathing apparatus with a filter in it so you look
13 like a Martian and you had to wear a bonnet on your head [inaudible 14:41]
14 ya had gray hair all day. And the floors were sticky and you were inside a
15 booth, so you were isolated and you really couldn't talk and you really
16 couldn't read because the stuff would end up with paint all over it, so it was
17 kinda boring. And you just sprayed the paint and just look forward to your
18 breaks. And I hated it and I was – I remember him sayin' well, you could
19 stay on days and work in here. I'm like no way. I'm going [laughter] back
20 to Trim and that's what I did and I ran back to Trim. And I had leveled off
21 couple a times and, um, I'd gotten in there again and then another time I laid
22 off was when they were, um, adding the mezzanine to Paint. And I
23 remember I was doing pit fill then and, um, that was some putty that ya had
24 to spray on the seams and then scrape it off before it dried. And it was fine
25 until they were rebuilding and we had to get moved because we had pebbles
26 falling on our head. And once again, the union came and saved us because
27 our safety man made'm – made us move us a few feet. I didn't believe we
28 had to have the union to come down to tell us to move us a few feet 'cause
29 we have pebbles fallin' on our head but we did. And it worked. [coughing]
30 But then I went back to Trim. When everything went back, I always went
31 back to Trim.
32
33Doreen Howard: Um, [inaudible 15:51] – Doreen Howard. I wanted to take you back to, um,
34 something that you touched on earlier. When you came into Trim, you had
35 said that there was no other women in your area. [16:05] I'd like to know
36 how were you treated as a...
37
38Marilyn Coulter: [sniffing]
39
40Doreen Howard: ...woman and, um, how were you treated being a...
41
42Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.
43
44Doreen Howard: ...minority...
45
46Marilyn Coulter: [tsk] Well...

1
2Doreen Howard: ...woman on top...
3
4Marilyn Coulter: ...init-...
5
6Doreen Howard: ...of that?
7
8Marilyn Coulter: ...initially when I got around the corner, [Vickie Britton 16:19] was
9 working around there but [coughing] for the most part, in Trim, [coughing]
10 you know, I was in my – I was 18, lotta the other people were in their late
11 20s, early 30s, mid 30s [sniffing], um, so it was fine. There were a couple a
12 people who treated you like you were a piece of meat. [tsk] And, um, I can
13 remember certain incidents that happened. And, you know, basically you
14 had certain people who would cross their bounds but once you told'm where
15 you were comin' from, they didn't bother you too much except [tsk] you'd
16 get the cat calls, people whoo-who'o'n, baby, and stuff like that but it used to
17 tickle me because [tsk] sometimes I'd had on coveralls with a bandana on
18 my head, you couldn't see anything, and people were whoopin' and
19 hollerin' like they were people stranded on a desert island and hadn't seen a
20 woman in a million years. And had that but for the most part, guys treated
21 you with respect. If they knew that you weren't gonna be, um, [taken].
22 [Inaudible 17:26] you had some who tried to take liberties but some a the
23 guys though, they t-, they, they took you under your wing, you know, and
24 they let people know don't treat'm like that. So the guys would come and
25 stick up for you but you learned not to go to sleep and not to bend over.
26 [laughter]
27
28Doreen Howard: Hm.
29
30Marilyn Coulter: 'Cause if you went to sleep, you might get your shoes tied together and, um,
31 if you fell asleep, you might get pi-, if you bent over, you might get pinched
32 or – in the behind. They had a thing that they used to do that I had never
33 seen before. Blew my mind. That was called goosin'. [laughter] And the
34 men were pinchin' other people in the behind. Men were pinchin' other
35 men in the behind and I'd never seen that in high school but I did see it in
36 Fisher Body. And found out it was called goosin'.
37
38Doreen Howard: Hm. Um.
39
40Cheryl McQuaid: Cheryl McQuaid. When you – you said that when you hired in here, [tsk]
41 your father did not want you to work in the...
42
43Marilyn Coulter: Uh-huh.
44
45Cheryl McQuaid: ...factory.
46

1 Marilyn Coulter: [tsk] No.
2
3 Cheryl McQuaid: Um. But you hired in here anyway. [18:27] Why did you hire in here and
4 did you have any other family that worked here?
5
6 Marilyn Coulter: Well, [sighing] my grandfather – my stepgrandfather worked up in Paint but
7 he was in and out here before I'd ever – and I actually knew where he went
8 to work but they never talked about where they worked. My father worked
9 in the foundry but he never talked about it. It wasn't until later years I even
10 found out that my father was a union rep. It was just somethin' he didn't
11 talk about. It was the factory life was not a life that he wanted for his girls.
12 My other 2 sisters went to college. Um. [tsk] I was supposed to go to
13 Western Michigan University; however, I came into Fisher Body University
14 and got a whole nother [laughter] type of education.
15
16 Doreen Howard: [laughter]
17
18 Marilyn Coulter: And, um, [tsk] I remember the night – my dad didn't even know we, we had
19 come to, uh, stand in line to get a job in here and when I th-, and I still
20 remember the night that, um, I got hired in and there was a big discussion
21 and that was probably one of the most uncomfortable dinners at my house.
22 And it was one a the – definitely the most loudest dinners 'cause my dad
23 was very adamant about me not coming in here. He did not want me in
24 here. And, and, I think that might've been because he was in a foundry and
25 he didn't want factory life for his daughters and later on, with the physical
26 problems that I've gotten from workin', I can understand that too. But I
27 have no real regrets for comin' in here.
28
29 Cheryl McQuaid: [19:48] But why did you come here?
30
31 Marilyn Coulter: I came in here because I wanted – I was gonna go to school [tsk] but I said I
32 wanted to go ahead and take a year off first and make some money. And
33 actually, I got in here and I started makin' money and I was supposed to go
34 in January the following year to Western but I just never did. I never went.
35 I got caught up as they say.
36
37 Cheryl McQuaid: [20:13] When you hired in, was the – was this plant called Fisher Body?
38
39 Marilyn Coulter: When I hired in, it was indeed called Fisher Body. And it was a coach and,
40 you know, they had Body by Fisher and that's, and that's what it is. It's –
41 the name has changed but, you know, if you say Lansing Car Assembly or
42 [BLC 20:29], people really don't know. Th-, they just say Fisher Body.
43 They refer to it as Fisher Body.
44

1 Cheryl McQuaid: [20:35] Can you explain some of the changes within the plant that you've
2 seen since it was Fisher Body to the day before it closed down? Um.
3 Supervisory changes...
4

5 Marilyn Coulter: Hm.
6

7 Cheryl McQuaid: ...building changes...
8

9 Marilyn Coulter: Oh, yeah. When you – when I first hired in, there was – our, our facility had
10 2 – actually 2 plants in 1. [sniffing] You had A line a B line. I hired in on
11 the B line, which was the big car line and the A line was the Cutlass line.
12 And they ran [tsk] parallel to each other on both floors and, um, so it was 2,
13 you know, 2 floors and so one a the first changes was they took the big cars
14 and kept'm upstairs and then they took the little cars and put'm downstairs.
15 And so you had upstairs and a downstairs and there was A and B line and
16 then later came [M and C 21:23] line. So that was the line change. You saw
17 chains being cut out, you saw paint shops bein' extended and those are some
18 a the physical changes they did. They went to putting on, um – oh, we have
19 things called Andon Cords that you could stop the line, so therefore, it made
20 it a little bit easier so you could just stop sections of the line instead of the
21 whole line being shut down. Which was a job saver because if there was a
22 problem in one line, you didn't lose a whole lotta line because the other line
23 can keep on goin' and the other line could, could build up a bank and build
24 up. So you had those. You had automation come in. We had a lot of robots
25 come in in the body shop. I never worked in the body shop but, um, there
26 was a lot of robots that were placed in the body shop during our time here
27 when they started the GM [X120 22:15] cars and they put a lot of robots
28 there. And actually the – we went from tag relief, which – meaning a relief
29 per-, a relief person will come and relieve you to a mass relief where
30 everybody would be taking reliefs at the same time. And that would be like
31 body shop and, um, paint shop and trim shop. They all had their own
32 different start times and so they would have mass release. I believe, uh,
33 body shop or – no, Paint still had tag relief but everybody else had mass
34 relief where we shut down. And, um...
35

36 Cheryl McQuaid: [22:53] Did you notice...
37

38 Marilyn Coulter: ...that was a big change.
39

40 Cheryl McQuaid: ...any big difference between the tag relief to the mass relief? Were they
41 were any major problems...
42

43 Marilyn Coulter: [sniffing]
44

45 Cheryl McQuaid: ...with that whole system or...?
46

1Marilyn Coulter: The biggest problem for me [laughter] bein' a woman was when you have
2 mass relief, there's less time in the bathroom 'cause [laughter] you have to
3 spend more time in the bathroom because there weren't that many stalls. So
4 that was the biggest problem. I mean, it was good in the sense that you
5 could maybe sit down and visit with your friends and everybody could sit
6 down and take a break at the same time. But, you know – so there's goods
7 and bads to, to each one. And, uh, that and we went from having managers
8 who came from the rank and file and moved up to contracts. That happened
9 – to contract supervisors. That happened like from 2000 on and that was
10 like you had somebody who came from the line, knew what it was about,
11 knew what workin' the factory was to somebody who might've been a
12 manager at Meijer's who had – who knew doodly squat about the line and
13 they were managers. And so that was some – that was a change that I didn't
14 like. Not that I have any problem with workin' for kids but, you know, it's
15 hard to have somebody who doesn't know anything about something tellin'
16 you what to do 'cause they don't know anyways.

17
18 A big change – one a the biggest positive things, and I was a part of a lot of
19 those changes, were when they started some a the different programs where
20 they had employee involvement, first one being QWL, uh, team build
21 processes, EP – employee participation groups, and they had product
22 development team representatives where they started letting hourly people
23 get involved with the workings of the plant. And that was, that was cool. I
24 thought that was a big change and it was a step in the right direction
25 because, you know, if you do somethin' 5 – you know, 500 times a day, I
26 think you pretty know what you're talkin' about. And that was, that was a
27 good, smart stroke of business for General Motors to get employees
28 involved in the process and that's – and suggestions. Um. They had benefit
29 reps, they had [adaptive 25:00] coordinators, which were people who placed
30 injured workers and, you know, these were people who, who came off the
31 floor and most of'm knew what was going on.

32
33 And then, um, I did quality work life but one thing I did like was when they
34 had product development representatives. Those came around in the '90s
35 and that's where they allowed hourly representatives to be liaisons between
36 the engineers and the plant. And they had the same equal voice and say as
37 all the engineers did. You did match checks, uh, you did pilot builds, and
38 you had [a say on something 25:35] to try to ward off things that would
39 happen in the beginning. And I think that was some things that we had. We
40 had, um – and through that project, we had guest assemblers and I thought
41 that was great 'cause engineers would make things in theory and then they'd
42 come in and they'd do their job on the line and sometimes they found out
43 what they wanted to do on paper wasn't workin' on the line. You know,
44 doin' something in controlled environment versus doin' it on the line, whole
45 nother story. So that was what was good about it. And then, um, you know,
46 some people might say it started out with creature comforts but, you know, a

1 picnic table or a chair may not mean much to a manager but to an hourly
2 person, havin' a chair that you can sit down on for 5 minutes to get a break
3 means a lot, so. We did those types of things. And those are some of the
4 changes that were good.
5
6 Cheryl McQuaid: [26:27] Did you, as an employee, ever participate in check pools, um,
7 raffles, dinners?
8
9 Marilyn Coulter: Yeah. [laughter] Check pool was where you played poker off your checks
10 and, um, it was your last 3 and change. And, um, my first paycheck, I
11 remember the guys asked me did I wanna play poker to get in check pool.
12 I'm like no. No, no, no. Best check pool, a huge pot. Best check pool ever,
13 I had 4 aces. And I didn't play it. Everybody [laughter] wanted to like play
14 my check because I had it but I, uh, didn't play. And I did play after that
15 and I won a couple a times. You know, you win a few bucks. And we did
16 that and then we had raffles. Usually when we had raffles, we did it for
17 [sighing] – to help somebody and if nobody knows anything else, General
18 Motors UAW employees, they always help. The be-, benefit dinners for
19 people, they've done – raffled off quilts to help people. Members who may
20 have had cancer or had their houses caught on fire or, um – I remember the
21 first time I was ever out and I was sick. I got the hugest basket I'd ever seen
22 in my life and it came from my coworkers and I – and it just brought tears to
23 my eyes co-, when that came to my house 'cause I didn't think anybody
24 really knew me that well or cared that much about me and then I got this
25 huge basket. I could not believe it. It was great. And, um, when my father
26 passed away, they took up a n-, a nice collection for me and, you know,
27 really family, so.
28
29 And we would do those kinda benefit dinners and then we did dinners just
30 because it was Friday or Saturday and we had to work. And I used to put a
31 lotta those together and that's where we'd all pitch in money for, for the
32 meat and everybody would bring in – it'd be a potluck and you brought your
33 best thing or whatever and for a while there, I lived right off fast food
34 highway, so it might be a thing where I pick up a bucket a chicken and
35 everybody would bring somethin' to pass and we got through our day that
36 way and it was – and that was good, you know. And then sometimes people
37 had little coffee shops and they'd have doughnuts in the morning and, uh,
38 Quality Dairy in Lansing had a place called, um – they had doughnuts called
39 grab and go, so on Thursday, we'd take turns gettin' a grab and go box of
40 doughnuts to have with our coffee in the morning and it's just one of those
41 types of things that help bring people closer together and it does.
42
43 Doreen Howard: Doreen Howard. Uh. You talked about employees having coffee inside...
44
45 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.
46

1Doreen Howard: ...the plant. Um. [29:00] Was that something that was prevalent?
2

3Marilyn Coulter: Prevalent and illegal [laughter] you might say because they – uh, but it was
4 one a those things where, um, pe-, people had coffee pots and we would,
5 you know – some people had coffee pots, some people sold pop, um, some
6 people sold little knickknacks, so it was close to the job and they'd have
7 their little stores goin' through. And – but primarily it was coffee and coffee
8 would be an-, anywheres from a dime to 15, 20 cents. And the people who
9 sold it at the end would probably do pizzas or doughnuts or somethin' like
10 that at the end. But it was, you know, just gettin' a good cup a coffee versus
11 crappy vending machine coffee. And it was, you know – I [laughter]
12 remember when I hired into Fisher Body, I didn't drink coffee and I just
13 thought it was dirty water and then I was like give it to me intravenously
14 [laughter] because you, you work in here all those hours and goin' to school,
15 you start drinkin' coffee.
16

17Doreen Howard: Uh, you said that it was against plant rules.
18

19Marilyn Coulter: Yeah.
20

21Doreen Howard: [29:57] How did management take people having these small little
22 businesses [inaudible 30:03]?
23

24Marilyn Coulter: Periodically they'd come through when people would get outa hand and
25 shut'm down if they were gettin' too much as-, beside themselves. They'd
26 come through and shut'm down if they caught'm but for the most part, you
27 know, we did what we did, you know? You're in here 9 – you know, before
28 we went to 8 hours. 'Cause you're in here 9 hours a day, 6 days a week.
29 Skilled trades people were in here 7 days a week. You do what you have to
30 do to get by, you know, 'cause 9 hours a day 6 days a week, 2 Saturdays on,
31 1 off, it gets pretty monotonous and you have to do what you gotta do. And
32 we were in here and the supervisors were right in here with us, so.
33

34Cheryl McQuaid: And the supervisors probably...
35

36Marilyn Coulter: Drank coffee too.
37

38Cheryl McQuaid: ...wanted that good cup a coffee.
39

40Marilyn Coulter: They drank...
41

42Doreen Howard: [laughter]
43

44Marilyn Coulter: ...the coffee too.
45

46Doreen Howard: [Inaudible 30:41].

1
2 Marilyn Coulter: They drank the coffee too and I think that would – I would say that that’s
3 probably in any, any place of business, you know? Um. And they still – the
4 cafeteria, people still [laid up 30:51] there too. So they’d – so, you know,
5 some people brought their lunch in, some people went out for lunch, some
6 people, you know, bought stuff from the vending machines. You know.
7
8 Doreen Howard: Uh, Doreen Howard. Um. [31:05] How has the supervisory techniques
9 changed from when you first started here till now?
10
11 Marilyn Coulter: Best thing I can say about supervisors, when I hired in, [tsk] supervisors let
12 ya do your job. They knew you could do your job and they let you do your
13 job. We were called the capital a quality because we did good work. We
14 worked together. Supervisors, you know, it was like a unwritten rule, you
15 know. You take care a your supervisor and your supervisor’ll take care a
16 you, i.e., meant, you don’t send no crap down the line, you got no crap from
17 him and he took care a you. And, um, that was the biggest deal. They
18 didn’t try to babysit you. If certain things happened and I remember, you
19 know – like I said, we were young.
20
21 I still remember 1 person, she, um – we have a place across the street called
22 Harry’s and, you know, people drank. Some people drank, of course they
23 did. In all jobs, they drink. But it was her birthday and she didn’t get to go
24 home, so – and she had never had a drink in her life and, um, she drank
25 Yukon Gold [laughter] and she came back and she literally passed out. And
26 we had cots downstairs in the bathroom and us ladies went and put her in the
27 bathroom and our supervisor back then, he said you guys did it to her, you
28 cover her job. And no junk better not get [inaudible 32:27] job. Nobody got
29 burned that day. It was her birthday. He couldn’t let her go ‘cause we
30 didn’t have any extras. And, um, you know, they c-, and the guys covered
31 her job. They got her hammered [laughter] meaning [splotted 32:40], so
32 they covered her job. And that’s what we did. You know, um, we have
33 team build now but we used to have team build back then too in the sense
34 that if you had to go to the bathroom and the – you know, the pickup guy
35 was busy, we’d cover your job and let you go. And we worked together,
36 you know. We’ve always been a team. Little pockets a little families in our
37 own little community. ‘Cause d-, Fisher Body is – you have anywheres
38 from 3000 to 7000 people work in a place, it becomes a community within
39 itself.
40
41 Doreen Howard: [Inaudible 33:10]. [tsk] Um. Doreen Howard. [33:18] Can you explain
42 some a the environmental changes that occurred during your course of
43 employment here?
44
45 Marilyn Coulter: [sighing] Environment in terms of the bi-, the facility...
46

1Doreen Howard: Yeah.
2

3Marilyn Coulter: ...the air, what?
4

5Doreen Howard: Y-, well, all that. Um. You t-, you started to talk a little bit about some a
6 the changes and they made additions to the plant...
7

8Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.
9

10Doreen Howard: ...and, and things like that. [33:43] Did – how did that affect the, the
11 internal environment? Was it cleaner? Was it brighter? Was – you know,
12 did they do things to...
13

14Marilyn Coulter: Periodically they...
15

16Doreen Howard: ...to...
17

18Marilyn Coulter: ...paint...
19

20Doreen Howard: ...for that?
21

22Marilyn Coulter: ...but it was a factory, you know. It was, it was lights and stuff like that.
23 It's a factory, you know. And, you know, they put a clean room in up at the
24 paint department to keep dust and stuff off the paint so you had to wear
25 special lint-free clothing and stuff like that. But as far as Trim, you know,
26 as far as the environment, a lot of – every now and then – I think I can
27 remember'm paintin' it once. And then they'd clean it. And what they
28 would do is when we had ch-, model changeovers or Christmas holidays,
29 they'd wash the walls. I did that. You know, I'd sign up to work those
30 changeovers and we'd seal floors and we'd wash walls and it's not easy
31 washing. Factory walls get very dirty. And ya had to use some stuff called
32 tack cloth and clean off the – and, you know, we'd clean it off and we'd
33 spruce it up, stuff like that. They put in certain safety railings and stuff like
34 that to help people. [sighing] Um. Those types of things that happened.
35 And it was, [inaudible 34:51] different. Yeah.
36

37Doreen Howard: [34:53] So in general, the trim department where you worked was a fairly
38 clean department?
39

40Marilyn Coulter: Y-...
41

42Doreen Howard: As far as...
43

44Marilyn Coulter: ...uh, yeah, I, I would say...
45

46Doreen Howard: ...dirt and noise and...

1
2 Marilyn Coulter: ...you know, you know, there were certain p-...
3
4 Doreen Howard: ...pollutants in the air?
5
6 Marilyn Coulter: ...there were certain pockets. One a the things that happened is we used to
7 have, um, [tsk] noise increase with [inaudible 35:11] things called balers.
8 Balers is what they would put cardboard boxes in. And when they reduced
9 out the, um, sanitation department, environmental services, they put balers
10 in different areas in the plant and they would break down the boxes. And,
11 uh, they would put those boxes in the balers and those were noisy. Because
12 ya used to have – you know, they used to come through and environmental
13 services people, they'd sweep your area and that was one a the changes.
14 They made it later so employees were supposed to sweep their own general
15 area in their own little teams and groups. You know, that was a change that
16 they made. Um. That was noisy.
17
18 Doreen Howard: Hm.
19
20 Marilyn Coulter: That was one a things that they made.
21
22 Doreen Howard: Hm. Uh, Doreen Howard. [36:00] When you originally hired in, how did
23 you clock in and out of the facility?
24
25 Marilyn Coulter: Well, when we first hired in, you used to have the old little punch cards.
26 You had, you had to wear a little badge that had your little employee
27 number on it but I t-, unfortunately, I turned mine back in. [tsk] And ya have
28 to just go in and they had a little punch clock that they used to have in a lotta
29 buildings. Then later we went to, uh, [computer] [inaudible 36:26] system
30 where you just had a card that you swiped and that little green light come on
31 and make a little noise and said that you punched in or punched out and that
32 was it.
33
34 Doreen Howard: Um.
35
36 Marilyn Coulter: But.
37
38 Cheryl McQuaid: Cheryl McQuaid. [36:48] Marilyn, if you were to pick your best memory of
39 Fisher Body, what would it be?
40
41 Marilyn Coulter: [sighing] [tsk] My best memory. I have to say, I have a lot of memories.
42 You know, workin' with the people in here, we had a good time. And, um,
43 when we used to work nights, [inaudible 37:12] sometimes the lines would
44 go down or they'd break down and we had radios and we would dance.
45 And, you know, we made the best of our time. And there wasn't any real
46 best time. [tsk] Um. [sighing] I think some of my best times happened was

1 once I really got involved with the union and it – and when I got involved in
2 some a the programs and said I had a change. Oh, I take it back. One of my
3 best times I was involved in [tsk] a process and, um, in one a the programs,
4 we had downtime. I was a trainer for a while with downtime training and
5 that was some school. We had [a Main Street 37:51] school and, um, I was
6 a teacher and so here I was, 23 years old, it was 1987...
7
8Cheryl McQuaid: [coughing]
9
10Marilyn Coulter: ...and these people did not want to be there because they were laid off. It
11 was summertime and they had to come back in and take classes and I taught
12 the, uh, human resource and development part, you know, team building,
13 how to get along, problem solving. And there was this one young – this one
14 man. He was a older gentleman. Brought a paper in every day. And, um,
15 we came to a part where people had to share their part. And back then, I
16 was unfortunately a small girl and I says hey, let's take a break. Let's take a
17 break. 'Cause he was gettin' really weird. So I went outside with him and I
18 asked him not to be offended, but could he read? And he said no. And I
19 said that's okay, we can work with that. And, um, so I read him his part and
20 he went back and was a, you know, active part in that class again. And it
21 was great. One a the best days was when he came and told me that he did
22 go back [inaudible 38:53] his GED and I have to say, that was the best part
23 'cause I impacted somebody's life. And he was able to read now and he
24 went back and got a GED and that was one of my happiest moments, I'd
25 say, when he came and told me that he got his GED. And to know that you
26 helped somebody. That was awesome.
27
28 And then also when I had people who came back and said well, [sniffing]
29 from taking the communication classes, it helped them with their kids. That
30 was awesome too. [papers rustling] Um. Yeah, I enjoyed when we had
31 those classes and that was another a those things where hourly people were
32 able to teach other ones. That was cool. I liked that. And, uh, [sighing]
33 let's see. Hm. And gettin' involved with the union. That was fun. You
34 know, once you [inaudible] [impacting 39:39] lives and changing things.
35 Because it's like when you say s-, I was, I was a civil rights chair in the
36 union [tsk] and I remember when I hired in, there wasn't a whole lotta thing
37 about sexual harassment and stuff like that and I didn't know that I had
38 those rights. I just knew I had to take care of myself but when I found out
39 that the union was there for me and I could have some impact on some a
40 those things so you didn't have to look at the dirty books and – 'cause some
41 men, they wore – read dirty – I mean, it was part a life. It's not bad, it's not
42 good, it just was so – you know, the whole country changed. And we had to
43 change with it.
44
45Doreen Howard: Doreen Howard. Uh, you said that you were the civil rights chair for the
46 union.

1
2 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.
3
4 Doreen Howard: [40:21] Uh, when did you, um, get elected to that position?
5
6 Marilyn Coulter: Well, [sighing] I first – they had elections and first I was a member. I was a
7 member of the – of it. We were 3-year terms...
8
9 Doreen Howard: Mm-hm.
10
11 Marilyn Coulter: ...and, um, I did 2 stints on the committee and then I think in the late '80s,
12 early '90s, I became chair and I did that right up until 2000. So all of my
13 '90s, I was chair. All of the '90s, I was the chair. And, um, part of, yeah,
14 part of the '80s. And it was good.
15
16 Doreen Howard: Um. [40:59] I'm interested in, um, [tsk] as a woman's perspective with
17 union involvement, how were you perceived when you went and, and went
18 through the facility and talked with people and tell them that you're running
19 for civil rights chair? H-, how were you perceived by other fellow
20 employees?
21
22 Marilyn Coulter: Um. Being – [tsk] given – first of all, given the fact that it was civil rights,
23 you have to realize we have people here from all walks a life, you know.
24 Uh, you had people who were good people, bad people, prejudiced people,
25 nonprejudiced people. So you had – it was like any other election. Some
26 people back then – when you first started out, you give a little card and you
27 talk about people. I, I believe in talkin' to people, askin' questions. You
28 had some people who wouldn't even look at you. You had some people
29 who would take your card and throw it in the trash right in front a you. And
30 then you had some people who go oh, wow. We have this. That's what it
31 does. You know. And they sat there and th-, the first time I remember –
32 and, and, you know, and then here again, you're a woman and you have to
33 think about it. On any given day, I could look to the left of me and right of
34 me and around of me and see nobody that looked like me. [laughter] You
35 know? I wasn't treated illy but, you know, there was no comfort zone to
36 look and say, oh, there's somebody with me. And I had the comfort zone of
37 women but it's about – as a person of color, no. [sniffing] And that's, and
38 that's – and that makes for a long day, particularly when, you know, you had
39 to learn to acquire a taste for country music.
40
41 But [laughter] anyways, back to n-, election. And so some people, they
42 didn't even know about it and they didn't know how it could be used. And,
43 um, so we went there. The first election that I went, I put in a good
44 showing. Three of us were running and I remember the guys said you're not
45 gonna win, you know. You're not gonna – and I came in second, so I didn't
46 feel bad about that. And I – went and got some more time under my belt

and seniority's a big thing. And, um, I got a little bit more seniority, went through again, I, I won by acclamation actually. And then, um, people got into the process and just try to, you know, get people to understand a little bit more about it.

Doreen Howard: Um. [43:07] As the civil rights chair, um, could you explain what that job entailed?

Marilyn Coulter: Yeah. In 1946 at the n-, at our UAW National Constitutional Convention, they started what was called the fair practices committee, which later became the civil rights committee. And what they do is, they go on fact-finding mission when a 6A grievance is involved. A 6A grievance is, is a discrimination grievance, um, or a sexual harassment-type grievance or some type of conflict. Uh. The civil rights committee is considered to be one of the most special committees [inaudible 43:45]. It's one of the only – it is the only standing committee that has a right to be involved in a bargaining unit issue. We are not part of the bargaining unit. We work with the bargaining unit at the bargaining chair's, um, [sniffing] request. And at that time, say for example if there was a sexual discrimination or sexual harassment, we'd go on a fact-finding mission to find out, investigating, and, um, have hearings to see whether or not the, uh, complaint has merit. And then you let'm know whether it does or not and then they – and it goes back to them. [tsk] But you do the investigation for them. Sometimes a lotta times we just would – you know, primarily what you wanna do is you wanna get the, uh – whatever the offense is stopped. If it's a hostile work environment, if there's some kind of conflict, you wanna get it resolved. 'Cause you [inaudible 44:36] be able to quit. Uh. [sighing] It could be a supervisor against employee or employee against employee. If it's an employee against employee, you'd do what – you do a hearing, [tsk] which is held right here at the, uh, union hall and, um, the civil rights chair is the highest presiding officer at the hearing.

[tsk] We also do equal application where we, um, sit down with members of management from labor relations department to talk about the environment. What types of things are going on? You might say well, maybe we h-, we're gettin' a lotta complaints outa Trim. Um. Maybe somebody's hanging nooses in p-, in Paint. And, um, we would deal with those issues. And then we also tried to have educational programs to get people to understand like what sexual harassment is, what discrimination is, and we ch-, and actually, one of the [inaudible 45:29] I tried to do was try to take the black face off of civil rights because unfortunately a lotta people think that that's what civil rights were. So many people are covered under that umbrella. Particularly working here, a lot of us don't realize that the handicapped are and the ADA, um, which is, um, oh, my goodness. Americans with Disability Act. A lot of us, because we get injured here, we – in later, fall in place under that. [clicking] But one of the most things that I

was proud of as a civil rights person, chairperson, was we had equal application committee meetings with, um, management personnel and they were quarterly meetings.

But one of the things that we started was we do – we had housekeeping tours and safety tours. So what I started was – I started an environmental civil rights tour. And what that would be was we would take random areas to see if supervisors were indeed enforcing the rules, meaning there weren't no girly pictures bein' hung up, there weren't offensive materials. And we would look for offensive materials because I wanted supervisors to see offensive material the same way as they saw – noticed screws on the floor or trash on the floor or safety items so that we – 'cause sometimes – some – in some areas, you might have 2 or 3 women work in an area. They shouldn't have to look at a bunch a people – you know, 'cause my motto was if you wanna [inaudible 46:51] look at your girly pictures, look at'm at home. Don't do it in the shop. Because we wanted to make a comfortable work environment for everybody. And understand me, by and large, everybody was nice and respectful but we even had men who were appreciative when I would do that because we have a lotta people used to look at us as beer-drinking bowlers but we had a lot of educated people in there, we had a lotta Christians on the line. And it's hard for a man to make a complaint about that because then, you know, what are you, a girly boy? You know?

So they – men would come and say well, Marilyn, you know, they got this [inaudible 47:24] and I don't really appreciate that because we, you know, we had plant tours with kids and stuff comin' through and it stopped and I had supervisors saying, you know, Marilyn, is it okay? And they started lookin' at it and they started takin' stuff down. And that's what I wanted to accomplish with that and they did. And it cleaned up the area. Because, you know, back in the '70s, you [laughter] know, before a lotta the law started getting enforced, it wasn't pretty all the time in certain areas, you know? It was – you know, we were women comin' into a man's world. [tsk] And so I appreciated that. And like I said, most of the guys were like family and they treated ya really well. And like anyplace, just like a doctor's office, lawyer's office, or any other corporate office, sometimes people st-, overstep their bounds. But this let them, you know, reinforce where their bounds were.

Uh. Doreen Howard. [48:17] What is your most appreciated bargained benefit?

I'll tell you what. [sighing] Um. I really appreciate the f-, every time I go to get my medications refilled or have a doctor's appointment, it's my healthcare benefits. But I'll tell you, I appreciate all that the UAW has done for not only me but for the community because anyplace we are, the community does better also and people often come off of us. The biggest

1 problem, I think, with the union is that people – we fail to educate people on
2 all that we did. So a lotta the people came in young, they would think that
3 oh, it was Generous Motors and it was things that were f-, fought for at the
4 bargaining table and anything that we get at the bargaining table can be
5 taken away with legislation. So anything that the UAW has done for us has
6 been a good thing. And so I, I, um, I've only worked, I've only worked for
7 General Motors and so I've always belonged to the UAW but I would never
8 wanna work anyplace where a union wasn't. And that's it.
9

10Doreen Howard: Doreen Howard. Um. Earlier you – I asked you about education.
11

12Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.
13

14Doreen Howard: [49:38] Did you use the tuition assistance program to...
15

16Marilyn Coulter: Most assuredly.
17

18Doreen Howard: ...further your education?
19

20Marilyn Coulter: Most assuredly. And, um, once again, another bargained benefit. And, um,
21 tuition assistance to help us – you know, if people want to advance
22 themselves, UAW GM has made it available for them. And it doesn't
23 necessarily have to be, you know, rocket science or an engineering thing.
24 You might wanna learn how to do something that might be a hobby that'll
25 turn into something. Um. Whatever. They even make it so if you wanna go
26 and go to a gym just to get physically fit, you could do that too. Uh. Those
27 are some good things. We have so many talented people, educated people.
28 A lotta times, people don't realize the, the, the wealth of education that's
29 [inaudible 50:25] here. And, you know, General Motors has realized that,
30 which is why they have a lotta these people now in, um, nontraditional job
31 assignments because, you know, the UAW GM has negotiated good
32 paychecks and good benefits and you have a lot of people who have [tsk]
33 [sighing] full degrees or maybe the, the, the field was filled and so now
34 they're able to put that to use here in the plant. And they have. Some of'm
35 have gone on to be managers and, um, [tsk] some of'm just have what's
36 considered a nontraditional job assignment, i.e., they're not building cars but
37 they have something to do with the plant. And I think that's good.
38

39 And we have, have – I – we, we didn't – we kinda talked a little bit about
40 vending. We have so many talented people. I know, um, the rocking chair
41 that I got for my nephew when he was a little boy was built by one of our
42 members. He wasn't a skilled trades person. He was just somebody who
43 knew how to do it. I've had dolls made by people who crocheted and they
44 sold things and god knows I've – think I've bought everything from
45 everybody's [laughter] child who's every worked through here. 'Cause you
46 sell things for your kids. But they have so many different people who have

1 so many different talents in here. Everything from jewelry making to wood
2 burning to making dolls, whatever and, you know, there's a, th-, th-, there's
3 a talent out there and a lot of artists too. We have artists, some people – um,
4 one of my fun memories, we had an employee by the name of [Lyle Bertram
5 51:51], he's our citizenship and legislative chair now. But I remember Lyle
6 playing his harmonica and his fiddle or some a the guys sometimes at
7 breaktimes would come in and they would play their instruments and stuff
8 like that. Like I said, things we did to get through the day. There's a lot of
9 talent inside General Motors.

10

11Cheryl McQuaid: Cheryl McQuaid. [52:11] Did you ever have a skilled trades person do any
12 kind of government jobs for you, um, or do somethin' for you to make your
13 job easier?
14

15Marilyn Coulter: Oh, sure I did. First of all, like I said, we had radios. And I didn't – back –
16 later on, we got – well, s-, well, some a the things that we had, uh, that
17 changed in transition were we initially did not have, um, lockers. We had
18 coat racks and if you wanted a toolbox to put somethin' in, you had to get it
19 yourself. And I remember, um, some carpenters made a toolbox for me that
20 I could put my radio in so I didn't have to carry my radio home every night
21 so I could put it in there. So that's – that was one of my favorite things.
22 Sometimes I might want a, a plug here or a plug there 'cause my whole
23 thing was give me a radio and I can work all day for you, so [laughter] I'd
24 oftentimes have electricians give me plugs. That was my big thing. Or
25 sometimes I might want a chair or somethin' like that or a fan moved and
26 I'd get that. You know, maybe have it done a little bit faster. But just those
27 types of things and I've had a few people who knew how to do things. You
28 know, help me at my house a little bit.
29

30Doreen Howard: Doreen Howard. Um, you talked a little bit about people, uh, making things
31 for you. Um, it sounds like you had an awful lot of friends that you had
32 made during your time here. Um. [53:33] Can you talk a little bit about the,
33 the working...
34

35Marilyn Coulter: Oh.
36

37Doreen Howard: ...uh, family that you had?
38

39Marilyn Coulter: Well, General Motors, we have a lotta things that we had. We had people –
40 oh, well, like I said, I, I grew up in Lansing, so a lot of people – I know
41 people who came here. Uh, some of my friends that I have here I went to
42 junior high with. Uh, a few of my friends I met while I've been here with
43 and we've done a couple of vacations. Um. The person of whom I'm see
44 currently right now is from – I met him here in the facility. Um. And
45 they're good people. And some people are like work friends, you know?
46 You're together at work and you really don't see'm outside and there are a

1 couple a people that you do. Um. We also have – one thing about – we
2 have a lotta different events. We have picnics. We have a union picnic and
3 then we also have baseball teams and golf outings and stuff like that but I
4 was on the bowling team. You – I played on – [sighing], uh, UAW Local
5 602's, both their night and their day shift bowling teams. And, um, w-,
6 when I did the, the, the day shift bowling team, and we bowled at night, uh,
7 we were called And Then There Were Us. Because initially it was just a
8 bunch a men and we were team of women [laughter] and we got on there.
9 And so you, you develop friendships or strong acquaintances from that.
10 And it's good. Um. And those are some a the things that, uh, that we did. I
11 didn't do a lotta stuff. I did go – I did vacation with a couple of people from
12 the plant and that's – you know, s-, and some people are like family. I
13 mean, they take vacations together, they camp together, they have a [year
14 round 55:15] – yearly trips that they take.
15
16 Cheryl McQuaid: Cheryl McQuaid. [55:22] Marilyn, can you tell me what was a typical lunch
17 for you...
18
19 Marilyn Coulter: [chuckle]
20
21 Cheryl McQuaid: ...when you hired in and, and maybe even how it progressed? Some people
22 had bible studies, some people went to the bar.
23
24 Marilyn Coulter: Yeah. Well, you know, we had some people – it was amazing. And
25 unfortunately, it was part of the culture. We're talking about the culture.
26 There was a bar at every door. Now, you had some people who – we also
27 lived off – we worked on – off Saginaw and down Saginaw, you had
28 McDonald's and Burger King and KFC and – Kentucky Fried Chicken, and
29 you had all that. So you had some people who would work up the line to
30 run and go down there. And then we also had people who would work up
31 the line to either go to the Shop Stop, which was off the Paint department
32 door or to the Irish Pub, which was on Saginaw, or to Harry's, which was –
33 which – and – which, you know – and they sold food and they also sold
34 spirits. You know? Some people would go over there and have'm a beer or
35 2 at lunch and then – or 3 [laughter] and they'd come on back into work.
36 And, um, that's what they did. And so for me, sometimes I'd bring my
37 lunch in and study because I was goin' to school. Sometimes I would bring
38 my lunch in or – actually, one of my friends, she used to love to cook, so she
39 used to bring in lunch and we'd sit down and we might play cards. Usually
40 people either played Euchre or Bid Whist, uh, which is a form of Euchre.
41 And, um, we'd play those card games at lunchtime and that's what we did.
42 So you had some people who did that.
43
44 Um. Some people crocheted and that's what they did. A lotta people do –
45 lotta people do crossword puzzles. Lotta crossword puzzles. A lotta
46 newspapers. Some people just read. And then you have some people who

1 just run over to the bar and get a hamburger and some spirits and then they'd
2 come back. You know, some people sleep. You know? I remember I used
3 to – at one time, I used to climb in bins and I'd sleep at lunchtime. So it
4 depended. People did a lotta different things. And sometimes people
5 partied inside [laughter] too, so it was good. Um. And that was one a the
6 changes. You had asked me about the changes. One a the big changes was
7 in the '70s when we hired in right up to the 2000s, you could smoke in the
8 plant. And a big change happened when the – um, they had a city ordinance
9 happen where you could no longer smoke [laughter] inside facilities. And
10 the plant was one of'm and it was weird 'cause you used to be able to just
11 fire up right on your job. And, um, you know, but then now you had to walk
12 outside or go to a designated area.

13

14 But I have to tell this funny story. It's a funny story about smokin'. I w-,
15 had a job, I was [put on] [inaudible 58:03] patches and my friend was
16 smokin' a cigarette and she smoked a cigarette and she lit it [laughter] and
17 then she shook the match and tossed it. And I'm talkin' to her and I'm
18 workin' the line and all of a sudden, I stop, I look at her, and this blaze is
19 comin' up behind her head [laughter] where she set the trash can on fire.
20 So, you know, she – and she came back [inaudible 58:21] I said oh, we need
21 water. She came back with a small coffee cup. You know, it wasn't even a
22 coffee mug. A very, very small, small cup of water and put it in the water.
23 And, you know, the guys came through and they put it out and then she went
24 back to her job but we have like in-plant fireman and stuff like that, so when
25 somethin' like that happens, you get all these white shirts with your
26 supervisors and you get the safety department coming down and she had
27 gone back to her job and I had to deal with her mess [laughter] on my job.
28 So that was funny that night. I told her you can't smoke on my job because
29 you don't know how to handle your matches.

30

31Cheryl McQuaid: Cheryl McQuaid. [58:56] Marilyn, I've work with ya for a number a years
32 since...

33

34Marilyn Coulter: Yeah.

35

36Cheryl McQuaid: ...you had mentioned that sometimes you sleep on lunches. And I know
37 you have a funny story about one time when you fell asleep on a lunch in a
38 [stock 59:07]...

39

40Marilyn Coulter: Oh! [laughter]

41

42Cheryl McQuaid: [chuckle]

43

44Marilyn Coulter: Oh, yes. People pull practical jokes. And you get, you get through and
45 there's this guy named [Clare 59:15] and he had been goin' on all over.
46 'Cause, you know, you stand at a bench and he was grabbing my legs and

1 stuff all day but I was also goin' round and round with my stock man about
2 my stock. I was put on somethin' called stock moldings – [scalp 59:27]
3 moldings. And my scalp moldings came in a box that mighta been, oh,
4 maybe 5 foot by 2. It – or somethin' like that. Now, they were small boxes.
5 But Clare's like 6'2". So I went to lunch and I came back and there was a
6 box of stock in front of my desk and I'm fussin' 'cause – goin' oh, what did
7 [Jerry 59:47] put this here for? Da, da, da. Doesn't dawn on me that there's
8 black tape on this box. [tsk] So I figure forget it, I'm just gonna go ahead
9 and I'm gonna put this stock up on my rack. And I go to pull [laughter] the
10 tape up and this man jumps outa this box outa me – at me. And I'm
11 [laughter] like how did you get your butt – I mean, I musta jumped 20 feet
12 and I laughed [inaudible 1:00:06]. I'm sure I laughed as hard as anybody
13 else 'cause I could not believe he jumped out at me outa that box and I
14 wonder how did you get yourself in it, who taped you up in it? So there
15 were a couple people who were in on it and it was, it was funny though. I
16 had a laugh.

17
18 And, um, the worst thing, the worst thing you can do in the plant is for
19 people to know that you're jumpy, which I am. And once you become
20 jumpy, it's – you get a s-, you can, um, believe you're gonna get at least 2 to
21 3 scares a day, which I did. And that was my best scare though. That was
22 my absolute best [laughter] scare because he jumped out of a box at me.
23 Another one would be, um, unfortunately they would do things to rodents,
24 little mice, and they would tape'm...

25
26 Cheryl McQuaid: [coughing]

27
28 Marilyn Coulter: ...certain places. So if they knew you had a thing about mice, you would,
29 um, [tsk] have – you might open a locker or get in a car and see a dead
30 mouse taped to interior of a [laughter] car. And they were all over. I
31 remember [Joyce 1:01:03] – there was one funny story and she – I'm sure
32 she didn't think it was funny but a woman by the name of [Joyce Robinson
33 1:01:08], [sniffing] she had rubber bands always around the bottom of her
34 pants. And I asked her Joyce, why you got your rubber bands on the pants?
35 And because a mouse had ran up her pants leg. And, uh, so, you know. But
36 it was a factory, you know? We had trains coming in and out and we had
37 mice in here but we also had cats, wild cats, that were in here and people
38 would feed'm but they were part of it. And birds and everything else, you
39 know. So inside the plant, we had a lotta things other than cars in here.

40
41 Cheryl McQuaid: I wanna remind you of another memory you told me about years ago and
42 that was probably in 1979, 1980. GM had a major power outage.

43
44 Marilyn Coulter: [laughter]

45
46 Cheryl McQuaid: [1:01:52] Can you tell us a little bit about what happened?

1
2 Marilyn Coulter: Oh, wow. [sniffing] Yeah. That was interesting. We had a, we had a
3 blackout and it was funny. It was, um – [tsk] I had a car back then. It was a
4 old blue Impala. Didn't have light in it, so I had a flashlight. And I
5 remember the lights went out and the supervisor had to use me to, uh, help
6 pass out checks that night 'cause if you work second shift, you got paid on
7 Thursday night and there [laughter] wasn't any lights in the bathroom, so
8 women wanted to get escorted down to the bathroom 'cause naturally, guys
9 are pullin' jokes and pranks. And the air absolutely reeked. [laughter] So
10 those people who were smokin' things other than cigarettes were definitely
11 smokin' but it was a good time and we had the lights out for a while and
12 then finally they decided to send us home. And the lights came on just as
13 we were goin' – [laughter] just as we were leavin' and then we just all
14 walked a little bit faster.
15
16 Cheryl McQuaid: [laughter]
17
18 Doreen Howard: [laughter]
19
20 Marilyn Coulter: And then the second blackout happened when major – in 2000 era and, uh,
21 um, not only Lansing but quite a bit a the midwest got blacked out and, uh, I
22 saw the lights flicker and I thought a – and it immediately came back to my
23 mind – they flickered again, I went and grabbed my purse, I started headin'
24 for the door and I got halfway to the door, the, the lights went out and
25 people said how'd you know? I said been through it once, you should
26 know. [laughter]
27
28 Doreen Howard: [laughter]
29
30 Cheryl McQuaid: [laughter]
31
32 Marilyn Coulter: And, um, that happened.
33
34 Doreen Howard: Hm.
35
36 Marilyn Coulter: That was a...
37
38 Doreen Howard: Uh, Doreen Howard. Um. [1:03:21] Have you participated in any types of
39 community activities?
40
41 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm. [tsk] I am union active. I also, um – I've been – I'm an active
42 member now, past president of the coalition of labor union women. And it's
43 a a-, it's a organization built up of women of different labor unions, um, to
44 help empower women and to educate them. Um. I'm, uh, president now, an
45 active member of, um, A. Phillip Randolph Institute, which, once again, is a
46 labor organi-, based organization of different unions. We educate and do

1 voter registration and voter education. And, um, once again, try to get
2 people involved in the labor process and we support labor activities. Um,
3 we're – all these are [inaudible 1:04:05] groups and I'm also an executive
4 committee member of the NAACP. A lotta people don't understand that,
5 um, the UAW and the NAACP go hand in hand with labor and, um, [tsk] the
6 freedom fight and they don't really understand how, uh, instrumental Walter
7 Reuther, who was, uh, if not, uh, the most, uh, [sighing] influential
8 presidents of the UAW had impact with doing that. It was Walter Reuther
9 who helped to get, uh, Martin Luther King out of the Birmingham jail.
10
11 Doreen Howard: Hm.
12
13 Marilyn Coulter: And we've always been, um, active in those movements because the same
14 people who are against labor are the same people who are against, you
15 know, civil rights. And, uh, so those types of groups. And women's right.
16 You know, a woman's place is in her union and any other place she chooses
17 to be. [laughter] So, so those. Helpin' people, that's what I do.
18
19 Doreen Howard: [Inaudible 1:05:01]. Um. [1:05:06] With [sighing] the plant closing and
20 you're one a the few people that saw the very final days here at the plant,
21 um, can you describe the feelings that you had when you walked around the
22 facility and the closing of it?
23
24 Marilyn Coulter: You know, um, [sighing] before I had said I had worked changeovers. So I
25 was used to p-, the place being sparsely populated or darn near vacant but
26 you used to see construction workers comin' in. And as you walked through
27 certain parts a the plant, you know, it's always good. It's good to know that
28 we have somethin' new coming. But you walk through and you see
29 memories and you walk certain places and you remember things that
30 happened and you s-, it's gonna be weird not knowin' that you were here
31 'cause this big green buildin' has been here all my life and, uh, you know,
32 uh, so it's gonna be weird not comin' in here. It's n-, it's great that we have
33 a wonderful place to go to. I mean, we're very fortunate at a time when
34 General Motors is closing a lotta facilities. But, um, it's, you know, it's
35 mixed when you look at the emotion when, you know, Sexton High School
36 is right down the street and the kids who worked there can't even have a
37 dream of comin' in here. 'Cause some of'm, you know, they know they
38 wanna get [inaudible 1:06:22], they – and there's good job there, good pay.
39 So it's sad. You know, it's bittersweet. It's bittersweet. It's exciting to
40 know we have a new place to go and, you know, and it's kinda nice to know
41 that you're gonna be – you know, you stop to think about it, we're all –
42 we'll all be historians in the sense that we were there when this door closed
43 and we're gonna be there when those doors open. So.
44
45 But's it's, it's kinda sad though because, you know, 27+ years a my life has
46 been in that place and technically speakin', I grew up in there 'cause I hired

1 in – I turned 18 in August and hired in there in September, so I’ve been
2 there all my adult life and, uh, seen a lotta changes, good things and bad.
3 The worse thing I ever seen there was we had a fatality [sniffing] and we
4 had a construction worker and he got his head caught in a chain. And, uh,
5 we have an ERT team, which is Emergency Response Team. They did all
6 that they could do. They responded very quickly but when you set there and
7 see another person danglin’ in the air with their head crushed and you see
8 that and we have – UAW GM, great job, because I think that having – we
9 have – we – they were not called called work family reps at that time. They
10 were called em-, EAPs, Employee Assistance Program people, and they help
11 people and they brought people in to talk to people to deal with that
12 situation and you could still go down there afterwards. ‘Cause once you see
13 somethin’ like that in the plant, you don’t forget it immediately and you
14 sleep with it and you wake up with it and so those are things – those – so
15 you take those memories with you right along with the good things. Um.
16 Like I said, um, the water fights, the hard workin’, the different changeover,
17 the model changes, the crazy jobs.

18
19 You know, you unfortunately, um, you know – one a the other programs we
20 have is sheltered workshop because – and I’m, and I’m in that also. And
21 that’s where you’ve worked and it might be because I did regulators, which
22 is the thing that makes the windows go up and down, boltin’ down seats
23 with torque guns, all those different things and then just walkin’ on – you
24 know, we didn’t – we have erg-, ergonomic matting now but before, you
25 just walked on s-, floor, cement floor all day. And now, um – so you have
26 to get in the sheltered workshop, which is where you try to get some work
27 that’s in line with your restrictions that you can do so that you can feel, um,
28 good. Unfortunately, sometimes, um – you can, you know, you know, you
29 can work. ‘Cause people wanna work. It’s just they don’t wanna hurt
30 anymore and sometimes you get treated like a second-class citizen but it’s
31 nice that they do have the sheltered workshop to try to place you and to do
32 things that you can do. Unfortunately, we have a lotta jobs outsourced now,
33 so some a those jobs that were easier for us to do have been outsourced to
34 other companies. You know, environmental services, [door build-up
35 1:09:25], things like that have been outsourced and that stuff comes in
36 already done now. Some outsourcin’ is good. Robots. People didn’t need
37 to be doin’m anyways ‘cause they got hurt too. And, um – but, you know,
38 the sheltered is there for us too.

39
40 ‘Cause that’s only be-, that’s the only downside about work in the factory.
41 Sometimes the physical requirements, you know, workin’ that line and
42 movin’ motors and stuff. We have ergonomic tools and stuff now. Those
43 things have evolved and made it better but sometimes it’s still rough on the
44 body.
45

1Cheryl McQuaid: Cheryl McQuaid. [1:10:03] Marilyn, is there anything that you'd like to
2share with us that we've not asked you?
3
4Marilyn Coulter: Hm. [tsk] Can't think of any. I really can't right now.
5
6Cheryl McQuaid: Well, we really appreciate this time...
7
8Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.
9
10Cheryl McQuaid: ...that you've spent with us. Thank you very much.
11
12Doreen Howard: Thank you.
13
14Marilyn Coulter: Thank you. Bye-bye. [sniffing] [clicking]
15
16
17/ad