

**Don Davis discusses his career in General Motors and specifically
as a maintenance manager at the Fisher Body plant in Lansing, MI**

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4
5Doreen Howard: Uh, Doreen Howard. I'm, uh, at the, what is this...
6
7Interviewer: Jobs Bank.
8
9Doreen Howard: ...the Jobs Bank out in Dewitt.
10
11Doreen Howard: Uh, we will be interviewing Don Davis today. Um, it is December 20,
12 2005, approximately 8 a.m., um, Marilyn, um, you guys go ahead here.
13
14Marilyn Coulter: Marilyn Coulter.
15
16John Fedewa: John Fedewa.
17
18Doreen Howard: Yeah, I just push the stop and, and then let it go.
19
20Marilyn Coulter: It's recording.
21
22Doreen Howard: It's recording. Okay. All right.
23
24Marilyn Coulter: Marilyn Coulter.
25
26John Fedewa: John Fedewa.
27
28Doreen Howard: [0:49] Okay, and, um, Don can you, um, state and spell your last name
29 and your address?
30
31Don Davis: Yes, it's Don Davis, um, D-A-V-I-S. My address is 16720 Wacousta
32 Road, Grand Ledge, Michigan.
33
34Doreen Howard: [1:04] Okay. Um, Don, are, are you married and do you have any
35 children?
36
37Don Davis: I am. I have 3 children.
38
39Doreen Howard: [1:12] Okay, and, um, what is your educational background or military,
40 do you have any military service?
41
42Don Davis: I do. I have 3 years military. Um, I served in Vietnam. I was, um, a, a
43 pilot. I was, um, I was in a lot of different areas in the military and my
44 education is criminal justice. I have a criminal justice degree and also an
45 electrical degree.
46

1Doreen Howard: [1:36] Okay, um, great, um, what is your seniority date and can you, um,
2 talk about the first time that you hired in to General Motors?
3

4Don Davis: My original seniority date was the year I got out of the service, which was
5 1962. I hired in to Flint Chevrolet, and, uh, but I worked 3 years and then,
6 I, I quit and broke my seniority to go to college and do some other
7 adventures, so, uh, I have a total of 30 years, but again, it's broken service
8 so, um, I don't know what date we really wanna use.
9

10Doreen Howard: [2:15] Okay, um, now your service time at Flint, was that all at the Chevy
11 plant or did you, um, go to other facilities in Flint?
12

13Don Davis: I worked at other plants in Flint. I worked at Chevrolet, what they call
14 "down in the hole," which is Chevrolet assembly. I worked at Flint Truck
15 Plant. I worked at AC Sparkplug. I worked at Flint Fisher, uh, I worked at
16 several plants around the Flint area because of layoffs and reductions in
17 forces and things like that.
18

19Doreen Howard: [2:42] Now during that time, you hired in as an hourly employee, correct?
20

21Don Davis: I did. The early years, in the 60s, I hired in as a production worker and,
22 uh, decided I thought I wanted to go out and try some other things, so
23 that's why I went back to school to become an electrician and eventually
24 coming back in to Chevrolet as an electrician and then a-, again,
25 transferring over to Lansing after that.
26

27Doreen Howard: [3:06] Okay, and, um, at what timeframe did you come to the Lansing
28 facility?
29

30Don Davis: I came from Chevrolet, uh, in 1982, uh, there was a layoff and I was
31 transferred over as an area hire, um, in 1982 and hired in the body shop as
32 an electrician.
33

34Doreen Howard: [3:28] And, um, at what, uh, timeframe did you go on to management?
35

36Don Davis: I went on management, uh, in 1985 and became a skilled trade supervisor,
37 uh, again in the body shop for a period of time, went to trim for a while
38 and, uh, I had the trim and building 23, which was body shipping.
39

40Doreen Howard: [3:54] Now when you came in in '82, the plant was cons-, uh, called
41 Fisher Body at that date?
42

43Don Davis: That's correct.
44

45Doreen Howard: Okay. Um, Marilyn?
46

1 Marilyn Coulter: [4:06] Um, when you came from – to Lansing from Flint, were there any
2 big differences that you saw in as far as the cultures of the people that
3 worked and how were you, um, accepted as being an electrician from
4 another plant?
5

6 Don Davis: There was a total difference in culture and the environment was totally
7 different over here from what I was used to in Flint, uh, the atmosphere
8 that it was more friendly over here, uh, we were accepted easily into the
9 plant, uh, there was absolutely no problems. The uh, the management-
10 union relationship was so much better over here, uh, I mean I could tell
11 you stories about Flint that we don't want to talk about, not that they were
12 that bad but they were so much different. You never saw hourly and
13 salary mingle in, in Flint ever whether it be a restaurant, uh, and afterhours
14 and to have a drink after work, whatever. You just never saw that and that
15 was probably the biggest thing that I saw – the biggest difference I saw
16 when I came over here.
17

18 Doreen Howard: [5:06] Um, so when you came in, you hired into the Fisher Body Plant as
19 an hourly employee and you said you were an electrician at that time?
20 Um, describe what, what it was like when you first came in there. What
21 was tha-, the, uh, facilities, uh, like – you know what was the atmosphere
22 in there?
23

24 Don Davis: Well, it was, obviously, it was an older plant but I was used to that
25 because most of the plants in Flint were, were, you know, were older
26 plants but all the uh – in fact all the equipment when I first got here was
27 the old style, the old, the old, all the old equipment and then I got to help
28 set up the new robotic areas and all of the things that, that we did in
29 Lansing, uh, back in the mid-80s and got to do that whole transition thing.
30

31 Doreen Howard: [5:55] So, the robotics, that all came in with the, the Grand Am?
32

33 Don Davis: That's correct.
34

35 Doreen Howard: [6:02] In what, '84, is that when that?
36

37 Don Davis: '84 is when we started, right.
38

39 Doreen Howard: Okay.
40

41 Don Davis: Yeah.
42

43 Doreen Howard: [6:07] Um, can you explain some of the differences between the way that,
44 um, the facilities was prior to the robotics and a lot of the technology
45 coming into the plant? What, what was, uh, some of the differences that,
46 that you saw? As...
47

1Don Davis: Well, the, the biggest thing was that it was the old hands-on, uh, well
2 guns, everything to do in the body shop, which is what I was mor-, most
3 familiar with were all the standalone fixtures, no robotics. Everything was
4 done by hand and, uh, the biggest transition there of course was that –
5 what we had a lot of reaps to come up. We had to learn how to run the
6 equipment, we installed the equipment and then there was a big difference
7 in the way the people, uh, operated with the new machinery because it, it
8 didn't really eliminate jobs but it changed jobs. It moved people to
9 different things and some of the things that people did by hand then the
10 robots did but, uh, in my way of thinkin', I didn't see that it did replace,
11 uh, people like they thought it might.
12

13Doreen Howard: Marilyn.

14

15Marilyn Coulter: [7:11] Did you find that actually the robots took away, um, took the jobs
16 that were like probably unsafe and unhealthy for people to be doing?
17

18Don Davis: To a lot of degree that's true. There was a lot of jobs that people did with
19 hands-on that probably weren't safe, uh, by today's standards especially
20 and, uh, both for ergonomics and everything else, uh, that did relieve a lot
21 of those, of those stresses for sure.
22

23Marilyn Coulter: [7:38] So, when you were doing, um, those electric – those jobs as an
24 electrician at that time, um, were you working many hours?
25

26Don Davis: We worked on the average, uh, – well I worked 7 days a week all my life
27 pretty much in GM, uh, up until the last couple of years. That is just the
28 way it was. I mean, yeah, there was – we worked 7 days a week, you
29 worked sometimes double shifts, uh, and that was jus-, just a way of life
30 when you were in skilled trades.
31

32Marilyn Coulter: [8:07] So, when you – because that is the way of life and it becomes such
33 a big part of your life, what were some of the things that you did? I mean,
34 did your workers become like your work family and what types of things
35 did you do to pass the time in so far as how, how did you get along
36 communicating and then pass the time?
37

38Don Davis: Well, if you'd, if you'd look at the clock, you were with the people you
39 worked with more than you were your own family. Your awake hours you
40 spent more time at work, which we all do anyway, uh, with your workers
41 than you do at home. So, there was a lot – the downside of that is, you
42 don't see your family as much, you do not see your children grow up as
43 you should. We did spend an awful lot of hours in the factory and, uh, and
44 it did, it did, uh, not allow us to do a lot of family things that we should've
45 probably been doing.
46

1 Marilyn Coulter: [8:59] So, you were – your coworkers became your work family where
2 the things – did you guys have dinners?
3

4 Don Davis: We did.
5

6 Marilyn Coulter: Like...
7

8 Don Davis: Uh, you know, it was a close family, I mean especially by area, if you
9 worked in the body shop, or if you worked in trim or paint, uh, yeah, you
10 had dinners. There was always somebody bringing in food or cooking, or
11 – it was very close and, uh, even after hours you found that you would
12 even socialize after hours with the same people you worked with, so, yeah
13 it was a close family.
14

15 Marilyn Coulter: So, uh, I just want to digress just a little bit. [9:31] Um, what brought you
16 into Fisher? Wha-, what brought you to the GM Fisher Body family?
17

18 Don Davis: Well, I worked outside for a number of years. I was an electrician, I was a
19 pilot, uh, I was a policeman and I did a lot of things that, that, uh – I guess
20 that the final result that brought me back in the factory was I enjoyed
21 being an electrician, I enjoyed the, the work, uh, I was, I was getting a
22 little older [laughter], more mature I would like to say, but actually older
23 and, uh, so I thought I wanted to go someplace to retire from and the jobs
24 that I was doing, uh, back in those – in the 70s, uh, didn't pay as well on
25 the outside and, uh, to be honest, I was lookin' for security probably more
26 than anything.
27

28 Marilyn Coulter: I see. [10:17] So, um, what made you, uh, decide to go from hourly to
29 salary?
30

31 Don Davis: Well, uh, I don't know, I, uh, I was approached several times to go on
32 salary and I really didn't want to. I was a union person all my life and I
33 firmly believed in the union, I still believe in the union more than, than I
34 probably do the salary side and, uh, for a lot of reasons, uh, and of course,
35 I was apprehensive. I didn't really want – I didn't know that...the other
36 side of the fence if you would. I didn't, I didn't want to manage people so
37 much, uh, but then I thought maybe I could help a little bit more with
38 maybe change some of the styles and things like that if I did go in
39 management, so, so that's why I did it.
40

41 Marilyn Coulter: [11:06] That's...Okay, I'm gonna move back a little bit further because
42 you said that you were union active and were you active in the union prior
43 to becoming a salaried person?
44

45 Don Davis: I was not ever an elected official in the union but I was all my life, or all
46 the years up until the time I came back in the factory, I was, uh, you know,
47 I'd...I had served my time on the picket line with everybody else. I went

1 through labor, you know strifes, especially in the Flint area, uh, that was a
2 pretty volatile area. There was always something, you know, no matter
3 where you worked it, you, you had problems, you know with, uh, with
4 again with the labor management arena so it was just, uh – I just believe in
5 the union that if the union hadn't been there that the salary folks or nobody
6 else would have had what they had, so, that's, that's my background.
7

8Marilyn Coulter: That's good. [11:55] Alright, um, you said so that you could change the
9 salary style. To you, what made a bad supervisor or a good supervisor and
10 what were the changes that you wanted to have?
11

12Don Davis: Well, a good supervisor, uh, finds who his people are, finds out what their
13 strengths and weaknesses are and lets them perform a job without telling
14 them every step of the way that everything they have to do. There, there –
15 they know their jobs whether – no matter what their jobs are, skilled, non-
16 skilled, whatever. They know how to do their job and you just put the
17 faith in back in them and left them do their work. If they need help, then
18 you assist 'em, then you don't, you now you don't, uh – I know, that's just
19 the way I was.
20

21Marilyn Coulter: That's great.
22

23Doreen Howard: Doreen Howard. [12:42] Um, I want to take you back to somethin' that
24 you, uh, had touched on, uh, you talked about, uh, strikes and things like
25 that in Flint, um, can you elaborate a little bit more on the issues that
26 surrounded that?
27

28Don Davis: Well, there was, there was both, you know, there was wildcat strikes that I
29 was involved in that, that, uh, that – again Flint was a lot different than
30 Lansing. That's one of the big differences that Marilyn asked me about,
31 uh, there was times that, that it wasn't even safe to go to work because if
32 you, uh, if, if you – if, if there was a wildcat or whatever, you better
33 participate and there was people that really, really wanted to go to work
34 an-, and, uh, and they would – the, the company would put people out on
35 disciplinary, they would send them out by, uh, the numbers, like 50 or 100
36 people and then they would, they would replace them with people right off
37 the street and try to break their jobs. So, there was a lot of strife. I mean
38 there was, there was – you would have management people up on the
39 roofs of the building taking your picture going out to your car. I mean it
40 was just a totally different atmosphere over there. So, uh, it was just a
41 way of life, just a totally different culture and...
42

43Marilyn Coulter: [13:58] Um, can you explain what a wildcat strike is?
44

45Don Davis: Well, a wildcat is pretty much based on the fact that it's not sanctioned
46 either by the union or the company, uh, people would just up and walk
47 out, uh, over an issue, it could be a safety issue, it could be, uh, work,

1 added work that was put on, uh, some operators and, and uh, and the
2 whole plant could walk out and that's what they would do. It didn't
3 happen often but it wasn't very, very friendly when it did.
4

5Doreen Howard: Doreen Howard. [14:33] Um, during – when you came to Fisher Body,
6 um, you said you never saw the conflicts that you saw between the union
7 and the management at, at the Flint facility. Was there ever any, uh, point
8 during your, um, timeframe here that they had any, any type of strike at
9 our – at the Fisher facility and if, if there was, do you recall what it was
10 about?
11

12Don Davis: You know, we did have the 1 strike and it only lasted what, about 3 days,
13 that, uh, I was out of town at the time. I wasn't even involved in it until I,
14 you know, and I, to be honest with you, I don't remember what those
15 issues were that, that brought that about, uh, but as far as the, the
16 relationship between the 2, no, there was, there was – it was, everything
17 was always, uh, negotiable. Everybody sat down and talked about it. We
18 didn't always agree but, uh, they always seemed to resolve things in a
19 much friendlier and a-, in a more professional way.
20

21Doreen Howard: [15:38] Um, Fisher Body over the years had become, uh, known as the
22 “Capital of Quality”, um, what do you think about that statement and what
23 do you feel makes that statement true and, um, compare the quality at the
24 Fisher plant compared to the quality that you saw, um, at the Flint plants?
25

26Don Davis: Well, the “Capital of Quality” was a good, a good statement because we
27 did, from the time I got here they did, uh – quality was number 1 not
28 numbers and in Flint, uh, if you had a job, uh, that you had to produce so
29 many parts, if you could pro-, produce those parts in 3 hours and your shift
30 was 8 hours you went home in 3 hours and you got paid for 8. So, there
31 was never any quality built into a system like that, uh, totally the opposite
32 here in, in Lansing because everybody, uh, you had different checks and
33 balances. There was, uh, and it was a personal thing. Most all employees
34 felt responsible for the quality of the product that they built, uh, which we
35 never saw in some of the other plants.
36

37Doreen Howard: Um, let's see here...

38

39Marilyn Coulter: [16:55] Um, I had a question for you, Marilyn Coulter, um, as a hourly
40 employee and as a salaried employment, employer, which – can you tell us
41 what were some of, or 1 of your most memorable moments and 1 of your
42 most rewarding moments?
43

44Don Davis: [laughter] I don't know, that would be, that would be so difficult to, to
45 answer. I would tell you that I probably enjoyed, uh, being an hourly
46 worker more than a salary worker and primarily because I like to do a
47 hands-on. I mean I just don't like to stand back and supervise and it was

1 really difficult for me ta-, to, to do that, uh, I mean because I really – again
2 I thought I was pretty good at what I did but then I couldn't do it anymore
3 and I had to try to, you know help people do their job but not bein' able to
4 do anything myself. It was just different, uh, but the satisfactions are
5 keepin' equipment running, the satisfactions of, of havin' a good
6 workforce and the things like that. I guess that's probably the most mem-,
7 memorable part of what I did.
8

9Marilyn Coulter: [17:59] Are you the only member of your family that works in Fisher
10 Body or for GM?
11

12Don Davis: I am. Uh, my father worked in, in Fisher Body back in Flint in the, in the
13 40s but just for a short time but I was the only career person if you would
14 in my family for GM.
15

16Marilyn Coulter: Great...
17

18Doreen Howard: Doreen Howard. [18:20] Um, how did the, um, changing in the – as far
19 as the plant population based on, uh, gender, an-, and race, um, how did
20 that affect you as far as, um, the comparison between the Flint – what was
21 the demographics of the workforce there versus when you came into the
22 Fisher plant? What was the demographics like in, in our plant?
23

24Don Davis: I would say in that respect, they were comparable. I don't think there was
25 a lot of difference in, in how many women or how many minorities or how
26 many, you know, what the workforce was made up with, uh, Flint was a
27 pretty diverse town, an-, and as far as that goes, um, so I didn't see a lot of
28 difference there. I really didn't.
29

30Marilyn Coulter: [19:06] Being that you, uh, worked in the skilled trades arena, Marilyn
31 Coulter, and um, you were a hourly person and a salaried person in the
32 skills trade arena for females, what would you say the skilled trades world
33 is like for them and has it changed over the years?
34

35Don Davis: It has changed greatly. When they – when the, when females were first
36 accepted in the skilled trades they had a really rough road, uh, it was a
37 male dominated workforce, uh, and the women were really discriminated
38 against. They had a tough time. The early women that came on, they had
39 to prove – almost prove themselves as a man if you would. I mean, they,
40 they'd come into a "man's world" if you would and they did have a tough
41 time and, uh, fortunately some of the ones – the first ones that came on –
42 that I saw came on, could, could handle themselves as a man but that
43 really wasn't fair. They shouldn't a had to do that...
44

45Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.
46

1Don Davis: ...and that's changed drastically. I mean you just don't – anymore it's
2 who can do the job, male, female, it doesn't matter, uh, that's changed a
3 lot.
4

5Marilyn Coulter: What, um...

6

7Doreen Howard: Doreen Howard. [20:24] Um, I guess, has, do you feel that the
8 supervisory techniques have changed since you first, uh, went into the, the
9 salary arena versus, uh, how it is today?
10

11Don Davis: Yes. It has changed a lot, when, when – whether it was Flint or Fisher
12 Body, the earlier years was, uh, totally dominated by, by the supervisor.
13 The supervisor told you everything. What to do it, when to do it, how to
14 do it, uh, and didn't involve the employees. Didn't let them use their
15 minds if you would to help with the process. That's changed, uh,
16 completely changed and matter of fact it has gone the other way, uh, so
17 much to the point where I don't think that the supervisor really does a lot
18 of supervising. It is the hourly folks that put their teams together, decide
19 how the job should be done, uh, the best way it can be done, uh, the
20 quality aspects of it, uh, the environmental – all kinds of things that they
21 do now that, that it's a totally different environment.
22

23Doreen Howard: Marilyn Coulter.

24

25Marilyn Coulter: [21:31] Um, Don, can we talk about supervisory techniques? You came
26 up through the rank and file onto salary, how do you feel works having as
27 a manager who comes in through the rank and file versus one who comes
28 in off the street? Is there a big difference in...
29

30Don Davis: Well, there's, there's – I think there is. I think that that's, that it helps the
31 person. I think that, you know, if they've come off the floor and came
32 from that environment, learned the jobs, knew the jobs and then became a
33 supervisor. I s-, I think you have to know the job to be able to teach the
34 job or to supervise that job, uh, nothing against college, uh, degreed folks
35 that come in that have no prior experience, uh, they come in with a
36 different attitude, different aspect. They, uh, they're, they're educated
37 and, uh, but they don't always know how to deal with the people, they
38 don't understand all the jobs, um, an-, and if they're smart enough they
39 can learn to do that if they can put their trust in the people and learn from
40 the people but I think that the guy that – or the person, guy or woman, that
41 comes off the floor has, uh, has the upper hand I think. I think they do a
42 better job.
43

44Marilyn Coulter: [22:45] In so far – because being skilled trades, that is a very – can be a
45 very dangerous, dangerous job, um, both as a um hourly person and a
46 salary person, uh, can you stress anything that is important so far that you
47 had to do as a manager to make sure your employees are safe?

1
2Don Davis: Well, we're mandated by, by MIOSHA and different laws as to what,
3 what our safety training protocol is and, uh, as a manager, it has become
4 more apparent in the last few years is that you, you have to make sure that
5 everybody's fully safety trained, they have all the equipment, the safety
6 equipment, the training, uh, because there's liabilities now too in these –
7 in the last few years. Uh, if a supervisor allows an employee to work in an
8 unsafe manner and that person gets injured, uh, there is liability back on
9 that supervisor today. It's not just the company that will back – it'll take
10 that responsibility. That individual is responsible for their employees, so,
11 there is a lot at stake. I mean primarily number 1 is you want to make sure
12 nobody gets hurt. You want everybody go home just like they came to
13 work. So, but, it's, it's, it's inherent you have to make sure that
14 everybody's safety trained.
15
16Doreen Howard: Doreen Howard. [24:00] Um, you have touched base on, on some – the
17 safety training as a skilled trades employee, um, what type of training did,
18 did they have? Was there training that you had to have prior to going on
19 your certain jobs? Was there training once you became, um, an electrician
20 that you had to continue your education? Was there any type of ongoing
21 training that, that you had to, to take?
22
23Don Davis: Yeah, there's classes both from fall hazard, you had those types of classes.
24 You had electrical safe work practice. You had equipment that you, that
25 you wore, uh, and that's changed over the years. It was quite lax early on.
26 Now, it's the rubber gloves and sleeves and all the things that you have to
27 do that are – that have come into the workforce, uh, it, it seems sometimes
28 we go overboard. Uh, at one point and time we did hardly enough to
29 ensure the safety and then we go the other way to the other extreme. It
30 makes it a little more difficult for the employees to do their work but
31 bottom line is it's all about safety an-, and so you have to look at it that
32 way.
33
34Doreen Howard: [25:12] Do you think that you actually, um, is there any statistics that
35 they've, um, proven that all this training and additional, uh, precautions
36 have helped over the years, or....
37
38Don Davis: They have. They have. Uh, you know, I couldn't recite any but I would
39 tell you that, uh, my early years I saw a lot of people get hurt very badly. I
40 have seen people get killed. Uh, I have witnessed that and, uh, I would, I
41 would say that the last uh, oh 15 years or so, in this environment, I have
42 not seen anybody severely injured in any way, uh, lacerations and then
43 maybe a broken bone or something like that, but nothing to the degree that
44 I saw early on.
45

1 Marilyn Coulter: Um, Marilyn Coulter. [26:03] And I know it does affect you but, I, an-,
2 and I too have witnessed someone, you know, who got killed in the plant,
3 um was that in Lansing Fisher Body that you witnessed that?
4

5 Don Davis: Uh, that's 1. I did see 1 killed here. That's, that's correct, uh, a
6 contractor, outside contractor, maybe is that, maybe that's what you're
7 referring too?
8

9 Marilyn Coulter: [26:24] Was that the one in 3X?
10

11 Don Davis: Yes, that one.
12

13 Marilyn Coulter: Yes, that's the same 1.
14

15 Don Davis: Yeah.
16

17 Marilyn Coulter: [26:28] Um, how, when being a manager and a skilled trades person, how
18 did you – how did it affect you and how did you deal with that?
19

20 Don Davis: Well, the sad part about any accident is that after you analyze it and you
21 realize what happened, it, it should never have happened and most
22 accidents are that way. We can all look back an-, and sometimes joke
23 about it as long as we don't get hurt but when, when you have a person,
24 or, or people that are not familiar with equipment or, or the plant, or the
25 environment they are in, uh, the sad thing about that particular one was
26 that that person got in the line and didn't know the line was going to start
27 up when he had a break time or a lunchtime as a I remember and the line
28 started up and, uh, and, and he was subsequently killed but, uh, you know
29 it affects you. I mean, I have had, you know – you have got to remember
30 that we, again, were with these folks more than we are our own families at
31 home so if somebody, you know gets hurt like that, but the other side of it
32 is you have got to learn from that an-, and pass that on an-, and that's what
33 we do.
34

35 Marilyn Coulter: [27:34] I know that, um, General Motors does have, um, they have been
36 very good as far as having provisions for their workers. I know they had
37 work-family reps that were there to help, um, the people who were on the
38 line, were there people that also helped your employees also?
39

40 Don Davis: Yes, uh, yeah there was. There was counseling and there was a lot of
41 things available to the, to the, to the folks an-, and it's unfortunate that
42 everybody had to witness that but the other side of it is is that the Fisher
43 Body folks really came together on that even though that was an outside
44 person that was, that was, uh, killed, uh, they took up a collection for the
45 family. They did all kinds of things, uh, it was really rewarding. I mean
46 that was really a nice gesture and uh, but it was, it was a tragic thing to
47 see.

1
2Doreen Howard: Doreen Howard. [28:23] Um, that sounded as if that was probably one of
3 your saddest, uh, times here, um, do you recall any happy or funny
4 moments that, that occurred during your time at the plant?
5
6Don Davis: Oh boy, in 30 years [laughter] you see a lot of things that are funny but, uh
7 [laughter]...
8
9Doreen Howard: [28:45] So what's, what's some of the pranks or some of the crazy
10 things...
11
12Marilyn Coulter: Yeah.
13
14Doreen Howard: ...that people used to do to entertain themselves?
15
16Don Davis: Uh, well, you know, Fisher Body always, well all the plants back in their
17 early years had a good – they had more fun at their jobs if you would. Uh,
18 there was always pranks goin' on, uh, they claim there – even, even
19 sometimes there was a little socializing that maybe shouldn't of went on...
20
21Doreen Howard: [laughter].
22
23Don Davis: ...but uh, but I know down in the body shop, they used to, uh, put gas in,
24 in the A-pillars and B-pillars and things, an-, and to the next guy come
25 along and weld and they'd have a little explosion in there...
26
27Interviewer: [laughter].
28
29Don Davis: ...that'd scare people and of course there was people rode in cars that, uh,
30 that weren't appropriately dressed. Things like that. There was a lot of
31 things that I probably ought not go into some of those. [laughter].
32
33Doreen Howard: No, no, that's, that's what they do that we are interested in...so that the
34 culture and things like that.
35
36Interviewer: [laughter].
37
38John Fedewa: [cough].
39
40Doreen Howard: [29:40] Um, what did you do during lu-, lunchtimes and things like that?
41 Did you eat in the, um, supervisor dining area, or did you....
42
43Don Davis: I never did.
44
45Doreen Howard: ...what did you do?
46

1Don Davis: I never did. Uh, that was another interesting thing about Lansing was a lot
2 of the folks went across and I'll use Harry's as an example. We couldn't
3 wait until lunchtime to go over an-, an-, and have a, have a beer and, uh, it
4 didn't matter if you were hourly or salary over there, that's, that's what
5 really struck me the first time I went into Harry's and saw a supervisor
6 sittin' at a table wi-, with some hourly folks. I was amazed because you
7 didn't see that, I mean you didn't see that. The salary folks didn't even
8 walk through a parkin' lot over in Flint so I thought, you know, God, who
9 is this guy. Well, the one guy that I saw that I met in the bar one day was
10 actually turned out to be my supervisor.
11

12Interviewer: [laughter].
13

14Don Davis: So, it was, it was interesting, but no we, uh – I saw the mate in the plant,
15 I'd – it was a chance to get out of there, an-, and I did.
16

17Marilyn Coulter: Um, let's see here...[30:43] So, I know you said that they took a benefit
18 dinner, did you participate in many of the benefit dinners that they did in
19 the plant? Did they do a lot of that?
20

21Don Davis: Oh yes. They had benefits for a lot of folks, uh, over the years. I, I par-,
22 every one they ever had I was – I participated in, uh, whether it would be
23 at Christmastime for the Toy's for Tot's or whether it was an employee
24 that had cancer, or whatever. Uh, Fisher was really good about that. I
25 didn't see that as much, uh, in other plants but Fisher was great about that.
26 Uh, if there was an employee sick, no matter where or what department
27 that person was in, uh, all the areas put on a fundraiser for that family and
28 they did a wonderful job at it and raised a lot of money an-, and there was
29 a lot of hard work that went in to, to make that happen.
30

31Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm. [31:27] I know, um, we, we did a lot for people inside and
32 outside the plant and that's one of the things that, um, working 7 days did
33 you realize – notice a lot of the people who were at the gates when you left
34 from the outside communities that came to collect – for collections and
35 stuff?
36

37Don Davis: They did. Yeah. There was, uh, no matter what the occasion was that
38 you're right, they were either in the plant or at the gates an-, and
39 everybody did very well with that. They all, um, gave money or donated
40 food, whatever and, uh, it was a – Fisher was a big family. They just
41 seemed to, you know – they didn't all know each other but they seemed to
42 get along very well.
43

44Marilyn Coulter: [32:05] So, you worked 7 days a week, what did you do for holidays?
45

46Don Davis: Worked [laughter].
47

1 Marilyn Coulter: [32:12] Did you have dinners and things then also?
2

3 Don Davis: We, yeah, we did, we did, it's, you know, that tradition always went on,
4 uh, but that's true, I can remember workin' 6 months straight without a
5 day off and we used to, we used to kinda joke about it, you know how
6 many days we worked without ever havin' a day off cause you didn't
7 know any different. You just got up and you went to work. It didn't, it
8 didn't matter if it was Sunday or, or Christmas or what it was. You just
9 got up and went to work cause that's just, that's just the way it was.
10

11 Marilyn Coulter: [32:38] What shifts did you work Don?
12

13 Don Davis: I worked all shifts. Uh, I spent, as most people did, uh, my early years on
14 2nd and 3rd shift and then the later years, uh, I spent probably the last 5 or 7
15 years or so on days, uh, because of what my job was, but uh, it took a
16 while for seniority-wise to get, to get to the day shift obviously.
17

18 Marilyn Coulter: [33:00] And that's your preferred shift?
19

20 Don Davis: It was. It was. Uh, i-, in some ways the nightshifts worked better. I, I
21 enjoyed workin' nights, uh, selfishly I guess as I look back but, uh, it was
22 a good, it was a good place – a good time to be in the plant maybe more
23 than it was on day shift.
24

25 Doreen Howard: Doreen Howard. [33:21] Um, as a skilled tradesperson, did you ever do
26 what they'd consider a governmental job for anyone or did you ever have
27 any-, anyone make something for you in the plant an-, and if so, you
28 know...
29

30 Don Davis: That sounds like a...
31

32 Doreen Howard: ...and what kind of things did they make and what kind of...
33

34 Don Davis: That sounds like a loaded question but...
35

36 Doreen Howard: ...interesting stuff?
37

38 Interviewer: [laughter].
39

40 Don Davis: ..., uh, yeah, of course that went – that, that happened. There was, uh,
41 what you'd call, ga-, government work was something that somebody
42 wanted made either for their person or for their department. It wasn't
43 always something that, that you made to, to, to give away or to take outta
44 the plant, but there was things, creature comforts as I would call them, uh,
45 some of the production workers would want a locker made or a bench
46 made or this or that made. So, yeah, from skilled trades standpoint, we
47 had, you know, we had the ability to do that so we did that a lot. Uh, the

1 early years, I would tell you that there was, uh, a lot more of that went on.
2 There was cars painted. There was things that, that, uh, that they did, um,
3 that was sanctioned actually but as the years went on, that changed a lot.
4

5Marilyn Coulter: [34:29] Speaking of the outside and being an electrician, did that, I am
6 Marilyn Coulter, did that allow you to, um, even though workin' 7 days
7 would be difficult to do things on the outside with your profession also?
8

9Don Davis: On the outside, you didn't, you worked – it was a different environment.
10 You worked, uh, you worked out of a hall and you were sent to different
11 cities or locations. Uh, sometimes it wasn't – it was actually worse
12 because you, you traveled. You were what they called a tramp. You were
13 – you, you'd go where they told you to go so the work didn't necessarily
14 stay in your hometown or, in, in your, you know close to your house so the
15 shop was, uh, the fact it was probably a lot better in that respect even
16 though you worked more or longer hours you were always – you always
17 went to the same place, uh, within you know – you were closer to home.
18

19Marilyn Coulter: [35:17] Now as that – did you ever have to do things for family members
20 or friends with your skill?
21

22Don Davis: Oh yeah. You mean as far as being an electrician?
23

24Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.
25

26Don Davis: Of course. I mean, if, if somebody's hotwired whether they'd lost power
27 in their house that's who they call, somebody they know that can help fix
28 that and I would do that.
29

30Doreen Howard: [35:37] Don, um, does your skills, um, flow over into any hobbies that,
31 that you may have?
32

33Don Davis: Uh, I was always a mechanical person whether it be an electrician or
34 mechanical person, whatever. I, I like to build cars, um, I have flown
35 airplanes for a lot of years, uh, I fish and hunt I guess like most but, uh, I
36 guess my – probably my biggest hobby is building cars on the outside
37 street rods if you would and I also do a little racing, str-, uh, things like
38 that.
39

40Doreen Howard: [36:10] Um, I know you have, um, quite a-, an extensive collection of, of
41 vehicles, um, and you had some, some older vehicles that you were
42 restoring?
43

44Don Davis: I do.
45

46Doreen Howard: [36:25] Can you talk a little bit about, about that hobby?
47

1Don Davis: Oh golly, I have had a lot of cars over the years. I've – right now I have
2 got a '31 Ford Model A. I have got a '70 Chevrolet Nova. I have got a '50
3 Chevrolet pick-up, um, and I've probably got a clutch of another 30 cars
4 or so tucked away in barns that I am gonna hopefully restore when I retire.
5 [laughter].
6
7Interviewers: [laughter].
8
9Marilyn Coulter: 30 cars?
10
11Don Davis: Yes. [laughter].
12
13Doreen Howard: [36:53] So the, the amount of time invested in the, the plant, ah, was, uh,
14 very good to you as far as being able to, um, purchase a lot of...
15
16Don Davis: Which is that?
17
18Doreen Howard: ...a lot of those extra hobbies, uh, if the estimates there? [laughter].
19
20Don Davis: Um, yeah, there is some truth to that. I mean, first, you gotta remember,
21 General Motors, you know, we were paid very well, uh, and again, I guess
22 we, we spend what we make sometimes but I, I wasn't that – you know – I
23 didn't waste or spend that much money on my cars. I, I, I've accrued
24 these over the years so if I – everybody knows I do that, so if they, sa-, see
25 a deal or they see a car for sale, they will always come say "hey Don, I
26 saw this car, were you interested?" Well, I kinda wish they wouldn't do
27 that cause a lot of times I would just go buy it but, uh, you know, usually
28 they are pretty good deals and that you know. My wife didn't always
29 think so but I did.
30
31Doreen Howard: [37:45] Um, ta-, touching base on some, some of the benefits that, uh,
32 General Motors has offered to you over the years, um, what's 1 of the
33 most appreciated benefits that you ha-, that you think that we've received?
34
35Don Davis: Well, I have always thought that General Motors treated me very well, uh,
36 that I always agree with everything that happened, no. Uh, I didn't agree
37 always with the philosophy of the management and things like that but
38 bottom line was they were trying to provide a job for us an-, and I
39 appreciated that. I worked hard for them and I think in the same token
40 they took care of us. Uh, I am nervous about our future. I don't, uh,
41 particularly care to see the, the way the future looks for all of us especially
42 at my point of life where I'm, you know, within months or weeks maybe
43 of retiring. I, I am concerned, I'm very concerned about it but I thought,
44 uh, that General Motors took, uh – was a good place to work.
45
46Doreen Howard: [38:46] Um, is – did – were you ever able to take advantage of the tuition
47 assistance program when you were younger? You said that you had

1 worked for General Motors and then left to go to school, was that through
2 tuition assistance or did you just quit, an-, and then rehire back in?
3

4Don Davis: I, I did not use – I used some, uh, for some personal classes through
5 General Motors but most of my college, uh, degree and all my other
6 outside work, uh, I did with my GI benefits, my military benefits, uh,
7 which worked fine because I was not employed by General Motors when I
8 did go to college so my GI Bill took care of that, or took care of a lot of it.
9

10Doreen Howard: [39:26] And was – is there any difference in, um, that you’ve noticed
11 between the hourly benefits and the salary benefits, is there anything, um,
12 one way or the other that, that you see a difference in as far as benefits?
13

14Don Davis: Well, yes but by the same token, I mean it’s, it’s hard to let it – you got to
15 look at it in the right way. Uh, salaried folks are paid, uh, some more
16 monies, uh, by the same token they contribute more money back for some
17 of their benefits and that’s the way it’s, it’s always been. It’s, it’s, it seems
18 to, uh, be a little more on the salary side as far as their co-pays, things like
19 that, uh, because it’s a, it’s – you know there is no contrast with salary,
20 with salary folks, uh, they can, you know they can do that an-, and again
21 General Motors is in serious trouble and I think so, you know, and they’ve
22 went to the union and renegotiated certain things an-, and union, uh, has –
23 is give – I, I will say give back some things too but for the most part salary
24 is pretty top heavy when it comes to some of that.
25

26Doreen Howard: [40:39] Um, over the years that you’ve been there have, um, I know that
27 during the holidays they would have like salaried Christmas parties offsite
28 and in different venues like that. Can, can you talk about any of the, the
29 types of, uh, things like, uh, I guess you know...
30

31Don Davis: Activities that they...
32

33Doreen Howard: ...yeah, dinners, or, or any offsite activities that they did some of, some of
34 the things that you got to go to?
35

36Don Davis: I would say that back in the 80s, the salary workforce was probably a
37 tighter workforce, uh, they were more like the hourly folks. They had, uh
38 – they were – everybody knew each other, they, they knew their families,
39 they knew their children, um, but as the years went on, it seemed to – that,
40 that changed and I guess I ca-, I don’t know why but it’s been a lot of
41 years since the salaried, uh, side of General Motors has ever done any
42 outside function such as Christmas parties, uh, and things like that. They
43 just don’t do it.
44

45Marilyn Coulter: [41:46] Don, do you attribute any of that from once again having
46 managers that are coming from the outside versus from coming up through
47 the rank and file and being – having longevity to get?

1
2 Don Davis: Yeah, uh, you know it used to be that if you hired or your parents hired
3 into GM they retired from GM. You spent – everybody worked at GM.
4 They were there for 30 years. Now, you see, especially in the
5 management arena, you see a lot of younger folks coming in, uh, and their
6 careers, uh, sometimes are very short. They don't stay. They either, uh,
7 get promoted out or they opt to go to another company, uh, there's, there
8 is not the closeness that there was, uh, in, in that side of the house.
9

10 Doreen Howard: Doreen Howard. [42:32] Um, in recent years there's been a lot of
11 contract in, uh, supervision that has come in, how has that affected the
12 workplace environment?
13

14 Don Davis: Well, again, you know you look at the, at the way GM has done business,
15 uh, a lot of the salary side, they wanted to reduce salary head count
16 because of the expense, so, it was cheaper, uh, less money to contract
17 those, those people in and some of them were pretty good supervisors but
18 there was no, uh, no allegiance if you would to the company because they,
19 they didn't uh – they never worked for GM, they worked for the contract
20 house in a different, uh, outlook on the way they did their, their jobs. Uh,
21 they could pay people, they could make things happen but, uh, there was
22 no, uh, again no allegiance an-, and that's kinda too bad.
23

24 Doreen Howard: [43:24] How, how do you think that that affected the outcome that the
25 hourly people saw in the outcomes of the quality, etc. of the, of the vehicle
26 itself with the contract supervision coming in?
27

28 Don Davis: Well, I don't want to say anything really bad about the contracts but there
29 is really no ownership by allowin' them. They were here to do a job, they
30 were paid, uh, quite a bit less money, they didn't enjoy the benefits and,
31 uh, they knew that they – at a moment's notice they could be terminated
32 so they didn't have the ownership if you would and, uh, I am sure that that
33 filtered onto the folks that worked under them, uh, you know, you respect
34 the person you work for, uh, by what they know and how they treat you
35 an-, and what they can teach you an-, and if they're just here to pay you
36 an-, and go home then you don't have that interaction.
37

38 Doreen Howard: [44:18] Um, I guess one last question that, that I wanted to know is, um,
39 uh, what's some, let's end on a, a happy note, what's one of the fun things
40 that you can remember doing or, or in the plant, something...
41

42 Don Davis: Uh...

43

44 Doreen Howard: ...happy or funny...

45

46 Don Davis: [laughter].
47

1Doreen Howard: ...that you can remember?
2

3Don Davis: You know, there are so many things over the years. I would tell you that
4 I, I didn't have any bad times at General Motors, uh, I managed, uh, for
5 the most part, uh, very good people. They did a good job. They, they
6 were dedicated to GM, uh, we had our parties, we had our social times out
7 of the plant, uh, I have enjoyed workin' at General Motors. I am going to
8 miss it, I am going to, uh, Marilyn said earlier about the people, an-, and I
9 guess I am going to miss that more than anything but you get a bond with
10 the people you work with and again you're with them more than you are
11 your family members so you, you've got to get along but, uh, I, I've just
12 totally enjoyed working for General Motors.
13

14Marilyn Coulter: [45:21] One last question from me, Marilyn, um, you said that you had a
15 lot of vehicles, so you were always around a lot of cars and I know that
16 General Motors here in Lansing, they have had a lot of, um, different
17 opportunities to display our vintage cars or to display cars, do you ever
18 participate in any of those promotional-like thi-, type things when we
19 showed our vehicles to the public?
20

21Don Davis: I did. Yeah, I went, uh – I worked at the Detroit show, I have worked at
22 some of the shows like that and yes.
23

24Marilyn Coulter: [45:51] What's that like to go out and talk about what you do to the
25 public?
26

27Don Davis: Well, you are proud of your product, uh, I, I hate to say the downside of
28 that is is that we've, we, we only have 1 car anymore. You know, we,
29 we've lost Chevrolet, Ponti-, Pontiac, Buick, I mean our parents grew up
30 with a certain car, you drove a certain car, uh those days are gone, there,
31 there's no product allegiance anymore. It's the same engine goes in every
32 car, it's just typically the same body style, uh, I think our engineering
33 could be better but, uh, the earlier years, you know you, you picked a
34 particular car, Oldsmobile, that's where Lansing was famous for. I was a
35 – I, I very much liked Oldsmobile so I was proud to represent that an-, and
36 pass that on to the public. I enjoyed that.
37

38Marilyn Coulter: [46:38] So what about your own personal babies?
39

40Don Davis: [laughter].
41

42Marilyn Coulter: [46:40] Did you ever get to display any of those?
43

44Don Davis: I do. I go to car shows all over the country. I go to, uh, I, I'm pretty much
45 a Chevrolet guy so I have a lot of different styles of Chevrolets an-, and,
46 uh, so, yeah, I go to, I go to car shows a-, all over the, all over the United
47 States actually.

1
2 Marilyn Coulter: [46:59] Is there 1 car that's maybe your number 1 baby?
3
4 Don Davis: [laughter] Oh, that'd be hard to say. I always say that they're all that way
5 and I am never going to sell a car but that's not true either cause I do end
6 up selling. My first car was a '50 Chevrolet and I have restored one and I
7 drove that for a lot of years and then somebody come along and wanted to
8 buy it and I sold it so I guess, I guess I couldn't say that any one particular
9 car was my favorite.
10
11 Marilyn Coulter: It's been wonderful talking to you. [47:27] Was there anything that we
12 didn't touch on that you'd like to be sure to share?
13
14 Don Davis: No, I enjoyed the interview, uh, the only thing I would say that, uh, was,
15 that was probably the biggest difference here in Lansing too is that, that
16 General Motors is not used to was the body shipping aspect and I am sure
17 you guys have talked about in other interviews?
18
19 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.
20
21 Doreen Howard: [47:46] Actually we have-...
22
23 Marilyn Coulter: You...
24
25 Doreen Howard: ...we really haven't touched a lot on that...
26
27 Marilyn Coulter: [47:48] ...Could you talk a little bit about that?
28
29 Don Davis: Is that right.
30
31 Doreen Howard: ... if you would like to elaborate on that a little bit more? Um, appreciate
32 it...
33
34 Don Davis: Well General Motors, as you know, uh, when the Fisher Body division
35 such as, and even in Flint, uh, bodies were built by Fisher and then they
36 were assembled at either Buick or, or a chassis in this case here in Lansing
37 and I managed that activity for about 7 years and that was probably one of
38 the most interesting jobs that I had and the fact, uh, it was an expensive
39 operation. Uh, those trucks, those 7 trucks that we, that we've had on the
40 road, uh, uh, day and night to haul our bodies was really an extension of
41 the line, uh, no matter what the weather was, no matter what, uh, what you
42 – what the moods of the drivers, you had to get the cars across town and
43 those 7 drivers, if you want to think about it, really controlled all of
44 Lansing because if anything happened to one of those drivers, they didn't
45 get the bodies across town, you shut all of Lansing down. So, and again,
46 expense wise, it was very expensive, uh, it averaged about 3.5 million
47 dollars a year just to run those trucks. So, it was very expensive, uh, but

1 that was, uh – I mean you had to keep the trucks up 100%. We had to, uh,
2 you know, uh, go by DOT regulations, we had to work with the local
3 police agencies, the local governmental agencies as far as keeping the
4 roads safe and open for us, uh, we had to get our traffic lights timed and
5 things so we could get over there in a, you know, in a quick manner and it
6 was just an interesting thing.
7

8Marilyn Coulter: [49:22] Um, Don, how many vehicles would be able to be placed on these
9 trucks to be finished?
10

11Don Davis: You had, you had 7 cars, 7 bodies in each, in each truck, in each trailer
12 and, uh, if you, you gotta put the numbers together, we averaged, uh, when
13 we ran 2 shifts, uh, 5 days a week, we built 1000 cars a day, um, I'm
14 sorry, we built 2000 cars a day, 500 a line when we were – on each line on
15 each shift so that was 2000 cars a day and if you think about puttin' in
16 times 7 in a trailer and taking across town that was quite a undertaking.
17

18Marilyn Coulter: [50:02] So, being the captain of body and building of 1 vehicle in 2
19 different plants, the deal of the city and everything that was a major
20 undertaking?
21

22Don Davis: It was. Uh, the drivers were very well-skilled drivers. Our equipment,
23 we, we spared no money to keep the equipment up. We had, uh, the best
24 of everything that we could buy to keep the trucks running whether it be
25 tires, whether it be engines, whatever, uh, it's just almost like – we treated
26 it like an airplane almost. It was just – there was nothing that we wouldn't
27 do to keep those trucks running safely.
28

29Doreen Howard: Doreen Howard. [50:36] Um, was that process unique just to the Fisher
30 Body facility or was there other, uh, General Motors plants that, that, uh,
31 did the body hauling?
32

33Don Davis: I know that the la- – we were the last plant to do it, uh, in General Motors
34 that will ever do it. Uh, I know that Flint did it up, up until the 70s, early
35 80s and then they – in fact we inherited their trucks. We took those over
36 when they were still running gasoline trucks and went to diesel. Uh, but
37 ge-, but Lansing was the last General Motors plant to ever do it. There are
38 still, uh, Ford, Chrysler, I'm not sure, I know there is a Ford plant that
39 does that, uh, in fact, they had to open up and make some bridges bigger to
40 get some of their trucks, uh, down in Detroit area acrossed, which we
41 never had to do, uh ta-, there's General Motors will probably never do that
42 again. That's why they built their new plants under 1 roof.
43

44Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm. [51:36] But it still makes aga- – I guess it gives GM pride
45 though to know that we were constantly getting awards and we were
46 basically a dinosaur?
47

1Don Davis: We were. We absolutely were. But again, I think a lot of that goes back
2to the people an-, and their ideas and the way they did things, uh...
3
4Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.
5
6Don Davis: ...they believed in what they did and they, uh, they did a good job at it.
7
8Marilyn Coulter: That's great. [51:56] So, um, I guess I'd like to let, for anyone that's
9going to be listening to this is going to be our manager, what would be the
10words that you'd say if they were coming into assembly plant? What's the
11best thing that they could do?
12
13Don Davis: As a manager, uh, you mean as an hourly person coming in to a plant?
14
15Marilyn Coulter: Either one.
16
17Don Davis: Either one? Well, I've always respected the people that I work for and I
18think that they need to do the same. I think that they need to keep an open
19mind and they need to, to want to do what they are doing and uh, an-, and
20appreciate the, the fact that they've been given the best training and the
21best, uh, place to work an-, an-, and good wages, an-, and I think they uh, I
22think that they should do a good job for the plant.
23
24Marilyn Coulter: Thank you.
25
26Doreen Howard: Thank you.
27
28
29/lb