2 3	rt Fell discusses his career as a production worker and UAW Safety Representative at the Fisher Body plant in Lansing, MI
4 5Cheryl McQuaid: 6 7 8 9	[recorder clicking] [background noises] My name's Cheryl McQuaid. [clicking] I'm in the Labor Relations conference room on August 16th, 2005. It's 9:58 a.m. [background movement] I'm here with [clicking] Robert Fell, [background movement] who's going to [background movement] talk to us a little bit [background movement] about his history at Fisher Body.
11 12	[clicking]
12 13Robert Fell: 14 15 16 17	Yeah. My name's Bob Fell. [tsk] [I'm 0:23] male. I'm, uh, married, [background movement] 4 children, 6 grandchildren. [papers rustling] [clicking] Um, [what else you want? 0:30] [papers rustling] You want me to go through this whole thing?
18	[papers rustling] [background noises]
19 20Cheryl McQuaid: 21 22 23	No. [thumping] [papers rustling] [0:34] Um, like to know a little bit about the day you hired in. [background movement] What date [background movement] did [you hire 0:39]?
23 24Robert Fell: 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47	I hired in, uh, [background movement] twice here at Fisher Body. [clicking] Uh, [clicking] in October of 1979. Uh, [background movement] worked 89 days [in 0:49], so just prior to getting my 90 days where I had the protection a the union, [thumping] I got laid off, as many people did at that time. [background noises] Um, I then rehired again in 1981, March 27th. Uh, worked in the Trim Shop both times I hired [clanking] in here. Um, [background movement] worked with Doug Rademacher, sittin' right over here, [laughter] [background noises] in Trim Shop. [clanking] Um, worked the production line down there for about 3 years. Uh, after that, uh, we had a layoff on [extensive 1:20] re-, [background movement] uh, remodeling [coughing] [inaudible 1:22] the plant. [coughing] Um, I came back after a leveling off to [background movement] the Paint Shop, worked in, uh, [in 1:29] paint repair system. Learned [clicking] how ta repair cars as a [clicking] utility person. [background movement] [papers rustling] Um, [squeaking] that was [clicking] [papers rustling] one a the better jobs [background movement] I've had in a long time. Um, besides, uh, [background movement]. We would work in Small Parts [background movement]. Um, [beeping] left that system, went to the opposite system in Paint Repair also [background movement]. Um, and over there we covered the [background movement] paint mix distribution [group 1:54] [scraping] and, [background movement] and, uh, paint repair. Um, worked with a lotta, lotta fine [papers rustling] [background movement] people in those areas. [background noises]

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13	Um, after probably, uh, s-, [thumping] 9 years in, uh, [thumping] Paint Repair, position [background noises] for the Paint Shop safety advisor, uh, [clicking] opened up. Um, [clicking] I applied for that, uh, received that job, um, did that for a number of years, uh, representin' safety for the Paint Shop. [background movement] Um, very rewarding job. Um, [background noises] from there I was probably noticed by other, [background movement] uh, members of the union. [clicking] Um, after several years of the advisor job, I was appointed to, uh, [background movement] um, [background movement] the UAW health and safety position by [Richard Shoemaker 2:40], so I've had that job probably [background movement] 7 years now to the current, [background noises] the current time. Um, [background noises] anything
14 15	[clicking]
16Cheryl McQuaid: 17 18	[2:50] Would you say most of your time has been on the day [thumping] shift or the afternoon shift?
19Robert Fell: 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27	Afternoon shift. I've been mostly an afternoon shift worker with a few visits to day shift. Uh, the stretch I'm on right now, uh, [background noises] because of plant closing, uh, [background movement] all the activities are on days. I'm on the day shift now [background movement]. So there's been, uh, [background movement] there's been kind of a change at home because after 24 [background movement] years on [background movement] night shift, now to be home. [thumping] Um, so there was a lotta TV programs I'd never seen [laughter] just because they [background movement] were always on in the evening. So [clicking] it's been quite a change.
28 29 30	[background noises]
31Cheryl McQuaid: 32	[3:26] And can you tell me what [papers rustling] your favorite job was?
33 34	[papers rustling]
35Robert Fell: 36 37 38 39 40 41	I'd say the one I'm in currently representing safety [background movement] for workers is [clanking] the most rewarding. [background movement] Um, you get some heartfelt thank yous from a lotta people, [background movement] uh, sometimes when you least expect it. But that's been quite rewarding [background noises] to do that, to know that you're [background movement] actually makin' [background noises] [clicking] a difference [background noises] in people's safety and health.
43 44	[background noises]
45Cheryl McQuaid: 46	[3:53] Now you said that you started out – was it in Trim?

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1 [background noises] 2 3Robert Fell: Yes. 5Cheryl McQuaid: When you first hired in? 7Robert Fell: Trim Shop. 9Cheryl McQuaid: [3:59] What job did you do in Trim? 11Robert Fell: The first job I had in Trim on, in 1979, was on the [background noises] 12 Eighty-Eight, Ninety-Eight line. [background noises] [papers rustling] Uh, 13 they gave me a butter [background movement] knife to clean excess 14 urethane off [background movement] the cars. Um, [background movement] I lost a knife one time. This was on my, maybe my second day a work. 15 16 [background movement] Um, figured I better report [background 17 movement] it right away. Said well walk to the cafeteria and get another one. [laughter] So I went up to the cafeteria, [laughing] [background noises] 18 found some big cook up there. [background noises] I said, "I need a, a butter 19 20 knife." [background noises] They said, "You can't have a butter knife." 21 [papers rustling] [And I thought, 4:31] I was really worried about what was 22 gonna happen then, [thumping] so I, I went, uh, uh, I just hid for a while till 23 she went back in the kitchen. [clicking] I went and grabbed a butter 24 [laughter] knife and ran back [clicking] downstairs. [background noises] So 25 that's what I did. [background noises] I cleaned off urethane off the 26 windows. 27

28Cheryl McQuaid:

29

31 32 [background noises]

33

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Um, I [inaudible 4:57] Paint [papers rustling] Repair, and I learned all aspects of paint repair work, [papers rustling] [clicking] uh, how to paint cars, um, [background noises] how to repair cars, um, [background noises] prep cars for repainting. [background movement] Um, very – that was [background movement] pretty rewarding. [thumping] I did that for [background noises] guite a number of years. [background noises] Uh, as utility [thumping] you cover different [background noises] positions, so it's different [thumping] people doin' different jobs [thumping]. And not only that, you get the, the opportunity to work throughout the Paint Shop on, [background noises] on other days, different types of operations. So that was rewarding. [thumping] That was a good job. [clicking] Good people up

And then you went into – after the changeover, the model change, you

[clicking] went into the Paint Department. [4:54] Do you remember

[background movement] the job that you did there?

45 there.

46

1 Page 3 of 11 1 [background noises]

3Cheryl McQuaid: [5:33] Anybody that, uh, you remember that [background movement] just,

[squeaking] great memories, [background noises] practical jokes...

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6Robert Fell:

Uh, too many to even [background movement] [clanking] think about. We used ta, um [thumping][scratching] — we had a lot of guys on the [clicking] [C-line 5:47]. We, [thumping] we're all had a good sense a humor every day. Lots a jokes played back and forth, uh [clicking]. Um, [thumping] now a lot of'm have retired and moved on, you know, [background noises] and, uh, you kinda lose track of a lot of'm, but awful lotta people that made it [background noises] enjoyable, in a sense, to come to work every day.

13

14 [background movement]

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16Cheryl McQuaid: [6:12] Another thing I'd like to touch on is, uh, your appointment with

17 UAW, the safety appointment...

18

19Robert Fell: Mm-hm.

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21Cheryl McQuaid: ...from Mr. Shoemaker...

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23Robert Fell: Mm-hm.

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25Cheryl McQuaid: ...is that what you said? Just tell me a little bit about that.

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27Robert Fell: [tsk] That was, uh, [background movement] that was, that was a nice day. It was nice, uh, getting that letter and that appointment from Dick Shoemaker. 28 29 Um, [background movement] [clicking] [it 6:30] was with, uh, [clicking] 30 Chairman [Doug Taylor 6:32] and President [squeaking] [Bernaff 6:33] 31 [clicking] at, uh, at the local here. Um, [background noises] they, uh, they, 32 of course, [clicking] had a lot to do with that, [clicking] Um, [clicking] so I 33 take that position [clicking] very responsibly. Um, [clicking] every now and then I meet with Mr. Shoemaker, who gave me this job, and, uh, he's very, 34 35 uh, [background movement] he's a very down-to-earth [background noises] 36 type a person, um, [papers rustling] but very strict in what he expects from 37 [beeping] his health and safety reps. Uh, we meet generally on a yearly 38 basis, but, um, yeah, that was [clicking] – um, I'm very honored, uh,

[clicking] to have that position.

40

41Cheryl McQuaid: Bein' in the Safety Department, um, I'm sure you've seen a lot of changes

from the day you hired in to [background movement] present day. [7:19]
Could you maybe comment on some of the changes that you've seen that,

44 that you're particularly proud of or...

45

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Yeah. Um, it's, uh, [background movement] a lotta changes in both, uh, [clicking] the production world and the skilled trades world. [background movement] Um, [background noises] things that used to be considered [background noises] kind of normal at one time, such as uh, uh, people would, when they first went in to paint would have paint on their arms or [background movement] faces and stuff like that. And they would use all sorts of solvents in the Paint Shop to clean themselves up. [thumping] Um, that practice has ended. If somebody were to do that, I mean, people would just look at you very strangely, like, [background movement] and, and say somethin'. But it used to be a routine-type [background noises] practice with [thumping] [clicking] people to do those kind a things. Um, the safe handling of, of Paint Shop chemicals, uh, that's changed quite a bit. Um, people have gotten a lot smarter with education as to, as to how ta deal with those type a things.

14

In the trades, [clicking] in, world, that's really changed dramatically, um, [background movement] with training and, [creaking] and constant reinforcement of rules such as working at heights. At one time, uh, tradesmen would think nothin' a walkin' out on the beams or standing on the top rails of catwalks and things like that to reach things they had to. [background noises] Um, now we have lifts throughout the, the plant, um, training programs, uh, harnesses, lanyards, um, [background noises] engineering quite involved in, in, uh, how to eliminate the hazards that [clicking] people have to go through. So [background movement] there's some real rewarding programs, such as Confined Space. Um, we used to be, uh, pretty hazardous in that area. Of course we know we had fatalities at this plant involving confined spaces [background noises] [thumping]. So [background movement] we have, I believe, some of the best Confined Space programs ever. [background noises] Um, it's tragic that it came out of [clicking] those tragedies, but, uh, they had to happen. And [background movement] even to this day, most people that involved in those spaces knew those men that died here, so that, [clicking] that helps reinforce what we have to do together. [clicking] It's been quite rewarding to be involved in it.

35

[recorder clicking]

36

37Cheryl McQuaid:

[9:40] Bob, could you tell me a little bit more about Confined Space?

38

39Robert Fell:

Confined Space is, uh, um, [background movement] has been quite well studied in the safety industry. Um, I, I [clicking] – to know the facts right now of how many people die each year in this country is -I, I don't have that in front of me, but there's terrible [clicking] accidents involving confined spaces. Uh, it has a lot to do with, uh, uh, [background movement] uh, the configuration of a space you're going into, the [clicking] atmosphere [thumping] of a space. So it could include anything such as, uh, vaults, pits, um, um, tanks, anything that [thumping] a person could get themselves into.

1 Page 5 of 11 Um, so because of the fatalities we've had at this facility, [thumping] uh, we take that very seriously as far as our program, uh, identifying all the [background noises] various confined spaces that we know of in the plant. Uh, we've identified several hundred confined spaces.

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Um, [background noises] we have some that we rout-, we [creaking] routinely go into but then others, uh, [background movement] very rarely do we, [creaking] do we enter. [background movement] But, uh, we have a process that we follow before we go into any of the, the, the [background movement] permit-required type spaces. [background noises] Uh, other spaces don't require a permit that just need a [thumping] [shallow drive pit 10:54] of some sort. Um, [clicking] you could turn a non-permit type space into one if you're going to introduce something [clicking] to that space that would put it into the category [clicking] of permit. But, uh, um, it's a very serious program [background movement] that involves an awful lot [background noises] of people, the industrial hygienist, the Safety Department, Plant Security, the workers, the supervisor. Everybody has to sign off. [clicking] Everybody has to plan [thumping] exactly what's gonna happen when they go in to do that type a work. So we engineer as much as we can ta take the hazards out of the work that has to be done in those places.

21 22

23 [clicking]

24

25Cheryl McQuaid: [11:34] When you introduce something new to a, [background movement] a confined space, what do you mean? [background noises] Introduce a new employee, introduce...

28

29Robert Fell: Well it...

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31Cheryl McQuaid: ...a new chemical...

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33Robert Fell: ...it may be, it may be a chemical that's gonna change the atmosphere. 34 [thumping] It may be, uh, cutting [clicking] and welding, [background] 35 movement] uh, putting excessive weld fumes [background movement] into a 36 space. Uh, it, it could be any [clicking] number of things, so that's why you 37 can't look at just going into [thumping] a space. [clicking] You have to look 38 at every aspect of what's [clicking] gonna happen, uh, when people go in 39 there and what, what's the plan. [clicking] Um, not only do we have a plan 40 A; you also have to plan how you're gonna rescue people [background 41 movement] from that space. Um, [background movement] [clicking] and 42 speaking of that, some of the, uh, [clicking] I've been involved in a rescue 43 team here for quite some time. [clicking] [background movement] Um, that 44 is some of the most difficult training that you'll ever take. Um...

45

46Cheryl McQuaid: [12:22] Would that be our [background movement] Emergency Response...

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1	
1 2	[clicking]
3	[clicking]
4Robert Fell:	Yes
5	1 65
	Toom
6Cheryl McQuaid:	Team?
7 8Robert Fell:	Though a though a toom in turining this year, and shyiously it years
9	yes. There's a, there's a team in training this week, and obviously it won't be for this [thumping] facility. It's gonna be for the next facility, [thumping]
10	- 1 0- 1 0-
	but that training has to [clicking] continue, uh, [clicking] keep moving
11	forward all the time. Um, they're [background movement] always changing
12	things in the training as to [clicking] what's gonna, [thumping] um, you
13	know, to improve training. [background movement] But I would tend to
14	think that outside of the military, this is [clicking] some of the toughest
15 16	training that, [thumping] uh, a person can actually go through. Um, it's done
17	with the Lansing Fire Department to go down into very deep spaces
18	[clicking] buried under the ground [clicking]. Uh, very tight and you can hardly maneuver yourself through [background movement] some of the
19	underground piping that you have to crawl through. Um, [background
20	movement] so it takes people [coughing] to their physical limits and to their,
21	[thumping] uh, [background movement] psychological limits as to what you
22	can put yourself through. So it's really, really good training. I've always
23	been impressed by the training and our training folks that put it on.
24	been impressed by the training and our training looks that put it on.
25	[thumping]
26	[mumpmg]
27Cheryl McQuaid:	[13:22] [tsk] So tell me – you said [thumping] places underground. Um, are
28	you talkin' [clicking] about tunnels or
29	you talkin [cheking] about talines of
30	[clicking]
31	[cheking]
32Robert Fell:	It could be tunnels. You have, uh, tunnels [clicking] under the ground, uh,
33	steam tunnels that run from this plant over to Plant 2. Um, [clanking] but
34	mostly, [clicking] mostly everything we have falls in the lines of, uh,
35	eliminator tanks, uh, vaults, that type a thing.
36	0.
37	[scraping]
38	Far all O1
39Cheryl McQuaid:	[13:36] Vaults, eliminator tanks – what are those?
40	
41	[clicking]
42	-
43Robert Fell:	Uh, like eliminator tanks underneath the Paint Shop. That's where our
44	fatalities happened years ago, [background movement] um, back in 1983.
45	[background noises] Um, [background noises] and quite often in confined
46	spaces, uh, your fatalities [background noises] are, uh, also rescuers. More

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1 2	people are killed trying to rescue someone else [background movement] than actually, um, than all the, the original accident. That's what happened
3 4	here at this plant. Two people tried to rescue a third person, [clicking] and they all became fatalities.
5	
6	[clicking]
7	
8Cheryl McQuaid: 9	[14:18] Why would the third person be there? Was it, is it a tank where like fluids go, a holding tank or [clicking] – I don't understand
10	
11Robert Fell:	Yeah. This was a tank that, uh, [clicking] all the, uh, um, paint sludge drains
12	to. Um, they drained [thumping] the tank out, and then [clicking] they were,
13	they found – and there was probably [clicking] pockets of, uh, um,
14	something that [clicking] pushed the oxygen out of the tank, so it became an
15	oxygen-deficient atmosphere is what happened. Um, very tragic.
16	oxygen deficient dimosphere is what happened. Oin, very tragic.
17Cheryl McQuaid:	[14:48] And are there other areas in this [clicking] plant that are that – [well
5	
18	14:52] with Confined Space [clicking] they are not that hazardous anymore,
19	but [background movement] there are a lot of those spaces in Fisher Body?
20	
21	[background noises]
22	
23Robert Fell:	[tsk] Yes, there are because, uh, hazards [background movement] may not,
24	[clicking] uh, be of that type a thing. It could be an engulfment like in a
25	water tank, um, [background movement] any [clicking] – there's quite a few
26	[clicking] different spaces that we just – like I said, there's a couple hundred
27	that we've [clicking] put down as permit required, meaning you [clicking]
28	have to have an entire plan [background movement] from beginning to end
29	[clicking] before you go in.
30	
31	[background movement] [recorder clicking] [background movement]
32	[ouenground movement] [recorder eneming] [ouenground movement]
33Cheryl McQuaid:	[15:33] How has the Safety Department in-, affected the employees
34	[background movement] in the plant?
35	[background movement] in the plant:
36Robert Fell:	Um, the nice thing about the Safety Department, it, it is one of our [clicking]
	• • •
37	joint programs here [background movement] at GM, [clicking] and then uh,
38	uh, [clicking] UAW GM. [thumping] It's, [clicking] I think, a better program
39	than maybe some of our counterparts do, the way it's designed. [thumping]
40	Um, we have an equal number of management reps and, uh, UAW reps.
41	[background movement] Um, at this facility there's 6 of us total, [clicking]
42	um, 3 on each side. [background movement] Um, as a, as a joint health and
43	safety committee, [background movement] uh, we make all the final
44	[clicking] decisions involving safety in the facility here. [background
45	movement] [clicking] Um, [thumping] it's made a tremendous impact
46	because I, [clicking] I truly believe that over time, we've actually changed

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safety culture [background movement] in the plant. [clicking] Um, [clicking] things that people used to find acceptable as, as, uh, [background movement] a work practice are not acceptable any, any longer. [clicking] Um, I see it in the workforce out there [background noises] because they're, they're understanding [coughing] the safety culture, um, and they're asking the appropriate type questions, um, uh, [thumping] when they don't understand certain types of rules. Uh, they may understand parts of'm, um, but rules they may not see very, [clicking] uh, or have to deal with very often. [thumping]

Um, [background movement] we've made quite a few changes such as the pedestrian walkways. Uh, people generally stay in those pedestrian, uh, [background movement] walkways. Um, but we're always challenged with new things, uh, coming [background movement] forward, um, such as in our society with the, the use of cell phones now, um, throughout the plant. Now we're seeing a, the issue of people using cell phones. [clicking] We have, uh, we've had to write some rules about it. The enforcement of rules is a little difficult because cell phones are so [clicking] prevalent through society. [background movement] Um, we definitely don't allow'm on, uh, uh, industrial vehicles, [clicking] [thumping] um, [clicking] but people have a hard time [throat clearing] with that. Um, it's not our intention to be the safety cops, [clicking] um, although we will be if we have to, but we prefer to, uh, [background movement] treat everybody as our brothers and sisters and help them understand why these [clicking] rules are in place and why they have ta [thumping] be enforced. [clicking]

Um, that reminds me of one time when we had a, a, tradesperson [thumping] that was so upset by so many safety rules [clicking] that he thought it was really hampering his job. Uh, him and his committee man come to talk to me in my office. [door squeaking] Um, he couldn't understand why [clicking] me, not being a tradesperson understanding his trade, how [clicking] I could come up with rules that affected him and his trade [clicking] or other trades. [thumping] And, uh, uh, we had to go down to, to show that there's a lotta expertise that goes behind all these safety rules, uh, down to the UAW [clicking] GM Health and Safety Center. [clicking] Uh, rules are based on, [clicking] uh, uh, government, uh, [clicking] government standards. [background movement] Um, he couldn't understand how the government could do that. [background noises]

Um, what it finally boiled down [clicking] to is, uh, every fatality that's ever happened in General Motors has, um, a booklet, and that booklet has your name on it. [clicking] And I have a whole locker full of these booklets, [thumping] and I ended up havin' to show'm these booklets [thumping] and say, [thumping] "These are the people that wrote [thumping] the safety rules [clicking] and every one of'm there." [thumping] So that, uh, [clicking] drove the point home, that every, [clicking] every single rule we have out

1 Page 9 of 11

1	there, there's, uh, someone paid for that rule. [clicking] And whether it's
2	[clicking] talkin' on a cell phone, [thumping] such as Chrysler just had a
3	fatality [background movement] due to somebody talkin' on a cell phone.
4	[thumping] Every rule has [thumping] came from that type a place.
5	[background movement] But, yeah, this – it's [thumping] very difficult
6	talking to, uh, workers and explaining rules sometimes. [clicking] Um, um,
7	it's very difficult. Some people take it [thumping] as a personal, um, assault
8	on'm, but generally most a the time you can kinda turn people around to
9	[clicking] see it your way, [clicking] to, to realize that the rules are equal to
10	everybody.
	everybody.
11	
12	[background noises]
13	
14Cheryl McQuaid:	[20:00] Bob, a question I forgot to ask you is do you have any family that
15	works in this plant?
16	
17	[clicking]
18	
19Robert Fell:	Uh, I'm the last one of my family to work [laughter] in this plant. Um,
20	[throat clearing] my, uh, [background movement] my mother and
21	[thumping] father met each other working here, [thumping] uh, in 1953.
22	[background movement] Um, I've had 2 brothers that worked here,
23	
	[thumping] um, [background movement] an uncle that's worked here
24	[thumping] um, a cousin that's worked here, and I'm the last one. [thumping]
25	I, my – the last relative [clicking] was my cousin that [throat clearing]
26	transferred [over to 20:32] Grand River Assembly. [background movement]
27	[clicking] So – but that's all right here in this plant. Uh, my father was in
28	trades. He was the, uh, pipe fitter. Uh, my mother [background movement]
29	was in production. Uh, her last job here was in the Paint Shop. Um, I had a
30	brother that was a, uh, inspector [background movement] on the [clicking]
31	Trim line, and he left voluntarily. [background noises] He decided to, to go
32	a different route, uh, in his employment. [clicking] Um, [clicking] my
33	cousin, uh, [thumping] [yeah, had 21:02] transferred. [clicking] I had an
34	uncle that was in, uh, [clicking] on the management side. He was a, uh, uh,
35	in engineering. [clicking] Uh, he went over to the, uh, uh, had – became a
36	production superintendent before he retired. So [background movement]
37	now everybody in the family [background movement] has moved on. I'm the
38	last one here, so
39	idst one nere, so
40	[thumping]
	[thumping]
41	
42Cheryl McQuaid:	[21:19] Did your parents retire from here?
43	
44	[background movement]
1 □	

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45

1Robert Fell: Yes. They both retired. They're both [clicking] [papers rustling] deceased now, but [papers rustling] they had both retired and, and, uh. But this is the place they met, [thumping] so this is where I come from.

4

5 [laughter]

6

7Cheryl McQuaid: Literally.

8

9Robert Fell: Yeah.

10

11Female: Literally. [laughter] [thumping] [clicking] [Inaudible 21:33].

12

13Robert Fell: Yep. Pretty much.

14

15 [background noises]

16

17Cheryl McQuaid: Well it's been wonderful [papers rustling] interviewing you, and I [clicking]

thank you for this opportunity.

18 19

20 [papers rustling]

21

22Robert Fell: Mm-hm. [clicking] Well it's been great. I have enjoyed this. It's – thanks for

doin' this.

24

25 [murmuring] [recorder clicking]

26 27 28/lk

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