

1 **Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham discusses her career as a production worker**
2 **and UAW member at the Fisher Body plant in Lansing, MI**
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4

5 Cheryl McQuaid: This is Cheryl McQuaid with the Lansing Fisher Body
6 Historical Team. Uh, it's December 6, 2005. It's approximately
7 12:00 noon. We're preparing to interview Dona Jean Gillespie-
8 Graham. Um, first of all, we'll have the other members state
9 their names.
10
11 Doreen Howard: Doreen Howard.
12
13 Marilyn Coulter: Marilyn Coulter.
14
15 Cheryl McQuaid: And Dona Jean, would you please state your name and spell
16 your last name for the record?
17
18 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham. That's G-i-l-l-e-s-p-i-e hyphen
19 G-r-a-h-a-m.
20
21 Cheryl McQuaid: [00:39] And Dona are you, I'm sorry, I need your address also.
22
23 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Uh, 6496 West Dewey Road, Ovid, O-v-i-d, Michigan 48866.
24
25 Cheryl McQuaid: [00:51] And are you married? Do you have children?
26
27 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Yes, I am recently married actually. I have a husband Peter,
28 and 2 stepsons, **Christopher** and **Dominick**, and my own
29 daughter, **Alyssa**.
30
31 Cheryl McQuaid: [01:05] And could you give us a little bit of your educational
32 background?
33
34 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: I have an associate's of business from Baker College, and at the
35 time I got called to Fisher Body, I was working on my
36 bachelor, but I haven't finished that up yet.
37
38 Cheryl McQuaid: [01:21] And speaking of Fisher Body, when were you hired in?
39 Do you know what your seniority date is, and could you tell us
40 a little ba-, bit about the very first day walking in the plant?
41
42 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: I have an adjusted seniority date of July 2, 1991, because I was
43 at several other plants for brief periods before. I'm a GM gypsy
44 kind of person. Um, I came to Fisher Body in August of 1994
45 and I just remember it being very huge, but I was immediately
46 adopted by Craig Johnson, our alternate benefits rep or...
47

1 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
2
3 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: ...alt-, not benefits rep, alternate, uh...
4
5 Interviewer: Workers' comp?
6
7 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: ...workers' comp rep [sighing] and he and I worked together for
8 about 6 years to start off. So he started me o-, o-, off right He
9 introduced me to everybody and still looks out for me now and
10 then.
11
12 Cheryl McQuaid: Do you remember your first job?
13
14 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Yes, I was on the, uh, door line inserting side door glass. Um,
15 at one point, we did front and back and then when they moved
16 the, uh, door line upstairs in the plant, the-, and went to taking
17 the doors off to build up the door and then, aft-, after the door
18 is completely build up and then put it on a conveyor, it goes
19 back down and is refitted to the car, uh, at that point in time,
20 they broke it up into front glass and re-, rear glass and I was on
21 front glass. Um, so I did that for about probably 8 years all
22 together.
23
24 Cheryl McQuaid: [03:05] So you said you're a GM gypsy. Could you tell us a
25 little bit about your GM life?
26
27 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: [sighing] Yeah, I started in '81 over at chassis plant on the C-
28 system right when the, uh, the Grand Ams and stuff, I think it
29 was in like the second or third model year. They were ramping
30 up still for fu-, full production and so they brought on actually
31 – no wait a minute, that's not where I started, that, that was in
32 '84, I...
33
34 Cheryl McQuaid: Mm-hm.
35
36 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: ...I'm sorry. Um, '81 I went over to metal fab and I loaded
37 conveyors with raw crankshafts. They're just big chunks of
38 semi-shaped steel and you load them onto the mill, the
39 conveyor, and they feed'm into the mill and grind'm down to
40 certain specifications. And then on weekends, when we
41 worked, uh, overtime, I did gauging operations as, as they
42 come off the mill, as the crankshafts came off the mill. That
43 was in '84, I was a week short of getting 90 days in...
44
45 Cheryl McQuaid: Mm-hm.
46

1Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: ...and they said, "Well, okay, see ya." Then they called me back
2 in '84 to the chassis side and that's, um – what did I do over
3 there? I did a lotta things. I did, uh, worked on instrument
4 panels, connecting elec-, making electrical connections, uh,
5 and worked on [e-check 4:33]. I installed speakers into the
6 instrument panel and then I ended up there, I was, uh,
7 installing, um, back seats. The cushions, they get bolted down,
8 and the seatbelts and that was, then in '87, [laughter] they said ,
9 "See ya," again..
10

11Cheryl McQuaid: Mm-hm.
12

13Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: ...and I was off for about 7½ years until I got called to Fisher
14 Body. We call that the 7 years of famine at our house.
15
16 [laughter]
17

18Cheryl McQuaid: Mm.
19

20Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: I worked other jobs meantime, but they were all pretty menial.
21 Sometimes I worked as many as 3 jobs...
22

23Cheryl McQuaid: Mm.
24

25Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: ...tryin' to make ends meet but it's not a GM job.
26

27Cheryl McQuaid: Mm.
28

29Marilyn Coulter: [05:25] So then you came in...
30

31Cheryl McQuaid: Marilyn Coulter.
32

33Marilyn Coulter: I'm sorry, then you came in to the Lansing Fisher Body.
34

35Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Yes.
36

37Marilyn Coulter: [05:30] How did the people of Fisher Body differ from the
38 other 2 facilities that you worked at?
39

40Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Well, you know, it, it's odd and I'll get in trouble for saying this
41 because I got in trouble the last time I said this and I had made
42 the mistake of putting it in print, I never spoke to a committee
43 person. A committee person never spoke to me while I was at
44 either of the plants in '81 and '84. I didn't know who they were
45 and nobody ever said union meeting is on such and such a day
46 and nobody, immediately the first thing when I came over to
47 Fisher Body, I knew who the committee man was. I knew

1 when the meetings were. It was very different, uh, system. You
2 were encouraged to attend meetings and it was just, I guess
3 maybe because it's so much bigger over at the other plant, it's
4 spread out more or something, new hires were not really, um,
5 initiated as, as, uh – I don't know how to say it politically
6 correct, but they weren't strongly encouraged to get involved.
7 But to justify that a little bit in between the interims, during
8 that 7 years of famine, I got active politically. So when I came
9 back, I had already been coached by some other UAW
10 members to start getting involved because the union will help
11 your candidates. So my first experience, I can't remember my
12 fir-, first day in the plant but I remem-, remember my first time
13 I came over to this union hall.
14
15Marilyn Coulter: [07:08] And what was that like for you?
16
17Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: That was Marilyn. [laughter]
18
19Marilyn Coulter: Marilyn, sorry. [laughter]
20
21Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Um, I came to the plant to ask if they would put a yard sign in
22 the front of the, uh, I came to the hall to see if they would put a
23 yard sign out for my candidate who was at that time Damion
24 Frasier, and he was running against Dave Camp in the fourth
25 congressional district, and our receptionist at that time was
26 Gayle, um, ...
27
28Interviewer: Gooslin.
29
30Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: ...Gayle Gooslin, and as it happened, president Garry Bernath
31 was not occupied and she sent me up to see him and I
32 introduced myself and he shook my hand and the end result
33 was he said, "I'll take two," and he took – 'cause he happened
34 to live in our district too, so he took one for his home and one
35 for the union hall. And that was kinda the start of things for me
36 as far as union activism goes.
37
38Interviewer: Oh, that's great.
39
40Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: A month or so later, I found myself actually out, um, working
41 on the campaign. This was before all the, uh, new regulations
42 on stuff, they, uh, out as an organizer but in fact, I don't know
43 if you can use this part, but they used to be able to send people
44 out to work on campaigns and I was in the plant maybe 6
45 weeks [laughter] and all of a sudden I was gone for 3 weeks.
46 [laughter]
47

1Interviewer: Mm-hm.
2
3Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: So it was kind of a strange beginning but it wa-, turned out to
4 be pretty fortuitous for me. I apparently made a good
5 impression when the first words out of my mouth were "Can I
6 put [a 8:44] yard sign here?" [laughter]
7
8Interviewer: [Inaudible 8:45].
9
10Cheryl McQuaid: Cheryl McQuaid. [08:49] Dona Jean, do you, um, remember
11 what it was like having a child at home and having, having to
12 go from plant to plant and how hard was it on your family life?
13
14Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: The plants were all in Lansing. That was not, um, I was always
15 very blessed in that my parents were able to step in and look
16 after my daughter, um, no matter what shift I worked when I
17 was at GM. The, the hard part was when I was off from GM
18 and had to juggle 3 jobs and go to school full time and try to
19 make ends meet. Those were the hard parts. But yeah, my
20 parents were always there. If I had to work Saturdays, I usu-,
21 usually was able to be home when she was home. A lot of
22 times I volunteered to work nightshifts so that I could be home
23 during the daytime, but, uh, then, you know, during her teen
24 years, when you have to pay a babysitter, you feel like you're
25 paying somebody else to raise your kid for you and that person
26 may or may not raise your kid according to your own personal
27 values. But because my parents were in there to fill in a lot,
28 especially during her younger years, um, that took a lot of that
29 guilt or burden off me. It was a real lifesaver. [sighing] I, you
30 know, as she got older, it, and her personality was more, and
31 character, were more well-formed, it wasn't such an issue but
32 during those really young years, you want your kids to have the
33 right values and when you work afternoon shift, you don't see
34 your family until Saturday or Sunday and that is if you're not
35 working on Saturday.
36
37Interviewer: Mm-hm.
38
39Interviewer: [10:42] So you were laid off a number of times. Um, what was
40 it like being laid off?
41
42Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: It was horrible. It is like one day you have a job and everything
43 is going well and you're working tons of overtime and you've
44 got money coming in, and suddenly they come up and you're
45 going to be laid off in 2 days or 1 day, or whatever, and that's
46 it. They don't really set you down and explain, uh, what your
47 options are or what the process is. They just, you know, hand

1 you a sheet of paper and expect you to figure it out. Whe-,
2 that's why when it came to the mass layoffs here at Fisher
3 Body, I got, planted myself at Art – President Art Luna's office
4 and I said, "Look you've got a lot of young, low-seniority
5 people who do not know and they are scared to death because
6 I've been there and I've done that and I know exactly what their
7 fears are and we have got to help them. We've got to pave the
8 way so that they know exactly what they're entitled to, exactly
9 what their responsibilities are and what benefits are available to
10 them and what other sources of help," um – that was probably
11 one of the most, I think personally, the most valuable things
12 I've done as a union activist is to help our members get through
13 those 3 waves of mass layoffs. As we went through successive
14 waves, the, um, members who had more experience, they were
15 more higher seniority and they knew more or less what to
16 expect because they've been following along with the program,
17 the layoff support system that we came up with, they had been
18 following that along, so was less and less but the first batch
19 was real low seniority, scared young kids with young families.
20

21 Interviewer: [Inaudible 12:32] .

22
23 Marilyn Coulter: You often say family. [12:37] Did you find that, and you said
24 that like when you came to – Marilyn Coulter – you said
25 [laughter] that, uh, like Craig took you under the wing, um, did
26 you have a work family within the plant?
27

28 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Um, yeah, I think, bu-, I think you build families or
29 communities or whatever you wanna call'm wherever you go.
30 Um, we always used to joke, my last partner, **Hector Rodriguez**
31 and I, we always use to joke that we were really closer to each
32 other and we know more, as much about each other as our
33 husbands and wives do.
34

35 Marilyn Coulter: Mm.

36
37 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Because those cars keep going by and you've gotta kill the
38 monotony somehow and so you know every detail of what,
39 whose kid is dating what and whether they're a no good son of
40 a gun or whether they really like'm or you know honest to God,
41 [laughter], uh, this is probably one of those off the records, but
42 we discussed our bowel habits. [laughter]
43

44 Marilyn Coulter: Uh-huh.

45
46 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: You know. You go that far. Finally, we figured out that what
47 we drink, you know, like 3 quarts of water during the work

1 week but on the weekend, [laughter] we don't drink as much
2 water. I mean, it gets really down to personal details. You find,
3 um, one thing that surprised me, I guess, is how many people
4 are willing to talk about spiritual and religious issues. And
5 that, they kind of surprise you because people don't, as a rule,
6 talk openly about that stuff, it's more personal, I don't know,
7 but, um, you, you are going to talk to the person you work with
8 every day assuming you get along reasonably well, you're
9 gonna know inside and out. They're gonna know if they got a
10 hangnail or an ingrown toenail, or whatever going on and
11 there's a bond there that never goes away. I haven't worked
12 with CJ, Craig Johnson, in 10 years but we still gotta hug and
13 catch up quick first thing we see each other.
14
15Marilyn Coulter: [14:36] Have you, Marilyn Coulter still, have you had any of
16 those relationships that continued outside the plant walls?
17
18Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Hm. Because we live quite far away from Lansing, I'd have to
19 say no, although we do still keep in touch with Garry Bernath
20 but that's because he is out in our neighborhood.
21
22Interviewer: Mm-hm.
23
24Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Um, most of the union activities we see a lot of people at other
25 union activities that take place outside the union hall outside
26 the plant. Pete has been here longer, my husband, Pete
27 Gillespie. He has been at Fisher Body much, much longer. He's
28 got 27, going on 28 years. Uh, he has people he's known since
29 he was a teenager and...
30
31Interviewer: Mm.
32
33Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: ...yes they're still friends and they talk and they email And and
34 outside the plant but I would have to say that most of the
35 friendships, by the time you get home, you drive an hour to
36 work, you drive an hour home, you put in 8 to 10 hours at
37 work, by the time you get home you've gotta clean house,
38 you've gotta cook meals, you've gotta do laundry, you've gotta
39 wash the dishes. You've got all these other things to do and I
40 don't have any friends outside of the union I don't think.
41
42Interviewer: [laughter]
43
44Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: We went out for dinner probably about 2 months ago with, uh,
45 3 other couples and that was like, wow that was fun. That was
46 the first time we went to something that was just purely social.

1 But we're both pretty committed unionists and most of our
2 weekend and evening activities flow around that.
3
4Interviewer: Hm.
5
6Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: So I guess we'd have to get away from the union to see if those
7 contacts continued.
8
9Cheryl McQuaid: Doreen Howard.
10
11Doreen Howard: [16:21] Um, you were at a couple other plants in the Lansing
12 area.
13
14Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Mm-hm.
15
16Doreen Howard: Um, explain some of the differences and similarities between
17 the facilities that you were at.
18
19Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Um, first of all, the first plant I was in, it was kind of an
20 isolated job. You weren't around many people. You were just 2
21 or 3, you know, there wasn't team meetings, um, there wasn't a
22 lot of interactions with people that weren't right in your
23 immediate area, so that limited your contacts inside the plant to
24 maybe a half-a-dozen people plus your supervisor. Now the
25 second plant because I moved around to so many different
26 jobs, um, from the instrument panel line to the cushion line and
27 all that stuff, then you got to meet more people and as you went
28 to the next group, you met a new group of people but you kept
29 contact at least in passing with the other folks that you met and
30 how, how all that compares with, uh, 602 at Fisher Body,
31 you're always going to be closest to the people that are right
32 next to you, I think.
33
34Marilyn Coulter: Marilyn Coulter. [17:42] Dona, how was it for you being a
35 woman, inside a factory environment?
36
37Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Well, first time around in '81 at, uh, the fab plant, I have to
38 admit to coming to the conclusion that men will look at any
39 woman whether she's attractive or not, rather than look at
40 another man. [laughter] If you're the only woman there,
41 everybody is going to look at you. Here I didn't, at, at, at 652 I
42 never made an effort to get involved. Nobody made an effort to
43 draw me in but I never made an effort either. So six of one, half
44 a dozen of the other. Here, I never found it an issue. I was, I
45 guess fortunate in making that initial contact with Garry
46 Bernath and he kind of fast-tracked me.
47

1 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.
2
3 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Which did cause some resentment from my, uh, peers that had
4 worked longer, worked harder, been, been involved longer,
5 initially. But I think that after a couple of years they pretty
6 much accepted that I proved myself and that seemed to go
7 away and that, I was here longer by that time.
8
9 Marilyn Coulter: [18:56] Um, that, and you proved yourself, I'm just kind of
10 moving forward, you moved forward and were fast-tracked but
11 you kind of also proved yourself and shown your support
12 because you were now the recording secretary of this local
13 union and you have done so for 2 terms, correct?
14
15 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: This is my third term.
16
17 Marilyn Coulter: Your third term?
18
19 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Mm-hm.
20
21 Marilyn Coulter: So you're going into your third term each term being 9 years.
22
23 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: No, each term being 3...
24
25 Marilyn Coulter: Three, I mean a total of 9 years.
26
27 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Three years, a total of 9 years, yes.
28
29 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.
30
31 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Um, yeah and that happened after Garry Bernath had moved to
32 the international. I always tell him, about that, yeah, you got,
33 helped me get started here, here, and here, but I got elected on
34 my own, you know.
35
36 Interviewer: [inaudible 19:33]
37
38 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Actually, I didn't, I'm one of the very few officers of this local
39 who has never been elected. Nobody's ever actually cast a vote
40 for me because I ran [laughter] unopposed, 3 three times
41 [laughter]
42
43 Marilyn Coulter: [19:47] All 3 times?
44
45 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: So no, I wasn't elected [laughter] it was just default. Nobody
46 else wanted the job and I always tell him that this job sucked so
47 bad, nobody wants it.

1
2Interviewer: [laughter]
3
4Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: But, however, Garry Bernath did help me get started, uh, as a
5 substitute editor for the local union weekly publication And uh,
6 then when the editor got a full-time job doing something else, I
7 took over as full-time editor, left for a little while over, I guess,
8 uh, whatchamacall editorial conflicts? And now I'm back and
9 I've been back for...
10
11Marilyn Coulter: And...
12
13Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: ...about 3 years now.
14
15Marilyn Coulter: [20:29] being the editor of the paper, um, what does that entail?
16 What've been some of the most exciting things that you've
17 covered?
18
19Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Hm. Some of the most exciting things we cover never get into
20 the newsletter [laughter]. Um, as the editor, it's not, I don't
21 write articles for the paper, I could, but I don't, because that's
22 not what the editor's job is. The editor's job is to make,
23 basically to make everybody else make sense. You know,
24 somebody turns in a, a, an article to me on whatever subject be
25 it, community services or union label or whatever, and they're
26 not writers and they're not editors and they're not supposed to
27 be, so I have to take that material, raw material, some of it is
28 more raw than others and make it readable so that the average
29 member out there who is chasing cars down the line can figure
30 it out without having to feel like they are working to figure it
31 out. But, um, a lot of times you're just chasing people. I, I'm
32 wor-, working on a manual right now on how to write, uh,
33 letters to the editor and letters to your congress person And and
34 press releases and articles and one of the definitions of deadline
35 in there is that, uh, that a deadline is a figment of the editor's
36 imagination.
37
38Marilyn Coulter: [laughter]
39
40Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Because nobody's going to respect it [laughter] except you. But
41 a lot of times you spend just chasing down the right people to,
42 um, get the information for, from them so that you can put the
43 paper together and then the day after the paper has already
44 been printed, they come in and say well I need this in an hour,
45 you know. You're going to get it next week, you're not going to
46 get it this week, or you're going to have to do a separate, I
47 guess that's the most frustrating thing about it. The most

1 rewarding thing about it is that I do get to slant the news in a
2 direction that's positive for the union and for the membership.
3 Um, by that, I mean, okay, uh, you could just put in a blurb that
4 the old newsboys raised \$2033.95, or you could go on and say
5 how our membership has continued to give and give and give
6 to all these different charities even though we've been going
7 through some hard times of our own for the last 3 years.

8
9 Um, you kind of control the message and present it, I have
10 always maintained even back when Garry Bernath was
11 president, is we need internal communications, which is our
12 newsletter and our website, and we also need external
13 communications to the public. I think we've got a good grasp
14 on promoting the union to our own membership and that's one
15 of the unexpected side effects of this, uh, plant closure, is that
16 it's opened up a lot of educational opportunities for members
17 who weren't and may never be activists but at least now they're
18 knowledgeable about what the union does or is supposed to do
19 or is trying to do and I think most of them can see because of
20 the different programs that were put into effect, like the layoff
21 support team and the human resource group, they can see that
22 our union did something that the other unions weren't doing.

23
24 Interviewer: Mm.

25
26 Cheryl McQuaid: Doreen Howard.

27
28 Doreen Howard: [24:06] Um, what, what do you do as the recording secretary?
29 What is your duties in, in that position?

30
31 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: As the recording secretary, I take the minutes at the executive
32 board meeting and at the general membership meeting and al-,
33 also responsible for attendance. There's, uh, some members
34 that are appointed to positions, uh, be it a local appointment or
35 uh, what they call a [doc 46] [24:31] or international
36 appointment are required to attend, uh, one out of every three
37 meetings minimum and so it's my responsibility to, to keep
38 track of that. They sign in, I let the hall secretary know. If
39 they've missed three meetings in a row, they're sent a letter
40 saying you can be removed from this position, that gives them
41 one more meeting to come to, excuse me, and ask to be
42 excused, And uh, some of them get excused for the damndest
43 reasons. I don't know, [laughter], I don't want to lose my job;
44 okay, you're excused. Uh, [laughter] you know that's, and then
45 I see it go the other way around where people have kind of a
46 valid excuse and they're re- rejected.

47

1 It's, it's just whatever the membership action dictates, is what
2 happens. Um, there's, um, that, at, on the meeting day I do
3 those, and I take my minutes, I compose that at the computer so
4 I take the minutes on laptop And uh, then as soon as I get time,
5 I go through them, and I kinda do a, uh, typing shorthand thing
6 and so I've gotta go in and fill out all my abbreviations and all
7 that, then it goes onto the hall computer, the secretary, um, the
8 president's secretary reviews it, proofreads it, formats it, and
9 prints it out so that it can be distributed at the next meeting.
10 Same thing with the attendance. Um, this role, I think is a little
11 more activist than what may be some of our previous
12 secretaries had. I, I, or maybe it's just that I've been lucky, um,
13 to be counted among, this administration at least, uh, to be
14 counted among the leadership, not, in, in...
15
16 Interviewer: It has been.
17
18 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: ... in the past, past administrations from what I have seen, the
19 recording secretary's role was kind of a backgrounder thing,
20 somebody that worked from the sidelines And uh, I've, feel like
21 I've been given, uh, a lot of opportunities to take some
22 leadership roles as in the layoff projects, um, that you wouldn't
23 normally see in the past but I think because of the demands on
24 our union these days, that we need more people in leadership
25 roles and that's a contributing factor. I'm not saying, I'm not
26 trying to say I deserve to be a leader, I'm saying we just need
27 more leaders, we need more people to share the responsibility
28 so that when, I'm horribly concerned that [Art or Steve? 27:24],
29 either one are going to get burned out and end up in the
30 hospital sick or something because they're literally wearing
31 themselves out and so it's good to see so many other people
32 taking leadership roles and getting their ideas going and I think
33 it makes them feel empowered and more a part of the union. If
34 you're not a part of the solution then you're part of the problem.
35
36 Interviewer: Mm-hm.
37
38 Cheryl McQuaid: Dona Jean, I'm sorry, Cheryl McQuaid, [27:50] you mentioned
39 that your husband works in the plant. Was that a shop
40 romance? Did you meet him at work?
41
42 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: I met him at a union meeting. Um, I came as I said to Fisher
43 Body in August of '94. I was, um, in October I had my
44 whatever time in, 90 days is it? 90 days in? Um, and I came,
45 went to the October union meeting because I was officially part
46 of the union now. Up until that point you were just kinda like,

1 yeah, you are, but not, you don't have full whatever, full rights,
2 or whatever...
3
4Interviewer: That's true.
5
6Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: ...to representation, so in October I went to the first union
7 meeting and Garry Bernath swore me in and I had felt
8 compelled to thank the membership for helping, this local
9 helped a lot of us who had been laid off for the long periods of
10 time, we broke seniority, apparently there was some move on
11 managements part to hire off the street and this local was
12 instrumental in saying no, first we bring back all our people
13 that are laid off.
14
15Interviewer: Mm-hm.
16
17Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: So I thanked the membership after I was sworn in for doing
18 that for being willing to step up to bat and risk going out on
19 strike if necessary to do that, so then on my way back down the
20 center aisle, there was, uh, 2 gentlemen on my right, one of
21 them was Derrick Quinney, he was right on the aisle and the
22 next one was Pete Gillespie and people were shaking my hand
23 as I walked down, welcoming me to the local and Derrick
24 reached out to shake my hand and Pete just about knocked him
25 over...
26
27Interviewer: [laughter]
28
29Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: ...to get to me. So I knew right then, that boy, that boy is
30 serious [laughter].
31
32Interviewer: [laughter]
33
34Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: No, uh, um, actually it wasn't until probably December,
35 Christmas party...
36
37Interviewer: [Inaudible 29:51].
38
39Donna Jean Gillespie-Graham: ...that same year in '94 and I was talking to this couple but I
40 had no clue who they were, I still don't, but they said they got
41 married here at the union hall and they had their reception here
42 and I thought that was really, really cool and I still at this point,
43 I knew Pete...
44
45Interviewer: [coughing]
46

1 Donna Jean Gillespie-Graham: ...I talked to him every day but we hadn't dated or anything and
2 I finished talking to that couple and I walked up to the front of
3 the club room part and Pete was sit'n there with Andy Graham
4 and Michelle Penfield and I put my hand on his shoulder and I
5 said, "Well Petey, how are ya?" And I, and he looked up at me
6 [laughter] and I just knew right there. You know, we're going
7 to get married here in this union hall.
8

9 Marilyn Coulter: [30:33] And how many years later did that happen?
10

11 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Uh, 10 years later, 2005, that was '94. He didn't act-, actually
12 ask me out until February of 2000 or of '95 and so it took 10
13 years, but, yeah, I kinda grow on him.
14

15 Marilyn Coulter: [30:52] You had a very interesting wedding here. Didn't you
16 have a very...
17

18 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Yes, we did.
19

20 Marilyn Coulter: ...interesting wedding party?
21

22 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Yes, we did, we did.
23

24 Marilyn Coulter: [30:56] Want to tell us a little bit about that?
25

26 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: We did, it was great. I loved it. It, we had both been married
27 previously. We didn't, uh, want people to, we wanted friends
28 and family there, but we didn't want them to feel like it was
29 something big, formal, and bring an expensive gift. So the first
30 thing we did, um, was we sent out flyers instead of invitations
31 and the flyers had our dog on it and our dog was dressed in a
32 nice tuxedo and he was going to be, actually he was one of the
33 bridesmaids but he wore a tuxedo because we couldn't find a
34 gown to fit him. Um, and the flyers also asked that instead of
35 wedding gifts, that people bring food or money to donate to the
36 Lansing Food Bank And, um, we weren't going to have a band
37 we were going to hire a comedian, we got that taken care of
38 and then a band volunteered anyway from our church. So it
39 ended up being a lot of fun, a lot of people, um, a potluck kinda
40 thing, lots of people brought lots of food and the dog had a
41 wonderful time. In fact, one of the nicest things coming down
42 the aisle, my daughter had the dog, she was behind Pete and I
43 as we went down the aisle and somebody stopped and they had
44 a little gift bag of dog treats for the dog. I thought that was so
45 sweet. He'd have stayed there forever [laughter] until all the
46 treats were gone.
47

1 Interviewer: [laughter]
2
3 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: But anyway, we had a great time. We had a good party, uh, it
4 was great, and we raised around \$1000 for charity.
5
6 Interviewer: Wonderful.
7
8 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Not counting the food that was donated too.
9
10 Cheryl McQuaid: Doreen Howard.
11
12 Doreen Howard: [32:42] Um, going back to the different plants that you were
13 at...
14
15 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Mm-hm.
16
17 Doreen Howard: ...um, what were the working conditions like at our facility
18 compared to the working conditions that, that you were at, or
19 you saw at the, the other plants And um, of those, what made
20 us different, I guess than other facilities?
21
22 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Uh, you can't say that it was the plant that was different.
23 Actually, the other facilities looked newer, they looked, they
24 had better lighting, natural lighting, uh, they, I always thought
25 Fisher Body was hotter than any of the other plants that I
26 worked in. Um, I think the difference has to be the people and
27 nothing wrong with anybody I ever worked with, I loved them
28 all, and I harassed 'em all, but, uh, the people here at this plant
29 worked in some unbelievably negative conditions. I remember
30 one spring we literally had to wade through water to get to our
31 jobs. It was like swimming pools, the plant was so flooded, and
32 yet they didn't shut 'er down. They kept the line running and
33 they, you know, the working conditions themselves I think are
34 actually worse here than they were at the other 2 plants that I
35 saw.
36
37 Cheryl McQuaid: Marilyn Coulter.
38
39 Marilyn Coulter: [34:12] Um, coming in here, in some plants they do, were there
40 any types of, um, pranks that were played, how did people pass
41 the time. What types of things did you do for lunches and
42 holidays?
43
44 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Hm. Um, I don't remember the potlucks like they had at Fisher
45 Body, at, honest to God, I don't remember having any potlucks
46 at chassis but they probably did, I just don't remember them
47 because it was so long ago, but it seemed like here there's

1 always some kinda potluck or some kinda fundraiser for the
2 needy or something's always going on and a lot of times it
3 involved food, whenever possible I'd say [laughter].
4
5Interviewer: [laughter]
6
7Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: It seemed to be a prerequisite, we'll do something as long as
8 there's food and food is a good way to get people to participate.
9
10Marilyn Coulter: [35:08] Um, now do, are you, you, do you have any other
11 family members other than your husband that work here?
12
13Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Yes, I do. My sister, Diane Husted, is, um, in charge of the
14 skill center and she and I actually hired, I hired in at chassis in
15 '81, and 2 weeks later she hired in here at Fisher Body. I got
16 laid off, she stayed. So she actually has 7 years more seniority
17 than I do, even though we basically got hired in at the same
18 time, it was just kinda luck of the draw because she was, she
19 has been laid off over the years, but she was never laid off long
20 enough to break seniority.
21
22Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm. [Inaudible 35:50].
23
24Cheryl McQuaid: And I'm sorry, Cheryl McQuaid [35:51] did you mention any
25 of the pranks or any of the horseplay. Did you see any of that?
26
27Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Mm. That I can tell you about?
28
29 [laughter]
30
31Cheryl McQuaid: [laughter] You can tell me about anything.
32
33Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Um, mostly I saw like glove ball fights, you know or, or
34 somebody would get up and you'd hide something on 'em.
35 Somebody would go to the bathroom and then they'd look for
36 their lunch pail but it wouldn't be where they thought it was,
37 but I never say any, um, oh, one time, they had this thing, I
38 can't, Mary, Mary [Milosec 36:24]. Remember her?
39
40Interviewer: Mm-hm.
41
42Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Okay, they had this thing where they went around and they
43 outlined everything in yellow tape where the trash bins were
44 supposed to go and where the stock, um, what do you call it,
45 platforms, were supposed to go. Everything was outlined in
46 yellow tape on the floor. So one day when our supervisor was
47 gone to a meeting and the line broke down, we got, we found a

1 roll of yellow tape and we went in [laughter] and we put little
2 corner of yellow tape on the, on his, um, legs of his desk on the
3 floor and then we put [laughter] it around the, um, the 4 prongs
4 of his little swivel chair, [laughter]...

5
6Interviewer: [laughter]
7

8Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: ...and then just waited for him to notice. We just went in his
9 office and did all that. I mean that was a harmless prank and
10 yeah, it maybe wasted 2 yards of tape but, and then he never
11 noticed it until he went over, [laughter], he is so used to see-
12 seeing yellow tape all over, he never noticed it until he bent
13 over to tie his shoe and here is this [laughter] yellow tape
14 where he's supposed to just stay right there. [laughter] but,
15 other than that, it's, uh, mostly, mostly harmless and you know,
16 if somebody'd go do something and then other people would
17 set 'em up or, um, send notes down the line, jokes down the
18 line. I didn't really see any horseplay that would endanger
19 anybody's safety.
20

21Interviewer: Mm-hm.
22

23Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Not at any of these plants.
24

25Marilyn Coulter: Um, Marilyn Coulter. [37:49] What made a good supervisor.
26 What made a bad supervisor?
27

28Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: You know that's such an interesting question because I've seen
29 management, um, that were pure management, they'd never
30 worked on the line and I've seen them, that are, that had been a
31 good supervisors, what I call a good supervisor. Likewise, I've
32 seen supervisors that came from the line and should know what
33 the line is like that didn't work good, in my book, good
34 supervisors. So it's a mix. You'd never, I don't think it's, it's
35 what your values are and some supervisors, long before all
36 these new support the operator things, they already knew what
37 their job was and their job was to be there if you needed help
38 and to get our of your way and let you do your job the rest of
39 the time and they did that and [Miguel] [38:39] Garza was a
40 good one like that And um, by the same to-, token, I can name
41 a couple supervisors that came from the line that weren't, all of
42 sudden they had this management code, treated you, they
43 treated their employees like, uh, they were real people, just
44 maybe not close personal friends but working, it was a working
45 relationship instead of a supervisor/worker relationship. It was
46 like kinda well we're all into this together And and I've worked
47 with supervisors, just you know, like straight out of school and

1 I think it's a difference in personality not necessarily in your
2 background or your training. Your personal values.
3
4 Marilyn Coulter: Now one thing, um, also, now I know when they came in here,
5 I know they had the smoking, was, was allowed and then they,
6 the smoking ban happened. [39:26] How did that effect you
7 and your coworkers?
8
9 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Um, well we got outside more. [laughter] Uh, a lot of people
10 didn't like it, a, sure, that it helped all of us, in, in that we
11 learned to go for at least an hour-and-a-half until the next break
12 without a cigarette, but, um, it was very difficult when you
13 only have 12 minutes or 14 minutes for a break to go to the
14 bathroom, um, run outside for a cigarette, and if you have to
15 heat your lunch up or whatever, you know, a snack or
16 something. It, it pretty consuming. It would have been better if
17 they had, had smoking stations that were not a half a mile
18 away. You know, within, within, uh, walking distance, but I'm
19 a smoker and I think I'm a, hm, excuse the pun, dying breed.
20
21 [laughter]
22
23 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: And I thinks it's probably good that the new plant is
24 nonsmoking and a lot of your, um, more seniority people are
25 going to resent that and probably find ways to cheat but in line,
26 if I can work in here for 4 hours at a stretch and not have a
27 cigarette, I can work, you know I can make it work and if I can
28 make it work, anybody can because I'm basically lazy and
29 greedy. [laughter]
30
31 Interviewer: [laughter]
32
33 Cheryl McQuaid: Doreen Howard.
34
35 Doreen Howard: [41:02] Um, what is one of your happiest or saddest times in
36 the plant?
37
38 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Hm. In the plant. Hm. I don't know. I just don't really think I
39 wanna go there. [laughter]
40
41 Cheryl McQuaid: Okay. Um, Marilyn Coulter.
42
43 Marilyn Coulter: [41:34] Can – is there anything that you'd like to talk about that
44 we haven't talked about.
45
46 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Um, no, I, one reward, unexpected benefit of being involved in,
47 in so many union activities, and especially like the layoff

1 support programs and things like that is I got to meet so many
2 people in the last couple years that I never would've gotten an
3 opportunity to meet otherwise because when you work in paint
4 shop, when you work in trim, you don't get to circulate with the
5 people in paint shop because it's an isolated environment. You
6 don't see the people in body shop, very many of 'em, because
7 that's another isolated environment even further away. You
8 basically, if you're a trimmer you know most of the people in
9 trim and that's kinda your world there. But, being involved in
10 these other projects got me around, and Lord help me I'm old
11 and I can't remember names very well, so, but people who met
12 me when I was doing interviews, layoff interviews, they
13 remember me, and so I'd say, "Hi hon, how you doin?"
14 [laughter] or "Hi sweetie." You know, [laughter] I'd try to fake
15 it until I, eventually I'll remember their name, but usually not
16 right at first glance, but. I think that was the benefit of this
17 whole thing is I got to meet so many people. The saddest time,
18 I do have a sad one, can we back up to that?
19

20Interviewer: Mm-hm.

21
22Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: At the end of the first wave of layoffs, um, the very last night,
23 we went around, with fresh packets of materials to make sure
24 everybody had all the newest, latest, greatest material, the, the
25 fact sheets and um, all that and I walked the entire trim shop
26 and talked to every single person that I had worked with during
27 the last 6 to 8 weeks, on getting them their information, and I
28 got right to the end which was the repair line, the end of C-trim
29 and those guys weren't going anywhere, so I knew I didn't have
30 to talk to those, so then I cried all the way back because you
31 get so tight with these people and you knew that you were
32 never going to know the end of some of these stories and being
33 a writer, and an avid reader, I always read the end first.
34 [laughter]
35

36Interviewer: [laughter]

37
38Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: I like to know where the story is going. I like to know that the
39 one kid who had a baby on the way and his insurance was only
40 gonna last a month after the baby, you know, I want to know
41 that these kids all came through safe and we really had no way
42 to follow up on that, once they were out of the plant, we did,
43 you know, we made meetings available, informational
44 meetings available on a weekly ba- basis, kind of a coffee hour
45 for anybody to have questions and some of them did show up.
46 Um, but they go away and until we're all back together at the
47 new plant, you don't know how they made out. We, one of the

1 concerns the human resource group had was how many deaths,
2 how many suicides, how many cancer or other stress-related
3 illnesses are going to come out of this? How many divorces
4 and broken homes, and those were things that we considered
5 every time we met, every week, and ways, there's a limit to
6 what we can do but we could make sure that they have access
7 to resources that can help them with those problems. But you
8 never know until we all end up back at the new plant how some
9 of those stories ended and hopefully they didn't end, they just
10 continue on to the next step.
11
12 Interviewer: [Inaudible 45:11].
13
14 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: But I cried all the way back out of the plant but I made it,
15 [laughter] I made it to the end of the line before I started
16 [crying] but by the time I got back up to the office, I couldn't
17 breathe.
18
19 Cheryl McQuaid: Thank you for very much.
20
21 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: Oh yeah, thank you.
22
23 Marilyn Coulter: Thank you, thanks for the interview, thank you for the things
24 we do-, didn't know.
25
26 Doreen Howard: Thank you.
27
28 Interviewer: Thanks.
29
30 Dona Jean Gillespie-Graham: I didn't know you didn't k3
31
32
33/ds