

**Alex Hernandez, a Hispanic American, discusses his career
as a production worker and UAW member at the Fisher Body plant in Lansing, MI**

5Earl Nicholson: Uh, this is the Fisher Body Historical Team interview. Today is March 8,
6 2006. The time is roughly 9:05 a.m. and we are at the Frank Dryer
7 Greenhouse. First, I'd like to introduce the team.

9Gary Judy: Gary Judy.

11Cheryl McQuaid: Cheryl McQuaid.

13Marilyn Coulter: Marilyn Coulter.

15Earl Nicholson: And, uh, I'm Earl Nicholson. Uh, Alex, we're interviewing Alex
16 Hernandez today. [0:27] Alex, would you please say your name and spell
17 it for us?

19Alex Hernandez: Alex Hernandez, uh, A-l-e-x, uh, H-e-r-n-a-n-d-e-z.

21Earl Nicholson: Fantastic, Alex. Um, before we get into, um, your, your, uh, your hiring
22 into Fisher Body, we'd like to talk about your, as you grew up in the
23 neighborhood, we'd like to talk about your neighborhood experience.
24 [0:51] We'd like to, we'd like to tell you, we'd like you to tell us, you
25 know, what it was like for your, for you to grow up in the, in the same
26 neighborhood as, uh, as Fisher Body.

28Alex Hernandez: Okay.

30Earl Nicholson: How...

32Alex Hernandez: Well, um, I can think back to probably 1968, um, and, uh, vivid memories
33 of being at Verlinden Elementary School and, uh, and my father worked
34 there and, um, and, uh, sometimes I would, in class I would look out the
35 window and I'd, you know, my dad's over there working. They're
36 building cars and everything.

38 And I was a Cub Scout too and, uh, and, and I, I bugged my father a lot,
39 you know, I want to go in there. I can't take you in there. Well, like I
40 said, I was a Cub Scout. We got to go on a field trip there and I remember
41 walking in going oh my God, you know. This is – I saw my dad working
42 on the line and I saw all these people putting, um, this vehicle together.
43 And, uh, and, you know, I saw people talking and working and, and, um,
44 and it was just, uh, to me it was like happening, it was like wow. There
45 was just so much stuff that was, um, awesome looking. You know, here's
46 a vehicle being, uh, made. I, I wanted to go in there for a long time and I,

1 I got to and so I was absorbing everything. Well, right then I pretty much
2 made up my mind I wanted to work there.
3
4 And, um, I was playing, uh, baseball with a couple of my friends and, um,
5 oh, we were talking about what we wanted to do and, and, uh, a couple, a
6 couple of my friends I'm going to be an astronaut or whatever and now it
7 came to me it's like I'm going to work over there and one of my friends
8 who still, I still have these two friends, Dan and Steve and, um, uh, Dan
9 looked over at me, why do you want to work there for? Dude, I'm going
10 to work there, you know, I said that and, uh, and it happened. Uh, the
11 chance I could, uh, um, I hired in there in 1981 and, um, uh, I love it.
12
13 Earl Nicholson: Fantastic, Alex. Um, I'm going to go over some, some biographical
14 information and then I'd like to, to, for you to, to tell us what it was like
15 to, to grow up in the neighborhood, um.
16
17 Alex Hernandez: Okay.
18
19 Earl Nicholson: So, uh, [3:26] your marital status.
20
21 Alex Hernandez: Uh, single. I got, I got a daughter.
22
23 Earl Nicholson: [3:32] Um, and your, uh, educational experience.
24
25 Alex Hernandez: I went to, uh, J.W. Sexton and, uh, had some college at LCC.
26
27 Earl Nicholson: [3:41] And, uh, any military experience?
28
29 Alex Hernandez: None.
30
31 Earl Nicholson: Okay. [3:45] So tell us what was it like to grow up in the neighborhood
32 when you were growing up, you know, when you worked around the
33 factory, you know. What, what was that like?
34
35 Alex Hernandez: Well, um, we'd, we'd see a lot of cars going in and out of there
36 sometimes. And, uh, and I, I had a paper route. I went to school there,
37 had a paper route, and I played right by there so that factory was always in
38 my sights whatever I did pretty much, um.
39
40 Earl Nicholson: So you played around the factory.
41
42 Alex Hernandez: Yup. I played on, on the field and every once in a while we would bike to
43 the parking lot that, you know, me and you would park at just to get a, a
44 glimpse. They used to park cars over there, new cars there in the back and
45 we would go and look at them and they were mainly Cutlasses or, you
46 know, they were Oldsmobiles and we would always look at those things

1 and, and, um, and, uh, you know, oh man, I want one of these cars or
2 whatnot.
3
4Earl Nicholson: Marilyn Coulter?
5
6Marilyn Coulter: [4:46] Um, Alex, when you say the lot, which lot, what street was it on?
7
8Alex Hernandez: The North Lot, so the North Lot it was off of Stanley Street.
9
10Marilyn Coulter: Okay.
11
12Alex Hernandez: Right there and it's, they called it the North Lot and, um, where the
13 employees park.
14
15Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.
16
17Alex Hernandez: And then there was a section there where they would park some cars there,
18 you know, but they were, you know, they were going to do some
19 rechecking on them or I don't know but we would look at them and, and,
20 uh, and we'd play there, you know, ride our bikes there or and, um.
21
22Earl Nicholson: [5:20] You say play there, you played, did you ever get in trouble, uh, with
23 the security guards?
24
25Alex Hernandez: Oh yeah. I had, um, a go kart and it wasn't, we weren't done putting the
26 motor together but we wanted to see this thing roll and we used the
27 concrete new ramp on the side there on Stanley Street to roll that thing
28 down and they were chasing us and we were laughing about it and, uh,
29 kept doing it. And, um, I wasn't putting 2 and 2 together but, you know,
30 they knew my dad, they knew who I was and I didn't know that and they
31 knew my father so my father caught wind of it and, you know, I got a
32 talking to about playing over there.
33
34Earl Nicholson: [chuckle] So, uh, the, the, the factory was a major part of your life even
35 when you were very, very young.
36
37Alex Hernandez: Mm-hm.
38
39Earl Nicholson: And, and you grew up with that.
40
41Alex Hernandez: Mm-hm.
42
43Earl Nicholson: And, and those experiences, those are such vivid memories for you.
44
45Alex Hernandez: Oh man. They're, they're, I, you know, they're instilled in me. Um, when
46 I, when I think about those days, uh, um, you know, the air is crisp, um,

1 uh, there wasn't so much division back then in, in my eyes. Uh, you
2 know, they used to have a flowered coach on Verlinden, and, uh, we
3 played baseball a lot and, uh, we had like, uh, if you, if you hit that, if you
4 hit that area with the baseball, you were automatically out because we
5 would see these workers working on this, uh, this garden and when you,
6 when you look at it from and they, they had it, uh, arched a little bit so you
7 could see, you could see what it was. Um, it was the coach and they, those
8 guys worked on it all the time and it was a beautiful site so, you know, we
9 didn't really want anything to wreck that, um, but, uh.

10

11Earl Nicholson: Gary Judy?

12

13Gary Judy: [7:18] Alex, could you tell us what the coach was and, and do you know
14 anything about it?

15

16Alex Hernandez: Yeah, it's the 1901 Oldsmobile Curved Dash.

17

18Gary Judy: [7:29] So they had, they had that in flowers was it?

19

20Alex Hernandez: Yup, yup. There was flowers right there and, and, uh, they used to before
21 they, uh, on Verlinden Street they had open windows where they could
22 open the windows up and, um, they, later on they blocked them. And, uh,
23 but, uh, as a boy I'd play there and I could see those guys looking out,
24 taking their breaks with their cigarette, their arm out, and they're just
25 getting some fresh air. And, uh, they would say stuff to me and, uh, a lot
26 of those guys knew my dad and, um, and so I kind of, uh, when I had to
27 sell something at school, that's where my first place I would go was either
28 to the front, to the front of the building where they were coming in and out
29 or if they were already in there I would throw the candy or whatever up to
30 them and then they would throw their coins or dollar bills down and
31 sometimes I couldn't find them and they would, they would throw some
32 more stuff down to me and but, uh, you know, uh, those are, those are, um,
33 memories that, uh, that are instilled in me that are just fond memories I'll
34 never forget, and.

35

36Male: [8:42] So where, where exactly did you live in relationship to the factory?

37

38Alex Hernandez: I lived on 1804 North Genesee Drive and that is, uh, oh, parallel to the
39 elementary school, Verlinden Elementary and, um, that's where I grew up.

40

41Earl Nicholson: So that's, that's like we're saying within walking distance.

42

43Alex Hernandez: Oh yeah, I, you know, my, like, uh, my father used to walk to and from
44 school. We, we only had one car in our family. Our family was six kids
45 and, uh, all we need is one car. My dad walked to and from work and, um,
46 I did too when I first hired in and then I, I moved out of that house and,

1 um, and uh, um, had to drive but I was still close to it in the west side here
2 of Lansing.
3
4Earl Nicholson: Marilyn Coulter?
5
6Marilyn Coulter: Um, Alex, you said that you always wanted to work into Fisher Body.
7 [9:35] Now what year did you hire in?
8
9Alex Hernandez: 1981.
10
11Marilyn Coulter: 1981. [9:40] So was that your first job that you had?
12
13Alex Hernandez: No. My first job was at, uh, Burger King. [chuckle]
14
15Marilyn Coulter: Burger King.
16
17Alex Hernandez: Yup.
18
19Marilyn Coulter: Oh.
20
21Alex Hernandez: On Saginaw here on the west side and I liked that too. And, uh, but, um,
22 you know, my father had a huge influence on me and, uh, on that and, um,
23 I don't know, it's, we liked cars. We like, my dad always either bought an
24 Oldsmobile or a Chevrolet or something but, you know, and it was kind of
25 a home thing, um. I knew there was a future there for me. Um, and I
26 mean to this day even going to the new plant it's, I love going to work
27 and, uh, I never saw it as a chore to go to work there. I was, I, you know, I
28 tell people, man, I'm leaving my dream. It's important to, to, um, you
29 know, if you want to do something, do it, and.
30
31Marilyn Coulter: [10:40] Alex, growing up that close to a plant, was there anything about
32 the plant that you noticed? Was there any special noises or smells or
33 anything that you could get all the way to your house do you remember?
34
35Alex Hernandez: Yeah. You could, you could, you could hear, um, you could hear like in
36 the wee hours of the morning you could hear the semi-trucks going, going
37 by, you know, and 'cause they used to truck, truck'm from Fisher to
38 downtown and you could hear that. You could hear the train going off, in,
39 in the early mornings. And, and, uh, couldn't really smell it that much
40 when I was a kid but the thing that I remember too is that when I went to
41 bed at night they were working. There was cars being built while I was
42 sleeping and, uh, and my dad was on night shift so, you know, I used to
43 think about my dad being over there and I used to go, sometimes I used to
44 walk over there just to see if I could get a glimpse of him 'cause you, you
45 were able to go look up in those windows and, uh, that place is so huge.
46 And I used to, I used to walk with him to work thinking that he's going to

1 take me in there and he's like you got to go back home. It's like I tried,
2 you know. And I would go over there on lunch hour and, um, and, uh,
3 you know, my dad didn't really come out that much but, uh, he'd, he'd go
4 to Harry's once and a while and, um, we played over there too.
5
6 Marilyn Coulter: [12:16] And what is Harry's?
7
8 Alex Hernandez: Harry's is a neighborhood bar that was across the street from the plant and
9 we could have something to eat there and then afterward he'd have
10 something to drink.
11
12 Marilyn Coulter: [12:28] Now did you ever go in there as a child?
13
14 Alex Hernandez: Yeah, I went in there and played pool. I learned how to play pool there.
15 [chuckle] Matter of fact, I was beating a guy pretty good and he got real
16 upset with me and, uh, Charlie Watts he went and told my dad, so my dad
17 went over there and talked to Art and told him not to let me in there. But I
18 used to, I used to, actually, my, probably my first if you want to say my
19 first real job was I was stocking bottles in, in the back there for Art
20 [inaudible 12:57] and, um, the returnables and then I'd go in the back,
21 there was a lot there and we'd play football and then every now and then
22 I'd go and see what I needed to stack up so, um, so he would let me. I, I
23 could go in there when there wasn't anybody in there and there was a few
24 guys in there and, um, I learned how to play pool pretty good there.
25
26 Earl Nicholson: So, so what was it, so – Earl Nicholson. [13:24] What was it like? Uh, I
27 mean you're in there, you're in this bar, you were just a boy. There's all
28 these gruff, dirty people coming in to the bar, you know, and you're seeing
29 them, you know. What did you think about that?
30
31 Alex Hernandez: I thought it was interesting. Actually, I wanted to see what, I, I wanted to
32 see what they were seeing but, you know, I couldn't go in there.
33
34 Earl Nicholson: Uh-huh.
35
36 Alex Hernandez: Um, I kind of was envious.
37
38 Earl Nicholson: Were you really?
39
40 Alex Hernandez: Oh yeah. Yeah, I wanted to [inaudible 13:47].
41
42 Earl Nicholson: You got these guys coming in, they're dressed in coveralls.
43
44 Alex Hernandez: Coveralls.
45
46 Earl Nicholson: And they stink and they're dirty.

1
2 Alex Hernandez: Yeah, yeah. I could tell they, they worked, you know. And um, there's a,
3 there's, there's back then there was an image of a factory worker and, um,
4 so, you know, prior when I saw just a little bit of it and I wanted to go
5 back in there every chance I could but, you know, it wasn't, it wasn't safe
6 for a little boy being there and, and, um, but it, you know, had a lot to do
7 with my, my dad working there.
8
9 Marilyn Coulter: Alex, Marilyn Coulter. You said there was an image of the workers.
10 [14:26] What was that image? Did the community have the worker
11 [inaudible 14:29]?
12
13 Alex Hernandez: Just grime and, you know, they, uh, they put together a car that was built
14 here and, and so, they took pride in it.
15
16 Earl Nicholson: So Alex, tell me, you know, there's a, I've heard a story that you used to,
17 to play on the trains. [14:48] Did you ever hop on a train?
18
19 Alex Hernandez: Yup, I hopped on the trains and, um, my, my, uh, my parents would have
20 killed me, especially my mother if she knew that I was doing that, you
21 know. Matter of fact, we got caught couple times and, and that was
22 another way of trying to get in there through the back door and, and, uh,
23 but, you know, they were pretty watchful about, you know, who was on
24 there or not and it was quite dangerous.
25
26 Earl Nicholson: [15:14] So where, where would you hop on these trains at?
27
28 Alex Hernandez: Over at, there's a park, uh, um, across Saginaw there, it's called Westside
29 Park, and I would jump the train there and it would take us across Saginaw
30 into the, where the plant is at.
31
32 Earl Nicholson: You actually rode the train into the factory.
33
34 Alex Hernandez: Yup, by the, they used to heat the factory with coal and we would almost
35 get away with it because it would stop right there and there was a big
36 mountain of coal right there and they didn't see us but once we went away
37 from that coal they saw us, you know.
38
39 Earl Nicholson: [15:49] And what would they do?
40
41 Alex Hernandez: Just escort us out, [laughter] you know, and say you don't have any
42 business here, you know, you're, you're going to get yourselves killed or,
43 you know.
44
45 Earl Nicholson: But they – you never got in trouble. They never called the police.
46

1 Alex Hernandez: No. They never called the police. They should have but that's where I
2 think they knew, they knew my dad so they just kind of, you know better.
3 And it was always me because there was other, a couple of my friends
4 their dads didn't work there and they just knew it came from me so they
5 never had anything said to, it was pretty mainly me. They knew where it
6 started from, that it was me trying to get in there.
7

8 Earl Nicholson: [16:30] So which, where did you go to high school at?
9

10 Alex Hernandez: J.W. Sexton.
11

12 Earl Nicholson: J.W. Sexton.
13

14 Alex Hernandez: Right there.
15

16 Earl Nicholson: [16:34] And, and where is J.W. Sexton?
17

18 Alex Hernandez: It's on Michigan Avenue so, um, it would be south of the plant.
19

20 Earl Nicholson: So J.W. Sexton is right in view of the factory.
21

22 Alex Hernandez: Yup.
23

24 Earl Nicholson: [16:46] And, and what was that like going to school, going to a high
25 school where, you know, where the, the factory is right there, you get out,
26 you go to school you come out, you know, the factory is there, uh.
27

28 Alex Hernandez: That's, that's what I was saying earlier. A lot of it, that, that factory was
29 in my view...
30

31 Earl Nicholson: It was...
32

33 Alex Hernandez: ...90% of the time of my whatever I was outside or when I was playing
34 sports. Even when I was a little boy when I went to Verlinden, um, it was
35 there. And my dad worked nights so my dad would come out on his
36 breaks to see me play Litt-, Little League on the north side. And then
37 when I played football on the south side of the plant he would come out
38 there and watch me too so, um, it was always, matter of fact, when I got a
39 little bit stronger, um, when I played baseball we would, we would hit that
40 factory with a baseball. Actually, I broke the plant manager's window. I
41 didn't know whose window that was and they end up, uh, I wasn't the first
42 one to do it but, you know, uh, it became a big deal when I did it because
43 my dad worked there so, um, but they put a fence up and, uh.
44

45 Earl Nicholson: So you broke the plant manager's window.
46

1 Alex Hernandez: Yeah.
2

3 Earl Nicholson: [18:02] Was that when you, was that one of those where your father comes
4 home and, and what does he do? Does he slap you on the back and say
5 good job or?
6

7 Alex Hernandez: Actually, they, the ball was in there, my dad was working and when I got
8 up to go to school the next morning the ball was on the kitchen table
9 [inaudible 18:16] when I got up.
10

11 Earl Nicholson: The ball was on the kitchen table.
12

13 Alex Hernandez: Yup. So plant security saw that and they, it was at night. I don't know, I
14 don't know who was the plant manager, I want to say [inaudible 18:28]
15 was maybe the plant manager then, I'm not sure but they went in there
16 and they got that ball 'cause he wasn't there.
17

18 Earl Nicholson: Uh-huh.
19

20 Alex Hernandez: My dad worked there so they gave it to him and he brought it home and...
21

22 Earl Nicholson: [18:39] Do you still have that ball?
23

24 Alex Hernandez: No, no. I don't have that ball but my dad didn't say too much about it
25 because he just knew I was just gettin' maybe you guys are a little bit too
26 old to be playing over there and, you know, so yeah.
27

28 Earl Nicholson: All right, fantastic. [18:58] So you're in high school, you're, you're
29 second year in high school, you're about to graduate and at what point had
30 you decided that you were, that, you know, that you were going to, I mean
31 how did you go about the process of, of getting, of getting hired into
32 Fisher Body?
33

34 Alex Hernandez: Well, um, I was a little ahead in school so I got out a little early and, um,
35 my dad came home and said they were going to hire so I went out to the
36 south side of the plant and, and went there at 3:00 in the morning with a
37 couple of my older friends that were already graduated and waited until
38 8:00 in the morning to get this little card to fill out and, um, and, uh, try to
39 get a job there. Well, for the first couple days I didn't hear anything and
40 my dad said, well, maybe I'll talk to somebody. No, no, no. I didn't want
41 him. They used to have a phrase I'll see if I can, I can get your, your card
42 pulled, somebody can talk to you. Well, uh, they called me and, um, a guy
43 by the name of Dick Budd and, uh, he started asking questions and he
44 said, uh, he saw what year I was born and said, well, you're not 18 yet. I
45 said, well, I graduated and I had a little business card that was a diploma.

1 I pulled that out and, uh, it was March. I didn't turn 18 until that May two
2 months later.
3
4Earl Nicholson: So you're saying that when you hired into the factory you were, you...
5
6Alex Hernandez: 17.
7
8Earl Nicholson: 17 years old.
9
10Alex Hernandez: Yup. And, uh, he told me to keep my mouth shut for two months so I did,
11 so. And anyway, and when I went to, come weekend I had to go there on
12 Saturday morning for my physical and when I walked home, you know, I
13 worked, I was working at Burger King at the time and that day I happened
14 to get my federal income tax in the mail that day and I opened it up and it
15 was I don't know \$300-and-some and, um, and my dad said I was going to
16 make that every week. And I was just thinking what. You're going to
17 make that every week at that place. And I was like oh my God. What am
18 I going to do with this money? But that's when reality started hitting
19 'cause I didn't, I didn't know what I was going to, that wasn't even on my
20 mind about what I was, I knew they paid good money but I just wanted a
21 job there so as far as, um, pay it wasn't really my focus. It's even like that
22 today, you know. I, we get a good wage and everything and, uh, I don't
23 even think about that, you know. I just I'm in a place where I'm happy
24 and, uh, yeah, I get, I get good money but, um, that's why it's so important
25 to be where you're at if you want to work.
26
27Earl Nicholson: Marilyn Coulter?
28
29Marilyn Coulter: [21:59] Alex, I just wanted to know, what was it that your dad did in the
30 plant?
31
32Alex Hernandez: My father was an assembly worker on the line and then later became
33 management. Also, when I, I'll go back. When I, in '81, uh, they, uh,
34 were trying to get me to go in management and I've already established a
35 lot of friends by then and, um, and I watched guys become management
36 and I watched how they kind of changed a little bit, you know. And, uh,
37 so I never really wanted to go there 'cause I wanted to keep my friends,
38 my friendships are important to me and, um, so I didn't go on
39 management. I stayed on hourly.
40
41Marilyn Coulter: [22:46] So oftentimes people knew, was your dad a manager a good
42 portion of the young part of your life?
43
44Alex Hernandez: Oh yeah. Matter of fact, they were, they'd kid me and say when are you
45 going on management.
46

1 Marilyn Coulter: Okay.
2

3 Alex Hernandez: And that kind of bothered me a little bit 'cause they had an image back
4 then. They were rough and, and, uh, and I really didn't want to do that.
5 My dad was a pretty good boss because my father knew the contract and,
6 um, so he didn't really have very many battles.
7

8 Marilyn Coulter: [23:18] So what was it like coming into the plant and being a boss's kid?
9 Was there privilege? Was there special treatment? Or did you get kind of
10 [inaudible 23:29] little bit because of your dad?
11

12 Alex Hernandez: There was, maybe a little bit of special treatment as far as management but
13 there was a lot of, uh, uh, you know, they would, like I said, they would
14 kid me about going on management or, or whatnot and then also I didn't, I
15 wanted to do a good job because I always thought about my dad. I didn't
16 want to make my father look bad and, uh, so I'd go to work and I, they
17 expected a little bit more out of me. And, and I'll admit I had a lot of, I
18 had a lot of trouble with that sometimes because, um, I was almost
19 allowed not to make any mistakes and, um, I've had [inaudible 24:07] tell
20 me you know better than that. This is unacceptable from, from you. We
21 expect more out of you. And, uh, you know what, it, it even goes on a
22 little bit today but I just, I'm older now so I can, I know how to take it
23 better, you know. When you're young, that's a lot of pressure on you, so.
24

25 Marilyn Coulter: [24:31] What department did your father supervise in?
26

27 Alex Hernandez: My dad supervised in trim area and then he moved into environmental
28 services, sanitation. They used to take care of the upkeep of the factory.
29

30 Marilyn Coulter: [24:46] And so the department you hired in?
31

32 Alex Hernandez: I hired in as, as hard trim repair on the, on the A line what they called.
33 Matter of fact, when I came home and my dad said where you're working
34 and I told him I'm working repair and he said you can't be working in
35 repair, it's a high-seniority job. And I said that's, that's what they said.
36 He asked me who I'm, who my boss was and I told him it was Gary
37 Bobier and my dad used to work with him on the assembly line and, um, I
38 said that and he just couldn't believe it and so he asked me where I was.
39 My father was working days that time and I was working nights so he
40 asked me where I was and, and I tried to explain to, to him where exactly
41 where I was. I actually got lost in there when I first couple days I forgot
42 where I was supposed to be or I couldn't, couldn't remember and I
43 actually had to walk the whole line until I'd seen s-, some familiar faces
44 'cause I just I couldn't find my way back.
45

1Marilyn Coulter: One more question, I want to go back a little bit. [25:50] Being a, a child
2 of a worker and a supervisor, were there any kind of company picnics,
3 management family outings that you did as a child? Do you remember
4 any things like that?
5

6Alex Hernandez: I remember my father played baseball for the UAW 602 and, um, they had
7 a baseball league then and we would go to family picnics and they always
8 had a big baseball game and, um, and, uh, seeing that unity and, uh, that's
9 when we get in the UAW side. Um, my father became management so he
10 got out, he, he wasn't, uh, UAW, uh, but when he would go to the UAW
11 meetings I would try to peek in there and they would, they would even
12 kick me out of there too and say no you can't be listening to this, you
13 know, but I remember the, um, you know, the unity. The solidarity song I
14 can remember that when I was a little boy and back then they used to sing
15 that at the union meetings I believe in the beginning of the union meetings
16 Solidarity Forever. So, you know, there was just so much emotions
17 wrapped up in that place for me that I saw as a little boy.
18

19Marilyn Coulter: [27:11] Now as a little child did you ever, growing up in the area, did you
20 ever remember any strikes or anything that might have happened when
21 you were a child?
22

23Alex Hernandez: Uh, I don't re-, I, I don't remember seeing them but I remember my, when
24 my father was on strike and, and not working and things were tight and I
25 remember the food stamps were coming into effect and, um, and, you
26 know, later on when I got hired in there was guys that my dad worked
27 with and they, they were telling me detail how that, that was. They were
28 out for a long time and, um, striking, how cold it was outside and, uh, had
29 to make fires and stuff like that to keep warm.
30

31Earl Nicholson: [27:53] Could you, can you remember what year it was?
32

33Alex Hernandez: I want to say 1970.
34

35Gary Judy: Gary Judy. [throat clearing] [28:04] Do you remember what the strike
36 was about, what they went on strike for?
37

38Alex Hernandez: No.
39

40Gary Judy: [28:07] Did your father ever talk about that or?
41

42Alex Hernandez: No, I don't remember. I can remember him showing me his check stub
43 and it wasn't very much money.
44

45Gary Judy: [28:15] The strike pay...?
46

1 Alex Hernandez: Yeah.
2
3 Gary Judy: ...check stub?
4
5 Alex Hernandez: Yeah. And, uh, I remember he said he had to tighten up, you know.
6
7 Earl Nicholson: Was that...?
8
9 Alex Hernandez: I had a problem with food stamps when I was a kid. I didn't like those
10 things. [chuckle]
11
12 Earl Nicholson: [28:31] So was that, was that an emotional time, I mean for your father.
13 Did he, did he ever show any emotion or I mean did you ever detect fear
14 in him or anger or?
15
16 Alex Hernandez: Yeah, he was afraid and, and it was also kind of good 'cause he was home
17 with us and, uh, you know, my dad was, uh, he would go into work, I
18 would get out of work or school at 3, at about 3:00 and then my father
19 would have to go in I think back then about I don't know 3:30 or quarter
20 to 4 right around then, so I didn't really have much time for, with my dad
21 until the weekends so he'd go to work and, um, on night shift. And, uh,
22 and so he wanted to be home with us but, you know, with the, when the
23 strike was going on but, you know, he, he, had a, he wanted to be back at
24 work too because we had such a big family.
25
26 Earl Nicholson: So that's, you know, I think that's something that, we – Earl Nicholson –
27 that we haven't covered. [29:29] What was, how often did you actually
28 see your father even, I mean even when he was working and when he was
29 not working? I mean do you remember, you know, as you were growing
30 up do you remember him whether when he was around and when he
31 wasn't around?
32
33 Alex Hernandez: He wasn't, he wasn't around a lot when I had, um, functions. Every once
34 in a while he would take, um, he would come home and go to the function
35 and he'd go back to work. Um, and, uh, you know, me, you know, me
36 about 9 or 10 I was starting to have a problem with it and believe it or not
37 I was starting to resent that place a little bit too. Once I got older, I
38 realized what, you know, you got to support your family. My dad wasn't
39 real happy about it himself. I was quite, I was quite angry with him one
40 night that he couldn't go to a function of mine and, um, and, uh, he ended
41 up, uh, coming back home and instead of going back to work he came
42 back home and he, he went up to my room and talked to me about, you
43 know, I have to work, uh, you know, maybe later I'll be able to go on day
44 shift when I have enough seniority. But, uh, right then it hit me I wasn't
45 really, I couldn't be mad at my father anymore. He was explaining it to
46 me what he had to do and that's where I had to really start growing up and

1 also, you know, I was the oldest of six kids so I'd help my mom a lot and
2 my dad depended on me and, uh.
3
4 Earl Nicholson: [31:01] So you were the, the oldest son in your family?
5
6 Alex Hernandez: Yeah. I can remember, um, with my dad working nights, um, my
7 bedroom was, uh, faced the front of the house and I can remember my
8 father would come home 1, 1:00, 2:00 in the morning and he would like
9 wind down and I can remember looking out my window and, um, seeing
10 him on the front porch in the lawn chair relaxing, smoking a cigarette, just
11 gazing.
12
13 Earl Nicholson: [31:27] Would, would he ever bring any friends home with him?
14
15 Alex Hernandez: Matter of fact, uh, [chuckle] if they worked a little bit longer, uh, my dad
16 used to, we used to have a mud room and, uh.
17
18 Earl Nicholson: A mud room, you'll have to explain that.
19
20 Alex Hernandez: Mud room is, we used to take our boots and stuff off before you went in
21 the house and, um, so you wouldn't get the house all full of snow or mud
22 or whatever and, uh, my dad was pretty good friends with Art at Harry's
23 Bar and they would put beer in there and my dad would sell beer after
24 work over there in there [laughter] so I could, I, I remember hearing guys
25 coming in and, uh.
26
27 Earl Nicholson: So you're trying to tell me your father was operating a blind pig in your, in
28 your house? [laughter]
29
30 Alex Hernandez: Yeah, yeah. My dad was doing that and he'd take the money to Art the
31 next day and, you know, there was some, you know, there was some
32 fringe, fringe benefits for my father, uh, over that at Harry's, uh, but, um,
33 yeah, my dad did that, so. I would hear every, every once in a while my
34 father would have card games in the basement and there was a guy named
35 Jim Bosley that worked at the plant and he had a real distinguished voice
36 that was rough and when I met him and I saw him I knew exactly who he
37 was and I remember as a little boy [inaudible 32:38] I remember him that
38 raspy voice he had in the basement, um, hearing him in my home. I didn't
39 even know this guy but, uh, when I hired in there I knew I heard that voice
40 and I knew I, you know, and I asked my dad who is he, oh, a friend of
41 mine. Did he ever, was he ever at the house? Oh, he used to the come to
42 the card games and right then I knew who he was.
43
44 Earl Nicholson: [33:04] So, I mean, you, your dad would come home and friends would
45 come over, would you get up and go down to see what they were doing?
46

1 Alex Hernandez: I used to go down there and peek and I can remember seeing millions and
2 millions of cigarette butts on the floor, smoky and everything. And, uh, I
3 can remember, uh, my dad, uh, he didn't really clean it up right away so
4 I'd go down there and I'd, me and my b-, me and my brother would go
5 downstairs in the morning and we would find coins or something on the
6 floor, you know.
7

8 Earl Nicholson: So, uh, is, was – Jim Bosley was a supervisor.
9

10 Alex Hernandez: Yup, and he was, he was another guy that really expected a lot of stuff out
11 of me.
12

13 Earl Nicholson: So but I mean at, when the people came back to your house, I mean, it
14 wouldn't just be, it would be supervisors, line personnel, everybody,
15 people.
16

17 Alex Hernandez: Yeah. My, my dad had a lot of friends hourly and once my dad became
18 management he lost a lot of his friends too and I knew that, um, they
19 didn't come around much and that was, that was one of the main reasons
20 why I didn't go on salary. Uh, I wanted to in my heart but, um, there was
21 a lot of things that went along with it and it's like no way, I wasn't going
22 to give all that stuff up just to make a little bit more money or prestige or
23 whatever and...
24

25 Marilyn Coulter: The price was too high. Marilyn Coulter. [34:29] Alex, do you remember
26 how old or how old were you when your, when your dad went from being
27 an hourly worker to a management worker?
28

29 Alex Hernandez: I think I was 12 years old when that happened. And, uh, actually, you
30 know, that was kind of a good thing for our family 'cause my dad made
31 more money and, um, my dad went to work every day with a tie on and I
32 was proud of him. I mean, um, I was really proud of my father. I mean,
33 he used to come all grungy and he was tired and, um, but, you know, I
34 didn't, I didn't know, I didn't know. I just, that's a normal thing, you
35 know. Once you, once you hire in the plant and you find about, you find
36 out about there's a union there and, uh, back then there was a, there was a
37 white line. You were either on this side or on the union side or the
38 management, management side and, um, so, uh, those are things you had
39 to think about seriously if you really wanted to do that because if you
40 wanted to be hourly there was some sacrifices that you had to make and
41 my father's was his family.
42

43 Marilyn Coulter: [35:50] Now Alex, they said that it used to be that like I know hourly
44 personnel would work days or night but at any time did your father go
45 from days to nights as a supervisor or did he work straight nights or did
46 he...?

1
2 Alex Hernandez: Yeah, he did.
3
4 Marilyn Coulter: [36:07] Did that make it a little bit better for you...
5
6 Alex Hernandez: Yeah.
7
8 Marilyn Coulter: ...once he became a management person?
9
10 Alex Hernandez: Yeah.
11
12 Marilyn Coulter: He was able to...
13
14 Alex Hernandez: Sort of 'cause then, you know, when I got older I didn't really want him
15 around because [chuckle] [inaudible 36:14] discipline or something. We
16 used to get away with a lot with my mom, you know. And, uh, I can
17 remember my dad calling and getting on us or something or said he was
18 going to come home at lunch or something and so we'd make sure we
19 were in bed, we were in bed by that time 'cause I didn't want to, you
20 know, get a talking to. But, uh, no, once he, once he made that switch I
21 was older so, you know, he was able to, you know, come to some of my
22 football games at, in high school and then when I went to the prom and
23 stuff like that. I mean, you know, he went to my graduation. He wasn't
24 going to miss that for anything. But, you know, it was important for me to
25 have him around, you know, um, when girls entered my life, so. And I
26 was quite proud of my father and my, and my mom, you know. He knows
27 a lot of my girlfriends I would bring home, prom, you know, I was, I
28 wanted my dad there, you know.
29
30 Marilyn Coulter: [37:17] Now was your mother a stay-at-home mom since she had six kids
31 or did she work also?
32
33 Alex Hernandez: My mom, my mom worked at Eberhard's Grocery Store here and, and, uh,
34 she was the head cashier so, um, whenever my dad had to switch, um, they
35 switched, my, my dad was on days, my mom worked nights and then
36 when my dad had to go to nights, my mom switched to days.
37
38 Marilyn Coulter: So it worked out [inaudible 37:39].
39
40 Alex Hernandez: So we either had, we had somebody home.
41
42 Earl Nicholson: Uh, Earl Nicholson. [37:46] Alex, um, your father was a UAW employee
43 working the line and, um, he, uh, he went on to supervision, uh, could you
44 tell me how that happened and was there an emotional change around the
45 house when that happened?
46

1 Alex Hernandez: Uh, I'm almost positive that he went on management because it was more
2 money and, uh, yeah, there was a change in our house because my father
3 had, we had more money so things were a lot easier especially on him and
4 his body and, um.
5

6 Earl Nicholson: [38:32] Was your father in pain?
7

8 Alex Hernandez: No, he wasn't in pain but as far as just, you know, he worked there and,
9 um, when you went on management you supervise so, you know, he was
10 getting older. And, um, my dad was a, he was a good boss and, um, I've
11 heard a lot of guys tell me that [inaudible 38:53] I wish, I wish your dad
12 was back. And, um, so, you know, my dad was the kind of guy that knew
13 the contract and, um, knew well how to pick their battles and if someone
14 did their job you just didn't bother'm, you know, um, cut a little bit of
15 slack, they'll get to it, you know, and, uh, had faith in his, um, workers.
16

17 Gary Judy: Gary Judy. So your father is on management and, uh, so you say it
18 changed the household atmosphere a little bit. [39:32] Can you tell us a
19 little bit about the neighborhood and what it was like and how the
20 neighbors what their perception of, of, uh, Fisher Body was and if your
21 father ever, uh, talked with the neighbors about, uh, the plant and what,
22 what they thought [coughing] of the plant there?
23

24 Alex Hernandez: Um, well, [throat clearing] I'll start off by saying the neighborhood that I
25 grew up in, all those houses there were built by factory workers at that
26 plant in the early 30s and 40s. Um, there was a lot of retirees that lived
27 there still when I was a little boy.
28

29 And, um, so whenever there was, uh, a strike or, you know, later on in the
30 80s when they were having problems with the paint and it was putting like
31 a flaky stuff, black flakes in the air and they were getting at people's cars
32 and they weren't really happy about it and we would be out there cleaning
33 our cars and, um, just washing your cars in your driveway and, and there
34 would be a couple neighbors that would come over and say stuff to my
35 dad about it and what are they going to do about it. And really my dad
36 really had no control over that. And, um, and, uh, you know a lot of it
37 was, you know, people were moving in there and making a decision if
38 you're going to live by a factory, well, those are the things that you're
39 going to have to deal with and, uh, so as a family we kind of took offense
40 to that, you know, I, we, we liked living there so it didn't really bother me
41 none. It didn't bother my father. We'd just wash it off, you know. I, we
42 never really got angry about it or anything so we just kind of this is where
43 we live and this is the conditions that we accept, you know.
44

45 Marilyn Coulter: Alex.
46

1Earl Nicholson: Marilyn Coulter.
2

3Marilyn Coulter: [41:33] Working, living in the neighborhood, um, would the people who
4 worked here were they good neighbors to the neighborhood in terms of
5 parking, in terms of respecting your neighborhood as employees that just
6 came into the plant to work and then leave the area?
7

8Alex Hernandez: Oh yeah. There was never any kind of, uh, violence or anything. Uh, you
9 know, it, it would be a little bit busy there when they would go home but it
10 was always, it was always set up after we were out of school, just getting
11 out of school and then they would come out or sometimes they, they
12 would get out just before we'd get out of school so their timing was pretty
13 much perfect. It was, I can't think of any car accident or, you know, any,
14 any kind of, um, you know, uh, catastrophe that happened as far as...
15

16Marilyn Coulter: Or any inconvenience.
17

18Alex Hernandez: Right.
19

20Marilyn Coulter: Okay.
21

22Alex Hernandez: You know, that there was an accident or something.
23

24Marilyn Coulter: Now speaking of you went to Verlinden Elementary school and you went
25 to Saxton High School. I know that the security guards used to help do the
26 crossing of the children at Verlinden.
27

28Alex Hernandez: Mm-hm.
29

30Marilyn Coulter: [42:45] Do you remember that?
31

32Alex Hernandez: Vaguely, yeah, vaguely.
33

34Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.
35

36Alex Hernandez: Vaguely. Um, they, uh, they were, they did a lot of things that they
37 weren't really supposed to do back then. There, that was a different kind
38 of security guard because those, most of those security guys were, they
39 used to work on the assembly line.
40

41Marilyn Coulter: [43:08] So do you remember some of the things that they did special for
42 the children at Verlinden, some of the things that the General Motors
43 employees did for the children of the neighborhood?
44

45Alex Hernandez: They would, they would come over to the school sometimes and help out,
46 you know, or talk, you know about safety or something or, or, uh, you

1 know, don't hit the building with anything or something like that or that
2 was going on when we were little.
3
4Earl Nicholson: Baseballs. [laughter]
5
6Alex Hernandez: Baseballs or rocks or we used to fly our kites purposely and I would do it,
7 I'd fly my kite by the top of the factory on, on top and I would purposely
8 try to get my kite to go on top of those smokestacks so I could burn my
9 kite and, uh, [laughter] they didn't like that. They would come out and
10 say, you know, and, uh.
11
12Earl Nicholson: You got your kite that high?
13
14Alex Hernandez: Oh yeah, yup. We got our kites that high.
15
16Earl Nicholson: That's amazing.
17
18Alex Hernandez: Yeah, we used to just try to steer it and I would, did I ever do it, no. It
19 never, never burned up in front of us but, you know, we, we were trying to
20 do it and they, they saw what we were trying to do and, uh, we had to pull
21 it down or something or.
22
23Earl Nicholson: So you're, so we're going to, we're going to switch directions now. We're
24 going to go, we're going to go to, uh, your, your factory, the factory
25 experience now. Um, you graduate from high school. You've hired into
26 Fisher Body. [44:44] Your first day, tell us, which gate did you, did you
27 enter from?
28
29Alex Hernandez: The Verlinden gate, so I went downstairs and, um, it's the same stairs that
30 my dad, I used to walk with him when I was a little boy wanting to go
31 down there and he said no, you need to go walk back home. I couldn't
32 walk down those stairs so I was going down those stairs this time.
33
34Earl Nicholson: [45:02] And what was it like to go down those stairs?
35
36Alex Hernandez: Well, I almost fell because [chuckle] it was quite steep and I wasn't really
37 paying attention. I was really, you know, looking, you know, I wasn't
38 paying attention to my feet but, uh, I was, I was quite eager to get in there.
39
40Earl Nicholson: [45:20] And your, your first day in, you, you walked into the factory, uh,
41 what did they do? Did they take you to a room or?
42
43Alex Hernandez: They, they took, a bunch of us were, a bunch there and they said for us to
44 sit on this picnic table and, uh.
45
46Earl Nicholson: [45:34] Where was this picnic table at?

1
2 Alex Hernandez: Upstairs and it was the B line, you know. And, uh, we were waiting there
3 and all of a sudden this guy come, it was Gary Bobier and I didn't really
4 know this, I just, this is the first time I'd seen this guy. Well, this guy
5 probably was, it was one of my dad's rivals. They were on utility
6 together. Uh, they used to fight a lot with each other and, um, about what
7 job they were supposed to go or who's turn it was and, and they were both
8 on management. They liked each other but they were pretty rivals and,
9 um, he came up and he didn't know who I was and he just picked 12 guys,
10 you, you, you and I was one of them, took us downstairs and there was a,
11 there was a door not painted on the ground and there was a bunch of parts
12 next to it and he said you will put this back together and take it apart, put
13 this back together, you will know this door like the back of your hand.
14
15 So here we are putting this thing together and the door, inside a door
16 before they put the door panel on it's sharp and we were cutting our hands
17 and we didn't put gloves so we put some gloves on so we wouldn't cut our
18 hands and we were trying to figure this thing out and we did and, um,
19 started the night shift. They, they, they were down to one shift at one time
20 and, uh, they restarted the night shift with a bunch of kids in repair and
21 that was rough.
22
23 Earl Nicholson: Repair.
24
25 Alex Hernandez: Yeah.
26
27 Earl Nicholson: You hired into repair.
28
29 Alex Hernandez: Yup.
30
31 Earl Nicholson: [47:08] Was, was there shock? I mean for the people around you.
32
33 Alex Hernandez: Yeah, uh, we didn't really know what repair was and, at least I didn't.
34 When I went home and I told my father where I was working he said you
35 cannot be working in repair, that's a high-seniority job. I said, well, that's
36 what they told me. And he asked me who my boss was and I told him and
37 he knew I just couldn't bring up, pop up that name. He knew Gary Bobier
38 and knew where he was working. So he said whereabouts are you guys
39 and I told him and he came, he was, I was on nights so my dad was
40 working days so he stayed after work and he come down and said, boy,
41 did you luck out, you know. Back then in repair I did every sixth job.
42 When I had some, I had some checks I had to do and if it was, if I had to
43 fix something then I had to make sure I got to the next job and it's the kind
44 of job we had a lot of responsibility, uh, if you let something go the, the
45 pressure was, um, was hard, um, there was a consequence even getting
46 time off of work.

1
2Earl Nicholson: And we're talking you had not even had your 90 days in yet, so you're in
3repair, you're, you're, you're doing repair on the night shift, you get your
490 days in. [48:32] Did, was there a change?
5
6Alex Hernandez: Yeah, before we got our 90 days in we'd work a shift and if we let things
7go and we didn't see, well, um, they would take us upstairs and just ream
8us out for about an hour, so, uh, and threaten us that maybe we might get
9fired.
10
11Earl Nicholson: Gary Judy?
12
13Gary Judy: [48:55] Could you explain to us what the, what 90 days, what, what is that
14all about?
15
16Alex Hernandez: 90 days is, uh, you need to get your 90 days in and you'll get union repre-,
17representation.
18
19Gary Judy: So.
20
21Alex Hernandez: So you were, you were on probation basically.
22
23Gary Judy: So.
24
25Alex Hernandez: Like I said, uh, you know, you got to keep your nose clean.
26
27Gary Judy: So you were really under a lot of pressure because you hired into a repair
28job that with no experience and just learning the job and you didn't have
2990 days in the union, so.
30
31Alex Hernandez: Yup. Had a boss and I thought about going in the marines and I didn't and
32here, here I was, uh, had a boss that was like treating us like we were in
33the marines and, uh, so it was a lot of pressure, you know. Like I said, I
34was 17, I used to go home and tell my dad I was going to get fired I think
35if I missed one more thing and, um, I was afraid 'cause I didn't want to get
36fired. Uh, I wanted to be there but also I kept thinking I didn't want to. I
37thought about my father a lot. I didn't want to make, I didn't want, I
38wanted to look good around my surroundings because of my father too.
39
40Earl Nicholson: [50:10] So tell us, Alex, there's a, there's, you're in repair, you're under
41tremendous pressure, you're trying to get your 90 days in, were, were your
42coworkers, did they, did they play any pranks on you? Was there any
43initiation or hazing before or after you got your 90 days in?
44
45Alex Hernandez: Yeah, they used to throw us in the, the trunk and you'd go through water
46test. Well, me being 110 pounds I believe, I, I was able to get out

1 [chuckle] and I was skinny enough to get out of there and, uh, but stuff
2 like that, yeah. Or they would, they'd do, they did a lot of things in there
3 like drop the cans and it would scare the, you know, crap out of you.
4

5Earl Nicholson: Drop a can?
6

7Alex Hernandez: Drop a, a trash can, a barrel on the ground and it's pretty loud. And, um,
8 so, uh, you know, we, we, um, I wanted to move out of my house when I
9 hired in there, you know. I didn't, they would tease me about living with a
10 mama, papa, sister stuff all the time and I didn't shave yet. And, uh, and,
11 um, I had a girlfriend and I can remember one night I asked for a night off
12 so I can go take her to the prom and boy did I get a lot of grief for that
13 one.
14

15Earl Nicholson: Huh.
16

17Alex Hernandez: But, um, you know, I...
18

19Earl Nicholson: You weathered it.
20

21Alex Hernandez: I would, I would do all that stuff all over again if I could.
22

23Marilyn Coulter: Alex, Marilyn Coulter. [51:42] Did you get to take her to the prom?
24

25Alex Hernandez: Oh yeah.
26

27Marilyn Coulter: All right.
28

29Alex Hernandez: Yeah, I told my boss, Gary, and he started laughing and, and, uh, so what
30 was going to happen if you don't take her? You know, you got to be here.
31 Well, then, I don't think I'm going to be seeing her that much anymore,
32 so. [chuckle] So he, he liked me. He really expected a lot out of me, um.
33 I didn't really like him that much when I first met him but later on I just, I
34 understand what he was trying to do.
35

36Marilyn Coulter: [52:19] Alex, when you hired in you're working in the plant, you're
37 working second shift, uh, you hired in, in the, in what March you say?
38

39Alex Hernandez: Yeah, March 27.
40

41Marilyn Coulter: And then the summer comes. [52:31] When, what did you think about the
42 environment? Was it what you expected? Was it hot? Was it cold? What
43 was it like working on the line [inaudible 52:40]?
44

45Alex Hernandez: It was hot and back then we were allowed to wear, a lot of people, you
46 know, even in this room remember that I used to wear just a pair of shorts

1 and some, you didn't have to wear socks. You had to have some leather
2 shoes on so I wore leather toe shoes or something or and with no shirt and,
3 uh, it was hot in there, quite hot.
4

5Marilyn Coulter: [53:05] You didn't have to wear protective clothing?
6

7Alex Hernandez: No.
8

9Marilyn Coulter: You never worried about getting cut or anything?
10

11Alex Hernandez: No.
12

13Marilyn Coulter: [53:10] Did you have protective...?
14

15Alex Hernandez: Uh, you had to wear, there were safety glasses but, you know, that, that
16 changed later on. Um, they had to wear shirts and stuff but it was so hot
17 in there that they just didn't really say much about it.
18

19Earl Nicholson: Alex, Earl Nicholson. [53:26] Alex, did you notice when it got hot you
20 noticed people wearing shorts, um, and there were women there, correct?
21

22Alex Hernandez: Yeah. [chuckle]
23

24Earl Nicholson: [53:39] So I mean what, what, what were the men wearing, what were the
25 women wearing in trim shop, you know, it's hot, uh, I mean was anybody,
26 was, was there ever a time when anybody was sent home because they,
27 they weren't wearing something that was appropriate.
28

29Alex Hernandez: Yeah. When I hired in and my dad said you're going to hear things,
30 you're going to see things. Well, I saw something and, uh, and, uh, I was
31 already 18 by then but, you know, we were all wearing shirtless and there
32 was this lady there and, uh...
33

34Earl Nicholson: [54:12] Do you remember her name?
35

36Alex Hernandez: Yeah, but I don't want to mention her name. And, uh, and she came in
37 with no shirt on and boy was I, I mean it was like wow.
38

39Marilyn Coulter: Excuse me. Alex, did you just say a woman came to work without her
40 shirt?
41

42Alex Hernandez: Well, she came in and then she saw us so she took her, she was rough and
43 she took her shirt off [laughter] and the place went nuts and they shut the
44 line down and, uh, that was my, uh...
45

46Earl Nicholson: [54:42] Was that [inaudible 54:43]?

1
2 Alex Hernandez: That was my introduction to manhood I think, uh. [laughter]
3
4 Marilyn Coulter: Alex, she took her shirt off...
5
6 Alex Hernandez: Mm-hm.
7
8 Marilyn Coulter: ...in the plant it's in the summertime. [54:58] You have to tell us what's
9 the story around why she took her shirt off and what happened with all
10 this.
11
12 Alex Hernandez: Well, we were allowed, males were allowed to take their shirts off and it
13 was 'cause it was hot and, uh, she was obviously hot and she wanted to
14 take hers off but that ended that. Uh, very next day we weren't, we
15 weren't allowed to take our shirts off anymore. So I can understand what,
16 you know, where she was coming from, uh, everything has to be fair there
17 and, and, um, so she kind of was laying the law down, you know, hey,
18 they do, how come I can't, so that's what, that's why, that's why she did
19 what she did.
20
21 Marilyn Coulter: [55:47] Did she get time off from work for doing that, what happened?
22
23 Alex Hernandez: I think they tried to but they couldn't 'cause of the fact that we had ours
24 off so they knew they had to change that quickly.
25
26 Marilyn Coulter: [56:01] So this happened, so can you tell us what the environment was
27 like? You're young, you're working night shift, you're not even, you
28 know, you're in your early teens, what, your late teens rather, what was it
29 like? How did you pass the time? What was it like? Let, help me see
30 what the night shift was like.
31
32 Alex Hernandez: Well, the night shift started at I believe 5:00 back then. I didn't have
33 much of a social life. A lot my friends were in college and they were
34 going out during the week, weeknights and I, I missed a lot of stuff but the
35 thing is, uh, being, being in there at, at those times a lot of my friends were
36 getting in trouble with alcohol or whatnot and I always thought, well, I
37 was at work in, you know, those hours that kind of got me away from that
38 part of it, you know. I was working and, and so I didn't, you know, I
39 didn't get in trouble that much, you know, or I didn't get in trouble at all
40 with alcohol and, uh.
41
42 Marilyn Coulter: [57:16] Inside the plant how did the young, were there a lot of young
43 people on night shift?
44
45 Alex Hernandez: Oh yeah. I wasn't the only one.
46

1 Marilyn Coulter: [57:23] How did it function? What was it like working the night shift?
2 How did you guys pass the time? Music, what?
3

4 Alex Hernandez: We, we would goof around once in a while once we got comfortable and
5 we would be mad sometimes because we wanted the night off and we
6 couldn't get it. It was hard to go in there sometimes 'cause it was so nice
7 out before we went in there.
8

9 Marilyn Coulter: [57:41] Were you allowed to have radios? Did you listen to music and
10 stuff?
11

12 Alex Hernandez: Oh yeah. We had [inaudible 57:43] that was our, that our out. That was
13 my out a lot is I would listen to music.
14

15 Marilyn Coulter: [57:50] So it was easy to listen to music inside of a noisy plant?
16

17 Alex Hernandez: Well, everybody put, sometimes everybody would put it on the same
18 station so boy it was pretty loud and, and, uh, you know, we were
19 whistling while we worked, um, you know, so. But, um, I can remember
20 when, uh, [inaudible 58:10] we had a breakdown or something and they
21 would say line time for the night shift is and they would, you know, say
22 four hours and there would be a cheer in there, a cheer, people would just
23 be happy, you know, that we were going to get out and, and we were free
24 for a night or whatever and I just, I remember those cheers, you know.
25

26 Gary Judy: Alex, Gary Judy. You lived in the neighborhood. [58:38] Did you ever
27 hear those cheers from your house?
28

29 Alex Hernandez: [chuckle] No.
30

31 Gary Judy: Because they were throughout the whole plant [inaudible 58:44].
32

33 Alex Hernandez: I can remember my dad coming home and they said they had a breakdown
34 or something but, uh, no. I wouldn't hear those cheers, um, you know, I
35 just...
36

37 Gary Judy: [58:55] Or do you think maybe those cheers came in with the younger
38 generation or?
39

40 Alex Hernandez: Yeah, I think so. I think so. Um, you know, back when my dad hired in
41 you couldn't even have a radio in there. And, uh, so we were, you know,
42 we were allowed a lot of things and I think we were a more wilder bunch,
43 more vocal bunch, um, than anything and, uh, I think we had a lot of, of
44 ideas too. We were...
45

1Earl Nicholson: So tell me, Alex – Earl Nicholson – a year, you know, your time has gone
2 by, six months, a year, um, you're starting to, to get used to, to working in
3 a factory. I'm assuming that you were still in repair at this time after you
4 got your 90 days in.
5

6Alex Hernandez: Yeah, I was in repair for probably...
7

8Earl Nicholson: [59:47] Was there a sense of camaraderie amongst the employees, um, I
9 mean people, you know, they just, they'd come together as a team where
10 everybody was working together well or?
11

12Alex Hernandez: In repair we did. We kind of helped each other. We were making, when I
13 hired I was making \$10.05 an hour and that was a lot of money for a 17-
14 year-old and, uh, that was, that was the top pay I believe if you weren't on
15 skilled trades, uh, as far as assembly work and, uh, oh yeah, you know,
16 um, there was a lot of envious people that wanted to be in repair and, um.
17

18Marilyn Coulter: Marilyn Coulter. [60:31] Alex, working repair now being a repair person
19 did you work, have to work longer hours than the regular line?
20

21Alex Hernandez: Yeah, uh, well, they'd ask if you wanted to work. They had this, uh, uh, at
22 the very end of the line it's called a horseshoe and the car wasn't movin'
23 but they put this car in a horseshoe area and, and you could work on it and
24 I used to go there sometimes and work, work 'til I don't know maybe
25 three hours longer so it would be like 5 in the morning. It was good
26 money, um, couple of us guys would go over there and they'd ask if we
27 wanted to go and, you know, make sure these jobs were okay before they
28 shipped them downtown so I would go and work sometimes over there
29 and I was able to buy some nice things when I was young.
30

31Earl Nicholson: So Alex, you, you touched on a, on an issue that I'd like to, I'd like to
32 explore a little bit. Um, you said, uh, that, um, there was camaraderie
33 amongst your group but there seemed to be a little envy from other people.
34 [61:44] Uh, could you explain that?
35

36Alex Hernandez: Well, being in repair, um, you know, sometimes it, it's basically like this,
37 in repair there are just sometimes people have problems with their putting
38 their job together prior to where repair is at and there would be nights
39 where there wasn't very much repair and, uh, so we didn't work but then
40 there was nights when we worked. We had to really, you know, put things
41 together and, and, um, so, and, you know, it was more money and I wasn't
42 stuck on a job one by one. I did every sixth job and I was on a team so I, I
43 was on the right side and he, I had a partner that was on the left side.
44

1Earl Nicholson: [62:32] So you're, so you're saying, um, how, how, here you are a young
2 man, you're in repair, it's a high-seniority job, how were you treated by,
3 by the, by the regular line workers?
4

5Alex Hernandez: Well, some of them would say to me and I had a couple buddies too that
6 their dads worked there and I want to say that we pretty much all of us our
7 dads worked there and they said the only reason why you're there is
8 'cause your dad's on management or something like that. I heard that a lot
9 and I, I knew it wasn't true with me because Gary didn't even know me
10 when he picked me. He was awfully surprised when he found out who I
11 was later on and, uh, so yeah, you'd get guys saying stuff to you about that
12 and I didn't like it too much. I never really said anything back and I kind,
13 I kind of took it personal a little bit. So yeah, that was, it was more money
14 and, and you didn't, you weren't, you didn't do every single job.
15

16Earl Nicholson: So tell us, Gary Bobier didn't know that you, who your father was.
17 [63:42] What, what was it, what was it like when he found out? I mean
18 did he, did he, was he in shock or, I mean...?
19

20Alex Hernandez: Yeah, because, uh, he was, before he became a supervisor him and my dad
21 were on utility and, you know, the reputation that utility had back then is
22 they didn't want to do anything and they were both like that. They didn't
23 want to do really too much so when I was in there, um, now I'm not
24 saying I was perfect but I took my job seriously and, um, he knew my dad
25 and, uh, my dad took his job seriously too but not as serious as I did and I
26 was real picky about things, um.
27

28Earl Nicholson: I mean but the moment that, that he found out who you were, actually
29 were.
30

31Alex Hernandez: He couldn't believe that was my father. I mean he, I look like my dad but
32 our, our mannerisms were, you know, here I, here I liked old, old music
33 and here I knew things about you know, 50s and 60s and, and, uh, he just
34 was amazed that that was my dad. My dad never really, really shared
35 those kinds of things with anybody. My dad wasn't really, my dad wasn't
36 from here so he was quite amazed so, you know. That kind of hurt me too
37 because he even, he even, he even expected more out of me even more and
38 he was trying to get me on hourly or salary.
39

40Marilyn Coulter: Alex, was there anything...?
41

42Earl Nicholson: Marilyn Coulter.
43

44Marilyn Coulter: [65:09] Was there anything about coming into the plant and working on
45 the shift that might have shocked you or surprised you or what you, as
46 opposed to what you had envisioned?

1
2 Alex Hernandez: Uh, you know, people get kind of mad there a lot and it was pretty vocal.
3
4 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.
5
6 Alex Hernandez: And, uh, I saw a couple fights in there, and, um, a lot of the arguments like
7 with hourly and management where they were just like, just like a baseball
8 game, the umpire and manager just right in their, right in their face and,
9 uh, yelling and, um, so you really had to, you really had to suck up a lot of
10 things, you know. And if , uh, somebody is going to push your buttons
11 and, you know, you were pretty much allowed to swing if you wanted to.
12 I mean you're going to be off a week but you weren't going to be thrown
13 in jail or anything but, um.
14
15 Marilyn Coulter: [66:14] What was it like working in a facility that large? Was it, some
16 people say it's like a city. Yes?
17
18 Alex Hernandez: Yeah.
19
20 Marilyn Coulter: [66:19] Did you find it to be that way?
21
22 Alex Hernandez: Yeah. There was a, it was a city within a city and, uh, um, I don't know.
23 It, it's kind of an awesome thing because you could, you could look down
24 and see two lines and you could see people working, you know, and you
25 could watch this car being built, you know, so. And, you know, back then
26 there was a lot of people working [inaudible 66:44] and then we started
27 seeing it dis-, disappearing so when they started cutting jobs and
28 everything, boy, you didn't see very many heads and it was worrisome.
29
30 Marilyn Coulter: [66:54] So could you explain when you said two lines, you saw two lines
31 running at the same time, can you explain that a little bit?
32
33 Alex Hernandez: Two different vehicles were on the, on upstairs, so this car if you didn't
34 know, if you weren't familiar with that place you, you couldn't tell where
35 it began or ended on the assembly line. If you knew that place and you
36 knew right where it started and right where it ended and what line was
37 what, like I said, there was masses of masses of people up, upstairs just,
38 uh, assembly.
39
40 Marilyn Coulter: [67:31] You said that you worked in, you worked in repair for a year, yes?
41
42 Alex Hernandez: I worked in repair for 12 years.
43
44 Marilyn Coulter: For 12 years you did.
45
46 Alex Hernandez: Yeah.

1
2 Marilyn Coulter: So during those 12 years oftentimes union workers would call each other
3 brother and sister. [67:49] Did you find your workers to be a family and
4 what types of things did your family do for lunch, holidays, things like
5 that? Let us know what that's like.
6
7 Alex Hernandez: Well, yeah. Um, one thing that, that I've always felt and, um, that when
8 the holidays came around, everybody kind of came together and there was
9 food and, you know, we had a good time and if somebody had dire straits
10 there at the factory, um, I saw a lot of people giving a lot of money, you
11 know, helping to help somebody out. And, uh, you know GM has this
12 image, you know, Generous Motors but, you know, the worker there, if
13 somebody is in trouble, some person's kid is sick and we saw a lot of cans
14 and a lot of money going in to help a lot of families or a lot of, you know,
15 if you lost somebody in your family there was always when you got back
16 there was always some kind of card with a bunch of signatures on it with
17 money packed in there and a lot of caring there.
18
19 Earl Nicholson: [69:00] So, uh, Alex, you, uh, you talked about brothers and sisters, did
20 you develop any, any friendships inside the factory, permanent, long-
21 lasting friendships?
22
23 Alex Hernandez: Oh yeah, there was a guy by the name of Rick Smith and, um, we were the
24 same age and, uh, he said he was from Nashville and me being a city kid I
25 didn't get out of the city that much and I thought he meant Tennessee and
26 [chuckle] it was, you know, what do you mean, you're going to live up
27 here now or what. He goes no, no, no. It's over there by Charlotte and I
28 vaguely knew Charlotte. I vaguely knew Grand Ledge and it was really
29 close but, you know, back then you just didn't leave your, your, your, uh,
30 your, your home step. You didn't really go off anywhere and, um, so I,
31 you know, we became good friends. We're still friends today and, um,
32 you know, experiencing, you know, marriage and, uh, having a family and
33 stuff like that, and, uh, you know, uh, grandparents, parents passing away
34 or whatnot, you know, and, uh, funerals and stuff so that, that kind of
35 stuff, um, is, is really like a really close kit there. You know, when
36 somebody is hurting that you met there and you work with and you talk
37 with and stuff it, it, uh, you take part in, in their family things too
38 sometimes vice versa.
39
40 Earl Nicholson: [70:30] So tell me did you, uh, did you ever participate in the, um, the, uh,
41 the, the shop dinners or the, the events that, uh, departmental dinners that
42 they [inaudible 70:43]?
43
44 Alex Hernandez: Oh, all the time, yup.
45

1Earl Nicholson: [70:45] And what were those like? What, what, what kind of food would,
2 would be there? What kind of...?
3

4Alex Hernandez: Well, sometimes you know, me being Spanish and, you know, and I would
5 bring a Spanish dish or I, you know, that's another thing about that place.
6 There's a lot of hunters and fisherman there and they used to play a joke
7 on me and you'd like a piece of meat or something and I'd say yeah, I'd
8 just eat it and they'd say oh you just, you just ate grizzly bear or
9 something or, or, uh, you know, some kind of fish that I would never,
10 never tried before but I tried a lot of different foods there and liked a lot of
11 it.
12

13Earl Nicholson: All right, fantastic.
14

15Marilyn Coulter: Um.
16

17Earl Nicholson: Marilyn Coulter?
18

19Marilyn Coulter: [71:22] Can you tell me what were breaks like? What types of things did
20 you, did for breaks? Since repair you had a little bit more time, what
21 [inaudible 71:30] did you read, did you play cards, did you do any of those
22 types of things during your breaks?
23

24Alex Hernandez: Yeah, I read. I read a little bit. I listened to music. Uh, I didn't have a
25 cell phone then but I would listen to their trivia question and I used to try
26 to run to the payphone but and try to get the answer and I'd get away with
27 it sometimes but, uh, um, I don't know. We would sing while we worked
28 or something. It was kind of fun because after lunch it was a little more
29 relaxed and, and, uh, everybody was kind of winding down a little bit so,
30 you know, you saw, you saw people singing and dancing around and stuff
31 like that and it was, it was kind of funny and you'd see a side of people
32 that you didn't, didn't really know and you'd put your guard down, you
33 know, and you knew if somebody was having a bad day or something, you
34 know, and.
35

36Earl Nicholson: [72:24] So tell me, Alex, um, you're in, um, repair, um, were you assigned
37 a locker or did you have to have a locker made for you or, or did you ever
38 have a skilled trade guy make a locker up for you?
39

40Alex Hernandez: Yeah, I had a, I had, uh, um, my godfather worked there and he was a
41 millwright. He, he made me a wooden box that I still own today and it
42 said my name on it and I used to put my tools in there and then he made
43 me a metal one later and I was able to buy that too and I, I got those both
44 at my home. I used to put all my stuff in there and lock it up and, uh, I
45 had my snacks in there too and, and, uh, an extra pair of shoes or
46 something or, you know, a couple magazines, pictures, my family.

1
2Earl Nicholson: So you just mentioned that the, the skilled tradesperson that helped you,
3 you were related to him. Um, could, [73:24] were there any other
4 members of your family that worked in the factory?
5
6Alex Hernandez: My, my sister worked there for a short time. She took, they had a, they
7 called it buyout and they gave you some money if you wanted to leave
8 early and she left early.
9
10Earl Nicholson: [73:35] When, when did she hire in?
11
12Alex Hernandez: 1984.
13
14Earl Nicholson: [73:40] And she worked for?
15
16Alex Hernandez: I think she worked there for about three years.
17
18Earl Nicholson: [73:43] She didn't like it?
19
20Alex Hernandez: She didn't like it that much, no.
21
22Earl Nicholson: Marilyn Coulter?
23
24Marilyn Coulter: Alex, you told us that how when you were a child you used to sell things
25 to the, um, hourly employees through the window [inaudible 73:59].
26 [74:00] Did you participate in vending, in buying or selling when you
27 were in the plant?
28
29Alex Hernandez: Oh yeah, you know, even today I, or, you know, uh, at the plant, you
30 know, my daughter was selling something for school and I'd take stuff
31 there and I'd sell it and then if somebody I knew asked me do you want to
32 buy some cookies or candy bar, well, then, you know, you always could,
33 you always knew that you could sell that stuff there.
34
35Marilyn Coulter: [74:27] Did that bring back memories for you [inaudible 74:29]?
36
37Alex Hernandez: Oh yeah, 'cause I won a lot of contests when I was a little boy because I
38 would, I knew I could sell stuff there and, um, I did. I would, I would, I
39 would sell a lot of stuff there. Matter of fact, my friends would, would
40 come with me and try to sell their stuff too and I always sold a little bit
41 more because they were going to buy it from me than my friends and, and,
42 uh, but, uh, that's how generous that place was.
43
44Marilyn Coulter: That's, that's sweet. I, I was a Scout too. I always remember there was
45 one girl always outsold me. I later found out it was because her father
46 worked at Fisher Body. Um, we know that, um, you had a shocking

1 moment, uh, when the young lady took her shirt off. [75:10] Can you tell
2 us what was your happiest moment working there and what was your
3 saddest?
4

5 Alex Hernandez: Well, let's see. Well, let's see, hm. I think my, my, I had, I had, I've had
6 so many happy moments there, um.
7

8 Marilyn Coulter: [75:38] Can you share one?
9

10 Alex Hernandez: Well, I bought a 1971 Oldsmobile Cutlass in, uh, in '83 and my dad
11 helped me work on it and, uh, I took a lot of pride in that and I bought
12 something with the money that I earned. I bought something that I wanted
13 since I was a little boy and, uh, that job made that happen and my dad was
14 helping me work on it too so there's, I got so many things wrapped up in
15 that car. Later on, they, when Oldsmobile ended they did, The Journal
16 wanted to talk to me 'cause I lived in the neighborhood and, uh, they told
17 me it was just like a little blurb and, um, when I woke up the next day, uh,
18 I was up on the front page of the, The Journal and, uh, I didn't know that
19 was going to happen. When I went to work, I didn't buy a paper and, uh,
20 a lot of my friends were screaming at me and they were patting me on the
21 back and, and, you know, it was on the national news and, and, um, I let
22 all my feelings out about that place and they, and they wrote about it, you
23 know, and, uh, I was real proud of it and, and, uh, overwhelmed about it.
24 Um, you know, my dad retired there. I was, I was happy but I was sad.
25 When I received my five-year tie pin, um, I was real happy about that.
26

27 And, and, uh, my saddest, probably my saddest moment was, uh, well, we
28 were, we were, it's not my, it's one of my saddest is when we, when we
29 were working at that plant we just built Oldsmobiles and when they said
30 they were going to take, take'm out and we were going to build the Grand
31 Am, we were afraid. We didn't know what was going to happen.
32

33 And when they shut down the plant and, uh, they said they were going to
34 end Olds and then a little bit later they were going to close the plant down
35 and that hurt, um. They were going to, you know, they were going to,
36 they announced they were going to shut my school down, um, so things,
37 um, as far as my neighborhood, they were, I always thought they were
38 going to be there and, um, and they're, they're going to tear it down, so,
39 uh, a lot of me is in there and, and, uh, a lot of things that I enjoy looking
40 at even when I'm an, you know, an adult and I show my daughter these
41 things and, um, so they, you know, they hurt, uh, you know, there's, that's,
42 that's where, that's my childhood, you know. I grew up there and, you
43 know, I used to, I used to hang out there when, when I was upset about
44 something or, or, you know, I had a lot of happy times there and, um, as I
45 was a little boy, even, even working there, um, so yeah, that, that's, that's
46 probably the saddest moment.

1
2 But we got a bright future with a new plant and, um, I'm over there now
3 and, uh, I went there early and, uh, and I take a lot of pride in that, you
4 know, um, but I, I don't want to see this place go. I always thought they
5 would just make another car and it's not. They're, they're tearing it down
6 as we speak right now.
7

8 Gary Judy: Gary Judy. Alex, you recently had another happy moment happen, uh, to
9 you. [79:32] Could you tell us a little bit about that, what happened
10 recently that was a happy time?
11

12 Alex Hernandez: Well, uh, I, I got, before I go into it, um, I'll speak real quickly on I wasn't
13 really involved in my union and, um, I used to have this image about I
14 don't need my union and they only take care of people that are in trouble
15 and I got to go up to Black Lake and, um, reality hit me hard there. Uh, I
16 found out what this place has done for me and, and prior and, uh, I got
17 right in to it and, uh, it was like a spiritual awakening for me. Anyway, it
18 changed my whole outlook on how I saw things and thinking that, you
19 know, this is what I want to do. I'm happy. I just, I don't need anybody
20 to for my rights or whatever and, um, anyway, I got involved in my union.
21

22 Marilyn Coulter: Alex, before you go further. [80:37] Will you please explain to the people
23 what Black Lake is?
24

25 Alex Hernandez: Black Lake is a facility that [inaudible 80:42] [coughing] education that
26 tells about the UAW and, uh, and, um, the history of it with Walter
27 Reuther and it's a place to go where we can get schooling and, um, and get
28 away from everything. It's a beautiful place to go to and, um, and it's
29 unity and solidarity. And but anyway, um, when I came back home a lot
30 of people that knew prior what I said and I was really trying to, you know,
31 they knew something happened to me and, uh, Art, he called me up to his
32 office and, uh, he, uh, I really didn't know what to do with it. I was trying
33 to get people to go and people were telling me no, they're not going. It's
34 like, you know, and so Art, Art kind of really helped with, um, putting all
35 that in perspective, you know, and, uh.
36

37 Marilyn Coulter: [81:38] Was that Art from Harry's Bar?
38

39 Alex Hernandez: Art Luna, our union president. And um, and, uh...
40

41 Male: And you were trying to get people to go.
42

43 Alex Hernandez: Oh yeah, trying to get people to go.
44

45 Male: Go to Black Lake.
46

1 Alex Hernandez: Union meetings.
2
3 Male: Union meetings.
4
5 Alex Hernandez: Get involved in the union and whatnot and, um, you know, it's a thing that
6 we, that we need to do or it's going to go away. And, uh, and, so anyway,
7 uh, I ended up, uh, I was given [inaudible 82:06] for a while and, um, I
8 didn't really pay that much attention to it and, um, they had a raffle and,
9 uh, unions are shrinking so they were trying to think of a fundraiser to get
10 some more funds and, and stuff and, uh, they bought a vehicle and, uh,
11 they sold tickets and they were going to give this, raffle it off. Well, I
12 ended up winning it and, um, the thing is that at that moment I kind of
13 forgot about it hap-, going on and at that moment that they were having
14 the raffle I was really unaware of it. I knew it was going to happen but I
15 just, I didn't know what day or what time it was going to be and I didn't
16 really think about it.
17
18 I'm pretty involved at Lansing Delta Township, it's our new factory, um,
19 that we're, it's going to open up here pretty soon and, um, with a new
20 vehicle and I was working. I was really getting into my work and I was a
21 little frustrated and, um, I got a call saying that I won this thing and I was,
22 um, I didn't know what they were talking about at first and, um, they said
23 it's this vehicle and they were reminding me and it's like oh my gosh, you
24 know, and I remember thinking, geez, I was so mad at my job not
25 knowing that something really wonderful was happening and that really
26 put me in perspective too. It's like, gosh, you know, why, you know, why
27 get mad over silly things. And anyway, um, so yeah, I won this 2005
28 SSR, it's yellow and the top goes down and my daughter is going to love
29 this thing and I, I take a lot, I take a lot of pride in that too because I kind
30 of see that's from my UAW, you know, and, and, uh, so I'm going to keep
31 it.
32
33 Earl Nicholson: Alex, um, we've gone into the – Earl Nicholson – we've gone into, um,
34 into the union, uh, um, area now and we're starting to touch on that
35 subject. [84:20] Um, what was your union experience like on the line?
36 Did you, how, how did you perceive the union when you were young?
37 How did you perceive it when you were old, a little older? Did you ever
38 actually need the union for anything while you were on the line?
39
40 Alex Hernandez: No, not really. I, I would always try to talk to my boss or something but
41 every now and then they had to call the committeeman. And, and, uh, and
42 the thing is, uh, all, all along I had a couple friends that were
43 committeemen and all along they were trying to get me to, to go to union
44 meetings and I didn't want to go and, uh, and they were real patient with
45 me, I mean real patient with me and just try to encourage me to go and,

1 and then, uh, they asked me if I wanted to go to Black Lake and, uh, I said
2 I, okay, I'll go check this thing out.
3

4Earl Nicholson: [85:23] As, as the years went by, I mean did you, did you, did you witness
5 the union doing anything for its people? Was it a positive thing?
6

7Alex Hernandez: Yeah, it was a positive thing. I saw that they would, you know, sometimes
8 management would be unfair on a lot of things or, um, union would have
9 to come in and reinstate what the contract says and, and, uh, and to help
10 people so they don't get taken advantage of. And, um, you know, the
11 union does a lot of things for even our community and, um, even if a
12 brother or sister is, you know, down and out, they'll do anything they can
13 to help them.
14

15Earl Nicholson: So you're active in the union now, Alex. [86:14] Could you tell us how
16 that all came about?
17

18Alex Hernandez: When I went to Black Lake there was all this literature and all these
19 classes and, uh, and it explained what the union did, why you pay union
20 dues and, and I never really read anything. I, I kind of wondered what
21 were they doing with all that money and stuff like that, I used to think that
22 and, and, um, so I read all this stuff and I was like wow. And I was also
23 ashamed of myself because I used to say things and, uh, and, uh, you
24 know, when you're young you say a lot of things you wish you'd never
25 said and, uh, I said some things and, um, I kind of believed in my head,
26 you know, things that about the union that weren't really great but when I
27 read all this stuff I ended up locking myself in my room and, uh, reading
28 all this stuff and that really, I was really getting myself into something else
29 'cause I wasn't participating in what was going on up there. I wanted to
30 read all this stuff and, uh, um, [inaudible 87:19] came up and banged on
31 my door and told me I need to get out of there and, and come down and,
32 you know, and hang out with the people and I did and he was explaining a
33 little stuff to me about it.
34

35 And so I didn't really know how to, you know, grasp all that stuff and,
36 um, anyway one of the guys that would really prompt me was Rob Murray
37 and, um, when I came home he knew that something happened to me.
38 And like I said earlier, Art took me upstairs and, and, um, we talked and I
39 started getting involved.
40

41Earl Nicholson: [88:02] So you started attending union meetings?
42

43Alex Hernandez: Yup. Started going to union meetings and next thing you know Rob
44 Murray, uh, elected me to the, um, nominated me for the election
45 committee which I used to say things about. [chuckle]
46

1Earl Nicholson: Nominated you to the election committee.
2

3Alex Hernandez: Yeah, um, said, raised his hand and said I nominate Alex. And what they
4do is they, they write a bunch of people's name on the chalkboard and, uh,
5and then they, people vote and, um, I got on and, um.
6

7Earl Nicholson: [88:35] So what does the election committee do?
8

9Alex Hernandez: Well, they run the elections. They make sure the counting is right. They
10make sure that, um, that it's, uh, um, fairly done. There's no, uh,
11dishonesty in there, uh, counting numbers more than once, um, you know.
12Uh, be friendly, people come in and, um.
13

14Earl Nicholson: [89:06] Do you think that maybe one of the reasons that people voted you
15in was because you were a man that people could trust?
16

17Alex Hernandez: I'm pretty sure my experience in Black Lake had something to do with
18that because a lot of people witnessed and a lot of them was like, you
19know, a lot of them was what the hell happened to you, you know, and,
20uh, so, uh, yeah, that had, I'm pretty sure that had a great deal. And then
21I'm pretty vocal as far as if I believe in something and, uh, that's the
22wisdom of Rob Murray, uh, he did that with me and knowing that if
23somebody would speak anything against it that I would say uh-uh, no, this
24is what we do and it's, and I was guilty of saying it and I'm telling you
25right now it's not. It's legit. Those, you know, there's no dishonesty in
26there what so all, whatsoever.
27

28Earl Nicholson: Marilyn Coulter?
29

30Marilyn Coulter: [90:00] Alex, can you tell me how much seniority did you have when you
31finally got turned around or as you say enlightened?
32

33Alex Hernandez: Twenty-three years' seniority. [chuckle]
34

35Marilyn Coulter: After 23 years, so it's not an immediate thing.
36

37Alex Hernandez: No.
38

39Marilyn Coulter: Sometimes it, it's a while.
40

41Alex Hernandez: Yup, so, um, yeah, I, I get involved and, um, I, I, uh, I like being in the
42election committee and, uh, I'm on the education committee now and I
43like that too. I just like, I like going to the union meetings. They're just,
44they're quite humorous sometimes and they're quite tense other times but,
45uh, I think it's important to go to hear what's going on.
46

1 Marilyn Coulter: [90:51] Alex, can you tell me as somebody who didn't, how the union
2 impacts the everyday line worker?
3

4 Alex Hernandez: Well, they, they're, they want to touch on our healthcare and, uh, and our
5 conditions of our job, you know, making sure that they're safe and they
6 won't hurt our, our bodies later that when we do retire, um, u-, union, uh,
7 brings unity, helps bring unity and trust with one another, um, looking out
8 for one another, um, support, and supporting our leaders which they really
9 need, they carry a big burden and, uh, they need, they need support even
10 whether it's a you're doing a good job. It's basically, you know, it's nice
11 when they hear that once in a while 'cause they, they, they take a lot of our
12 burden from us.
13

14 Earl Nicholson: It's Earl Nicholson. It's nice to hear that Alex because obviously you are
15 becoming mature and you're become aware. Um, and you're telling me
16 that your super-, the supervisors that you were around were all good.
17 [92:16] Did you ever have an experience with a supervisor that you would
18 call a bad experience?
19

20 Alex Hernandez: I had a few that when I was younger and where I, where I had, had to call
21 the union and they were really rough with me as far as expectations of
22 what I was supposed to do because of my father working there being on
23 management, they were, I felt they weren't treating me like everybody
24 else and I kind of took offense to that sometimes but on the other hand I
25 would kind of be hard on myself too.
26

27 Earl Nicholson: [92:53] So did you feel, um, now that you're mature enough, do you look
28 back on that, do you feel, um, that the union was, could you imagine, let
29 me put it this way, could you imagine working in a factory without a
30 union?
31

32 Alex Hernandez: No. Absolutely not. Um, the way, uh, the way things are run now it's,
33 they'll cut your healthcare and they'll cut your pay in a, in a minute and,
34 um, our union protects us of that.
35

36 Earl Nicholson: Marilyn Coulter?
37

38 Marilyn Coulter: Alex, as we draw close to the end, couple of questions, first one being,
39 [93:28] you worked in a preferred job for 12 years right from the street
40 into a preferred job, how did it go for you going from that preferred job to
41 a maybe less preferred job after those 12 years going to a regular line job,
42 how did that affect you?
43

44 Alex Hernandez: Well, it really didn't, uh, you know, there was cutbacks and I was a little
45 afraid that, you know, the numbers were, they were laying off people and

1 you didn't see very many people there on the line anymore and, um, so,
2 uh, you know, I had to work on the line but...
3
4 Marilyn Coulter: [Inaudible 94:10].
5
6 Alex Hernandez: ...I liked it too 'cause really that's really what I expected when I hired in
7 there so I got to do that. Um, and, uh, I still looked at stuff, you know,
8 and found stuff sometimes.
9
10 Marilyn Coulter: [94:30] Okay, question #2, you lived in the community, you grew up with
11 it, you grew up with Fisher Body, while you worked there it went from
12 BOC to Lansing Car Assembly, what did you think about that and what
13 did you call the place?
14
15 Alex Hernandez: I basically called that place my second home.
16
17 Marilyn Coulter: [94:52] What did you think about the name changes?
18
19 Alex Hernandez: Uh.
20
21 Marilyn Coulter: [94:54] Did you call it Fisher Body, did you call it Lansing Car Assembly?
22
23 Alex Hernandez: Yeah, I always called it Fisher, you know, [inaudible 95:00] Fisher and
24 when you say that around here people it didn't matter if they went to BOC
25 or Lansing Car Assembly, um, they, uh, uh, they knew [inaudible 95:11].
26 But to be honest with you, um, I didn't really like it when it was BOC but
27 I didn't mind saying Lansing Car Assembly. I, I didn't mind that at all.
28
29 Marilyn Coulter: [95:22] Another question, you seem to be very product loyal, uh, company
30 loyal, have you always owned General Motors vehicles?
31
32 Alex Hernandez: Yup.
33
34 Earl Nicholson: [95:35] So tell me Alex, have you ever used [inaudible 95:38] in any of
35 your [inaudible 95:41] funds that were available to you? Did you ever
36 take any educational classes on [inaudible 95:47]?
37
38 Alex Hernandez: Oh yeah. I, I took a few, you know, I took a generator class and a snow
39 blower class and then a power wash class. I was using those, those funds
40 for that and learned a lot, great deal on motors which I really don't really
41 know that much about.
42
43 Marilyn Coulter: Alex, as we come to a close, you grew up in this community, and you said
44 the building had a lot to do with you, you become union active but as we
45 look across the street they're tearing the plant down and it hurts.
46

1 Alex Hernandez: Mm-hm.
2
3 Marilyn Coulter: [96:30] But, um, is there anything, is there anything that once that building
4 is gone you'd like people to remember about that building and how it's
5 affected you, what would it be?
6
7 Alex Hernandez: Well, I hope that, I hope there's some kind of marking there for one thing.
8 Um, what that land, what that site was, uh, you know, what it, what it
9 meant to our community. Um, I don't want people to forget about it.
10 Uh, I, I guess, uh, I guess it would be nice if it would be like a, you know,
11 some kind of playground or some place for the elderly to be at. It's, it's
12 pretty much like prime land in the city so, it's pretty safe around here, um,
13 so I, I would like to see, you know, something, some kind of thing for
14 people to live at, maybe shop or something or, or, you know, like a warm
15 place to be, [inaudible 97:47] active place.
16
17 Marilyn Coulter: Alex, I want to say thank you for sharing your memories and I can't think
18 of a better person to have won that General Motors vehicle and thanks for
19 becoming an active UAW member. Thanks for the interview.
20
21 Alex Hernandez: You're welcome.
22
23 Gary Judy: Thank you Alex.
24
25 Cheryl McQuaid: Thank you Alex.
26
27 Earl Nicholson: Why did you close it for?
28
29 Marilyn Coulter: Because it was [inaudible 98:04].
30
31
32/mlc