

**Wendell "Rocky" Wright discusses his career as a production worker  
and GM manager at the Fisher Body plant in Lansing, MI**

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4  
5 Doug Rademacher: [recorder clicking] Good morning. Today, uh, is May 23, 2006. We're  
6 the Lansing Fisher Body Historical Team. And today, it's approximately,  
7 uh, 9:20 a.m. [sniffing] And we're here to interview Rocky Wright. First,  
8 we'll introduce the team.  
9  
10 Cheryl McQuaid: Cheryl McQuaid.  
11  
12 John Fedewa: John Fedewa.  
13  
14 Jerri Smith: Jerri Smith.  
15  
16 Doug Rademacher: And I'm Doug Rademacher. [0:26] Would you please state your name  
17 and spell it for us?  
18  
19 Rocky Wright: Rocky Wright, um, I'm better known as Rocky Wright, anyway. The real  
20 name is Wendell Wright, W-E-N-D-E-L-L W-R-I-G-H-T.  
21  
22 Doug Rademacher: [0:40] And what is your address?  
23  
24 Rocky Wright: 1902 Shore Drive, Orleans, Michigan 48865. [papers rustling]  
25  
26 Doug Rademacher: [0:49] And are you married?  
27  
28 Rocky Wright: Yes, I am; 46 years.  
29  
30 Doug Rademacher: [0:54] And do you have any children?  
31  
32 Rocky Wright: Two.  
33  
34 Doug Rademacher: [0:57] Are they, uh, boys or girls?  
35  
36 Rocky Wright: Two girls.  
37  
38 Doug Rademacher: Okay. [1:02] Uh, Rocky, where were you born and raised?  
39  
40 Rocky Wright: I was born in Hartley, [coughing] Kentucky. And, uh, I came here, uh, at  
41 the age of 15 from Kentucky and, uh, lived, uh, on Jerome Street and went  
42 to school at Eastern High School.  
43  
44 Doug Rademacher: Okay. [1:19] What is your education level?  
45

1 Rocky Wright: I have some college through General Motors classes [sniffing], graduated  
2 high school in '58 and, uh, because I'd missed about a half a year there.  
3 Uh, then I took some courses, uh, through GM, over at GMI, in Flint.  
4

5 Doug Rademacher: All right. [1:39] And were you in the military?  
6

7 Rocky Wright: No, I wasn't.  
8

9 Doug Rademacher: [1:42] What did your parents do for a living?  
10

11 Rocky Wright: My dad was a coal miner. My mother was a h-, a housewife.  
12

13 Doug Rademacher: Okay. [1:51] What did you do before you hired in at Fisher Body?  
14

15 Rocky Wright: I was a cook in the Lansing area, uh, different restaurants. Uh, one of the  
16 ones that really comes back to mind is Home Dairy Company. I was a  
17 second cook in probably one of the largest catering outfits around Lansing,  
18 anywhere.  
19

20 Doug Rademacher: [2:06] Where was that located?  
21

22 Rocky Wright: That was located on Washington Avenue, downtown Lansing.  
23

24 Doug Rademacher: Okay.  
25

26 Rocky Wright: And we ran a cafeteria there, uh, a, uh, delicatessen, bakery, uh. I worked  
27 on the third floor doin', uh, all the food for the cafeteria. And then on the  
28 – when we had the catering jobs, we'd work all night sometimes. And at  
29 Thanksgiving, we'd do maybe 400 turkeys, stuffed turkeys. And people  
30 would pick'm up just the night before Thanksgiving. Quite an experience.  
31

32 Doug Rademacher: [2:35] Just for my own, uh, interest, where exactly, where was that on  
33 Washington Avenue?  
34

35 Rocky Wright: Uh, that was...  
36

37 Doug Rademacher: Was it downtown or was it, was it south?  
38

39 Rocky Wright: ...uh, that was just, uh, south of the Michigan Theatre, if I remember  
40 correctly.  
41

42 Doug Rademacher: Okay.  
43

44 Rocky Wright: It's quite a big building.  
45

1 Doug Rademacher: All right. [2:52] Uh, would you please tell us why did you hire into Fisher  
2 Body?  
3  
4 Rocky Wright: Well, I'll tell you, I, I, I loved cooking, but, uh, I couldn't make the living  
5 that I wanted to make. So, uh, I hired in at, uh, GM because that looked  
6 like the best place to work at that time. And, uh, and then I could work  
7 weekends or whatever at the, uh, cooking business.  
8  
9 Doug Rademacher: So you wanted more money, but you, uh...  
10  
11 Rocky Wright: I wanted [inaudible 3:17].  
12  
13 Doug Rademacher: ...decided to work two jobs for a while.  
14  
15 Rocky Wright: Yes, and I did that.  
16  
17 Doug Rademacher: [3:20] When did you hire in at Fisher Body?  
18  
19 Rocky Wright: Uh, May 16, 1963.  
20  
21 Doug Rademacher: [tsk] [3:28] How did you know they were hiring?  
22  
23 Rocky Wright: Uh, I had a, um, couple of, uh, neighbors talkin' that they were going to be  
24 hiring, so, uh, I, uh, took off over here and put in a application. And, uh,  
25 within two or three days, I got called. [tsk]  
26  
27 Doug Rademacher: [3:47] Did you have to stand in line or was there a, [sniffing] a group of  
28 people at that time or did you just show up and walk right in?  
29  
30 Rocky Wright: I, um, basically walked right in. Because I don't know if it was the wrong  
31 time or, or the right time a day or what but, uh, there was, uh, very few  
32 people fillin' out apps at that time. Uh, but shortly after that, they really  
33 were hiring. I mean everything that walked through the door practically,  
34 they were hirin' at that time. But, uh, there was really not that big a crowd  
35 when I came in and filled out the application.  
36  
37 Doug Rademacher: [4:22] And do you remember where you went?  
38  
39 Rocky Wright: Uh, yes, at the old Fisher Body plant down – went down in the main  
40 entrance and up to the – and [clanking] around the corner to the old  
41 employment office.  
42  
43 Doug Rademacher: Okay. [4:34] And do you remember what your, uh – what that was like?  
44 Was there a...  
45  
46 Rocky Wright: Oh.

1  
2Doug Rademacher: ...physical or what kinda things was...  
3  
4Rocky Wright: [laughter] Yeah, well, it was, uh, kinda reminds you of a dungeon, really.  
5 [laughter] It was, uh, very dark and not, not any windows or anything.  
6 And, uh, it was, uh, I mean it was – it looked like an office and it was  
7 clean and everything but it just seemed strange to me, you know, that  
8 everything was below ground level. And, uh, then, uh, I remember going  
9 upstairs when I came back to, uh, get a physical – had to go upstairs and  
10 get a physical [clicking] but that was on the main floor. And that, that  
11 area must've moved I don't know how many times – uh, half a dozen in  
12 my career there.  
13  
14Doug Rademacher: [5:20] How old were you when you hired in?  
15  
16Rocky Wright: Twenty-three.  
17  
18Doug Rademacher: [5:24] What shift and what department did you first work?  
19  
20Rocky Wright: I, uh, started on days in the, uh, cushion room. And, uh, worked 41 days  
21 and g – or, uh, worked 89 days and got laid off.  
22  
23Doug Rademacher: Well before I get you to the 89<sup>th</sup> day and ask you why, why that's a special  
24 thing, tell me about – you'd been a cook. You've came in. You've been  
25 accepted for work. [5:50] Would you please share [clicking] – you saw the  
26 dungeon, where you, where you filled out your paperwork. The day they  
27 brought you in, can you describe what you saw and what it felt like when  
28 you saw the assembly line for the first time and, uh, [sniffing] and your  
29 first day on the job?  
30  
31Rocky Wright: Well, they brought me in and, uh, took me up to a supervisor's office.  
32 And, uh, they talked to us and told us a little bit what was gonna take place  
33 and what we did in this area and, uh, in the, uh, cushion room. And, uh, I  
34 was overwhelmed really with, uh, how many seats they were building  
35 runnin' on that line. And so, uh, I was, you know, uh, I wasn't real young  
36 but I was – I mean I wasn't a kid, 18 years old. But I'll tell you, it was  
37 kinda scary, what you was gonna have to do to make that money, you  
38 know. And if I remember right, it was only about \$2.29 an hour or  
39 somethin' like that.  
40  
41Doug Rademacher: [6:53] Were you welcomed by the people...  
42  
43Rocky Wright: Absolutely.  
44  
45Doug Rademacher: ...when you went up to the – to that assembly line?  
46

1 Rocky Wright: Yes, I was.  
2

3 Doug Rademacher: [6:58] Now did you – the cushion was a separate area. Did you see the,  
4 the automobile assembly line on your way there?  
5

6 Rocky Wright: No, no I didn't. Um, they, uh, took us through the hallways and you could  
7 hear the things goin' on in I guess it was the body shop and stuff. But the  
8 cushion room was located in Building 15 over on – off Michigan Avenue  
9 and, uh, right next to the Shipping Building 17. And, uh, we didn't see  
10 any, uh, [tapping] any real production areas because they took us through  
11 the office area and out across by Layout and stuff like that to get us over  
12 there. Um...  
13

14 Doug Rademacher: So...  
15

16 Rocky Wright: ...but then I really was scared when they finally got me upstairs and  
17 showed me where everything was put in – bein' put together. It was  
18 awesome.  
19

20 Doug Rademacher: It was awesome?  
21

22 Rocky Wright: It was awesome. [tapping] I said, "Lord, have mercy. What did I get into  
23 here?" [laughter]  
24

25 Doug Rademacher: Now, you've shared getting taken to your job. You said the people  
26 welcomed you. [8:00] Can you share that first day? What'd they have  
27 you do and what was it like? Was there a, a ra-...  
28

29 Rocky Wright: Well, it...  
30

31 Doug Rademacher: ...race to learn the job or did...  
32

33 Rocky Wright: Uh, it was, um, completely new to me – what I'd, what I'd been doing all  
34 my 23 ye-, years of life. And, uh, I remember this lady, uh, breaking me  
35 in on zigzag. And I don't know if you guys even know what zigzag is but  
36 zigzag is where you, uh, put the springs together for the cushions and then  
37 brought this big gun down and put the clips on the springs to hold'm  
38 together, you know, before you put the jute and the pad and all on  
39 [clanking] for the cushion. And, uh, she showed me, uh, uh, two or three  
40 of'm and what to do and how many clips to put on and what have you and,  
41 uh, and I took over. But boy, I'll tell you, by the time I got done that day,  
42 this little guy was tired. [laughter]  
43

44 Doug Rademacher: [8:56] And was [papers rustling] this a – uh, hard on the hands or, or was  
45 it, uh, just strenuous? Or was it just repetitiveness? What was – what  
46 wore you out?

1  
2 Rocky Wright: Basically, it was, uh, hard on your shoulder and hand because you're  
3 pullin' the gun down. It was on a, uh, balancer of some kind. You'd pull  
4 the gun down and, and then pull the trigger. So, uh, about anything new  
5 like that was definitely gonna make you sore and tired. But, uh, I hung  
6 with her.  
7  
8 Doug Rademacher: Okay. [9:23] Well, now share that, uh, [clicking] you did that and you  
9 went on to this 89 days. You say you got laid off?  
10  
11 Rocky Wright: Well, things slowed down, I guess you might say. And, uh, they, uh, um,  
12 started cuttin' people and doin' things different, slowin' down the line and  
13 stuff. And they, uh, laid me off at 89 days. And I had to get 90 days in  
14 order to get the benefits and establish seniority. So, uh, I'm pretty sad  
15 when they laid me off, you know, because I had bec-, I had become pretty  
16 good at what I was doin' and had moved around a couple a times in, uh,  
17 different jobs. [sniffing] And, uh, I hated to go back to that cookin' full  
18 time, but, uh, I, uh, I left. I'm sad but I left. And, uh, I thought that was  
19 the end of it. And, um, 41 days later, I got called back. And I had  
20 [thumping] to quit my job again.  
21  
22 But, um, I don't know, you guys may not know [Jerry Brooks 10:24] but  
23 Jerry Brooks was the, uh, employment, uh, supervisor at that time. And he  
24 said – he called me and he says, "Rock, I got a job for you." And he says,  
25 "It looks pretty good." He says, um, "But you have to work nights." And  
26 I said, uh, "No, I ain't workin' nights. I gotta job. I'm workin' straight  
27 days and I guess, uh, I'll just, uh, stay here." He says, "Well," he says, uh,  
28 "we really need you. We really need your help." And, uh, he says, uh,  
29 "Come in on days then, Monday." I said, "Okay, I'll do that." So, uh, I  
30 came in on days. And, and, uh, I had been laid off for the 41 days so, uh,  
31 now I gotta work on this 90-day thing again, you know. And I got up to  
32 88 days and they laid me off again. Boy, I am fired up now. And, I mean,  
33 I'm hot 'cause now I gotta go see if I can get a job back cookin' [clicking]  
34 again.  
35  
36 And – but anyway, [clicking] I left again. And, and I was only off, uh, 37  
37 days, if, uh, if I remember the numbers right. And he calls me up again  
38 and he says, "I got a job for you but you'll have to work nights." And I  
39 said, "Jerry, don't tell me I gotta work nights 'cause I ain't comin' back to  
40 work nights." And he says, "Okay. Fine." And then he hung up. I  
41 thought that was the end of it. Couple days later, he called me back. He  
42 says, "All right. Come in on days. Can you be here tomorrow mornin'?"  
43 I said, "Jerry, I can't just walk out on these people, you know. I'm  
44 cookin' upstairs here and, uh, they need me." And he says, uh – okay, I  
45 think this was on Wednesday, maybe. I said, "I can be there Monday."  
46 He said, "Make it Friday." And I said, "I don't know if I can do it." He

1 says, "Make it Friday or I'm just gonna forget you." So I says, "Okay.  
2 I'll be there Friday." So, uh, I went in at, uh, midnight at my cooking job  
3 and got everything ready for the cafeteria and I was here at 7:00 in the  
4 mornin'. And, uh, I was never laid off after that except for changeover.  
5  
6 Doug Rademacher: [12:42] Did you continue to work the two jobs for a little while?  
7  
8 Rocky Wright: Oh, yes.  
9  
10 Doug Rademacher: Oh yeah?  
11  
12 Rocky Wright: Yes.  
13  
14 Doug Rademacher: So you didn't let'm go. You...  
15  
16 Rocky Wright: Well, in fact, I worked three jobs. I worked at Fisher Body [thumping] 40  
17 hours a week. And I cooked, uh, [clicking] about 20 hours a week. And I  
18 worked weekends [clicking] at, uh, Texaco Gas Station, right across from  
19 Gorsline Runciman Funeral Home on Saturday and Sunday. I did that for  
20 over two years.  
21  
22 Doug Rademacher: [13:05] And this time, you – uh, every time back to the cushion room or  
23 where were you at?  
24  
25 Rocky Wright: Uh, yes, I went back to the cushion room there until, uh, uh, we started  
26 runnin' seatbelts. Um, and, uh, I put in a transfer to go up in Trim and, uh,  
27 moved up to Trim and started installin' seatbelts.  
28  
29 Doug Rademacher: Okay, you spoke about seein' that assembly line with the autos on it and  
30 you said it was awesome.  
31  
32 Rocky Wright: Oh, it was.  
33  
34 Doug Rademacher: [13:31] So tell me about goin' to the seatbelt job and how awesome was  
35 that?  
36  
37 Rocky Wright: Well, when I saw that, [tapping] [sniffing] I'm thinkin', uh, how in the  
38 world [thumping] do you put all these bolts and screws in every one a  
39 these locations, you know? Every body that comes through there has gotta  
40 have one. And, uh, it don't take you long to figure out how to do it 'cause  
41 you get down at the end of that hose and that is tough work down there but  
42 more you can stay up the line, the better off you are. I mean you get the  
43 shot at it right way. So, uh, it was a, it was a new experience but, uh, I  
44 worked it out. And, and I had a little trouble with my arm, runnin' that  
45 gun. But, uh, that's the way it was, you know.  
46

1 Doug Rademacher: [14:15] Do you remember who taught you that job?  
2  
3 Rocky Wright: Well, let's see, I think maybe that that might have been, uh – I think the,  
4 um, hourly guy might have been, uh, Keith, um – oh goodness, forgive  
5 me, but, uh...  
6  
7 Doug Rademacher: Oh, that don't matter. I just wondered if, if, uh, that person treated you  
8 good. If you – if he, if he...  
9  
10 Rocky Wright: He treated me really good.  
11  
12 Doug Rademacher: ...made it easy for you.  
13  
14 Rocky Wright: He treated me really good. And, uh, he showed me some a the shortcuts  
15 of how to get there and, and not be down the line on time. That's the  
16 worst thing you could do was be down the line. And I know from bein'  
17 [coughing] an hourly, you know, I fought jobs. And, and as a member of,  
18 uh, 602 Local, uh, fightin' the job because they were tryin' to add on all  
19 the time, you know. Well, you know how that goes. And, uh, but, um, he  
20 just was, uh – I think he was glad to, uh, teach me because, uh, I think he  
21 was kind of a utility guy, you know. And he didn't like that job either  
22 [laughter] and so, uh, he wanted me to catch on right away...  
23  
24 Doug Rademacher: Yeah.  
25  
26 Rocky Wright: ...so he could get off of it.  
27  
28 Doug Rademacher: [15:25] What's a utility job? What's that do?  
29  
30 Rocky Wright: Well, at that time, it was, uh, extra people that when, uh, uh, Doug  
31 Rademacher don't show up for work, he might be doin' your job that day.  
32 [tapping] Or, uh, uh, I wouldn't show up, he'd be doin' my job. So, uh,  
33 uh, they called'm utility people back then. It, it got different later on.  
34  
35 Doug Rademacher: [15:45] Did you have any other family members that worked at Fisher  
36 Body?  
37  
38 Rocky Wright: [tsk] Uh, not at that time. Uh, later on, uh, uh, after I had, uh, went to  
39 salary, my, uh, brother came in here to work. And, uh, I did not get him  
40 hired in but he hired in on his own. But I did have a son-in-law that, uh, I,  
41 uh, talked him into comin' here and he still works, uh, for General Motors.  
42  
43 Doug Rademacher: [16:13] Thinkin' back to, uh, your early days, do you remember any, uh,  
44 new hire initiations or pranks played on you?  
45



1 Rocky Wright: Oh, [papers rustling] yes, quite a few of'm, to be honest with you.  
2 [coughing]  
3  
4 Doug Rademacher: [16:23] Could, could you [inaudible 16:24]?  
5  
6 Rocky Wright: Uh, I didn't fall for all of'm, but some of'm I did. And, uh, you know,  
7 that, uh, that went on. I don't care who you were, sooner or later, they're  
8 gonna get you for one. Uh, and I can remember one that, uh, these guys  
9 all got together in a little – what we called a smokin' area in the cushion  
10 room because everything was so flammable over there. You had to go in  
11 this room if you smoked. And they said, uh, "Hey Rock," he says, uh,  
12 "you know it's almost Thanksgiving." And he says, uh, "The Wednesday  
13 before Thanksgiving, uh, if you go over to, uh, the employment office at,  
14 uh, [tapping] 4:00, they, uh, will give you a turkey." And so, you know,  
15 [tapping] naïve, dumb or whatever you wanna call it – wow. So I started  
16 askin' around, you know, some of the people that didn't play pranks and  
17 stuff, and they just kinda grinned. I thought, uh-oh, [thumping] somethin'  
18 is wrong here.  
19  
20 So I go back and I was tellin' this guy that told me this story, I said, uh,  
21 "By the way, uh, we've already bought our turkey and, uh, we don't have  
22 a freezer to put it in. So you just, uh, take my badge number and go over  
23 there and get it for yourself." And he said, "But I'm already gettin' one."  
24 I said, "Well, get two of'm. You gotta big family of liars." [laughter]  
25  
26 Doug Rademacher: Got him right off – caught him on, on that one, huh?  
27  
28 Rocky Wright: But there was more than th-, that that they tried to pull. I'll tell you.  
29 There was some, oh, there was some real dirty tricks that some guys  
30 pulled. They, they – that were almost sickening.  
31  
32 Doug Rademacher: Uh...  
33  
34 Rocky Wright: But we got through it.  
35  
36 Doug Rademacher: [18:02] You don't wanna share one of those sickening ones?  
37  
38 Rocky Wright: Uh, well, I can tell you one that was, uh, real, I thought it was – I won't  
39 mention any names of who did it because I thought it was really sick. But,  
40 uh, this, uh, one gal that hired in, uh – and like I said, I won't mention any  
41 names. Uh, uh, she was workin' on the line up there and one a the guys  
42 told her, uh, "Hey, uh, go back and tell your foreman there, uh, um – listen  
43 to him talk about his, uh, kid. He just won a, a skating contest in the  
44 Olympics." There's no Olympics goin' in, but she was real naïve, and she  
45 goes back. And she says, uh, to the supervisor, says, uh, "Hey, I hear that  
46 you have a, uh, real talented son that, uh, won a skating contest in the

1 Olympics.” He said, “What are you talkin’ about? My son don’t have any  
2 legs!”  
3  
4 Jerri Smith: Oh no.  
5  
6 Rocky Wright: That was the sickest thing I ever heard in my life but that was some of the  
7 stuff that wa-, they came up with.  
8  
9 Jerri Smith: [tsk] Oh...  
10  
11 Doug Rademacher: Those guys thought that was funny, didn’t they?  
12  
13 Rocky Wright: They thought it was funny, and she just broke down and cried like crazy.  
14 And, and, she wouldn’t even talk to those people for a long time after that.  
15 [sighing] That’s a bad joke, really.  
16  
17 Jerri Smith: Mm-hm.  
18  
19 Doug Rademacher: Oh, that’s painful for...  
20  
21 Rocky Wright: Real bad.  
22  
23 Doug Rademacher: ...all the parties.  
24  
25 Rocky Wright: Yeah.  
26  
27 Doug Rademacher: [19:24] Do you remember the people you hired in with or did you hire in  
28 alone? Did you come in in a group?  
29  
30 Rocky Wright: I, uh, came in with a group, uh, but, uh, boy, I can hardly remember the  
31 names or anything. But, uh, there, there was a lotta people came in there  
32 right around that time. Um, they started in April, I think, uh, hiring and,  
33 uh, tryin’ to fill the place up, so they could speed up the lines or  
34 something. And, uh, oh yeah, I remember a lotta people but to tell you the  
35 names, I just can’t, uh.  
36  
37 Doug Rademacher: [19:55] So you hired in and out a few times, but you don’t re-, you don’t  
38 hang out or re-, keep contact with people you hired in with originally,  
39 back in the – in those days?  
40  
41 Rocky Wright: No, not really because I moved outta town, you know, soon as I retired.  
42 And, uh, we used to do some things together, uh, uh, like with [Jerry  
43 Chamberlains 20:10] [tapping] and I and [Frank Meis 20:13] and, uh,  
44 people like that, uh, even [Ron Allman 20:17]. Uh, we used to do a little  
45 drinkin’ together, I guess you’d call it.  
46

1 Doug Rademacher: [20:25] Recreating?  
2  
3 Rocky Wright: Recreating.  
4  
5 Doug Rademacher: Uh-huh. [laughter] Um...  
6  
7 Rocky Wright: Lip-wetting. [laughter]  
8  
9 Doug Rademacher: [20:31] Now, tell us about your work life at Fisher Body. What was the  
10 environment like inside the plant? And what was the typical day like?  
11  
12 Rocky Wright: Well, uh, when I first started, the typi-, typical day was just, uh, come in  
13 and do your job [tapping] for 8 hours and go home tired. But then, we  
14 started runnin', uh, what they call the Astrodome Wagon. [coughing]  
15 Remember that, where the – all the folding seats were built offline. And,  
16 uh, [tapping] I got into buildin' the second seat. And that thing had a ton a  
17 hardware on it and it was heavy. And, uh, and they wanted us to work, uh,  
18 10 or 12 [sniffing] hours a day 'cause they were sellin' every one of'm.  
19 The Astrodome was the one that had the, uh, raised roof with the glass  
20 across the front of it.  
21  
22 Doug Rademacher: Oh, the Vista Cruiser.  
23  
24 Rocky Wright: Vista Cruiser. Uh, it was – when we first started runnin', it was, uh, called  
25 the Astrodome but it – then they changed it to the Vista Cruiser.  
26  
27 Doug Rademacher: [21:25] Oh, so, that was the real name?  
28  
29 Rocky Wright: I was gonna get to that, yeah.  
30  
31 Doug Rademacher: [21:26] It was called the Astrodome?  
32  
33 Rocky Wright: Early, early on.  
34  
35 Doug Rademacher: I didn't know that.  
36  
37 Rocky Wright: Yes. And, uh, that was, uh, that was a trying job. But, uh, it was awful  
38 hard work and heavy work, um, but I did that for quite some time. And,  
39 uh, then, uh, you know, there was a real [sniffing] trick to skin and covers  
40 too. I became a – what we was talkin' about a little bit ago – a utility guy  
41 in the cushion room. And, uh, when you first started in skin and covers on  
42 where there was backs or cushions, you know, rollin' the corners and  
43 stuff, you had some sore hands for a few days. But, uh...  
44  
45 Doug Rademacher: So explain...  
46

1 Rocky Wright: ...after you got good at it – I mean you, you, uh, the cushion would come  
2 to you, let's say, uh, with all the pad and, uh, jute and all that stuff,  
3 hardware on the, onto the springs. And then, uh, the guy next to you  
4 would put a thin rubber pad on. And then we'd put the cover down  
5 [tapping] and I'd hog-ring it across the back and then flip the corners, flip  
6 the cushion over and [thumping] pull up in the center with a hog ring and  
7 hook it to the frame.  
8

9 Doug Rademacher: [22:30] What is a hog ring?  
10

11 Rocky Wright: A hog ring is a, is kind of a U-shaped thing that you push onto a, uh, wire  
12 or the, uh, uh, binding in the – on [tapping] around the cover and then you  
13 squeeze it together. And we did, uh, on certain jobs, you did'm by hand.  
14 And I still have my hog ringer and the hog ringer I own today that I used  
15 in the cushion room. And then, of course, we got high tech, started, uh,  
16 makin' hog ring guns and, uh, they were run by air. And you'd put a –  
17 you had a strip a hog rings that were shaped like a U, let's say, or a C and  
18 you put, uh – slide'm onto the gun and then, uh, you pushed the cover up  
19 to where this wire was and pulled the trigger and it would squeeze the hog  
20 ring for you.  
21

22 Doug Rademacher: [22:22] Now, automation brought a little more danger, though. Can you  
23 tell me about that?  
24

25 Rocky Wright: Oh, absolutely. You, uh, sometimes would come up with that gun and slip  
26 or the, the, uh, cord would break on the cover and you might hook one in  
27 your chin or one in your arm or, uh, your lip. [thumping] Uh, yeah, it  
28 brought some dangers. [sniffing] A lotta people fainted down there from  
29 runnin' one in their arm and closin' it up and then somebody had to have a  
30 set of cutters to get it out. I know the ladies were real, uh, prevalent to  
31 faintin' if – always when they got one in'm. They'd usually faint and hit  
32 the floor. [laughing]  
33

34 Doug Rademacher: [23:59] And what was the, uh, [coughing] – what was it like? Was there a  
35 lotta women in this cushion room or?  
36

37 Rocky Wright: Oh, yes. Um...

38

39 Doug Rademacher: [Inaudible 24:03].  
40

41 Rocky Wright: ...cushion room was, uh, uh, a lot – mostly, uh, women, uh, in, uh, pad-up  
42 and spring-up and stuff where I started. Uh, but, uh, you know, there was  
43 many more women when I first started there than there was, uh, men. But  
44 they – that was just prior to, uh, or just after they had, uh, moved cut and  
45 sew out. 'Cause they used to make all the covers there in the cushion  
46 room also.

1  
2 Doug Rademacher: [24:31] So you developed friendships with the people you worked around.  
3 Did you come a time where you considered them brothers and sisters?  
4  
5 Rocky Wright: Absolutely.  
6  
7 Doug Rademacher: Can you tell me...  
8  
9 Rocky Wright: Uh, there was, uh...  
10  
11 Doug Rademacher: [24:42] How does that develop?  
12  
13 Rocky Wright: Well, I think, uh, that if you're like, uh, UAW membership, you do a lotta  
14 things together. You go to union meetings together. You work  
15 [thumping] together every day. And, uh, seemed to be everybody was  
16 brothers and sisters in there. Or, uh, and if one had a problem, we all had  
17 a problem, uh-huh. [throat clearing] And of course, later on, there was  
18 always a few, you know, that kinda separated and come to the top, you  
19 know, sorta like the cream. Uh, and, uh, those were – there was a few a  
20 those that were a little better than everybody else, you know. They didn't  
21 have time to, uh, hobnob with us or, uh, drink a beer with us or they were,  
22 uh, just snobbish, uh, ornery people, I guess I called 'em. So, uh, those  
23 were kind of in a little clique a their own, you know. And, uh, we stayed  
24 away from them.  
25  
26 Doug Rademacher: [25:38] So you say they were cream, they, maybe they were sediment.  
27  
28 Rocky Wright: Well, they might have but sediment don't come to the top.  
29  
30 Doug Rademacher: That's what I mean. Maybe [coughing] they were actually on the bottom,  
31 huh? [laughing] They just thought they were on top.  
32  
33 Rocky Wright: Mm-hm. Yeah. That's what I mean. Yeah. They did think [tapping]  
34 they were on top, uh, but they weren't.  
35  
36 Doug Rademacher: [25:52] Have you developed friendships from there that extended outside  
37 the plant?  
38  
39 Rocky Wright: Oh, yes, yes. Uh, like, um, uh, [Ron Allman 26:00] started in the cushion  
40 room, see. And, uh, we've, we've been friends for a lotta years. And we  
41 know his wife. And, uh, we don't – they live in Charlotte and we live in  
42 Orleans, so we don't get together durin' the year but I see 'em every year in  
43 Florida, every year. And, uh, we tip a few colas, you know, and, uh,  
44 summer soft drinks.  
45

1 Doug Rademacher: Mm-hm, mm-hm. [thumping] [tsk] [26:25] What did you do for lunch and  
2 can you talk about what it was like to, to know a break was comin'? Was  
3 it hard to keep up with the line? So what about breaks and lunches and  
4 stuff? [paper rustling] What did you do when you hired in?  
5

6 Rocky Wright: Well, if I remember right, we had like, uh, two eight-minute breaks a, a  
7 day and, uh, [throat clearing] two six-minute wagons. Uh, a wagon was  
8 where a coffee thing would come around on a little cart with doughnuts  
9 and, uh, coffee, and, uh, milk and stuff like that. We didn't have the pop  
10 or anything. But, uh, uh, we had two a those a day. But the cushion room  
11 had two eight-minute breaks. Uh, because, uh, you couldn't smoke in the  
12 cushion room, so we'd take the break and go in that room and just puff our  
13 brains out, you know. And, uh, a lotta folks smoked back then. And it  
14 was just a cloud of blue, I'm tellin' you. [laughter] And, uh, but for lunch,  
15 um, I usually brown-bagged it. But once in a while, you'd go to the  
16 cafeteria. We had a 42-minute lunch back then. And, uh, then we kinda  
17 changed that, went to a half an hour 'cause everybody wanted to get out  
18 earlier.  
19

20 Doug Rademacher: Okay. [27:38] Was there departmental dinners and did you participate  
21 come the holidays or other [tsk] events that would happen?  
22

23 Rocky Wright: Yes, we used to, uh, have, uh, a [tapping] Thanksgiving one and a  
24 Christmas one. Uh, we – everybody'd bring a dish to pass. And, uh, uh,  
25 those that didn't want to bring a dish would, uh, throw in a few bucks.  
26 And, uh, some, some of the team would take a, a – or get ham or roast  
27 beef or turkey. And, uh, [clicking] we'd have a nice layout and  
28 [thumping] – for the holidays.  
29

30 Doug Rademacher: [28:12] And you just worked right on around this food? And...  
31

32 Rocky Wright: Oh, yes.  
33

34 Doug Rademacher: ...and ate for eight minutes or...  
35

36 Rocky Wright: Yeah, we, uh...  
37

38 Doug Rademacher: ...of course, you had the lunch.  
39

40 Rocky Wright: We would always, uh, figure out some way where the relief people, uh,  
41 uh, who [clicking] relieved people from their job for emergency release  
42 and stuff and, uh, they would, uh, um, set up tables beside the line or  
43 somethin', you know, or right down the aisle where they wouldn't have to  
44 run material trucks or somethin'. And, uh, or in the smoking room, we  
45 called it. Uh, but those were really a lotta fun.  
46

1 Doug Rademacher: [28:46] Would you share a story about the cushion department and, uh,  
2 some trouble that happened and would you share your, your story of that  
3 particular chain of events and what happened back then?  
4

5 Rocky Wright: Yep, I, uh, [tapping] if I remember...

6

7 Doug Rademacher: [29:00] What year, what year was that?  
8

9 Rocky Wright: ...seems to me like it was, uh, 1966, but I may be wrong, and seems to me  
10 like it was September 17<sup>th</sup>. And, uh, we had been fighting, uh, for, uh,  
11 pigskin gloves, really. And pigskin gloves were expensive. And of  
12 course, they wanted to give us, [door closing] uh, cloth gloves that were,  
13 uh, about 10 cents a pair or somethin'. I mean they didn't last at all. I  
14 thought it was crazy that they bought those because they didn't last at all,  
15 uh, especially with the oily frames and, uh, sharp metal and stuff. And,  
16 uh, so, uh, we, uh, our, uh, union kept fighting for it and fighting for it.  
17 And, uh, I won't, again, won't mention any names, but there was a few  
18 people got together and, uh, decided that, uh, we'll bring her to a head,  
19 either they'll give us gloves or we'll shut it down. And, uh, I happened to  
20 be involved in that a little bit. And, um, some awful stories started about  
21 me in that area but then they weren't all true. Uh, but I was involved in  
22 the wildcat. And, uh....  
23

24 Doug Rademacher: [30:19] What's a wildcat?  
25

26 Rocky Wright: Well, that's a, that's a, uh, unauthorized work stoppage. And, uh...

27

28 Doug Rademacher: [30:27] And being unauthorized means it wasn't approved by the  
29 international union or...  
30

31 Rocky Wright: That's right.  
32

33 Doug Rademacher: ...the local?  
34

35 Rocky Wright: Never been a strike vote on it or anything. That was not approved by the  
36 international. But we got some attention.  
37

38 Doug Rademacher: [30:37] What happened? What did you do?  
39

40 Rocky Wright: Well, we ended up gettin' a few gloves, uh, and we went outside and  
41 locked the gates, so they couldn't move the trucks. And, uh, and the  
42 people, uh, didn't have any seats but the cars, so they sent 'em home. And,  
43 uh, of course a lotta them then kinda congregated around the, [sniffing]  
44 uh, gate and stuff and out in the parkin' lot and, you know, discussin' the  
45 matter and whether it was good, bad or indifferent. Uh, but it was kind of  
46 a, a wild night...

1  
2Doug Rademacher: Now...  
3  
4Rocky Wright: ...to say the least.  
5  
6Doug Rademacher: [31:12] And back then, did you, uh, with the work stoppage, did you still  
7 get paid, the other people?  
8  
9Rocky Wright: Uh, I, I don't know. I think maybe the other people did. We didn't get  
10 paid.  
11  
12Doug Rademacher: Okay.  
13  
14Rocky Wright: Uh, well, I guess we did get paid. Some of us got disciplined.  
15  
16Doug Rademacher: That's what I was wonderin' about.  
17  
18Rocky Wright: Yeah, uh.  
19  
20Doug Rademacher: [31:27] So did somebody take the, the [wrath 31:29] for that?  
21  
22Rocky Wright: Uh, yeah, there was, uh, some people that got, uh, [clicking] got some  
23 pretty harsh pun-, punishment, uh. I know Dorothy Stevens was one in  
24 that case. And, uh, I got a couple weeks myself. Um, so it, it was really  
25 tough on me. I – as soon as they gave me the discipline, I went to Florida.  
26 But, uh, it was a interest-, interesting situation. And I learned a lot,  
27 [thumping] brother. I learned a lot about that. And I don't think I'd ever  
28 do it again, not like that. But, uh – because that's the only blemish that  
29 was ever on my record here and, oh well, you know. I lived through it.  
30 Thank God, I did, but, uh, it's, uh...  
31  
32Doug Rademacher: Well, you say it was a blemish. [32:19] Did – but you felt you did it for  
33 the right reason?  
34  
35Rocky Wright: Yes, I thought I did it for the right reason but it's still on my record. I  
36 mean it was on my record that I had, uh – was involved in a illegal work  
37 stoppage. And, uh, but, uh, I probly would do it again but I'd do it  
38 different, let's put it that way.  
39  
40Doug Rademacher: [32:38] Well, as we talk about that then, would you please tell me about  
41 moving into the, uh, management role? And, uh, what made you – [papers  
42 rustling] when did you become a supervisor? And obviously they, uh,  
43 didn't think too less of you if they asked you to join the, the other side, the  
44 other [inaudible 32:54].  
45



1 Rocky Wright: Well, uh, I was always [thumping] – ‘cause I never missed any time,  
2 [clicking] ever. And, um, I always did my job, even though I argued with  
3 certain people. Uh, one in particular I will tell you about in the cushion  
4 room was, uh – I don’t know if you guys know or heard of’m is [Charlie  
5 Socher 33:16]. [laughter] Uh, that guy I just absolutely could not get  
6 along with that guy and I don’t care how hard I worked for him or  
7 whatever, he just did not like me. And then in, uh, after I had left the  
8 cushion room and, uh, I went on salary in Quality Control on October 7,  
9 1968 and so now I’m the Quality Control Supervisor over all the  
10 inspectors, see, so I come to the cushion room to check something and  
11 Charlie Socher runs over and throws his arm around my shoulder and  
12 “Boy, I just, I just think you’re the greatest guy and I’m so proud of you.”  
13 And I said, “Get your hand off me. You wanted to walk on me like dirt  
14 when I worked for you, so don’t touch me now.” And him and I never  
15 ever [throat clearing] got along after that or before. Excuse me.  
16 [coughing] But, uh, that was the only supervisor that I ever really did not  
17 want him around me, touch me, anything, you know. [clicking] And, uh,  
18 [thumping] so I, I mean he might have thought I was a real knucklehead,  
19 you know, when, when I told him to get his hands off me, don’t touch me  
20 but, uh, that’s the way I felt, so.  
21  
22 And but anyway, uh, I had, uh, I transferred into Quality Control and I did  
23 a good job for him so my boss, uh, Robert Martin, Bob Martin, you  
24 probably heard of him. He was the night shift superintendent at the time  
25 in Quality Control and he offered me the job, I took it and, uh, never  
26 looked back and, uh, I retired in 1998 as a, uh, production superintendent  
27 on the chassis side.  
28  
29 Doug Rademacher: [tsk] You – I’m gonna go back real briefly to, uh, you got your, uh, 89  
30 days in a couple times, you said the gentleman had called you back, said,  
31 “Rock, I got a job for you.” [35:26] Where did Rocky come from? And  
32 obviously it was on, early on, so why don’t you share how...  
33  
34 Rocky Wright: Okay, well...  
35  
36 Doug Rademacher: ...you got that nickname?  
37  
38 Rocky Wright: Uh, when I was a, a young lad in Kentucky I used to do some fighting,  
39 you know, for the school. [papers rustling] And, uh, and we had a little  
40 gym there in Kentucky, at that time it was Weeksbury, Kentucky just over  
41 the hill from where I was born. And, uh, I had never, uh, been knocked  
42 down or anything. I lost a few fights on points but I’ve never been  
43 knocked down, so my coach starting calling me, uh, Rockhead. And, uh, I  
44 don’t know, It just kinda stayed with me. [papers rustling] And then when  
45 I got to Michigan, uh, in 1955 I started working for this guy by the name  
46 of [Jerry Yarger 36:17] who was a farmer in Dimondale and he had a stall

1 in the Lansing, uh, vegetable market down there, the – at Shiawassee  
2 and...  
3  
4 Jerri Smith: City...  
5  
6 Rocky Wright: Cedar.  
7  
8 Jerri Smith: City Market.  
9  
10 Rocky Wright: City Market, yes. And, uh, [throat clearing] I started working for him and,  
11 uh, he says, uh, to me one day, he says, uh, “Where did you get a name of  
12 Wendell?” I said, “Well, my dad was an avid Republican. My  
13 grandfather was an avid Republican. And when Wendell Willkie was  
14 runnin’ for president in 1941, that’s where I got the name.” And I said  
15 they – my grandfather wanted to call me Wendell Willkie but my dad said,  
16 “No way you puttin’ Willkie in there.” So I don’t have a middle name.  
17 And so this Rocky just stuck with me, uh, from I don’t know, somebody  
18 mentioned it to somebody and somebody started calling me Rockhead,  
19 next thing you know they’re calling me Rocky and it just hung with me  
20 the rest of my life and everybody knows me as Rocky today. And, uh, I  
21 even go to my credit union and just sign Rocky and they know who it is.  
22 [laughter]  
23  
24 Doug Rademacher: Really? Um, you went into management, you say you went right fairly  
25 moved – just a moment here, Jerri Smith.  
26  
27 Jerri Smith: Yes. [37:36] Rocky, seeings how you worked on the line as a line worker  
28 and then [coughing] into supervision, how did you and the committee  
29 people get along after the transformation?  
30  
31 Rocky Wright: Well, [throat clearing] we, uh, I thought we got along quite well. There  
32 were certain committee men that, uh, you had a tough, tough time with  
33 and that’s when I became tough, [tapping] you know. If you want to be  
34 reasonable with me, I’ll be reasonable with you. You start trying to walk  
35 on me, I’m gonna get on top of you one way or another.  
36  
37 And, uh, yes, we had, uh, uh, [Curley Jones 38:13] and I have had some  
38 trying times, uh, but I never gave in to Curley Jones, uh, without a fight.  
39 And, uh, it doesn’t make any difference [throat clearing] if I’m a,  
40 committeeman or a salary man, I’m still gonna fight for what I think is  
41 right. I’ve had, uh, some very good relationships with, uh, people like, uh,  
42 uh, [Don Brown 38:35] when he was on, uh, shop committee and, um, I  
43 never had any problem with, uh, many other committeemen. But Curley  
44 Jones and I just didn’t see eye to eye but, uh, we didn’t see eye to eye  
45 when I had Repair up in 3X and, uh, Curley Jones was a repairman either  
46 ‘cause to be very honest with you, I thought Curley Jones when he came

1 to work was so tired he couldn't do his job because he was farmin', you  
2 know and, uh, maybe that was the reason. But, uh, him and I were head to  
3 head most of the time and, uh, then when he went on committee, uh, we –  
4 it didn't change much. Uh, we're not great friends yet but we still hobnob  
5 together a little bit in Florida.  
6

7 Uh, but I try to be honest and, uh, true. I mean I try to tell people what I  
8 thought was right and, uh, I never had a lotta people mad, or not a lotta  
9 people problems while I was managing. Uh, there – yes, there was, uh, I  
10 mean I had some pretty tough questions for the committeemen sometimes  
11 you know, like, uh, why do you spend, uh, 98% of your time with 5% of  
12 the workforce? Because we had such good people and then we'd have,  
13 you know, like a, a lump in the sugar box. You have just a few, you  
14 know, that caused you problems all the time, didn't show up for work,  
15 drunk on the job or whatever. And, uh, that, um, that always just  
16 absolutely blew my mind why we spend s-, me too, you know, because I  
17 spend a lotta my time with those problem people. We spent, uh, 98% of  
18 our time with, uh, 3% to 5% of the workforce, uh, rather than us going up  
19 and tellin' Doug Rademacher, "You just did a fine job today. I hope you  
20 have a nice evening." Uh, we didn't have time for that because we're  
21 talkin' to the guy that didn't come to work Monday, don't come to work  
22 on Friday especially on night shift. You paid'm on Thursday night then  
23 you didn't see'm Friday night, you know, we had a few of those.  
24

25 And then I won't mention one committeeman, I called him one day or one  
26 night, I was the night shift superintendent for quite some time in, uh, Trim  
27 and I called this committeeman up and said, "Get down to the office right  
28 now, I've got one down here, a real live one." "What's a matter?" I said,  
29 "He's drunk. He can't stay on the chair." He said, "Oh." He said, "Just  
30 call a cab and send him home." I said "Uh-uh. I'm not gettin' no lawsuit  
31 outta this one, pal. Come on down here." So he comes down and now  
32 I've got two drunks. [laughter] This committeeman was as drunk as the  
33 guy he's going to represent, so obviously I, uh, got another committeeman  
34 and, uh, we disciplined both of'm and Plant Security took one of'm home.  
35 I don't know what happened to the other one but, uh, man they were both  
36 messed up.  
37

38 And, uh, but we've had some, we had some real encounters around  
39 contract time. Uh, you know, um, union representation always tried to  
40 protect their people and management always tried to protect their people  
41 also and, uh, there was times when, uh, we got rid of some bad apples, uh,  
42 on discharging'm, you know. Uh, I remember [throat clearing] a little guy  
43 from Albion by the name of [Fred Whitney 42:10]. Uh, we sprayed  
44 headlinings up in 3X and this Fred Whitney, I mean which is a really  
45 dumb thing to do, he walks through [sniffing] and throws a firecra-,  
46 cracker in, uh, [FS1120 42:26] and that was that old yellow glue, you

1 know, that we sprayed on headlinings. The flash point is so low and that  
2 is pathetic and fortunately we didn't have a fire but he could've blown that  
3 building up because we had barrels of it around there, you know. I  
4 discharged him and he's one that never came back. He threatened my  
5 family, threatened me, everything but he never came back 'cause boy, he  
6 really put some people in jeopardy that night. And, uh, I don't know why  
7 he did it but he just thought it was gonna be funny if we had a little fire in  
8 that booth, you know. It was really dumb.  
9  
10 But that's just some of the things you encounter with some of these people  
11 and, uh, but when you had people out for absenteeism and what have you,  
12 uh, I mean discharge, uh, contract time comin' up, you know, of course  
13 the union is gonna try to get those people back and most of the time they  
14 did but, uh, again they just brought the problem back and we fought with it  
15 for another three years, you know, 'cause those people, a lot of 'em never  
16 made it. [throat clearing] They had problems and they just couldn't  
17 correct them. We couldn't either I guess. And you probably have some of  
18 those today. [laughter]  
19  
20 Doug Rademacher: Absolutely. [throat clearing] There are some new changes in, uh, in, uh,  
21 the national agreement to continue to help make it easier to, uh, uh, get rid  
22 of that people [coughing] [inaudible 43:51] that's, that always has been  
23 our effort to protect our, our workers. Cheryl McQuaid.  
24  
25 Cheryl McQuaid: [43:57] Rocky, what did you feel made a good employee?  
26  
27 Rocky Wright: Uh, a good employee was one that came in, uh, you know, he didn't have  
28 to get involved in anything else but he did his job and did it right. If he  
29 didn't do it right, he let somebody know that he didn't get it done right  
30 because the ultimate customer out there wants it right when he buys that  
31 car. And, uh, you know, for years we had salary people that keep  
32 [sniffing] pushin' the people, you know, to get it out, get it out, get it out,  
33 it don't have to be right, you know, get it out. And guess what? Look  
34 where we're at today because of that, because we did ship some, uh, bad  
35 quality for a long time. But then we improved but it was a little [sniffing]  
36 bit late. Uh, but a good employee was one that came in and, uh, did his  
37 job and, uh, if he wanted help with anything he wasn't afraid to ask and,  
38 uh, those type of people you weren't afraid to help 'em either.  
39  
40 And, uh, they need to be at work every day, you know. Unless you're  
41 deathly ill, you need to be at work every day because we depend on  
42 somebody to be on that job every day and, uh, it's so much easier on  
43 everybody if everybody is here every day. And, uh, I don't care if you're  
44 a, a what they call a absentee replacement or utility guy or relief guy, or  
45 what, you don't do that job like the guy that does it every day, day in, day  
46 out. Uh, so absenteeism was probably one of our worst problems we had.

1 Uh, we had some – but we had bad salary people too, don't get me wrong.  
2 It wasn't just the hourly folks. We had a lot people that just lived on  
3 numbers and some of'm were pretty high, uh, positions and, uh, I didn't, I  
4 didn't know why that we had to do business that way but it's not right.  
5  
6 Doug Rademacher: [45:59] When you say lived on numbers, you're talking about, uh, head  
7 count or workload or [inaudible 46:03]? What do you mean?  
8  
9 Rocky Wright: Head count, workload, uh, buy rates, uh, shipping rates. Uh, I mean  
10 there's a chart of numbers like the calendar there, you know. Uh, if you  
11 got, uh, if you didn't have 85% buy rate at the end of the line, you're not  
12 runnin', you know, it's just too much repair going up there. And, uh, I  
13 don't know. There was attitudes from some of the salary just didn't care,  
14 you know, that, uh, whether we got it done or not, just get it out the door.  
15 And a lotta those are not around anymore or weren't when I left. And  
16 some of those went bye-bye even though they were salary.  
17  
18 Doug Rademacher: [46:43] Uh, what was your relationship with the skilled trades?  
19  
20 Rocky Wright: Very good, very good. I, uh, I had a lot of friends in, uh, maintenance and  
21 skilled trades, uh, like [Glen Borman 46:54] and I are very good friends.  
22 Um, I had a tinsmith down there that we used to do a lot of stuff together  
23 and I got his daughters hired in here at one time, uh, uh, Lloyd Wolever.  
24 Uh, that guy was the most talented tinman I've ever seen. He could make  
25 anything out of tin. And, uh, if I needed anything in Trim, um, it might  
26 not have been the right thing to do but he'd go around his regular job and  
27 get that done for me. He – we were just good friends, you know. He's  
28 quite a guy. He's, he was never able, able to have kids yet he adopted a  
29 couple a girls and, uh, boy, they've been a lot of problems for him. And,  
30 uh, I've tried to help him out with it. I got'm a job but one of'm took the  
31 buyout and the other one she has all kinds of other problems and sh-, I  
32 think, uh, maybe drugs and booze might be the biggest problem. But I  
33 feel so sorry for him because they, they did so well with those kids or tried  
34 to give them everything they wanted and just never, never came to grips  
35 with it, their kids I mean.  
36  
37 Doug Rademacher: I want to take you back, uh, [throat clearing] the Fisher brothers purchased  
38 the building, they have what's recognized as the Body by Fisher is a  
39 coach. [48:17] Can you tell me about the Fisher coach and something that  
40 you might have done?  
41  
42 Rocky Wright: Well, I remember, uh, and again I don't, I don't even remember what year  
43 it was but, uh, we were down for changeover and, uh, usually at  
44 changeover I take the first two weeks vacation, you know. And, uh, we  
45 were going to be down four to five weeks that time, so I took the first two  
46 weeks and I come back and, uh, Bob Martin, who, the guy that hired me

1 in, um, Quality Control, uh, he met me at the door and he had a, a drawing  
2 as big as that chart you have up there, uh, maybe as big as that board.

3  
4 Doug Rademacher: [48:58] So about a 4 x 5?

5  
6 Rocky Wright: Yeah, something like that, with a draw-, hand drawing of the coach that he  
7 had drawn and he met me at the door with it and he says, uh [tsk] "I got a  
8 project for you here and I, I need it in two weeks." I looked at that and I  
9 said "Holy mackerel. What do you need me to do, color it? [laughter]  
10 And he says "No." He, uh, I mean he was the second man under the plant  
11 manager at that time. He was the production manager at that time. And,  
12 uh, he says, uh, "I've been told that you were one of the best woodworkers  
13 around." And he says, uh, "I want you to build this coach, a life-size  
14 coach that we can put some kids in for the parade in downtown Lansing."  
15 I said, "Holy mackerel. That's quite a, quite a job." He said, "Yeah but  
16 you can do it." And he says, "We've already been to the union and got an  
17 okay that you can work on this and we have a room set up for you and  
18 everything."

19  
20 So I go over there and while I was on vacation they had went to Indiana  
21 and bought a Amish buggy and they had it back there and we took the  
22 [papers rustling] cab off of it and, uh, I started measurin' everything and I  
23 said, "Bob, you're going to have to cut this frame and extend it two feet  
24 before we can get the front seat on it, you know." So [papers rustling] we  
25 did that and got that all welded up and ready to go. And, uh, I got a few  
26 guys lined up, uh, most of'm were salary just to run to the hardware and  
27 get parts or what have you and [John Chanson 50:45] in Labor Relations  
28 he was one of those runners and I'm gonna tell you the whole story. So  
29 anyway, I get a guy over in Layout, Jerry, uh, he was a carpenter not  
30 Layout. He was a carpenter in Maintenance, Jerry somebody. He since  
31 passed away but, uh, I got him over there and I showed him what I needed.  
32 Uh, I said, "I want these things turned on the lathe, you know, and put  
33 together for puttin' the eagles on top of it and all of that." And so, uh, he  
34 said, "Yeah. I can do that." And I said "Okay." So, uh, [inaudible 51:27]  
35 into it and I started puttin' the thing together.

36  
37 And, uh, then we had to get some people to do a little sewing, you know.  
38 We had Judy, uh, uh, that was married to the s-, general foreman in, uh,  
39 Quality Control or, uh, Material, uh, oh geez, I, I almost had it on the end  
40 of my tongue. [papers rustling] Uh, but anyway, uh, she did the sewing  
41 and built the, uh, made the skirt thing on the back and the skirt that went  
42 around the seat. And so I just started cuttin' and puttin' it together and  
43 then I, uh, framed all the windows and everything and, uh, upholstered the  
44 outside. And, uh, uh, like I said, I had a few people helpin' me like, uh,  
45 [Dean Crostin 52:13] from Trim. He, uh, uh, did some welding on it and,  
46 on the frame and [beeping] stuff and, uh, made the seat frame and all that.

1 And, and, uh, then I decided, well, we've got to, we got to have doors that  
2 open and close here. And, uh, I built these doors and put locks and stuff  
3 in 'em and they just, I mean they sound like an old Cadillac, you know,  
4 back in the 40s, click, you can hear the thing work so good. [laughter]  
5  
6 And then I upholstered the entire inside and never put a thread of needle in  
7 it. I took, uh, staples and stapled ribs in it and then took a broomstick and  
8 wrapped it in material and put it up through there and put, uh, finish nails  
9 up through it and you couldn't even, you couldn't see it and, uh, it really  
10 turned out [thumping] great. And I took this gold rope, we went  
11 somewhere and bought this gold rope and I trimmed out all the glass and  
12 bought the moldings for the top of it, bought the eagles. Uh, I think we  
13 paid like 50 bucks a piece for those eagles for it and, uh, then, we, uh, got  
14 her all finished.  
15  
16 Uh, I finished it on Thursday and we were gonna run it in the parade on  
17 Saturday. We won a judges' trophy with it. And everybody in the town I  
18 think had their picture taken by it or, uh – we had three kids. John  
19 Chanson's, uh, one kid and, uh, one of Material supervisor's, uh, two kids  
20 were dressed like the pilgrim dress, you know, in the black and white and  
21 their dresses and all that. And, uh, they rode in it with, uh – and we got a  
22 guy [inaudible 53:51] that, uh, pulled a, brought a identical set of Morgans  
23 and pulled that thing down through town and John Chanson was the, uh,  
24 pooper scooper [laughter] ridin' a little scooter behind it, you know, and a  
25 bucket and a shovel. [Inaudible 54:06] good job for him. [laughter] And,  
26 uh, but that was quite an experience and it just turned out great. And, uh,  
27 it's, uh, [inaudible 54:14] we, we took that to Detroit too, the Tech Center  
28 for, uh, about two or three months. And then they wanted to put it in the  
29 archives down here, so they stored it in the basement at Fisher for quite a  
30 while. Last time I checked, it was downtown, so, uh.  
31  
32 Jerri Smith: It used to sit in the audit – Jerri Smith.  
33  
34 Rocky Wright: Oh yeah.  
35  
36 Jerri Smith: It used to sit in the audit area 'cause when I came in the plant in '94 it was  
37 in the audit area down there...  
38  
39 Rocky Wright: Yep.  
40  
41 Jerri Smith: ...before they changed the front of the plant.  
42  
43 Rocky Wright: We had built a, we built [throat clearing] a special room...  
44  
45 Jerri Smith: Right.  
46



1 Rocky Wright: ...for it there and had all the history of it in there. Whatever happened to  
2 that? I wonder if the books are with it.  
3

4 Doug Rademacher: Um, don't know that I have a – I think it's at the R. E. Olds Museum,  
5 downtown Lansing [inaudible 54:53].  
6

7 Rocky Wright: [Inaudible 54:53] I'm gonna go down one of these days and see but, uh,  
8 that was quite an experience.  
9

10 Doug Rademacher: [54:58] Now just out of curiosity, did the Fisher brothers ever see or know  
11 of it? Anybody of the Fisher family or was it...?  
12

13 Rocky Wright: I, I haven't any clue unless they saw it at the Tech Center but, uh, I got a  
14 lot of, uh, accolades for that.  
15

16 Doug Rademacher: Well, the, um, the plant known as Fisher Body changed names many  
17 times. [55:20] What's, what's it to you? What is – you left and went over  
18 to the chassis side. What is this plant? What's...?  
19

20 Rocky Wright: I left Fisher Body and went to the chassis plant in, uh, October of, uh, or  
21 August I mean of 1985 and [papers rustling] it is still Fisher Body to me  
22 today. I mean you can take the boy out of Fisher but you can't take the  
23 Fisher outta the boy.  
24

25 Doug Rademacher: Cheryl McQuaid.  
26

27 Cheryl McQuaid: [55:49] Rocky, um, did you ever see anybody hurt in the plant?  
28

29 Rocky Wright: Absolutely.  
30

31 Cheryl McQuaid: [55:55] Any stories you want to share with us?  
32

33 Rocky Wright: Well, um, I was one of'm. Uh, if you remember how we moved cars  
34 around in, [clicking] um, Building, uh, 5 upstairs there before they came  
35 out of 3X and then they go through this transfer, you know, and then head  
36 down to Building 17. And we were having a problem with where the  
37 tracks change, you know, to, uh, shift the cars. Uh, we had a problem.  
38 We couldn't get it to go and Maintenance was [thumping] up there and,  
39 uh, I'm up there and of course I was the superintendent on nights at that  
40 time. And, uh, uh, we were about to shut Olds down because we didn't  
41 have cars over there, you know, because of all the problems. And, uh, so,  
42 uh, the maintenance guys were jackin' it up and trying to move this car  
43 over. And, uh, [tapping] one of'm says, uh, "Hold that wheel straight so  
44 it'll go down in the track." And I reach in and grab it but I grabbed it too  
45 low and it just smashed this finger and it's still dead, you know. It just,  
46 uh, uh, it, it still hurts. [laughter] Uh, but that was just a minor injury.



1  
2 I've seen guys, uh, caught between cars. And then I didn't see the guy,  
3 the, Steve, [clicking] uh, somebody that got killed over in, uh, the shipping  
4 building over there. They were trying to pull a, a car, a, a bunch of body  
5 trucks up or something and the cable broke and the thing hit him and  
6 killed him. That was quite a few years ago. Um, and then I've had, uh,  
7 I've seen guys get, uh – like we had a stack a quarter panels in the body  
8 shop. A stack was on a, a rack with wheels on it, probably had 20 quarter  
9 panels on it and, uh, the, uh, uh, strap around it broke and one of the  
10 quarter panels fell out and hit this guy on the back of the leg. And I mean  
11 it was a gash and the blood just pourin', so I ripped my shirt off and tied it  
12 around his leg until they got there, you know.

13  
14 And, uh, but yeah, I've seen a few people hurt. Lotta hog rings when I  
15 was in the cushion room. And, uh, uh, I've seen people hit themselves in  
16 the chin, the hog ring went in the chin but it hit that bone and man that,  
17 that's gotta hurt. [tapping] Uh, I've seen them in the nose, the lips. Uh,  
18 [thumping] and I'll tell you what, you don't stop pullin' the trigger when it  
19 hits you either. You just, you do, you just automatically hit the trigger and  
20 it closes it up. Now you can't get rid of it. You gotta cut it.

21  
22 Cheryl McQuaid: Another question I have Rocky is you worked in the cushion room, quality  
23 control and you were a superintendent. [58:46] What other departments  
24 did you work in the plant?

25  
26 Rocky Wright: Well, I worked, uh, I started out in cushion room, went to quality control.  
27 I was in quality control, uh, for about a year and a half and [Phil Darbor  
28 58:59] was the Trim superintendent at that time. Uh, he came to me and  
29 he says, "How would you like to jump ship and go to, back to Trim?" I  
30 said, "I don't know. What you got to offer?" He says, uh "I'd like to  
31 promote you to a seventh level and put you in Trim." "I said "Yeah. I can  
32 handle that." Get more money and more responsibility and so I  
33 transferred into Trim.

34  
35 Then, uh, I was, uh – Quality Control came back and wanted me to, uh,  
36 come back to Quality Control. And so I went back to Quality Control,  
37 became a general supervisor over, uh, Quality Control and I stayed with  
38 that for a while.

39  
40 And then I went, uh, back to Trim again as an eighth level, night shift and,  
41 uh, then I started replacin' the night shift superintendent in the entire plant,  
42 so I had Paint, Body, Trim, Cushion, uh, the whole works. Uh, I did that  
43 quite often, all the vacations and stuff I would replace them.

44  
45 And, uh, then in '85 I went to Building 90, uh, Production Superintendent.  
46 I traded jobs with Randy Thayer and then, uh, I stayed in there for five

1 years and I went to the, uh, center plant which was engine dress, uh, wheel  
2 room and, uh, paint repair, Building 150 and then I was up there for three  
3 years.  
4  
5 And then, uh, uh, [Bill Biggle 60:31] came to me and he says, "I'd like to  
6 give you an eighth level job in, uh, Material Handling." I said, "I've never  
7 worked in Material Handling before." He said, "Well, I'd like to have you  
8 come to work for me." So I said, "Okay." So I go to Material Handling.  
9 And, uh, [tsk] then, uh, [Randy Walter 60:54], who was the area manager  
10 at the time over there, he come to me and he says, uh, "Rocky," he says, "I  
11 got troubles down in wheel room, I got troubles in engine dress and fascia  
12 paint." He said, "If you come back to center plant and get it runnin'" he  
13 says, uh, "I know you want to retire so I'll see that you get a [mutual  
14 61:15]." I said "Okay, Randy. I'll be back." And the year after that I was  
15 gone. So I've been all over the place.  
16  
17 Doug Rademacher: [61:27] And you solved that problem before you went?  
18  
19 Rocky Wright: Yes, I did. [laughter]  
20  
21 Doug Rademacher: Rocky, uh, I know you're on a time limit today. I just wanted a quick  
22 story. You were, uh, uh, obviously Oldsmobile enthusiast. You had a, a  
23 pretty white car. [61:40] You want to tell a little story about that real  
24 quick here? You remember that?  
25  
26 Rocky Wright: Yeah. You mean that little '69 convertible?  
27  
28 Doug Rademacher: Yeah.  
29  
30 Rocky Wright: Yeah. That was, uh, uh, I put a lotta money in it but it was a beauty and,  
31 uh, [laughter] we were – you talkin' about when I was over at the Huddle  
32 that night? [laughter]  
33  
34 Doug Rademacher: Well, I [inaudible 61:59].  
35  
36 Rocky Wright: Oh, oh, oh. There's two stories. [laughter]  
37  
38 Doug Rademacher: Well, that's, that's fine. I know that story. Just we were – you had a need  
39 and, uh, I happened to be an Olds enthusiast also so I, uh, it's, it's your  
40 story. You got something you needed.  
41  
42 Rocky Wright: Well, uh, yeah And you know what? I can't even remember for sure how  
43 it all went. You probably could enlighten me but, uh, but I did have a very  
44 nice '69 convertible and, uh, the engine wasn't very good in it so I, I  
45 needed a 455 engine and we got that and, uh, and I didn't get it from here.

1 [laughter] We didn't have any. [laughter] But, uh, boy, it's hard to  
2 remember all this stuff that went on.  
3  
4 Doug Rademacher: Well, I got you some exhaust, some exhaust chrome bells for your  
5 bumper, but...  
6  
7 Rocky Wright: Oh, oh, yes.  
8  
9 Doug Rademacher: ...uh...  
10  
11 Rocky Wright: That was, uh, when I put that 455 Tornado engine in it and you got those  
12 bells for me. Yes. And, uh, I thought I had [tapping] died and gone to  
13 heaven. [laughter] Uh, but one thing I did do was I was over to the  
14 Huddle Lounge one night after we got outta work and these guys were  
15 talkin' about "oh that white convertible, it's purty but it ain't got no guts"  
16 and all this, you know. And, uh, so when the bar closed and everybody  
17 was gone but me and two other guys, we had a little bet over there and, uh,  
18 I backed up right to the edge of the parking lot and burnt rubber all the  
19 way to the drive [laughter] and the guys they, [coughing] they shut up  
20 then. And, uh, next time I'm in there, uh, Dick, uh, that owned the place,  
21 he was, he was beside himself. He said, "You got to get rid of these, uh,  
22 black marks on my parking lot." [laughter]  
23  
24 Female: Hi. How are you doing? You look good.  
25  
26 Female: [Inaudible 63:57].  
27  
28 Male: I feel good. [recorder clicking]  
29  
30 Doug Rademacher: Rocky, uh, you've retired. You've been, been out for a while. Lansing  
31 Fisher Body is now being disassembled as we speak. [64:12] What's your  
32 feelings about that? What's your comments about the future for Lansing?  
33 Uh, you mentioned Randy Thayer. Would you just close up this last  
34 couple minutes here and talk about that?  
35  
36 Rocky Wright: Well, I have a couple a spies in Lansing that keep emailing me with  
37 pictures of all the, the des-, destruction that's going on. And, uh, Randy  
38 Thayer also is a very good friend of mine and he keeps sending me  
39 pictures of the plant as they progress in the construction and gettin' it  
40 ready go. And, uh, I have a son-in-law, a ex-son-in-law that works over  
41 there and so he always calls me too and tells me what's going on. So I  
42 still have quite an interest in what's going on but I know from my  
43 experience that Lansing will succeed. Uh, if there are any cars built  
44 anywhere, they will be built in Lansing because of the workforce we have  
45 here and the relationship between the unions and management, uh, that's  
46 improved considerably, uh, both 602 and 652. And, uh, uh, I know that if

cars are built in Michigan, they will be built, building them here in Lansing. And, uh, I don't think you can beat the workforce in Lansing. I mean we struggled for a while and forgot what we were there for I guess but, uh, we learned and when we did finally figure out what we were doing wrong, we became one of the best there was and we came, became a great team I thought.

And, uh, I, uh, I always felt really good about how I was received when I walked up and down the line, you know. I was always out there on the line. I didn't spend my days in the office. And, uh, if I had to, uh, get something done, uh, if I had to pull 5% of the people or whatever, I did my best to do it but I went and talked to everybody before we did it and, uh, we would come to some kind of a conclusion that was good for both of us. And I always, I always enjoyed my job and I'll always be Fisher Body and I'll always be GM.

And, uh, I don't drive anything but GM and, uh, neither do my kids or, uh, my son-in-laws or, uh, they don't drive anything but GM. And it makes me sick to go to Florida and see all the foreign cars, Toyotas, Hondas, Nissans, Infinitis, uh, just sickening because there are not many American cars in Florida. And we need to – the people are, the American people are fickle people I'll tell you. It's, uh – they don't know what they're doing to this country by the automobile route and, uh, we got some politicians too. Uh, you know, I get pretty upset with Granholm sometimes with the way she talks about the automotive industry. "Well, we don't need them. We can go tech, high tech." Well, sure, yeah, you can but how long you think it's gonna last, you know.

I mean I have a son-in-law I would, or a grandson that I would have loved to have him hired in General Motors but it probably won't ever happen anymore. And, uh, he's, uh, you know, he struggles in school 'cause he doesn't like school but he's not dumb. He's smart but I don't know, he's gonna be a mechanic I guess, uh, 'cause he [inaudible 67:33] be able to get into GM or anything like that and I always wanted to have that. But – and we used to have it. It was nothing to get your kids in here or whatever. But believe me, some of the supervisors' kids were a problem too, let me tell you [laughter] and a lotta them worked for me. But I enjoyed my career. It was a long career. And, uh, I, uh, I truly miss the people, I really do. And, uh, [tsk] that's about all I can tell you about it.

Doug Rademacher: Well...

Rocky Wright: There's a lot more stories but we ain't got enough time in the day.

Doug Rademacher: I know that's true. And, uh, you know, I've only known you as management. I knew the stories of your past [coughing] coming up from

1 the line and we really appreciate you taking the time, uh, in your  
2 retirement years to come over and share your story with us. Thank you  
3 very much.  
4  
5 Cheryl McQuaid: Thank you Rocky.  
6  
7 Rocky Wright: You're welcome.  
8  
9 Jerri Smith: Thank you.  
10  
11 John Fedewa: Thank you very much.  
12  
13 Jerri Smith: Thank you. [recorder clicking]  
14  
15  
16/mlc