

1 **Doreen Howard discusses her career as a production worker and**
2 **UAW Suggestions Plan assistant at the Fisher Body plant in Lansing, MI**

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4

5Cheryl McQuaid: This is Cheryl McQuaid. We're at the 602 Greenhouse, preparing to
6 interview Doreen Howard. Today is December 22, 2005. It's
7 approximately 8 a.m. And first we're going to let everybody state their
8 name.
9

10John Fedewa: John Fedewa.

11
12Marilyn Coulter: Marilyn Coulter.

13
14Cheryl McQuaid: And Doreen Howard. [0:25] Could you please state your name and spell
15 your last name?
16

17Doreen Howard: Doreen Howard, H-o-w-a-r-d, and my first name is spelled D-o-r-e-e-n.

18
19Cheryl McQuaid: [0:35] And what is your address, Doreen?
20

21Doreen Howard: 1461 Cheboygan Road, Okemos, Michigan.
22

23Cheryl McQuaid: [0:43] And are you married? Do you have children?
24

25Doreen Howard: Yes, I'm married and I have two daughters, Courtney and Alyssa.
26

27Cheryl McQuaid: [0:50] Where were you born?
28

29Doreen Howard: I was born in Bay City, Michigan.
30

31Cheryl McQuaid: [0:55] And could you give us a little bit about your educational level?
32

33Doreen Howard: Okay. Um, originally being from Bay City, um, I came down to the
34 Lansing area in 1980 to go to school at Michigan State University. Um,
35 and I have a degree, a Bachelor of Science from Michigan State
36 University, um, in, um, retailing, being a buyer.
37

38Cheryl McQuaid: [1:27] What did your parents do?
39

40Doreen Howard: My dad worked for General Motors. Uh, he worked up in the Nodular
41 Iron Plant prior to them closing that facility and, uh, demoing that facility.
42 He retired from there. He was a millwright.
43

44Cheryl McQuaid: [1:46] What – why did you hire in to Fisher Body?
45

1Doreen Howard:

2 Um, after I graduated out of college, um, my husband, who had already
3 been working for General Motors at that time, um, I, I took some time off
4 from school not sure what I wanted to do. I looked to try to find a job in
5 retailing at that time and you just didn't have the opportunities in this area
6 and the money that they wanted to pay you was very minimum, so he said
7 hey, they're hiring over at the shop, why don't you go put in an
8 application. I'm like, oh, I really don't want to work there. It's not what I
9 really intended to do. I said I just spent all this time and all this money to
10 get an education. I really don't want to go work in a factory. And he's
11 like, well, you know, it, it's something that if you can get in there it's a
12 good job and we'd both be working at the same place, you know. So I
13 was like, okay, well, I guess. So I went over to the, the unemployment
14 office on Cedar Street, got in line with hundreds of people, um, I can
15 remember being blocks long, waiting for hours to get into the, just to put
16 the application in. Um, probably a week or two later I end up getting a
17 call and they said come on in for an interview, so I went over, did a, did a
18 small interview.

19 Um, at the time, um, I was working in retail and we had gone out and, and
20 had a little celebration with the girls that I had worked with. It was deer
21 hunting time and my husband was, was gone with the boys deer hunting so
22 we had girls night out. Well, it got, we got a little carried away at the bar
23 that night and ended up, uh, having a confrontation with somebody at the
24 bar and some guy hit me in the eye so I had to go to the hospital that night
25 and get my eye stitched up, so I go into the interview with a big scar on
26 my eye and three hours' worth of sleep. Uh, John [inaudible 4:12] was the
27 interviewer. The poor man just looked at me like oh you are an abused
28 woman [chuckle] kind of thing and, boy, we really have to get you out of
29 that situation [laughter] so I think that's why he hired me. Needless to
30 say, that wasn't the case, but. So that was quite funny but, um, from – I
31 got hired on in 1984. November 21, 1984, was my original hire date. Um,
32 I worked there for a few years and was laid off and when I returned I had
33 an adjusted seniority date of 11/10/88 so that's my current seniority date.
34

35 Um, when I first hired in to the, the plant, um, being a college graduate,
36 you know, I thought I knew everything and I was very w-, worldly and all
37 that kind of stuff. And my husband kept telling me that you're extremely
38 naïve and you really don't know a whole lot about life, you know. I said I
39 do too. I've been to college. [chuckle] He's like no, that's quite a
40 sheltered world in itself. And I get in there and was exposed to a lot of
41 lifestyles and different types of people that I had never had any contact
42 with before. Um, the diversity within the facility was, um, quite extreme.
43 There was, uh, not only a lot of males that I were not used to working
44 with, in the retailing industry it was mostly women and so I had not really
45 worked with men, a few stock guys but not, not a whole lot of men in, in
46 that arena. Uh, owners of the companies that I worked with were, were

1 male, but. So that was, that was very hard for me to get used to working
2 with males.
3

4 Um, there was a lot of the different ethnic groups that had come in that
5 were hired in at the same time. There was people from I believe, uh,
6 Cambodia and Vietnam and, and, and different places like that, that were
7 coming in at that time, um, that were hired, and so, and I had not had any
8 experience around different people of that ethnic group. Um, there was,
9 um, just about every type of diversity within the plant. I mean all the
10 different nationalities that when I came in were pretty much prevalent was
11 in the facility. Um, my – the biggest thing that I saw in the beginning
12 when I was there, um, was, uh, there wasn't, the women that were there
13 still were not treated equal. Uh, the, the, the men no matter what their
14 nationality or origin was, were still treated better than a lot of the women.
15 Um, it just didn't matter. Th-, they felt you had no business being there.
16

17 The very first supervisor that I ever had, I worked in the trim department,
18 he was extremely old school. Uh, I can't remember the gentleman's name
19 but he came out of the military and was extremely prejudiced of women in
20 the workforce at General Motors. He felt that you were taking a man's job
21 and you had no business being there so he would make sure that he'd put
22 you on the jobs that he knew that you would have to really work extra
23 hard to, to succeed at and most of the women could not do it and the guys
24 knew they couldn't do it but yet he would put them on these jobs anyhow.
25 So it, it, it was interesting to find out how the people on the line would,
26 would help you out. They wouldn't, they wouldn't let you fail 'cause the
27 guys knew that that supervisor would do that to you just because he could,
28 so they, they would try to help you out as much as they could.
29

30 Um, I was lucky enough that at the same time when I hired in I had two
31 brother-in-laws that hired in about a month after, after myself. They
32 happened to both be in the same department as, as myself. One of them
33 actually worked right next to me. The other one worked probably about
34 four or five jobs down the line so that, that helped a little bit because my
35 husband did not work in my department. He worked in the paint
36 department at the time and, um, so they kind of kept on eye on me and
37 made sure that the guys stayed away from me and, you know, they, th-,
38 they made sure that the guys knew that, hey, you don't mess around with
39 her or we'll see to, to it that you won't be a happy camper later on so, so
40 that, that helped a little bit.
41

42 Um, what else? Um, I just remember going in there and never being in
43 such a huge building as that before. I was just amazed at, at how big it
44 was. And my husband and I, we drove to work together. It was the
45 nightshift that I worked and his paint department was quite a long distance
46 walking, at least a 5 to 10-minute walk of really brisk walking from where

1 his department was to where I had to go. And he would sh-, he showed
2 me once how to get from the paint department in the, in the parking lot
3 through all the maze of doors and stairwells and everything else just to get
4 to the paint department was a trick in itself, let alone getting from the paint
5 department to the trim area was, was another trick. And it took me, oh
6 gosh, probably a month just to, to figure out how to get in and out of the
7 building by myself because each time he would bring me, he wouldn't
8 bring me the same way everyday so it's like I didn't know where I was.
9 I'd get in there and one day he'd bring me through the paint department
10 and the next day he'd bring me through the body shop instead of through
11 the paint department, so I couldn't figure out how to get in and out of the
12 building.

13
14 So luckily, it's like, okay, after a while it's like I can't do this anymore. I
15 figured out that if I parked in a different parking lot on the other side of
16 the building that all I had to do was walk in one door and my job was the
17 very first row of, of assembly that came out of the building. So it's like all
18 this time I've been walking for 15 minutes it seemed like from one
19 parking lot all the way across through all these buildings when I could
20 have just walked about five minutes in another door and I would have
21 been at my job, it's like, thank you, [chuckle] you know. He's like, well,
22 you know, he's like, well, that's just how it is. You have to learn your
23 way around here. And I was like, yeah, you're right, so that was the
24 extent of, of that.

25
26 Cheryl McQuaid: [12:07] Doreen, how old were you when you hired in?

27
28 Doreen Howard: Let's see here, I was 23 I believe.

29
30 Cheryl McQuaid: And you hired in on second shift. [12:18] Do you remember what job you
31 did?

32
33 Doreen Howard: I worked in the trim department. I had quite a few different jobs when I
34 first hired in. Um, I'm – being only 5' 2" they weren't really sure where
35 to put me because my height limited a lot of the jobs that I could do.
36 There was a lot of them where you had to be able to reach to the middle of
37 the car to wipe things or put things on and I, I just physically couldn't
38 reach that far. Um, some of the other jobs that, that they had tried to put
39 me on, uh, like I said, I couldn't reach so they end up, most of the jobs that
40 I end up doing were I did door panels. They were originally building up
41 the door, the inside of the door panels. You take hot glue and put them on
42 these pads and stick them on the inside of the door for sound, sound
43 barriers. I did that for a while but then after, it was, it was kind of a
44 premium job. It wasn't really a very difficult job so a lot of people liked
45 to get in to that so I ended up getting bumped off of that.

46

1 Um, I did a lot of different jobs, mostly on the outside of the vehicle, what
2 they called hard trim. Um, I put door moldings on, um, the body side
3 moldings of the car, um, trim around the, the windshields of the cars. A, a
4 lot of things that required the use of air, air tools, guns that you would drill
5 screws into these panels [throat clearing] to hold them on to the vehicle,
6 that kind of stuff. I did not do a whole lot on the inside of the car when I
7 was in Trim.
8
9 Cheryl McQuaid: [14:16] Were these jobs very physical?
10
11 Doreen Howard: Um, to me, the job itself just to do one job was not hard. I never found
12 the, the, the jobs to be physically hard in any way if you were only doing
13 one. Um, it was the repetition of doing it over and over again that was,
14 was hard. Um, anybody can just go over there and show you, hey, you do
15 this. Well, but when you had a timeframe, okay, well, yeah, you got to do
16 this but you only have, you know, 50 seconds to get it on there and do all
17 this. Well, that, that adds another whole dimension to something which I
18 never had to deal with before. I always had, you know, the jobs I had ever
19 done prior to that I was always able to work at my own pace. Um, so
20 that, that was the biggest trick to me was just learning how, how to pace
21 yourself with, with the line speed, um.
22
23 Cheryl McQuaid: You said that the job was, it was the repetition. [15:25] How many times
24 do you think you'd have to do a job a night?
25
26 Doreen Howard: Oh gosh, at that time, they were running probably close to I'm thinking
27 500 jobs a night, somewhere in that, that range.
28
29 Cheryl McQuaid: Marilyn Coulter.
30
31 Marilyn Coulter: [15:42] Doreen, what type of transition was that for you having been
32 someone who had just come out of college being trained to do something
33 else and then now you're doing the same job eight, nine hours a day, six
34 days a week? How did that do and how did you get through that?
35
36 Doreen Howard: Um, the transition was horrible for me. Um, I liked, I was a, a very hands-
37 on person so that part was not bad because as long as I would keep
38 moving and keeping myself busy, it helped some of the monotony. In the
39 beginning, you, you were so fo-, focused on just trying to do the job and
40 learning it that you didn't have extra time. You were just, oh my God, did
41 I do it, did I get everything on there, just the anxiety of learning a job, but
42 after a couple weeks of doing it, it was like second nature to you. You had
43 no other thing to do all day long. You already knew how to do it. You
44 know how to get it on there. You figured out the easiest way for you and,
45 and how you could, uh, have a few seconds extra time to, to rest, um, so
46 your mind would start to wander and that was just horrible because you,

1 you would just start thinking that you were someplace else, you weren't
2 here in that particular environment, on, on vacation someplace else,
3 [chuckle] you know. Basically, I would just check out for, for hours at a
4 time and just let my body do the work but mentally I wasn't there at all.
5

6Marilyn Coulter: [17:28] Being that you had come from retail, being that you were used to,
7 um, having employees and having people knowing that something needed
8 to be done and doing it and then how was that transition for, for you when
9 you go to the line and maybe there were some changes you felt that
10 needed to happen, whether it was employees or the job? How did that
11 work for you, um, basically giving up power like that?
12

13Doreen Howard: Um, it, it's very difficult when, when you're the one that, um, set the pace,
14 when you're the one that said this is what we're going to do today, this is
15 what we need to do, um, this, to, to give all that up to go into an
16 environment where you had no control whatsoever, the control was in the
17 line speed, that was the control. And you had only this certain length of
18 time to, to do the job and, and get that work done and, um, you didn't have
19 any control over anything. You were told be here at this time and you
20 may get out at four hours, five hours, six hours, ten hours. You didn't
21 know when you were going to be leaving to go home. Um, you really had
22 no control over any part of your work life at all. Your breaks were
23 controlled as far as when you were going to take'm, who was going to
24 give you the break, how long your break was going to be. Um, when, if
25 you had to use the restroom, you had to ask someone else, hey, I need to
26 go, it's not like, hey, my body is telling me I need to go use the restroom
27 now, I think I'll go. Well, you didn't have that luxury. You had to wait
28 until someone came and did your job so that you could leave the, the
29 production line in order to be able to go and, and do what you needed to
30 do.
31

32Marilyn Coulter: [19:22] Um, working on the assembly line and having to go to the
33 restrooms and there would be more men there than women, how were the
34 facilities for women? Were they close? Was there abundance of them?
35

36Doreen Howard: Well, being an older facility like ours was, it was never intended for
37 women to originally come in to those buildings so it wasn't set up for, for
38 women or their needs. Um, they, they refurbished some of the older
39 facilities and made them so that the, the women could now use these and
40 they added on some bathrooms but like most things, it was never enough.
41 Um, women just generally take more time and there's just not as many
42 restrooms as what the men had and so you would spend more, a lot more
43 of your break times just getting in the bathroom and doing what you
44 needed to do on a daily basis.
45

1Marilyn Coulter: [20:29] So, um, with being a new hire, being in off the street and
2 somebody who thought they knew it all, were there any special kind of
3 pranks that were played on you or any kind of new hire initiations or
4 maybe pranks that you witnessed?
5

6Doreen Howard: Um, yeah. Our group was the – like I said, I was very naïve. I didn't
7 realize it. My husband kept telling me that I was but I, I didn't seem to
8 think so. And not knowing any better, we came in around the holiday
9 time, Thanksgiving timeframe, it was just right before Thanksgiving so
10 the, the usual prank, hey, go over to the union hall and pick up your, your
11 Thanksgiving Day turkey. It'll be there waiting for you. All you have to
12 do is go in and show'm your, your ID badge and, and they'll give you a
13 turkey. Okay, you know, I was all excited, you know, I get out to the car,
14 I was like hey, you know, we get a turkey and my husband starts laughing.
15 He's like no, you are the turkey. [laughter] So needless to say, I, I didn't
16 make that trip over to the union hall but I really, if I wouldn't, if my
17 husband wouldn't have told me, I would have been on my way over there
18 to get my turkey 'cause in retail we really did give turkeys to our
19 employees [chuckle] so I thought it was, you know, the same. I didn't
20 know it was a joke, so, but everybody got a good laugh the next day at my
21 expense.
22

23Cheryl McQuaid: This is Cheryl McQuaid. You mentioned that your husband worked there.
24 [21:59] How hard was it to maintain a relationship in the plant?
25

26Doreen Howard: Um, it's, it's a very difficult relationship between a husband and wife to
27 work in an assembly plant, especially both working the same shift. Um, it
28 was very hard. Um, in the beginning, we worked in two separate
29 departments, which gave us some autonomy. Um, but over time it was
30 nice because years later, um, I ended up working in the paint department
31 and my husband and I actually worked on the same line together. But in
32 the beginning, it was a lot more difficult being a young female in, uh,
33 basically a man's world, what I felt was a man's world in there. Um, I felt
34 a, a lot of harassment by fellow workers and things that I felt were
35 inappropriate comments, um, even though they knew I was married and
36 they knew that my husband worked there, they, they didn't care. They
37 still said inappropriate things to you just because they could.
38

39 Um, the – a lot of times they would, uh, start rumors and make up
40 something just to see if it, how fast it would get from one department to
41 the next. People would make up things whether it was true or not, just
42 because it gave them something to do. Your mind would begin to wander
43 so it's easy just to, hey, let's do whatever, you know. They'd make up
44 some type of a, a rumor and see how fast it would go through the whole
45 department. It wouldn't matter, oh, you know, what, what it was but that
46 was just entertainment for the day and that ended a lot of relationships that

1 were in the facility. I think that, that was easy because the, the people got
2 to know both, both of you so it was easy targets was what I would call it.
3 But, um, my husband and I, we knew better. We knew what our
4 relationship was, so it, it didn't, it didn't really affect us. It affected other
5 people more because we would not let it bother us, the things that, that
6 people would say. But, um, I know a lot of other people that were married
7 couples in there where they did let that kind of stuff bother them and, you
8 know, ended up getting divorced and things like that.
9

10 It's a, it's a hard lifestyle on, on families as we got older and we had
11 children. The, the auto industry is not conducive to families in any way.
12 Uh, we both worked in the evenings and there was nothing that we could
13 do as far as, uh, rearranging our schedules. My husband, he was hired in
14 in '81 so he had higher seniority than what I had had so he had a little bit
15 more flexibility with his job than what I had with mine. Um, so after the
16 kids got a little bit older – in the beginning, grandma would take care of
17 the kids when we were younger but as we, they got older, um, it was a lot
18 more difficult.
19

20 My husband ended up going to the first shift and I worked second shift so
21 we would swap kids. He would come to work and we'd swap kids in the
22 parking lot and I, I would drive there and, and meet up with him. And I'd
23 come, if we wanted time together, it's like, okay, I'll come over at your
24 lunchtime and bring the kids so we can see each other and, and do that
25 kind of stuff and then he'd come back later in the evening and bring the
26 kids back on my lunchtime and, and I could tell them goodnight or
27 whatever and then he'd bring them back home and put them to bed.
28

29 But, um, it, it was very hard but luckily over, over years, um, I was able to
30 get in the last five years or so, I was able to get into the suggestion
31 department and we had a little bit more flexibility. I was able to move to a
32 day shift job and, and my husband worked days so it, it, it was a lot easier
33 on the family when we both worked the same shift and the same hours and
34 we could ride to work together, we had same vacation times. Um, so it
35 made it a lot of easier when, when I was in that position compared to
36 working on the line because a lot of times because of my seniority in the
37 department that I worked in, I wasn't able to get vacation time at the same
38 time my husband did and he had more vacation time than I did so there
39 would be times where he'd get, get days, a lot more days off and he's like
40 let's go vacation here. Well, yeah, that's all fine but in my department I
41 didn't have the seniority to be able to get those days. Other people with
42 higher seniority were able to, to get those days and I, I couldn't do that, so,
43 it, it limited us somewhat.
44

45 But overall, um, I really, I liked it because during the changeover times,
46 which is the change of the model vehicle from one year to the next, they

1 would have, uh, the assemblers did not work and so you had anywhere
2 from a week to two weeks or more, depending on the year, off in which
3 you were able to take, take basically a vacation time and so that was nice.
4 The Christmas holidays, uh, the Thanksgiving holidays, any of the
5 holidays that in retail that, you know, you normally you would not have
6 off, we had off every year and we were able to spend it together as a
7 family and that's been really nice and enjoyable and some of the, the
8 positive aspects of being a married couple working in the same place.
9

10Cheryl McQuaid: [28:36] Have you ever, have you ever had the chance to ask the kids if
11 they have memories of meeting up in the parking lot and...?
12

13Doreen Howard: Yes, um, they do. They remember coming over to the facility and, and
14 meeting us and their biggest, their biggest thing was they hated it. They
15 did not like it because Mom was at work, you know. They didn't, they
16 didn't like me working. Most little kids that's, that's pretty much I think a
17 given that they, they would want one of the parents to at least be home
18 with them, insecurities as, as little children.
19

20 But, um, they, as they got a little bit older, though, and we would start to
21 bring them, they had developed a program, bring your child to work
22 program, which was quite an interesting program that was supported
23 through General Motors and the UAW and they would have tours
24 throughout the facility where the kids, you could bring your children in
25 and show them where you worked and show them some of the things that
26 you did and, and they thought that was very interesting. They thought that
27 it was a pretty neat place. But I still can remember as, as young children
28 their, their biggest thing that they thought was the coolest part of our
29 whole job was the ERT truck they had for emergencies. They let the little
30 kids put the helmets on and sit on the trucks and take their pictures and
31 they just thought that was the coolest part of the whole, the whole process.
32 It wasn't building the cars, it was sitting on the little truck for the
33 emergency usage that, that they thought was the coolest part of the
34 building.
35

36 But, um, for the most part they didn't like, they didn't like us working
37 there, um, because over time and years of working, the repetitiveness of
38 the jobs tend to play a very large toll on your body so you would have a
39 lot of injuries that would occur, repetitive injuries, and so I would come
40 home and complain that my hands hurt and my shoulders hurt and things
41 like that and, you know, they didn't, they didn't like that. They didn't like
42 that because I couldn't go do things with them because, you know, my
43 hands and my shoulder would hurt.
44

45Cheryl McQuaid: Marilyn, did you have a question?
46

1Marilyn Coulter: Um, I was going to ask, did you ever – we’ve talked about your home
2 family. [31:24] Did you ever view the people that you worked with as
3 your work family?
4

5Doreen Howard: Um, somewhat. Um, I never really, um, developed a lot of personal
6 friendships with a lot of the people that I had worked with. Um, at the
7 time when I came in, a lot of the people were single and, and, you know,
8 we were young.
9

10Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.
11

12Doreen Howard: And I wasn’t in to the lifestyle that they chose to be so that separated me
13 somewhat being married already. I, I didn’t, um, choose the lifestyle that
14 the singles did. Um, and, but I still enjoyed being with the people that I
15 worked with and, and, and I enjoyed talking with them and the
16 relationships that we had during work hours but I never extended that
17 outside of the workplace.
18

19Marilyn Coulter: [32:28] When you were at work, um, and I know you said sometimes you
20 just checked out, but were there things that went on like on a daily basis,
21 like how they went through like how did you do lunch? I mean, did you
22 guys do anything at holidays? What did you do when the line might have
23 broken down to pass the time? What are some of those things that were
24 like, because most workplaces are like cities within cities and what, what
25 happened in, in that community of Fisher Body?
26

27Doreen Howard: There was all types of activities, like, like you had brought up. The plant,
28 there was so many people that worked there and, and I had never worked
29 in a facility that, that had that many people. I had worked in small retail
30 establishments that had at most 20 people and I come into a facility and
31 you’ve got hundreds of people just in, in one department and everybody
32 had, there were so many different personalities and, and interests of people
33 that, um, just about everything and anything that you wanted to, to seek
34 out was in there, um.
35

36Marilyn Coulter: [33:48] Examples?
37

38Doreen Howard: They had, um, dinners. A lot of people would, would bring in dinners and
39 cook and, and, and I participated in that a lot because I liked to cook so I
40 would bring in food and we, we’d, we’d celebrate different occasions,
41 birthdays or holidays or whatever, by eating dinner together. Um,
42 sometimes reading, a lot of people would read books. I lot of people
43 would play cards. Um, once in a while I’d do that. I wasn’t really much
44 for cards. We would – I enjoyed they had walking, our facility offered
45 healthcare programs to help the employees stay healthy and learn healthy
46 lifestyles, which interested me quite a bit, so I would be involved in

1 walking during lunchtimes instead of sitting. I mean I would sit and rest a,
2 a little but I would use that as my time for me and I would do my walking
3 and do something for myself because once I was out of the facility
4 [coughing] it was family time and the kids were young so you were
5 involved more with running of the kids and taking care of the family and,
6 and things like that, so I liked to do my exercising and things like that
7 during the lunchbreaks, um, I was involved with that.

8
9 Um, there was a lot of people that would have bus-, what I call businesses
10 within the business. They set up little areas where they would serve coffee
11 and snacks and things like that, which I enjoyed frequenting. The
12 cafeteria was to me too far to go to. I didn't want to take the time to walk
13 to the cafeteria and, and get food or drinks or anything like that for the
14 most part. I usually brought my lunches in so that on my breaks I could,
15 could sit and rest so that during the lunchtime when I had more time then,
16 then that's when I did my walking. Um, but I didn't really want to spend
17 my breaks running all the way up to the cafeteria to get a cup of coffee or
18 something that tasted terrible, for the most part instant coffee, when
19 somebody just a few feet away would have fresh brewed coffee for half
20 the cost so, so that made it interesting.

21
22 I had never, ever saw anything like that in the retailing business. I mean
23 you just didn't think of having a business within one of those businesses.
24 It just never happened. Um, there was all types of people doing crafting,
25 any kind of crafts that you could possibly imagine that they did on their
26 breaks or if the line broke down and they had extra time that they would
27 do knitting or crocheting or some m-, men liked to do woodworking and,
28 and different things like that. Um, and that was always fun because you
29 could always learn new crafts or holidays especially you could buy gifts
30 from these people and have well-made crafts and enjoy helping out a
31 fellow worker and putting money in their pocket and, and also receiving a
32 very beautiful gift at the same time.

33
34 Marilyn Coulter: [37:28] Um, in working there, did you find that there were many people
35 like yourself there who, um, were working there but they were also people
36 who had, had four-year degrees or more?

37
38 Doreen Howard: Um, as a matter of fact, um, I did. Um, when, when I first hired in, um, I
39 didn't think that that's how it was. I had envisioned the autoworker as
40 being something totally different than, than what, what they were in our
41 facility. The only – my dad being, uh, an autoworker at Nodular Iron
42 Facility, he would come home from work and, and tell me about how dirty
43 it was, how loud and how noisy but it was a foundry and, um, so he never
44 wanted that for his child. When I told him I was going to work in a
45 factory, oh, he was very upset, very upset, but, um, when I got in there it
46 was totally different. It – I'm like, Dad, this is a nice place. I worked in

1 the trim department. It was to me clean. I said it, it wasn't very, it wasn't
2 dirty. It was light and, and fairly bright and it kept clean. There was a lot
3 of stock and things laying around and it wasn't immaculate by any means
4 but for a factory, this isn't dirty, this, this place is pretty clean, um, so that,
5 that was one misperception there.
6

7 Um, my dad talked of a lot of the people that he had worked with were,
8 um, uneducated, which in the older workforce I'm sure that that's how it
9 was but I got in there and I had the stereotypes of, oh my God, these
10 people are just going to be basically idiots, you know, that I'll have to
11 work with and to my amazement there were so many educated people in
12 our facility that I, I couldn't believe how many people had degrees from
13 all walks of life. Um, people who were teachers that left the teaching
14 profession and came into the arena, um, people that were continuing their
15 education or, or working on degrees or, um, the, the tuition assistance
16 program that General Motors provided offered so many people the
17 opportunities to further their education that they wouldn't have ever
18 received outside of that facility, they just didn't have the capabilities or the
19 means or the motivation to, to continue their education outside of the
20 facility and, and those were some luxuries that were offered to the, the
21 employees and there was a lot of people that took advantage of that and...
22

23Marilyn Coulter: [40:40] That was the tuition assistance program?
24

25Doreen Howard: Uh-huh, yeah. And so I was amazed at how intelligent the workforce
26 really was and how the perceptions of the autoworker that you see on the
27 television and that the media tries to portray of the autoworker to be
28 totally a fallacy. I mean that is just about the opposite. Sure, there is a
29 few and, like I said, the older workforce that may have applied to a lot
30 more than now but the workforce that we have in there today that is not
31 true. There is very – there is a majority of the people I, that I have come
32 in contact with that have had some type of education as far as a formal
33 education because of the training that they need in order to do work within
34 an auto industry.
35

36Marilyn Coulter: [41:41] Doreen, for your time there, I know that you said you had different
37 jobs that we're going to get to in a minute but did you always work in the
38 trim department?
39

40Doreen Howard: No. I, I started in the trim department. I worked there for approximately
41 three, a little over three years. Um, I was laid off at the time. Um,
42 during that layoff, um, I went back to the retailing, um, and then, uh, I was
43 laid off approximately 3 ½ years and then returned back to work. At that
44 time, they had, the union had negotiated what they called a jobs bank.
45 That was something new to, to General Motors. Um, it was a new
46 program that helped, um, people who were being laid off so that they, they

1 were not just put out to the streets without any funding. They had monies
2 that they were, they were given to help tie them over until they could be
3 recalled back to work, um, which was, um, something that was never
4 heard of prior to that. It, it was something that I was extremely grateful
5 for, being a young person just getting our first new house, children that
6 came along the way. I mean I didn't have to worry about, oh my gosh, I
7 don't have any money, all my unemployment has run out, what am I going
8 to do now. I never had those worries, so I was extremely grateful for that
9 bargaining benefit.

10

11 Um, but over, over the time when I came back off that layoff, I was in the
12 job bank program. I worked in all three, paint, body, and trim. When,
13 when they reinstated me as a full-fledged employee, what they called,
14 back into the, the workforce, I was put into the paint department. I had
15 worked in the paint department on the night shift.

16

17Marilyn Coulter: [43:51] And how long did you work in the paint department?
18

19Doreen Howard: Oh gosh, approximately maybe about five years [coughing] I worked in
20 that department on the sealer line.
21

22Marilyn Coulter: [44:02] Was there a difference in the paint culture and the trim culture
23 insofar as people were concerned?
24

25Doreen Howard: Um, I noticed a big difference between all three of the departments,
26 between the paint, the trim, and the body shop. Um, the culture in the, the
27 trim department, um, there was more people. There was – they were
28 closer together in space. Um, they worked more in teams so you had – it
29 wasn't as loud, it wasn't as noisy. Um, you were able to converse. There
30 was a lot more movement. Everything was more fast paced. Um, the
31 managers were more uptight, making sure that everybody was doing their
32 job and 'cause to them the, um, the trim was where the public perception
33 of quality was more prevalent. They, they saw the, the trim as, um, a real
34 big quality issue, not that paint or body shop didn't see that.
35

36 In the paint department, there wasn't a whole lot you could do. Most of
37 the quality was inherent in the system itself. The operator had fewer
38 chances to, um, change the quality of the outcome, you know. On the
39 sealer line, you either had sealer in it or it didn't or it had bubbles in the
40 sealer or it didn't. I mean, there was not a whole lot of, of errors. The
41 paint was either smooth and there was no bubbles or no dirt or it had it and
42 you, you didn't have a whole lot, so the, the management in the paint
43 department was a little, not quite as, um, uptight as in the trim department
44 but they were still very anxious supervisors there.
45

1 Um, the body shop out of all the departments to me there was fewer
2 people, it was loud, it was noisy but even though they were spaced out
3 farther apart, they seemed to be more of a cohesive group. The
4 management and the hourly people relied on each other more because of
5 the environment that they worked in so they built, to me, more better
6 working relationships as far as a management's hourly team where I didn't
7 see that in, in the other areas only because there was fewer employees that
8 they had to manage so that gave them more time to get to personally know
9 the employees. And like I said, because of the environment that they were
10 in, you tended to be a little more segregated in your group so your, your
11 work group was a little more cohesive where in the Trim there was
12 hundreds of people in, in a department so they were very close, within a
13 couple minute walk you could go and meet up with other friends. And I
14 don't think the supervisors tended to really care as much in that
15 department, at least I didn't feel that way, um, as in other departments.
16

17Marilyn Coulter: Now over the years, uh, the UAW and GM negotiated contracts and things
18 like that on local and national levels. They allowed, um, the business to
19 change and the way that business changed was they allowed employees to
20 get involved in the business. Now I personally know that you had an
21 opportunity and you said earlier that you did a what is known as a non-
22 traditional job assignment, something away from the line called
23 Suggestions, so therefore, you go back into, you're away from the line
24 now, you're put into another office setting where you're able to use your
25 own skills and make an impact on the business and your fellow
26 employees. [48:28] You want to tell us a little bit about, um, how you felt
27 about doing that job? How was it for a woman doing that job? Any types
28 of things that you could tell us about that experience you had?
29

30Doreen Howard: For, for myself, I, um, was extremely happy to have the opportunity to go
31 into the suggestion department. Like you said, getting off the line, um, it's
32 a wonderful opportunity for anyone to be able to use skills other than just
33 your physical body. Um, to be able to actually use some of the knowledge
34 that I had acquired over the years, um, it, it was nice to actually be thought
35 of as, gee, you have a brain, not just a, a physical body that they needed,
36 um, to be more considered a person. I felt working on the line, they really
37 didn't care whether or not people were smart or had anything to offer the
38 company. You were just there, you had to put this part on or that part or,
39 or, um, anything else. [phone ringing] I have to get that. [recording
40 clicked off]
41

42 Okay, um, having the opportunity to go into the suggestions department to
43 me was, was, um, I was very grateful for that to be able to, to use my, my
44 mind once again, um. I h-, had the luxury of not being tied to the line.
45 Um, I had, there was a small office. There was five hourly employees and
46 one salary supervisor that worked in the group. Um, it was nice because

1 you're not being tied physically to the line and, and I once again had the
2 freedom to, to come and go as I pleased, um, and to do the, my work in the
3 timeframe that I wanted to work at and the pace that I wanted to, to work
4 at, not at the pace of somebody else as a discretion as far as working on
5 the line and having to work at the line pace. Um, it was a totally different
6 type of work, um, all over again.
7
8 Um, the suggestion pro-, program was a joint program between the union
9 and, um, General Motors, uh, management. Um, it, I liked it because it
10 gave the employee a chance to write down their ideas and express some of
11 their ideas and it gave them an avenue to, um, try to make an improvement
12 in the workplace. Um, and to me that's exact – in some instances they
13 truly did make significant improvements in the actual production or the
14 ways in which production, um, ceased to exist. There was a lot of
15 different changes that happened because of the suggestion program. Um,
16 safety and, um, wise, th-, they had, uh, a lot of things that were put into
17 place because of employees' ideas. Um, and it was nice because the
18 people were able to get money for, for their thoughts and, and it was a way
19 for them to, to use some of their, their mind and their education. Was it
20 always something that the management agreed with? No. The program
21 they didn't feel was necessary. They didn't like the program. To
22 management, it was a useless program that they didn't need the
23 employees' ideas. They didn't need the employees telling them how to
24 run their business or, or what can be improved, um.
25
26Marilyn Coulter: [52:42] But in saying that, what was one of the largest because of, because
27 of, because of the way it helped the business, what was one of the largest,
28 um, payouts [inaudible 52:51]?
29
30Doreen Howard: The largest...
31
32Marilyn Coulter: [52:53] To an employee?
33
34Doreen Howard: The largest payout that you could possibly receive would be a \$20,000
35 award as an individual. If you went in on your suggestion with more than
36 one person, you could receive up to \$25,000 split.
37
38Marilyn Coulter: [53:08] Did you ever, did you ever see that happen?
39
40Doreen Howard: Uh, yes, um, there was, uh, several, uh, at least one every couple months
41 we would have a large payout to that extent within one of the departments.
42
43Marilyn Coulter: So that even though some of the managers didn't see it, the employees did.
44
45Doreen Howard: Yes.
46

1 Marilyn Coulter: [53:30] Can you tell me, um, given the fact that you went from the line
2 into an office, how did the coworkers that were left back on the line treat
3 you?
4

5 Doreen Howard: Um, it was interesting. In the beginning, they, they thought it was okay.
6 They, they were, they were happy to your face but you knew they weren't
7 because you were the one that had been afforded the opportunity to move
8 on and they weren't, they were still there, so they resented it a lot. But
9 I'm the type of person that I have my own work ethics and I do things for
10 myself because that's how I want to be treated so, um, I worked very hard
11 when I worked in there and I worked hard for the people and I changed a
12 lot of the ways in which the program existed prior to coming into that
13 department. Um, prior, when I, before I came into that group, a lot, I had
14 suggestions that were on the books that were three to four years old that
15 were just sitting there. The supervisors didn't want to do them. They
16 didn't care about them. Nobody cared whether they were done or not and
17 a lot of them were suggestions that could have easily been [inaudible
18 54:50] and answered, you know, we either want it or we don't, you know.
19 It doesn't matter, you make a decision, at least let the person know. Don't
20 wait two years and then send them a piece of paper in the mail saying, oh,
21 by the way, we didn't like the idea.
22

23 So I worked with management and got them to at least let the person know
24 within a reasonable timeframe whether or not it's something that they
25 wanted to do and, and that helped encourage the people on the line
26 because they were starting to get responses to their suggestions and the
27 turnaround time had went from years to when I had left, the majority of
28 my suggestions were done within a 30-day timeframe. Um, some of them
29 that had larger payouts obviously th-, they took longer because the more
30 money that was involved, the more time that it took to investigate it, the
31 more, um, it took more time to implement some of them because you
32 might have to go outside the company to get something to make it happen.
33 Um, so the, the bigger the reward, the longer the timeframe was what I
34 would equate but, um, whether they received a yes or a no, um, yes,
35 everybody wanted to have their idea submitted and they wanted to receive
36 money for it but that's not why a lot of the people put the suggestions in.
37 A lot of the people wanted to, they put the suggestions in because they
38 wanted the supervisor to recognize that they had some input. They had
39 some ideas that would work if they would only listen to them, um.
40

41 Marilyn Coulter: Uh, last question. They called Lansing Fisher Body the capital of quality.
42 It went through a lot of name changes. Now, it's going to be closed.
43 [57:03] What's your reaction to what made it that and how do you feel
44 about the plant closing?
45

1Doreen Howard: Um, when I came in, I believe they had just gone through one of the first
2 initial name changes. I came in as BOC I believe. Um, no one called it
3 that. Even when I came in, I never called it that. Everybody knew it as
4 Fisher Body and that's what the plant life in there, everyone in there called
5 it Fisher. The public called it Fisher. No one even in the Lansing area
6 knew what you were talking about if you called it any other name. Um,
7 you know, that's just what it was. That was the, the heritage behind the
8 name Fisher. The people took that as personal pride in their work. Um,
9 when they saw the vehicle going by with Body by Fisher on it, they, they
10 thought of that as pride in, in themselves and in the work that they did and
11 that they were, um, putting a quality product out to the public and it made
12 them feel good. It made, it made the work that they did, it gave them
13 meaning to why they were there, why they were doing this monotonous
14 type of work.

15
16 And, um, like I said, I think it was just an overall, um, pride for the
17 community, so for them to lose that identity, it really hurt a lot of the, the
18 feelings of the people who, who worked there because they felt that they
19 were the ones that were being neglected or shunned by the company. How
20 could the company do that to us? They took it very personal even though
21 the company didn't see it that way because they didn't, they didn't look at
22 it as that personal but the people that worked there took it very personally
23 and so to them it will always be Fisher and, and that's, it won't be, the
24 name won't, it doesn't matter what name was on the building, that's just
25 what this community knew that building to be.

26
27Cheryl McQuaid: [59:23] Doreen, is there anything that we've not asked you about that
28 you'd like to talk about?

29
30Doreen Howard: Um, oh golly, um, let's see here. I just, you know, I enjoy the work that,
31 that I do at the plant, you know. It wasn't something that I would have
32 ever chose as a lifestyle. That's what I consider it to be because the auto
33 manufacturing is a lifestyle. It's, it's not – it's a way of life. It's a way
34 that people even in your own community who don't work in the auto
35 industry just have no concept of what it's like to be an autoworker and the,
36 the demands that that type of lifestyle puts on your life and your family's
37 lives. Um, it's, it's such a unique way of life to me that hopefully in the
38 future we continue to see a lot of, uh, the manufacturing industry and
39 General Motors continue to thrive in the way that it has. It's provided a
40 wonderful lifestyle for my family.

41
42 Um, is it ideal? No. Is any job ideal? No. Does everybody like
43 everything about their job? No. But the benefits that you receive, you,
44 you, it's hard to compare any other job to me that I've ever worked in to
45 what we receive as far as the benefits. And I, I mean benefits not just by
46 the benefits that have been negotiated through the union's efforts but the

1 benefits that you receive from the amount of people that you work with
2 and the benefits of having opportunity to, to meet such a varied, um,
3 ethnic groups and cultural backgrounds of people that I know I probably
4 would have not, if I continued in the retailing I would have never
5 experienced that type of, uh, opening of the horizons I guess for, for, at
6 least for myself. I don't think I would have seen that because there's so
7 many people from a lot of different, um, areas of the world that have come
8 and congregated at that facility and so I've learned a lot from the people
9 that I work with. And, you know, that has a lot to do with growing up
10 and, and you realize how wonderful people are that you work with and
11 they're not just putting a part on, that's not what the facility is about. The
12 facility is about the people working there and that's what makes it nice.

13
14Marilyn Coulter: Thank you.

15
16Cheryl McQuaid: Thank you Doreen.

17
18John Fedewa: Thank you.

19
20
21/mlc