

**David Karkau discusses his career as a skilled trades pipefitter
and UAW member at the Fisher Body plant in Lansing, MI**

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4
5Doreen Howard: Um, it is October 17, 2005. We're in the Lansing Car Assembly. I am
6 Doreen Howard and we will be interviewing Dave Karkau today. [0:14]
7 Um, Dave, could you please say your name and spell your last name and
8 your address for the record, please?
9
10David Karkau: Dave Karkau.
11
12Doreen Howard: [0:24] Spell your last name.
13
14David Karkau: K-a-r-k-a-u. My address is 110061 South Colby Lake Road, Laingsburg,
15 Michigan.
16
17Doreen Howard: [0:35] Okay, um, everyone please go around the table and we'll introduce
18 everyone.
19
20Doug Rademacher: Doug Rademacher.
21
22John Fedewa: John Fedewa.
23
24Marilyn Coulter: Marilyn Coulter.
25
26Cheryl McQuaid: Cheryl McQuaid.
27
28Michael Fleming: Mike Fleming.
29
30Doreen Howard: Okay, um, we have some biographical data to collect on you. [0:51] Um,
31 are you married?
32
33David Karkau: Yes, I am.
34
35Doreen Howard: [0:53] And do you have any children?
36
37David Karkau: Yes, I do, two daughters.
38
39Doreen Howard: [0:57] Okay, um, do you have any, um, education outside of high school?
40
41David Karkau: Yes, I spent four years at LCC.
42
43Doreen Howard: Okay. [1:07] And do you have any military service?
44
45David Karkau: No, I don't.
46

1Doreen Howard: Okay. Um, let's start off from the beginning. [1:15] When did you hire in
2
3
4David Karkau: I hired in on August 19, 1976.
5
6Doreen Howard: 1976. [1:29] Can you describe that very first day when you came to work
7
8
9David Karkau: Yeah, it was pretty frightening. I came in for the interview to a Mr.
10 Brooks and that was it, sometime in the morning, 9, 10:00, and I was hired
11 right then and I came back on the second shift which started at, I don't
12 know, about 2:30, 3:00. I had to come back and go through the medical
13 department and I started that, that evening in the body shop.
14
15Doreen Howard: Body shop. Do you recall...?
16
17David Karkau: In the jungle.
18
19Doreen Howard: In the jungle. [2:06] Explain what the jungle is and why they called it
20
21
22David Karkau: The jungle was a pretty scary place when you, you came to the plant. It
23 was part of the body shop. It's where they welded the side frames of the
24 floor pans, where they did most of their welding after the, they tacked the
25 stuff together. It was nothing but a bunch of hoses hanging down with
26 welder guns. There was no automation. It was all done by hand.
27
28Doreen Howard: [2:38] And was that where you had your first job in doing welding?
29
30David Karkau: Yes, spot welding.
31
32Doreen Howard: Spot welding.
33
34David Karkau: I did that for just a short time, then I was taken out of there and put in the
35 new building. At that time it was going to be the new paint shop up above
36 but down below it was part of the body shop and we reworked floor pans
37 so I MIG welded down there. That was in '77 or '78 I think is when that
38 started or when that building was completed. I was in there before that
39 welding.
40
41Doreen Howard: Okay.
42
43Michael Fleming: So Dave, when you left the jungle from doing spot welding or resistance
44 welding and went to MIG welding, the differences in the two weldings is a
45 little, is, is quite, quite, is quite a difference. [3:31] Explain what you did
46 with those processes.

1
2David Karkau: In the spot welding, it was taking a, a, a big gun that was, uh, it was held
3 together with hoses it seemed like but it was a pneumatic gun and electric
4 that would, the jaws would come together on the metal and as it pinched it
5 welded. That was a spot weld. The MIG weld was done with a handheld
6 type torch type, it was a wire feed and that would, uh, I don't know how I
7 want to explain that, how it fused the metal. It just melted it.
8
9Michael Fleming: It fuses the metal.
10
11David Karkau: It fuses.
12
13Michael Fleming: It melts it together.
14
15David Karkau: Right.
16
17Michael Fleming: And, and causes it to bond.
18
19David Karkau: Melt, melts it with adding metal to it.
20
21Michael Fleming: [4:22] But quite a bit of difference in skill level would it not, would you
22 not say?
23
24David Karkau: Oh yeah. Running the spot welders, it wasn't so much a skill running the,
25 the spot weld, it was a technique, but it required skill to do the MIG
26 welding, yes.
27
28Doreen Howard: [4:42] Do you recall your, who your supervisor was at that time?
29
30David Karkau: Oh geez. You're taking me way back in time. Jim Aldrich was my
31 supervisor in the jungle, in the body shop. And a guy by the name of
32 Mike, I can't remember his last name, was the supervisor that I MIG
33 welded with.
34
35Doreen Howard: Now when you, you first came in, um, in a lot of the groups they had
36 initiations to the new hires, to the new hires that came in. [5:20] Was
37 there any type of initiation or prank that they pulled on you being a new
38 hire coming in?
39
40David Karkau: Geez, I don't remember any of those as I came in. I know there was some
41 that were, uh, developed later on when, when I was no longer in wire and
42 the new hires came in. I don't remember when I came in, I don't.
43
44Marilyn Coulter: [5:48] What are some of those ones that got developed?
45

1David Karkau: Oh geez. In the art booths, they used to take coffee cups and fill'm up
2 with acetylene, oxygen and acetylene from the torches and tip'm upside
3 down and put'm on a place where somebody is going to MIG weld and
4 they'll explode. It's just a big pop. Or back then, back in those days, 30
5 years ago, we didn't have plastic lunch buckets, we had metal ones, so
6 working in the art booth is all metal so they would weld your lunch bucket
7 down, weld it shut. Um, there was always something done with sealer,
8 stick it in your lunch bucket or in your gloves, they would put it in your
9 gloves. Um, just little things like that.
10
11Marilyn Coulter: Little things to pass the day by.
12
13David Karkau: Little things, yeah, to pass the day by.
14
15Doreen Howard: So after you left the body shop...
16
17David Karkau: Uh-huh.
18
19Doreen Howard: ...at some point...
20
21David Karkau: Mm-hm.
22
23Doreen Howard: [6:55] ...where, where did you go after you were in the body shop and
24 how, how long did you actually stay in the body shop?
25
26David Karkau: I stayed in the body shop for probably, oh, let's see, if I hired in in '76 it
27 wasn't until the end of the 80s probably when I left the body shop.
28
29Doreen Howard: Okay.
30
31David Karkau: Actually, I left the body shop, um, let's, let's go back on that. I hired in in
32 '76. In '79, I, I was, I started my apprenticeship, okay, so I stayed in the
33 body shop for those three years. Um, I started the apprenticeship in '79.
34 It takes four years, so I finished that in '83.
35
36Doreen Howard: [7:36] And your apprenticeship was for?
37
38David Karkau: The apprenticeship was for, in maintenance.
39
40Doreen Howard: Maintenance.
41
42David Karkau: Pipefitter.
43
44Doreen Howard: Pipefitter, okay.
45

1David Karkau: And then after I finished that I would bounce around 'cause I was low
2 seniority. I bounced around to different areas.
3

4Doreen Howard: [7:50] Now how did you go from production that you were hired in to, to
5 getting an apprenticeship in skilled trades?
6

7David Karkau: Um, what they do is, uh, first of all you, uh, go down to Labor Relations
8 and fill out an application and get your name on the waiting list and then
9 you acquire points through various functions, one working here at Fisher
10 Body was one way, also working changeovers, um, any education that you
11 had that was pertinent to, to the trade you was going in, plus they offered I
12 believe twice a year apprenticeship test and you had, had a score on that,
13 so they added up all your, all your totals and wherever that total put you
14 on the list, is, that's where you was at.
15

16Doreen Howard: Okay.
17

18Doug Rademacher: So Dave, you said you went to Lansing Community College.
19

20David Karkau: Yes.
21

22Doug Rademacher: [8:53] The four years you say you took there, was that a four-year
23 apprentice trade after you hired in to GM?
24

25David Karkau: I took some courses before I, I came in to Fisher Body and I also took
26 some courses through the apprenticeship.
27

28Doug Rademacher: [9:07] What were the courses you took prior to coming in to Fisher Body
29 and why did you hire in to Fisher Body?
30

31David Karkau: Most of my classes that I took prior to were math classes. I liked math. I
32 thought I was going to go somewhere with that. Why I hired in to Fisher
33 Body? Um, I worked at Motor Wheel prior to and, as soon as I got out of
34 high school, and I kind of did not like being inside working in a factory so
35 I quit. I chose not to work there anymore. I worked construction for a
36 short time doing cement work and that was kind of seasonal to where I just
37 worked maybe six months out of the year and it was pretty hard for me to
38 save money or to manage my money to where six months would last me
39 for a whole year. I kind of really needed a job and I heard that this, that
40 Fisher Body was hiring. As much as I did not want to come to a factory, I
41 decided to put my application in not knowing that I'd be hired that day.
42 [laughter]
43

44Male: So that day, huh.
45

46David Karkau: That day. So that's how I ended up here.

1
2Male: [10:13] So did you hear about the hiring from a friend or people you had
3 that...?
4
5David Karkau: I...
6
7Male: ...worked in the facility?
8
9David Karkau: Yup, my dad worked here back at that time and I was told by him to more
10 or less get my butt down here and put an application in, [laughter] so I did.
11
12Doreen Howard: [10:32] Did you have other relatives other than your father who worked
13 here?
14
15David Karkau: Not at that time.
16
17Doreen Howard: Not at that time.
18
19David Karkau: I have a brother that works here, I have a cousin that works here, but at
20 that time back in the early 70s, uh, just my dad.
21
22Cheryl McQuaid: [10:46] What did your father do here?
23
24David Karkau: He also was a pipefitter.
25
26Doreen Howard: Oh, okay, so you had a little bit of background of what was entailed in the
27 pipefitter job.
28
29David Karkau: Not really.
30
31Doreen Howard: Not really.
32
33David Karkau: Um, what he did really didn't interest me so I didn't, I had no idea what a
34 pipefitter was until I came here and, and worked changeovers with the
35 guys. I didn't know what they did.
36
37Doreen Howard: [11:14] Explain what a changeover is.
38
39David Karkau: Changeover is, uh, when they have a shutdown in the summertime
40 normally for, uh, um, a...
41
42Female: Model.
43
44David Karkau: ...model change. Um, we always didn't change the models, you know,
45 metal-wise. You might just change cosmetic things on them, on the

1 vehicle but it was a, it was a downtime that we had in the summertime,
2 usually two weeks in July.
3
4 Doreen Howard: [11:47] So you left the body shop and you went...?
5
6 David Karkau: To skilled trades.
7
8 Doreen Howard: To skilled trades.
9
10 David Karkau: Yes.
11
12 Doreen Howard: [11:54] And you were in the apprenticeship program for the pipefitters at
13 that time?
14
15 David Karkau: Yes, I was.
16
17 Doreen Howard: [12:01] So describe what your day en-, entailed for a pipefitter. What,
18 what did you do as a pipefitter and what were some of the things that you
19 did during the day as a pipefitter?
20
21 David Karkau: Okay, [chuckle] uh, during the 40 hours of, of a normal week, um, you
22 would just maintain, um, the facility here depending on where you was at.
23 There's four areas of the plant. There's body, paint, trim, and facilities.
24 So if you're in facilities, you're going to maintain the facilities, the
25 drinking fountains, the bathrooms, um, any of the pipes. Uh, pipefitter
26 trade technically takes care of all the, any pipes or anything that has any
27 liquids going through, gases, so a facilities guy would be doing that. If
28 you're in the trim area, the pipefitters [cough] took care of the urethanes,
29 any of the liquids, um, just general maintenance on the things, um, on the
30 machines. If you're in paint, they would take care of all the paint lines,
31 um, spray, spray machines, spray guns, anything that had to do with the
32 liquids again as the body shop, um, once again the hoses, uh, any of the
33 machines, all of the machines, anything to do with the liquids.
34
35 Cheryl McQuaid: [13:35] As an apprentice, are you, um, put in one department or do they
36 have you move around in different departments so that you can learn...?
37
38 David Karkau: Yeah.
39
40 Cheryl McQuaid: ...all of the stuff?
41
42 David Karkau: As an apprentice, you have a list of job descriptions that you're expected
43 to learn. Um, that's made up by the apprentice coordinator and Labor
44 Relations, and yes, you spend so many hours, um, in each area. You
45 spend so many hours going to school. Um, you have no overtime. You're
46 not allowed to, to work overtime unless all the journeymen are working.

1 [throat clearing] Excuse me. Back then, if I remember, we was kind of in
2 a, in a slow time so we didn't, we didn't have a lot of overtime. Um, yeah,
3 you have to go to all the areas so it's, it's broken down like the body shop,
4 you would have more hours in the body shop than you would in, in the
5 facility arena and maybe second you would have up in paint depending on
6 the workload, how much work was involved.
7

8Cheryl McQuaid: [14:51] What area did you like the most?
9

10David Karkau: Um, I kind of, I really don't have one area. They're all different. You
11 learn something, you do something different in each area. Um, the
12 construction part I liked that. You got to, I was able to use my math that I
13 thought I'd never be able to use. Um, in, in, in the body shop, it's more of
14 a hands-on mechanical type deal, so your mechanical abilities are, are
15 used out there. Um, paint, that's the place to stay away from unless you
16 like when you mix all the colors together they all come out purple, so
17 unless you're in to purple paint, it's the place to stay away from.
18

19Michael Fleming: Dave, um, in the skilled trades arena they have what we call lines of
20 demarcation. [15:49] Explain the lines of demarcation and how you as a
21 pipefitter interact with other trades to get a particular job done.
22

23David Karkau: Okay, lines of demarcation is the, is a distinct, uh, divider, if you want to
24 say, between the trades. Um, which means electric, electricians do not do
25 pipefitting work. Pipefitters do not do electrical work. Millwrights do not
26 do electrical work. We don't – we all have our own job descriptions,
27 okay, and they're all defined. They're in black and white. Um, if you're
28 on a job and it requires the work of an electrician and a pipefitter, you
29 work together. You do your, your part of the job, the electrician does his
30 part of the job. You do not do each other's work. That's something that
31 as we, as I came in to the apprenticeship that, that's taught to you right
32 from the beginning, so there is a distinct division between all the trades.
33

34Michael Fleming: And if I'm not mistaken Dave, a lot of this is more so for safety reasons
35 than...
36

37David Karkau: Safety reasons.
38

39Michael Fleming: ...anything else.
40

41David Karkau: Yes. Safety reasons, um, your personal, your own personal protection,
42 and I would imagine the protection of any and everybody around you as
43 well as machinery. You don't want to damage that. You don't want to
44 hurt yourself. Yes.
45

46Cheryl McQuaid: When you hired in this was known as Fisher Body.

1
2David Karkau: Yes, it was.
3
4Cheryl McQuaid: [17:29] Do you, do you have any feelings about the name changes that
5 occurred, um, what it was like working for Fisher Body compared to
6 BOC, LCA? Have you noticed any big changes in the building itself?
7
8David Karkau: I don't think the building itself has changed because of the, of the name
9 changes. Um, we've had additions put on the building but that doesn't
10 have anything to do with the change of the building, or the change of the
11 names. Um, before we changed to – was it BOC first...?
12
13Female: Yeah.
14
15Marilyn Coulter: Yeah.
16
17David Karkau: ...which was Buick, Olds, Cadillac, okay, it was Fisher Body. Um, at that
18 time I think there was only two Fisher Body's left. I think we were one
19 and Flint was one and then when we changed, I don't know if they, if Flint
20 changed before we did. I think we changed before Flint so it left one
21 Fisher Body. And, yeah, we worked here for – that was changed in the
22 80s I think, middle 80s, so it went 10 years, Um, I mean it didn't change
23 anything that we did. It just, um, the only thing I see really changed was,
24 was the name signs on the front of the building and the end of the building
25 it was changed.
26
27Doreen Howard: [18:58] What was your personal feelings about the name changes and
28 what do you call the building today?
29
30David Karkau: Today, I still refer to it as Fisher Body. A lot of people refer to it as Plant
31 6. Um, I, I still call it Fisher Body, which I think most people that hired in
32 back when I did probably do. The newer hires probably BOC, probably
33 LCA, whatever. Um, it's still Fisher Body to me. What was the second
34 part of your question?
35
36Doreen Howard: [19:39] Um, what's your feelings on...?
37
38David Karkau: Oh. You know, back then I probably had a feeling when it changed.
39 Right now I don't remember. [laughter] Um, there's been so much going
40 on lately that [chuckle] I don't, I don't know if I have a feeling. I
41 probably did then but I don't now.
42
43Michael Fleming: Dave, um, [throat clearing] most of the jobs in the big three are considered
44 jobs with the golden handcuffs. [20:09] Uh, can you talk a little bit about
45 the benefits that you have received by working here from then versus now

1 and the amount of money that you have garnered at the most, at the height
2 of your career? What was the most you've ever made within this facility?
3
4 David Karkau: That's a lot of questions you asked me. Um, I guess I'll start from the first
5 or the, the end of your questions. The most money I've ever made, I
6 didn't quite make 100,000 one year but I was very, very close. That was
7 on the third shift. Um, I don't remember what I, what I started out at as an
8 apprentice. I can remember when I worked at Motor Wheel it was \$4.41, I
9 remember that number. I don't remember what it was here. Um, what are
10 some of the other questions, the benefits?
11
12 Michael Fleming: Benefits that you've received.
13
14 David Karkau: Um.
15
16 Michael Fleming: [21:06] You know, such as your educational opportunities, you know,
17 your healthcare, you know, what do you think about those things?
18
19 David Karkau: Well, uh, the benefits, if you don't have benefits you probably don't know
20 what, what I'm talking about but to have benefits, um, to be able to go to
21 the hospital and not have to pay for this, to be able to go to the, to the
22 dentist, take your kids in to have braces, um, yeah, those, those are worth
23 their weight in gold. Um, hopefully we'll – through the 29 years that I've
24 been here I don't think we've lost any benefits. Um, if, if anything
25 they've gotten better, um, or stayed the same but I don't think we've lost
26 any of them, which is great. Um, my whole family has benefited from
27 that.
28
29 Marilyn Coulter: Dave.
30
31 David Karkau: Yeah.
32
33 Marilyn Coulter: [22:01] And I know that you said that you made close to 100,000 in one
34 year but can you let the people know what that, what was required of you
35 to make that type of money...?
36
37 David Karkau: Oh yeah.
38
39 Marilyn Coulter: ...in terms of hours, in terms of what you had to do?
40
41 David Karkau: Sure. Um, in order to achieve that amount, I worked seven days a week.
42 Probably the only time I had off was my vacation time, which probably at
43 that time was three weeks. Um, there would probably be some, uh, 10-
44 hour days in there and there was probably the third shift premium in there,
45 which is 10%.
46

1 Marilyn Coulter: [22:50] Was there a downside to that as far as your family was concerned?
2

3 David Karkau: Oh, big time. You don't realize that until after you stop working that, um,
4 not only to your, downside to your family, which they grow up and you
5 don't see, um, you don't spend a lot of time with them and then when you
6 do spend time, uh, you're tired. That was one of the, the two things. The
7 tiredness was something that really affected me. You don't know that
8 until you see somebody else, um, some of your fellow workers that you're
9 working with, you know, when you take a couple weeks' vacation or a
10 week's vacation you come back in and you see them dragging, well,
11 you're just like them. So yeah, two things, health, I'm sure health-wise,
12 uh, not a good idea. Um, at the present time we're just working 40 hours
13 and that seems pretty good so you, you feel like you have a little more
14 energy. But yeah, it took its toll on my family. My girls grew up and I
15 guess I felt as though – I mean the overtime was optional, you don't have
16 to work it. In the beginning I think we did. We had blackout periods
17 during changeovers and we had what they called Plan A and Plan – I think
18 it was just called Plan A where in order to have a Saturday off you had to
19 work two prior to. Sundays were always optional.
20

21 Marilyn Coulter: [24:16] And that's what a blackout period is?
22

23 David Karkau: No, the blackout period is so many weeks before changeover and so many
24 weeks after.
25

26 Marilyn Coulter: And that meant you couldn't [inaudible 24:25].
27

28 David Karkau: You could not take any time off before.
29

30 Michael Fleming: Until production got up to...
31

32 David Karkau: Right. There were so many weeks before, before changeover was the
33 blackout period and so many weeks after the start of production when they
34 come back from the model change or changeover, so there was probably
35 12 weeks in there where you could not take time off.
36

37 Doreen Howard: [24:46] And why?
38

39 David Karkau: You would, you would be disciplined for it.
40

41 Doreen Howard: [24:49] Why did they have such a blackout period?
42

43 David Karkau: They needed those people, they needed all the maintenance people there to
44 perform their, their jobs on the equipment to ensure, uh, the model would,
45 would run, would go down the assembly line.
46

1 Marilyn Coulter: [25:06] So because you spent so much time inside the plant with your
2 coworkers, um, did it become a second family for you?
3

4 David Karkau: Pretty much, yes, it did.
5

6 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.
7

8 David Karkau: Yeah.
9

10 Marilyn Coulter: [25:16] So what types of things did you guys do as an in-plant family?
11

12 David Karkau: Anything and everything we did as an in-plant family was done here in-
13 plant. We didn't have time to go anyplace else. Um, you probably really
14 don't want to hear those stories. [laughter]
15

16 Cheryl McQuaid: Only if you want to tell'm.
17

18 David Karkau: You know, what we would do is on, um, a lot of, I can remember a lot of
19 times in the summertime on, on weekends, especially Sundays, uh, our
20 families would come up, um, bring a picnic, bring a lunch, um, and we'd
21 have three or four families do that. Um, and we'd sit right out in front
22 right on the lawn and have a picnic, bring your kids, um.
23

24 Doreen Howard: That's nice.
25

26 David Karkau: We've done that. We've went over to the little park, I don't know what
27 the name of that park is right over here by the little school off Verlinden.
28 Um, we've sat there and had a picnic.
29

30 Doreen Howard: At least try to get a little bit of time in with your family at some point.
31

32 David Karkau: Yeah, if you want to call that quality time but back then we didn't have a
33 lot of time off.
34

35 Doreen Howard: [26:26] Did you guys have like in-plant dinners or retirement parties or
36 what did you guys do during lunch other than little picnics?
37

38 David Karkau: Um, we had in-plant parties and we involved all the skilled trades. The
39 skilled trades kind of stuck together. There was kind of somewhat of a
40 dividing line between production and skilled trades. We just kind of stuck
41 together. And, yeah, we'd have parties, uh, retirement parties, um, and
42 these, when I first came in to trades, all these parties were home-cooked
43 food and as time went on as people retired, um, the older ones when they
44 left, the younger ones it seemed like, uh, the home-cooked food started
45 leaving. Um, we would, in the end I guess to, to make a long story short,
46 you'd be buying pizza and have pizza parties where in the beginning we'd

1 have home-cooked. And, and during our Christmas breaks, um, we'd put
2 on the Christmas party, which was a pretty big to-do thing and for two
3 weeks we had refrigerators that we kept the food in and so for – it didn't
4 last two weeks but for three or four days afterwards 'cause we were all
5 here still, um, we had more parties.
6

7Doreen Howard: [28:06] You, you touched base a little bit about the changes in the people's
8 attitudes and I guess and, um, explain a little bit more about the
9 differences that, that you saw between the people that came in in your
10 generation compared to the new hires that came in years later. You
11 touched a little bit upon that.
12

13David Karkau: Okay. Um, when I hired in there was very little automation, so everything
14 was done manually, okay. Even the workers, I mean, it was a physical, it
15 was manual, physical labor to work on equipment. We didn't have all
16 these hoists. I mean we had some things but we didn't have the, the
17 mechanical ability to do a lot of this stuff. It was all done manual, okay,
18 using your, your body I guess you might say as opposed to nowadays, um,
19 there's more automation. Um, it requires probably less physical work to,
20 to work on things now than, than it did back then.
21

22 Um, I think what I look at now, if you look at the trades people, the
23 amount of people in the trades is, is diminishing except for the
24 electricians. Their numbers are growing, which kind of shows me that we,
25 we're in the age of the computers and all this and all the machinery is, is
26 computerized now, full of robots. Um, we lost a lot of people in the body
27 shop when, when we brought robots in so, um, that required more
28 maintenance people. But now to even show you what they've done with
29 the robots, when the robots first come in they was hydraulic, some
30 electricity on them and some hydraulic on them and some air on them.
31 Now the robots that come in are all electric, the guns work off electricity.
32 The, the clamping motions are all electric. They have servo valves in
33 them. Um, there's no hydraulics anymore. There's, there's no, no air on
34 them, no water, just electric.
35

36Doreen Howard: [30:37] So that's eliminating some of the skills that's necessary to
37 maintain them?
38

39David Karkau: Yes, it is. [throat clearing]
40

41Doreen Howard: Thus reducing the trades employees all, all around.
42

43David Karkau: Yes. It's reducing skilled trades by doing that too.
44

45Michael Fleming: [30:50] Dave, very, very briefly explain what servos are.
46

1David Karkau: A servo you're getting into a territory that I don't know that much about
2 because it's electrical but it's, it's a, it's, um – well, you got me on a good
3 one there. I'm not even going to explain it because I'd probably explain it
4 wrong.
5

6Doreen Howard: Okay, um.
7

8Cheryl McQuaid: You touched also that there was a division between the hourly and the
9 skilled trades. [31:23] Why do you think there was a division there? And
10 I guess I'd just like to hear a little bit more about that division.
11

12David Karkau: I think in my eyes there's a division because I think that as a production
13 person you're with production people all the time. You're surrounded by
14 production people, okay. Um, the only time you see a maintenance person
15 is when they have to come fix something, so they don't get to intertwine,
16 intermingle with each other that much so I don't think their relationships
17 are that close. I don't know if it's really a dividing line but it's just, um,
18 they just don't get to spend a lot of time together so, um, they're not really
19 acquainted with each other, um, as you would be if you was working next
20 to somebody each and every day.
21

22Cheryl McQuaid: What do you think the feeling is, um, from – you've played both sides.
23 You, you were hourly when you first hired in and then you became skilled
24 trades. [32:33] How do you think the skilled trades views the hourly
25 production worker?
26

27David Karkau: How does the skilled trades view the hourly? I don't know, um, how
28 everybody feels on that. I can tell you how I feel or how I view the
29 production people. I used to be one of them, so I know where they're
30 coming from when they have something that's not right. Um, I know that
31 until you fix it and fix it right or fix it the way that they want it, it may not
32 be right but whatever it takes to make them happy, that's what you have to
33 do, so. Um, like I said, I used to be one of them, so I know where they're
34 coming from.
35

36Cheryl McQuaid: [33:19] And do you think that's the, how most skilled trades feel about
37 the...?
38

39David Karkau: I would think so. I would hope so. I don't know if that's true but I would
40 hope so. I mean if you keep the production people happy, you're happy.
41

42Marilyn Coulter: Um, Dave, um.
43

44David Karkau: Yeah.
45

1 Marilyn Coulter: [33:40] Uh, since you've been here for so long, have you ever been active
2 in your local union?
3

4 David Karkau: Yes, I have.
5

6 Marilyn Coulter: [33:46] What types of activity have you done with that?
7

8 David Karkau: Um, I don't, okay, active, I don't do, I haven't done any, any activities.
9 Um, I, I have a job now. It's, it's union-appointed. I guess it's a joint
10 appointment through management and union, um.
11

12 Doreen Howard: [34:07] What is your title and...?
13

14 David Karkau: That is called subcontracting and planning.
15

16 Marilyn Coulter: So you're doing what's called a non-traditional job right now.
17

18 David Karkau: Um, yeah.
19

20 Marilyn Coulter: Okay. [34:19] So is this the first time you've been active in the union or
21 were you just active in going to meetings? How were you active?
22

23 David Karkau: I'm active in going to meetings, yeah.
24

25 Marilyn Coulter: That's good. [34:29] And, um, as you've been involved in, with that, um,
26 how, um, do you think the union involvement has changed over the years?
27

28 David Karkau: That's a good question. I don't know what the union involvement was
29 before I started going. Um, I think I've been going to union meetings for
30 about eight or nine years. Uh, it's hard to answer that...
31

32 Marilyn Coulter: Okay.
33

34 David Karkau: ...because I don't know what it was like before.
35

36 Marilyn Coulter: [35:03] So, um, do you participate in the, um, political and social activities
37 with the union?
38

39 David Karkau: Uh, no. I don't do any of the political, um, the social, no.
40

41 Marilyn Coulter: Okay. Well, now I know with skilled trades and the union involved, I
42 know skilled trades always seemed to be a big voting force during election
43 time. [35:25] Would you think that that's because of your strong
44 brotherhood that you had?
45

46 David Karkau: I would think so. I would hope, I would hope it is, yeah.

1
2Doreen Howard: You started to touch base on your current job. [35:39] Um, can you
3 explain what it is that you do, um, at this time, what your job is and what it
4 entails?
5
6David Karkau: It's called subcontracting and planning. It's, um, it's a job where I
7 interface between, um, management and union and what I, I guess my
8 main objectives are to keep all the skilled trades work in the plant that's
9 possible, so I'm kind of the skilled trades' voice in decision making with,
10 with the managers.
11
12Michael Fleming: [36:20] Another place where you get to use your math, Dave?
13
14David Karkau: Uh, yeah. [laughter] I get to use my math. [chuckle]
15
16Marilyn Coulter: [36:26] So you're kind of an in-sourcer, huh?
17
18David Karkau: Yeah.
19
20Michael Fleming: [36:29] Uh, can you talk about the math that you use as far as I'm sure we
21 have bids and contracts and stuff like that?
22
23David Karkau: It's working with numbers, with monies, with bids, with manpower, um,
24 yeah.
25
26Doreen Howard: So let me see if I have that, this right. Your job is to try to keep as many
27 of our skilled trades people working and keep them employed and not
28 bring outside contractors in for those jobs.
29
30David Karkau: Correct.
31
32Doreen Howard: Okay. So you say that you're really not that heavily involved in your
33 union. It sounds like you would be quite involved with your union
34 because you're representing your fellow union workers and, and helping
35 to maintain their, their jobs.
36
37David Karkau: Yes, saying it that way or putting it that way, yes, I guess I would be.
38
39Marilyn Coulter: You're a piece of the puzzle.
40
41Doreen Howard: Yeah.
42
43David Karkau: I'm a piece of the puzzle, right. I don't, I didn't, I guess I didn't look at it
44 that way but yeah.
45
46Linda Johnson: [37:38] How many outside contractors have you kept out of here?

1
2David Karkau: All of them. [laughter] There's, uh, most people don't know, um, I don't
3 know numbers. I just know that since I started this job that, um, it's very
4 rare that we do have contractors come in the plant here at Fisher Body.
5 Now that this plant is closing, um, we have new challenges at the Delta
6 plant, which is going to be a real nightmare for a while but we, our, our
7 goal is to keep all of them out. Um, we didn't achieve that goal but we got
8 pretty close to it. We got more and more work for, for our, for our skilled
9 trades, more and more of the jobs stayed in-house.
10
11Doreen Howard: [38:31] Now were you involved at all with, um, the Delta project in
12 helping to retain any of the work that's, that was going to be shipped to
13 other factories or given to other contract, outside contractors? Were you
14 involved in, in that?
15
16David Karkau: I'm in the process of being involved with that as we speak. Um, there's –
17 I deal with the skilled trades so if you're, if, I think part of your question
18 was referring to production. I don't deal with production. I think they
19 have somebody else that does that.
20
21Doreen Howard: Okay.
22
23David Karkau: Um, but yes, with the skilled trades we're in the process of, of working on,
24 um, the jobs that, uh, we have to fulfill with, with the type of work that
25 we're doing. Yes, we've, we're in the process of hiring some skilled
26 trades because we need, uh, we have more work, more areas to cover than
27 what we have people, so.
28
29Doreen Howard: That's a good thing. That's good.
30
31Michael Fleming: [39:39] Another question becomes here is will we do an area hire? Will
32 we see new social security numbers? How are we going to do that? Do
33 you have any idea?
34
35David Karkau: Um, that's in the hands of the skilled trade zone and the, and the shop
36 chair. I don't know. Yes, we will be seeing new social security numbers.
37 Um, I don't know how we're getting them. I think some of them are
38 coming from area hire. Um, we're going to, we're going to take care of
39 our own people, which when we go to the Delta plant they broke the
40 skilled trades down to core and noncore. The core trades are the
41 electricians, pipefitters, millwrights, and toolmakers. The noncore are the
42 carpenters, the tinters, and truck repair, and small tool repair. The
43 noncores will not be going as their trades, whatever their trade is they will
44 not be going over to Delta as that trade. Instead, we worked out a deal
45 with management that we will be putting on, we will be offering 38 people
46 which encompasses those four noncore trades the EIT program, and that's

1 Employee In Training, so we're going to do that. And we're working on,
2 um, apprentices but I don't think they're going to be affected. We're not
3 going to get any apprentices until the year 2007, but we're working on
4 that, so we're not just taking our people and putting them out the door.
5 We're kind of...
6
7 Michael Fleming: [Inaudible 41:20].
8
9 David Karkau: ...taking them under our wing and going with them.
10
11 Michael Fleming: It sounds as though the trades has a very bright future.
12
13 David Karkau: Yeah, yeah, we're doing okay, I think, I hope.
14
15 Doreen Howard: [41:29] So they're hoping to retrain some of the people that they have in
16 order to retain them in other skills?
17
18 David Karkau: Yes. What our main objective was to employ these people, not put them
19 in the jobs bank, not lay them off but to give them an opportunity to finish
20 out their careers, uh, with General Motors. Um, so by offering them the,
21 the program, the EIT programs, hopefully they can cash in on that and
22 finish out their career, whatever, however long it will be.
23
24 Doreen Howard: [42:09] Um, going back to our facility, give me your personal feelings on
25 the closing of Fisher Body.
26
27 David Karkau: That was a sad day when they announced that. Um, couple years ago they
28 come by and told everybody that the plant will be closing. Well, two
29 years ago I think we all thought, yeah right, we've heard this before. Um,
30 we've gotten other cars in, it just, it just didn't happen. And when the day
31 finally came and I think we, we lost a line first. There was a buildup to
32 this before the doors actually closed. Um, I think they slowed the lines
33 down, then they, they shut a line right off, and then I think then everybody
34 started, hey, this really might happen. And then when the day came it was
35 actually a year earlier than what it was supposed to be and so it was kind
36 of a shock, a bigger shock. I mean you come to work and they're going to
37 tell you, they did tell us that in two weeks, I think it was two weeks or
38 three weeks that the doors will be closing and they did. And it was kind
39 of, it was a real shock. It was kind of an empty feeling for a lot of people,
40 myself included, what are we going to do now, where are we going, so.
41
42 Doreen Howard: [43:40] What kind of vehicles do you drive? [sneezing]
43
44 David Karkau: [chuckle] Really?
45
46 Doreen Howard: Yeah. Do you, do you drive, have you...?

1
2David Karkau: Mine are all, mine are all GM.
3
4Doreen Howard: Mm-hm.
5
6David Karkau: I'd hate to be the guy sitting here that had to tell you Isuzu or something.
7 [laughter] Mine are all GM. They've always been GM except for one
8 vehicle in '79 I bought a Ford but other than that, they've all been GM.
9
10Doreen Howard: Mm-hm.
11
12Michael Fleming: [44:06] Can you talk about some of the ones you had were they
13 manufactured here in the past?
14
15David Karkau: Um, what did I buy that, I – no, I don't think any of mine were
16 manufactured here. I had a Chevette and that was, we didn't build those
17 here and, uh, but I do remember guys that, that did order cars that we built
18 here back in the, in the late 70s, um, which was 88s and 98s and the
19 Toronado and you could go up front and get your number of your vehicle
20 and you could go find it out in the body shop. He'd tell you when it was
21 going to be, what shift, what time it was going to be made and you could
22 track that through. And for all, I, I swear, for all the guys that did that
23 when it come time, you know, put a couple more welds here, put a couple
24 more there but – up in the sealer, up in paint, um, hey, put some more
25 sealer here, add a little more there, so that did go on with everybody,
26 everybody that tracked their cars through, make sure there's no runs in the
27 paint, which normally there isn't. They usually do a pretty good job of
28 painting.
29
30Cheryl McQuaid: Extra deadener in the trunk.
31
32David Karkau: Yes, yes.
33
34Doreen Howard: All the extra things for people, yeah.
35
36David Karkau: A little extra, yeah. But that was, I didn't have any that I chased through
37 but there, there was people that did.
38
39Doreen Howard: [Inaudible 45:32]. [45:35] Um, is there anything that you wanted to talk
40 about that we haven't touched base on at all today?
41
42David Karkau: Uh, geez, I don't know what it would be. My most favorable moment
43 here...
44
45Doreen Howard: Yeah.
46

1David Karkau: ...is the day that, um, I've had a lot of them but the day that I graduated
2 from apprenticeship. First, I think the, the very first one is the day I was
3 accepted as an, as an apprentice [sneezing] because that was a, that was
4 quite an ordeal back then, taking the test, working changeovers, doing
5 anything and everything you could do to get extra points to, the more
6 points you had, the farther up the list you went. And it was discouraging,
7 there was myself and a guy by the name of Bruce [Shoop 46:24], which is
8 in Tennessee now. He's at the Saturn plant. But we both come on as
9 pipefitters but we had to wait quite some time. Back then they was in, um,
10 for some reason there was a shortage of journeymen and they had to hire a
11 couple of them, three or four, I don't know, but we had to wait, um, until
12 the apprentice committee in the national, uh, local or national union,
13 national would approve us to go on so there, it wasn't like you just got
14 your numbers up to the top of the list and you went on. You had, we had
15 to wait for openings and so that was kind of discouraging having to wait
16 but the day I heard that I was, that I was going on was a good moment and
17 the day I graduated that was a real good moment.
18

19Jerri Smith: [47:18] Did they do anything special for you for graduation?
20

21David Karkau: Oh, if I remember, which I probably don't, but I think we all went over
22 across the street to Harry's and, and had a beer and celebrated.
23

24Male: [47:32] Did, did the corporation give you anything for certain
25 anniversaries as you worked here?
26

27David Karkau: Yeah, I was just going to go back on that one. You asked me if they did
28 anything when I graduated. That's what the guys, I think all of us just
29 went over there and had a couple beers and just celebrated. But the
30 Company gave me, oh geez, I think there was some, there was a wallet I
31 remember, the certificate of where you completed your apprenticeship,
32 um, it seemed like there was something else. But during the years that I'd
33 been here, yes, we've all gotten, uh, um, I don't know, milestones that
34 we've hit here. I don't know, I don't remember what they all are. I've got
35 quite a collection of that stuff, which probably a lot of people do, coasters,
36 um, bookmarks, um, yeah, we've – jackets. Um, I thought I had a one-of-
37 a-kind jacket. I guess I do in here. Um, yeah, we've, we've, we've gotten
38 different things.
39

40Cheryl McQuaid: [48:41] Do you remember your favorite boss?
41

42David Karkau: My favorite boss, how could anybody have a favorite boss? [laughter]
43 Um, probably if I was to answer that, I don't know if I had a favorite boss.
44

45Cheryl McQuaid: [49:00] How about least favorite?
46

1David Karkau: A least favorite, yeah, all of them. [laughter] Probably [Darryl Story
2 49:08] would be, um, one of the guys that I looked up to as a boss. Um,
3 when I came in as a helper before the apprenticeship when I still worked
4 in the body shop, um, on production, we came in to help the, the
5 journeymen during the changeover times and, uh, I worked with [Darryl
6 Story 49:35] and I learned quite a bit. He was one of the first ones I
7 worked with that's probably why, um, I remember him the most and then
8 he went on salary later as a, as a pipefitter boss so we still had that tie as a,
9 as a worker and now he's a boss but we still had a pretty good
10 relationship, so he's, he's a pretty good [inaudible 49:57].
11

12Cheryl McQuaid: So he started hourly and went on to salary.
13

14David Karkau: Yes, he did, yes. [throat clearing]
15

16Doreen Howard: Earlier on you touched base on a few of the pranks and things like that.
17 [50:10] Do you have any more fun stories to tell us?
18

19David Karkau: Oh geez.
20

21Doreen Howard: [50:13] Or anything funny that happened or?
22

23David Karkau: Well, I think I mentioned earlier about or somebody asked me if any
24 pranks were pulled on me when I came in and I don't remember those. I
25 remember some of the ones that I pulled on...
26

27Doreen Howard: Other.
28

29David Karkau: ...other people.
30

31Doreen Howard: Okay, let's hear those. [laughter]
32

33David Karkau: Well, when I went, when I went up in paint as a journeyman pipefitter
34 after leaving the body shop it was a new area to me and we had a new crib
35 we had to organize so I was in charge of that. So by organizing the new
36 crib, we got us a, one of these white boards that you can use one of those,
37 use the erasable felt tip markers on. Well, that board was supposed to be
38 used for breakdowns if we was leaving, it was communication between the
39 shifts of the pipefitters in that crib and I would write different messages on
40 the board for, uh, for all.
41

42 The, the new hires they were instructed through the message board to go
43 to the union hall, this was around Christmastime, to pick up their, uh,
44 Christmas hams, um, which we didn't pass out but they got those, were
45 instructed to go there. I would put on there, um, it wasn't really pranks
46 but I, I called the board show time and, uh, at 9:00 I'd, I'd write a time on

1 the board where people could come by. And, and I think a lot of times
2 you'd hear maintenance, people would say maintenance all they do is they
3 sit on their ass. Well, we put the board up or had the board there and show
4 time so at 9:00 they could come by and watch us work. We'd have pump
5 rebuild class or something and it got to where we had quite a few people
6 coming by.
7
8 So they're not really – the prank thing with the, with the new hires going
9 to the union hall that was, that, that, uh, so the committeemen tell me that
10 raised a lot of problems with, with them because they, they endured quite
11 a few committee calls with that. Then there's the normal pranks that the
12 maintenance guys play on each other, um, water fights in the summertime
13 with the fire extinguishers. Um, I think, uh, if I remember, riding around
14 in trim on hot days and you'll see, uh, the, um, production people
15 complaining that the fans aren't working or you're not getting enough air
16 or something and, uh, the maintenance people would have to go clean
17 them, which would be a millwright or something, and it was always nice
18 just to go up and tap on the fan while he was working on it or just before
19 he started working on it we would do that.
20
21 Doreen Howard: Get dust all over him.
22
23 David Karkau: Oh yeah, it was all dust, yeah, kind of a sooty type deal.
24
25 Doreen Howard: [chuckle] They probably didn't appreciate that a whole lot.
26
27 David Karkau: No, nobody did but [laughter] it's things that we did.
28
29 Doreen Howard: Uh, and sticky.
30
31 David Karkau: There's probably more but I can't remember all of it.
32
33 Doreen Howard: [53:32] Okay, well, in wrapping up here, um, is there any words of
34 wisdom that you could offer to the new people that will be coming in?
35
36 David Karkau: Words of wisdom, just come to work every day.
37
38 Doreen Howard: Work every day.
39
40 David Karkau: Yeah, come to work every day and don't forget your families. Don't bring
41 them to work every day. [laughter] But just remember that you have
42 families.
43
44 Doreen Howard: Okay.
45
46 Cheryl McQuaid: Thank you Dave.

1
2Doreen Howard: Yes.
3
4Jerri Smith: Thank you.
5
6Michael Fleming: Dave, thank you very much. [tape clicked off] [54:11] Dave, um, had you
7 been through any strikes here at Fisher Body?
8
9David Karkau: Yeah, I think there's only been one since I've been here and I think that
10 was back in, uh, just shortly after I hired in back in '78, '79 maybe,
11 somewhere in there, '78 probably.
12
13Michael Fleming: [54:32] Uh, can you talk about the things you did through the strike and
14 what happened? What was the...?
15
16David Karkau: Well, from what I can remember, um, I think we actually walked out
17 because I think, I, I know I went like a night or two nights before the
18 deadline, whatever that was, and we put together strike signs at the union
19 hall where we stapled the fronts and the halves together and then slid the,
20 the piece of wood in between them and stapled that to the wood. We
21 made, I don't know, hundreds of those and we put them in, we stacked
22 them in the back of pickups I remember that. And then the day that we
23 walked out and I'm not sure why we walked out if it was a 30-and-out
24 issue, I'm not sure but I don't know if it was 30-and-out. I think it might
25 have been local demands that we was after. Um, I'm not really sure but,
26 yeah, we passed those out. I, I remember doing that.
27
28Michael Fleming: [55:37] Do you know how long you stayed out?
29
30David Karkau: Oh, it wasn't very long. Um, I don't remember but it, it wasn't a lengthy
31 strike I know that.
32
33Michael Fleming: [55:44] Did you receive any strike pay, you know what that was at the
34 time?
35
36David Karkau: Um, I don't remember if I received that or not but I know it wasn't very
37 much. And I might have. We might have been out long enough to, to get
38 some strike pay 'cause now that you bring that up because that, that
39 number wasn't very much and it seems like we, it seems like I was
40 worried about because the strike pay was so little that you couldn't stay
41 out for very long, you know, and, and afford to be out. Back then, uh,
42 most of us, I, I don't know if I'm speaking for, for most of us but speaking
43 for myself, wasn't able to save money. I mean the money I was making, I
44 was, I was spending for my family, so yeah, a strike would have
45 definitely, definitely hurt. The strike pay was not very much. How much
46 I drew, I don't remember, I really don't.

1
2Michael Fleming: [56:42] But if it had been any longer you think you would have probably
3 had to look for another job or what would you have done?
4
5David Karkau: Well, I wasn't to that point but I'm sure that would cross somebody's
6 mind that, um, yeah, if you're going to be out for, for months, um, yeah,
7 you may have to look for another job. Um, I don't remember. That's 29
8 years ago [inaudible 57:04], [laughter] a long time ago.
9
10Michael Fleming: Well, Dave, I want to thank you for, for sharing that with us.
11
12
13/mlc