

**Mark Kirkey discusses his career as a production worker, skilled trades
toolmaker and UAW member at the Fisher Body Plant in Lansing, MI**

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4
5Mike Fleming: [recorder clicking] [papers rustling] Lansing Fisher Body Historical
6 [background movement] Team. [papers rustling] I'm Mike Fleming. Uh, it
7 is October 14th at 7:15 a.m. [background movement] We have today with
8 us Mr. Mark Kirkey. [creaking] [0:16] Mark, would you state your full
9 name and your address [banging] for the record, please?
10
11Mark Kirkey: Mark Robert Kirkey, [background movement] 6940 Mills Highway, Eaton
12 Rapids, Michigan. [background movement]
13
14Mike Fleming: [0:27] Uh, [background movement] your marital status?
15
16Mark Kirkey: Married.
17
18 [papers rustling]
19
20Mike Fleming: [0:32] Do you have any children, Mark?
21
22Mark Kirkey: Five.
23
24 [background movement]
25
26Mike Fleming: [0:35] How about ages?
27
28 [tapping] [papers rustling]
29
30Mark Kirkey: Uh, age 23 to 29. [tapping]
31
32Mike Fleming: [0:44] And, uh, your education or military service? [Inaudible 0:49].
33 [background movement]
34
35Mark Kirkey: No military service. Education for apprenticeship, 2 years a college.
36
37Mike Fleming: [0:54] Uh, what type of apprenticeship was that? [tapping] What type of
38 apprenticeship was that, sir?
39
40 [tapping]
41
42Mark Kirkey: Toolmaker.
43
44 [tapping]
45

1Mike Fleming: Toolmaker. Okay. [tapping] We gonna go around and introduce [tapping]
2 the people in the room.
3
4 [tapping]
5
6Doreen Howard: Doreen Howard. [tapping]
7
8Doug Rademacher: Doug Rademacher.
9
10Cheryl McQuaid: Cheryl McQuaid.
11
12 [papers rustling]
13
14Linda Johnson: Linda Johnson.
15
16Marilyn Coulter: Marilyn Coulter.
17
18 [papers rustling]
19
20John Fedewa: John Fedewa.
21
22 [tapping]
23
24Mike Fleming: [1:14] Mark, I'd like for you to tell me about your – the day [tapping] that
25 you hired in and what department that you hired into.
26
27 [scraping] [writing]
28
29Mark Kirkey: Hm, the day I hired in, I spent a whole week over in Main Street School
30 [laughter]. I never made it into the plant until the week [tapping] after I
31 hired in. [tapping] And I started out in Trim, intermittent relief man.
32 [tapping] I hired in as Production. [tapping]
33
34Mike Fleming: [1:42] Do you know what shift that was?
35
36 [tapping]
37
38Mark Kirkey: Yeah. First shift.
39
40Doreen Howard: [1:45] What, what date was the hire date? [tapping]
41
42Mark Kirkey: 11/19/84.
43
44Doreen Howard: [Inaudible 1:53].
45
46 [papers rustling]

1
2 Doug Rademacher: [1:53] Well why don't you share a quick thing about, uh, [sniffing] that
3 Main Street experience [throat clearing] since that's where you, uh, were
4 initiated to the Fisher Body plant.
5
6 Mark Kirkey: It was the first – yeah, initiation to GM. I'm thinkin' these fools are nuts.
7
8 [laughter]
9
10 Doug Rademacher: There was a lotta that...
11
12 Mark Kirkey: Yeah.
13
14 Doug Rademacher: ...sentiment going on – sentiment, so do share.
15
16 Mark Kirkey: [Inaudible 2:13] I never considered, and I never had anything to do with [it
17 2:15]. Yeah. [papers rustling] It was kinda crazy. Then I get in here,
18 [papers rustling] and it's totally [tapping] different. So [tapping] they kind
19 of blew it out of – I spent a week, for some reason, [tapping] sitting over
20 in the school with somebody tellin' me how things were gonna be. And I
21 walk in here, and it ain't that way. [laughter] I'm going, well, this is just
22 about like I'm used to. [laughter] [throat clearing] But no, I spent 3 years
23 on the line, [tapping] intermittent relief in utility between [tapping] Soft
24 Trim and Hard Trim. [tapping] And then it was 3 years of fighting to get
25 on Skilled Trade.
26
27 Doug Rademacher: [2:49] Did you already carry your...
28
29 Mark Kirkey: I carried my card when I walked in the door.
30
31 Doug Rademacher: [2:56] So why don't you tell a little bit about your, uh, first day on
32 assembly line.
33
34 [tapping]
35
36 Mark Kirkey: It was good. [tapping] [Inaudible 3:04] they pay you to do this? This kinda
37 money? [laughter] I mean it, it [tapping] was just kind of unreal. I, uh, it
38 was a pretty good [tapping] scam as far as I was concerned.
39
40 Doug Rademacher: [3:15] Well, tell me, what, what did you do prior to walking in to General
41 Motors? Sounds like...
42
43 Mark Kirkey: Working in a...
44
45 Doug Rademacher: Sounds like...
46

1Mark Kirkey: ...drop forge.
2

3Doug Rademacher: Sounds like you worked. [throat clearing] So, uh...
4

5Mark Kirkey: Yeah. I worked in a drop forge. [papers rustling] You take – a [tapping]
6 coffee break consisted of goin' to the coffee machine, gettin' a cup of
7 coffee, takin' it back to your bench and then coverin' it with a piece of
8 cardboard or [tapping] somethin' so you didn't get dust in it. [tapping]
9

10Doug Rademacher: [3:33] [tapping] Was that a union job also?
11
12 [tapping]
13

14Mark Kirkey: Oh yes. Worked for the International Die Sinker Conference. [tapping]
15 [tsk] They had UAW in the shop also.
16
17 [papers rustling] [tapping]
18

19Doug Rademacher: [3:44] [tapping] So you were used to hard labor. [tapping] So...
20

21Mark Kirkey: No. I just used to workin'. [tapping]
22

23Doug Rademacher: Yeah.
24

25Mark Kirkey: Stayin' busy all the time. Not, not necessarily hard labor, just busy all the
26 time. Somethin' to do. If you didn't have somethin' on 1 job to do, you
27 always had 2 or 3 back-up on your bench [tapping] somewhere. [papers
28 rustling] [tapping] And you always had repairs comin' in from [tapping]
29 the Press Floor or Hammer Shop. So...
30
31 [tapping]
32

33Marilyn Coulter: [4:05] Is that where you got your trade? There?
34

35Mark Kirkey: Yeah.
36

37Marilyn Coulter: Drop forge?
38

39Mark Kirkey: Yep. It's actually a die-sinker instead of a toolmaker, but in here it's [as a
40 4:14] toolmaker.
41

42Doreen Howard: [4:17] So the environment there was, um, dirty? [background movement]
43

44Mark Kirkey: Yeah. [tapping] Mm-hm. [laughter]
45

46Doreen Howard: [4:21] Was it loud? [background movement]

1
2 [tapping]
3
4 Mark Kirkey: Yeah. Loud. Greasy.
5
6 [tapping]
7
8 Doreen Howard: [4:24] And then you came here, and [tapping] – describe the environment
9 that you came into in the Trim Department.
10
11 [tapping]
12
13 Mark Kirkey: Quiet for the most part considerin' what I was used to.
14
15 [tapping]
16
17 Doug Rademacher: [4:36] What [tapping] about the clothing you could wear?
18
19 [tapping]
20
21 Mark Kirkey: That was the nice part. [tapping] I didn't have to worry about gettin' filthy.
22 [tapping] At the drop forge, [tapping] you took a shower before you left.
23 You had to change clothes and everything else 'cause you couldn't wear
24 [tapping] the same clothes day after day. Most a the time you had to
25 change [tapping] clothes in the middle of shift. [laughter] [tapping]
26
27 Doug Rademacher: So it was a good move for you.
28
29 Mark Kirkey: Yeah. It was good mo-, well, I had made the move strictly for monetary
30 purposes. [tapping] The Reagan Era, back in '84 of that impasse deal that
31 he come up with, the unions and the companies under negotiations, I was
32 [tapping] lookin' at losin' \$3 an hour in pay. [tapping] I walk in here, I lost
33 a buck and a half an hour, but I had – 16 and 18 months I was gonna be
34 back over what I was already at. And I didn't have to worry about gettin'
35 my benefits cut. [tapping] It was kind of a rough [road 5:33] – [tapping]
36 move for me to make with kids and everything else, [tapping] worrying
37 about their insurance and stuff. [tapping] But I had to do somethin'.
38 [tapping] About the same position the [Delphi 5:42] folks are in right now.
39
40 [tapping]
41
42 Doug Rademacher: Yeah. It's funny how you say that. [tapping] You brought back the, the
43 Reagan...
44
45 Mark Kirkey: Mm-hm.
46

1 Doug Rademacher: ...and the cuts, and look at where we're at today.
2
3 Mark Kirkey: It's the same thing. It's where [them laws 5:52] came from.
4
5 [background movement]
6
7 Mike Fleming: [5:56] Do you have any family members that work here, Mark?
8
9 [sniffing]
10
11 Mark Kirkey: No.
12
13 Mike Fleming: [6:05] Um, within the skilled trades arena [that it's, uh 6:09], since you
14 made that move back in – what year would – what year did you – '87?
15
16 Mark Kirkey: '87 I went [inaudible 6:14].
17
18 [tapping]
19
20 Mike Fleming: [6:16] From '87 until now, [tapping] how do you feel the trades have, have
21 come? [tapping] Are they – is it any better than it was then? [tapping] Or
22 [sniffing] describe what you feel the changes have been within your arena
23 from '87 until, [tapping] here we are in '06, almost.
24
25 Mark Kirkey: Well, there's been good and bad all the way through it. I mean, there's,
26 there's been bosses that [tapping] – it used to be General Motors promoted
27 from within the trades. [tapping] So if you were in a trade, your boss was a
28 [tradesman 6:46]. [tapping] Now it's not so [laughter]. Usually the bosses
29 you have now, they just threw in there because General Motors has got
30 this philosophy that if you're a supervisor, it doesn't matter what you're
31 supervisin'. They just throw you in everywhere. [background movement]
32 [tapping] And they're doing the same thing with engineering staff. So, big
33 deal. [tapping] It's gotten good. It's gotten better. [tapping] I've had my
34 chances to improve it. Right now I'm in a process of tryin' to help improve
35 the situation [sniffing] for the new plant. [tapping] Uh, I like to think that I
36 improved [beeping] at least my area. [beeping]
37
38 [tapping] [clicking]
39
40 Cheryl McQuaid: [7:27] Mark, can you tell us some of the big impacts that you were able to
41 change at the Fisher Body?
42
43 Mike Fleming: Yeah. [background movement] Um, the supervisor that I had [background
44 movement] – well, a couple different times [tapping] – it seemed [to 7:42]
45 I always ended up back with him because I – every time I either got
46 changed in an area or got moved around, he seemed to pull his reign in,

1 and I got – ended up workin' for him [laughter]. He was, uh, [tapping] one
2 a the few supervisors that [tapping] knew what he was doin' and let his
3 people do their job. [tapping] And he was good. He'd, uh [tapping] – what
4 he didn't know, he'd try to figure out, and he'd let his people do their work.
5 [tapping] He trusted his people. He did – he had a handpicked crew.
6 [tapping] If somebody on his crew wasn't doin' their job, they disappeared
7 [sniffing] to somebody else. He – for some reason, he had that pull. Um,
8 by doin' that, [tapping] it gave me a little bit of more input, a little bit more
9 leeway. [tapping] Um, a couple a guys that I've worked with and teamed
10 up with, uh, it's been great as far as makin' the areas better, settin' up the
11 areas better. [background movement] [tapping] Um, and I also spent 4
12 years on per diem directly supervising the toolmaker group. [tapping]
13 [papers rustling] And I was put in charge of all the swing metal leaving the
14 plant.
15
16Female: Mm-hm.
17
18Mark Kirkey: [Outta 8:57] the front-end sheet metals. Both of'm.
19
20 [tapping]
21
22Female: Hm.
23
24Cheryl McQuaid: [9:02] So how did you like being [inaudible 9:03] [tapping] – and for
25 those people who don't know what per diem is, can you tell'm what per
26 diem is?
27
28Mark Kirkey: Per diem is a supervisor's position, but you're paid hourly. You're not part
29 of the local. You're also not part of management. You're kind of in a
30 limbo. Um, part of it is to see whether or not they [background movement]
31 want you to become permanent or whether you want to stay on it. And it
32 [tapping] has its goods and bads. [tapping] Um, I have to admit
33 [background movement] that I had probably one a the best supervisors to
34 work for [background movement] as a per diem, so that kinda cushioned
35 me a little bit [tapping] because we had some upper management that
36 wasn't too congenial to what we needed to do. So he gave me a little extra
37 push and helped me in the back, [tapping] back end so that I didn't have to
38 fight so much.
39
40Mike Fleming: [9:51] Who was that, [sir 9:52]?
41
42Mark Kirkey: Mike [Greene 9:54]. [tapping] He was in charge of the engineering group,
43 and they made a big switch. [tapping] And [Gary] [Pennison 10:01] got
44 [tapping] everything in the back end, and Mike, Mike [Greene] got
45 everything in the front ends.
46

1 [tapping]
2
3 Doug Rademacher: [10:06] [tapping] And Mike made it comfortable to work? Or Mike was
4 difficult to work with?
5
6 Mark Kirkey: I've worked with Mike before. [tapping] Mike is – Mike's very intelligent.
7 [tapping] He's also a fairly good supervisor to work for in that he trusts
8 you and lets you do what you need to do. [tapping] But he'll also, if you
9 come up to him and tell'm you needed help with something, he'll back you.
10 [tapping] So it, it, it helps with those things. Um, he helped – 'cause I had
11 to deal with everything over at the chassis side. If we shipped somethin'
12 over, [background movement] I had to go over and make sure that
13 [tapping] whatever it was that they were hollerin' and screamin' about, I
14 could either fix or give'm an [bump] answer for. And, like I said, it was
15 interesting doing the front end sheet metals.
16
17 [papers rustling] [thumping]
18
19 Doreen Howard: I, I'd like you to back up a little bit. [sniffing] [10:57] Um, could you tell
20 me what a toolmaker does? Describe what your daily routine consists of.
21
22 Mark Kirkey: [laughter] Now, that's kinda hard. Uh, we do all the shimmy as far as the
23 [background movement] metal positioning for the, [tapping] how the car
24 goes together. [tapping] We do [papers rustling] [tapping] – it's kinda of a
25 combination between the trades and who does what on certain things, but
26 basically we rebuilt clamps [background movement], um, the mechanical
27 mechanisms on the clamps. Uh, we build up things, uh, for carriers, for
28 carrying, [tapping] transporting the parts from one spot to another.
29 [tapping] Uh, we master that stuff. Uh, we also do, uh, it's a computer-
30 guided [background movement], uh, measuring tool that we use to make
31 sure that we're building the car properly. [tapping] So we go into a station,
32 and we make sure that all the placement of the NC blocks, which are the
33 net locations for metal is where it belongs. [tapping] Uh, we also do the
34 measuring a the car in [off station in CNM room 12:11] to make sure that
35 what we're building is coming out right. [tapping] Or if we have a
36 problem, we can find it within the build. [tapping] [papers rustling] Have
37 an all-around – I don't know what you would call it, [tapping] uh, kind of
38 [sigh] partly machine repair. [tapping] But we don't have a machine
39 repairer, so it's kind of a combination between millwrights and toolmakers
40 now on who does what.
41
42 Doug Rademacher: Mark, you were [sniffing] – started out in trim. [12:38] Now, when you
43 got to the body shop and were able to work with the robotics and the, and
44 the big presses and things, did that, uh – something you enjoy doing?
45 [background movement] [tapping] Is that where you got your joy out of

1 [background movement] makin' those things work and fall within its
2 place?
3
4 Mark Kirkey: Oh, yeah. [tapping] Uh, th-, that's, that's the fun part. It, it's not supposed
5 to be fun havin' the line down, but that's the fun part. [laughter] [tapping]
6 It's when things are broke down. Uh, they brought a unit in, in [papers
7 rustling] '91, [tapping] and 85 percent of the group went, "No, I ain't
8 workin' on that." [tapping] Or, "No, I don't know how to work on that."
9 Or, "No, I'm not going near it." [laughter] [tapping] And there was a few
10 of us – uh, at the time, there was basically – I think there was 4 of us that
11 got involved in it, worked with an outside company that brought it in. It
12 took us 6 months to get it runnin' properly, [tapping] but when we got it
13 runnin', it'd run great, [papers rustling] [background movement] and it
14 was everybody's nightmare. Because that's what held [Car Track 13:44]
15 [background movement] 80 percent of the time – the [Utica 13:47] tool.
16 [laughter] And in processes they've changed – they've brought in new
17 [sniffing] tools since then. We've changed the [Utica] tools, I think, th-, total
18 of 3 times. We've had 3 different systems in here. And bein' on [Car Track
19 that whole time, [tapping] I got to be the go-to guy for it.
20
21 Mike Fleming: [14:12] [tapping] Talk about what a [Utica tool] does to the [vehicle 14:15].
22
23 Cheryl McQuaid: [14:15] And what's [Car Track]?
24
25 Mark Kirkey: Well, [Car Track] is where all the sheet metal gets put together before it
26 [tapping] goes to front end. Uh, put your [side 14:24] rings, your roofs,
27 your quarters, your fenders – well, fenders don't get on [but 14:29] your
28 motor compartment. [tapping] It builds everything except for your fenders
29 and your swing metal, which is doors, hoods, and deck lids. It puts it all
30 together. It's a combination of where the [side] rings are build up, [tapping]
31 underbody's build up, and it puts it all together.
32
33 [tapping]
34
35 Doug Rademacher: So, knowing in the past, many years ago, [background movement]
36 [tapping] men put those parts together and did those well. It's pretty
37 amazing that...
38
39 Mark Kirkey: Yeah, it was a different process. Yeah. Before '84 it was done with gates
40 and this and that. [Car Track] was a tube system, tube drive system, that it
41 started in one end, and when it came out the other end, it was all welded
42 together, which I think at the time was somethin' like 3 or 400 welds from
43 [papers rustling] one start of [Car Track] to the end of it. And the original
44 [Utica] tool did 28 pierces in 1 shot. [background movement] It had 2 –
45 [tapping] it had a front [bridge 15:30], rear [bridge], and 2 side units.
46 [tapping] 'Cause at that time we pierced for the doors, for the door hinges.

1 So, and it was held up by airbags, [background movement] [tapping]
2 balanced by airbags. [laughter]
3
4Female: Wow.
5
6Doug Rademacher: Very hard to control.
7
8Mark Kirkey: Yes.
9
10Female: [It was hard 15:47].
11
12Mark Kirkey: Yes. It was, it was – well, it wasn't so much hard to control. [tapping] It
13 was hard to get it back [background movement] once it crashed. And all it
14 would take was a punched brake [tapping] or an electrician pushed the
15 wrong button, uh, because the logic on it [background movement] wasn't
16 real great. Um, they never did get that straightened out. Even the unit we
17 have in here today isn't that great as far as the logic. I've had to write SOPs
18 and, uh...
19
20Female: [16:17] What's an SOP?
21
22Mark Kirkey: Standard operating procedure [laughter]. Um, I've had to write the SOPs
23 for going in and working on a tool. I've also had to write the SOPs for
24 troubleshooting the tool [tapping] because I've tried, or actually, I did try.
25 [tapping] I wasn't given the ov-, the time to do it as far as overtime 'cause I
26 wanted to take 2 electricians, 2 toolmakers, and a pipefitter on weekends,
27 on a Saturday, and train'm on how to run that tool. I got to do it 2
28 Saturdays, and they cut the funding as far as overtime for it.
29
30 [background movement]
31
32Mike Fleming: [16:58] [tapping] How many toolmakers is there in the group?
33
34Mark Kirkey: Well, [sigh], tryin' to think. [tapping] Total, I think, there is 26 or 27. But
35 right now general assembly's gonna be [background movement] 1 short,
36 and body shop is gonna be about 4 short for their original numbers.
37
38Female: [Do you 17:24]...
39
40Mark Kirkey: So we've – and we've come down. When I first come into the group in '87,
41 it was 62.
42
43Male: Wow.
44
45Female: Wow.
46

1 [whistle]
2
3Female: [17:32] Do you, um, work in groups? [tapping] Or do you work by
4 yourself when you...
5
6Mark Kirkey: We generally work by ourselves. [tapping] We had a specific area that we
7 covered. [papers rustling] [tapping] Um, we've always been position. We
8 had people in tool room, [background movement] people on the floor.
9 Each area – [tapping] each person had their own area. [background
10 movement] Uh, we had the [CNM 17:32] room and the [Zeiss 17:53]
11 room. We had people over there. Um, and if we needed help, we always
12 had the other [background movement] you'd get help from [scraping]
13 because we always run 2 lines so you had, [background movement] had
14 somebody that was doing the same thing but on another system.
15
16Doug Rademacher: [18:08] Would you share [inaudible 18:08] – [CNM 18:09] and the Zeiss –
17 would you explain those two?
18
19Mark Kirkey: Those are the measuring devices which we check the car with. We take the
20 CAD data, [tapping] [take 18:18] points on it, figure out where something
21 needs to be checked, and we can verify whether or not it was checked
22 [inaudible 18:24] according to the original design. [tapping] And it tells us
23 if we have a problem as far as the sheet metal coming in or the way we're
24 building it.
25
26Doreen Howard: [18:36] [tapping] So when you came in, in '84 [papers rustling] to the
27 present, um, [tapping] what changes have you seen in the processes that
28 the toolmakers did before versus, versus now?
29
30Mark Kirkey: Well, in '8 – '87, um, [tapping] we were workin' mostly with weld guns
31 and presses and stuff. [tapping] Most of our job had to do with pulling
32 weld guns out, changing pivot pens, bushings, stuff like that, to where
33 today, uh, it got down to where we were running clamps, troubleshooting
34 whether something was being built properly or something wasn't working
35 right. We got to figure out how to use – how to get it to work right.
36 [tapping] Uh, processes have changed, probably tenfold, as far as from
37 where we started. It's like the difference between [papers rustling] drivin' a
38 [tapping] car right now and the old stone age Fl-, [laughter] – Flintstone-
39 type cars. [coughing] [tapping] And it's changed that much in processes.
40 [squeaking] And it's gonna make another leap that's even greater.
41 [background movement]
42
43Doreen Howard: [19:44] So technology has contributed a lot to that...
44
45Mark Kirkey: Technology is...
46

1Doreen Howard: [arena 19:47]?
2
3Mark Kirkey: ...being awesome [laughter].
4
5Mike Fleming: One reason why you went from 62 to, [tapping] uh, 29 maybe?
6
7 [tapping]
8
9Mark Kirkey: No [laughter]. That was a management decision.
10
11Mike Fleming: So you feel there is a need for more toolmakers.
12
13Mark Kirkey: Yeah. It was a management decision. [tapping] They've [background
14 movement] – and this isn't to bang on any specific group, [tapping] but
15 we've had managers and supervision that think that the floor needs to be
16 run by electricians.
17
18 [tapping]
19
20Female: [Oh, okay 20:22].
21
22Mark Kirkey: [tapping] And your toolmaker groups, your pipefitter group, and your
23 millwright groups have all gotten cut right down to bare minimums or
24 less. And they do the brunt of the work. But we seem to have a lot of gray
25 areas that doesn't seem to be addressed properly...
26
27Female: [Inaudible 20:42].
28
29Mark Kirkey: ...as far as who's supposed to do what. And we have some things that I
30 don't agree with. They made [Weimers 20:52], electricians, and all the
31 [Weimer] did was rebuild the weld gun. That's not electrical [laughter].
32 That's a machine repair group or a toolmaker group. It's a mechanical
33 group, not electrical. [background movement]
34
35Mike Fleming: [21:08] [tapping] Talk to me about your early years and, uh, when you
36 came in, and anyone that came in to your group. [thud] [tapping] Were
37 there any initiations [paper rustling] or pranks [sniffing] that you all did to
38 a new member within the group [when they first started 21:20]?
39
40Mark Kirkey: No. No. This isn't, this isn't like a college deal. [tapping] We didn't do any
41 initiations. You had different things, you know. You'd get workin' on
42 weekends and stuff, and people pickin' on people, and you're gettin' to
43 learn people, but there's no initiations. [sniffing]
44
45Cheryl McQuaid: [21:39] How about when you first hired in on the line? Didn't you – what
46 was the difference from hiring in on the line and then going to the trade?

1 [tapping] Did that help your relationship with the assembly line hourly
2 worker more or...
3
4 Mark Kirkey: Well, I don't know if it helped my relationship with'm. It gave me a better
5 perspective as [background movement] far as they were concerned,
6 [tapping] which means when they started talkin', I knew what they were
7 talkin' about. [tapping] Also had more concern that I knew what they're
8 doin' chasin' that chain, that it needs a be a little easier for'm, and if I can
9 make it easier, that's a better way to do it. So...
10
11 Doug Rademacher: [tapping] Well, you kinda said it when you first came in to the plant that
12 you thought the, workin' the line was, was, uh, sounded like a vacation to
13 you compared to your – the foundry or forge that you said you were
14 workin' – forge?
15
16 Mark Kirkey: Yeah.
17
18 Doug Rademacher: So now – [tapping] but now you say you respect the fact that people
19 chased the chain.
20
21 Mark Kirkey: Right.
22
23 Doug Rademacher: [22:33] [tapping] Can you elaborate a little more on that?
24
25 Mark Kirkey: My problem is, I can't stand anything that's brain-dead. And if you ask me,
26 the way they want to run [background movement] production is brain-
27 dead. They don't allow the operators to do what they wanna do or how
28 they wanna do it. All they're concerned about [tapping] is doin' it as a
29 robot. And chasin' the chain is brain numbing [laughter]. Yeah. It was, it
30 was a vacation compared to what I did, but it drove me frickin' nuts
31 [laughter]. [tapping] That's one reason why I stayed on intermittent relief,
32 and when I went from that and got reduced out, I went to utility. I got to
33 do a different job every night [laughter]. [tapping] And I could usually
34 learn a job in about a half an hour, at most. And I've gone – I've – when I
35 worked out of hard trim, I worked up in paint, I worked out here in the
36 body shop in the old weld [booth 23:31]. I'd never [made 23:32] welded
37 before, [papers rustling] [tapping] and I went out and [made] welded roof
38 seams one night [laughter]. So I enjoyed it.
39
40 Doug Rademacher: [23:40] So you liked variety?
41
42 Mark Kirkey: Yep.
43
44 Doug Rademacher: [23:42] And this plant offered you that? [tapping]
45

1Mark Kirkey: Yeah. [tapping] Yeah, as far as the utility was concerned. And when I was
2 as – on the toolmaker group, oh, uh, probably about 4 years into it, I ended
3 up bein' the utility, 'cause they needed somebody to cover here, somebody
4 to cover there for vacations or absenteeism or sick leaves. I got to cover it.
5 So I didn't get to do the same job all the time that way either. So I got well
6 rounded on the floor as well.
7

8Doug Rademacher: Well, you said doing 1 job drove you crazy or chasin' the chain. [24:15]
9 Did you feel that was – there was a, there was a group of people that
10 would think that, uh, you were stuck to that line. But you said you had
11 opportunity. Can you – is there a lot of opportunity in, in an assembly
12 plant with General Motors?
13

14Mark Kirkey: There is if you wanna do it. There's people out there that don't mind doin'
15 that. They want the same job every day. [tapping] They wanna do the
16 same thing. They don't wanna rotate like they're askin' them to rotate.
17 There're also people that are like me. They don't wanna stay on the same
18 position every day. They wanna move around. [background movement]
19 And I don't know how you compensate for both, but, [tapping] for me, I
20 need to move around. I can't do the – you know, doin' it 2 or 3 days in a
21 row or somethin' like that. But we're talkin' months, weeks, years on end
22 doin' the same job every day. I can't do that. I get brain numb. I get bored.
23 I don't wanna come to work [laughter]. [tapping] And all I think about is
24 getting out of work when I'm doin' that.
25

26Mike Fleming: [25:14] [tapping] Um, talk about what it is you doin' currently, and are you
27 – is, is, um, you-, what capacity do you [inaudible 25:26]? What, what is
28 your job? What do you, what are you doing now?
29

30Mark Kirkey: My job right now is parts acquisition [laughter]. If there's somethin' in the
31 plant that the new plant needs, I find it.
32

33Female: Hm.
34

35Mark Kirkey: [tapping] Um, I like to think I got a nice little acquisition crew, that we all
36 work together. I have – right now I have 2 toolmakers and electrician that
37 I work with. [background movement] [tapping] We're the only ones left in
38 the plant from the body shop as far as workin' on the floor. They call me.
39 They ask me for specific items. I either go order it or I go out in the shop
40 and find it or one of the electricians – or the electrician and the millwrights
41 do it. [tapping] Uh, my job is to make sure that the life over in LDT for
42 those guys is as easy as I can make it.
43

44Mike Fleming: [26:17] LDT – what's LDT?
45
46 [tapping]

1
2Mark Kirkey: That's the new plant. Lansing [sniffing] Delta Township.
3
4Female: [26:24] [tapping] Can you give me, um, your feelings on the closing of the
5 plant, and, and lookin' around and seeing everything gone and the people
6 gone?
7
8Mark Kirkey: I'm gonna miss it. [tapping] It's a shoehorn process in here, but that's what
9 made it kind of interesting, figuring out how to get somethin' to work
10 within [inaudible] [streets 26:45] that we had. I'm gonna miss some of the
11 set-ups that we had as far as people and organization, workin' with
12 production people. It's – there's enjoyable times. There was bad times. It's
13 like anything else. [tapping] Um, I enjoy workin' with the people. I always
14 got along with the production groups. Um, I guess that's why I enjoyed
15 bein' on per diem the way I was. I got to work with the production group. I
16 got to work with my toolmakers, and I actually think I [background
17 movement] – at least I hope I did, at least the way they acted – I gained
18 some respect outta the toolmakers. That I got a bunch a junk when I first
19 [tapping] got on there 'cause they gave me a bunch a crap for goin' on it,
20 but after a while, the guys wanted to work for me. Partly 'cause I knew
21 what they were doin'. I knew what they had to go through, and I also let'm
22 do their job. I didn't tell'm how to do it.
23
24 [tapping]
25
26Doug Rademacher: [27:48] So was it, uh, somethin' you enjoy doin' as a per diem? Did you
27 want to stay on? Or did [background movement] management decide they
28 didn't have an opening for you?
29
30Mark Kirkey: No. [tapping] I had to get laid off.
31
32Doug Rademacher: So you were in a layoff.
33
34 [tapping]
35
36Mark Kirkey: Yeah. Which I wasn't supposed to be [laughter].
37
38Doug Rademacher: [28:02] You wanna talk about that?
39
40Mark Kirkey: We won't go into that.
41
42Doug Rademacher: [28:03] You don't want to do that?
43
44Mark Kirkey: We don't wanna go into that. No. Uh...
45
46Doug Rademacher: You're [sayin' it 28:06] unjust, though.

1
2 Mark Kirkey: No. It wasn't that. It was outta line. And General Motors paid for it.
3
4 [papers rustling]
5
6 Cheryl McQuaid: [28:19] Do you have a special memory, um, workin' here that you can
7 share with us? Somethin' just unforgettable about this place. [background
8 movement]
9
10 Mark Kirkey: Oh, boy [laughter].
11
12 Doug Rademacher: Well, you can give a couple.
13
14 Cheryl McQuaid: Yeah [laughter].
15
16 Mark Kirkey: Well, I give one that isn't, uh, I guess you can get away with it now.
17 [tapping] You can say it now 'cause they, uh, most of them guys aren't
18 around. [papers rustling] Uh, come in here one Saturday. [tapping] They
19 had a bunch a work to get done. And most of us got all our work done
20 within the first hour or so. Poor planning. They figured an 8-hour job for
21 an hour and a half. So we had a bunch of us in here, and I think at the time
22 there was – geez [papers rustling] – I think there was 12 or 14 of us on
23 second shift. [tapping] And it was a hot summer day. It was, ah, [laughter]
24 [tapping] a little too hot, and before we knew it, we had guys runnin'
25 around with trucks and [laughter] fire extinguishers...
26
27 [tapping]
28
29 Female: Oh.
30
31 Mark Kirkey: ...[hid 29:29] underneath things. And when they'd go by somebody, they'd
32 get squirted. And pretty soon you'd have people up in the steel squirtin' at
33 ya when you went drivin' by and – [laughter]. So it was [laughter] – it got
34 to be a regular fire extinguisher war that night. [tapping] [laughter]
35 Nobody got hurt. Nobody, you know, got into any trouble. All we did was
36 [background movement] get wet.
37
38 Doug Rademacher: The work was done, and the, and the plant became a playground, almost.
39 [tapping] An enclosed playground.
40
41 Mark Kirkey: Yep.
42
43 Female: They did a little cleaning.
44
45 Mark Kirkey: We cleaned. Yes. [laughter] Yeah. We kinda washed things down a little
46 bit [background movement], includin' ourselves. [laughter]

1
2 Doug Rademacher: Did your group, uh – [tapping] on those occasions, did you guys have
3 dinners or something that you did, uh, on a regular basis? [tapping] Or
4 only for holidays?
5
6 Mark Kirkey: Dinners and stuff were usually done in areas. [tapping] Um, usually what
7 happened was, because you worked in a specific area, there might be
8 [papers rustling] 10, there might be 30 production people that work in that
9 area. But you also had, um, electricians. [papers rustling] You had a
10 pipefitter that covered your area. Um, you had millwrights that worked
11 outta that area or came into that area. [tapping] And they'd have somethin'
12 come up, like a holiday would be comin' up or somethin' like that. And
13 everybody would just kinda get together for that area, and they'd have
14 their own little meal. And you'd have a bunch of'm goin' on through the
15 whole plant, 'cause each area did their own little thing. Um, as far as the
16 group – no. [tapping] The toolmakers kinda – if you worked in an area,
17 you went with'm. And if you didn't have an area, you got pulled in by
18 somebody. [laughter] So you didn't get missed out anyway.
19
20 [papers rustling]
21
22 Mike Fleming: [31:19] You mentioned that you came here strictly for monetary, um,
23 reasons. [tapping] Um, talk about the most you made within a year and
24 your [inaudible 31:31]. [coughing] What were they like?
25
26 [tapping]
27
28 Mark Kirkey: Well, let's see. First when I – when I first came here, I got to take the time
29 off durin' the summer, which was nice [laughter]. 'Cause I was on
30 production, I got to take the shuttin' down time. [tapping] And the last year
31 that I was on production, we were on a 6-week shutdown, and I built an
32 addition on my house. [tapping] Had it all done before I come back to
33 work. That was the last time I got a chance to do that [laughter]. 'Cause I
34 went on skilled trades after that, I didn't get time off.
35
36 Doug Rademacher: [32:06] [When 32:06] you called it a shutdown, now that would be a
37 model changeover?
38
39 Mark Kirkey: Yeah. [Inaudible 32:10] normal sh-, summer shutdown. It's a model
40 change. Um, and went anywhere from 6 to 12 weeks [thumping]. I've seen
41 it go longer. I've seen it go shorter. [background movement]
42
43 Doug Rademacher: [32:20] And how's that done now?
44
45 Mark Kirkey: Now it's done on a fly. Uh, you get the 2 weeks [tapping] durin' down, and
46 that's it. [tapping] That General Motors has their normal shutdown, and

1 you do it on the fly. Some of it, uh, [papers rustling] they shut certain
2 spots down and start makin' the changes before the [papers rustling] line
3 even shuts down. [papers rustling] Or they move it off to another area and
4 make the change. The new systems, you won't have to do that. It's just a
5 programming changing software.
6
7Female: Hm.
8
9 [tapping]
10
11Mark Kirkey: So there isn't even gonna be any mechanical changes for the most part. At
12 least not for quite a while.
13
14Mike Fleming: [33:02] [papers rustling] So, again, um, what was the most that you made
15 within a year? And, and I'm sure some of it, when you get in trades and
16 model changeovers attributed to some of that.
17
18Mark Kirkey: Uh, I made \$106,000.
19
20 [tapping]
21
22Mike Fleming: [33:19] So...
23
24Female: [Inaudible 33:19].
25
26Mike Fleming: ...was it worth comin' to General Motors to [background movement] come
27 to work [inaudible 33:23]?
28
29Mark Kirkey: Oh, yeah. Like I said, it, uh, it was a monetary reason. I took a cut in pay
30 when I first come, but I knew it was gonna change. [background
31 movement] But yeah. [papers rustling] I mean, and that was – that
32 \$104,000 was quite a long time ago too. That was about [background
33 movement] 8 years ago.
34
35Female: That's serious cash.
36
37Mark Kirkey: Yeah. When you're talkin' I had over 3,000 hours that year.
38
39Doreen Howard: [33:49] Now, what shift did you say that you worked on?
40
41Mark Kirkey: Second shift for the most part.
42
43 [tapping]
44
45Female: [33:54] And you worked primarily 7 days?
46

1 Mark Kirkey: Uh, we worked 8 years for 7 days.
2
3 [tapping]
4
5 Female: [Oh 33:58].
6
7 Doreen Howard: [34:01] Give me your thoughts [tapping] on, um, [background movement]
8 the new plant. [tapping] Um, you said that you were going to be moving
9 up there. Just give me your thoughts and expectations for the new plant.
10
11 [tapping]
12
13 Mark Kirkey: Actually, it's almost like the Main Street School issue [laughter]. I'm
14 getting all this GMS training [throat clearing], and we're gonna get out
15 there, and I know it's gonna fall down. [tapping] But it's not gonna fall
16 down because of the people. It's gonna fall down because a management.
17 [tapping] Main Street School [issue 34:33], and every time they've tried to
18 [tapping] redo this empowerment to the people on the floor. Every time it's
19 fallen down, it's because management hasn't totally bought into it. Either
20 the floor management hasn't done it or they're upper management didn't
21 back'm on it. And they get into this mentality we've gotta have production.
22 Forget about quality. [throat clearing] [tapping] And then they start
23 screamin' because the quality is bad. Well, let us shut it down and fix it
24 right, and we won't build junk. But we'll see. I told'm I'd have an open
25 mind until they changed it.
26
27 [laughter]
28
29 Doug Rademacher: I'm with ya on that. [35:11] Would you share again about – [tapping] you
30 said it was hard on your family when you made the move...
31
32 [tapping]
33
34 Mark Kirkey: No. It wasn't hard on'm. I was worried about makin' the move. Because I
35 was goin' from havin' full insurance and everything else, and I had, at that
36 time, 3 young kids at home. And I was worried about it because I wasn't
37 gonna have any insurance for the first 6 months [laughter].
38
39 Doug Rademacher: [35:37] You mean the 90 day? Or was it 6 months?
40
41 Mark Kirkey: No, 6 months. You don't get – you didn't get insurance or anything for the
42 first 6 months. Then you got a little bit every 6 months 'til you got your 18
43 months in, and then you got your full coverage. And because I hired in, in
44 production, I started out at 85 percent instead of full rate. If I'd a come in
45 to the skilled trades group, I'd a started out at full, full rate. [background
46 movement] But because there was a hassle in tryin' to get in here, I

1 actually hired in through the unemployment office. I stood out in line
2 [tapping] [coughing] with the other 2500 people that were [laughter] tryin'
3 to get a job that day, [tapping] and I happened to be about number 250 in
4 line.
5
6 [laughter]
7
8 Mike Fleming: Wow.
9
10 Doreen Howard: [36:22] [tapping] Well, in, um, wrapping up here, is there any final
11 thoughts that, that you would like to share with us that we haven't touched
12 on? Anything that you th-, that you want to talk about? And, um, give us
13 your final thoughts of – an overview of the plant and, and your feelings of
14 [inaudible] 36:44].
15
16 Mark Kirkey: Oh, it's a good place. It's been a good place to work. [tapping] I've had a
17 lot of good times here. I've enjoyed my work. I've had some bad times. I
18 don't mind it, but I'll miss it. I think this is somethin' that shouldn't of been
19 closed up. They coulda kept it goin', [tapping] but I – still not
20 understanding the accountants way of doing things. How you can take and
21 say this was the most inefficient system in the corporation when we built
22 more cars than anybody else and more efficiently is – just doesn't make
23 sense to me. But the accountants are runnin' it, so I guess we don't have a
24 choice [laughter].
25
26 Cheryl McQuaid: Mark, thank you so much. Well, I think all of us could...
27
28 Female: Hm.
29
30 Cheryl McQuaid: ...sit here and listen and talk to you for another hour.
31
32 Mark Kirkey: [laughter]
33
34 Cheryl McQuaid: I appreciate the opportunity.
35
36 Doug Rademacher: And we know you were committed to someone at 8:00.
37
38 Mark Kirkey: Oh that's – like I, like I said, it's kind of a variance, but this is one of the
39 issues that I gotta do right now, and he needs somethin' over at the plant,
40 and he's gotta come up with it.
41
42 [tapping]
43
44 Doug Rademacher: Well, I look forward to workin' with ya out at the new facility.
45
46 Female: Thank you.

1

2Cheryl McQuaid: Thank you.

3

4Female: Thank you.

5

6

7/em