

**Betty McNary discusses her career as a production worker and  
UAW member at the Fisher Body plant in Lansing, MI**

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4  
5 Marilyn Coulter: Marilyn Coulter with the Fisher Body Historical Team. It's September 1,  
6 2005, at 1:00, uh, interviewing Ms. Betty McNary. [0:13] Um, Betty,  
7 would you like to...?  
8  
9 Betty McNary: I'm better known as Betty. My name on my birth certificate is Kathleen  
10 but when I became a citizen here I wanted to ask if I, 'cause I went  
11 through school as Betty, a nickname, somebody in the family didn't like  
12 the name of Kathleen [chuckle] and so they nicknamed me Betty. I went  
13 through school and everything as Betty, so when I became a citizen in this  
14 country, I was born in Toronto, Canada, I asked them if I could have the  
15 name of Betty 'cause I was better known as Betty and they said yes, so I  
16 went by Kathleen Betty and everything legal now is Kathleen Betty. I  
17 sign Kathleen Betty so it won't get mess, messed up.  
18  
19 Marilyn Coulter: Well, Kathleen Betty McNary.  
20  
21 Betty McNary: You can call me Betty.  
22  
23 Marilyn Coulter: All right, that's fine but I will, I'll call you Betty. [0:57] Um, so Betty,  
24 um, did you, will you spell your name for me, please, so they have it on  
25 the record?  
26  
27 Betty McNary: McNary?  
28  
29 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
30  
31 Betty McNary: M-c-N-a-r-y.  
32  
33 Marilyn Coulter: [1:10] And, um, you hired in when?  
34  
35 Betty McNary: I hired in in May of, the second time, May of '48.  
36  
37 Marilyn Coulter: May of '48. [1:21] And what department did you hire in?  
38  
39 Betty McNary: Cut and sew.  
40  
41 Marilyn Coulter: Cut and sew. [1:25] And that was considered what department?  
42  
43 Betty McNary: Cut, they always called it cut and sew.  
44  
45 Marilyn Coulter: Oh, okay. [1:32] Was that what later became known as the cushion room?  
46

1 Betty McNary: Well, then the cushion room was the other end of it.  
2  
3 Marilyn Coulter: Okay.  
4  
5 Betty McNary: It was [inaudible 1:38]. We made the stuff for the cushion room to f-,  
6 finish up the cushions.  
7  
8 Marilyn Coulter: Oh.  
9  
10 Betty McNary: We made the coverings.  
11  
12 Marilyn Coulter: Okay.  
13  
14 Betty McNary: We sewed the coverings that went on the cushions, see.  
15  
16 Marilyn Coulter: So now – and you hired in in 1948.  
17  
18 Betty McNary: Mm-hm.  
19  
20 Marilyn Coulter: [1:53] So now what did, what year did you hire in prior to that?  
21  
22 Betty McNary: I hired in in '46 and worked one year and was off for a year and then I  
23 needed a job really bad and so I wondered if I could get back in. I had to  
24 leave the first time because babysitting problems. I had young children  
25 and I had to have a reliable babysitter because you can't just leave kids on  
26 their own. They were only 6, 8, and 10 and, and I lived in the country,  
27 rural, and it was hard to get someone to come out in the country to take  
28 care of the kids so I had to quit. [throat clearing] And then there was a  
29 neighbor lady that finally offered to take care of them, so the following  
30 year I said gee, I wish I could get back in, you know, I'd go to work there  
31 because I felt more comfortable, I had a year's experience there. And one  
32 of my friends, [throat clearing] her name was Lepha Muzzy, she retired  
33 from Fisher too, she talked to Mr. Drinkwater and he was the  
34 superintendent of the cushion room, of the sewing department. So  
35 anyways, she, he said yeah, have her come in, so I came in and of course  
36 they hired me again and I stayed there for my 30 years. [chuckle]  
37  
38 Marilyn Coulter: [3:06] So you worked in the cushion, in, in the cut and sew for your...  
39  
40 Betty McNary: Cut and sew.  
41  
42 Marilyn Coulter: ...for your entire 30?  
43  
44 Betty McNary: Uh, no, that went out, that went out in '58 the cut and sew, see. It went  
45 out. They moved to Grand Rapids, cut and sew did.  
46

1Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
2

3Betty McNary: And then they called us back and, uh, I came back in to the cushion room  
4 assembly and of course the people were called back, naturally, we were  
5 going to be replacing people, so we weren't accepted very readily, you  
6 know.  
7

8Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
9

10Betty McNary: And I can understand. So if you couldn't do a job that was very high  
11 production, you were out three days and then you're out, so I don't know  
12 how many people washed out but I was one of them. And, uh, but that  
13 was all right because they called me back a little while later and then I  
14 came back in and I went, went in to the paint department.  
15

16Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
17

18Betty McNary: And I went there the rest of my time.  
19

20Marilyn Coulter: [4:06] So now what was it like for a woman coming in to the plant back in  
21 1946, '48, what was that like to be a woman working in a, in a factory  
22 back then?  
23

24Betty McNary: I worked with a lot of women. I went into a department where there was  
25 women. The men, men were the stock people. They picked up the  
26 materials that we had sewn together and moved it on to the next stage of  
27 the process of fixing this cushion or the seatback or whatever so I was  
28 with women so it was comfortable.  
29

30Marilyn Coulter: Okay. [4:37] So, um, were there women working in other parts of the  
31 plant or just in the cut and sew room?  
32

33Betty McNary: There were some women but not as many. I didn't get in the rest of the  
34 plant very much but there wasn't as many women as there is today, which  
35 of course it came to where we could work the same amount of hours, get  
36 the same rate of pay for the same job in time, you know, thanks to the  
37 union so that really helped us, you know.  
38

39Marilyn Coulter: [5:00] So initially when you worked in, women got paid less than men  
40 working?  
41

42Betty McNary: Oh yes. Because there wasn't men sewing on the sewing machines.  
43

44Marilyn Coulter: Oh.  
45

46Betty McNary: We didn't have men. They just had foremen as men.

1  
2 Marilyn Coulter: [5:11] So was it a large difference in pay between what the men made and  
3 what the women made in the sewing room?  
4  
5 Betty McNary: As far as I understand it was but I really don't...  
6  
7 Female: [5:19] Do you recall how much you made?  
8  
9 Betty McNary: I don't know how much I made. To the best of my knowledge I think  
10 when I started [throat clearing] the very first time I think was, well, I don't  
11 know why 97 cents comes into my mind but I think it was a dollar  
12 something. It may have been \$1.79.  
13  
14 Marilyn Coulter: That was a lot of money back in 1948.  
15  
16 Betty McNary: That was in '48 when I, I think it was \$1.79 because they had a contract I  
17 guess in between or something. I don't remember what happened but I –  
18 and of course after you work three months for a little less money but if  
19 you got your seniority, like three months, you got a 10 cent raise and then  
20 you stayed on so that was the way it worked at that time. I don't know  
21 how it is now.  
22  
23 Marilyn Coulter: [6:06] So, um, can you tell me what, um, were some of your fondest  
24 memories about it and what it was like to work? How was the work?  
25  
26 Betty McNary: The work was hard. It was hard. I mean you had to make production. I  
27 mean, if you didn't, they were on you to make it. If you didn't do a good  
28 job, they had women coming around inspect, they'd pick up a piece of  
29 your work that was on the floor in front of you and check it out, you know.  
30 If you were, weren't doing a good job they'd naturally [inaudible 6:32] up  
31 and...  
32  
33 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
34  
35 Betty McNary: ...we got called to the office. I never did get called. I was very fortunate.  
36  
37 Marilyn Coulter: Oh.  
38  
39 Betty McNary: I, I was blessed but [inaudible 6:40] always made production but I tried to  
40 do a good job [throat clearing] because I was, I was so thrilled to have that  
41 job and make that kind of money to support my family...  
42  
43 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
44

1 Betty McNary: ...that I would just do the best I could. All the way to the day I retired, I  
2 did the best I knew how. I never felt like I had to back up for my  
3 paycheck.  
4

5 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
6

7 Betty McNary: Never.  
8

9 Marilyn Coulter: That's wonderful. [7:04] Now you said, now, now at that time were you  
10 married or were you widowed?  
11

12 Betty McNary: Oh yeah, I was married.  
13

14 Marilyn Coulter: So you...  
15

16 Betty McNary: But my husband was not a provider. He had an illness and he was not a  
17 provider.  
18

19 Marilyn Coulter: Oh, so you had to do everything.  
20

21 Betty McNary: I had to, I had to get out and work.  
22

23 Marilyn Coulter: [7:17] So, um, what were some of the other conditions like as far as for  
24 women's facilities and things like that?  
25

26 Betty McNary: I'll be honest with you, I was blessed, so I didn't complain. I, I could get  
27 along fine.  
28

29 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
30

31 Betty McNary: It was a community bathroom but they had private toilets [inaudible 7:35]  
32 toilets but it was a big bowl around where you washed your hands and  
33 like 12 people I think could get around this big bowl and you stepped on a  
34 lever and the water come out all the way around and you washed your  
35 hands there.  
36

37 Female: It's still like that today.  
38

39 Betty McNary: And we had, we had toilets with doors and private, you know.  
40

41 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
42

43 Betty McNary: And then, of course, there was the women's and the men's, it was  
44 separate.  
45

46 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.

1  
2Betty McNary: That was true.  
3  
4Marilyn Coulter: [7:59] So, um, did you, during your time here, were you involved in any of  
5 the strikes that were...?  
6  
7Betty McNary: Oh yes.  
8  
9Marilyn Coulter: [8:08] Can you tell us about that a little bit?  
10  
11Betty McNary: Well, [throat clearing] we went out on strike, gosh, when was it? I can't  
12 think of the year. That's part of the aging process I think.  
13  
14Marilyn Coulter: That's fine.  
15  
16Betty McNary: But anyways, we went out on strike and I, and then I did come here at the  
17 hall and worked on the phone for a couple of days [inaudible 8:26] [throat  
18 clearing] at the gates. [throat clearing] When I went back, I got called  
19 back to work after the strike was over, I was called to the office, they, they  
20 said I was picketing [inaudible 8:37]. It wasn't me, they had me mixed up  
21 with someone else and I proved it because I was at the union hall working  
22 that time and that really shook them up because they were swearing that I  
23 was out in front picketing and so that was quite an experience. But I, I  
24 never had much trouble picketing. I mean, they, they never bothered. It  
25 seemed like whatever shift I had or whatever I had to do, I never was  
26 bothered that much. I never had, I'm sure some of them got people going  
27 by and cussing them and, you know, misusing them, you know.  
28  
29Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
30  
31Betty McNary: But I never had that.  
32  
33Marilyn Coulter: [9:12] Do you remember any of the things that you went on strike for?  
34  
35Betty McNary: Well, we went on strike for, #1 we went on strike for better working  
36 conditions. They felt like we weren't – they were pushing too hard, they  
37 wanted more production, you know. And, uh, another thing, they wanted  
38 to take away breaks several times and then they went on strike for of  
39 course I'm sure it was money too. I never had the greed gene. I was so  
40 tickled [inaudible 9:43]. I apparently was one of the, there's some more  
41 like me but I never, 'cause I was so [inaudible 9:49] having a job, a good  
42 job and I'm limited, my education is very limited.  
43  
44Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
45

1 Betty McNary: I thought oh my goodness, to make that kind of money. I tell you, I was  
2 just, you know, you couldn't get a job like that anyplace else unless you  
3 had a good education.  
4

5 Marilyn Coulter: [10:06] So may I ask you what type of education did you have?  
6

7 Betty McNary: I went to, I went through 8<sup>th</sup> grade and then I had to get out and work when  
8 I was at home. And then I, I got so fed up with being misused because I  
9 couldn't mix in with the Jewish family, Jewish culture because we moved.  
10 My mother figured I was getting old enough I'd be getting married  
11 sometime and I had to be in with the Jewish people, you know, and [throat  
12 clearing] so I left home. I left home at 16 and I went to the United States.  
13 I hitchhiked to the United States and I got a job in a restaurant there. I  
14 worked, you know, that's the only thing I had first and then, of course, the  
15 man, one man, the first man that come along that was [inaudible 10:56]  
16 married him, there you are, you know. And I was just a young punk. I  
17 didn't even know. I wasn't dry behind the ears even.  
18

19 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
20

21 Betty McNary: But I was up all by myself.  
22

23 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm. [11:07] Was being Jewish, um, an issue for you when you came  
24 to the States?  
25

26 Betty McNary: No. But I've never really forced it out too much because I didn't want, I  
27 had it so much when I was younger but I couldn't handle it, the stress was  
28 that. So it just really, it was, but it, I'm sure it, it is at times and places.  
29 I'm sure it happens here in this country but I've been blessed. I tell you,  
30 God, God has been certainly good to me. He's taken care of me since I  
31 was born.  
32

33 Marilyn Coulter: We're going to take a break for just one second. We're going to take a  
34 break [inaudible 11:43]. [11:45] So going back into the factory again, um,  
35 what can you, well, as far as the supervisors, what were they like?  
36

37 Betty McNary: The ones I came in contact always treated me good.  
38

39 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
40

41 Betty McNary: But I think part of it was they always told me that I always tried to do a  
42 good job. I have to, I have to, I'm not bragging myself. I hate to but it  
43 was true because I really did try.  
44

45 Marilyn Coulter: Now I know you spoke about, uh, Drinkwater but you didn't particularly  
46 care for the person above.

1  
2 Betty McNary: The person above, the plant manager...  
3  
4 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
5  
6 Betty McNary: ...when he'd come around, I hate to say this but he spit on the floor right in  
7 the sewing room, didn't make any difference. He just, he was a t-, tobacco  
8 chewer so he spit, you know, go along just spit, just didn't even think of  
9 getting, of carrying a can along with him or spit in a cloth or anything but  
10 on the floor and that was terrible. Here we are putting our stuff on the  
11 floor with, that we sew, it's going to go on cushions and seats and stuff.  
12  
13 Marilyn Coulter: So he was just, what...  
14  
15 Betty McNary: He was mean-looking even. He just, he had an air about him [inaudible  
16 12:53] I would hate to tangle with him.  
17  
18 Marilyn Coulter: Oh.  
19  
20 Betty McNary: He had an air about him. He just looked, looked very fierce even. And I  
21 don't know him personally. I didn't have any personal contact with him.  
22 He stood behind me and beside me watching me work and it made me  
23 nervous because I knew he was the plant manager.  
24  
25 Marilyn Coulter: [13:12] So upper management came out on the floor a lot back then?  
26  
27 Betty McNary: [Inaudible 13:14] not a lot but Drinkwater now he would come around a  
28 lot but the plant manager didn't.  
29  
30 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm. [13:22] Now how was your immediate supervisor?  
31  
32 Betty McNary: Oh he, I've always, never had any trouble with him, never. I never had  
33 trouble with him. Oh gosh, he was the nicest guy, the first one in the  
34 sewing room, I can't think of his name too. And Massick, there was  
35 another one that was nice. Massick was underneath this other one. I can't  
36 remember, Massick I can't remember his name 'cause he was in the cut  
37 and s-, sew room and the Building 15, he was just over that part there.  
38 Massick, I can't think of his first name. He was, he was nice.  
39  
40 Marilyn Coulter: That's the last name.  
41  
42 Betty McNary: I never had many, much trouble with any of the foremen, really I didn't. I  
43 think it's because I stayed minding my own business. That was the best  
44 thing for me to do in my consideration. I have my family and everything.  
45  
46 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.



1  
2 Betty McNary: I didn't want to get fired. I didn't want to get laid off.  
3  
4 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
5  
6 Betty McNary: So I really stayed by myself.  
7  
8 Marilyn Coulter: [14:12] Now how did the community look at women who worked in the  
9 plant?  
10  
11 Betty McNary: Outside the plant, people thought that women that worked in the plant  
12 were loose women but a lot of them did. They went across to Harry's Bar  
13 and drank. A lot of them met their husbands there and drank. I'm not  
14 saying all just as everybody else but that was a fact, I mean that was well  
15 known and that's why I stayed to myself pretty much.  
16  
17 Marilyn Coulter: Hm. Because you were a married woman.  
18  
19 Betty McNary: Well, I was married and I had a family and I wanted my job and I didn't  
20 want to get into trouble.  
21  
22 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm. [14:48] So do, would you think that oftentimes that the  
23 community had the wrong impression of what factory workers were?  
24  
25 Betty McNary: Yes. Definitely yes, because a few of them showed it that way and what,  
26 what they see, you know, they see them going out across the street to  
27 Harry's Bar, you know. A lot of people, community people live all around  
28 there, you know.  
29  
30 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
31  
32 Betty McNary: And it just, it was sad, it was sad.  
33  
34 Marilyn Coulter: [15:15] Now did you know, did many of your coworkers – how did you  
35 get to work? I mean did you carpool or?  
36  
37 Betty McNary: I, I drive. No, well, at first my father and I, I rode with my father-in-law  
38 until he retired and then I had to drive and then I had to learn to drive. I  
39 never learned to drive until I was 33 I think it was. [chuckle]  
40  
41 Marilyn Coulter: [Inaudible 15:34] 33.  
42  
43 Betty McNary: And I rode to work with my, my father-in-law just lived a very short  
44 distance from me and so he, um, he's the one that actually helped get in in  
45 the first place because he went there and talked to Tommy Burns was the,  
46 I guess he must have done the hiring and he must have talked to him, you

1 know. And Tommy Burns liked everybody. My father-in-law was kind of  
2 a kibitzer and he knew Tommy real well so he asked him I guess if, if I  
3 could get in and Tommy said bring her in. Well, I went in and he hired  
4 me.  
5

6Marilyn Coulter: [16:11] So, um, with working in there and you worked in the sewing room  
7 and then after you, the sewing, the cut and sew room went away, where  
8 did you go to then?  
9

10Betty McNary: Well, then they took me into the, I would say they called it the cushion  
11 room...  
12

13Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
14

15Betty McNary: ...to assemble the cushion backs and seats and that was really tough but the  
16 people there did not want us. They, I mean they didn't welcome when  
17 people come in because they were going to be losing their jobs. They  
18 didn't want replacements and I can't blame them so I didn't feel bad when  
19 I washed out. They wouldn't show me all the details of how to do it the  
20 right way and everything.  
21

22Marilyn Coulter: [16:50] So you were unable to work there?  
23

24Betty McNary: So, no, they laid me off.  
25

26Marilyn Coulter: [16:53] And how long were you laid off?  
27

28Betty McNary: I laid off about six months.  
29

30Marilyn Coulter: Hm. [16:58] So, and when you came back in you came into...?  
31

32Betty McNary: I came into the sewing room.  
33

34Marilyn Coulter: [17:02] And can you, you do it until...?  
35

36Betty McNary: No, it wasn't the sewing room then. I came in to paint. That's when...  
37

38Marilyn Coulter: You went into the paint after that.  
39

40Betty McNary: 'Cause, 'cause cut and sew was eliminated.  
41

42Marilyn Coulter: Yes.  
43

44Betty McNary: That's why I got laid off.  
45

46Marilyn Coulter: And then you went to...

1  
2 Betty McNary: Mm-hm.  
3  
4 Marilyn Coulter: [17:13] And so when you went to paint, what did you do in paint?  
5  
6 Betty McNary: Well, I started out, um, spraying deadener. And, uh, let's see, what else  
7 did I do there? Mostly painting, I did that, I did everything.  
8  
9 Marilyn Coulter: [17:27] So now what part of the car were you putting the deadener on?  
10  
11 Betty McNary: In the trunks, in the trunks so then they, they made carpets and stuff where  
12 they put on top of this deadener that was to deaden the noise down I think  
13 from pebbles and stones I guess hitting the bottom of the car.  
14  
15 Marilyn Coulter: [17:45] So now when you went in to the paint department, were there, was  
16 that particular department mostly women or at that point did you become  
17 integrated...?  
18  
19 Betty McNary: It was mostly women.  
20  
21 Marilyn Coulter: ...with the men?  
22  
23 Betty McNary: It was mostly women.  
24  
25 Marilyn Coulter: In the paint department...  
26  
27 Betty McNary: Mm-hm.  
28  
29 Marilyn Coulter: ...there was still mostly women.  
30  
31 Betty McNary: Mm-hm.  
32  
33 Marilyn Coulter: Ah. [17:57] And so now when you're working there and you said about  
34 production and getting production, how many jobs did you guys build  
35 back then around, do you remember?  
36  
37 Betty McNary: I'm trying to think. I, I must have known then but I really have no idea at  
38 that time. There must be records someplace of that.  
39  
40 Marilyn Coulter: [Inaudible 18:12] don't remember that's fine. [18:15] Um, what, what do  
41 you remember about breaks?  
42  
43 Betty McNary: About what?  
44  
45 Marilyn Coulter: About the breaks, about your lunches and your breaks.  
46

1 Betty McNary: Oh, I see.  
2

3 Marilyn Coulter: [18:21] What did you do for lunches and breaks?  
4

5 Betty McNary: Well, we had this, um, break, we had a break in the morning and the  
6 afternoon, it was six minutes. The line stopped and that was, it really  
7 relieved your mind that was really an important thing because your mind  
8 has a rest, it doesn't see the car going 'cause we used to go outside, of  
9 course they had a smoking area back then and the people would go out  
10 there and smoke and then, and then I took up smoking. I went out there  
11 just to, to relax, to get away from that constant noise because when the  
12 cars went into the ovens and they went through the different processes,  
13 paint and they had to go through an oven to, to heat, dry the bodies off, it  
14 was very noisy, it was just a noisy [inaudible 19:06] they made a lot of  
15 noise. I suppose it's noisy in there now, I don't know. I haven't been in  
16 the plant since but it's, they were very noisy and it was hot, very hot.  
17

18 Marilyn Coulter: [19:17] So, um, they had designated smoking areas for you?  
19

20 Betty McNary: Yes, yes.  
21

22 Marilyn Coulter: [19:21] And that was because of it was in the, in the smoking, department  
23 or was it the plant rule in general?  
24

25 Betty McNary: I think it was plant-wide because of the fact of the material and stuff  
26 around if they catch fire, smoking, you know.  
27

28 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
29

30 Betty McNary: They had to have smoking areas.  
31

32 Marilyn Coulter: [Inaudible 19:32] allowed to smoke inside the plants. [19:36] So what did,  
33 um, some people...?  
34

35 Betty McNary: Oh, and we had lunch hour. Now we stopped for lunch, they stopped the  
36 lines for lunch. I think different areas stopped at certain times, I mean,  
37 body shop was different because we had to keep the lines running all the  
38 time I guess they had to stock something up or bodies or something. But  
39 anyways, we had lunch and we had 42 minutes if I'm not mistaken, 42  
40 minutes was our lunchtime at that time and I think at the end I think we  
41 only had a half hour. Is it half hour now?  
42

43 Marilyn Coulter: It's half hour.  
44

45 Betty McNary: Yeah, then they cut it down to a half hour but we used to be 42 minutes.  
46

1 Marilyn Coulter: [20:16] So what type of things, I know some people went to, to Harry's  
2 but what are some of the other things people did back then for breaks?  
3

4 Betty McNary: They had a cafeteria. You could go up to [inaudible 20:23] cafeteria but  
5 most people brought their lunch.  
6

7 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
8

9 Betty McNary: I, in fact, in fact, I got acquainted with one of the ladies real nice and she  
10 was, stayed to herself pretty much and we, we used to go out and sit in this  
11 one place and have our lunch and we'd discuss the issues of the world and  
12 just solve them [inaudible 20:42]. [chuckle] We had a good time.  
13

14 Marilyn Coulter: [20:45] So what are some of the, the big events that happened in the  
15 change in the Fisher Body that you remember?  
16

17 Betty McNary: Well, the big event was when I got laid off and I didn't know if I'd ever  
18 get back in a job again, that was when the cut and sew went out.  
19

20 Marilyn Coulter: Uh-huh.  
21

22 Betty McNary: See, we could have went there but I couldn't because I couldn't move to  
23 Grand Rapids because of my family, you know.  
24

25 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
26

27 Betty McNary: I couldn't.  
28

29 Marilyn Coulter: [21:09] So what about as we fast forward, coming forward, um, I mean  
30 was there any particular other plant managers that you remember well?  
31

32 Betty McNary: Step, Step, that the only, that's his last name, his last name [inaudible  
33 21:24].  
34

35 Marilyn Coulter: [21:24] Cleve Stepter?  
36

37 Betty McNary: He, he asked me [throat clearing] to go on a relief job. They needed a  
38 relief person what they call [inaudible 21:35] where they, they dip the  
39 bodies and stuff.  
40

41 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
42

43 Betty McNary: And I said I don't know, I said. He said listen, he says [inaudible 21:43]  
44 try it and 'cause he says you're here all the time. We never have to look  
45 for you to place you, he said. And that's a relief person replaces anybody  
46 that's off, you know, you step in to take someone else's job.

1  
2 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
3  
4 Betty McNary: So I did that and they said gee whiz, he said, I was pretty good 'cause I  
5 was regular. That was it. And I always tried to do the best job I could. I  
6 tried to cover up if there was mistakes. Sometimes you got, you get  
7 something that doesn't fit good, you know, and right and everything so the  
8 next guy has got to work around it maybe it's part of what you have to do,  
9 see, so you have to kind of cover that up, you know, fix it up and that's  
10 what, I always tried to do the best job I could, that was all. That was my  
11 nature.  
12  
13 Marilyn Coulter: [22:28] So when you worked here, did you get involved in any of the  
14 women auxiliaries or things that later became the women's committees or  
15 anything like that?  
16  
17 Betty McNary: I went into, um, I went into the women's committee for a while but it  
18 interfered with me at home. I just couldn't. I had children who were  
19 going to sports and stuff like that. I just couldn't take the time to do that.  
20  
21 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
22  
23 Betty McNary: But then after I retired, I was chairperson of the retirees for a while but  
24 then I just, it was just too much, too time consuming, I mean it just really  
25 was so I just [inaudible 23:01]. I promoted other people [throat clearing]  
26 for those jobs [throat clearing] and then they tried to get me again but I  
27 said no, it wasn't for me because I just didn't have the time or the energy  
28 for that. I had other interests.  
29  
30 Marilyn Coulter: [23:17] Now I understand, now do you have any other family that worked  
31 here?  
32  
33 Betty McNary: Yes, I had, well, I've got a granddaughter and I have a son that just retired  
34 here a couple years ago and, in fact, my father-in-law worked here. That's  
35 the one that got me in. He worked here, so we've, there was quite a few of  
36 us McNarys.  
37  
38 Female: [23:35] Can you tell us their names for the record?  
39  
40 Betty McNary: Well, my father-in-law was Sherman McNary. Uh, my son's name is  
41 Shane McNary. In fact, he just retired a couple years ago. A lot of people  
42 know him well because, in fact, we can't go shopping anyplace 'cause  
43 everybody knows him. [chuckle] [sneezing] And [inaudible 23:54] of  
44 course, he got around. He was a repairman, he was an electrician. And  
45 then I have Connie Swander who was financial secretary the last session  
46 here, so, and then myself.

1  
2 Marilyn Coulter: [24:07] And Connie is your granddaughter, right?  
3  
4 Betty McNary: Connie is my granddaughter.  
5  
6 Marilyn Coulter: Okay, so, um, I understand, um, 'cause I know Connie. She told me that  
7 you had a pretty good experience in going to I think it was Japan.  
8  
9 Betty McNary: Oh, I went to China.  
10  
11 Marilyn Coulter: China.  
12.  
13 Betty McNary: China.  
14  
15 Marilyn Coulter: [24:24] Can you tell us about why you went to China and what you did  
16 there?  
17  
18 Betty McNary: First of all, I was approached to go to China because I was a factory  
19 woman, a female, and they wanted, all they would get was these doctors  
20 and nurses, what they call the educated, you know, people and I said I  
21 couldn't afford to do that, you know, I just [inaudible 24:44] I couldn't  
22 afford to do that. And they said we'll help raise the funds for it. And I  
23 asked my family. They said oh my goodness, go, who else has got an  
24 opportunity. They said [inaudible 24:57] been there for '77, you know,  
25 and I thought oh Lord have mercy, so I thought well okay, I'll try it, so I  
26 went and the union helped support it too.  
27  
28 Female: [25:08] And what year was that?  
29  
30 Betty McNary: '77 I think.  
31  
32 Female: '77.  
33  
34 Marilyn Coulter: '77.  
35  
36 Betty McNary: '77 I think it was.  
37  
38 Marilyn Coulter: [25:14] So what did you do when you went over there? Did you go over  
39 there with a group?  
40  
41 Betty McNary: Yes, it was a group. The U.S.-China Peoples Friendship Association and  
42 they raised funds for me and we had things at the union hall. They, they  
43 helped raise funds for me and, in fact, it cost me very little and it  
44 ordinarily would have cost around at that time I think \$3,000 or \$4,000.  
45  
46 Marilyn Coulter: [25:38] How long were you there?

1  
2 Betty McNary: Twenty-one days.  
3  
4 Marilyn Coulter: Twenty-one days.  
5  
6 Betty McNary: Yes.  
7  
8 Marilyn Coulter: Wow. [25:42] And so what did you do when you went there?  
9  
10 Betty McNary: We went to different places and I told them I wouldn't go unless I went to  
11 a car factory. Oh boy, was that an experience. At the car factory  
12 [coughing] if they had one car go through there in 1 ½ hours that would be  
13 a miracle. I'm telling you it was so slow and people were just working  
14 their buns off trying to kick through the jobs. They must have had too  
15 much to do that's all there was to it. It took about 1 ½ hours before that  
16 job ever got through to go out the door because I tell you it was just ooh it  
17 was so slow but it was nothing like our, our cars, no. Our manufacturing  
18 was so far advanced to that. Then I went to [inaudible 26:29] factory and  
19 different places but they wouldn't take me to, they would not allow us to  
20 go to certain, only to certain places because I'm sure those places that we  
21 went to wasn't very nice but those other places were worse that they  
22 wouldn't let us go to. They were pretty, pretty – the toilets you stood up  
23 above the toilet. There's no modern facilities and that was in big cities, I  
24 mean, main cities. Beijing was one of the biggest cities there, you know,  
25 and so I just, but it just really was very poor, very.  
26  
27 I used to get up in the morning at about 5:00 and go out walking the streets  
28 because I wanted to see the people, I wanted to see how they react, I  
29 wanted to see their homes and that, and I walked just around the  
30 neighborhood close. Well, I tell you, I caused a disturbance one time.  
31 They ride bicycles like just umpteen zillion, you couldn't see through the  
32 bicycles and they all looked at me 'cause of course I'm a white person and  
33 I was an American, you know, and they all looked at me and they'd turn  
34 around, they're on bikes and gee, I don't know how many fell off their  
35 bikes. [laughter] What, what, what a catastrophe and, boy, the police  
36 come along and said please move along lady. [chuckle] And so I moved  
37 along. Oh, it was really something.  
38  
39 And then I see people get, go to the little truck to get their milk. They had  
40 a little bitty bottle, a half a pint little bottle for milk. Just it was amazing.  
41 And then they do brush their teeth over there but they go out in the  
42 backyard like you do in the country and brush your teeth and spit on the  
43 ground. [chuckle] It was really amazing. It was really unique.  
44  
45 And one time there was a group of us walked in the evening and there was  
46 a watermelon truck and we all [inaudible 28:11]. I said wouldn't you like



1 watermelon. No one had money. I had money with me. I says okay, I  
2 said we'll buy a watermelon and we'll see if they'll cut it for us and we'll  
3 eat it. So I had money with me and I didn't know how, I couldn't, they  
4 didn't know English for beans and I, I handed out some money out  
5 [inaudible 28:26] so they took that. I don't remember just how much it  
6 cost. And they cut it for us and I, I tried to give a little girl a piece of it,  
7 they would not let her have it. I don't know why because they'd seen it  
8 whole and everything there but I just, whether she was shy and their  
9 family or whatever but they didn't let her have it. But it was an  
10 experience. We were trying to demonstrate we wanted, wanted them to  
11 cut it and it was just really charades I guess you'd call it. It was really an  
12 experience but it was a good experience really. I was glad I went but I  
13 really – today would be so much different I'm sure. It's modernized and  
14 everything but it was so, so primitive, so primitive.  
15  
16 But every window had some box of greenery. There was not a window  
17 that didn't have some box of greenery growing. If it was vegetables or  
18 just green leaves, something, it was something green. They just were  
19 growing something. Another thing their, their coal mine was open, you  
20 could see their coal mine was just open. And then you see the, the  
21 vegetation in the gardens it was like terraced all the way up the hill,  
22 terrace and then space and terrace, you know, it wasn't a wide terrace, and  
23 they're growing the vegetables and that was right there. That was an  
24 experience to see and then, um, [inaudible 29:50] car assembly was really  
25 something. I don't know if it ever got through in 1 ½ hours but the thing  
26 would never, never [inaudible 29:58].  
27  
28 Marilyn Coulter: [29:59] So their working, how would you say their working conditions  
29 were compared to ours? I know they were working so what were the  
30 conditions like?  
31  
32 Betty McNary: I know it was very primitive and they worked a lot harder.  
33  
34 Marilyn Coulter: Than what we did.  
35  
36 Betty McNary: They had to work a lot harder. They, they didn't have time for nothing.  
37 They didn't even have time to wipe their nose, at least we could have. We  
38 could wipe our nose even if it's one hand we could do something but they  
39 couldn't. I tell you, that was something.  
40  
41 Marilyn Coulter: So...  
42  
43 Betty McNary: Of course it would be different I'm sure.  
44  
45 Marilyn Coulter: [30:25] So now, um, you said when you came here you said that you  
46 retired in '79.

1  
2 Betty McNary: Yeah.  
3  
4 Marilyn Coulter: And so, um....  
5  
6 Betty McNary: I got my 30 years and out. We fought for 30 years and out for a long time  
7 and I had my 30 years and I figured I wasn't rich but I wasn't going to get  
8 rich and I'll be able to get by on my pension because I lived simple and I  
9 still live simple...  
10  
11 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
12  
13 Betty McNary: ...yet I've managed. I can take care of myself. I don't have to have  
14 anybody else support me unless the whole country goes to pot then my  
15 money will go down the tube too. [chuckle]  
16  
17 Marilyn Coulter: [31:04] So now you said you fought for 30 and out, so was the 30 and out  
18 part of one of your strikes that you [inaudible 31:08]?  
19  
20 Betty McNary: Yes, one of our strike benefit at the time. [Inaudible 31:10] I was on two  
21 strikes I think, two or three, two or three strikes.  
22  
23 Marilyn Coulter: [31:16] What was the longest strike you remember being out?  
24  
25 Betty McNary: The longest was only about a month I think it was, a month...  
26  
27 Marilyn Coulter: Hm.  
28  
29 Betty McNary: ...to my recollection. I could be wrong on that.  
30  
31 Marilyn Coulter: [31:26] Now did many of the people that you struck with during the 30  
32 and out, did they take advantage of it too or did they stay longer?  
33  
34 Betty McNary: I don't know if they did or not. I, I'm sure they did. I'm sure they did  
35 because I know a lot of people did because I know p-, particularly I have  
36 to say skilled tradesmen. I'm not knocking it 'cause I have a son  
37 [chuckle] and a daughter, granddaughter but at that time it seemed like  
38 they could, I've seen them stand around and talk to their girlfriends. I say  
39 girlfriends 'cause they were the same ones all the time they're spending  
40 their time with, you know, and they weren't doing anything, you know.  
41  
42 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
43  
44 Betty McNary: But when the line stopped when there was a breakdown, boy, everything,  
45 they were walking, they were moving, they were just everywhere, those  
46 repairmen were out there working their buns off too but when everything

1 was running smooth it seemed like they didn't have that much to do but  
2 right now I don't think th-, th-, that condition still exists.  
3

4Marilyn Coulter: [32:26] So, um, if you had to be asked, um, what was your fondest thing  
5 that you remember about working in the plant, what would that be?  
6

7Betty McNary: I had a couple of friends there. I really, really – Ann Muzzy, her name  
8 was Letha Muzzy, she worked at Fisher Body, and Mary, it's Benedict  
9 now, no, Kimball now. It was Benedict. She, her and I had, I got real  
10 close with them. Ann Muzzy came to be a neighbor of mine and Mary,  
11 uh, Kimball I met in the shop only but we kept up our friendship and I  
12 tried to see her now but she has Alzheimer's and it's kind of hard to  
13 communicate so it's difficult. Of course, she lives in Lake Odessa and I  
14 don't drive anymore, so getting over there is a little bit of a problem.  
15

16Marilyn Coulter: Hm.  
17

18Betty McNary: But everybody knew Mary. Mary was a very, very nice lady. Ann Muzzy  
19 was too as far as that goes. She was a different personality, different  
20 person.  
21

22Marilyn Coulter: So what would you say made, um – 'cause Fisher Body has been here, had  
23 been here in Lansing for a long time.  
24

25Betty McNary: A long time.  
26

27Marilyn Coulter: [33:45] What would you say was the key to their success here?  
28

29Betty McNary: Key to what, their success?  
30

31Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
32

33Betty McNary: They built a quality car 'cause I think most of the people tried to do the  
34 best they could and I think that, and the engineering I think was good. I  
35 think it was better at that time and I don't, I don't know whether the edu-,  
36 I have to say I think education sometimes has gotten away because I think  
37 right now I think General Motors has let us down. They didn't build any  
38 car to compete with any of the lower-gas-consuming cars on the market  
39 and this has been going on for years people are buying them. They  
40 wanted them. We showed them the technology. They brought them over,  
41 showed us, they brought, took them to our plant and showed these foreign  
42 countries how to assemble these cars and do it and I feel bad about that.  
43

44 In fact, there was an experience I had when I was metal cleaning. I seen  
45 we were always buy American, buy American, what does this [inaudible  
46 34:50] say, Japan. The steel was from Japan. I said what are we doing

1 with this steel from Japan, and that was really hot to buy American. So I  
2 called the committeeman and I said did you know this, this metal is from  
3 Japan? He said yes and he said there's nothing we can do about it. I said  
4 what do you mean? So I had, his name is on the tip of my tongue, top  
5 committeeman, and he said they have an agreement that we were going to  
6 show them and agreed we buy this metal so I thought right then the union  
7 let us down. They shouldn't be forcing us to try to buy American if we  
8 can't do it and we're working on this Japanese metal, nothing being done  
9 about it. We have our own steel here, steel factories. We did have, where  
10 are they now? They're long gone aren't they?  
11  
12Marilyn Coulter: [35:45] And that's – when you say that they are long gone now, now back  
13 in the 40s, um, what was industry like here?  
14  
15Betty McNary: Well, I think it was pretty good. I think everybody was pretty much the  
16 people were working if they want. If they wanted a job I think they could  
17 get one.  
18  
19Marilyn Coulter: Uh-huh.  
20  
21Betty McNary: But today there's not the jobs that we used to have.  
22  
23Marilyn Coulter: Oftentimes I've heard people say there was Oldsmobile and there was  
24 Motor Wheel and there was Diamond REO.  
25  
26Betty McNary: Yes, there was. Yeah, there was other places.  
27  
28Marilyn Coulter: And then the forge, and then the job forges here.  
29  
30Betty McNary: But see, those disappeared. They, they [inaudible 36:23] that's true.  
31 Those were here and yet they went out of business. Why did they? Drop  
32 Forge is metal and stuff, you know. There you go.  
33  
34Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
35  
36Betty McNary: We, we cut our own throats in a lot of ways.  
37  
38Marilyn Coulter: That's...  
39  
40Betty McNary: I have to say this. The union let us down in a lot of ways. They maybe  
41 can't print that but I'll tell you, I, I felt they have. We, we should have  
42 had a car. We should have had engineers educated enough to keep  
43 competing, have a car better than the competition that we have to face.  
44  
45Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
46

1 Betty McNary: What have we got today? General Motors is in trouble.  
2

3 Marilyn Coulter: [37:04] So let me ask, so if you were to give a message to the young  
4 workers of today, to the young union members of today, what would that  
5 message be?  
6

7 Betty McNary: Get in there at the union. See what you could do to get these things, union  
8 stronger, the union has to be. Because we have to have a voice but we  
9 can't, we cannot cater to management like we have. We've let them get  
10 above us.  
11

12 Marilyn Coulter: Yeah.  
13

14 Betty McNary: We got, and I hate to say this maybe you can't print this [inaudible 37:36]  
15 say this, but I think they got their hands, both of them got their pock-,  
16 hands in each other's pocket too much.  
17

18 Marilyn Coulter: All right.  
19

20 Betty McNary: I don't know whether you can say that or not but I'm, I'm saying it.  
21

22 Marilyn Coulter: Well, you said it.  
23

24 John Fedewa: Betty, you talked about when you came in you, you made \$1.79 in the  
25 [chuckle] cushion, in the cushion room. [38:00] Um, from the time you  
26 hired until the time you retired, could talk about or let us know what you  
27 felt about General Motors and, and the life it afforded you and your  
28 family?  
29

30 Betty McNary: I'll tell you, General Motors was very, very good to me, very good to me.  
31 I cannot complain. I, I really, the only thing is I wish they would have  
32 taken some of the raises and put it into our benefits to be sure the people  
33 that retired their benefits won't be messed up.  
34

35 John Fedewa: [38:31] So the benefits that you have now as a retiree, um, you, you would  
36 have liked to have had just a little more?  
37

38 Betty McNary: No, I'm satisfied but I'm afraid they're going to mess it up some more  
39 because they've messed it up a little. I can manage. I can manage all right  
40 with it now but I'm afraid 'cause other companies have cut out insurances  
41 and everything and I'm afraid of that.  
42

43 Marilyn Coulter: [38:53] How much, now how much w-, was your, um, you said you were  
44 making \$1.79 when you hired in, how much were you making when you  
45 retired?  
46

1 Betty McNary: You know, I can't really remember the exact amount. [throat clearing] It's  
2 got to be, it's got to be, I wish I had kept track of it and I should have kept  
3 my check stubs but I didn't. There's got to be an idea what.  
4

5 John Fedewa: [whispering].  
6

7 Marilyn Coulter: [39:15] Was it \$7.95?  
8

9 John Fedewa: Yeah.  
10

11 Betty McNary: Was what?  
12

13 Marilyn Coulter: [39:19] Does \$7.95 sound...?  
14

15 Betty McNary: Oh, it was more than that.  
16

17 Marilyn Coulter: It was more than that.  
18

19 Betty McNary: It was more than that.  
20

21 Marilyn Coulter: [39:24] More than that?  
22

23 Betty McNary: I think so.  
24

25 Marilyn Coulter: [Inaudible 39:26] 1979...  
26

27 Betty McNary: Of course, you know, one thing though, we did lot, work a lot of overtime.  
28 We worked Saturdays so that, that made your wages go up...  
29

30 Marilyn Coulter: Hm.  
31

32 Betty McNary: ...really and even your check [inaudible 39:36].  
33

34 Marilyn Coulter: [39:37] So what type of hours did you work back then?  
35

36 Betty McNary: Oh, at first we only had to work, work 40 hours, then it got to where we  
37 could work, um, 54 hours, then it got to where we can w-, work as much,  
38 and that was all issues of the union. The union has been good but they've  
39 been waxing some of the things that needed to be taken care of too, you  
40 know, really.  
41

42 Marilyn Coulter: So did you...?  
43

44 Betty McNary: 'Cause a lot of people want just money, money now [inaudible 40:02]  
45 contract going up, you know. That's what they want, more money. They

1 don't stop and think when they retire you want to be sure that that's going  
2 to be there when you get done.  
3  
4 Marilyn Coulter: [40:12] So, um, the, um, being a woman back then did you also have to  
5 work some of those 12-hours days or those 13-hour days that the men  
6 [inaudible 40:23]?  
7  
8 Betty McNary: I never got to work that long but I did work seven days a week a couple  
9 times. In fact, I had to come in one time on [coughing] was it a Sunday, a  
10 Sunday worked four hours because Buick needed some work and we did  
11 some work for them in the sewing room. That was in cut and sew. I was  
12 shocked when they brought us in on Sunday. I mean that was, and there  
13 was, most of them came in.  
14  
15 Marilyn Coulter: [40:49] There was nothing you could do about it? Could you refuse it?  
16  
17 Betty McNary: Well, we could refuse but it just didn't look good. I mean I didn't want to  
18 ever have a black mark against me so I went, I would do that.  
19  
20 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
21  
22 Betty McNary: I would work.  
23  
24 Marilyn Coulter: So you were just a model employee. [chuckle]  
25  
26 Betty McNary: I think I was. Well, the day before I retired, [Inaudible 41:10] come up to  
27 me and wanted me to stay.  
28  
29 Marilyn Coulter: [41:13] Who did?  
30  
31 Betty McNary: [Inaudible 41:14].  
32  
33 Marilyn Coulter: [Inaudible 41:14]?  
34  
35 Betty McNary: [Inaudible 41:15], he come up and got me personally to talk to me.  
36  
37 Marilyn Coulter: And he was...  
38  
39 Betty McNary: He's the plant manager.  
40  
41 Marilyn Coulter: He was the plant manager then.  
42  
43 Betty McNary: Yeah. And he come up, he says won't you please stay. He asked me  
44 won't you please stay. I said no. If I die today you'd have someone take  
45 my place tomorrow. He said I can't deny that but he says we don't have

1 the people as loyal and faithful as you've been, so I felt really good about  
2 that.  
3  
4 Marilyn Coulter: [41:41] So now during your work time, did you take vacations?  
5  
6 Betty McNary: Yeah, we had vacations. Uh, I always took my vacation when the plant  
7 was down for model changeover.  
8  
9 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
10  
11 Betty McNary: I always took my kids and Muzzy her brother had a cottage at Higgin or  
12 Houghton Lake. We always rented that. She took her three kids and I had  
13 my three kids and I, I had a car and I drove it up there and the kids were  
14 always hanging out the window. [laughter] They liked it. They had a  
15 good time up there.  
16  
17 Marilyn Coulter: So the model change was when it went from one year to the next.  
18  
19 Betty McNary: Yeah.  
20  
21 Marilyn Coulter: [42:13] And how long were those model changes?  
22  
23 Betty McNary: Around two weeks, two to three weeks.  
24  
25 Marilyn Coulter: Two to three weeks.  
26  
27 Betty McNary: And then we still got set money, you know, we got set pay. And they,  
28 well, I always got my vacation check [inaudible 42:31]. I don't know how  
29 you guys get them now, once a year...?  
30  
31 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
32  
33 Betty McNary: ...you get'm? And we used to get'm and it depends where, what year or  
34 what...  
35  
36 Marilyn Coulter: What month.  
37  
38 Betty McNary: ...time of the month you were hired in.  
39  
40 Marilyn Coulter: Hired in either in the summer or the winter.  
41  
42 Betty McNary: Yeah.  
43  
44 Marilyn Coulter: Depending on when you got your vacation check.  
45



1 Betty McNary: So I was very fortunate I got mine in the summer and we used that  
2 [chuckle] for our vacation.  
3

4 John Fedewa: [42:50] When you were in, uh, the, the cut and sew and, and most of the  
5 ladies weren't used to working Sundays, but was that the case with the  
6 men in production within the shop? Did they work Saturdays and Sundays  
7 all the time or sometimes?  
8

9 Betty McNary: They worked, they worked, that was a very unusual Sunday. That was  
10 only one Sunday that I ever remember working on a Sunday. Saturdays  
11 got to be quite frequent. They got, General Motors, their car was a good  
12 car. We were making a good product and they were selling.  
13

14 John Fedewa: [43:22] But I guess I'm asking is what about the other people, the men...?  
15

16 Betty McNary: I think most of the people were there.  
17

18 John Fedewa: ...the men, the men in the shop.  
19

20 Betty McNary: [Inaudible 43:28].  
21

22 John Fedewa: They were, they were allowed to.  
23

24 Betty McNary: Well, I wasn't around too much men, too many men.  
25

26 John Fedewa: But they, but they were allowed to work.  
27

28 Betty McNary: Oh, absolutely. Oh, absolutely. They were working, they had as much  
29 privilege. The only thing is I was cut and sew. I don't think that the men  
30 were [inaudible 43:40] that Sunday. Of course nowadays, I don't know if  
31 they even have to come in on Sunday. Well, I mean, skilled trades don't  
32 they have to have somebody on the, what is it?  
33

34 Marilyn Coulter: In the powerhouse [inaudible 43:51].  
35

36 Betty McNary: Powerhouse.  
37

38 Marilyn Coulter: Yes. But now I was going to say, [inaudible 43:55] about the women  
39 because of when you, when you hired in the predominant number of them  
40 worked in the, in the cut and sew room and then the cushion room and  
41 then the paint department.  
42

43 Betty McNary: I worked around mostly women.  
44

45 Marilyn Coulter: And then that's primarily, so those were the departments where most of  
46 the women were all would you say...

1  
2 Betty McNary: [Inaudible 44:12] there was women scattered through the plant but not as  
3 predominant as other [inaudible 44:16].  
4  
5 Marilyn Coulter: [44:16] I mean how many women would you guess probably worked here  
6 back then?  
7  
8 Betty McNary: It must be around 400 or 500.  
9  
10 Marilyn Coulter: [44:26] 400 or 500?  
11  
12 Betty McNary: I would think so. I think so.  
13  
14 Marilyn Coulter: So [inaudible 44:28].  
15  
16 Betty McNary: Throughout the whole plant.  
17  
18 Marilyn Coulter: Throughout the whole plant.  
19  
20 Betty McNary: I mean, I think there was but now I don't know what [inaudible 44:32]. I  
21 have no idea. Gosh, you got women working in tinsmith even, I mean.  
22  
23 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
24  
25 Betty McNary: [Inaudible 44:37].  
26  
27 Marilyn Coulter: So there were no women, skilled tradeswomen when you came in I'm  
28 sure.  
29  
30 Betty McNary: No, there wasn't but there finally was before I left, so yes. There was, in  
31 fact, I think there was one woman that got to be, wasn't she a head of one  
32 of the departments? I think one of the women got to be the head of one of  
33 the departments, I can't remember which one.  
34  
35 Marilyn Coulter: [45:02] So that, so, so there were, most of the supervisors were men then?  
36  
37 Betty McNary: Yeah, men, men, men supervisors.  
38  
39 John Fedewa: [45:09] From 1948 until what time do you think it got much better for  
40 you? Because if I, if I'm not mistaken there were times when the auto  
41 industry wasn't selling cars that they would lay people off, if I'm not, am I  
42 mistaken here?  
43  
44 Betty McNary: I think it depended on your seniority, the layoffs, see.  
45  
46 John Fedewa: So you...

1  
2 Betty McNary: I wasn't laid off very much.  
3  
4 John Fedewa: [45:33] But it did get lean when they weren't selling cars, right?  
5  
6 Betty McNary: Well, yeah. You, you always worked just the eight hours, like 40 hours,  
7 five days a week, eight, eight hours a day. The only time if some people  
8 had [inaudible 45:45] the line or something we got home, sent home early  
9 because they had to stop the line for something happened, maybe down in  
10 the body shop or something so they had to, the line stopped and they...  
11  
12 John Fedewa: [45:58] Was there ever a time that it got to where it was negotiated for you  
13 to be able to get supplemental, supplemental pay when the lean times  
14 came?  
15  
16 Betty McNary: Oh yes, see, that's happened, yeah. That happened when we started  
17 [inaudible 46:15].  
18  
19 John Fedewa: [46:17] Do you remember when that happened?  
20  
21 Betty McNary: I don't remember just what year that was either. If we worked, had the  
22 short workweek and it was not our fault, you know, it was the Company's  
23 fault, they had to make up a certain percentage. Yeah, I don't know just  
24 when that was either. I'll be honest with you, I should have kept track of  
25 all that. Just I'll tell you one thing, when you work in a, on the line, you  
26 don't use your head too much, you do it, you do it automatically and that's  
27 boring. I need, I think they need to change people around [chuckle] more  
28 often so [inaudible 46:47] different job. See, when I was relief person, I  
29 got around to do different jobs, that's why I could take that relief job  
30 easier, see.  
31  
32 John Fedewa: [46:58] You, you lived through the Depression, didn't you?  
33  
34 Betty McNary: 1920, do you think I was living through the Depression?  
35  
36 John Fedewa: Yes, I do. [47:05] Um, could you talk about the Depression and, and what  
37 you felt the economy was then and after?  
38  
39 Betty McNary: You know, I'll be honest and tell you, I can't tell you that I was, I wasn't  
40 [inaudible 47:18] because my mother was an unusual woman, unusual.  
41 We walked miles to [inaudible 47:26] an indoor like market where they  
42 had vendors outside the houses and streets [inaudible 47:36] an area and  
43 we walked quite a few miles to get there and we'd come home with both  
44 our arms full of bags, you know, big, heavy bags. And we bought, we  
45 used to go late at night on the weekend 'cause Jewish people of course  
46 Sunday they just were closed, you know, they closed Friday and then

1 Saturday and Sunday, so anyway, we'd go and, you know, they instead of  
2 buying the first-class oranges, my mother bought ones they were going to  
3 discard. We bought them. She took them home. I'd go to school maybe  
4 on Monday and I'd take a half an orange that had been cut off [inaudible  
5 48:16] the other kids were looking at me, I'm eatin' an orange. They said  
6 "Where did you get that?" I says "My mom." Never thinking that I was  
7 underprivileged or I was privileged. They were underprivileged. I lived  
8 in a, we lived in a poor neighborhood.  
9

10Marilyn Coulter: Hm.

11

12Betty McNary: Really, it was. And my mother was just an unusual woman. She could  
13 take a little of nothing and make a big meal out of it. Probably your  
14 mothers could do the same.  
15

16John Fedewa: Oh certainly, you know.

17

18Betty McNary: And that's the way it is. But my mother was really an unusual, she never  
19 married again. She never. She, she was still a young enough woman.  
20

21John Fedewa: [48:57] What was the first automobile you bought, Betty?

22

23Betty McNary: Pardon?

24

25John Fedewa: [48:59] What was the first car you bought?

26

27Betty McNary: First car I bought, General Motors. I never bought any car but a General  
28 Motors car.  
29

30John Fedewa: [49:05] What kind, Betty?

31

32Betty McNary: It was a Buick. It was a secondhand car, it was a Buick. It was, in fact my  
33 husband, he's the one that picked it out, of course, you know. It wasn't  
34 my choice. I didn't want a convertible [inaudible 49:20] want a  
35 convertible. Oh God Almighty. And that's when I learned to drive. That  
36 was my very first, and that was when I was 33. Oh Lord have mercy.  
37 [chuckle] [Inaudible 49:35] drive something else.  
38

39John Fedewa: [49:38] When you finally got to where you could pick your own car, what  
40 type did you pick Betty?  
41

42Betty McNary: Uh, I'd just pick an Oldsmobile, that's all. That's all I ever bought was an  
43 Oldsmobile.  
44

45Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm. [49:50] How did you feel about it when Oldsmobile...?  
46

1 Betty McNary: Pardon?  
2  
3 Marilyn Coulter: [49:53] How did you feel when Oldsmobile became nonexistent anymore?  
4  
5 Betty McNary: It's hurting.  
6  
7 Marilyn Coulter: That's the only vehicle...  
8  
9 Betty McNary: It's hurting. It's hurting. I feel bad.  
10  
11 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
12  
13 Betty McNary: It just hurts my heart. [crying] It hurts my heart.  
14  
15 Marilyn Coulter: Hm.  
16  
17 Betty McNary: And we could still be right up there. [whispering]  
18  
19 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
20  
21 Betty McNary: I hate to think of this plant not being here. [crying] It's tough.  
22 Oldsmobile was mighty good to me, mighty good. I thank the Good Lord  
23 he sent me here and they hired me. I took care of my family. It was  
24 tough. Tough [inaudible 0:48] not going to be here no more. It will  
25 always be Fisher Body to me. This plant will always be Fisher Body until  
26 the day I die.  
27  
28 Marilyn Coulter: [51:05] Because when you retired it was still Fisher Body, right? And  
29 then it became, the name changes came later.  
30  
31 Betty McNary: It was Fisher Body.  
32  
33 Female: Thank you Betty.  
34  
35 Marilyn Coulter: Yes, thank you.  
36  
37 John Fedewa: Yes, Betty, we want to thank you very much for coming.  
38  
39 Marilyn Coulter: Yeah.  
40  
41 John Fedewa: We want... [audio clicked off]  
42  
43 Marilyn Coulter: We talked a little bit about the plant, Betty. [51:26] Can you tell us a little  
44 bit about the UAW Local 602? Do you remember has it always been here  
45 or were you here when this facility was being built here at 2510 West  
46 Michigan?

1  
2 Betty McNary: I, I wasn't, it wasn't here when I first – in fact, when I joined, when I went  
3 to work I joined the union just the day I even hired in there. They said you  
4 didn't have to join right away. I says I'll contribute right now 'cause I just  
5 believed in unions and I still do but I do think they have their bad points  
6 too and that's all, that's everybody. But this plant – this, this union hall  
7 wasn't here then. [Inaudible 52:02] in fact, we used to pay our dues at a  
8 different place too. [throat clearing] We used to go someplace. I  
9 remember a cage we used to pay our union dues there.  
10  
11 Marilyn Coulter: [52:12] So you had to go to a cage and pay your dues?  
12  
13 Betty McNary: Well, it was someplace...  
14  
15 Marilyn Coulter: [52:14] It wasn't automatic out of your check?  
16  
17 Betty McNary: No. And then finally it got to where it was out of our check. It wasn't.  
18 We had to go to pay our union dues.  
19  
20 Marilyn Coulter: Oh, you had to go and pay your union dues.  
21  
22 Betty McNary: We had to pay union dues.  
23  
24 Marilyn Coulter: [52:26] So how did, um, did you guys get the building here at 2510?  
25  
26 Betty McNary: I really don't know how that came about but anyways they finally got it.  
27 'Cause I wasn't attending, I couldn't, I had small family.  
28  
29 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
30  
31 Betty McNary: I had to be home. I had to do the washing, the ironing.  
32  
33 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
34  
35 Betty McNary: The house, the whole household run I had to do it on the weekends...  
36  
37 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
38  
39 Betty McNary: ...'cause I was tired from the shop.  
40  
41 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
42  
43 Betty McNary: But I just – when it was here and then when I got to where I started  
44 coming to union meetings and everything I just, I just was blessed  
45 [inaudible 53:01].  
46

1John Fedewa: We just...  
2

3Betty McNary: I was glad to have the union. I mean, the union has been good to me. I  
4 can't deny it but I do feel like it, it could go back to where it used to be  
5 because right now I don't think, I think there's too much, well, I'll tell  
6 you, I think Walter Reuther would turn over in his grave if he knew  
7 everything that was going on right now with the union 'cause he was a  
8 union member.  
9

10Marilyn Coulter: [53:27] Did you ever attend any of the rallies or anything when they were  
11 on strike or did you ever, did you see Walter?  
12

13Betty McNary: [throat clearing] I used to go to some of them with like the nurses and that.  
14 I used to go to some of them when they were striking but I couldn't very  
15 well because I still had family, you know, to take care of and things.  
16

17Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
18

19Betty McNary: And I lived out in the country and all that, it just was tough.  
20

21Marilyn Coulter: Hm.  
22

23Betty McNary: It just...  
24

25John Fedewa: [53:50] Was there a nice attendance when it came to the union meetings  
26 that you went to? Were there several people or few people?  
27

28Betty McNary: There wasn't as many as there is now I'm sure but right now I feel like so  
29 many of them it's just because a lot of them they have to be. That's an  
30 awful thing to say [chuckle] but a lot of them they have to be here because  
31 the positions that they hold but I do think that there's got to be a way of  
32 getting more unionism into the people. There really is because without a  
33 union, if they stop and think without a union where would we be.  
34

35Marilyn Coulter: [54:27] When you came in did they have any kind of union initiation? Did  
36 you have any kind of union education when you came in other than  
37 knowing that it was the right thing to do?  
38

39Betty McNary: No. I [throat clearing] we were just had to come and get sworn in. No,  
40 that was when I was, became president, uh, chairperson but just pay dues  
41 and in fact, they used to come around and collect them even sometimes  
42 from the shop.  
43

44Marilyn Coulter: [54:53] How did they get information to you about the union back then,  
45 like if the union was doing something, if they're getting ready to go on  
46 strike? How did you guys get information on that stuff...?

1  
2 Betty McNary: I think...  
3  
4 Marilyn Coulter: ...working on the line?  
5  
6 Betty McNary: Uh, I think there was some way of posting having a meeting and then  
7 word of mouth in the shop. I mean if anything happened, boy, it got  
8 around that shop. I'm sure right now if anything happens, that shop in half  
9 hour the whole thing knows, the whole plant knows, you know, it's just  
10 the way it is. I can't remember reading anything but I must have read  
11 something. We used to have a bulletin board but I'm sure they didn't  
12 allow that stuff up in the, on the bulletin boards. That's what I was trying  
13 to figure. There's got to be some way.  
14  
15 Marilyn Coulter: [55:31] So when you guys went on strike, did you just walk out?  
16  
17 Betty McNary: Well, word got around.  
18  
19 Marilyn Coulter: You guys just...  
20  
21 Betty McNary: And they told us what time to go and that's it, we went.  
22  
23 Marilyn Coulter: You just dropped your guns and went.  
24  
25 Betty McNary: Just dropped and went right then, absolutely, walked out [inaudible 55:47]  
26 and that was it. No problem as far as I was concerned.  
27  
28 Marilyn Coulter: Okay, thank you.  
29  
30 Betty McNary: I really, really, I got to say that the union has been good to me. I have to  
31 say it but General Motors has been good to me [inaudible 56:06] with, you  
32 know, the people that worked here, the foremen and I had a good  
33 experience here, I really did. I got to say that and not, and not, and not  
34 everybody says that.  
35  
36 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
37  
38 Betty McNary: But I think it's your own attitude lots of times, what you make out of your  
39 own situation. I needed a job and I was so thankful to have it, so I wanted  
40 it to be worth it.  
41  
42 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
43  
44 Betty McNary: That's the way I feel, you know. That's the way I feel about life. God  
45 must think I got something more to do because he's keeping me around.  
46 I've already lived my [inaudible 56:43]. [laughter]



1

2Marilyn Coulter: Well, we're glad you're still here to share the story. Thanks.

3

4Betty McNary: You're welcome. You're very welcome.

5

6Marilyn Coulter: All right.

7

8

9/mlc