

**George Nelson discusses his career as a production worker
and UAW member at the Fisher Body plant in Lansing, MI**

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5 Doug Rademacher: Good morning. I'm Doug Rademacher, and I'm here with the Fisher Body
6 Historical Team. We are going to interview George Nelson today. It is
7 October 26th at approximately 9:20, and we are in the Labor Relations
8 conference room in 2005. Good morning, George. [00:26] Would you
9 please state your full name and spell your last name for the record?
10
11 George Nelson: George Nelson, Jr., and, uh, last name's spelled N E L S O N.
12
13 Doug Rademacher: Thank you. And what is your address?
14
15 George Nelson: 16271 South Lowell Road.
16
17 Doug Rademacher: [00:43] What is your marital status?
18
19 George Nelson: Single.
20
21 Doug Rademacher: [00:48] Do you have any children?
22
23 George Nelson: Yep.
24
25 Doug Rademacher: [00:52] And that is...
26
27 George Nelson: I have two daughters. I have a 19-year-old and a 10-year-old.
28
29 Doug Rademacher: That's wonderful. [00:58] And do you have any, uh, education? What's
30 your education?
31
32 George Nelson: No. [laughter] High school then everything GM can throw at me.
33
34 Doug Rademacher: Excellent. [01:07] Did you have any military service?
35
36 George Nelson: No.
37
38 Doug Rademacher: Okay. Uh, we're going to go around the room and identify all the people
39 in the room.
40
41 Doreen Howard: Doreen Howard.
42
43 Cheryl McQuaid: Cheryl McQuaid.
44
45 John Fedewa: John Fedewa.
46
47 Linda Johnson: Linda Johnson.

1
2 Doug Rademacher: And I'm Doug Rademacher. Good morning to you. [01:22] George,
3 would you please tell us about hiring in? Give us your hire-in date and the
4 department and shift in which you hired into.
5
6 George Nelson: It was August 29th, '78. Uh, they brought a bunch of us in. I put in two
7 applications to get in here, and, uh, the lady that was going through the
8 applications had both of 'm and said, "You must've wanted in here bad,
9 huh?" I say, "Yep." So, they brought us all into a big room, one of the
10 conference rooms up here and, uh, sat us down and divided us up into two
11 groups and the one group, they said you go to the armpit of Fisher Body.
12 And I'm like, "Oh, great. What's that?" And that would be the body shop.
13 They had us down in the body shop.
14
15 Doug Rademacher: Okay. [02:05] And, uh, tell me, what brought you to Fisher Body?
16
17 George Nelson: The money.
18
19 Doug Rademacher: [02:09] How did you hear about them hiring?
20
21 George Nelson: Oh, it was, it was public knowledge. I was driving a semi at the time. I
22 had to take a day off work for two days to stand in line. And the lines
23 went all the way down Verlinden... and it was actually pretty neat.
24
25 Doug Rademacher: Okay. So, your first day in the plant, tell us about that.
26
27 George Nelson: Well, they took us down in the body shop and, uh, asked all right – I –
28 they gave me a choice of hang car doors or puttin' in a striker. I had no
29 idea what a striker was, and to this day, that was one of my biggest
30 mistakes [laughter] 'cause I chose car doors 'cause I thought, "Well, I, I
31 know what a door is. It can't be that hard." Well, I was wrong. It was
32 pretty heavy. They were [Del 02:52] 88 doors and 98 doors, and my
33 buddy, he got the striker job, which was puttin' a striker in, which is
34 nothing more than a large bolt with a ratchet and tappin' it with a little,
35 bitty hammer. And he was right down the line from me, so I got to watch
36 him do that eight hours, ten hours a day, whatever we were workin', and
37 I'm liftin' doors that weighed about 75 pounds and hittin' 'm with a big
38 hammer with no lift assists or anything like that. Just pick'm up, slam'm
39 on, bolt'm on, beat'm up.
40
41 Doug Rademacher: [03:24] And what was the plant called when you hired in?
42
43 George Nelson: Fisher Body.
44
45 Doug Rademacher: [03:28] Okay. Do you remember your starting wage?
46

1George Nelson: Yep, \$7.77 an hour.
2

3Doug Rademacher: That was a lucky day for ya.
4

5George Nelson: Yes, it was.
6

7Doug Rademacher: [Been playin' that 03:36] ever since or hopin' to [inaudible 03:38]. Uh, tell
8 us about your boss and, and the union. [03:48] How did they, uh, treat
9 you on your first day in, and were you brought up to speed?
10

11George Nelson: Well, back, back then, you – well, it's still the same, but we don't do new
12 hires too much anymore, but you had to get your 90 days in. So, for your
13 first 90 days, you were basically at their mercy. And, uh, it was a lot
14 different than it is now, believe me, they – it was like you were a rookie,
15 and you'd do what they tell ya, and no matter how much work they'd put
16 on you, you'd do it and you couldn't miss no days and you couldn't, you
17 know, do anything really. You just had to be here, so... but the union was
18 around big time.
19

20 I mean, you know, I used to watch'm – they could-, course, couldn't
21 represent us until we had our 90 days in, but they would, uh, be out on the
22 floor fightin' for worker's rights big time, but – and it was pretty much
23 fightin' back then. A lot of yellin' and stuff and fists poundin' on desks.
24

25Doug Rademacher: George, they hired a lot of people at that same time.
26

27George Nelson: Oh, yeah.
28

29Doug Rademacher: [04:40] Did you know other people that you stood in line with? You said
30 your friend was right up in front of you.
31

32George Nelson: Well, he just became my friend from getting' hired in, but – no, actually, I
33 really didn't recognize too many people. There was maybe a handful that I
34 knew from high school that got hired in, you know. But people came from
35 all over, Vermontville, Grand Rapids, Jackson, you know, stood in line.
36

37Doug Rademacher: [05:05] In your work environment, tell me about how the atmosphere was
38 on the assembly line. How did people treat each other or...?
39

40George Nelson: It, it was really good. It was. We all got along, and, uh, it, it was – you
41 got to know people a little more than what you do now because they have
42 the jobs spaced out so much. Before, you were workin' – the minute you
43 got done a car, somebody was right behind you doin' somethin' else. I
44 mean, like for instance, we had four people on each side of the line puttin'
45 car doors on, and you rotated, did every fourth car, you know, so you had
46 a ton of time. You were humpin', but you had a ton of time.

1
2 Doug Rademacher: Okay. [05:37] Do you remember your first boss?
3
4 George Nelson: Yeah.
5
6 Doug Rademacher: Tell us about him.
7
8 George Nelson: Sam [Sikes 05:51]. Yeah, he was ornery, let's put it that way. He was
9 very ornery, and he loved to mess with new hires, you know. He'd be on
10 us hard. Me and him never really, uh, saw eye to eye for a long, long
11 time, I think, all the way up 'till about the last year before he retired, then
12 we got along.
13
14 Doug Rademacher: [06:12] So, he took that, uh, uh, we'll call it the, um, the 90 days that you
15 had to be more or less good, he, he took that beyond the 90 days?
16
17 George Nelson: No. No, no, he was – he never changed. He was always the same from
18 day one. I mean, he was just... ornery to put it politely. He wasn't a very
19 happy individual I don't think.
20
21 Doug Rademacher: Talk about the older seniority people. [06:45] How did they treat you?
22
23 George Nelson: Oh, like we were new hires, you know. They were good, but they'd mess
24 with us a lot, but that was kinda – you know, now I look back on it 'cause
25 I've almost got 30 years in. I used to look at those guys that had 25 and I'd
26 go, "My God, they've been here 25 years. No way I'm gonna do that," you
27 know, [laughter] and here it is. But, yeah, we used to, you know, really
28 look up to 'em, and then they'd tell us about when they hired in and how
29 hard it was and, you know.
30
31 Doug Rademacher: [07:12] What was your plan when you hired in? Was it...?
32
33 George Nelson: Actually, my plan was just to work for a few years and then move on to
34 somethin' different.
35
36 Doug Rademacher: Doreen Howard.
37
38 Doreen Howard: [07:24] Um, when you hired in, was there any new-hire pranks that they
39 did to you, to you? You said they messed with ya.
40
41 George Nelson: Oh, yeah. There was – you'd be boltin' a car door on and they had a guy
42 called an intermittent relief guy, and he wou-, he would give you
43 bathroom breaks and stuff, and they would, uh, come walkin' around and
44 dump water on ya, you know, or hit you with a fire extinguisher and, you
45 know. There was a lot more, uh, jokin' around that went on back then and
46 indulgences and whatnot constantly, but it was, it was the auto industry of

1 the 70s. I mean, that's the way it was. It was crazy. It was, you know,
2 everything that you've pretty much heard about it was true, you know.
3

4Doreen Howard: [08:06] Can, can you describe the environment of the body shop? What
5 was it like? Your surroundings.
6

7George Nelson: Oh, it was very loud, very dirty. I mean, when you got eight people
8 bangin' on door hinges all pretty much at the same time, it's pretty loud.
9 And, uh, then you had the jungle, which was all the spot-welding
10 operations, and everywhere you looked you had welding cables hangin'
11 down and welding guns, I mean, as far as you can see, which wasn't very
12 far 'cause it was always smoky. And lots of sparks and noise and, I mean,
13 it was just – it was gross down there. It really was.
14

15Doreen Howard: [08:40] Did you always work in the body shop?
16

17George Nelson: Yep. I've always been there. Yep, since '78. Kinda got comfortable with
18 it.
19

20Doug Rademacher: Linda Johnson.
21

22Linda Johnson: [08:51] Um, you were talking about how noisy it was, did they practice
23 hearing protection back in the 70s? Or –
24

25George Nelson: No, not so much.
26

27Linda Johnson: When did that come in?
28

29George Nelson: I think that was more in the mid-80s. They really started pushing hearing
30 protection and stuff like that. I mean, we always took – we had our
31 physicals with hearing tests and whatnot, and then they also sampled you
32 for lead because there was a lot of lead we were usin' on seams and stuff
33 of cars back then. But, um, nope.
34

35Linda Johnson: [09:16] And you were saying no door assists back then?
36

37George Nelson: No door assists. No -you, you –
38

39Linda Johnson: Er, ergonomically, it was...
40

41George Nelson: Oh, it was bad. It was, it was – I mean, you know. It made ya strong, you
42 know, [laughter] it really did. I mean, you carried doors all day long, you,
43 you know, you're no slouch [inaudible 09:30] by the end of the day. But I
44 can remember goin' home and from the air guns, the first month that I
45 worked, I'd wake up in the middle of the night, and my hands would be
46 closed right shut, cramped right shut, and I'd have to go to the bathroom,

1 turn on hot water, and run'm under there and straighten'm out 'till your
2 hands got built up and used to doin' that.
3
4Doreen Howard: [09:53] How did that...
5
6Doug Rademacher: Doreen.
7
8Doreen Howard: Change over the timeframe that you worked in the body shop?
9
10George Nelson: Oh, a ton. They start – shortly after I hired in, uh, I wanna say maybe the
11 mid-80s, before we switched body styles, they brought in a, a fixture that
12 we used on the doors, which clamped on, which made it a little easier
13 'cause you still had to grab the doors and carry'm, but you slid'm on.
14 Before, you kinda had to kinda hang on to'm and then bolt'm on with the
15 first bolt and then the door would stay on, and then you'd do the rest, you
16 know, free hand. But, um, a lot more ergonomic things, ergonomics
17 started getting more involved, you know, and, I mean, they still had a
18 ways to go, but from when I hired in to now, I mean, it's, you know, those
19 people complained about hanging car doors [inaudible 10:37] it ain't
20 nothin', you know, 'cause you're usin' the airlift assist now and you
21 swing'm on and there's no – there's hardly no effort to puttin' a car door on.
22 It's all timing and getting' your motor skills together.
23
24Doug Rademacher: Doug Rademacher. George, go back to the body shop. [10:55] Tell me
25 about, um, in the camaraderie that you developed in a particular area for
26 that ornery boss you spoke of, um, did, uh, did you guys work and help
27 each other or were you left on your own?
28
29George Nelson: Oh, no. We always helped each other. I mean, everybody that you
30 worked with, you pretty much got along with. I mean, there was a few
31 scuffles where people – you know, anytime you have that many people –
32 and we used to work into the August months big time and for some
33 reason, I, I just remember it bein' hotter back then. Of course, hangin'
34 doors, you know, we didn't have the airflow we do now and whatnot.
35
36 But, uh, yep, people got along good. We used to have, uh, you'd have
37 department softball. I mean, we had softball leagues. This place was so
38 big and hired so many people, I mean, every department had their own
39 softball team. There was a schedule, you know. They rented city parks
40 and – I mean, that, that was a lot of fun. That was a lot of fun.
41
42Doug Rademacher: [11:49] You were afforded breaks according to the union contract?
43
44George Nelson: Oh, yeah.
45
46Doug Rademacher: Talk about...

1
2 George Nelson: Oh, I remember when I hired in, and they told ya – I forget the exact times
3 they were, but you had like a 12-minute break, a 14-minute break and 16-
4 minute break and stuff like that. And then you had your lunch, you know,
5 but they had a break – they'd call it a wagon, and they said that's seven
6 minutes. I looked at'm and I was like, "Right. What are you gonna do
7 with seven minutes?"
8
9 But I tell you what, after two hours on that line hanging car doors, you
10 look forward to seven minutes of that line stoppin' big time. And a little
11 lady'd come around with a cart with, uh, they'd always have coffee and
12 donuts and, you know, honey buns and all that kind of stuff on there. I'm
13 tellin' you; you'd be lookin' down that isle way lookin' for that cart, you
14 know.
15
16 Doug Rademacher: [12:36] So, if you didn't have a clock, the, uh, cart told you what, what
17 was comin'?
18
19 George Nelson: Oh, yeah. You, you knew what was goin' on. We used to have to use
20 actual time cards, you know, the paper time cards over by the escalator in
21 the body shop, and everybody'd stand in line at the end of the day to punch
22 out, you know.
23
24 Doug Rademacher: [12:50] Early on, George, did you – when the break would come and you
25 – did you find yourself still workin' and other people were all gone?
26
27 George Nelson: O, yeah. I'd do that, and then when I first hired in, I wouldn't leave
28 [laughter] 'cause I couldn't find my way out. I had to follow people out to
29 the parking lot 'cause there was s-, so many departments and so much stu-
30 I mean, it took ya a good couple weeks to figure it out, you know, but I'd,
31 I'd, sit on a bo-, a stack of bolts, you know, boxes of bolts and just wait for
32 the break to get over and then go back to work 'cause you didn't wanna go
33 anywhere, you'd never get back.
34
35 Doug Rademacher: [laughter]
36
37 George Nelson: And people wouldn't really help you out, "Yeah, it's over there." They'd
38 point and you're like goin' okay. Then they'd just laugh 'cause they know
39 you were lost, you know.
40
41 Doug Rademacher: Was it – you said you, uh, made the big mistake of choosing doors over
42 strikers. Talk about going – being led down to the body shop, [13:41]
43 what was your first impression?
44
45 George Nelson: Oh, I was like – I just thought, "Oh my God. What'd I get into?" 'Cause, I
46 mean, it, it was just huge and, I mean, I, I like doing that kind of work

1 anyway, but I was goin' [laughter] "Oh, man." I mean, there was people
2 everywhere and it – and it was like you see in those prison movies, you
3 know, when somebody comes walkin' in and everybody stares at'm?
4 Same deal here. You [come walkin' down 14:01] – 'cause they'd lead ten
5 of us down there, you know, and everybody's goin' "Whoo!" and hollerin'.
6 I mean, a woman couldn't walk by in the body shop. There was no way.
7 That whole place would come – you could always tell if a woman was
8 comin' by. I mean, all the way down to the other end of the body shop,
9 you'd hear the hollerin' and the cat calls. A lot's changed. [laughter] Now
10 you get fired, you know.
11
12 Doug Rademacher: [14:25] What'd you do on your lunch break, George?
13
14 George Nelson: Uh, at the start, I just stayed right there. I'd take lunch like a good boy,
15 you know, and then as the years rolled on, you got a bunch of friends,
16 everybody'd book over to, uh, the Shop Stop Bar, and you'd stay over
17 there as long as you could and drink as much as you could and then you'd
18 hurry back and hang car doors as best as you could. [laughter]
19
20 Doreen Howard: [laughter]
21
22 Doug Rademacher: [14:49] Do you remember how long was lunch when you first hired in?
23
24 George Nelson: I wanna s-, I, I think it's was – it's always been half hour. I'm almost sure.
25
26 Doug Rademacher: Doreen Howard.
27
28 Doreen Howard: [15:03] [Inaudible] you've touched base, um, on the women in the body
29 shop. Um, when you hired in, was there very many women at that time?
30
31 George Nelson: Actually, if, if you, uh, could not bear children, they would let you work
32 down there because of the lead, you know.
33
34 Doreen Howard: So, there was very few women then?
35
36 George Nelson: Right. So, that would explain why [the men and the woman 15:23]
37 happened to walk through. I mean, you could still walk through the body
38 shop, they just didn't want you working in with the lead and stuff, so it
39 was mainly men.
40
41 Doreen Howard: [15:32] Wh-, when did that change?
42
43 George Nelson: Uh, when we got rid of the lead, you know, 'cause we went, we went to
44 silicon bronze and stuff, and then they started having more women in the
45 body shop.
46

1Doreen Howard: [15:43] So, that was at the end of the Cutlass?
2
3George Nelson: Yeah, I'm pretty sure it was. Yeah, I think it was when we started the
4GMX130s.
5
6Doug Rademacher: [15:51] What's a GMX130?
7
8George Nelson: Oh, a GMX130 – that's an Olds Cutlass class when we downsized big time
9into Grand Ams and, uh, I mean, we downsized – we went from building
10big cars to little mini cars. That was just enjoyable when you're talkin'
11about hangin' car doors 'cause they were a lot lighter.
12
13Doug Rademacher: Doreen Howard.
14
15Doreen Howard: [16:15] Um, how were the women – how were – what was the reception
16for women and, and – I'm not sure, was there a lot of minorities at that
17time in the body shop?
18
19George Nelson: Oh, yeah. Yep. Yeah. There really wasn't – everybody got along. I
20mean, for the most part, there really wasn't a whole lot of, you know, "Oh,
21we don't want women down here," you know. But when it came to like
22hanging car doors, I can't really remember ever having women hanging
23car doors when I hung'm. I mean, it was just too – you just couldn't do it,
24you know. They were – you had to be a big guy. Everybody that hung car
25doors was pretty much big guys.
26
27Doreen Howard: [16:53] Did you always hang doors? Or [inaudible 16:56]?
28
29George Nelson: No, I – actually, I hung doors –
30
31Doreen Howard: In, in that...
32
33George Nelson: for, for a long ti-, for probably – I think I did that job for three, four years
34and then I got a relief job, which is givin' people their breaks throughout
35the day, and, uh, I still wasn't – doin' doors, you know, but I also had to go
36over to other departments, the metal finisher, the grinding booths where
37they grind metal flanges and... but that's pretty much it. Just stayed right
38in the body shop area. I've done pretty much everything in the body
39shops, but...
40
41Doug Rademacher: [17:29] George, do you have any other family members that work here?
42
43George Nelson: No.
44

1 Doug Rademacher: [17:38] What was your first reaction when the time came where they con-,
2 discontinued being Fisher Body and brought in a new name plate for the
3 plant? Did that mean anything at all to you?
4

5 George Nelson: Oh, yeah. We didn't like it. We didn't like it. We thought that was the
6 beginning of the end, you know, and same way when, when we got rid of
7 the big car. All the old timers all said, "That's it. We get rid of these –
8 these have been our bread and butter forever, and we get rid of'm, we're
9 done." Well, Grand Am proved'm wrong. I mean, you know, that car sold
10 like crazy.
11

12 Doug Rademacher: [18:09] So, when they got done, now building the Grand Am, what was
13 the perception when they went from BOC, Buick, Olds, Cadillac route to
14 the Lansing Car Assembly?
15

16 George Nelson: Uh, everybody pretty much had it with the way they changed the names
17 and just became letters and, you know, the acronyms, they're just hung up
18 on those. I don't get that whole thing, but, uh, they – everybody was like,
19 "You gotta be kiddin' me." You know, every time we turned around, they
20 were changing the sign out on Mission Avenue.
21

22 Doug Rademacher: Doreen Howard.
23

24 Doreen Howard: [18:40] So, um, what was the general perception, um, of the people that
25 you worked with for the name changes? How did they feel about...?
26

27 George Nelson: Oh, they, they got to the point where it was just pretty much a joke. I
28 mean, they were like, "Oh, they changed the name again. Must be tax
29 purposes or something", you know.
30

31 Doreen Howard: [laughter] [19:00] What do you call the building and what did other people
32 in the area...
33

34 George Nelson: Oh, we still – oh, we still call it Fisher Body. I mean, anybody that hired
35 in when it was Fisher Body, it's always Fisher Body. Or the big green
36 building for people – if you're talkin' to somebody young and they don't
37 know Fisher Body, you just say the big green building over there.
38

39 Doug Rademacher: George, you said you had a ornery supervisor when you hired in. [19:23]
40 Did you ever have any good supervisors?
41

42 George Nelson: Yes. Oh, I've had a bunch of'm. I had one, Dick [Dowler 19:39]. He was
43 old as the hills when I hired in, but I'll never forget deer season come
44 around and I still – I don't think I'd quite hit my 90 days in. I was gettin'
45 real close to havin'm in, and everybody was asking for opening day off,
46 you know. And I told him if he let me out that night, I'd go huntin'

1 opening day, and I'd bring him a roast back for second shift. And he let
2 me go home, and man, there was some hot old timers. [laughter] I mean,
3 big time. But I ended up drivin' all the way up to Houghton Lake that
4 night, ended up takin' a deer, and I brought him a roast and stuck it on his
5 front porch before I went to work. So, that worked out pretty good.
6
7 But, yep, I've had a ton – actually, I've had more good ones than bad ones.
8 The people here are really good. I mean, that's one thing that I'll always
9 remember about this place is, you know, the friends you've made and, you
10 know, even – I, I'll usually get along with management anyway unless
11 they don't pay me, then we have issues.
12
13 Doug Rademacher: Okay. Doreen Howard.
14
15 Doreen Howard: You, you started to touch base on the friendships and the people that are
16 here. [20:35] Um, can you go into more detail? Do you have, uh, friends
17 that you do things in the plant with outside the plant?
18
19 George Nelson: Oh, yeah. Yep, all the time. I do a lot of huntin' with guys from here.
20 Snowmobiling [with guys here 20:49] and boating. I mean, you know, we
21 all get together and hang out, you know, and have cottages at similar
22 places and – you know.
23
24 Doreen Howard: [20:57] So, you feel that the people here are family and friends?
25
26 George Nelson: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, for sure. Yep.
27
28 Doreen Howard: [21:06] Did you, um, get involved in any of the [phone ringing] lunch time
29 activities that happened? An-, any of the lunch time activities, uh, such as
30 the dinners or retirement parties?
31
32 George Nelson: Oh, yeah. Yep.
33
34 Doreen Howard: Or any of that kind of stuff?
35
36 George Nelson: Yep.
37
38 Doreen Howard: Were you...
39
40 George Nelson: Oh, yeah. And, and as the years went on – I mean, they've always been
41 really big any time, you know, somebody's retiring or – they were even
42 doing'm for birthdays and stuff like that or just when the holidays come
43 around, they will have, you know the big, uh, Thanksgiving dinners and
44 Christmas dinners and, I mean, you know. People here eat well.
45
46 Doug Rademacher: Cheryl McQuaid.

1
2 Cheryl McQuaid: [21:43] How was that arranged? I mean, who took care of making sure
3 that dinner happened?
4
5 George Nelson: Usually, if there was a female in one of our groups, she would be the
6 organizer. That's usually how that would work. Nine times...
7
8 Cheryl McQuaid: [21:54] And organizer meaning...
9
10 George Nelson: Just with – they'd have a sheet of paper, "Hey, sign up." They'd take it and
11 pass it around. Sign up, what're you bringin' in, you know.
12
13 Cheryl McQuaid: [22:03] So, it was like a potluck type basis?
14
15 George Nelson: Yep. Yep.
16
17 Doug Rademacher: Doreen Howard.
18
19 Doreen Howard: [22:09] Was there any other times where the people of the area came
20 together as a group [phone ringing] or a family to support one of their –
21 one of the coworkers?
22
23 George Nelson: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Anytime somebody lost somebody, they, the collections
24 were big. I mean, you know, you could – if you lost somebody and you
25 were liked, you'd – there'd be a collection that would – it, it'd pretty much
26 amaze ya, you know. How much – uh, the people are really giving. I
27 mean, and then they're – you know, they care about each other. They
28 really do, you know.
29
30 Doreen Howard: [22:41] So, they would collect – they would go from person to person
31 collecting money?
32
33 George Nelson: From – person to collect – yep. Yep. They'd have a card for you to sign.
34 And then if you wanted to gi-, it wasn't mandatory that you gave money,
35 you know, but everybody usually threw in a couple bucks and when you're
36 talkin' in a department an average size of 45 people... you know, that's a
37 lot of money.
38
39 Doug Rademacher: [23:05] George, has a s-, a particular coworker impacted your personal
40 life?
41
42 George Nelson: Just you, Doug. [laughter]
43
44 Doug Rademacher: [laughter]
45
46 George Nelson: No, not really.

1
2 Doug Rademacher: I'm sure there's many, but would you please – [23:23] what's your best
3 memory of the Fisher Body plant?
4
5 George Nelson: Oh, God. I – you're right. There's a ton of'm. I can't really...
6
7 Doug Rademacher: Can you give one good time?
8
9 George Nelson: I can give one. My – I, I'm loose jointed in my arms, and there's a
10 supervisor that I had, Rufous Hudson, and anybody that knew Rufous, he's
11 a big gambler and he was a motorcycle racer, and we used to drive these
12 three-wheel scooters around, the supervisors had'm. Well, one day it was
13 get-, we were all getting pretty bored, so I said, "Watch this," and I
14 slammed a car door real hard, and he was lookin' the other direction and I
15 popped my arm out, so it looked like it was broke. I said "Ruf, look at
16 this!" And he freaked out. "Get on the back of the cart!" And he jumped
17 on his cart – I mean, it's totally unsafe, so don't do this at home. But he sat
18 there [laughter] and drove me all the way down the assembly line, all the
19 way down to medical and, I mean, the whole line knew what was goin' on.
20 And they were rollin' and Ruf, he was all serious about his drivin' and
21 going fast as he could.
22
23 And we get down to medical, I said, "Oh, man, it popped back in." He
24 goes, "Oh, good." And then he took me back. [laughter] But, I mean,
25 watchin' his face, he was a trip. And the water extinguisher fights in the
26 summer, you know. You'd take those fire extinguishers and it'd get out of
27 hand.
28
29 Doug Rademacher: [24:38] Have you had a skilled trades person ever do something special for
30 you? Did you have something you ever needed that you were able...
31
32 George Nelson: Oh, [laughter] yeah. Leave it at that. No, [laughter]. No, no. I, I had –
33 back in the day, if you needed anything built, and they used to call'm
34 government jobs. And, as a matter of fact, most of our skilled trades
35 would be working on government jobs as opposed to working on regular
36 jobs and, I mean, you could get all kinds of stuff built. Those guys are
37 great. But nowadays, you can't do it so much, but – yep, used to have
38 some pretty neat things assembled.
39
40 Doug Rademacher: [25:20] Did you have a locker or something special made for you?
41
42 George Nelson: Oh, yes. Yeah. We'd have special lockers made, bow presses for your
43 compound bows. Uh, things for your car. If something broke and you
44 needed a special part made for it, they could fabricate pretty much
45 anything.
46

1 Doug Rademacher: Let's talk about your union a little bit. [25:41] Did you attend union
2 meetings?
3

4 George Nelson: Yes.
5

6 Doug Rademacher: [25:45] How was the... how has your union involvement changed over the
7 years?
8

9 George Nelson: Uh, immensely. They, you know, I've been blessed with getting' a good
10 job through them. Hope it continues. But, uh, they, they supported ya,
11 you know. And there's, there's lots of opportunities within the union out
12 there. And, uh, any time your involved with it and, you know, you, you
13 care about the people, you know, you got opportunities out there for ya,
14 so...
15

16 Doug Rademacher: [26:11] Did you see the union change in the way they do business?
17

18 George Nelson: Oh, yeah. Big time. Uh, when I first hired in, it was definitely a war
19 between, uh, union and management and now, it's not at all really.
20

21 Doug Rademacher: Lansing has been known for quality and productivity.
22

23 George Nelson: Mm-hm.
24

25 Doug Rademacher: [26:35] What do you – can you connect that to something? What would
26 be the reason for that?
27

28 George Nelson: Uh, just we wanna be number one. I mean, peop-, people in this town care
29 about buildin' cars and they always have. And, you know, no matter what
30 anybody says, we build good cars. I mean, the only time they were
31 limited in, uh, what we were doin' is when the materials were getting'
32 more superior and, you know, you had to get by with what they were
33 givin' ya and make the best out of a bad situation, but the whole auto
34 industry back in the 70s went through that. I mean, you had cars – if you
35 had anybody bought a car made in the 70s, you know how fast they rusted
36 out and the paint peeled off and everything else. But, uh, now, you know,
37 quality is definitely number one.
38

39 Doug Rademacher: [27:18] Have you voted in the union and political elections?
40

41 George Nelson: Yes.
42

43 Doug Rademacher: [27:24] Did you participate in any of the political or social activities with
44 supporting the union?
45

46 George Nelson: Oh, yes.

1
2 Doug Rademacher: [27:34] With your job, were you required to do any particular community
3 service and what are some of the things that you did?
4
5 George Nelson: I'm mean, not really – I'm not really required to do it, but I do, you know.
6 We, we did the river cleanup years ago. We did all kinds of stuff. Just...
7
8 Doug Rademacher: Doreen Howard.
9
10 Doreen Howard: [27:54] [laughter] Um, you touched base on your job. What is your
11 current job? [I mean, what, what do you do 27:58]?
12
13 George Nelson: Uh, right now, I am a safety support for the [inaudible 28:02] body shop. I
14 was safety advisor for 18 years for, uh, the body shop.
15
16 Doreen Howard: [28:09] And what, what does that entail? What was that –
17
18 George Nelson: Uh, basically, making sure any safety [calls that 28:13] the employees
19 have, they'll put in safety [inaudible 28:14], kinda like a committee man
20 for safety. Uh, I do safety tours once a week, follow-up tours, uh, make
21 sure that the – everybody's up to date on all their safety classes. Um, just
22 anything related to safety, that would've been me.
23
24 Doreen Howard: [28:31] And when did you s-, start in that arena?
25
26 George Nelson: Um, 18 years ago, so whatever that is.
27
28 Doreen Howard: So, it's been a long time.
29
30 George Nelson: Yeah.
31
32 Doreen Howard: Okay.
33
34 Doug Rademacher: Cheryl McQuaid.
35
36 Cheryl McQuaid: George, you said you hired in on second shift. [28:43] Did you ever work
37 the day shift?
38
39 George Nelson: Yeah. I worked a day shift for, uh, six months. And about the time I got
40 used to it, I got bumped back to nights. I'm on day shift currently.
41
42 Cheryl McQuaid: [28:52] Did you notice any differences between those shifts when you first
43 hired in?
44
45 George Nelson: You know, yeah. Yeah. Day shift people, they don't wake up until
46 probably after lunch. You know, that was the big standard back then.

1 You could read a paper while you're doin' the job and any-, everything.
2 And when I first went to days, you didn't re-, I learned real quick you
3 didn't really talk to anybody too much in the morning, you know.
4 Everybody just kinda did their job. But after lunch, it was on big time,
5 you know. It would – it – the day shift was fun. I liked'm both, you
6 know. I did lots of breakfast burritos on day shift.
7
8 Cheryl McQuaid: [29:27] Where did you get the breakfast burritos?
9
10 George Nelson: Uh, there was a guy named Val. He used to bring'm in all the time into the
11 body shop and sell'm.
12
13 Cheryl McQuaid: [29:36] Did he walk the line with'm? Did he –
14
15 George Nelson: Uh, sometimes, yeah, 'cause he had a pretty good job, so he could kinda
16 cruise around, but everybody knew where he was at, located at, and they'd
17 always come over and got to where he'd sell out in the first hour anyway.
18
19 Doug Rademacher: Doreen Howard.
20
21 Doreen Howard: [29:53] Was there other people that was in the body shop that brought in
22 other things? Did they, did they sell'm?
23
24 George Nelson: Oh, yeah. We used to have our own little stores. Yeah, there'd be guys –
25 there was a guy named Hawk, and he had a huge store over in the metal
26 finish area and – I mean, he sold everything. Combs, shampoo, I mean,
27 this guy had everything. He had a locker special built by the skill trades
28 guys and it was, it was loaded with anything – basically, anything you
29 wanted, you go over there and you could buy it.
30
31 Doreen Howard: [30:20] Was there other food items?
32
33 George Nelson: Oh, yeah.
34
35 Doreen Howard: That, that people...
36
37 George Nelson: Oh, yeah. They'd bring in – they'd bring in everything. I mean, they'd
38 bring in everything from a roast pig to – I mean anything you could think
39 of, people'd bring it in and sell.
40
41 Doug Rademacher: Linda Johnson.
42
43 Linda Johnson: [30:32] You had mentioned, George, that you hunt and, um, I'm sh-, your
44 coworkers probably?
45
46 George Nelson: Mm-hm.

1
2 Linda Johnson: [30:42] Did you ever have, um, meals where everybody brought in their
3 best, uh, item, you know? You might bring in – could you tell me about
4 that?
5
6 George Nelson: Yeah. Um, we used to have a intermittent relief guy named Ike [Kinsey
7 30:55], and that man was the best cook you could find anywhere. A
8 couple times, I'd be out huntin' durin' the day working, uh, second shift
9 and, uh, I'd shoot a deer, and I'd just cut off the whole hindquarter and
10 walk in with a deer leg, right past security, and lay it on the table and he'd
11 cut it up and cook it.
12
13 Doug Rademacher: [laughter]
14
15 Linda Johnson: [laughter]
16
17 George Nelson: You know, it was hilarious. We'd have a good time, but yeah. All the
18 time, we'd have meals like that. Pretty much every Friday for sure.
19
20 Doug Rademacher: Doreen Howard.
21
22 Doreen Howard: [31: 23] Did that change over time?
23
24 George Nelson: Yeah, they start-, the, the meals you could still do, but they started, you
25 know, they didn't want ya to have'm every week and, you know, then they
26 got – came out with notices that you could only have'm for retirement
27 parties and everything but – I mean, it's like anything else, you know,
28 people go, "Yep, okay, we won't," and then they still do. So...
29
30 Doreen Howard: [31:45] How, how did they cook the meat? You said you brought in a leg
31 of a deer.
32
33 George Nelson: Oh, they'd bring in – we, we had stoves, skillets, crock pots, the whole
34 nine yards.
35
36 Doreen Howard: So, regular old kitchen
37
38 George Nelson: Kitchen. Oh, yeah, for sure. It was easy, you know. It was a good time.
39
40 Doug Rademacher: George... John Fedewa.
41
42 John Fedewa: [32:08] George, you'd, uh, back up a little bit here, talked about the current
43 job you have right now. How'd you become to the position you have?
44 Was it posted? Was it –
45

1George Nelson: Actually, we had an election. And that's how they used to do safety
2advisors. When I got back on, uh, all the safety team members, you know,
3if we had – the original safety advisor was getting bumped to a different
4department, and so we had an election and I won, and just kept the job
5ever since.
6

7John Fedewa: Okay.
8

9Doug Rademacher: Doreen Howard.
10

11Doreen Howard: You talked about safety advisors. [32:41] So, there's, there's more than
12one? In...
13

14George Nelson: Right. Each department – back in the day, each department had – we had
15two lines. We had a A and a B line and, uh, each line would have an
16advisor for each department, so there'd be two on second shift, two on first
17shift and, uh, a-, as time went on and they started getting' leaner, they cut
18it down to one to cover both body shop, and then they'd have one for the
19paint shops and one for the trim.
20

21Doreen Howard: [33:11] And, I guess, as the, as the safety advisor, what, what was your
22responsibly, um, to the employees and what's your responsibility as far as
23what management, um, expected from you – from that position?
24

25George Nelson: Um, just basically what I said before. Doin' the tours – you did the weekly
26tours and then that involves you pick an area and back then, we'd, you
27know, you'd have like seven, eight areas in a body shop, and you'd do a
28couple a week, and you go through and do a tour and address all the items
29that you found, and the expectations were the same for management as
30they were for the people on the floor. But then, I'd have to go out and help
31people when they had a concern like say a supervisor is tryin' to make'm
32do something unsafe, you know, or they got a fan that's broken or they got
33a safety mat that's not workin'. They would call me out and then I'd take
34care of goin' around gettin'm the proper people to fix it.
35

36Doug Rademacher: [34:06] George, is there a particular incident that you hold dear to your
37heart that, uh, that you were involved with in your safety position where
38you may have helped or saved somebody?
39

40George Nelson: Uh, well, I didn't save'm, but, uh, we had a guy that, uh, passed away out
41in Building 23. We had to do CPR on him, and that was – that was really
42rough because I'm part of the ER Team, Emergency Response Team, and
43we probably get called out on a lot of potential heart attacks, you know,
44and 90 percent of the time, the person isn't havin' a heart attack, but, uh,
45this time we rolled up, and he was layin' there and purple and everything,
46and it was, it was really rough 'cause before that, I had never done CPR on

1 anybody and it's nothin' like doin' it on the dolls. I tell ya, not a thing, not
2 even close.
3
4 But, uh, yeah. I'll never forget that. And the family came in and thanked
5 us. They had a big thing where they wanted to thank us for doin' all we
6 could and – I mean, it was tough. There was a lot of tears. We met in this
7 room right here and had a debriefing on it right afterwards. And I tell you
8 what, that was rough. That was real tough. And I didn't even know the
9 guy. I mean, you know, I'd never seen him before, but it was – not nothin'
10 I wanna do again real soon, I know that.
11
12Doreen Howard: [35:14] How long ago was that?
13
14George Nelson: Mm, it was probably eight years ago.
15
16Doug Rademacher: You've been here with the safety group for 18 years. [35:26] How many,
17 how many, uh, members have passed away under your... was it –
18
19George Nelson: Uh, while we're workin'? You're talkin' on the job passin' away?
20
21Doug Rademacher: That you know of, yeah.
22
23George Nelson: Oh, uh, actually, I think he's pretty much the only one I know that lost his
24 life that I was involved with. Majority – you know, majority of the calls
25 we get are lacerations and whatnot. And we get people out pretty quickly
26 then.
27
28Doug Rademacher: Tell me, you have enjoyed, you said, good wages and, um, there's a
29 bargain benefit package secured for you by the International Union and,
30 uh, [36:11] can you tell us, what is your most appreciated bargain benefit?
31
32George Nelson: Bargain benefit. My most apprecia- [laughter] I, uh, appreciate'm all.
33 [laughter] I mean, you know, to be quite honest, I do.
34
35Doug Rademacher: [laughter]
36
37George Nelson: I mean, we got it – as far as anywhere else in the United States, we've got
38 great, you know, insurance. We've got great benefits, you know. You just
39 don't find'm anywhere else. Of course, they're tryin' to change that, but
40 [laughter], you know. We do. We got, we got the best goin'. I mean, you
41 know, anybody you talk to doesn't pay for any of that stuff, and we end up
42 – I mean, they pay for it and we don't, you know. So, you can't beat it.
43
44Doug Rademacher: [36:51] Did you ever take the opportunity to use your tuition assistance?
45
46George Nelson: Yep. Oh, yeah. Yep. Several times.

1
2 Doug Rademacher: [37:01] That was just to further your – enhance your own life? Or was it
3 [inaudible 37:04] position?
4
5 George Nelson: Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah. I took several of the classes that they offered and
6 then back in the day, I took the ones where we, uh, we could actually get
7 like a generator or a GPS and stuff like and went to class, you know, and
8 ended up purchasing those from 'm for extreme discount, and those were
9 great. I wish they still had 'm. [laughter]
10
11 Doug Rademacher: [37:26] With community activities, has your job and your skills carried
12 over outside of the, the working [environment 37:33]?
13
14 George Nelson: Yeah. Every now and then, I'll go to – well, my daughter's school,
15 whatever school she's goin' to at the time and do presentations on safety
16 and fire safety and stuff like that. I don't take over for a fire chief or
17 nothin' but, you know, just talk to kids about it and whatnot. Anytime I go
18 on a field trip where it's an overnight thing, I let 'm know I'm all, you
19 know, CPR certified and all that and first aid certified in case somebody
20 gets hurt. And it's come in handy at dance things like when a girl broke
21 her arm and, you know, [laughter] stuff like that. So... it works.
22
23 Doug Rademacher: [38:06] What's your thought about moving to this new Delta plant and the
24 closing? I guess, first, what's the thought of the closing of the Fisher
25 Body?
26
27 George Nelson: Well, the closing's sad. Anybody that's worked here as long as I have and,
28 and y-, or, you know, or even close, you know, and y-, you walk around
29 this building now and it's just sad 'cause you, you can – you know, there's
30 no voices out there. You can walk around the whole plant, and there's
31 nothin' goin' on. You know, it's, it's just weird. It really is. And I – and,
32 what was weird was when they cut out one line too. You know, when we
33 were still workin', all of a sudden, boom, one line's gone. Then reality's
34 startin' to set in, you know.
35
36 I mean, our future's uncertain, even with a new plant it's uncertain. You
37 know, more, more so now than ever, and it's just – it's weird. I'm excited
38 about the new plant and – but I'm apprehensive too, you know, 'cause
39 you're like goin' we've been here and been safe, you know, and now we're
40 goin' out to a new plant that – who's to say they can't pull the plug on it,
41 you know, at any time they want. I mean, everybody's talkin' all, "Yeah,
42 this is all for sure, for sure," but, you know, you watch the news, you don't
43 gotta be an Einstein to figure it out, you know.
44
45 Doug Rademacher: [39:04] George, I wanna run back. Since you've takin' in – on the, uh,
46 safety position, would you share a story about some of the things – there

1 used to be old – the old Fisher Body, they built roofs over roofs. They've
2 got, uh, different things that, uh, a lot of the average person would never
3 even see in their lifetime. What – share something that you've seen here
4 that you didn't even know existed before you got...
5

6George Nelson: Well, I can tell you a real good one. We were, uh, doin' something in the
7 men's locker room. I, I can't even remember what it was, and we
8 happened to look down at where one of the benches was bolted to the
9 floor. And we lifted that up, and there's a secret stairwell [laughter]
10 underneath it. It was wild. And so, of course, we went down there and,
11 uh, when we got down in there, there were all these tables where whatever
12 they did during the World War, I think they built munitions or somethin'
13 in here or whatever, but – I mean, there are still tables. I mean, big as
14 these here down underneath that locker room, and it, it was just – it was
15 really neat. Old wooden tables layin' around and an old whiskey bottle
16 was down there, and it – that was pretty – that was neat. I liked that, that
17 was cool.
18

19Doug Rademacher: [40:21] How big was this room?
20

21George Nelson: Oh, God. It was probably 100 feet long and maybe 40 feet, 50 feet wide.
22 It was, it was a pretty good size room.
23

24Doug Rademacher: [40:38] And it's underground in the middle of nowhere?
25

26George Nelson: Underground in the middle of nowhere, yeah. Yep.
27

28Doug Rademacher: [40:43] Are there tunnels also in this plant?
29

30George Nelson: Uh, not in that one. There's tunnels in this plant. I've been in several of
31 the tunnels doing ERT things and, uh, those are pretty neat and creepy
32 and, you know, old. But yeah, they actually – they connect us with the
33 Genesis plant and y-, y-, used to be you could go a lot further, but they
34 made blocks in'm, but you can go quite a ways underground around here.
35 And I heard rumors that there used to be a tunnel that went across the
36 street to Harry's too, but I don't know if [that's true 41:11].
37

38Doug Rademacher: [laughter]
39

40John Fedewa: [laughter]
41

42Cheryl McQuaid: [laughter]
43

44Doug Rademacher: [41:13] And what is Harry's?
45

1 George Nelson: Harry's is the local, uh, bar right across the street on Verlinden and, uh,
2 I'm pretty sure that's a true story, but...
3

4 Doug Rademacher: [laughter] Uh, Doreen Howard.
5

6 Doreen Howard: [41:25] The tunnels, do you have any idea what they used those for and
7 why they were built?
8

9 George Nelson: Uh, the tunnel – the one tunnels I was talkin' about, we have, uh, steam
10 lines and whatnot that run from plant to plant that are underneath, and I
11 don't know how long they've been there, but they're, they're old.
12

13 Doreen Howard: And...
14

15 George Nelson: You know, and, and the other one, goin' to Harry's, well, that's just to get
16 to Harry's. [laughter]
17

18 Doug Rademacher: [laughter]
19

20 John Fedewa: [laughter]
21

22 Doreen Howard: [41:47] The steam lines, they were used because there's only the one
23 power house that –
24

25 George Nelson: Right.
26

27 Doreen Howard: That makes steam?
28

29 George Nelson: We had – we supplied our own power, and they supplied it for all the
30 facilities around here. So...
31

32 Doug Rademacher: [41:59] Can – could you please talk about that? Were you ever, uh –
33

34 George Nelson: [sneezing]
35

36 Doug Rademacher: The coal [inaudible 42:05] and the, uh, the feeding system for that, is that
37 a – can you talk anything about that?
38

39 George Nelson: Uh, they – we had large quantities of coal 'cause that's what they used to,
40 uh, heat the plant and do the steam and do the power and, uh, they – it's
41 just – y-, you had to see it. I don't even think I could describe how big the
42 coal pile was. It was, it was huge. They had a front-end loader that would
43 come in and pick the coal up and take it over to the power house, and they
44 had all these chutes. And occasionally, they'd get fires in there, and I
45 remember when we were first on the ERT, we had a fire there and we
46 weren't very knowledgeable. I mean, we were just kinda fire extinguisher

1 people and we [laughter] went out to put out a coal fire, you know, which
2 you don't do. You just let coal fires burn 'cause you can't really put'm out.
3
4 And, uh, I remember I was standing in the coal pile, and Bob Fell, who's
5 not very big, he was hangin' on to my lifeline. I'm thinkin' I outweigh him
6 by 100 pounds, and he's got me, and we're in this coal pile. Well, coal
7 piles have air pockets in'm. They're very dangerous. You shouldn't even
8 be out in'm, right? I mean, and I had no idea how deep this funnel was
9 that fed all the ovens, right? Well, they're like 40 feet. [laughter] And I'm
10 at the top of this thing, and I was glad to get out of that one without
11 getting' hurt 'cause after we started debriefin' and talkin' about it, people
12 were like, "You know how big those are?" And we went out and looked
13 at'm and I went, "Oh, my God. I should never have been there," you
14 know. Sp-, Bob would've got rope burns goin', "Uh oh!" You know?
15 [laughter]
16
17 Doug Rademacher: [laughter]
18
19 John Fedewa: [laughter]
20
21 Doreen Howard: [laughter]
22
23 Cheryl McQuaid: [laughter]
24
25 Doug Rademacher: Well, George, you've put a lot of years in. [43:47] What would you say to
26 people that – we had a hiring group in about '95, so we have a lot of
27 people that just came in with about 10 years seniority. What would you
28 say to somebody that's just getting started in the auto industry or – what
29 would be your, your recommendation to the people?
30
31 George Nelson: My biggest thing with the, the newer hires that we have is just respect
32 what's been laid out before ya, you know? What people fought for 'cause,
33 uh, quite a few of'm – I was involved with orientation of new hires and
34 whatnot, and there was a definite trend that once they got their 90 days in,
35 that they thought the job was owed to them, and nobody's owed a job, you
36 know, you gotta earn it. And, uh, a lot of that mentality has gone away,
37 you know. People think, "Oh, I'm in here. I'm in the union, they owe me
38 this," you know, and union and all that can go away in the blink of eye and
39 you're gonna be out there with everybody else, so you need to appreciate
40 what you have.
41
42 Doug Rademacher: [44:35] Is there anything that you would like to share that I haven't asked
43 you today?
44
45 George Nelson: Just I'm really glad I met you, Doug. [laughter]
46

1John Fedewa: [laughter]
2
3Cheryl McQuaid: [laughter]
4
5Linda Johnson: [laughter]
6
7Doreen Howard: [laughter]
8
9Doug Rademacher: [laughter] Well, it's been pleasure meeting you too, George. We
10 appreciate your interview today.
11
12Cheryl McQuaid: Thank you, George.
13
14George Nelson: Thank you, guys.
15
16Doreen Howard: Thank you.
17
18George Nelson: You guys have a good –
19
20
21/tl