

**Donald Perry discusses his career as a production worker, booth cleaner,
maintenance oiler, and UAW member at the Fisher Body plant in Lansing MI**

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4
5 Michael Fleming: Good morning. , uh, we're with the Fisher or-, Fisher Body Oral History
6 Team. , uh, we're at the Greenhouse today and we're gonna interview, um,
7 would you please state your name?
8
9 Donald Perry: Uh.
10
11 Michael Fleming: ...for the record and spell your last name.
12
13 Donald Perry: Donald Perry. P-e-r-r-y.
14
15 Michael Fleming: And today is Friday, the 27th of January at 10:00. [00:24], uh, Mr. Perry,
16 um, what's your address?
17
18 Donald Perry: 1530 Waverly Road, Holt, Michigan.
19
20 Michael Fleming: [00:32] Um, your marital status?
21
22 Donald Perry: Single.
23
24 Michael Fleming: [00:35], uh, do you have any children?
25
26 Donald Perry: No.
27
28 Michael Fleming: [00:38] Um, wer-, where, where were you born, sir?
29
30 Donald Perry: Uh, Lansing, Michigan.
31
32 Michael Fleming: [00:44] And your education?
33
34 Donald Perry: Um, completed high school, some college.
35
36 Michael Fleming: [00:49] Military experience?
37
38 Donald Perry: Four years, United States Air Force.
39
40 Michael Fleming: Okay, I'm gonna go around the room and introduce all our interviewee, uh...
41
42 [throat clearing]
43
44 Michael Fleming: ...people that will be helping interviewing today. Could we please start
45 here...
46

1 Jerri Smith: Jerri Smith.
2

3 Cheryl McQuaid: Cheryl McQuaid.
4

5 Marilyn Coulter: Marilyn Coulter.
6

7 John Fedewa: John Fedewa.
8

9 Michael Fleming: And I'm Michael Fleming. [01:21] Um, Don, uh, when did you hire in to
10 Fisher Body?
11

12 Donald Perry: Uh, originally it was the end of May of 1972. I worked 1 week, they laid me
13 off, was laid off a week, called me back, worked 93 days, they laid me off
14 again. I went in the air force then.
15

16 Michael Fleming: [01:30] Um, the – why did you hire in to Fisher Body?
17

18 Donald Perry: Uh, my parents were pushing me towards it, I had no desire to work in a
19 factory and they pushed me into it and they had some friends that worked at
20 Fisher Body that were foremens and so I went over and filled out the
21 application and within 2 weeks they called me to come in for a physical.
22

23 Michael Fleming: [01:53], uh, when you hired in, was it a, a pretty intimidating sight to walk
24 into a factory of that size?
25

26 Donald Perry: Yes, it was. I walked out and I was just in awe of how big it was and I didn't
27 know where to go. I got lost a couple times.
28

29 [laughter]
30

31 Michael Fleming: [02:14], uh, so when, when you, when you went in, what was the first thing
32 that, that you did as far as employment?
33

34 Donald Perry: Uh...
35

36 Michael Fleming: What was your [inaudible] 02:21].
37

38 Donald Perry: ...uh, the first job when they brought me in on second shift, I worked with a
39 guy on the cardboard baler and that was for 1 night and the next night I went
40 to third shift in the booth cleaners.
41

42 Michael Fleming: [02:34] So you went right from production into booth cleaning?
43

44 Donald Perry: Uh, I went right off the street into booth cleaning.
45

1 Michael Fleming: [02:39] Okay, right off the street into booth cleaning. Talk about, talk about
2 what a booth cleaner does, please.
3

4 Donald Perry: Uh, a booth cleaner maintains the booths after production goes down. We go
5 in and clean the floors, clean the paint hoses, walls, whatever might need
6 cleaning from the paint, getting it off, and get it ready for the next day shift
7 to come in. Then on weekends, we clean the pits. Dig those out, whatever,
8 and keep those flowing good.
9

10 Michael Fleming: [03:10] Was booth cleaning considered a, a preferable – a desirable job or
11 non-desirable?
12

13 Donald Perry: Uh, a lot of people thought it was desirable because it was third shift and
14 they figured, you know, they could come in, possibly take a nap, whatever.
15 But once they got in there actually doing the work, they realized how hard it
16 was and a lot of 'm didn't care for it then.
17

18 Michael Fleming: [03:34] Um, when, when you – or what, what are, what is your present job
19 at, a [inaudible 03:42].
20

21 Donald Perry: Uh, when I left, uh, Fisher Body when they closed it down, I was a
22 maintenance oiler.
23

24 Michael Fleming: [03:48] Okay, so you left booth cleaning?
25

26 Donald Perry: Yeah, I was laid off that and, uh, my group [filtered 03:53] down into oilers
27 for seniority purposes – or leveled off into oilers I should say.
28

29 Michael Fleming: [04:00] Let's go back to when you hired in. How old were you? When you
30 hired in?
31

32 Donald Perry: Uh, 19, ex-, excuse me, 18.
33

34 Michael Fleming: 18? [04:11] Um, was that, uh, something that you regret at this point, do
35 you, do – is this something that you were proud of, the fact that you hired in
36 at 18 and, and it worked out well for ya?
37

38 Donald Perry: Yeah, it seemed to work out really good. Then I really didn't [inaudible
39 04:28] I fought my parents tooth and nail but I thank'm every day now that I
40 did do it, everything, 'cause the time I – after I was laid off and went in the
41 service, that's when the early 70s oil embargo came, a lotta people lost their
42 jobs or got laid off. Loss seniority and mine kept going from being on
43 military leave.
44

45 Michael Fleming: [04:49] Wh-, which branch of the service again?
46

1Donald Perry: Air force.
2

3Michael Fleming: The air force? [04:53], uh, did you get any special skills while you were in
4 the air force?
5

6Donald Perry: Uh, I, I trained as an aircraft electrician and everything and I've pursued
7 skilled trades when I got out but they weren't hiring at the time, so I never
8 pursued it any further. I was happy where I was at.
9

10Michael Fleming: Sounds, sounds like an interesting trip. Uh, [05:14] when you returned back
11 to the plant after your layoff, you were still a booth cleaner at that time?
12

13Donald Perry: Yeah, they took me right into booth cleaners. It was right before
14 changeover, so they needed the people, so they took me right into booth
15 cleanin'.
16

17Michael Fleming: [05:26] Don, what's changeover? Let's talk about that.
18

19Donald Perry: That is where they do the model change, um, back then it was anywhere
20 from 6 to 8 weeks, depending on the year and that's when maintenance did a
21 thorough cleaning and everything and they did re-tooling whatever might be
22 needed done for the new model run for the next year and my particular job,
23 we did thorough cleanings of the paint booths and arc booths, the welding
24 booths, whatever.
25

26Michael Fleming: [05:53] Talk about how long, at that time a, uh, changeover would take
27 versus the later years and how long the length of time changeovers were
28 taking.
29

30Donald Perry: Uh, then they averaged anywhere from like say 6 to 8 weeks, but at one
31 point I believe it was in '78, when we moved up to the new paint
32 department, it was off for almost 4 months and today, they average
33 anywhere from 2 to 3 hours.
34

35Michael Fleming: A drastic change then...
36

37Donald Perry: Yeah.
38

39Michael Fleming: ...in the way...
40

41Donald Perry: Change.
42

43Michael Fleming: ...in the way that we do business.
44

45Donald Perry: Yes sir.
46

1Michael Fleming: [06:27] Uh, would you say it's for the better or do you think it's, um,
2 something that's not as, uh, a good of a changeover period?
3

4Donald Perry: Uh, in one aspect I think it's for the better but, yet, two, I think it's not good
5 'cause a lotta a the maintaining of the equipment isn't getting done like it
6 needs to be done.
7

8Michael Fleming: Uh, Cheryl McQuaid.
9

10Cheryl McQuaid: [06:48] Um, Mr. Perry, you were third shift booth cleaner and you did your
11 deep cleaning during changeovers, so you worked all the changeovers?
12

13Donald Perry: Yeah. I had one changeover off in the 30-something years I've been there.
14 We worked in 7 days a week during the changeovers.
15

16Cheryl McQuaid: [07:06] How much different was the deep cleaning compared to just the
17 everyday cleaning?
18

19Donald Perry: A lot, 'cause you ended up climbing into the air ducts and the size of the
20 booths you'd have to hand scrape the paint off them and everything.
21 [Inaudible 07:19] more get in with putty knives and scrape them out good.
22

23Cheryl McQuaid: [07:26] And what is the size of a pit?
24

25Donald Perry: Uh.
26

27Cheryl McQuaid: I'm sure they must vary in size, but...
28

29Donald Perry: The original ones when I hired in was about, they had them in stages, they
30 were usually about 4 to 5 foot deep, anywhere from 4 to 5 foot square but
31 the ones they have now were like 25 to 30 foot deep, probably 20 to 30 foot
32 square and you actually had to go right in and stand in the sludge and stuff
33 to start digging them out or washing down, whatever.
34

35Cheryl McQuaid: [07:57] When you first hired in and it's different...
36

37Donald Perry: Well then, even now, I guess they do it differently but back then you'd have
38 to climb right in. That was one a the first instances I had of a memory was, I
39 was 19, all gung-ho, I could jump in and start right doing it and everything
40 and I sunk into the sludge up to my waist almost...
41

42Cheryl McQuaid: [laughter]
43

44Donald Perry: ...got my boots stuck. I had to get a guy on each arm and pull me right out
45 to get me out.
46

1 Cheryl McQuaid: [laughter]
2
3 Michael Fleming: Oh man.
4
5 Donald Perry: They were just laughing their butts off.
6
7 Michael Fleming: I bet.
8
9 Cheryl McQuaid: I bet it was something they'd seen before.
10
11 Donald Perry: Yeah, yeah. They knew what was coming and everything. They just let me
12 do it.
13
14 Cheryl McQuaid: [08:32] As kind of a prank?
15
16 Donald Perry: Yeah.
17
18 Cheryl McQuaid: Oh. [laughter]
19
20 Donald Perry: And everything. My – they had to dig my boots outta the sludge because
21 they stayed in and I didn't, so.
22
23 Cheryl McQuaid: [08:39] So what kind of safety training did you get for that job?
24
25 Donald Perry: Back then they didn't have no safety training at all. It wasn't until the 3
26 booth cleaners got killed that they initiated the safety training process and I
27 was there in the plant the night that happened.
28
29 Cheryl McQuaid: [08:57] Can you talk to us about that?
30
31 Donald Perry: Uh, I had just went into oiler group about 3 months prior to that and they
32 had recalled me back to booth cleaning and I turned'm down and I was in
33 Body Shop doing my job and I had my radio on and I heard the foreman had
34 passed away, the call on the radio that he needed help. So I took off, went up
35 there and when I got up there they had him, all 3, out of the pit laying on the
36 floor doing CPR and whatnot on'm. And I just stood around. That's all we
37 could do 'cause the EMS crew was there by then, and we just stood around
38 and watched them and then they took'm all out on a gurney and probably an
39 hour later we had been told they had all passed away.
40
41 Cheryl McQuaid: [09:40] So at – while you were watching that, did you ever think, my
42 goodness, I've been working down there.
43
44 Donald Perry: Actually, that come across my mind first thing because the last time that pit
45 they'd died in was cleaned myself and the foreman that died had been the

1 ones to clean it. And that just freaked me right out. If I'd a went back into
2 booth cleaning, I'd a been the one there doing it with them.
3
4 Cheryl McQuaid: [10:06] Did – before that happened, did you ever think that – did, did the –
5 were there ever any fumes that you were curious about or?
6
7 Donald Perry: Just your normal paint fumes like you paint in your house and stuff and we
8 never gave it any thought. We just got in, did the job, and got out and never
9 thought twice about it and stuff and from what I was told, uh, what
10 happened that night is – they had shut the circulation pumps off and, uh,
11 paint had crusted over and the fumes had built up in it and one of'm stepped
12 into it and the fumes come up and knocked him out and then they drowned
13 into the sludge. Then the foreman, he had seen it and he yelled in – down to
14 get help, and he went down in to help'm out and he got overcome by the
15 fumes too and passed out.
16
17 Cheryl McQuaid: [10:54] So you knew all these gentleman?
18
19 Donald Perry: Yeah. They were all good friends. Dick Claeys, the first one that passed
20 away, he was one of the first people I worked with when I was in booth
21 cleaning and Bob Ward, the foreman, he was my foreman when I was in it,
22 booth cleaners, and Roger Tackett, the third one, he was, uh, supplementary
23 to come in for changeover to help'm. He was a production person who
24 supplemented in for changeover to help and I bowled with him, so he was a
25 good friend too.
26
27 Cheryl McQuaid: [11:27] So you – at this point you were an oiler though?
28
29 Donald Perry: Yeah, I was an oiler for about 3, 3 or 4 months at the time that happened. It
30 was a rough go of it. It was a hard time on everybody.
31
32 Michael Fleming: Um, Mike Fleming, [11:42], uh, Don, um, throughout all this, um, you, you
33 – the, the end result after that tragic accident, was there any safety training
34 that they implemented that you know of or this is [inaudible 11:57] confined
35 spaces if I'm not correct...
36
37 Donald Perry: Yes.
38
39 Michael Fleming: ...did they do anything to, to help bring awareness about that?
40
41 Donald Perry: Uh, after OSHA had come in and investigated it, they set up a policy for
42 training everybody for confined space and safety equipment to wear and all
43 that when you go in the pit and everything.
44
45 [throat clearing]
46

1Donald Perry: And even I, in my oiler job, I had to have training for it because there was
2 other areas we went in in the plant for greasing our equipment that we had to
3 get in pits and whatnot. So everybody in the plant skill trades, maintenance,
4 everybody was then started getting trained on safety – confined space entry
5 and whatnot.
6

7Michael Fleming: [12:39] Don, have you ever heard the term "indirect labor" or a group of
8 individuals that are not directly tied to working on the automobile?
9

10Donald Perry: Uh, yeah.
11

12Michael Fleming: Um, and, and I'm sure you've been referred to as that as an oiler?
13

14Donald Perry: Yeah.
15

16Michael Fleming: How do you feel about that? What – what is your take on that as far as the
17 value that you add to the product and, and how it makes you feel that your
18 someone thinks that you're not? Um...
19

20Donald Perry: Well we've been called bottom of the barrel, low man on the totem pole, all
21 such a different terminology but I figure the job I do was needed to keep the
22 equipment running or to keep the booths clean, otherwise production
23 wouldn't be able to run 'cause everything would be building up and
24 everything. I just took it in stride. I just figured I was one of the lucky ones
25 that had, uh, a supposed easy job that some of'm thought and everything, but
26 – like again – once they got in and seen what I actually did do, they didn't
27 want no part of it. So I felt lucky because I was pretty much my own boss. I
28 could come and go as I wished. If I needed a break, I'd take it and
29 everything. So I felt fortunate to be in the department I was in.
30

31Michael Fleming: [13:52] The booth cleaners themselves, um, you see a lot of high seniority
32 people come into that group and like you say, once they realize what they
33 really have to do, they get out as fast as they can. Is that, is that something
34 that you've seen?
35

36Donald Perry: Yeah, a lot of them do but a lot of them were farmers too, so they come in
37 and hopefully ta – be able to take a nap so they can get out and do their job
38 and then go home and plow their fields or whatever too.
39

40Michael Fleming: So it was...
41

42Donald Perry: [A lotta 14:18] reason that a lot of'm comin' in...
43

44Michael Fleming: ...it was a job for – of convenience for some?
45

46Donald Perry: Yeah, yeah exactly.

1
2 Michael Fleming: [14:31] Um, did you, um, when you came in – we'll go back to when you
3 came in. Why don't we just talk about the oiling job? Who broke you in as
4 an oiler? How, how – what happened?
5
6 Donald Perry: Uh, uh, I got reduced out of booth cleaning and I, uh, leveled off into oilers,
7 and the guy that broke me in was named Ken [Spiegel 14:50], he was about
8 5 years lower seniority than I was and he broke me in along with his partner
9 he was working with at the time and showed me the gist of the job for about
10 a week and then me and his old partner, Joe Garza, was on our own. Back
11 then, we – each – there was 4 of us on third shift and we each, 2 of us had
12 each had a line and I did what they called s-, A line back then, which is C-
13 Body Shop now. We went – started in the Body Shop, went through Paint
14 and Trim, did it all over a month period of time. They'd break it off into
15 certain jobs certain days and we greased it all, but as the time went by, they
16 got more oilers in the group and we was all, uh, put into a certain
17 department that covers that specific area.
18
19 Michael Fleming: [15:41] Let's, let's talk about – now you, you, you're usin' grease guns and
20 oil cans and all types of things to keep, uh, machinery lubricated. What,
21 what did you – what else did you do with those things? Is – was there any
22 type of, uh, initiation into that group? Was there anything that you all did for
23 fun to one another or someone that didn't know any better? Uh, talk about
24 some of those things that, that possibly [could've happened 16:04].
25
26 Donald Perry: Uh, well, one instance that happened to me was we had a pump that we was
27 pumpin' oil in a bottle – an air bottle they called it for a cylinder. I was usin'
28 the pump and the hose blew, I got oil sprayed all over me and people kinda
29 laughed about that. But as far as us doing fun things to other ones, we pretty
30 much didn't do that in our group 'cause it could be hazardous at times with
31 different chemicals and whatnot. We used the oils and hydraulic oils,
32 different types a greases we had to use and stuff, so we was pretty diligent
33 on that, pulling pranks on other ones like that with that stuff.
34
35 Michael Fleming: Okay. So now you, you talked about hydraulics. Now hydraulics are, are –
36 some of'm are heated.
37
38 Donald Perry: Yeah.
39
40 Michael Fleming: [16:57] Um, and I'm sure the one that happened to you, had you seen
41 anybody else have a hydraulic incident that was, um, probably not a very
42 good thing to see, I'm sure?
43
44 Donald Perry: Uh, personally, I'd never seen one happen but a friend a mine told me about
45 one this morning, in fact, where a line busted and sprayed a guy and it
46 crystallized his shirt.

1
2Michael Fleming: [17:17] Crystallized his shirt?
3
4Donald Perry: Yeah. It was a hot hydraulic and when it hit him, he said he had to rip his
5 shirt off and run to the hospital but she said it crystallized his shirt. She was
6 tellin' me that this morning at the [inaudible 17:28] office.
7
8Michael Fleming: [17:30] How much pressure are some of those lines under about? Do you
9 have any idea?
10
11Donald Perry: Oh, some of'm depending on what they were operating could be up to a 100
12 PSIs, pounds per square inch.
13
14Michael Fleming: [17:42] That's quite a bit a pressure isn't it?
15
16Donald Perry: Yeah, it is.
17
18Michael Fleming: Thanks. Um.
19
20Cheryl McQuaid: Cheryl McQuaid. I'm a – I'm just amazed that you hired in right to the third
21 shift. Um...
22
23Donald Perry: That is a rarity to have that happen, right into put in maintenance off of the
24 street.
25
26Cheryl McQuaid: [18:12] ...I worked day shift, I worked second shift. I never spent any time
27 on third shift and it's gotta be so much different than the day shift and the
28 second shift. Could you tell me a little bit about what's going on in the plant
29 on second shift. Do ya see any animals?
30
31Donald Perry: Uh, yeah, one area we went to over in Building 22 where the trash
32 compactors and stuff were, we went in there one night to fill up the
33 hydraulics and I looked down and there was like a foot-and-a-half rat down
34 in the pit.
35
36 [laughter]
37
38Donald Perry: And let me tell ya, I left that place right now.
39
40 [laughter]
41
42Donald Perry: And we seen raccoons in the plant, a – stray cats have come in. They come
43 in looking for food and whatnot and possums now and then and everything,
44 but we had a deer come in one night, I believe. I, I heard about it, but I didn't
45 see it. They said there was a deer in there one night. Yeah, we had all kinds
46 a weird events going on during the night.

1
2 Marilyn Coulter: [19:06] Marilyn Coulter. What time did your shift start?
3
4 [throat clearing]
5
6 Donald Perry: Uh, when I first hired in, it was 11 to 7:30 then a few years down the road
7 they switched it 10 to 6:30 a.m. and it went different times. Just whatever
8 the need might be. Then weekends a lotta times they'd bring us in at second
9 shift 3 to 11:30.
10
11 Marilyn Coulter: [19:26] So now, you, when you started at 11, you know, the line was still
12 running, what did you do prior to...
13
14 Donald Perry: Well that was...
15
16 Marilyn Coulter: [inaudible 19:38]?
17
18 Donald Perry: ...the shock to me when I first hired in. So I'd come in and go see the boss
19 and everything and then everybody disappeared and I had no idea where
20 they were, I just sat there by the old [glaze booths then 19:51] and sat there
21 for 3 hours not knowing what to do, where to go or anything and then all of
22 a sudden everybody would reappear...
23
24 [laughter]
25
26 Donald Perry: ...and everything and I said wait, something ain't right, so, uh, they finally
27 got me in the groove of it and told me that's when they go take their naps or
28 whatever and everything. They all had a little specific area they went and
29 hid in and stuff. So I got to where I'd nap now and then but not often. I'd go
30 out and started meeting people and talkin' to 'm and exploring the plant and
31 finding, you know, seein' different areas of what they do and how they build
32 the cars and everything.
33
34 Marilyn Coulter: [20:28] Now given the factor that you came into that department right off
35 the street, um, and that was an odd thing to happen, that normally did not
36 happen?
37
38 Donald Perry: Back then it was, yes, 'cause normally they brought ya in right to
39 production.
40
41 Marilyn Coulter: [20:46] And, and, but that being the case, how did the fellows treat you
42 knowin' you came right in off the street into what was considered – even
43 though it was a nasty job – it was a preferred job?
44

1Donald Perry: Most of'm were pretty supportive of me. We had a few that kinda gave me
2 the cold shoulder at first but they got over it eventually and everything. I got
3 more flack mostly from production people...
4
5 [laughter]
6
7Marilyn Coulter: Mm.
8
9Donald Perry: ...at that time, you know, how'd you get so lucky to hire right in off the
10 street into something like that.
11
12Marilyn Coulter: [21:11] Now – I'm – and I shouldn't – I just wanna take you back a little bit
13 a-, actually quite a bit. You said that your parents had you come in here. If
14 you were in the community – I mean – what did – had – did you know
15 anything about the plant prior to coming in?
16
17Donald Perry: My father worked at Oldsmobile in what was now known as the chassis
18 side, and he worked swing shift back then like 6 weeks on days, 6 weeks on
19 second, 6 weeks on third and just by his attitude when he'd come home, how
20 tired he was, grouchy sometimes and everything, I didn't want no part of it.
21
22 [laughter]
23
24Marilyn Coulter: [21:52] So that was just the way you didn't like the way it seemed like it
25 made him...
26
27Donald Perry: Yeah.
28
29Marilyn Coulter: ...like the type of person...
30
31Donald Perry: Yeah.
32
33Marilyn Coulter: ...it made him.
34
35Donald Perry: Yeah. And far as what they did in the factory and all that, I had no
36 knowledge of that whatsoever.
37
38Marilyn Coulter: [22:00] All you thought was it made him a tired, grumpy person?
39
40Donald Perry: Yeah and that they made cars. That's all I knew about.
41
42Marilyn Coulter: And that's all you knew. So when you came into that...
43
44Donald Perry: Yeah. And then when I walked in and seen the process of it, even 34 years
45 later, I'm still fascinated watching it progress starting from pieces of metal
46 into what they make.

1
2 Marilyn Coulter: [22:22] So, um, being fascinated by that and then knowing the importance
3 of what it is that you do because you help the [wheel to run 22:29], right?
4
5 Donald Perry: Yes ma'am, I do.
6
7 Marilyn Coulter: [22:35] Keepin' it goin', um, what was the sizes of the teams that you
8 worked in? [Inaudible].
9
10 Donald Perry: When I was a booth cleaner – is – there was probably back in the beginning
11 40 to 50 people in the group and we were in teams of like 4 to 5 per booth.
12
13 Marilyn Coulter: [22:51] Now were, were, were maintenance personnel, were they primarily
14 all men or were there woman in [inaudible]?
15
16 Donald Perry: Back then they were strictly men and, um, the women didn't start coming in
17 ta even skilled trades until probably the mid 80s.
18
19 Marilyn Coulter: [23:06] All right. And now are there, are there women booth cleaners?
20
21 Donald Perry: Uh, to my knowledge, there's still not, no ladies – or women in booth
22 cleanin'.
23
24 Marilyn Coulter: [23:14] And are there any female oilers?
25
26 Donald Perry: No.
27
28 Marilyn Coulter: [23:17] No. And do you think that's because it's – why do you think that is?
29
30 Donald Perry: I, truthfully, I don't know if anybody's – if any woman's ever put in for the
31 job or not or if it's just some restriction they might have of not allowing
32 woman because of the type a work.
33
34 Marilyn Coulter: Mm.
35
36 Donald Perry; Because there is a lot of climbing and digging and heavy lifting and whatnot
37 involved in it. So I don't if that plays a part in it or what it might be.
38
39 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm. [23:42] Now because you work with toxic chemicals and things
40 like that and, do you guys have to take any kinda special physicals every
41 now and then [inaudible]?
42
43 Donald Perry: Yeah, they give us yearly physicals. We do the breath test and hearing test,
44 all that good stuff, every year.
45
46 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.

1
2Donald Perry: And they check everything out and they do chest x-rays and all that on ya to
3 make sure everything's [needs 24:07] to be where it is.
4
5Marilyn Coulter: Hm. So okay.
6
7Michael Fleming: [24:13] Don, you did mention the fact that you were laid off and went into
8 the service. Have you ever been in a strike when, when the plant was on
9 strike?
10
11Donald Perry: Uh, the first one we were on I believe was in the late 70s, early 80s. I was on
12 Body Shop production then. We walked off the line at midnight and we
13 were back the next morning, or the day shift was back the next morning.
14 Then, uh, probably 3 contracts ago, I believe, we went out locally for 3 days
15 and then went back.
16
17Michael Fleming: [24:54] Okay. Um, the supervisors, you mentioned that you pretty much,
18 um, supervised yourself and knew what you had to do – so did you have a
19 good supervisor when you did have to interact?
20
21Donald Perry: Um, most of'm overall, the worst ones I had was when I was on production
22 but maintenance supervisors were fantastic. Booth cleaners were really good
23 and then, once I went into oilers, I hate to say it but most of'm didn't have no
24 idea what we did. We had maintenance – skills trade supervisors, so they
25 just gave us our preventative maintenance sheets every month and said you
26 know what to do, go do it. So we went out and did our job and turned'm in
27 when we were done.
28
29Michael Fleming: Uh, Jerri Smith.
30
31Jerri Smith: [25:38] Yeah, Don, you were saying that you got 34 years in. Do you plan
32 on going out to the new plant?
33
34Donald Smith: Yes, I – of right now, I'm scheduled to go on the [material line 25:46] third
35 shift and I plan on being there probably until I'm 55 and then I plan on
36 retiring.
37
38Cheryl McQuaid: [25:58] Cheryl McQuaid. Um, you mentioned when you first...
39
40 [throat clearing]
41
42Cheryl McQuaid: ...went into the oiler group, you would sit for about 3 hours...
43
44Donald Perry: Well that was in booth cleaners.
45
46Cheryl McQuaid: Oh, that boo – booth cleaners?

1
2Donald Perry: Yeah.
3
4Cheryl McQuaid: Because you couldn't do anything while production was running?
5
6Donald Perry: No, not while production was running.
7
8Cheryl McQuaid: And you mentioned that the other people on your team would disappear...
9
10Donald Perry: Yeah.
11
12Cheryl McQuaid: ...and come to find out they were in little sleeping nooks and...
13
14Donald Perry: Some were, some were just out visiting, doing other things.
15
16Cheryl McQuaid: [26:25] Where did they go to sleep at?
17
18Donald Perry: Uh, different areas. Some went on top of the booths. Some went in – on top
19 of the fake ceilings, false ceilings I believe they called'm. Some just went in
20 a corner and found a chair and sit in and nodded out. Just wherever they
21 could find a spot.
22
23Michael Fleming: [26:58] Uh, Don, there was, um, a lot of, uh, activities that go on around the
24 plant and one of'm was, they always had, uh, high school football games.
25 Um, did you ever get a chance to watch any of those football games or did
26 you know any folks that went up and watched those?
27
28Donald Perry: Yeah I must confess I did a couple times went up on the roof and
29 watched'm.
30
31 [laughter]
32
33Michael Fleming: [27:08] So excuse me, explain...
34
35 [throat clearing]
36
37Michael Fleming: ...I don't know if we heard that or not. You went where to watch them? And
38 explain about that a little bit.
39
40Donald Perry: Uh, well at one point, they had the big double doors when they built the new
41 paint department open, we could sit there and watch'm but other times I
42 went up on top of the roof and watched them for 15, 20 minutes, see who
43 was winnin'.
44
45Michael Fleming: [27:29] Were there are other people there?
46

1Donald Perry: Oh yeah, there was lots of production people, trades people. Production
2 people would come up on their breaks and check'm out and then trades
3 people would come up every now and then and watch'm.
4

5Michael Fleming: [27:40] Did they have popcorn and pop 'n stuff?
6

7Donald Perry: Not unless you brought it yourself.
8
9 [laughter]
10

11Michael Fleming: Okay.
12
13 [laughter]
14

15Donald Perry: Even caught a couple foremans up there one day watchin'm.
16

17Michael Fleming: Did ya? That was a pretty good deal that, uh, you go up and get – it's a great
18 vantage point from up there...
19

20Donald Perry: Yes it is.
21

22Michael Fleming: ...to see it. Yeah.
23

24Donald Perry: A birds eye view of it.
25

26Michael Fleming: [27:56] Yeah. Any other things that you know of that went on in there that,
27 uh, only the, uh, what we would call indirect labor folks would know about
28 and production people didn't. Were there things that went on inside there
29 that we didn't know anything about?
30

31Donald Perry: Uh, about the only thing I'm aware of is the areas the production people
32 were not aware were in the plant 'cause I could take people out there and
33 get'm lost under the ovens or out on the catwalks whatever and it'd be hard
34 for'm to find their way back.
35

36Michael Fleming: Okay. All right.
37

38Donald Perry: Because there was a lot of area where the conveyors went that they had no
39 idea were there...
40

41Michael Fleming: Mm-hm.
42

43Donald Perry: ...and everything, but as far as any activity-type stuff, I can't recall any that
44 they might have that the production people weren't aware of.
45

1 Michael Fleming: [28:46] Wh – did the oilers combine with any other group or did they stay to
2 themselves when they came to having, um, dinners, uh, celebrations of
3 birthdays, of holidays, be it Christmas or Easter?
4

5 Donald Perry: Uh, normally we, on third shift, we got with the trades people and had just
6 one big dinner or whatever.
7

8 Michael Fleming: [29:08] Talk about those dinners when you first came in until the time you
9 got **relieved**. Did they get better? Did they get worse? Were there more
10 people involved at a certain point?
11

12 Donald Perry: Well actually I believe they got better because when I first hired in, I don't
13 recall them ever having'm. And once I – we moved up into the new paint
14 department and stuff, I noticed they started havin'm more and a few times I
15 actually set'm up myself. They put me in charge of'm and everything, so
16 they actually got better over time.
17

18 Michael Fleming: [29:36] So if you were, um, coordinating the dinners, what, what types of
19 dinners did you coor – what did you, what did you...
20

21 Donald Perry: Uh, we had birthday dinners. One guy [throat clearing], excuse me. One
22 trades guy [throat clearing], excuse me, one guy turned 50, so we threw'm a
23 surprise birthday party and, uh, we usually had everybody bring in a dish to
24 pass and then we would, uh, everybody'd chip in a certain amount a money
25 for the meat. We'd have ham or turkey, whatever, and, uh, it turned out
26 pretty good.
27

28 Michael Fleming: [30:12] Okay. How about benefits? Like for someone that might have had a
29 house fire, someone that might've had, uh, someone sick in their family?
30 How about – did you have any of those where people collected money to
31 help anybody?
32

33 Donald Perry: Yeah. One instance was Mike **[Quinterri]** 30:26], he was an electrician in
34 Underbody, he got injured at work and, uh, it was pretty bad. He had his ear
35 just about ripped off and some other injuries and myself and **Carl** **[May]**
36 30:39], another oiler and, uh, **John Anthony**, the benefits rep, we got
37 together and, uh, set up a benefit dinner for him. Had hotdogs and potato
38 salad and that type a thing. We ended up raisin', between the 3 dinners we
39 threw, about \$6000 for'm.
40

41 Michael Fleming: Excellent.
42

43 Donald Perry: We took it over and gave him. He was in tears when he seen it.
44

45 Michael Fleming: [31:02] Here's the thing, did you – that, that was somethin' that was pretty
46 common in there, wasn't it?

1
2Donald Perry: Yes, it was.
3
4Michael Fleming: [31:07] Uh, would you say that was part of the culture of Fisher Body, the
5 way that the family felt of each other in there [inaudible], or they thought
6 each other as a family?
7
8Donald Perry: Yeah, I really do, 'cause, uh, it was like walking in and havin' a second
9 family 'cause everybody would watch out for everybody. If you needed help
10 on your job, if someone could, they'd run over to help ya and, uh, like you
11 say, if someone got injured, it was like the whole plant was there to back'm
12 up and support'm through their recovery.
13
14Marilyn Coulter: [31:41] Marilyn Coulter. Um, Mike, you said – I mean...
15
16 [laughter]
17
18Marilyn Coulter: [31:46] Excuse me, Don, you said that, um, Mike Quinterri had his ear
19 ripped off – did, did this happen at home? Did it happen in the plant? What
20 happened?
21
22Donald Perry: Um, no, it happened in C-Underbody. He – one a the presses they had then
23 went and broke down. He went up above it ta see what the problem was, and
24 from my understanding, he rech in with a stick to hit a switch to trigger it to
25 go again and the stick got called – caught into something and pulled him
26 right into the press and pulled him down and threw him back out onto the
27 catwalk when it come up, and it ripped his ear off. It was still hanging on
28 but it ripped it partially off and did some other injuries. He broke his jaw, I
29 believe, and had some other injuries. But one a the production people below
30 the catwalk heard someone [throat clearing], excuse me – heard a noise and
31 looked up and blood was dripping down onto the floor by his work station
32 [throat clearing] and that's when they, uh, got EMTs out there and took –
33 rushed him down to medical and took him to St. Lawrence Hospital and we
34 went up and seen him afterwards and he was in critical condition and, uh, he
35 recovered from it very well.
36
37Michael Fleming: [33:01] Mike Fleming. Uh, what's an EMT?
38
39Donald Perry: Uh, emergency medical technician.
40
41Michael Fleming: [33:07] We have those throughout the plant do we?
42
43Donald Perry: Uh, then we didn't. It was, uh, back then it was mostly plant security and
44 whatever foreman or maintenance person might be around at the time. But
45 then they formed a ERT group, which is emergency response team, and they
46 go on all emergency calls now.

1
2 Marilyn Coulter: [33:30] No-, Marilyn Coulter. Now – is that team made up of – who's that
3 team made up of? Or do you know?
4
5 Donald Perry: Uh, they have production people, maintenance people, uh, foremans, uh,
6 security guards, whoever wants to volunteer and go through the training for
7 it.
8
9 Marilyn Coulter: Mm.
10
11 Cheryl McQuaid: [33:47] Cheryl McQuaid. You mentioned that for the benefit dinner for
12 Mike Quinterri you raised like \$6000? That's quite the benefit dinner. You
13 can tell us a little bit about that and how you were able to raise that much
14 money?
15
16 Donald Perry: Yeah, uh, originally, when we first started to do it, there were several of us
17 that planned it and we had it up in Paint Department and we, uh, John
18 Anthony got some polish dogs, hotdogs, whatnot, donated them. We had
19 people donate different dishes to pass and we took donations for it and I
20 believe that time we raised about \$2500 at that particular dinner and then we
21 got wind that the Body Shop people were upset 'cause we had it in Paint
22 'cause Mike worked in Body Shop, so we organized another one for Body
23 Shop and I believe on that one we raised another 1500 to 2000 and then
24 Trim people were upset because we were so far away from them so we
25 ended up organizing another one for Trim Department and raised another
26 couple thousand for that and we put it all – and pooled it all together and too
27 it over to'm at home. And him and his wife just busted out in tears they were
28 so shocked by it. But that, to me, that's part of what the GM people are all
29 about. When someone is down and out, we all get together and help'm out.
30
31 Cheryl McQuaid: [35:11] Um, Cheryl McQuaid still. I'm sorry, you, uh, you touched on the
32 environmental conditions of the third shift and I guess I'd like you to – I, I
33 never worked third shift. Third shift, whenever I went in there and the lights
34 were off, the place was extremely eerie to me. And I guess I'd like to know
35 what it was like hiring right in on the third shift and I'm sure you were able
36 to get used to it but it's still a diff-, different than any – anything else that
37 any of us have experienced. If you could tell us a little bit more about that
38 shift.
39
40 Donald Perry: Uh, yeah, when I first hired in, uh, the setup of the plant was totally different
41 than what it is now, but when production went home, it got really quiet and
42 nobody around and then all of a sudden the workers appear. But back then I
43 was real nervous about venturing out too far so I pretty much stayed in my
44 area but as the time went over, I started venturing out more and everything
45 and, uh, got to know the place and once production went home, about all
46 you heard was air leaks and fans goin' or the heater kickin' on, whatever.

1 And it's real eerie at first hearing all these strange noises you aren't used to
2 and everything and I'd always jump around and look and see what was
3 behind me or somethin'. But you grow to get used to it and everything and
4 then when you don't hear it, you know somethin's wrong because it's spose
5 to be a noise there, and it's not. So you start looking for trouble, problems or
6 something to correct.
7

8Michael Fleming: [36:56] Mike Fleming, Don, um, when you, um, you got 34 years in here
9 and there's been an awful lotta name changes over there like BOC, LCA,
10 um, and I don't know what else had been changed to, what, what do you
11 think about the name changes that were in the plant?
12

13Donald Perry: Well, when I hired in, it was, uh, called Fisher Body and as you say, it
14 changed from that, after about 10 years it went to BOC, which was Buick-
15 Olds-Cadillac. And then from that it went to LCA, which was Lansing Car
16 Assembly, and to me with all the name changes, it's still Fisher Body. It
17 always will be even once they tear the building down, it's still gonna be
18 Fisher Body in my memories.
19

20Marilyn Coulter: [37:56] Mm. Uh, Marilyn Coulter. I just wanted to go right back for a
21 second to the building. Was there ever a time in there – I know we had
22 power outages and things like that – were you – did you – were you ever in
23 the building during those and...?
24

25Donald Perry: Uh, there was a couple times we were there when the power went out but
26 the most significant power outage was when they had the East Coast power
27 grid go down. I wasn't there when it happened but we got called into work
28 that night and at the gate they gave us flashlights to use to see our way
29 through and we got in there and it was dead silent. Nothing. No lights. No
30 air anything, and that was real eerie and stuff. We made our way into – to
31 get into our coveralls and we went down to the maintenance office and they
32 guided us out to the parking lot by the powerhouse and we sat there for
33 pretty much the whole night 'cause they thought they'd be getting power
34 back. They didn't realize how significant of a power outage it was and, uh,
35 we stayed there the whole night out in the parking lot. Thank goodness it
36 was summer.
37

38 [laughter]
39

40Donald Perry: And, uh, went home the next morning and the second night they had told us
41 to come back in. We went in and same thing, went and sit out in the parking
42 lot. Other – the – thing different, we didn't change into our work clothes. We
43 just went out and sat out in the parking lot and the third night we come in
44 and they let us go home finally at lunch and I believe the day after that's
45 when the power come back on.
46

1 Marilyn Coulter: [39:20] Mm. But – now speaking of lunch, third shift, um, how did you have
2 your lunch and your breaks? I mean was the cafeteria open? What did you
3 do for lunch?
4

5 Donald Perry: When I first hired in, they had a little, uh, cafeteria set up in the main
6 cafeteria that whatever production was left over from production they'd put
7 in there for us. And they had a lady, Cheryl [Trayer 39:43] who ran that for
8 us and everything. So we had a hot meal then. Then they had our wagons
9 that'd come around on break times with snacks and pop and whatnot on it,
10 so I was able to get stuff off that. But as time went on, they did away with
11 that and put in vending machines, so that was about all we had ta get our
12 lunch out of if we didn't bring somethin' in for ourselves.
13

14 Marilyn Coulter: [40:07] So now, Mike, just back up. So now first of all, what was wagon and
15 they had wagons for you on third shift?
16

17 Donald Perry: Uh, well production-wise, 'cause their last wagon come around about our
18 break time.
19

20 Marilyn Coulter: Oh.
21

22 Donald Perry: And a wagon was a little cart that had – they had, uh, trays on'm with ice
23 and pop on'm and Twinkies, cupcakes, that type a thing on it. Chips,
24 whatever you might want for a snack. And they'd come around different
25 times of the night and in the morning when about time we'd go home is
26 when the morning one would, one would come out for production.
27

28 Marilyn Coulter: [40:38] And so for your lunchtime, for a period of time you had a small
29 cafeteria that you ate whatever was on the menu for that day from the
30 cafeteria and now, do I understand you right, where that went away and you
31 guys just had vending machines?
32

33 Donald Perry: Yeah, eventually that went away. They closed it down and...
34

35 Marilyn Coulter: Mm.
36

37 Donald Perry: ...they, uh, tried keepin' the, uh, main cafeteria open for production up until
38 1:00, so third shift could at least get up there and try to get a burger or
39 somethin'. I guess the response from the third shift people were so low they
40 ended up closin' it up at 11. So we were then put to the vending machines if
41 we wanted something to eat.
42

43 Marilyn Coulter: Oh, or you had to bring your own.
44

45 Donald Perry: Or bring our own lunch in.
46

1 Marilyn Coulter: [41:21] Oh. So now did you – were you able to get a longer lunch hour if
2 you had to bring your own in? Or was it the same?
3

4 Donald Perry: No, it was the same, 3 to 3:30 was our lunch break.
5

6 Marilyn Coulter: [42:34] Okay. Now, um, you went in from booth cleaning to oilers and you
7 initially hired in in what year?
8

9 Donald Perry: Uh, 1972.
10

11 Marilyn Coulter: In '72. So at that time, that's when both lines were still together. How did or
12 did it not affect you having the, the lines change when they went from being
13 both on the same floor to separate floors. Did that change your job? How did
14 it affect what you did?
15

16 Donald Perry: Uh, about the only way it changed is we just had to do more walking and
17 then that's when they brought more guys into our group so they split us up
18 and so many guys did one line and so many guys did the other line...
19

20 Marilyn Coulter: Mm.
21

22 Donald Perry: ...and everything, but we just did a lot more walkin' then.
23

24 Marilyn Coulter: [42:14] And, um, supervisors. You said that, um, some of'm didn't know
25 what you did, um, a couple things. What made a good supervisor, what
26 made a bad supervisor for you? And how did it change as we got closer to
27 the end of our time here?
28

29 Donald Perry: Uh, a good supervisor was one that says or told me they knew I did my work
30 and they trusted me as doing it and, uh, just told me to go out on my own
31 because they knew it'd get done. A bad supervisor to me was one that some
32 a the other guys might be screwing off not doing their work, let'm get away
33 with it and then I would have to go back or me or some a the other guys and
34 do their job to keep the line runnin' and that's happened on more than one
35 occasion, sad to say.
36

37 Marilyn Coulter: [43:10] Hm. So, um, how has the supervisor techniques changed or are they
38 pretty much the same standard?
39

40 Donald Perry: Uh, I'd say they're pretty much the same 'cause some of'm get in there and
41 know what the boss...
42
43 [throat clearing]
44

1Donald Perry: ...likes or whatever and talks to'm, sports or whatever they might be
2interested in and gets in buddy-buddy with'm and gets away with a lot more
3than some of us do.
4
5[coughing]
6
7Michael Fleming: [43:35] Um, Don, I wanna talk to you about – we're talkin' third shift here –
8the wages. When you hired in, your, your wages that you made shift
9premium and hours. You did an awful lotta hours. Talk about that – could
10you talk about that for us?
11
12Donald Perry: Uh, yeah, when I hired in, in '72, my base rate was \$5.25 an hour, I believe.
13I still have my paycheck stub at home.
14
15Michael Fleming: Really.
16
17Donald Perry: And shift premium on third shift, we got 10% shift premium and second
18shift we got 5%. And hours back then, we did a lot of 6 days and a few 7
19days and then changeover time we did 7 days straight through however long
20it might be. And at one point when we got the 4-month shutdown, I worked
2168 days straight without a day off and I was finally setting in the parking lot
22waitin' to go in and one a my friends come up and looks and said, "Get the
23heck outta here. Go home." So I says, okay, pulled my finger, and says okay
24and I'm gone. [laughter]
25
26Michael Fleming: [laughter]
27
28Donald Perry: And I went home and took a night off and I called my boss to let him know I
29wasn't coming in. He says I wondered when you was finally gonna take a
30day off.
31
32Michael Fleming: [44:47] So you went from \$5.25 in '72 to what you [inaudible] – what is it
33now?
34
35Donald Perry: Uh, I believe it's \$27 something an hour right now.
36
37Michael Fleming: At the height, uh, like you said, you did 68 hours straight, but at the height
38of what we – what you would consider, um, wages and earnings, what was
39the most that you ever made in 1 year at Fisher Body.
40
41Donald Perry: Uh, oh, I believe it was about – about 78,000 and I had taken my vacation
42time tha – that year and everything too.
43
44Michael Fleming: [45:22] That was with vacations that you made that [inaudible].
45
46Donald Perry: Yeah, taking time off for vacations and stuff.

1
2 Michael Fleming: [45:28] So what, what, what would be one a your, um, best-bargained
3 benefits that the UAW bargained for you? Uh, other than obviously wages,
4 um, what would be one of them?
5
6 Donald Perry: Uh, I believe healthcare, prescription coverage, eye coverage, that type a
7 thing, dental, 'cause I see a lot of people when I go to get a prescription and
8 stuff forking out \$200 to \$300 for 1 or 2 prescriptions and I'm payin' \$10 for
9 them, that really makes you wake up and appreciate that benefit as being
10 negotiated for us.
11
12 Michael Fleming: [46:05] Mm-hm. Do you view, uh, your co-workers as your brothers and
13 sisters?
14
15 Donald Perry: Uh, for the most part, yeah, 'cause we all get along really good and
16 everything and I do view'm that way, they're like part a my family.
17
18 Michael Fleming: [46:20] Any particular...
19
20 [coughing]
21
22 Michael Fleming: ...long-lasting relationships or friendships that you've taken outside of the
23 plant since you worked there?
24
25 Donald Perry: Yeah, I have my friend, Carol Cooper, we met in early 80s and she's my best
26 friend right now. So we've known each other about 25 years. A couple a the
27 booth cleaners I've worked with early on, I met'm and we're still friends 25,
28 30 years later. Hang out and do a lot together.
29
30 Michael Fleming: [46:47] Is there any groups of people that you particularly hang with other
31 than the oilers or inside of the oilers or that may play instruments, do Bible
32 studies, or any kind of focus group activity inside a the plant?
33
34 Donald Perry: No, I never – bein' on third shift, we really didn't have a lot of that. I went
35 around and talked to a lot of production people but none a the ones I knew
36 on production were really involved in anything like that – or got into.
37
38 Michael Fleming: [47:19] Okay. Um, we had a smoking policy or a ban on smoking inside a
39 the plant and then they went to these little rooms or whatnot, if you are – or
40 not – or are not a smoker, did it have any impact on you?
41
42 Donald Perry: Well, I'm not a smoker, so that, that aspect didn't really affect me. But I
43 think it was unfair that they banned it in the plant because a the people that
44 did smoke, that they [inaudible 47:44] have the right to do it. But at the
45 same time, when they banned it, I thought it was kind of ironic because they
46 had all the smoke comin' from the weld guns and robots in Body Shop and

1 to me that would be more hazardous to your health than what smoke from
2 cigarettes and stuff would do.
3
4Michael Fleming: [48:01] Um, have you ever participated within your local union?
5
6Donald Perry: Uh, a few times, yeah.
7
8Interview: [48:10] Uh, would you like to elaborate on some a the things you've done?
9
10Donald Perry: Uh, well, I went, uh, worked at the union picnic a couple times and gone to
11 meetings here and there and stuff. Again, working third shift, it was hard to
12 get the time schedule straight with the times they had stuff scheduled and
13 stuff for my sleeping and whatnot.
14
15Interview: [48:28] Do you vote for your leadership?
16
17Donald Perry: Yes, I did. I vote every election.
18
19Michael Fleming: [48:39] Um, let's see. How about you – TAP – you know a TAP is a tuition
20 assistance program that's offered as a benefit. Have you or any of your
21 family members had an opportunity to use any of it?
22
23Donald Perry: Yeah, actually I have. I went, uh, to Lansing Community College and took
24 massage therapy classes. So now I'm a massage therapist on the side.
25
26 [laughter]
27
28Michael Fleming: Well, Don, we want to have you elaborate on that...
29
30 [laughter]
31
32Michael Fleming: ...and I'm gonna start with Jerri Smith and we'll go around the room.
33
34 [throat clearing]
35
36Jerri Smith: [49:09] I was gonna say, when this, uh, interview's over could we get some
37 samples of the massage therapy?
38
39 [laughter]
40
41Donald Perry: Sure, not a problem.
42
43 [laughter]
44
45Marilyn Coulter: So...
46

1Michael Fleming: Miss Cheryl McQuaid, go 'head.
2
3Cheryl McQuaid: Oh, I had nothin', thank you.
4
5Michael Fleming: Marilyn.
6
7Marilyn Coulter: [49:20] Um, I, so you doing massage therapy now and that's something that
8 you do while – as a – as a...?
9
10Donald Perry: I do it as a side job. It got me into it because one of the ladies that worked
11 for [Jimmy Surette 49:33] took classes on it and had been talkin' to me and
12 I'd go up and down the line and talk to my friends and stuff and started
13 givin'm shoulder rubs and stuff and they'd come up, "You're in the wrong
14 profession, you need to do this." So the closer I got to retirement, I started
15 thinkin' about possibilities a somethin' I might like to do afterwards and so I
16 figured I'd take one class and see if I liked it. So I signed up for it through
17 TAP, tuition assistance program, and, uh, took the whole first class, massage
18 class, and just fell in love with it. So I ended up taking 12 classes, I believe
19 it was of different areas that do with massage therapy.
20
21Marilyn Coulter: [50:10] So now you're a certified masseuse?
22
23Donald Perry: Uh, uh, I'm not certified 'cause I felt I wasn't going to do it as a full-time
24 income...
25
26 [throat clearing]
27
28Donald Perry: ...so just as a side thing, so I never got my certification on it.
29
30Marilyn Coulter: Hm.
31
32Donald Perry: But I still do it. I got a good clientele build up.
33
34Marilyn Coulter: Oh. Okay.
35
36Michael Fleming: [50:56] Mike Fleming. Don, that – that's really a great story to hear that
37 'cause most men don't go into that field and, uh, it – it's, it's one that we, um,
38 could use with all the musculoskeletal, um, injuries and repetitive motion
39 injuries that we get [inaudible 50:47]. I don't think you'll ever need to look
40 for – you, you – job security is gonna be there. Um, have you ever
41 participated in any activities outside of the plant? What do you do
42 community-wise or...?
43
44Donald Perry: Uh, I was doing Meals on Wheels for about 9 years delivering meals to shut-
45 ins and senior citizens that couldn't get out. And I continued doing it until I
46 got put on day shift when the plant started closing and I wasn't able to

1 anymore. But now I'm also involved in Special Olympics and actually we're
2 getting ready to leave next Tuesday to go up to Traverse City for winter
3 games.
4

5Michael Fleming: Very good Don.
6

7Marilyn Coulter: That's awesome.
8

9Michael Fleming: It is.
10

11Marilyn Coulter: [51:31] So, um, how long have you been with Special Olympics?
12

13Donald Perry: A year.
14

15Marilyn Coulter: A year?
16

17Donald Perry: Yes.
18

19Marilyn Coulter: [51:35] And so, um, what is that you do with the children?
20

21Donald Perry: Uh, right now, my job basically consists of being a chaperone for'm. I go
22 out, like the winter games, we go up and we have to make sure they get to
23 their events on time and we have 3 athletes in each room, so we [got 51:53]
24 pretty much their guardian for the time that they're up there and stuff. We
25 take'm to their events and take'm and make sure they get their dinner or get
26 their meds or whatever they might need.
27

28Marilyn Coulter: [52:09] Now, I know right now, um, you and some of your co-workers are
29 doing something special as far makin' some things for some people for next
30 winter aren't you?
31

32Donald Perry: Uh, yes, we are, at the Jobs Bank office in Dewitt we're – make – crocheting
33 hats and scarfs and whatnot and we're donatin'm to rescue mission and some
34 of'm are being donated ta Sparrow Hospital Maternity Ward for newborns.
35 The ladies there got me into it and I'm poppin'm out right and left [inaudible
36 52:35]. [papers rustling]
37

38Marilyn Coulter: [52:40] Hm. Um, and what you said right now, is, is you said some things
39 that, um, about workers and number one is that they're there for their co-
40 workers and for the community, and, um, working there, there're some
41 things about your co- – fe – fellow co-workers along with yourself that the
42 people in the community don't know as far as maybe their education, as far
43 as what they do for outside community?
44

45Donald Perry: Uh, I believe so. Everybody thinks that I get this thrown at me a lot, that you
46 work at GM, you got a easy job, you make lots a money, that type of thing,

1 but they really don't realize that a lot of'm are very high college educated
2 and a lot of'm [loud background noise] do, do community service. We got a
3 lot from the bank and community service right now doing the jobs and, uh,
4 even like we hear of someone being injured or somethin' or having a disease
5 or whatnot, we'll take a collection up for'm and send to'm. A lot of people
6 help out at schools for tutoring and whatnot. And a lot a public just don't see
7 that part of us.
8

9Marilyn Coulter: And a lot of them have taken their crafts and made businesses out of'm so
10 they help there...
11

12Donald Perry: Yeah.
13

14Marilyn Coulter: All right.
15

16Michael Fleming: [54:00] Mike Fleming, Don. Um, okay [sighing] can you remember or what
17 was your best memory of the Fisher Body plant?
18

19Donald Perry: Uh, I think the best one I can think of is the togetherness of all the people,
20 making friends and being like one big family. And again, it goes back to if
21 someone was in need, everybody'd be there to help out in whatever aspect
22 they could. And then again, uh, just the knowledge of being able to see a car
23 develop from pieces of metal into a full-fledged car was amazing to me and
24 still is today.
25

26Michael Fleming: [54:49] What would be considered your worst memory of Fisher Body?
27

28Donald Perry: I believe when the booth cleaners got killed 'cause that will be with me
29 forever.
30

31Marilyn Coulter: [55:26] Marilyn Coulter. Um, you were an oiler and a booth cleaner and,
32 you know, right know we're in the transition to going to the new facility and,
33 um, Fisher Body, as we all love and know it, is now gone, even as of
34 yesterday, they took the signs down, which means the building's coming
35 down. Being from Lansing, working there for 34 years, how does that make
36 you feel?
37

38Donald Perry: Really sad 'cause Lansing has always been known as the capital of
39 Oldsmobile and everything, in fact the last day I was in the plant, I just
40 drove around and was lookin' at everything and it actually brought tears to
41 my eyes because it's been over half of my life I spent in that building and it
42 was really a sad part of – like – part of Lansing history is being torn down.
43 And it's just a hard pill to swallow as they say. I know it's all part of
44 progress and we're going into a new facility, state-of-the-art facility, but still
45 this has been home to me for 34 years. I actually – I think I spent more time
46 in Fisher Body building than I have at my own house over the years. But it's

1 real sad losing – it's like I'm losing a part of my life and everything but it's
2 all part of progress I guess.
3
4Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.
5
6Michael Fleming: [56:26] Mike Fleming, Don. Is there anything that we haven't covered that
7 you would like to speak about?
8
9Donald Perry: Uh, no, nothing that I can think of offhand.
10
11Michael Fleming: Well we want to thank you for coming in and interviewing with us.
12
13Donald Perry: Uh, you're more than welcome. Thank you for having me.
14
15Michael Fleming: Thank you, Don.
16
17 Thank you, Don.
18
19
20/ds