

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

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5 Cheryl McQuaid: This is the Lansing Fisher Body Historical Team. It's February 15, 2006,
6 approximately 20 after 10 a.m. We're at the Frank Dryer Greenhouse,
7 across the street from Local 602. [0:19] Why don't we let everybody else
8 know who's in the room?
9
10 Earl Nicholson: Earl Nicholson.
11
12 Gary Judy: Gary Judy.
13
14 Jerri Smith: Jerri Smith.
15
16 Marilyn Coulter: Marilyn Coulter.
17
18 John Fedewa: John Fedewa.
19
20 Cheryl McQuaid: And this is Cheryl McQuaid. [0:32] Douglas Rademacher, could you state
21 your name and spell your last name for us?
22
23 Doug Rademacher: Doug Rademacher, R-a-d-e-m-a-c-h-e-r.
24
25 Cheryl McQuaid: [0:43] And what is your address?
26
27 Doug Rademacher: The address is 2310 Woodruff Avenue, Lansing, Michigan 48912.
28
29 Cheryl McQuaid: And you're a male. [0:52] Are you married?
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31 Doug Rademacher: Yes, I am. I've been married for 26 years and I have two children, two
32 daughters, 23 and 19.
33
34 Cheryl McQuaid: [1:02] Where were you born?
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36 Doug Rademacher: I was born right here in Lansing, Michigan, at St. Lawrence Hospital.
37 Um, I lived in Williamston until I was five years old, but I was born here
38 in Lansing. [throat clearing]
39
40 Cheryl McQuaid: [1:17] Um, what year was that?
41
42 Doug Rademacher: I was born in 1959 and my parents moved to Lansing when I was five
43 years old and I grew up about 3 ½ blocks from the Fisher Body plant and
44 attended Holy Cross Grade School and Lansing Catholic Central High
45 School.
46

1 Cheryl McQuaid: [1:40] Speaking of your parents, what did they do?
2

3 Doug Rademacher: My father worked for his brother, who owned a liquor store here in
4 Lansing called Toolans Delicatessen, and my mother worked for the State
5 of Michigan, downtown Lansing.
6

7 Cheryl McQuaid: Were – did you – I’m sorry. [2:05] Did you spend any time in the
8 military?
9

10 Doug Rademacher: No, I have no military experience other than that my father was a – taught
11 weaponry in the army, so as I grew up it felt like I was in the military.
12

13 Cheryl McQuaid: [2:23] Could you tell us a little bit about your background, your education,
14 growing up in the area of Fisher Body?
15

16 Doug Rademacher: Well, yes, I, [sneezing] as I said, I lived quite close to the Fisher Plant.
17 Holy Cross School and Church was on Saginaw and Jenison, so I just
18 walked straight to school every day in the morning. And then at 7th grade I
19 went to what became Lansing Catholic Central. They merged the two
20 Catholic high schools in Lansing and I went there the first year that they
21 had joined the two schools together and I was the first graduate of the
22 combined of 7th through 12th. In 1977, I graduated.
23

24 Cheryl McQuaid: [3:16] So what were some of the things you did as a, as a kid in the
25 neighborhood?
26

27 Doug Rademacher: We had a lot of fun in this neighborhood and we played. There’s a lot of,
28 um, boulevards, a lot of the neighborhoods are really, they were connected
29 to the St. Lawrence Hospital. The doctors lived nearby. There’s nice
30 homes and things up in this area. And so we played, I met the local kids,
31 we played ball. Um, one of the things I remember was my friends and I
32 would gather at this little spot behind a place called Harry’s Bar and there
33 was an open lot. It’s not very large at all but at our age if we could put the
34 ball into the parking lot of the Harry’s Bar it was a homerun. And, um,
35 one occasion we put the ball in the parking lot and broke the back window
36 out of the owner’s window of his Delta 88 and we all went sprinting away
37 in fear. You know how all the kids run. And then one of the kids who
38 was the son of the mayor of Lansing, Gerry Graves was the mayor, and his
39 son Billy went back and owned up to the, to the event. But we had lots of
40 fun in this neighborhood.
41

42 Cheryl McQuaid: [4:44] Did that car belong to a Fisher Body employee or?
43

44 Doug Rademacher: No, it was the owner of the Harry’s Bar establishment. Art is his name. I
45 don’t remember his last name properly.
46

1 Cheryl McQuaid: And so living that close to the plant you must have walked by. [5:00] Did
2 you have any interaction with the employees?
3

4 Doug Rademacher: Absolutely. Again, with my father having the store, I was always into
5 finding a way to make money. And so the Fisher Body plant always had
6 such large traffic, we'd come up and check the barrels in front of the, the
7 shop. As kids we'd pull out beer and pop bottles out of there and take
8 them to my dad's store and get all the money for candy, which there used
9 to be a, a D and C, a Dime and Cent I think that's what they were called
10 back then, store across from my father's, the liquor store, so it had a
11 wonderful candy counter and all these little separate compartments. It
12 was, again, a little kid's paradise. So we'd, we'd find ways to get money.
13 Back then, beer bottles were worth 2 cents. If you had, 7-Up was in a
14 green bottle that was worth 3 cents. And a, and a quart bottle of beer was,
15 a brown bottle was worth a nickel. So we, we would go through all the
16 barrels and up and down the street here and people always were throwing
17 those away so it was money in our pocket. That was early on.
18

19 Cheryl McQuaid: [6:14] Where was your father's store located?
20

21 Doug Rademacher: Toolans is located on Saginaw Street. It's approximately, maybe about 10
22 blocks from the Fisher plant. And, um, I worked four years there during
23 my high school years but met many of the people I ended up working
24 with. They would come in on a regular basis on their lunchbreaks or after,
25 before or after work, and so I met many of the people through the store
26 that once I hired in to Fisher Body I recognized them from coming into my
27 father and uncle's store all the time.
28

29 Cheryl McQuaid: [6:56] What, what kind of jobs did you have before you hired in?
30

31 Doug Rademacher: Well, I guess the first thing I think about is growing up three blocks away,
32 I was, um, I was a paper boy and I delivered the Lansing State Journal in
33 the afternoon and I delivered the Detroit Free Press in the morning before
34 school and that covered a large part of this surrounding neighborhood, so I
35 was always around the plant. One of my deliveries came down what
36 would be North Genesee and the Osborn streets which come right down
37 next to Verlinden Grade School and so forth, so I was by the plant all the
38 time. That would have been my first jobs and I was a, a hustler. I'd go
39 out there and solicit people to take the paper and I was a good little
40 salesman. I won a few trips to a dude ranch down in Indiana. I went to
41 opening day at Tiger Stadium. I went up to Lake Michigan for a cookout
42 and stuff. So I was just a little, always after trying to find a way to make a
43 buck even as a kid. So that was my first job.
44

45 Following that, I did work for New York Carpet World as a measure man,
46 cut remnants and so forth. I'd go into a home, measure the room, draw it

on graph paper and measure the room and then the people would come in and order their carpet [inaudible 8:34] from a, from a salesman. Following that, I went to work for the Department, State of Michigan was the Commerce Center down on Capitol Avenue and I worked as an Account Clerk 05 for a period of time doing, um, I guess it was unemployment and public assistance and I balanced counties to the checks that were being written.

And from there, I did a two-week stint, I went into a place called National Welding and I had got the information about hiring in there from my wife, my, my to-be-wife. Um, her sister worked there and they needed someone to do payroll, so I hired in there, got my own office, started to do what they call equalization of hours and balancing out the hours charged to a company and their job and divide it amongst the workers. And then I got a call from General Motors and Fisher Body – I stood in line and Fisher Body had called me and I quit that job over the weekend. I called the boss at home. She wasn't in. I left a message with her son and I never went back, so I don't know where I might have been had I stayed in accounting-type duties.

Doug, uh, from working with you this past year, I've heard a lot of stories about the neighborhood around General Motors. [10:05] Could you tell us a little bit about, um, being raised in this neighborhood? What was it like having a house three b-, blocks from the plant?

Since I was five years old, I really didn't know anything else. The plant was always there. It was huge. And we had the public high school, Sexton, was right nearby. [throat clearing] There was always a lot of traffic. There was always, um, things going on, trucks, trains. Um, you know, we'd play down at the local schoolyards. Verlinden had some ball diamonds and stuff. We'd get down in there and we'd see all the trucks on the weekends. We'd come down as we got older, we'd ride our minibikes in the parking lot on Sundays, they'd allow us, sometimes they'd kick us out but the security, we, we could come in and use the wide open parking lot. Being a city kid, there was no other place to ride those but we would grow up spending up time [coughing] [inaudible 11:13] group of kids, young guys hanging out. We'd climb on those semis that were parked out back and fool around the train tracks.

It was a while before they had put in the, the new – Oakland and Saginaw Street ran side by side and they put a bridge in and one of the funnest things as a kid was to be able to stand on top of the bridge and they're one-way streets going about 40 miles an hour and we'd throw snowballs straight down on top of vehicles and there was nowhere for them to stop and that was one of our biggest fun times. But we used to, we used to do a lot of crazy little things but we weren't real bad but it was a few times we

1 had vehicles go up to the top of the viaduct and pull over. There was no
2 place to really come and get us 'cause we were so far back on the railroad
3 tracks but we just had little pranks that we'd do.

4
5 And there was an ice cream parlor called Tastee Freez and we'd spend a
6 lot of time there and you could see the plant and the parking lots and
7 people would always be coming in. And, um, the old Paramount News
8 Center, so we'd slip in there and read books and stuff like that, try to get
9 someone to try to buy cigars or something. I remember one time we got,
10 we bought a little pack of Winchester cigars and crossed the street and sat
11 at the American Bank & Trust and, uh, some parent, as always, would,
12 they caught us and took'm away from us. It's like even if your parents
13 weren't there, somebody was always watching out for what's going on in
14 the neighborhood and taking care of the kids, keeping an eye out.

15
16 Cheryl McQuaid: [12:53] So being a neighborhood child, plant security would allow you
17 certain privileges?

18
19 Doug Rademacher: I don't know if it was privileges. Um, one security guard that comes to
20 mind is, there was a guy that was a year older than me, Frank [inaudible
21 13:09]. He ended up coming to work at the plant and then moving on into
22 engineering and higher management, but his father was a security guard.
23 He lived on Jenison Street also and I always remember he would always
24 meet his dad walking home from the plant, which was probably another
25 additional block than, further than I was but I just remember him always
26 seeing his dad come down the street in his uniform and thinking how neat
27 it was and never realized what was going on in the building. But on
28 Verlinden Avenue we'd play ball and, uh, at that little park and then we'd
29 come across to the security gate in the front and go down and that water
30 was always so cold down at the front. We'd get down in there and just, so
31 I always – you saw the guard shack type of area. It was inside the
32 building, just inside. They'd check us out but they'd let us have a drink
33 and we'd sometimes, you know, talk a little bit, make conversation.

34
35 And later on in years after we got older, of course, when the line would be
36 running more like in the summer when we had the time off, we'd hang
37 around the front of the building. In the old days the building had windows
38 all the way down. We're only four feet, five feet off the ground, I guess
39 four feet. There had always been bushes and plants all along the front but
40 you used to be able to go up and peek in the windows and they, uh, they
41 were big and green but they open out so you could stick your head up and
42 kind of be looking inside the building and occasionally the workers inside
43 would, would hoot and holler and have fun with us and spray us and stuff
44 like that with hoses or things like that. But I remember my friend Eddie
45 [Lira 14:57], he lived only a block and a half or so from the plant in the
46 first block there and his grandfather worked in there. I don't know his

1 first name but we used to come up and bring him stuff up and pass it
2 through the window, so there, there was always interaction with the
3 workers.
4

5 Cheryl McQuaid: [15:15] What kind of stuff would you pass through the window?
6

7 Doug Rademacher: Oh, usually limes and stuff, uh, maybe his lunch, stuff like that.
8

9 Cheryl McQuaid: [15:26] Do you remember much about the environment around the plant?
10

11 Doug Rademacher: Yeah, it's, um, it's a diverse area and even though we were all real close,
12 it was kind of racially divided as far as neighborhoods and you kind of had
13 particular parameters that you would, me being white and then the blacks
14 would be just north or just south of Michigan Avenue. And you just, it
15 was a known thing that you just was – in those days, we're talking in the
16 60s and up into the early 70s, there was racial unrest and so you would –
17 there was always a, a hint of concern or fear, actually it was fear that you
18 didn't want to get yourself in a situation. But my paper route that I had in
19 the morning, the Detroit Free Press took me up into the neighborhood so I
20 saw them and met the people when I collected on my paper route, carrying
21 money and so forth. So those were some things just as you get toward the
22 Sexton High School there was just some boundaries, uh, that you just, it
23 was like the white kids played on this side and the black kids played on
24 the other end. We didn't really intermingle. Occasionally, we'd meet in
25 front of Sexton and play football, um, as we got into our teens.
26

27 But, um, as far as the environment if you're talking about the air and so
28 forth, I remember distinctly in the summertime, of course we all had, I was
29 one of five kids and, um, as any kid, the idea was to eat your dinner and
30 get your chores done and get the dishes done and get outside so you could
31 play until the street lights came on or whatever and, um, on those certain
32 nights you'd walk out and there would just be the smell of paint. They
33 were painting cars up there in the body shop or in the plant and you would
34 just have this smell that would just hang as soon as you got out of your
35 house. You could almost feel it like you were wearing it.
36

37 And later on, originally we had a wood home and then my dad had
38 aluminum sided it and I remember we always had to wash the house every
39 so often, you know, with, spray it down to wash off the, the soot and the,
40 and the stuff that would gather from being that close to an assembly plant
41 but it was never, it was never negative. It was never discussed that we
42 didn't want to live there. I mean that's where we lived and that's what
43 you lived with. There was odors in the air. There was lots of noises, like I
44 said, the trucks and the banging. You'd go by and you'd hear, you know,
45 inside the factory just the banging of metal and hammers and just all kinds

1 of stuff, so it just, just became, it was all natural for me. I didn't know
2 anything else.
3

4Cheryl McQuaid: [18:48] So what were some of your thoughts when you're out on the street
5 playing and you could hear them in there? Did you ever think about what
6 they were doing or...?
7

8Doug Rademacher: No, I really didn't really ever think about it other than I knew that they
9 built vehicles. I guess I want to say that there was a, as a young,
10 youngster, some of my earliest memories of that front of that building was
11 they had a garden and it was the Fisher Body Coach done in bushes and
12 flowers and it was gorgeous. It was, it was built on an angle where the, so
13 you could see it from the street if you drove by in a vehicle. But as, as
14 kids, you know, on the weekends we'd go up and look through that and it
15 was just really neat to see something that was maintained meticulously to
16 keep that coach looking so sharp and, and made out of real plants and
17 flowers and stuff.
18

19 Um, but again, I never knew, I didn't ever recognize the end product. The
20 Fisher Body plant just built bodies and shipped them about a mile away to
21 the Oldsmobile plant and it really never connected that's, you know,
22 'cause you never saw the final product over at Fisher, you always just saw
23 parts of cars disappearing all the time. I didn't really recognize the end
24 product until you travel with your parents or something and you'd go by
25 these parking lots that were full of brand new vehicles all over this town,
26 so that was for me it was just always just a place of, of they were building
27 vehicles but they weren't complete so it was kind of different for me. I
28 don't know.
29

30Cheryl McQuaid: You mentioned that you used to play in the semis out in the parking lot.
31 [20:54] Did you ever play in the boxcars?
32

33Doug Rademacher: Occasionally we would. Um, I liked, there's a park called West Side Park.
34 It's just across from the Fisher plant to the north. There's a lot of parks
35 around here, by the way. Um, but the trains would run and, um, as a kid
36 we would become adventurous and if we traveled through West Side and
37 all the way down, uh, down Comfort Street, which is one street over from
38 the plant, that would go down and ended at a gravel pit at the end of the
39 road and the train would go down there and it would meet the, the Grand
40 River. And we would go down there and fish and stuff, so occa-, we,
41 there was occasion where we jumped the train with our fishing poles and
42 would ride it down past Willow Street toward Grand River and at that time
43 Logan Street and then we'd hop off and fish down at the gravel pit.
44 Occasionally, ride our bicycles down, play down around that gravel pit.
45 And as I got older, I would, in the winter I would walk my dog down there
46 with a friend, hang out. Um, but not too often would we jump the train. It

1 was recognizably hard to get, get, you could get on but it was hard to get
2 off when it was moving. [laughter]
3
4 Cheryl McQuaid: [22:22] So why did you hire in to Fisher Body, Doug?
5
6 Doug Rademacher: I was a high school graduate and really didn't have plans for college. I
7 won't say that it was never pressured on me that I needed to get through
8 high school and go on to college. My parents didn't push that and I had
9 already worked hard to, you know, make, I was taught if I wanted
10 anything I had to get it for myself. I remember buying my first five-speed
11 Stingray. But um, I needed, I wanted to be on my own. I was always
12 pretty independent and so even though I had this other job, I recognized
13 the opportunity. My brother John told me they were hiring. He's a year
14 older than me and he'd already had a year in, so knowing that he was
15 doing pretty good that I decided to go stand in line. That line was huge. I
16 came to Fisher Body to have a chance to make money and it was in my
17 backyard, the place I grew up in, so it felt comfortable.
18
19 Cheryl McQuaid: [23:35] Did John give you any helpful advice about coming into the plant?
20
21 Doug Rademacher: A few things. John is a, due to my age, John was, um, he's actually two
22 years older than me but he was always at my dad's side. He's a
23 handyman, a jack-of-all trades. He had taken on a welding job out in a
24 small town called Mulliken and he had welded and stuff so he had worked
25 hard. He had worked in a flower shop here at Belen's Flowers. He had
26 done different things but, um, I knew that working at Fisher was better
27 'cause he knows a lot. It wasn't as dangerous work as it was as welding
28 where he was and, um, he shared that with my oldest brother and I and we
29 both got hired in.
30
31 Cheryl McQuaid: [24:28] When did you hire in?
32
33 Doug Rademacher: I hired in October 4, 1978, and it's kind of an odd story. You have to get
34 90 days in to be represented by your union and so I had October,
35 November, December. I only had, uh, close to my 90 days but I didn't
36 have 90 days in by the Christmastime and the plant closes at
37 Christmastime and I was working the assembly line. A gentleman I stood
38 with in line, Mike [Odell 25:10], we hired in the same day. He was a
39 utility man and that's a person that's trained to learn all the jobs in an area
40 rather than just one job and since he was utility class, classification, he had
41 to stay and work over Christmas. I was excited I didn't have to work over
42 Christmas but I didn't know if I'd ever get called back to get my 90 days
43 in, but I, after the Christmas downtime they did call me back and I got my
44 90 days only to find out somewhere along the line I lost that week of
45 employment. I don't know if it was because I didn't get my 90 days in in

the first year but my seniority date now is 10/11/78 even though I possess the check stub from the week of October 4 of '78. [recording clicked]

4Cheryl McQuaid: [25:58] Doug, could you tell us a little bit about the hiring-in process?

6Doug Rademacher: Yes, I'd love to. I remember again my brother telling me that they were taking applications. He shared that with my older brother and I and, um, so we found out they were taking the applications down here at Rosemary and Michigan Avenue, came down to stand in line and the line was long. I didn't even, again, didn't really know what went on inside that building but obviously there was a whole lot of interest so I thought I'd go stand with all those interested people [chuckle] and, uh, I put an application in there that day.

And then I don't know if it was only another week or whatever, I heard they were taking applications again and I went to the, this time they took them at the front of the Fisher Body plant on Verlinden Avenue and I remember getting there that morning and he told me to be there early and by the time I got there, it was already a line from the staircase, the front of the Fisher Body plant entrance is, is down probably about 15 staircases so you're out of site when you go into the building and here the line was down, up over, up, up the staircase, down the street, almost back to the grade school. It was going toward Verlinden Grade School. And we just got in line and started shuffling and I recognized a guy there, Mike [Odell 27:27] was, he went to Sexton High School. I went to Lansing Catholic but we had known each other through mutual friends and so forth, so he was right in line with me. He showed up at the same time I did. Um, and we wandered, took our, you know, spent the day there walking and waiting our turn to get to the line up to the front.

Now this time through I had heard that, that they, um, had a table where when you went in and turned in your application that there was a, on the one side of the table was the box you're going to get hired and the other side wasn't and it had a, it had a curt-, or a table skirt in front so you really didn't know but I didn't know the gentleman, um, but, you know, you always wondered which box you were going in. You didn't know which one was which but, um, shortly thereafter I got the call. I was 18 years old and they told me to report to work, so as I told you earlier, I, I called the boss on a Friday. I got the call Friday and told him, I called my boss that I worked for at National Welding that I wouldn't be in, that I was going to work for General Motors.

And so I reported that Monday morning to General Motors, walked in the front door. They took me up to a group of offices and it was like a conference room. They put us in there. I hired in. The room was full, so I mean there was, they were hiring a pretty good group of people that day,

1 maybe 20. And from that point on, we just sat and kind of all looked at
2 each other, people from all different walks. But in would walk a
3 supervisor and he would just look down the row and he'd just say you,
4 you, you come with me. You just waited for you to be you and up, up you
5 went and you just followed somebody like a little puppy dog and that was
6 a crazy feeling 'cause, again, you still hadn't seen how, what goes on in
7 there. Even from peeking through the windows as a kid, I didn't really get
8 it, but to walk out in there and just all of a sudden see this huge assembly
9 line, just continuous line of workers and tools and parts, it was just, it was
10 overwhelming.

11
12 And, uh, they gave me – a gentleman picked me. His name was Chris
13 [Pfeifer 29:50], and he walked me up. This – the plant is huge and he
14 walked me up into this area so I didn't know where I was at, somewhere in
15 the middle of the building, they called it 17-2, which later on became it
16 was just Building 17. I don't know how many buildings are inside the
17 building but that area is where the vehicles came out of the paint
18 department and they had to be put on to another body hauler which would
19 take it down through the trim department 'cause they came out of the
20 ovens after they'd been painted and there's a buffer time where they
21 would travel and cool before you started the next part of the assembly
22 process. And they walked me up into this area and it was a bunch of
23 separate lines and they probably held, each line probably held 15 vehicles
24 or so and so you had the one feeding line coming out of paint and a, and a
25 big drop station that would drop the body down onto a body carrier and
26 then it would start proceeding toward where I was located.

27
28 I hired right in, they took me down to these, this operation. There were
29 raised platforms and stuff but the two gentlemen were Jody Frasher and
30 Jerry [Vanalstine 31:09] and their job was to install the sunroofs or the T
31 tops on the Cutlass, Cutlass Supremes I believe back then. And they just
32 sat me down in there and said this is where you're going to work and they
33 gave me a chalk pencil and they told me to put 3 X's with chalk on the
34 firewall to identify whether the car was, had a half vinyl top or not. Back
35 then they used to have half vinyl and full vinyl tops on the vehicles. You
36 could – so my job was just to identify which one was going to be a half
37 vinyl and that way the gentleman that was up in a little small tower that
38 moved all the transfer vehicles on separate lines knows which, where they
39 were going to go. All I had to do was put those 3 X's on there and that
40 guy would recognize the X's and send it down a particular line to have
41 special studs and half vinyl and stuff put on.

42
43 Cheryl McQuaid: What – you said you put 3 X's on a firewall. [32:19] What's a firewall?

44
45 Doug Rademacher: Well, the firewall is the place between the engine compartment and the
46 interior of the body and without an engine there, this is a body plant as I

1 told you earlier. I've only seen cars partially built. I had never seen a
2 finished product. Um, so it would be on the front where there was an area
3 with no engine, just so they could see the front of the car where the engine
4 would go and I would just put 3 X's on it. I also had to lift this little latch
5 and it had like a hook and it locked the car down on to the body carrier so
6 that was the other part of my job but here I had been scared to death about
7 the work in here and here I got this what I considered a gravy job. I felt
8 guilty getting my first paycheck.
9

10 And again, I hired in in October. These guys were working hard, climbing
11 in and out of these cars, taking totes full of parts and tools and they're
12 working on putting tracks down, screwing in, uh, T tops and all this work
13 is going on. They have only, I don't know, seven car lengths to get their
14 job done and here I'm, they had a Cutlass bucket seat without the, without
15 the, um, fabric over it. It was just the foam part but it was a high-back
16 Cutlass bucket seat and they had it mounted to a, like a park bench so I
17 just sat on this cushiony seat and I would get up with my chalk pencil and
18 walk down and I could mark about four vehicles and then go back and sit
19 down and read. These guys were working their tails off and have been
20 there for, I don't know, I'd come to find out later after I knew'm, they'd
21 been there a year, year and a half, and, uh, I had it made, I tell you.
22

23 The supervisor was great. Steve [Selters 34:11] was the other one and
24 Steve had a drinking problem. It was obvious but I learned later, you
25 know, I think he kept a little stash in his drawer. But Chris was, was good,
26 friendly, and I enjoyed working for, for Chris. It was no problem working
27 for Steve 'cause he really just stayed in his office. But, um, I had it made
28 and 60 days in and then somebody, I didn't know who he was, a guy
29 named John Powers, come to find out he was the general foreman or
30 something, the boss of all these supervisors, and he saw me and I, I guess
31 he said what, what's he doing. That was it. He said come with me. And
32 they took me down to the trim department. And back then we had what
33 they called the A and B line. On one line they ran Cutlasses, one the other
34 one they ran Delta 88s and Oldsmobile 98s, big vehicles.
35

36 And they stuck me on this job where I had to put the trim along the deck
37 lid, which is the trunk lid where it folds down your bumper on the back. It
38 had to have this chrome trimming put around it. It was three pieces. I had
39 a little hammer and I had to tap those on. Then I had an air gun, high-
40 speed air gun that I had to put seven screws in to this chrome that had to
41 be tapped along, so I'd take the chrome and a handful of that and then I'd
42 tap it on. Then I'd have to grab a gun that was hanging near the line, take
43 these self-tappers, I was wearing a pouch and I'd have to continually fill
44 that but they had like a little gum on the end so it wouldn't slide on the
45 metal and you'd start it and that would keep it in place until you started
46 biting into the steel and I put that on. And then if it also had a, I believe it

1 was an A90 they called it, that meant it had a power trunk release and I
2 had to take this, the power trunk mechanism, use a cor-, a corner of it,
3 bend out a piece of the metal in the back of the trunk lock area, mount it
4 up there. I had a separate gun and another big screw and here I started
5 working.
6
7 I, I was working to death. You could wring my t-shirt out at this point, so
8 my 60 days were gone and I was learning what work was all about. I
9 think a lesson was being taught to me, I don't know but, um, they came
10 down and got me. I worked for Jerry [Doan 36:35] at that time. He comes
11 down and pulls me off the assembly line and again I'm just dripping and
12 he says come with me, so here I go again. So I go walking, he takes me
13 down and shows me vehicles that during my pace to try to keep up with
14 the assembly line I had the screws that slid, the chrome had slid and I what
15 they called burned, I ran the screws right through the top of the deck lid
16 and, um, I, I hurt, I guess I hurt seven cars and they told me one more and
17 you're out of here. I didn't, still didn't have my 90 days in yet so I was
18 working under fear, stress, and I didn't burn any more, you know. I didn't
19 wreck any more but it, it was a very busy job up until, right up through my
20 90 days after that.
21
22 Cheryl McQuaid: [37:22] And what shift was that on?
23
24 Doug Rademacher: I would say I've always been stuck on second shift. There was – the shift
25 thing there is your seniority, I didn't have any and I hired in that day
26 thinking someday I'll get on days. Five years later, I thought maybe then
27 I'd get on days and then the workplace changed and I think we had some
28 layoffs or something. But then it was 10 years, I still hadn't made it to
29 days and just came to be a conclusion that maybe when I got 15 years then
30 I'd get to days. And I finally did about 17 years ago I think I made it to
31 days. That only lasted about four years and I got bumped back, so I've
32 been on nights almost the whole time second shift. I would come in at
33 about 5 in the afternoon and work until almost 2 in the morning.
34
35 Cheryl McQuaid: [38:17] So what was it like, um, on the, on the line, 18 years old? What
36 were some of the things that you did besides just working your tail off?
37
38 Doug Rademacher: Well, times were a lot different back then as they are today. Here we are
39 in 2006. In those days, the drinking age was 18 and, um, I graduated from
40 high school at 17 years old. Of course, some of my friends were already
41 18 in high school, so it was a whole different atmosphere. We were young
42 kids fully capable of, uh, buying homes, running businesses. The right to
43 drink was just another one of those things. You could go to war. You
44 could get married. You could do whatever you wanted at that age, so.
45 There was with my dad having the liquor store interest, I was always
46 brought up around it. We, we all seemed to party. Another one of my, my

1 oldest friend here in town, his father had a liquor store downtown Lansing
2 called Charlie Bozzo's Downtown Party Store, so we were pretty much
3 familiar with alcohol so that was a, one of the pastimes. Quite regularly
4 we would, you know, just enjoy some beverages to ease you through the,
5 the workday.
6

7Cheryl McQuaid: [39:48] And what did you do for lunches?
8

9Doug Rademacher: Well, early on, like I said, the plant was huge. You didn't have your 90
10 days in, you had to get through that period so, um, after that 60-day period
11 where I had all that freedom that, after that it was just, you could get lost
12 in the plant so easily. They had a cafeteria but I didn't how to get there
13 and if I got there, I didn't know how to get back. Even on a break to go to
14 a bathroom, you'd come down the stairs and think you could find your
15 way back and you'd just be amazed how quickly you get lost and you'd,
16 you'd ask somebody, hey, you know, you didn't even know where, you
17 didn't know the name of your job, you didn't know [chuckle] where it was
18 located, so you pretty much just stayed to your job and, and your breaks
19 and your lunch right there just so you didn't take the mistake of not being
20 on that line 'cause they'd put you out the door. I remember that quite,
21 quite well.
22

23Cheryl McQuaid: [40:47] So what were some of the other things that you did to make the –
24 did you enjoy check pools or...?
25

26Doug Rademacher: Yes, I did. There was, you know, there was a lot of lessons to be learned.
27 We hired in, back then a lot of young people came in at the same time and
28 I, I felt we all grew up together inside the plant. It was – we made close
29 relationships, diverse group of people. And again, with that particular
30 time with it only being 18 to drink, you know, a whole group of us, it was
31 pretty much just a lot of fun to go to work and we'd all have radios and
32 we'd plan lunches, run up to, even up, run up to McDonald's after you
33 knew where you were at and you'd just dash out the parking lot, run up to
34 a fast food joint, you might stop at the Party Store, just it was unbelievable
35 what you could fit inside of 30 minutes and get back to the assembly line.
36 It was always a good time.
37

38 Um, I did go to the cafeteria occasionally. At that time, there used to be,
39 uh, the supervisors were held in high regard and they had their own
40 parking lot, they had their own cafeteria that was just off the employees'
41 cafeteria, with the nice armchairs and those types of things. At that time,
42 it was just like, I was a kid so I respected adults. My dad taught me that,
43 so there was courtesy. But they were held up, they were held in a high
44 esteem and I never really worked toward becoming a supervisor but I
45 knew that that was a position of authority and I gave them their due
46 respect. It's part of the...

1
2 Cheryl McQuaid: [42:42] Do you remember a favorite supervisor?
3
4 Doug Rademacher: Yes, my favorite supervisor out of 27 years now was Donny Andrews. He
5 was a big man. He, he'd come up and smack you on the back and send
6 you for a ride down the, uh, you know, [chuckle] always having a good
7 time but expected you to do your job. And he said, you know, don't make
8 me do my job. That's all he said and that was clear enough for me. You
9 do your job and don't make me do mine and that's what I did. And, uh,
10 that's where I hired in.
11
12 Mr. Nicholson here sitting next to me in this interview ended up getting
13 down into Don's area and Earl and I we had to drill holes. We had this
14 floating jig and it looked just like the shape of a car window. I'd say I
15 think it was a two-door. Yeah, it was a two-door fixture that would fit
16 inside where there was no glass. We – it would lock into the place above
17 the door into the top of the car and it had a little arm on it and it would
18 lock into a little finger would point up into the roof, it would hold it in
19 place and then we'd grab this air gun again. These were drills instead of,
20 uh, screwdrivers. These you, we have to change these bits too but the
21 drills were real fine and we would drill holes so that the next team up
22 would be able to install the, the drip edge molding that would go into all
23 these holes that we drilled so the water would run off down those little
24 channels and not run into your cars, another great job, but Don Andrews
25 was the supervisor there.
26
27 We had our problems that would – you'd be drilling these holes up into
28 that steel and the metal shavings would drop down into the pit of your
29 elbow where your elbow bends in the soft skin and it would just burn and
30 here you got to get the job done, just that might make you tip your hand
31 and snap the drill bit and then you're racing to put another drill bit in, key
32 it, lock it down with the, with the key and finish the job 'cause the hoist
33 only had so much distance it could travel. It was on real big retractable
34 casters that floated up on the ceiling above you on these, on these rails.
35 And, um, I remember that. I mean the job was great and my partner was
36 great but you'd get these burns and it was just tough keeping up with the
37 line.
38
39 And I always wondered, where did all these cars go and now that I have,
40 you know, we were running two shifts, two separate lines building 500
41 cars per shift, so 2000 cars were leaving here and I've been there now 28,
42 28 years now before we close the doors on May 5 of 2005 but I could
43 never understand where all these vehicles went to. Even now today, to
44 think that there's other assembly plants building cars out there. I, I
45 thought we built them all for the whole darn nation. [chuckle]
46

1 But, uh, um, it was always great work. The work environment in there,
2 the people were great. Occasionally, I would run into a job that was
3 challenging. Something about that in there, you know, it seemed like
4 every six months you'd get good at what you did and for some unknown
5 reason to us, management would decide it was time to change your job
6 and I don't understand that even today. Um, so as soon as you thought
7 you were comfortable and you had your job down, next thing you know,
8 you'd come in and it would be a day of stress and that would lead into a
9 couple of days of stress trying to learn a new job. First you were
10 combative 'cause you didn't want the change and then you're just learning
11 how to change your, the way you always moved your body. It was, it was
12 a challenge. It was always a challenge.
13

14 Um, I had some time where I did a job called over door rubbers and, uh, at
15 that time it was a two-man operation. We did every other car and this was
16 to replace the old over-the-door drip channel metal, they went to a rubber.
17 It also helped seal the door and made, cut out the air, air noise that used to
18 travel through the, the doors and the window area. Well, this had to be
19 started with what they call, uh, a rosebud and it was just a plastic nail with,
20 uh, louvers and grooves on it and you'd push it into a hole into the, that
21 was already pre-dilled into the steel down by the bottom of the, the
22 windshield area and then you would go up and the, the rubber was formed
23 in such a manner to fit over a flange all along the edge of the car. That
24 flange was painted but it was awful. It often had metal shavings, pieces of
25 steel. You'd be running up that and that steel would come right through
26 and go right into your hand, you know. You didn't know it was there.
27 There was no tool for this job. There was no way to do it other than to
28 pound it on with your hand, the palm of your hand and we'd start at the
29 bottom and pound this thing all the way up.
30

31 Um, occasionally, they'd give you this, you'd have a rubber hammer but
32 you really couldn't use it and, um, that job finally hurt me. My hand I
33 couldn't use it anymore and they, they, they send you to the hospital or I
34 called for a hospital call and I go down and your hand is all swollen and it
35 would just ache from pounding like a hammer and they created these new
36 er-, ergonomic helpful gloves. It was, it was a little blue nylon glove but it
37 had some padding mounted in the palm area and stuff so they, they started
38 issuing things like that out and I just did that until I couldn't do it anymore
39 and then I had to go out on workers' comp.
40

41 Um, there's something called a, I think it's called a 60 or 90, 6-month
42 letter. Well, this job, I fought this job hard enough and long enough that
43 they sent someone up and they wrote the job down and, and looked at it
44 and found out that there had been at least a dozen people hurt doing this
45 operation so when I finally went to my personal doctor, he told me that I
46 wasn't going to go back to that job until they fixed the job and I got that in

1 writing and, um, so I went out on workers' comp until my hand could
2 heal. When I went back in, they hadn't changed the job, so my doctor
3 kept me out. There was again this six-month letter after this was reported
4 and reported, they were supposed to make a physical change in the
5 operation of that, of that job, so you do this for day to day knowing that
6 hopefully within six months they were going to make a change and fix this
7 job and, uh, it never happened. All they did was add a third person in so
8 that you'd have less amount of impact and, uh, when they did add the third
9 person I came back to that operation.
10
11Cheryl McQuaid: So you're working eight, nine hours a day. Your hands are hurting.
12 You're trying to get this job done. [50:24] How did you get through the
13 day? I mean are you listening to music? Are you visiting with people?
14 What are you doing? What's going through your head while all this is
15 going on?
16
17Doug Rademacher: Well, you got, again, you got partners. Everyone in the, in an area, areas
18 were made up primarily just like a classroom. The supervisor had the
19 responsibility of about 20 to 30 people. You really occasionally didn't
20 know why they needed a supervisor. I always wondered why a supervisor
21 watched over 30 adults and all he really did was make sure they were
22 punched in and punched out and paid. I didn't understand. It was your
23 job to be on the line and, and you knew your job. They couldn't help you.
24 They weren't allowed. With the union in place, the supervisor was not
25 allowed to work on the assembly line. That's the workers' work and it's
26 been, it's a bargained thing to keep supervisors. If they need more people,
27 they have to hire them and not, not do the work themselves. But they
28 were good jobs and we all had a great time but then like I said on these
29 bad jobs.
30
31 My partner there was a guy named Curtis Smith and Curtis would dress
32 impeccably. He would come in what were like almost like church clothes.
33 He wore dress shoes. He carried himself in a professional manner and
34 worked that assembly line but he also loved to sing and we all, I love to
35 sing also. I went through – I took choral in high school. I was in choir
36 and so we got along great and so even though the job was getting you
37 down, we'd play music and sing and then finally Curtis went out and
38 bought what they call these karaoke machines that came out and he
39 brought that in and we'd, we'd have that microphone going down there
40 and it was just, you found ways and things to humor yourself to pass the
41 day away.
42
43Cheryl McQuaid: [52:20] Did you ever, were any, um, pranks pulled on you or did anybody
44 else pull pranks on you?
45

1 Doug Rademacher: Pranks are a continuous part of the workplace. Again, these are friends
2 mostly. [chuckle] Some of them, uh, maybe did it not out of fun. But, uh,
3 a particular prank that was really, it would get you so well was, um, when
4 you'd leave your operation for even the shortest amount of time, there's
5 pranksters everywhere but the one got me was they would pop your air
6 gun off. Now these are air hoses hanging down. They'd release the gun
7 off. They put a small screw into the air hose where it would connect, the
8 nipple that would connect the gun to the air line and then they'd put it
9 back together and then you'd get ready, the line would start, you had no
10 idea and here you go, you know. These cars go by one a minute, more
11 than one a minute. We were building over 60 cars in an hour, about 67, so
12 you got a car going by you every 50-something seconds and you're trying
13 to keep up with the assembly line and all of a sudden you get up there and
14 your gun doesn't work and you're going down the line and whatever you
15 do impacts the person behind or the next person in front of you so you're
16 trying your best. You're thinking maybe it's stuck in reverse or something
17 and you're checking everything.

18
19 It's, it would be something like that would stress you right out. Grant you,
20 it was funny but it, in those clutch moments and you don't want to bring
21 attention to yourself, that was one of the pranks I thought was, you
22 couldn't find it, you didn't, you couldn't figure out what the problem was
23 and, and that would be something real simple.

24
25 Other things, in those days they had what they call oilers. The air lines
26 were oil fed and this wasn't necessarily a prank but occasionally these,
27 these oilers would, would, um, malfunction and it was almost like a
28 bearing grease smell, just terrible, rank smell. This oil in these cups
29 sometimes would spill or leak on you and you couldn't get it off and it
30 stunk so bad and here you're stuck the rest of the day working with this
31 spray that was on you and, um, I remember those.

32
33 But some of the fun things were people would fill your gloves with screws
34 or the, the real bad one would be the, the sealer. There's, um, this black
35 sealer that they'd seal the windows and glass windshields and so forth and
36 some of the rubber components that had to be adhered they'd squirt that
37 stuff up in the tips of your fingers of your gloves. You wouldn't know it
38 until you got your glove back on after your break and ready for work and
39 then here you go, you got this and sometimes it would seep through and
40 then you got mess on the car and you can't get it off your hand and the
41 cars are going by and there's no way to stop so you'd just be frustrated
42 and do the best you could and be waiting on that next break so you could
43 get yourself cleaned up.

44
45 And at that time there was also something called oleum. And they had
46 oleum, these little metal cans they looked, they were fire engine red, they

1 were about as big as a Dutch oven. They had a little, you know, like a
2 mesh colander thing inside of it. It was spring-loaded and you would, you
3 would take rags or cotton or something and you could dip down into it, get
4 a little of that. It was almost like a paint thinner or a turpentine of sort but
5 it was called oleum and, of course, none of us knew what oleum was but
6 we would, you would dip into that and get your hands cleaned off like, just
7 like a mechanic would do in a garage and we used that on just about
8 everything. You could get stuff off the car paint, you could get it off your
9 hands, um, if you got something on your pants, you'd use it only to find
10 out later on as we became General Motors and the UAW started putting in
11 to place, what was that called, um, I can't remember the acronym but it
12 was they had to identify all the chemicals and products that we used.

13
14 Marilyn Coulter: MSDS.

15
16 Doug Rademacher: MSDS, yeah, the Motor Safety Standards or something but they had to tell
17 you what everything you were working with, only to find out that a lot of
18 the stuff we used for years was soluble, went right through your skin and
19 into your system. Uh, so who knows what's going to happen as we all
20 grow old. Granted they've, then they started issuing the rubber gloves to
21 use the same material but, you know, it's, these things have been
22 permeated and gone into our, our bodies. It's hard to say what that will do
23 in the future.

24
25 Since I'm there, I'll say I've worked in many different places in the plant.
26 I worked in Trim, Body, Paint, Sealer and finally made it into the Material
27 Handling department. [recording clicked] So having worked in all
28 different places in the plant, um, I've learned, met a lot of people. The
29 thing about an assembly plant is a lot of people will just take the job that
30 they get and stay in that location. I met people when we closed the doors
31 of Fisher Body plant in May of '05 here, I met people that had never even
32 been through other parts of the plant, people that worked in Trim had
33 never even seen the body shop and they'd been here 27 years and a lot of
34 people just did that. They came to work, they went to their jobsite and
35 they left and went home and never ventured out.

36
37 But, um, the wonderful thing about having a union and there was hundreds
38 of jobs you could, you could put in a transfer to any job and someday up
39 the road when the seniority would allow it, if there was an opening in that,
40 you'd, and had a transfer in, you'd be allowed to go to that other job. So if
41 you recognized that you were working hard and there was, you know, you
42 didn't think that day was ever going to come to an end but some,
43 somewhere up the road all of a sudden they'd say, yeah, you put in for that
44 job, they have openings, do you want it. You could always turn it down
45 but that would give you an opportunity to go do something different so
46 that was nice.

1
2 I was thinking about how hot it got in there in the summertime and you
3 can't believe it. This building is huge but the top of the roof is covered in
4 pea stone, hot tar and pea stone. You got a 90-degree day, we worked
5 second shift so you'd come in at 5:00 and the pea stone has been cooking
6 all day on the roof. You'd walk in there and that place was just like an
7 oven. The building is steel, the – it was always 10 degrees hotter inside
8 than it was out and, of course, lack of air movement so it was, it could be a
9 real sweat box.

10
11 One of the memories I have of our lunches we'd [inaudible 59:58]
12 [coughing] try to fit anything we could in 30 minutes and it was amazing
13 what all you could do in 30 minutes, but when it got real bad like that I
14 remember occasion where we would run, a guy had a van and we would
15 all dash out, jump in the van, [coughing] run down the street to what was
16 Mike's Superette I believe it was called at the time and we'd grab a beer
17 and jump back in the van and they'd cruise out to a place called Village
18 Green out behind the Lansing Mall. And that's about, might have been
19 about three miles from the shop. I don't know if it was that far but it was
20 just a, a group housing project but they had a swimming pool, public, it
21 wasn't public. It was their swimming pool but it only had a three-foot
22 fence and we'd come pulling up in that van and hop that fence.
23 Everybody jumping in their shorts and their t-shirts and we'd jump right
24 back in the van, cruise back and go right back to work soaking wet just
25 like that but that felt good. I remember that being a real good memory of
26 how crazy and how wild we were back when we were young. And it
27 changed. Every 10 years we kept growing up, we changed.

28
29 I wanted to say also that I hired in October of '78. My birthday is October
30 19th. I'd only been there two weeks and I had this gravy job I told you
31 earlier on about 60 days of a job that I almost felt guilty about but they
32 came up and they knew it was my birthday and they let me go home and I
33 thought man, this is great. I was making more money than I had ever
34 made. At that time I think we hired in around \$6.50 an hour but that was
35 the most I had made in any job I had been in. Here I was getting these
36 wonderful paychecks, using a chalk pencil and here they let me have my
37 birthday off. I'll never forget that. My dad, he couldn't believe it. He's,
38 uh, you know, he always worked 60 hours a week with his brother running
39 the store and here I was getting all these special perks. But I hired in
40 October '78, I got, I bought my first house in March of 1979, and I
41 married my wife in August of '79, so inside of less than a year I had got a
42 job, bought a house, and found my wife that I still am married to today so
43 that was wonderful. Then we waited about four years to have children.

44
45 Cheryl McQuaid: [62:29] Could you tell me a little bit about the music in the plant?
46

1 Doug Rademacher: Oh, music was you had to have it. Um, factory life, factory work is very,
2 very – it's strenuous and it's monotonous and it does take over your brain.
3 Music is just the way to get out of the reality that you were, once you
4 walked in the door you were theirs, so to bring in a stereo and play your
5 music was, was really nice. And, um, everyone had their own style of
6 music, so came a day where it kind of got to be what I call radio wars, you
7 know. And it was the, we were making good money so if you had people
8 playing music you didn't like, it came the day where I went out and I
9 bought this big old blaster and it stood, it was a 60, I think it's a 40 or 60
10 watt unit and back then that was a lot of power and it had four speakers
11 inside of it. It looked like a little suitcase. [chuckle] I'd bring that in and
12 put that on and just as the night got later and later, it would get louder and
13 louder.
14

15 And a particular supervisor named Ken [DeRosa 63:46] he always, he was
16 like a drill sergeant, conducted himself as such and he was just, he'd
17 always ride you but he'd say it's too loud. I said if you'd stay back in
18 your office you wouldn't, you wouldn't hear it but, um, he would always
19 turn it down and he'd walk away and I'd turn it back up and we got into
20 this little tiff and that's when again I learned that supervisors got a little
21 more power than me and one day my radio was taken. He took it right off
22 my bench and took it. He said I couldn't have it back, so I called the
23 committee and stuff but, you know, I knew it had gotten extreme but he,
24 he refused to give it back so it took quite a while.
25

26 I was – he had many sons in there. Kenny [DeRosa 64:32] had his, he had
27 four boys work in that plant. Well, his youngest one, Bruce, he and I
28 became friends so I kind of leveraged him. I'd have him bug his dad on
29 Sundays at home when they'd have family dinners and stuff and I finally,
30 finally got to get that radio back but, uh, it still, I still have it today. It's,
31 it's definitely a keepsake. It's still powerful. It does, it was definitely the,
32 the, uh, for the times, it had automatic program search. It would advance
33 to the next song on a cassette. It was pretty, pretty involved. But
34 everyone, then it was someone else would get one, get one bigger and
35 pretty soon if we'd all get on the same station, you could hear it out in the
36 streets, but.
37

38 Cheryl McQuaid: It sounds like a pretty good-sized radio. [65:27] Did you carry it in and
39 out every day or, when it was in your possession?
40

41 Doug Rademacher: Yeah, you know, I did carry mine in and out. A lot of people had secure,
42 fancy lockers and stuff but usually you had to have quite a bit of seniority.
43 And again, I'm telling you, I was fairly young then but the, the higher
44 seniority and the trades, these guys had big lockers. You could, they had
45 cabinets that they had crockpots and people would be cooking dinners and
46 they'd have coffeepots and they'd set up little shopping areas like candies

1 and snacks and there was just entrepreneurs all over in there. In the
2 mornings or in the afternoon you'd come in and there'd be a guy walking
3 around with a cooler full of sandwiches. [Darryl Mangles 66:18] did it for
4 years I remember coming through with turkey and ham sandwiches and
5 then people did burritos and they just, these people would make an extra, I
6 don't know, hundred, couple hundred dollars a week just doing
7 concessions before, during and after their jobs. But, no, I took my radio in
8 and out every day. I just tried to keep track of it. [recording clicked]
9

10Cheryl McQuaid: Doug, you said you've been in a number of different departments. [66:49]
11 Could you tell us a little bit about some of the departments you've worked
12 in?
13

14Doug Rademacher: Yes, I shared with you that I had worked in Trim, Paint, Body, Sealer, and
15 then in Material Handling. I've shared some of the work that I've done up
16 in Trim. Again there's numerous jobs I've done and I was a team leader,
17 which was someone that would take almost the responsibility of a
18 supervisor. Like I said, you'd make sure the line was covered, if not, you
19 got on it until the person showed up. Um, if they had problems, you'd
20 cover'm, help'm get caught up the line, fix the problem. If they needed a
21 can call, which was a bathroom call, in the old days, back in the early days
22 of the automobile industry there was no way to get to the bathroom and
23 they actually had a can along the assembly line. Of course, it was all men
24 then but that's where the terminology can call came from. You'd call over
25 your either utility or pick-up man and they let you go to the restroom and
26 come back. They'd cover your job until you got back.
27

28 Um, I worked up in paint early on. It was in the, it was called oil sanding
29 and back then in the, the paint style on the Cutlasses they actually sprayed
30 the lower part of the car body with a deadener and then painted over it and
31 it had what looked like an orange peel effect and I had what they called oil
32 sand. I'd spray oil on the vehicle and then I'd run a, a wheel with a real
33 slight, real fine coarse sandpaper on it and you'd just, you'd do that all day
34 and I had a particular part of the vehicle to do. And then it would go back
35 to the oven and bake and it would create this rock, stone retardant part of
36 the car so things that flew up off the roadway and stuff didn't chip your
37 paint job.
38

39 Um, I worked in what was called the sealer room and there was multiple
40 jobs there. One was the sealer wand. I think everyone hated it because
41 you had to get up inside the wheel wells. The cars came down from a lift
42 well over your head and then they would level off but you'd get, you had
43 that amount of time, the car length to get up inside there and squirt this
44 portion of wheel well with this, one was a black spray and this other one
45 was a white kind of a glue that you kind of went down all the seams and
46 sealed off all the seams so that, um, when it went further through paint it

1 would bake and it would be, you know, it would actually become almost
2 like a caulk you would put on a window or a bathroom caulk. That's how
3 it would end up setting up after it went through to the ovens.
4

5 Then I had another job in sealer called, it was a Permagum. This actually
6 was just like bubble gum or taffy but it, you would set out, like take a piece
7 of cardboard and you'd put a bit of this on a board and then you would cut
8 it off and put it into the car in places for, stick a little metal, piece of metal
9 that went further into the build, up in Trim after you got up that far. These
10 things, they'd lay down the body wires which were the wires for the whole
11 electrical system for the whole car, uh, and then they would just fold these
12 metal things down to hold the wires in place before they threw the carpet
13 over the top. So, um, again, some people went in and did one job and
14 stayed in one area their whole time but it's kind of, it's much more
15 rewarding for me to have been worked all over the plant and saw all the
16 steps to building a car.
17

18 And, uh, one time I was laid off from the trim department. They do
19 changeovers and I don't know if we were tooling up to a different model
20 or something but they shut the plant down for a period of time, part of the
21 plant. Some of them, if you had seniority, certain groups were allowed to
22 stay and work up to a certain seniority. Well, I went out the door for 10
23 months and I was married. There was a concern about me ever getting
24 called back here. I really never knew anything about job security. Just
25 one day was, one day to the next you really didn't know what was going
26 on. But there's something called leveling off and when you go out the
27 door on a layoff, you can sign this piece of paper that says I would like to
28 be called back according to my seniority rather than wait for the opening
29 to the job of which I was just laid off from, so I did that, signed the, the
30 recall piece of paper and I got called back into the body shop.
31

32 And that was having never seen the body shop that first time that was an
33 unbelievable experience because up in Trim it's clean, you could hear
34 your radio, you could wear shorts and t-shirts. Down in this area, you're
35 working with raw metal. It's all unpainted silver. Uh, you got weld guns,
36 sparks flying, raw metal edges, lots of danger and I worked down in there.
37

38 They called me back and I had my first job was to hang hoods and I had a
39 few other friends that were there. They got called in to hang the front
40 fenders, so we're all in the same little area so at least I knew people. But
41 back then they had no hoists or anything. We took hoods out of a rack,
42 had to put 'em on a, what would be like a bed and put the brackets, the
43 hinges that would, so you could raise up and down your, the hood of your
44 car. We'd have to assemble those, put 'em on, put 'em back on a rack and
45 then we'd do this continuously and we do every third vehicle. And you
46 actually grabbed the, the hood, the whole hood by stretching your arms out

1 to their full length and picking a hood up and walking to the assembly line
2 which is moving, step up on one of these body cars while it's moving and
3 then two guys would come in from the side that had just put on the fenders
4 and they'd grab the, the corners of that hood, lay it down and bolt the, the
5 hood to the fenders and the, and the framing.
6

7 And it was, that was a real eye opener. There was, to see the, the disparity
8 in job equity in the plant is, is hard to describe. There's jobs that are just
9 like I said gravy with chalk pencil and then there's jobs that are just labor
10 intensive where you don't, you can't imagine that people have done this
11 every day since they hired in. So with that hiring in to the body shop there
12 was also what they call return rights to your old department and sign those
13 when you came in and, and so as soon as they came down and said would
14 you like to go back to trim, I was overjoyed and happy to go back to the
15 trim department after learning about what went on in the body shop.
16

17 And, um, later on I was able to put in a transfer for the Material
18 department and that was driving fork trucks. They put us through training,
19 learn to drive flatbeds, haul parts, move different racks from semis, train
20 cars, and then to learn how to make your way down the aisles without
21 knocking things off, hurting anybody. It got you off the assembly line but
22 there were still brand new dangers and, and hazards.
23

24 It's just been, like I said, a very rewarding life to work inside of the auto
25 industry. I've never had to look back. I've been able to provide for my
26 family. I made lots of friends. There's always people you don't get along
27 with everybody but all in all it was just a great atmosphere. Um, during
28 breaks there was a time when they used to stop the assembly line and, and
29 they had what they called wagons and it was just the cafeteria crew had
30 these little carts and they would stock them with coffee, a coffee urn, some
31 milk, doughnuts and just some snacks and chips and stuff. And twice a
32 day, this was a bargained benefit that was Fisher Body, I don't know that
33 any other place had it in, in my recollection but they would stop the line
34 twice a day so you could go over and it was seven minutes I think and
35 you'd just go right over there, you could go to the bathroom, grab a snack
36 off that cart and get back to your operation and that line would start right
37 back up. But these, they would be all over the shop, there'd be little
38 coffee carts called the wagon and that was always a pleasure.
39

40 And then also was throughout your day you were bargained I think it was
41 about 48 minutes of relief time it was, they had what they called tag relief
42 and then they had mass relief. Depending on where you worked and
43 which department, they'd have a person that would come, they'd be
44 responsible say for eight people and they would just, that's all they did all
45 day. You'd start up the assembly line in the morning or the afternoon,
46 you'd start working for almost an hour and then this person would start his

1 routine or her routine and they would start replacing each person on the
2 line and allowing them what was bargained was I think 12, 12, and 14 and
3 this, you get three of these throughout the day to give you a break from the
4 assembly line and give you a chance to go to the bathroom or something.
5 At one time it was called tag and that person did those people.
6

7 And then came a time some departments would shut the whole line down
8 and everyone would go on break at the same time. It could be more fun.
9 At the same time, there's not as many, enough bathroom space but on that
10 mass relief when I worked in Trim it was, got to a point we were able to
11 convince the corporation to put in ping pong tables and, uh, that got to be,
12 it was like, it was the drug of choice. Everyone had their break and they
13 had their own paddles and it was competition and I would go down there
14 and you'd play, you'd play games and they had side by side and we'd,
15 you'd team up, they'd do doubles, singles, and it just, round robin. And I
16 mean you played every minute until that line came back up. And then if
17 you were in Material, it afforded you a few extra minutes you might get a
18 personal game in with another friend after everyone went back to the
19 assembly line.
20

21 But lots of different things happened on breaks and that was just one of
22 them. Some people just would sit down and rest their bodies. Some
23 would run to the bathrooms. Again, these vendors, they might restock
24 their coffeepots and all kinds of things. A lot of different varieties of, of
25 types of people and different job duties, again, some are so stressful and
26 strenuous and others were so easy and people got the same amount of pay.
27 It just kind of amazed me to see, like I said, the disparity in the job duties
28 throughout the plant.
29

30Cheryl McQuaid: Doug, you said that your, one of your last departments to work in was
31 Material [inaudible 78:38]. [78:40] What was, do you remember the
32 Material flow when you first hired in to the plant and how it changed
33 when you became in the, when you were employee in the d-, Material
34 department?
35

36Doug Rademacher: Well, Material is a preferred job and, again, there's multiple duties within
37 Material. Some people would run, have to empty the train cars and the
38 trucks and other people had to haul the parts out to storage locations
39 around the plant and then the other people would, other Material people
40 would come and pick it up and deliver it to the assembly line, so there was
41 multiple jobs within that. Again, it was a great opportunity if you didn't
42 like the job you had, you could put a transfer in and hopefully get to, to a
43 different job.
44

45 Then in time came obviously the computers and the computer screens.
46 They started eliminating, they were able to eliminate people. Every time

1 there was a, through automation and robotics and computers, they were
2 able to eliminate workers and they could take one job and add it to
3 multiple jobs and disperse and get rid of another head count. I think that's
4 the goal of the corporation was to build a vehicle with less people. But the
5 screens really helped a lot. I mean, a part would be needed available, they
6 would push a button along the assembly line, it identified the part and it
7 would come up on a computer screen where the material driver was
8 sitting, it's called a light board. And you'd recognize the part, you'd go,
9 you'd, you'd touch the screen, acknowledge that you saw that they needed
10 it and it was, then your name was on that so you had to deliver it and then
11 after you grabbed the empty and returned it back then you'd touch it again
12 and that would record how long it took you to deliver that part.

13
14 They occasionally would pit worker against worker. Some people liked to
15 drive fast and get the job done. Myself, I wanted consistency. I liked to
16 see people make it a job and not eliminate work by, you know, acting like
17 they could do more so I put a clock, I put a stopwatch, a little clock right
18 on my truck and I would, I would make all my hauls as, as consistent as
19 possible to be exactly the same. I tried to get other people to do that also.
20

21 Cheryl McQuaid: [81:10] Did any of this make you, um, more union active?

22
23 Doug Rademacher: Union is a different thing. Um, it was great to have'm. I saw a lot of
24 different things. When I first hired in, I didn't know what a union was. I
25 went 10 years before I even got involved in the union. And the purpose
26 for getting involved in the union was because I got tired of wanting
27 something to get done and not getting it done so I decided if I wanted to
28 do anything about it, I had to get involved so I ran. I finally ran for a
29 position. I first got active volunteering a little bit, um, on the Union Label
30 Committee. And that's, it's something I hold dear today. So I was on the
31 committee. My chairman decided he was going to run for a vice president
32 position and pulled the committee together and said, um, he knew that two
33 of us wanted to run for that position. He said you guys need to decide
34 who is going to run so, you know, we don't separate the votes and we
35 keep the committee.
36

37 The one gentleman was a tradesman who had more seniority than me and I
38 said, well, if he was going to run and I said, well, I'm going to run too, so,
39 uh, didn't back, that didn't work and he wanted to meet me for lunch. He
40 and another guy rode in together. They were both on the committee with
41 me and I just knew him on the committee. I had never worked with him.
42 I didn't really know him. They were older and they met me at a little
43 diner place out here on West Saginaw and it was discussed that I didn't
44 have a chance and that they were tradesmen and they had the, they had the
45 votes and they had the people and I said – they bought my lunch. I said,
46 well, I'm running anyway. So I did win that election by 11 votes and I've

1 kind of never looked back. I've always, I've ran. That's a three-year term
2 for that position. I ran that interim then I ran again. I was reelected and
3 did that for three terms.
4

5 What's unique about these positions at Local 602 is that the standing
6 committees are also on the executive board and most unions, and most,
7 most union structures only have what they call the original executive
8 board, which is about eight positions on their executive board. With Local
9 602, there's 22 people on the executive board. All the standing
10 committees have a voice and our people run independently and they're
11 elected by the majority of the people. So for every general election, we'd
12 have just numbers of people come out and run for positions, but you had
13 to go around and solicit the whole plant for their vote so it was, it was a
14 challenge. It was rewarding. It was a lot of work. It cost money and, and
15 I did that time and time again. The purpose of the Union Label is to help
16 our members and the public for that matter, to have, find a union
17 alternative when shopping for a product, trade, or service and I took great
18 pride in trying to find a way to keep our money in America and keep
19 union workers building products, um.
20

21 Cheryl McQuaid: We touched a little bit on your union activities. [84:54] How about
22 benefits? What is your most appreciated bargained benefit?
23

24 Doug Rademacher: I had the good fortune to be a part of this history program and I've been
25 listening and asking that question for months now. And just last Friday
26 our group here went to recognize the sit-down strikers of 1937 that sat
27 down on the job and took over the Fisher Body plant in Flint, Michigan.
28 They threw out the management and the Pinkerton Security and they
29 closed off the factory because they were being overworked, underpaid,
30 and enough was enough. These people worked unbearable conditions.
31 There's still about a dozen of them alive today here in 2006. And my
32 most appreciated bargain benefit is the fact that men and women that
33 many years ago stood up, sat down, and refused to work anymore and they
34 stopped production of the great General Motors Corporation. And that's
35 my most appreciated benefit that the people stood up and recognized the
36 United, UAW as the sole bargaining agent for the automobile industry.
37 Everything from that day forward has just gotten better and better. We've
38 had down years and up years but everything we got is from that group of
39 people and that's my most, most valued benefit was the voice of the
40 people that, that took on the great corporation.
41

42 Cheryl McQuaid: [86:54] And do you think with being the vice president of Local 602 that,
43 that you will be able to... [pause]?
44

45 Doug Rademacher: I think what you're trying to ask is whether I'll be able to carry on this
46 effort and it's truly what I'm all about. Um, as you just said, I am the vice

1 president now. I would tell you that I served three terms on the Union
2 Label Committee. Funny thing I want to say before that, I'll never forget
3 my first, I got my first election. I got in there. I went to my first executive
4 board meeting and at this time I was still fairly young and I walked in the
5 room and it was a lot of older gentlemen. I don't, I don't even remember,
6 I don't think there was a woman in there yet. I don't – were you there yet?
7 You were there. That was Marilyn Coulter was there. But I'll never
8 forget, I sat down and the guys looked, the two guys next to me said
9 you're in the wrong seat. Well, I've always been pretty st-, pretty strong
10 in my, in my will and I didn't move. I told them that I was there, I was
11 there and I'm one of them and I, I was, I held myself there. I didn't get up
12 and move. I've been going forward ever since.

13
14 But, um, after three terms, our local union president was put on
15 International staff and the presidency opened up and I felt that I was
16 prepared for that. And I, I always told him he was in the wrong, he was in
17 my seat, so, um, I ran for the president position and I came up short, 192
18 votes short as a matter of fact from the runoff. And that is a three-year
19 term, so to run for the presidency I had to resign my other executive board
20 seat, which kind of took me out of the political loop and out of favor with
21 those that win. It goes without saying that, that competition like that, that
22 breeds a little bit of distrust or something, even though all I wanted to do
23 was serve.

24
25 So I didn't go away. I, I healed my wounds for about a month but I got
26 right back into it. I stayed on committees. I'm now on the Citizenship
27 and Legislative, the CAP committee, Union Label Committee, recently on
28 the Region 1C Women's Committee. I belong to many constituency
29 groups and I just try to help move the labor movement forward and to
30 bring up the standard of living for all working men and women. And, uh,
31 now I've moved on and ran for the vice presidency. I was elected. This is
32 now my second term and that's my goal is to continue on with the battle
33 to, to have Lansing prosper, to build the finest automobile in the world,
34 and to keep moving the labor movement.

35
36 Cheryl McQuaid: They're going to, well, they've already closed the doors of Fisher Body
37 and you grew up around that plant. [90:19] What are your feelings about
38 the plant closing?

39
40 Doug Rademacher: Well, you know, just, just when you said that, that I grew up, the plant has
41 been there forever. It takes me right back to when I was about eight years
42 old, I start seeing myself. I went to Catholic school my whole life and the
43 Catholic schools didn't have swimming pools so I went to Sexton High
44 School to learn how to swim during the summer break when I was about
45 that young and it just reminded me that after swimming practice I'd walk
46 down Verlinden Avenue in front of that plant and walk into the doors of

1 Harry's Bar and I'd take the first booth. There used to be a jukebox on the
2 wall and I'd, there, it was a bar. It was pretty much a small bar at that
3 time. It's grown, grown quite large now but, um, I'd order a hamburger
4 and a Pepsi and a bag of potato chips and I'd sit in that little booth and I'd
5 play James Taylor Fire and Rain and that's just something that I'll never
6 forget and I'd pass through that back door and out into that little field that
7 I told you I played ball in.

8
9 But, um, to just imagine, I just can't imagine. It's been there ever since I
10 moved here, the smells, the sounds. Then to end up making my living
11 there, raising my family, all the opportunity that's been afforded to me
12 right by that building. And it's changed names. It closed as Lansing Car
13 Assembly but it will always be Fisher Body to me. It's painful.

14
15 I think everyone that gets into the auto industry after the 30-and-out was
16 fought for and won, that was another bargain benefit but that's everyone's
17 goal is get your 30 years in so you can get a paycheck in the mail for the
18 rest, for the rest of your life, you know. And work hard, give the company
19 what they need and, and that they were going to take care of us and that
20 looks like it's in jeopardy today the way the, the car industry has changed.
21 Economy has changed. Global economy they call it and shipping the
22 manufacturing base from United State of America to low-wage countries.
23 Challenge – corporations challenging their, their obligation to the workers
24 that afforded them the capital to invest in other ventures and overseas and
25 other, other building. It just it hurts to see that and knowing that the
26 Fisher plant was the, as a dinosaur plant it was still the highest
27 productivity plant in North America and possibly the world to build a car
28 from start, from a floor pan in a body shop to loading it on a body hauler
29 and hauling it a mile or two across town to Oldsmobile plant, sticking it on
30 another assembly line and walking it through that plant out the back door
31 and either on to a semitrailer or a train car to take it to dealerships around
32 this country.

33
34 We went to about almost 18 man hours per car. That's what it took to put
35 a car from Fisher Body and onto a train car and you multiply that times the
36 wage of an average worker at 20-man hours per car at \$25 an hour which
37 they say is an overpaid factory worker, that's only \$500. That's the cost
38 of building a car. Granted there's heating and cooling and the healthcare
39 costs and things but really the price of an automobile is, is hardly affected
40 by the cost of labor and that's a sad thing to see that they're blaming it on
41 the overpaid factory worker. It's a farce and that's, that's another sad bit.
42 But they're closing these plants, taking our jobs to other places. It's a
43 shame. I'll definitely, I get leery. I, I've been taking pictures of the plant
44 as it's being disassembled. It, it's definitely going to have an impact but
45 I'm going to keep that history for myself.

1 Cheryl McQuaid: I'd like to take just a moment and ask if any of the other history team
2 members have questions that they'd like to ask Doug Rademacher.
3

4 Marilyn Coulter: Doug, Marilyn Coulter.
5

6 Doug Rademacher: Hi Marilyn.
7

8 Marilyn Coulter: [95:11] Has many of the friendships that you've made inside the plant
9 extended outside the plant and has it ever affected your family in any
10 way?
11

12 Doug Rademacher: Absolutely. I told you who I hired in next to was Jody Frasher and Jim or,
13 uh, and Jerry [Vanalstine 95:28]. Jody is still a close friend. He, he
14 attended my wedding back with our long hair and our bellbottoms and
15 now today he's got no hair and he's a trainer in health and safety and now
16 again we're just raising our families and looking to go out. Uh, it's the
17 guy I hired in next to and I still see him today, so we stayed, and he's
18 union active so we do things like that. Sitting next to me is Earl
19 Nicholson, you know. I told you I worked on the line with him, drilling
20 those holes for the, uh, to put the over-door moldings on and we spent
21 many times together and over the years. Here we are again sitting here.
22 Further down the table Gary Judy. He worked in Don Andrews' area with
23 me. I know his stories, the ones we've haven't had time to put on the tape.
24

25 Memories are long and continuous. Numerous people have passed
26 through my life and my family's lives. I've brought people, many people
27 to my home. They've seen my children be born, grown up and now my
28 youngest is in college and it's, it's very rewarding. And now my
29 leadership and my past president that I'm friends with, now he's up at
30 Solidarity House in Detroit. It just goes on and on. And I just can't say
31 enough how a lot of relationships have continued on after the plant.
32

33 Cheryl McQuaid: [97:19] Are there any questions that we've not asked that you'd like to
34 bring up?
35

36 Doug Rademacher: I have one thing I'd like to talk about. Um, within the Union Label
37 position, there is something called the Union Industries Trade Show and
38 it's held in a different city every year. This had to be one of the greatest
39 opportunities I've had in my life within the General Motors Corporation. I
40 call it the biggest jobs fair in America. I've been, I was the chairman of
41 that committee. I was able to run for positions at the regional office level
42 in Flint. I chaired that. I also co-chaired Tri-County Union Label
43 Committee, the United Union Label Coalition. I also sit on the Michigan
44 State AFL-CIO Union Label and Service Trades Council putting on
45 educational conferences around the state.
46

1 The Union Industries Trade Show is, has grown in size. It's, it's between
2 four and five football fields in, in area. The big three put their vehicles
3 and their concept cars in. They give vehicles away. It's free to the public.
4 Nothing is for sale. Everything is given away and everything in there is
5 union-made from refrigerators to bicycles to guns to healthcare to
6 communications to, it just goes on and on. And it's just been so rewarding
7 to be a part of that and to draw the budget from the region and to put on
8 this display and to, to promote the region and the products within there
9 and to co-interact with all the different local unions, it's just been
10 rewarding, leaders from all over. And, uh, it allowed me to travel all over
11 this country and I've met people from all different, building Boeing jets to
12 Harley Davidsons and on and on. It's just, my contacts, some people stay
13 within the plant. I've done so many things and I'm so grateful for the, my
14 brother telling me they were hiring that day.
15

16Cheryl McQuaid: Well, Doug, I'd like to thank you for taking the time to share all these
17 memories.
18

19Earl Nicholson: Thank you Doug.
20

21Marilyn Coulter: Thank you Doug.
22

23John Fedewa: Thanks.
24

25Doug Rademacher: If you would ever like anything more, I'd be glad to add. I like to talk.
26 Enjoy. I hope, I wish us all well in the future. We've been very blessed.
27 We've proven ourselves as a labor movement. The abilities of Lansing
28 are recognized worldwide and we're going to move on to a new
29 investment. General Motors put \$3.1 billion into Delta Township and
30 we're going to move out there. Out with the old and in with the new.
31

32Cheryl McQuaid: Solidarity.
33

34Doug Rademacher: Solidarity, solidarity, solidarity.
35

36Male: Solidarity, solidarity, solidarity.
37

38Cheryl McQuaid: Thank... [recording clicks off]
39
40
41/mlc