

**Bob Rennells discusses his career as a production worker
and UAW member at the Fisher Body plant in Lansing MI**

1
2
3
4
5 Cheryl McQuaid: This is Cheryl McQuaid. We're at dock 15 at Lansing Car Assembly. Uh,
6 it's October 11th, 2005. It's approximately 8:10 and we're g-, preparing
7 to interview Robert Rennells. Did I pronounce that right?
8
9 Bob Rennells: Yes, you did.
10
11 Cheryl McQuaid: Um, first of all, we're gonna let everybody that's present in the room say
12 their names so that we have that on tape.
13
14 Michael Fleming: Mike Fleming.
15
16 Jerri Smith: Jerri Smith.
17
18 Marilyn Coulter: Marilyn Coulter.
19
20 Doreen Howard: Doreen Howard.
21
22 Linda Johnson: Linda Johnson.
23
24 Cheryl McQuaid: [0:34] And, Bob, could you state your name? Spell your last name for us
25 and, um, state your address please.
26
27 Bob Rennells: My name is Robert Rennells. R-E-N-N-E-L-L-S. Address is 6684 Cutler
28 Road, Bath, Michigan.
29
30 Cheryl McQuaid: [0:52] Um, what was your hire in date?
31
32 Bob Rennells: Hired into General Motors on December 12th – excuse me, December
33 16th, 1970.
34
35 Cheryl McQuaid: [1:02] And do you remember the first day you walked in this plant?
36
37 Bob Rennells: Oh, yeah. It was interesting because I had h-, I had been working at
38 Sealed Power in Saint Johns and got laid off there because of a strike and
39 that was a, uh, tsk, [piece part 1:18] plant making piston rings and stuff for
40 [Motors 1:22], so coming into this plant was a whole different thing.
41 Sealed Power was clean, didn't smell [laughter], and I hired into the body
42 shop, so that was my first introduction and out in the jungle and – uh, not
43 that this wasn't clean but it was a whole different world from what Sealed
44 Power in Saint Johns was and with all the cables, welders hanging, I mean,
45 the impression was uh oh, what did I [laughter] get into 'cause it didn't
46 look like any – like the other factory that I'd been working in, so it was,
47 uh, definitely a culture – not necessarily shock but it was, just ain't the

1 same. [laughter] And again, laid off from Sealed Power because of the
2 strike at GM and obviously they weren't building cars, wouldn't need
3 engines or engine parts [laughter], so I got called in over – after the strike
4 was done, I got called to come to work here and three days after I came to
5 work here, Sealed Power called me back and at the time, there was a dollar
6 an hour pay difference. This paid a dollar an hour more, which in 1970,
7 that was \$40 a week. That was big money, uh, so I stayed here instead 'a
8 goin' back to Sealed Power in Saint Johns.
9

10Cheryl McQuaid: And you hired in here in the body shop jungle.
11

12Bob Rennells: In the body shop jungle.
13

14Cheryl McQuaid: [2:44] What is the jungle? Why do they call it the jungle?
15

16Bob Rennells: They call it the jungle because it had all these spot-weld guns and welders.
17 Everything was hung from tracks overhead around the production line and
18 it looked like a bunch'a black vines in a jungle just hanging down around
19 everything and other than the main aisles, you had to – if you wanted to
20 get around, you had to weave in and out [laughter] of all these cables
21 hanging just to get through the shop.
22

23Cheryl McQuaid: [3:13] And did you hire in on day shift? Second shift?
24

25Bob Rennells: Uh, I hired in on day shift. I stayed on days for – I, I, I believe I got my
26 90 days in on days before I ended up getting bumped to nights and, uh, the
27 supervise – my two supervisors – I hired in under [Terry Hille 3:32] and
28 Jim [Warner 3:34]. [laughter]
29

30Cheryl McQuaid: [3:37] Were they good bosses? [throat clearing] Do you have memories of
31 them?
32

33Bob Rennells: I have memories of them. [Terry Hille 3:41] was an excellent boss. I was
34 not – Mr. [Warner 3:46] and I didn't see eye to eye. In fact, he tried to fire
35 me but I had my 93rd day [laughter] in before he decided to try and fire
36 me and I was in the union at that time and I've been here ever since.
37

38Cheryl McQuaid: [4:01] What job did you...?
39

40Bob Rennells: I started out – uh, obviously the first week or two, bounced around jobs
41 but then I ended up on the – in the wheelhouse pit welding underneath the
42 cars and again, I used to – the sparks, the conditions – it was an interesting
43 job. It was dirty, it was hot, had to climb into a pit underneath the cars to
44 weld and, uh, stayed on that job for a while 'til they had a utility opening
45 and utility was much better. At least you weren't stuck on the same job
46 every day. I stayed a utility man in the body shop for almost 14 years with

1 the exception of a few layoffs. I spent about a year and a half in the
2 cushion room, I worked for Jack Walker out there. He was a good boss
3 but I spent – got laid off, got called back to the paint department, spent 30
4 days in there. Couldn't wait to get outta the paint department 'cause back
5 then, the ventilation wasn't as good and was doing what you would call
6 undercoating, spraying dead near under the bottom of the cars and they
7 went overhead, which was a – you had to wear a hood. That was quite a
8 dirty job and I went back to the body shop quite happily [laughter] and
9 stayed in the body shop as a utility welder until 1984 and then transferred
10 into the material department in 1984 and was on days for approximately
11 six months, got bumped to nights [laughter] for that and drove a truck for
12 a couple years and then became employee participation advisor for the
13 material department on nights, which, uh, was great. I got t-, got to get a
14 lot of schooling for that and working with the people. I found that to be –
15 that was good and did that for approximately six years and then GM
16 decided that they only needed one PA to cover both shifts, so I'm back to
17 a truck driving a Ford truck and then was fortunate enough to become an
18 [alder 6:44] and a committee man for two years, which was another eye-
19 opening experience. Everybody should go through that once. [coughing]
20 [laughter] Definitely should be – should do that at least once and then
21 went back to driving a truck, uh, transferred out to the unloading dock on
22 dock 15, became the dock controller on the night shift. Worked that on
23 nights until around the year 2000, then my counterpart on days retired, so I
24 bumped to day shift – the dock controller job on day shift and now I'm
25 unfortunate or fortunate enough I'm here as we close this plant.

26
27 Michael Fleming: Talk about, you know, what – you did some training for EPA and your
28 involvement with the – being the ultimate committee man.

29
30 Female: And what EPA [inaudible 7:49].

31
32 Michael Fleming: [7:50] T-, talk about – he did tell us what EPA was. It was employee
33 participation advisor but talk about at the time when you came into
34 material, the type of material we moved and how much and then we went
35 to JIT and how that, how that transition worked out.

36
37 Bob Rennells: When I first came into material in 1984, at that time, it was kinda the
38 scenario if there was an open space on the floor where they could put
39 something, that meant we were outta parts. We had to keep the plant
40 filled. I mean, literally if there was a hole, you either brought a railroad
41 car in or a semi truck trailer in and unloaded it to put the parts in house
42 and at one time here when I worked on the 21 dock site out on a body
43 shop metal site, we had over 100 trailers in what they call the bull pen that
44 we paid rent to rent these trailers. They were full of parts and we stored'm
45 in our parking lots, both north and south, and we also stored these trailers
46 out to plant 5 at the Delta engine complex and we had – didn't have the

1 computer system that we used. We had what they call the manifest or bill
2 of ladings that showed the parts on it and we would keep those on a
3 clipboard and when you needed a part, if you couldn't find it in the plant,
4 didn't mean we didn't have it, just meant if you couldn't find it, then you
5 would go down through – you would literally look through all the
6 paperwork 'til you found the part number and found what trailer it was on.
7

8 Then, we would send out what we call a switcher to go get the trailer,
9 bring it to the dock, and we would unload it, oldest trailer first, and when
10 we unloaded that trailer, for the body shop side, they were what you would
11 call a miscellaneous trailer. It wasn't all one part. There were multiple
12 parts on this trailer, so you unloaded the whole trailer and if you needed –
13 if there were only 100 parts and you needed 200 pieces, you unloaded that
14 trailer then you brought the next trailer in that had that part on it and
15 loaded – unloaded that whole trailer also, so literally we just stacked parts
16 everywhere. Any place you could find a place to put it, you put it before
17 we had the Just in Time. We went to JIT, Just in Time, which was a real
18 struggle for management and hourly people because it was a change and
19 none of us wanted change. [laughter] We were very comfortable with the
20 way we did business but obviously it wasn't profitable, so went to school
21 to learn how, how to do that or what was expected. It didn't always work
22 the way we were taught we were going to do it and – but we did reduce
23 our in-house inventories and then I was fortunate enough to become a
24 trainer through General Motors to train hourly and management how to do
25 this also. Quite – I – again, the opportunities I've had here have been – I
26 feel I've been quite fortunate to get a lot of this training and General
27 Motors actually spent the money on me to allow me to do this.
28

29Cheryl McQuaid: Uh, I wanna go quite a bit further back to when you first hired in. [11:29] I
30 worked in the jungle at one time and, and the pit was always – I could not
31 imagine ever having to work in a pit and I just wanna hear a little bit about
32 your day in the pit in the jungle. What was it like?
33

34Bob Rennells: Well [startin' 11:44] in a pit, it – you, you basically worked by yourself.
35 You had a partner on the other side with jobs running between you 'cause
36 you did the right side, your partner did the left, so it was pretty much a
37 solitary job. Uh, no interaction. You had to, to hurry. If you wanna get a
38 drink'a water, I mean, you, you had, you had to run to get up to the
39 drinkin' fountain [laughter], get back, get back down and not miss a job.
40 Uh, we had stop buttons down there for emergency purposes but you
41 better be just about pulling a job off the line before you hit that. You had
42 to have your gun hung up or something and basically at that point, you
43 didn't hit the button; you bailed outta the pit and run like hell anyway.
44 Uh, so – but it was a solitary job. Uh, it was, it was hot, it was dirty. They
45 had fans that blew warm air around. At that particular time, you were
46 allowed to smoke in the plant, so they did have ashtrays down there,

1 [bucket 12:54], can, or whatever, uh, but you were stuck there for the full
2 shift. Uh, you wore either coveralls or a shop coat and you taped
3 everything up as best you could to keep the sparks out – off your hide, uh,
4 and there was sealer dripping off the cars. You, you wouldn't notice it 'til
5 you squeezed – when the spot welder squeezed it together to weld it, then
6 you'd have sealer either squeezing out or catching on fire. You had to
7 smell acrid – the acrid smoke from being under there because again,
8 you're down under the car and there wasn't good ventilation. The –
9 nobody liked the job.
10
11 Doreen Howard: [13:38] What was the, the size of the confinement spacing you were in?
12
13 Bob Rennells: The pit – the wheelhouse pit that I was in was approximately 4 foot wide,
14 because you could actually touch the sides as you stood on it, and it was
15 approximately 12 foot long and you, you had to get your welding done
16 within that 12-foot distance.
17
18 Doreen Howard: [14:03] And that was below the level of the ground?
19
20 Female: Of the floor?
21
22 Bob Rennells: That was below the level of the track – of the ground. You actually stood
23 underneath the car and welded the seams underneath the car as it went by
24 in around the, around the wheelhouses and the inner parts of the
25 automobile.
26
27 Jerri Smith: [14:25] Is it still like that now?
28
29 Bob Rennells: No. Uh, they have – now everything is up on a raised platform. Uh, they
30 have come to the wisdom that – again, it wasn't a confined space but it, it
31 was almost in the sense that the air didn't move and when you're –
32 because of the fumes from the welding and the sealers and everything else,
33 that everything settled so you were down there constantly breathing all
34 that and ergonomically, it was not a good – just plain isn't – wasn't good
35 on your body because even though the guns were hung on bal-, what they
36 call a balancer, it still was quite a physical job. The weight of the gun
37 itself was suspended but moving – getting the [mass 15:21] weight of the
38 gun, the inertia from swinging it in and swinging it out, most of this
39 welding of this type now is done by robots, again for ergonomic reasons.
40 It tore a lot of people up workin' in the body shop.
41
42 Doreen Howard: [15:41] Moving forward, can you, um, describe what your job is today
43 and, and how that has changed from when you first started doin' your job
44 as to when you're [inaudible 15:54]?
45

1Bob Rennells:

Well, the job I have today as, as a dock controller didn't even exist back in, uh, the early parts of the material world. That was all done – it didn't exist as an hourly job. It was done – it was a supervisor's job to determine what trucks, trailers they wanted in through [coughing] – the traffic department would put out a build schedule and they would know, you know, we need X number of parts [coughing] to [inaudible 16:24] X number of cars and when the supplier [throat clearing] – when they would contact the supplier, they would order X number of pieces and then [coughing] management would determine what trailers were brought in and the time and everything and, and it was kinda random when they'd come in. There were no windows set up. There was no delivery times. It was the plant's open at this time, get the [throat clearing] trailer here during this shift time. Again, 'cause we were dropping trailers in the bullpen. We didn't – nothing was on a scheduled delivery and through the course of negotiations with the union and management, they negotiated what they call a dock controller's job where the hourly people were taking – given the responsibility to keep track of the parts as they come off the trailer.

We had checkers that made sure when we had unloaded the trailer that that part was on there, which we would give that to the dock controller and the dock controller, again, working with the supervisor would determine what trailers they needed for that night by the parts that had been taken off from the previous shift. They would run down through, like, an inventory sheet and say, okay, we gotta do these trailers here and we don't need these and then as, uh, it progressed and computers became available for us to use, we were able to – along with the Just in Time, you could actually – the supplier would input into the computer system what was on his trailers supposedly and then we could look at a computer screen and a computer screen would actually tell us what trailers we needed to offload to facilitate that shift's production. Uh, even to this day, we do random checks on our trailers to make sure that the vendor does put on the truck what he says and as a dock controller, that was my job to make sure that the supplier got the trailer to our plant when it was supposed to be here, that the trucking company actually arrived when they said they were going to be here at the time they were told to, and to verify that the parts were on the trailer, make sure that we got our return dunnage back on a trailer and got the trailer back on the road in a timely manner.

40Doreen Howard:

[19:05] With, um, tsk, the scenario that you just set up, it seems as being the person in charge of a lot of comings and goings in, uh, distribution processes here, um, how did that affect you personally because wouldn't you be the person everybody's gonna come to and go why is this not here, why is this there, or where is it in – would – talk about some of the [inaudible 19:37].

1 Bob Rennells: Well, p-, yeah, it does but it also – by being one individual out of many
2 that did this – but I had a regular shift and I had contact numbers with all
3 the trucking companies and most of my drivers that came here – I say my
4 drivers. Most of the drivers that come here – we had the same drivers on a
5 daily basis, so they knew what was expected of them. Whether they
6 actually hit it or not, it's like anything else. Some drivers I could set my
7 watch by. Other drivers I knew that they would be late no matter what.
8 They just couldn't do it and part of my job also – if the trucking company
9 was late on a continual basis, then I w-, I had to contract our traffic
10 department and would call them to have them track the truck down and
11 they had a process where they kept track of if the trucks were late, if they
12 weren't, if everybody was on time and those that were late, then the traffic
13 department dealt with them within their realm and which – either change
14 drivers or change trucking companies but yes, there w-, a fair amount of
15 responsibility but, uh, given the training, almost anybody, if you really
16 cared about the job, could do it. It wasn't – it asked – you were asked to
17 do a lot but no different than your jobs, anybody else's jobs, and I liked
18 the job, so [laughter], so it made it easy. [laughter] But yeah, there's a fair
19 amount of responsibility and – but the responsibility was shared with
20 management also by them having – person-, personal part of it was I got to
21 talk to the drivers, so they knew what I expected of them, I knew what
22 they expected of me, and management here, I knew what they expected
23 me to do but they also knew what they were gonna get in return also.
24

25 Michael Fleming: [21:54] Y-, you mentioned two terms that some people listening to this
26 may not understand, so explain, um, what dunnage is and num-, the
27 second term was switcher and who was your best switcher.
28

29 Bob Rennells: Well, dunnage is the empty containers – uh, dunnage is what we call the
30 containers that hold the product that we received from the vendors. If it
31 was metal racks or a returnable rack, then we had to load that rack back on
32 the trailer, cut the shipper off the – print a shipper off the computer
33 sending a [tab 22:34] with a – telling the quantity of containers and where
34 it goes, what truck it went on, back to that vendor and the switcher was an
35 individual that – they had a small semi tractor here that we would send
36 them out to f-, get what, whatever trailer we needed where, wherever it
37 was stored at within the Lansing area. Uh, probably the best switcher I
38 had was, uh, an individual called Richard Smith. He would do anything
39 for ya. Sometimes it took a little while to get him to do it but – because he
40 was tryin' to help anybody. His only fault was he wanted to help
41 everybody. In reality, be a little frustrating at times but he [laughter] w-,
42 he was a good individual to work with.
43

44 Cheryl McQuaid: You've been all over this plant. [coughing] [23:35] What was your
45 favorite department? Who was your favorite boss?
46

1 Bob Rennells: Actually, it's – uh, favorite boss. I had a lotta good bosses, uh, and I had
2 bosses that I admired but I didn't like working for but they still had, uh,
3 capabilities that I admired. I – one'a the bosses that I didn't like working
4 for was an individual named Bob [inaudible 24:09] but this individual that
5 I – had, had a quality that I admired. You could give him a part number,
6 and how he did it I have no idea, but he would remember it. He never had
7 to write any part numbers down. He wasn't the most pleasant person to
8 work for [laughter] but he – you could give him a part number, a list of
9 part numbers, and he would never write any of'm down. He would
10 remember every one and he knew where everything was at and I did
11 admire that. I didn't like workin' for the guy but I did admire that, that he
12 could do that.
13

14 Michael Fleming: And you had to work with him. [24:46] Didn't he go outside and work for
15 another vender and still have some contact [inaudible 24:52]?
16

17 Bob Rennells: Yeah, he did [laughter] and when he worked for that other vendor, he got
18 fired, so [laughter] – uh, because they didn't like workin' with him either
19 but the man was good at numbers. He, he, he was amazing. Probably
20 [Terry Hille 25:10] was one of the better bosses I liked working for. Uh,
21 Randy [Gingrich 25:18] was another boss I liked working for. They had a
22 job [inaudible 25:24], we d-, and I had a job to do. Didn't always see eye
23 to eye but they were one'a the two, two supervisors that I, I felt were more
24 honorable to work for. Uh, again, understanding that they were always
25 under pressure from their supervisors to do certain things. We didn't
26 always see eye to eye but at least they were straightforward about it and I
27 remember years ago, even a senior supervisor that was a c-, there was –
28 it's quite comical to look back on. Was a little guy called [Hughie Price
29 26:05] and – for the body shop and seemed like he always had a fire
30 burning but he's always spinnin' his wheels and not goin' anywhere
31 [laughter] but he was, he was an individual to work for.
32

33 Doreen Howard: [26:27] Do you think that – um, from what I can remember, was it [Terry
34 Hille 26:31] and Randy [Gingrich 26:33] both, um, hourly at one point and
35 moved up the ranks into management?
36

37 Bob Rennells: Yes, they were. I think it makes a big difference if you have an hourly
38 background and go to supervision from there. It gives you [throat
39 clearing] a real – more of a real-world sense what it is to work for a living.
40 Not to say that supervis-, sup-, being in a supervisory position isn't work.
41 Having sat across from them on a union side, I know it's work. I know the
42 pressure they're under but I do feel that they have more of a real-world
43 sense. Uh, you can't do everything just because the book says that it is.
44 There's good programs out there without a doubt but you still have to do it
45 to understand what it is to work with your hands for a living.
46

1Doreen Howard: [27:34] Are you going to go out to the Delta plant in the position that
2 you're in right now?
3

4Bob Rennells: As it stands right now, they don't have dock controllers at the Delta plant.
5 That's [laughter]...
6

7Doreen Howard: [27:48] And why is that? [Inaudible 27:50].
8

9Bob Rennells: Uh, bec-, well, no, we're going to have trucks come in and be unloaded
10 but they have – under the plat-, platinum agreement out there, it looks like
11 right now the, uh, ri-, [Ryder 07] was going to do it. It's still in
12 negotiation. They haven't determined yet. They've talked about having
13 [Ryder 28:14] do it, they've talked about having the TCs keep track of
14 what comes in, which TCs are supposed to be fully – do nothing but TC,
15 so we're in, we're in negotiations on this yet and as far as my going out
16 there, you know, honestly, I gotta couple houses for sale. If they sell, I'm
17 gone. I'm retired. [laughter]
18

19Marilyn Coulter: You said TC. [28:40] Can you please define TC please?
20

21Bob Rennells: Uh, TC being the term used for team coordinator. That's – uh, or you
22 could call it – uh, TC's what we call it but TS, troubleshooter, team
23 troubleshooter would probably be just as good a term. Uh, more of a
24 hands-on – they're not a utility person but they are a hands-on hourly
25 person that has been trained, picked to lead the team and help their
26 coworkers with any problems they have within their work group with the
27 group being approximately six to eight people.
28

29Marilyn Coulter: [29:25] Would you say that the material drivers – the trick drivers, are –
30 were they a tightknit group?
31

32Bob Rennells: The old-school truck drivers were a tightknit group. In the last – as the
33 younger people came in, you know, old – the old-school people that
34 worked here were a tightknit group. As we got younger and younger
35 people into the shop, more individualism and less – uh, I don't like to use
36 the word team player. Less brotherhood and sisterhood amongst the
37 workers.
38

39Marilyn Coulter: [30:09] Can you say how that might've affected, uh, the workforce is –
40 insofar as getting things done? H-, how d-, how did that affect the work
41 here? How did it affect the union?
42

43Bob Rennells: Oh, I, I believe – my personal belief is that one, it was – made things more
44 difficult for the union from the standpoint that instead of everybody
45 looking out for everybody else, it was more of what's in this for me and
46 we may, we may not always got what was in it for me but the younger, the

1 younger people that were working here were more concerned about
2 whether I as an individual have a job versus what can I as an individual do
3 to make sure that everybody has a job? G-, seen – I’ve seen that. It
4 started in the early ‘80s. When I come in here in 1970, at that time, we
5 didn’t have [30 and out 31:32] when I hired in. You worked ‘til you were
6 65 or dead and so there was more of a what can we do to make it better so
7 I, I make the age 65 and retire and a lot of the – uh, you were taken aside
8 by the old timers and in all honesty said this is way it is and this, you
9 know, this is – and there was a lotta history-giving also at that time.
10 Again, as we got newer people in here, I don’t know that – part of it may
11 be that the people that hired in in the ‘80s were better educated or...?
12

13Marilyn Coulter: [32:18] Can you expand on history-giving? You said that – when you said
14 there was more history-giving. Can you explain that to me please?
15

16Bob Rennells: When I hired in here in 1970, 18 years old, a lotta the people I worked
17 with at that time, even on the nightshift – days or nightshifts, there was
18 people that were my parents’ age or older even and th-, they had a very
19 strong union back then and if you had a question, th-, they were – about
20 the union, about the shop, anything else, they were more’n happy to tell
21 you about it. Why they did things the way they did, how – why we had
22 wagon brakes, items like that because it was something new to me and
23 wondered why they h-, you know, why do we do this, why do we do that
24 and they were all quite willing to talk to you. As a new kid comin’ in, you
25 know, at lunchtime or at break time, if you – if they seen you doin’
26 somethin’ that wasn’t right that affected them or the way things were
27 done, then you were taken aside, you were – and told, you know, we don’t
28 do that for a reason. There’s a reason that we have, uh, utility men.
29 There’s a us-, reason we have welders. There’s a r-, the people that do the
30 welding. I mean, there, there, there’s a reason you don’t just do every job
31 here and given the history of why you don’t do every job here and you do
32 what – only what your job entails and you don’t do anything else and even
33 management was strong on that because they told us at the time, or at least
34 tried to tell us, that, you know, you learn that job, nobody can do that job
35 better than you. They didn’t want you over here doin’ somebody else’s
36 job because you wouldn’t get the spot welds in the right spot or you
37 wouldn’t drill a hole in the right spot or something else, so you were pretty
38 much stuck on the job that you had [laughter] – that you were given.
39

40Doreen Howard: [34:35] Y-, you touched base, uh, several times about the union. Can you
41 talk more about your experience? You said you had run for [alternate
42 34:44] committee and you had talked a lot about [unionism 34:47]. Can
43 you [inaudible 34:48]?
44

45Bob Rennells: Yeah, I, uh, was fortunate enough – we had a vacant opening and I was
46 asked to be a alternate committee man for the material and paint

1 department because the individual that had been there moved on, so I
2 accepted the job and – which was a real eye opener but it was also a great
3 opportunity because I was given – I was then sent to a school up at Black
4 Lake, which was very interesting. I met some great people up there, got
5 some more union history and why we do it, spent a lotta time on the
6 grievance procedure, on the legalities of it and all the responsibility of it
7 and the, and the history of why we have unions and that but even more so,
8 dealing with the people in management here on the floor, it's amazing
9 how – if you talk to management on one on one, the same as talking to
10 union people one on one, and we all know what we're supposed to do. It
11 doesn't always work that way either side of the floor, whether it be the
12 union or the management, but some great gains were – have been made
13 and hopefully that we retain but even plant rules and regulations, uh, you
14 know, realizing that it's the same for everybody. The rules apply whether
15 you're management or hourly as far as plant rules and the contract applies
16 both ways and sometimes a lotta the membership doesn't understand that
17 actually. When I say a lot, you have your select few. As with anything,
18 you have your 5 percent or – and, and it's on both sides. Five percent of
19 the management, 5 percent of the union 'cause I had managers that
20 [inaudible 37:14] contracts for union, it's not for [laughter] the
21 management and I had, you know, union people that – union dues payin'
22 people that said well, that's for management to live by. That's not by us,
23 so it [wasn't 37:25] very interesting but I did get to meet some great
24 people just workin' with the...
25
26Michael Fleming: Hobbies. [37:34] Um, obviously, uh, you have some – or a hobby, it
27 appears, that you do more than anything else. Will you talk about that?
28
29Bob Rennells: Well, actually I have more than one but I do ride Harley-Davidson
30 motorcycles and I try to get as much time as the weather and my, uh,
31 better half will allow me. [laughter] But I also fish and I do deer huntin'
32 and fortunately by working for General Motors, I've been compensated
33 well enough in my employment here that it, it does give me some time to
34 do this and afford to be able to take vacations and enjoy my hobbies.
35
36Marilyn Coulter: [38:29] D-, do you enjoy those hobbies with any of your coworkers?
37
38Bob Rennells: I do hunt and fish with some of my coworkers. Uh, as far as my bike
39 riding, my motorcycle riding, that's kind of a solitary thing. That's where
40 I go off – or me and the wife go off and just enjoy our time by ourselves.
41 Uh, but as far as the fishing and hunting, I do do that – uh, I go – spend a
42 fair amount of time hunting and fishing with an individual named Scott
43 [Parmley 38:59], so.
44
45Michael Fleming: [39:01] Some of the places you been on your bike with your wife.
46

1Bob Rennells: Uh, Cedar Point, uh, up into Mackinaw City, the UP, uh, throughout
2 Michigan, uh, pretty much all over. A little town called Luther. Uh,
3 mostly try to stay to the two-lane highway back roads and just the outta
4 the way places where you don't have to be in a hurry and you can just see
5 the scenery as it goes by.
6

7Cheryl McQuaid: [39:33] Do you remember any worst place in the plant? Any, um, pranks
8 that were pulled on you or that you pulled on someone else you'd like to
9 share with us?
10

11Bob Rennells: Well, I do remember that when I first hired in here, w-, I was amazed that,
12 uh, there wasn't a lotta horseplay but there was kind of a undertone of
13 horseplay where throwing, uh, snuff lids was a [laughter] big deal.
14 They're quite prevalent in here and then I – when I was out in the body
15 shop working as a utility man, over in the – what they called the – I guess
16 you'd call it the [brazing 40:25] booth, they would – they had an
17 individual that had the job – right before where you welded the steering
18 column brackets in, they had a job where you had this, uh, [brazing 40:39]
19 along the weld – along the seams on the rocker panels and thought it was
20 quite hilarious to heat up the rocker panel where I had to sit to weld the
21 [laughter] steering column in.
22

23Female: Ow!
24

25Bob Rennells: Oh, yes. [laughter] Uh, and in the summer time, five-gallon buckets'a
26 water were quite [laughter] prevalent out in the body shop because it was
27 hot and it was miserable. That was probably the extent of what I seen
28 goin' on, uh, and everybody enjoyed going to Harry's for lunch.
29

30Jerri Smith: [41:19] During the years that you've been all over in the plant, have you
31 noticed, like – y-, you talked about the jungle and all that. The difference
32 that the plant has gone through and the stages of what it was like in here as
33 – like when you first came in that it was a dark, dingy place and over the
34 years, it's improved?
35

36Bob Rennells: Oh, definitely. As – uh, going from the jungle back in 1984 when we
37 changed from building the large cars to our small cars and they revamped
38 the body shop, we used to have the old oiled wooden blocks was the floors
39 in here and when they built the new body shop, they poured all concrete
40 and – which definitely lightened it up. In that sense, just the fact that it
41 was concrete wors-, versus, uh, oiled wooden blocks and better lighting
42 going from just fluorescent lights to being – hanging sodium lights
43 throughout the plant. Don't know that they did it for better lighting. They
44 probably did it to save money but it [laughter] actually give a better light
45 also and cleaner, better ventilation when they re-, when they refurbished
46 the body shop. They put in better ventilation to pull the smoke and fumes

1 off. Um, more organized as they went to more robotics. They were able
2 to put up curtains, if you wanna call it. Actually it was a vinyl curtain but
3 it kept the sparks down, which also helped catch the dust, uh, because
4 people weren't walking through that area, so they didn't have to have
5 things open for, uh, pedestrian traffic and they – and being we didn't have
6 parts stacked clear to the roof in every hole that they had in here where
7 they could put some, our environmental services department was able to
8 do a better job of keeping up in getting to these areas to keep the dust and
9 dirt, uh, down. Throughout the whole shop it became that way.
10
11 As we got more efficient and needed less parts in here, opened up more
12 areas where we could do other work but also open it up so again – so that
13 we could keep it clean also and, you know, if – with, with Just in Time
14 inventory out there, we didn't have trucks that had been setting out for six
15 months in a parking lot collecting dust and dirt also, so even in a sense, the
16 parts that we brought in were cleaner. We didn't bring as much dirt into
17 the plant and then when we ch-, switched over – and I don't know what
18 year it was but when we went from, uh, coal fire boilers to a gas-fired
19 boiler, that made a big difference too because we didn't have all the coal
20 dust blowing in the plant.
21
22 Cheryl McQuaid: [44:29] You were here – uh, when you hired in it was Fisher Body.
23
24 Bob Rennells: When I hired in it was Fisher Body.
25
26 Cheryl McQuaid: It changed to BOC.
27
28 Bob Rennells: [Inaudible 44:36].
29
30 Cheryl McQuaid: Then we went on to Lansing Car Assembly. [44:39] What are some'a your
31 thoughts about the name changes, going through all that?
32
33 Bob Rennells: First, my thoughts on that...
34
35 Female: [Can we stop] [inaudible 44:48].
36
37 Bob Rennells: Well, uh, talking about the changes throughout the plant here. I hired in, it
38 was Fisher Body. Then it changed to BOC; Buick, Olds, Cadillac; and
39 then it changed to...
40
41 Michael Fleming: LCA.
42
43 Bob Rennells: [Inaudible 45:11] LCA, all under the roof of [inaudible 45:14]. You
44 know, as an employee, what is [inaudible 45:18]? It doesn't mean
45 anything to me. Even a fact – going back when we were Fisher Body,
46 when we changed to BOC and they stopped putting the Fisher Body coach

1 in the rocker panels, that, that was a – it seemed like we were giving up
2 our distinction, you know. We were proud – still are but we were proud of
3 the fact that we worked at Fisher Body, made the bodies, and we were
4 recognized as a body builder, not just an assembly plant that we, we built
5 Fisher bodies and it – and when it changed, it, it, it affected – to us – it
6 affected your pride. I mean, we still did a good job. We – but it was like,
7 you know, okay, we don't count anymore in a sense. It didn't cost'm any
8 more to have that little coach stamped in a rocker panel than to not have it.
9 I mean, it was part of the dye making process or whatever you wanna call
10 it and, uh, back when, uh, Oldsmobile – I mean, they had their rocket,
11 their rocket engines. There w-, that was different than a Chevy or Pontiac
12 and when that went away, uh, then it was harder to tell – well, you know,
13 why should I buy this or buy that 'cause there was loyalty there from the
14 people that worked here plus the outside public, at least as perceived in
15 working here and I think, you know, the more they take the – call it takin'
16 away the individual – even though we were a collective group of Fisher
17 Body workers, uh, and we're still Fisher Body workers. Even though our
18 name is gone, that's how we refer to ourselves. There's some pride in that
19 and when you take that away from people, you can't help but affect the
20 work force.

21
22Doreen Howard: [47:30] Are you going to go to the Delta plant? You said you're not sure?

23
24Bob Rennells: I'm not sure if I'm gonna go to the Delta plant or not. I, I'm – in all
25 honesty, I'm not looking forward to it. Again, I've been here for over 30
26 years and very comfortable in what I did for a living here and I'm real not
27 sure what I'm gonna do for a living out there if I do go out there because
28 the jobs have changed and I don't know that I'm all that receptive
29 [laughter] to doing that. [laughter]
30

31Doreen Howard: [48:03] Well, with your, your years of experience here, um, can you
32 elaborate on maybe some words of wisdom that you may pass on to the
33 people that – moving forward and possibly new, new people coming in to
34 old Fisher Body [inaudible 48:26]?
35

36Bob Rennells: As far as words of wisdom, I don't know about that. I do know that, you
37 know, for years and years and years, management told me that they
38 needed me to come to work every day 'cause nobody could do my job as
39 good as I did it and right or wrong, now they're going to a team concept
40 where they want you to learn everybody's job within your team group,
41 which means that, well, if – not sayin' the old philosophy was right or
42 wrong but, uh, coming from old school where all these years they told me
43 nobody could do my job as good as I c-, did it, now they want me to go to
44 a new plant, to a new school. The new train of thought is that, well,
45 everybody can do your job as good as you did it and you can do
46 everybody else's job as well as you did it and I'm not very receptive to

1 that and everybody has to make up their own mind on that. It may be the
2 new way of doing business, uh, but I don't believe that in reality that it, if
3 you, if you take an individual, any individual, and you teach them a craft,
4 whether it be writing, speaking – uh, if all's you can teach'm is to put a
5 washer and a nut on a bolt, they will do their best that they can at that and
6 when you start mixing these people up – I don't know but for me, I – it's
7 just not me.
8

9Marilyn Coulter: Now you said – just kinda goin' away from that for a second. Um, you
10 said that you had lunch at Harry's. [50:27] You wanna tell us a little bit
11 about what's Harry's and...?
12

13Bob Rennells: Harry's is a bar across the street but it was more than just a bar. Uh, you
14 could cash your paycheck there, you could get a meal there; more than just
15 a cold sandwich. You could get – uh, had an array of sandwiches and
16 french fries. You could get coffee there. You could get a glass of milk
17 there if you wanted it and it was, uh, right across the street. It was a place
18 where you could go with your fellow workers to cash a check, get lunch,
19 whatever, and you could wear your shop coat in there [laughter], your
20 clothes in there. You were treated like family when you walked in there
21 and if you walked in there after work and had to wait for a taxi, a bus,
22 whatever, you were still treated like family. It, it, it was part of the – it is
23 part of the Fisher Body family and you – but yet, you – we're expected to
24 behave in there also. [laughter]
25

26Jerri Smith: Bob, we could talk to you all day and I just wanna say that I really
27 appreciate you spendin' this time with us. [51:38] Um, is there anything
28 that we didn't ask you that you'd like to share?
29

30Bob Rennells: Uh, off the top of my head, I can't think of anything. I appreciate this
31 opportunity to speak to you and make this record for future people but if
32 anything else, it's always gonna change, understand that, and change is
33 hard for people but if you look at it [coughing] one of the things in the –
34 that I do know in the time I've spent here [coughing] is it does circle
35 around. A great idea tomorrow is probably something that we did in the
36 past and because we do learn from history and our mistakes, that at some
37 point we will make this circle again.
38

39Jerri Smith: Thank you.
40

41Michael Fleming: Thank you Bob.
42

43Doreen Howard: Thank you.
44
45
46/ad