

**MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY – SHAWN NICHOLSON
RUDOLFO (RUDY) REYES, A HISPANIC AMERICAN,
DISCUSSES HIS CAREER AS A PRODUCTION WORKER AND UAW MEMBER
AT THE FISHER BODY PLANT IN LANSING, MI**

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7 Marilyn Coulter: Fisher Body Historical Project interview, uh, August 11, 2005, Thursday.
8 In the conference room and [clicking throughout audio] Skill Center.
9 Interviewer: Marilyn Coulter. [background noises] Interviewee: Rudy
10 Reyes. [0:16] Uh, Rudy, could you please spell your name for me, please?
11
12 Rudolph Reyes: It's R-U-D-Y R-E-Y-E-S.
13
14 Marilyn Coulter: All right. [0:23] And, um, are you – it's Rudolph [but 0:25] do they call
15 you Rudolph or Rudy in the plant?
16
17 Rudolph Reyes: They usually call me Rudy in the plant. [zipping] [thumping]
18
19 Marilyn Coulter: [0:30] And, uh, Rudy, can you, um, give your address?
20
21 Rudolph Reyes: Yes. I live at 310 Beaver Street, Lansing, Michigan 08906.
22
23 Marilyn Coulter: [All right 0:38]. [0:39] And your seniority date, [clanking] please?
24
25 Rudolph Reyes: 4/18/69.
26
27 Marilyn Coulter: 4/18/69. [0:44] Um, [throat clearing] now – and y-, are you a resident of
28 Lansing? [0:49] Were you a resident of Lansing?
29
30 Rudolph Reyes: Yes. I've always been a resident, so.
31
32 Marilyn Coulter: [0:53] So, um, you – how old were you when you hired in to Fisher Body?
33
34 Rudolph Reyes: I was 18. The next day, I turned 19.
35
36 Marilyn Coulter: And the next day, [papers rustling] you turned 19. [1:02] Uh, did you have
37 any prior, um, uh, jobs prior to you coming in to Fisher Body?
38
39 Rudolph Reyes: I had plenty a jobs. I was a working kid.
40
41 Marilyn Coulter: You were a working kid.
42
43 Rudolph Reyes: I worked in the fields like a lot of, uh, Latinos. [background noises]
44 Worked in the fields and I knew I didn't wanna do that for a living. So I
45 worked at restaurants. [clanking] Um, I worked at, um – I guess I worked
46 from the fields to the restaurants and I did a lotta errands for people in the

1 neighborhood. I found out I could make money running errands, shoveling
2 snow, cutting grass, so I did all kinds a stuff, washed cars.
3
4 Marilyn Coulter: So, um, you've always been a working person. Now you grew up in
5 Lansing. [1:41] Uh, what high school did you go to?
6
7 Rudolph Reyes: Eastern High School.
8
9 Marilyn Coulter: Eastern High School. That's quite a ways away from the Fisher Body
10 plant. [1:47] Was there anything – any kind of, um, connections did you
11 have with the plant as you were growing up?
12
13 Rudolph Reyes: My dad worked here.
14
15 Marilyn Coulter: [1:54] Your dad worked here?
16
17 Rudolph Reyes: Yes.
18
19 Marilyn Coulter: [1:55] Now did you ever visit the plant or what did you...
20
21 Rudolph Reyes: No. I never visited...
22
23 Marilyn Coulter: ...think about the plant?
24
25 Rudolph Reyes: ...the plant. I just knew he worked there and knew they made good money
26 there but I never wanted to work here.
27
28 Marilyn Coulter: [2:04] But you never wanted to work here?
29
30 Rudolph Reyes: No.
31
32 Marilyn Coulter: Okay. [2:07] Um, I see now as your work experience is you said [that now
33 2:10] – were there any other plants that you worked in before you worked
34 in [clanking] before you worked here?
35
36 Rudolph Reyes: I worked at [laughter] – it's funny – is that I worked for [Milling Forging
37 2:16]. I worked for, um, Oldsmobile once. I hired in Fisher Body twice. So
38 the third time around, I stayed.
39
40 Marilyn Coulter: Now you say you hired in to Fisher Body twice. [2:28] What was it like,
41 eh – if you hired in twice and on 3 different occasions you came here, was
42 – which – what was each time like? [2:36] What was it like the first time
43 you came in here? [2:37] What'd you think?
44
45 Rudolph Reyes: The first time I went was to Oldsmobile and it was, it was [clanking] hurry
46 up, learn this job, you're on your own. Ended up cutting myself on the

1 motor blade 'cause we had to tighten down to 3 bolts, so you put a gun on
2 there and if you didn't get it right, it spun like a regular engine and the
3 lady I worked with got really mad because she said there's no way I
4 should've been on that job by myself so fast.
5
6 Marilyn Coulter: [2:58] So how long did you work at Oldsmobile?
7
8 Rudolph Reyes: Uh, I'd say about 60 days.
9
10 Marilyn Coulter: 60 days.
11
12 Rudolph Reyes: Uh-huh.
13
14 Marilyn Coulter: [3:02] And then on your second time?
15
16 Rudolph Reyes: I hired in Fisher Body and I worked 1 day.
17
18 Marilyn Coulter: [3:06] You worked 1 day? [3:07] Now...
19
20 Rudolph Reyes: Yes.
21
22 Marilyn Coulter: ...what was the experience like that caused you to work only 1 day.
23
24 Rudolph Reyes: Was I was working really hard and the guy next to me says – and, and I
25 know who he is [thumping] to this very day. He says you think this job's
26 hard now, wait till Christmas and I didn't come back the next day.
27
28 Marilyn Coulter: [3:21] You didn't come back the next day?
29
30 Rudolph Reyes: No.
31
32 Marilyn Coulter: [3:23] And now how – d-, do you remember how old you were?
33
34 Rudolph Reyes: I'm all 18 in that...
35
36 Marilyn Coulter: [3:26] You're...
37
38 Rudolph Reyes: ...[inaudible 3:27].
39
40 Marilyn Coulter: ...all 18?
41
42 Rudolph Reyes: Yeah. [Inaudible 3:28].
43
44 Marilyn Coulter: [3:27] So on your third time you came back, so...
45

1Rudolph Reyes: I was, I was married. My wife was pregnant. [background conversation
2 throughout audio] I worked at, uh, Universal Steel [thumping] and my
3 wife was pregnant before I hired [knocking] in, so they weren't gonna pay
4 for it. So the night before, I had, um, [clinking] had to wait for the bus
5 'cause I rode the bus – didn't have a car – and it rained. So I missed the
6 bus.
7

8Marilyn Coulter: Missed [clanking] the bus.
9

10Rudolph Reyes: So I had to walk home. So by the time I got home, I was sopping wet and
11 my wife says you have a job interview tomorrow. It's Friday. Friday. I said
12 okay. So I went to the job interview. Mr. [Roach 4:08] interviewed me and
13 he says, uh, on the first question – I mean after we did the interview, I was
14 healthy and everything else. He says, um, you wanna start tonight or you
15 wanna start Monday. I said, no, I'll start tonight. He said come in tonight
16 and that was Friday. That was – [knocking] the next is Saturday [inaudible
17 4:23]. He said [heh 4:25]. So I started that night and I went to my old boss
18 and I said, I p-, I won't be working here anymore. He goes don't ever
19 come back here for, um, with a c-, a reference or a job or anything else. So
20 my, my foreman where I worked said don't come back no more...
21

22Marilyn Coulter: [Inaudible 4:41].
23

24Rudolph Reyes: ...and I'd been there for like 6 months.
25

26Marilyn Coulter: [4:42] And that was at the Universal Steel plant?
27

28Rudolph Reyes: Yeah.
29

30Marilyn Coulter: [Inaudible 4:45].
31

32Rudolph Reyes: So I didn't plan it but, um, but I asked Mr. [Brooks 4:48] when I – I mean
33 after the interview, I said my wife has a baby 6 f-, months from now. Will
34 you pay for it? [tapping] And he said she can have it tomorrow and we'll
35 pay for it and that's when I signed the paper. [knocking] I'm here.
36

37Marilyn Coulter: [5:00] So [tapping] then you're saying benefits [inaudible 5:01]?
38

39Rudolph Reyes: Benefits. Yes. [clanking]
40

41Marilyn Coulter: [5:05] So – and this is back [tapping] in 1969?
42

43Rudolph Reyes: Right.
44

45Marilyn Coulter: [5:08] And so what was it like coming in here for good...
46

1Rudolph Reyes: I didn't know...
2
3Marilyn Coulter: ...from 1969?
4
5Rudolph Reyes: I was coming for good.
6
7Marilyn Coulter: [Inaudible 5:14].
8
9Rudolph Reyes: 'Cause I wanted to be an engineer.
10
11Marilyn Coulter: Oh.
12
13Rudolph Reyes: But then I had a wife and then I got a baby and then I learned how to do
14 the job and it was good income in. I went to school parttime and
15 everything else and then one day I just didn't go back to school. I just
16 stayed here and learned as much as I could. And I'm still going to school
17 to this very day 'cause I take classes as I need'm.
18
19Marilyn Coulter: [Inaudible 5:36].
20
21Rudolph Reyes: So th-, it's been good.
22
23Marilyn Coulter: [5:39] So when you were a new hire...
24
25Rudolph Reyes: [Inaudible 5:43].
26
27Marilyn Coulter: ...on the nightshift, what was – was there an initiation? [5:49] What was it
28 like? [5:50] Can you remember what that first day was like that you were
29 here and what area did you hire in?
30
31Rudolph Reyes: I hired in in, oh, the cushion room.
32
33Marilyn Coulter: [5:57] In the cushion room?
34
35Rudolph Reyes: Yes.
36
37Marilyn Coulter: [5:58] And what was done in the cushion room?
38
39Rudolph Reyes: We would put the seats together. We'd put the covers. We'd put all the
40 springs. We [clanking] hog ringed'm. We, uh, stapled'm with big staples,
41 not little staples. [Inaudible 6:07] like, uh, we stretched'm. Um, some
42 people hog ringed their fingers. [tapping] And, uh...
43
44Marilyn Coulter: [6:13] Now what's a – can you describe a hog ring or...
45
46Rudolph Reyes: A hog ring is...

1
2 Marilyn Coulter: ...[inaudible 6:15]?
3
4 Rudolph Reyes: ...is a gun that comes together like a, um, like a hook. It'll hook and it's
5 got points on both ends and you, you learn to go really fast and I'll do the
6 noise for you. It goes chk-chk-chk. And the faster you are, the faster you
7 can get done. So we had people that could really run that baby. But every
8 so often, you'd hear a howl that somebody [laughter] got themselves and
9 everybody else would howl with'm because it hurt.
10
11 Marilyn Coulter: They hurt. Okay. [6:38] How long did you, um – so was there an
12 initiation?
13
14 Rudolph Reyes: No.
15
16 Marilyn Coulter: [6:44] [No] [inaudible 6:44]?
17
18 Rudolph Reyes: What, what happens is when I went in the cushion room, my dad worked
19 in the cushion room...
20
21 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.
22
23 Rudolph Reyes: ...so a lotta the ladies there would ask me are you Poncho's boy and I'd
24 say yes. We're gonna take good care of you. And they did. They taught me
25 a lotta stuff to do, not to do and sometimes they kept me in line too.
26
27 Marilyn Coulter: [Inaudible 7:00]. [7:01] So they kinda held your hand and helped you...
28
29 Rudolph Reyes: Yes.
30
31 Marilyn Coulter: ...learn the ropes?
32
33 Rudolph Reyes: Mm-hm.
34
35 Marilyn Coulter: [All right 7:05]. [7:06] So how long did you work in the cushion room?
36
37 Rudolph Reyes: About a year and a half.
38
39 Marilyn Coulter: A year and a half.
40
41 Rudolph Reyes: Then they shipped everybody out [background noises] that was in the
42 cushion room that had less than 2 years [thumping] up to Trim or to the
43 Plant 9 up in Trim.
44
45 Marilyn Coulter: [7:15] And Trim is what?
46

1Rudolph Reyes: Uh, it was [3X 7:17] at that time.
2
3Marilyn Coulter: [7:19] And what did you do in Trim?
4
5Rudolph Reyes: I, um, put in inner parts [coughing] of the car like, um, screws and bolts
6 and convertibles, you know, the little holes that go around to hold your,
7 uh, convertible top that you put it down.
8
9Marilyn Coulter: Okay. [7:35] So trimming, eh, is, is the...
10
11Rudolph Reyes: A lotta handguns, a lotta screw guns.
12
13Marilyn Coulter: A lotta screw guns and a lotta handguns. [7:40] So tra-, Trim is just
14 considered like the interior fineries of the car? [clanking] [7:45] So, um,
15 did you do work in, um, just the metal part of trim or did you work in the
16 fabric part of trim?
17
18Rudolph Reyes: No. I worked, uh – I didn't work, uh – I don't think I ever worked on the
19 outside of the – I mean the coverup part. I call it where – all the part you
20 cover up everything that everybody else does. No. [thumping]
21
22Marilyn Coulter: Okay. [8:04] So you did all the interior trim?
23
24Rudolph Reyes: Mm-hm.
25
26Marilyn Coulter: Okay.
27
28Rudolph Reyes: I was good with my hands. [clinking]
29
30Marilyn Coulter: You were good with your [laughter] hands. [8:10] So and you've worked
31 in Trim. [8:12] Uh, did you work in Trim for your whole ent-, for your...
32
33Rudolph Reyes: Almost all except during '74 when they laid off everybody during the gas
34 embargo, when they laid me off from March to August and then they
35 called me back and said we're gonna send you to the Body Shop. So I
36 went to the Body Shop was 6 months. Then one day they asked me do you
37 wanna go back to Trim or you wanna stay here. By the fi-, time they
38 finished their question, I was gone. I went back to Trim.
39
40Marilyn Coulter: [8:35] So what was it like going from the [thumping] cushion room to
41 Trim to Body Shop to back to Trim?
42
43Rudolph Reyes: It was, uh, hot 'cause you had to wear coveralls. You had – and I – and,
44 uh, a shield for your glasses and sometimes you had to wear a hat.
45
46Marilyn Coulter: [And a hat 8:53].

1
2Rudolph Reyes: It depends on what you were doing because they had a lotta sparks flying
3 around.
4
5Marilyn Coulter: Okay. [8:57] So was it...
6
7Rudolph Reyes: [Inaudible 8:57].
8
9Marilyn Coulter: ...a cloth hat, a metal hat, a...?
10
11Rudolph Reyes: Cloth hat. [I got] [inaudible 8:59].
12
13Marilyn Coulter: Okay. [9:02] And now, um, [tsk] so the primary reason you didn't wanna
14 work in Body Shop [clanking] was the heat?
15
16Rudolph Reyes: The heat and the noise.
17
18Marilyn Coulter: [9:10] And the noise?
19
20Rudolph Reyes: Yeah.
21
22Marilyn Coulter: [9:12] So would you say that the, um, people, culture in Body Shop, Paint
23 and cushion room was similar or how did they differ?
24
25Rudolph Reyes: I think they all had their own culture.
26
27Marilyn Coulter: [9:25] How so would you say?
28
29Rudolph Reyes: Because the Body Shop people were all – you had your own area. You had
30 to yell to talk. So you made kinda like noi-, not noises but gestures to get
31 somebody's attention and then once you got their attention, you do what
32 you could to entertain each other and I did pretty good down there.
33
34Marilyn Coulter: [9:43] So what types of things did you do to entertain yourself?
35
36Rudolph Reyes: Oh, one time the car went by and we made it a, a floating trashcan. So I
37 told everybody they had to throw all their trash in the car. So [clanking]
38 everybody threw all their trash in the car. [laughter]
39
40Marilyn Coulter: Okay. [Inaudible 9:57]. [9:58] And so – then how was Trim?
41
42Rudolph Reyes: Trim was you could talk to people. People – there was people side by side
43 to each other, so you had to get along with people 'cause you're working
44 [thumping] next to the person. I mean there were like 3 or 4 people and
45 you got your job done [thumping] and somebody else got their [thumping]

1 job done but we were all sequential. Everybody was – it was body to body
2 in those days.
3
4 Marilyn Coulter: [10:19] So how has [clanking] – so what did you do for fun there to get
5 through your night?
6
7 Rudolph Reyes: Oh, I did a lotta things. I was, um – one time I went in the, um,
8 phonebooth and they put a cloth around my neck and put an S and M on
9 my shirt [thumping] and everybody – when we took a break – everybody
10 had to take a break at the same time, so as they came to the break area and
11 I waited till everybody sat down and I opened the phonebooth and I
12 hollered Super Mex. [laughter] [Inaudible 10:46] and they all thought it
13 was funny. [thumping] And I had that name for a long time. Some people
14 still [throat clearing] remember it.
15
16 Marilyn Coulter: So [laughter] Super Mex [inaudible 10:55]. [10:56] So now I see, um –
17 and I know [clanking] that, um, you – while you were here, you said you
18 went to school but I know that while you were here, you got involved with
19 your [tapping] union?
20
21 Rudolph Reyes: Yes.
22
23 Marilyn Coulter: [11:11] So, um, can you tell me something about your union experiences.
24
25 Rudolph Reyes: Um, I have good – a lot of good union experiences. Union has, uh – put it
26 bluntly, spent a lot of money on me but in reverse, I hope I've giving –
27 given at least that much and back because they educated [tapping] me.
28 They sent me places. They showed me things that I've nev-, never had the
29 opportunity to do, to sit on boards. Uh, I've had the opportunity to
30 represent labor. [clanking] I've been in the newspaper many times but a
31 lotta people forget when they put my name in the newspaper. It says, uh,
32 Local 6-, Rudy Reyes, Local 602 Community Service chairperson 'cause
33 that who I represent when I sit on the board. I usually represent labor.
34 Ninety-nine percent of the time, I'm labor and if I'm not, um, I associated
35 with labor.
36
37 Marilyn Coulter: [12:00] So do you remember what year you first got involved with the
38 union?
39
40 Rudolph Reyes: Um, it was like around the '80s. I always did – I mean I always did stuff
41 with the union but it was around the '80s when I started, uh – I was on the
42 Community Service Committee. I was asked to be on the Community
43 Service Committee.
44
45 Marilyn Coulter: [12:19] Is that the only...
46

1Rudolph Reyes: By [Kenny 12:20], by [Kenny Schultz 12:20].
2
3Marilyn Coulter: [12:21] Is that the only committee you've ever been on?
4
5Rudolph Reyes: Uh, yes. I, I did it – one day he asked me if I'd like to be a Chair because
6 he was thinking about retiring and then he had a heart attack and decided
7 to retire and there was 5 people ran for the job and [clanking] everybody
8 told me [thumping] they were gonna to get the job, all the union guys that
9 ran for it. [clinking] The only part they forgot to tell me is [clanking] the
10 part – the bad part they told me is they were gonna win it and by them
11 telling me they were gonna win it, made me more determined that I was
12 gonna win it and I won it.
13
14Marilyn Coulter: [12:57] What does a Community Service Chair [clinking] do?
15
16Rudolph Reyes: Community Service Chair represents the union in the community, like on
17 United Way boards, uh, Old Newsboys, blood drives, food drives. Um,
18 sometimes our people, um, have financial problems or medical problems
19 that nobody else seems to solve and by sitting on those boards, you get to
20 know those people from Red Cross or United Way and you – and then
21 Community Service has a class up to Black Lake once a year. We learn all
22 the ins and outs or other agencies that help people. So the more you mix
23 with people, the more you mingle with people, the more people you have,
24 more resources you have to help people. So I'm a pretty good mingler and
25 [inaudible 13:45]. Okay.
26
27Marilyn Coulter: We're gonna pause for 1 second [here 13:47]. [throat clearing] [clanking]
28 [13:51] Uh, Rudy, as you're doing [crinkling] community service, what I
29 wanted to ask you is [clanking] how do you feel that your community
30 service committee affected and it helped to change the culture within the
31 plant?
32
33Rudolph Reyes: It helped to change because [clanking] we got people to believe in us and
34 all we had was our credibility and when all you have is your credibility,
35 um, [clanking] people either believe in you and don't. I was fortunate that,
36 that the union people at that time were able to go tell management that this
37 is a good job and hopefully I was doing a good job that they let out of the
38 plant fulltime for, for about 12 years. I did community service fulltime. So
39 what we were able to do [background noises] is we were able to do what
40 we did better, work on it better. We were able to take the people on the
41 committee and get them trained. Like for United Way, we'd, we'd do
42 computer class and have a couple that do computer classes because we
43 [inaudible 14:56] the computer classes. Our president was on a community
44 center's committee. Not bragging but [thumping] uh, Derrick Quinney,
45 Roberta Cannon, a lotta people – yourself – did United Way. We had a

1 lotta people that came through, did United Way and went different ways
2 from there...

3

4Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.

5

6Rudolph Reyes: ...and the best thing we could do is show'm their options and everything
7 else or I guess let them be on their own and be their own boss.

8

9Marilyn Coulter: [15:24] A-, and with being with United Way and dealing with the regular
10 everyday worker on the line, how do you feel your committee affected the
11 average worker on the line, not the ones that were necessarily involved in
12 the union activities but just those everyday workers on the lines who might
13 have helped with your coat drives or with your – or, or through donations
14 or through their blood drives?

15

16Rudolph Reyes: I think the things, the letters we put out that we tried to appeal to them on
17 a one-to-one basis, some of the people, um, that we had write stories
18 weren't just the committee. We had people write [background noises]
19 stories. Plus hopefully our people felt that they were helping. [So]
20 [inaudible 16:02] said we needed coats. [background noises] We put a
21 story out that, you know, a lotta kids don't wear coats [when 16:07] you
22 see'm wearing coats when they don't have a coat [that 16:09] – it's not
23 because they're warm. A lotta times they don't have a coat. Those kinda
24 stories that we put out. Um, and hopefully we were able to get back to
25 people when they needed help and then got'm help. We had a situation
26 where one of our EAP reps called and they placed people in a, a rehab
27 place. And he, he said I have a guy that I can't place, can you call,
28 [coughing] so I called one of the places. I called and they [tapping] were
29 able to get'm in. They got'm in and it's just from the contacts that we had.

30

31Female: Mm-hm.

32

33Rudolph Reyes: But [our union] rep couldn't get'm in [clanking] because it comes back to
34 we make too much [tapping] money.

35

36Marilyn Coulter: [16:48] S-, so do you feel that through United Way it helped to connect
37 the worker – the UAW GM workers to the community?

38

39Rudolph Reyes: I think with all the agencies that we sat on, all the, the coat drives, the food
40 drives and people see you out there and everything else and they realize
41 that it's not, um, a job to get out of the plant. It's a job that you do that you
42 like and your hearts into it.

43

44Marilyn Coulter: [Mm-hm 17:17]. [All right 17:19]. [17:20] Um, so would you say that,
45 um, during your time here and you did community service and then you
46 say you hired in 1969 and this is 2005, how can you say – [background

1 noises] how do you feel that the, um, involvement of employees in certain
2 activities like that evolved?
3

4Rudolph Reyes: I think a lot of our employees do volunteer work but they don't tell people.
5 It's not, it's not – it's like a, um – something you do but you don't want
6 acknowledgement for. So I think a lot of our employees do volunteer
7 work. If they're gonna take all the people in our plant, we'd be shocked of
8 how much money, time that our people give back to the community.
9

10Marilyn Coulter: Um, and when talking about the plant, um, and the working conditions,
11 you said you worked in a bunch of different places. [18:21] What made
12 you – I know it was the [tsk] benefits was one reason you stayed but what
13 would you say was the best thing [papers rustling] about working here
14 outside of the benefits? [papers rustling]
15

16Rudolph Reyes: It's always been a good working environment. [papers rustling] I was
17 impressed by – when I first came in some of the things that happened, um,
18 [background noises] like getting a pair of gloves to work with. All you had
19 to do was ask for a pair of gloves. Some places I worked, you wanted a
20 pair of gloves, you had to fight tooth and nail to get a pair of gloves, and
21 the first time I asked for a pair of gloves, I got a pair of gloves. And
22 sometimes when you're handling things, [tapping] you know you need a
23 pair of gloves or you need this or you need that and I was able to get that,
24 to get drill bits, you know, driver bits. You asked for that stuff and you got
25 it. Sometimes, you know, certain supervisors, you had to pull a tooth or
26 two but you got it.
27

28 Plus [inaudible 19:11] seniority. I'm a firm believer in seniority because I
29 think seniority counts and I think it's about the fairest way that I know to
30 give somebody a job or apply for a job because I've seen the boss's buddy,
31 the union buddy, the union guys' buddies get jobs. Somebody's always
32 taking care of somebody or their buddies and seniority seems to be the, the
33 equalizer. That if you had seniority and you kept your little receipt, you
34 could get a job. A lotta people used to ask me, well how come you get all
35 these easy jobs and I would tell'm I applied for'm just like you can and I'd
36 apply for the job. A couple times I was told I couldn't have the job 'cause I
37 didn't have a receipt, so I'd say okay. Then I'd go home and I'd get my
38 little receipt and I'd show'm the receipt and this look on their faces like,
39 hm, like a mad look but I got that job 'cause I saved my little receipt that
40 says...
41

42Marilyn Coulter: So...

43

44Rudolph Reyes: ...I applied for that job.
45

1 Marilyn Coulter: Ahh. Okay. [20:11] So you [banging] so you had to have – you, you kept
2 your application that said you had it?
3

4 Rudolph Reyes: Application. Yeah.
5

6 Marilyn Coulter: You had to apply for [throat clearing] the jobs if you wanted to change
7 [tapping] stuff. [20:18] Um, so being there what would you say was you
8 happiest moment or your most fondest memory working in the plant?
9

10 Rudolph Reyes: [20:27] Working in the plant?
11

12 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.
13

14 Rudolph Reyes: Um, helping people.
15

16 Marilyn Coulter: [20:30] Helping people?
17

18 Rudolph Reyes: Yes. Be a team leader but I – I think I've always been a team leader. Now
19 they have jobs called team leaders. [clinking] It's when somebody needs
20 something and they can't get it and they have – everybody has their way of
21 trying to get something and s-, I guess sometimes I have a, a knack for
22 getting things and, and sometimes it's try to make somebody's job easier.
23

24 Marilyn Coulter: [20:54] So [tapping] what was the kinda knack that you needed [tapping]
25 to help make somebody's job easier?
26

27 Rudolph Reyes: Talking to people, just talking to people, giving logic and, and putting it in
28 the terms that the person needed the logic. I could put in my logic but it's
29 my logic that I wanna hear. So if I can put it in a supervisor's logic,
30 [tapping] which gonna save'm money, save'm time, save'm production,
31 they would listen. It would get done but I had to put it in their logic.
32

33 Marilyn Coulter: [Inaudible 21:23]. [21:23] So you had to have the power of
34 communication in order to do that job?
35

36 Rudolph Reyes: [Right 21:28].
37

38 Marilyn Coulter: [21:29] So, um, do you feel that, um, given the fact [clanking] that you
39 were – [crinkling] and, and you are, uh, of Hispanic descent, correct?
40

41 Rudolph Reyes: Yes.
42

43 Marilyn Coulter: All right. [21:41] And, um, do you feel that that played a part in your, eh,
44 in, in your, um, [work at all 21:48]?
45

1Rudolph Reyes: I say yes and no and some people may giggle and they say that's what –
2 I'm a hard worker. I learn quick. I learn easy. So you can stick me on a
3 job, in half an hour, I would learn it and then I would manipulate the job
4 [tapping] to eliminate steps and everything else to make it easy for me.
5

6Marilyn Coulter: [22:06] So, um, now and I, and I said that y-, and I said you're an Hispanic
7 male but what are y-, are you mixed with anything else?
8

9Rudolph Reyes: No. Genuine Mexican parts.
10

11Marilyn Coulter: Okay. [22:15] Just genuine Mexican part?
12

13Rudolph Reyes: Mm-hm.
14

15Marilyn Coulter: All right. [background noises] [laughter] [tapping] [22:19] Um, [tsk] so
16 during your time, I know – did you ever have to go through any major
17 strikes? [background noises]
18

19Rudolph Reyes: Yes. I went through one in '69.
20

21Marilyn Coulter: In '69? [22:28] How long were you...
22

23Rudolph Reyes: Yes.
24

25Marilyn Coulter: ...[out 22:29]?
26

27Rudolph Reyes: I think we were out for almost 90 days.
28

29Marilyn Coulter: [22:31] And what were you striking for?
30

31Rudolph Reyes: Um, tell you the truth, I can't remember what it was for 'cause I was – just
32 came in...
33

34Marilyn Coulter: Yeah.
35

36Rudolph Reyes: ...and we're – it's just before, uh, Walter Reuther [tapping] passed away,
37 I'm pretty sure.
38

39Marilyn Coulter: Okay. [22:45] Um, did you take part in the strike?
40

41Rudolph Reyes: Yes. I [thumping] was in front of the building and my job was [tapping] to
42 sit out front and make sure nobody came in that door. And they came by
43 every so often. You had to sign up. You had a certain day you showed up
44 for 4 hours [tapping] and then you stayed for those 4 hours. Somebody
45 came by and brought coffee and doughnuts and then afterwards they

1 would stamp or mark your car that you showed up and then a [background
2 noises] certain day you'd go get your check.
3

4Marilyn Coulter: [23:11] So did you participate in any [thumping] others?
5

6Rudolph Reyes: Uh, we had a s-, 1-day one. I think it was 1-day or 2-day one. Other than
7 that, those were the only 2.
8

9Marilyn Coulter: Those were the only 2. [23:20] In working and I know you had your
10 strikes and your layoff and your [tapping] [funding 23:24] but are there
11 any things that, um, they used to have in the plant that you miss that you
12 don't have anymore?
13

14Rudolph Reyes: I think the part is, uh, all the people 'cause there was a lotta people in the
15 plant. There was a lotta camaraderie. Now everybody's spread out
16 [inaudible 23:44] your own. You're in your own little world almost
17 everywhere you're at [and so that 23:47] you have a couple places where
18 there's a lotta people. And, and one time we had 6,200 employees. Just
19 before we closed down, we were like 2,800 employees. That's a big drop
20 of a lotta people.
21

22Marilyn Coulter: So that's a big drop. Now when ch-, when you talk about the amount of
23 people here. [24:03] I guess I'll ask when you were her in 1969 were there
24 a lotta females working here?
25

26Rudolph Reyes: No, there wasn't a lot.
27

28Marilyn Coulter: [24:09] How was...
29

30Rudolph Reyes: And if they were, they were on nights 'cause they didn't have seniority to
31 stay on days.
32

33Marilyn Coulter: [24:12] So what was it like for the a-, for the transition when a lotta
34 women started coming into the plant?
35

36Rudolph Reyes: We had a lot of, [laughter] we had a lot of droolers.
37

38Marilyn Coulter: [24:19] Droolers?
39

40Rudolph Reyes: Droolers. 'Cause all the sudden these – all these young ladies are coming
41 in and they want jobs and everything else [throat clearing] and it was like
42 oh, my goodness.
43

44Marilyn Coulter: Okay.
45

46Rudolph Reyes: [Yeah 24:30].

1
2 Marilyn Coulter: [24:30] Was it hard for you being a man working in the facility and having
3 women come in the plant?
4
5 Rudolph Reyes: No.
6
7 Marilyn Coulter: [24:36] It was an easy transition for you? [clanking]
8
9 Rudolph Reyes: Sure. It was, you know, [clanking] better scenery because you got
10 [thumping] tired of seeing them ugly guys all the time. So it was better
11 scenery and then what happens is as they, as they came in and they proved
12 themselves that they could learn the jobs, they learned a lotta respect from
13 almost everybody but there's a few that, you know...
14
15 Marilyn Coulter: Um, you came from Lansing. [24:59] How was it working with people
16 from outlying communities coming in to Lansing to work?
17
18 Rudolph Reyes: It was different. You had a lotta people from a lotta small towns. Eh, we
19 had a lotta farmers from all small towns and you learned about who they
20 were and they also learned about us...
21
22 Marilyn Coulter: [Hm 25:15].
23
24 Rudolph Reyes: ...us people who lived in town [tapping] and everything else and I always
25 thought that was good that General Motors did that because they gave a
26 fair chance to everybody, not just the people who lived in Lansing but
27 people from all areas of this – the state got to come in and work.
28
29 Marilyn Coulter: [25:29] How did it affect Rudy Reyes to work with people from out – how
30 did it help you?
31
32 Rudolph Reyes: Well my dad came from a farming community but I was, you know – I
33 never knew – I knew he lived in a farming community but never knew
34 about it and [background noises] then some of the people he grew up with
35 already worked in the plant, so they'd recognize me and s-, ask me if you
36 – I, you know, are you [Elias' 25:50] boy and I said yes and then he said
37 well, your dad grew up with me. So they would tell me bits and pieces of
38 his stor-, his story that he had never told me.
39
40 Marilyn Coulter: Oh.
41
42 Rudolph Reyes: So then and the other people when they came in, you found out there was
43 2 kinds a schedules, those that get to go home and go to sleep after you get
44 outta work and those who go to work. Say we're working nights, will go
45 work all day long and then come to f-, General Motors, Fisher Body and
46 work.

1
2 Marilyn Coulter: [26:20] S-, uh, so do you feel that the people who worked in the fields that
3 that effected the way [clinking] Fisher Body was able to do their job here?
4 [26:30] What made it special?
5
6 Rudolph Reyes: You learned a lot about, um, their way of life. Not their way of life but
7 what they did all day.
8
9 Marilyn Coulter: Hm.
10
11 Rudolph Reyes: And then you had a respect for what they did. Um, was it hogs? Was it
12 farming? Was it goats or whatever it was, sheep? You learned what they
13 did, that, you know, if you asked questions, they would tell you. If you
14 didn't ask any questions, you didn't care what was going on with
15 [thumping] the next person to you, you didn't learn nothing. Well I had a
16 lotta questions.
17
18 Marilyn Coulter: [36:58] So who would you z-, how m-, who would you say was [clanking]
19 probably your most interesting person that you met here?
20
21 Rudolph Reyes: [Wilbur Weller 27:03].
22
23 Marilyn Coulter: [27:05] [Wilbur Weller 27:05]?
24
25 Rudolph Reyes: Yes. He was a pig farmer.
26
27 Marilyn Coulter: [27:08] And what made him interesting?
28
29 Rudolph Reyes: Because he was like me. We were both – we knew how to get things. We
30 both knew how to get things and it was management [tapping] and the
31 union [tapping] and then there was us two. [tapping] Okay? And
32 sometimes we had to take'm both on because sometimes the union didn't
33 wanna give us what we wanted and sometimes management [knocking]
34 didn't [inaudible 27:27] and w-, when he quit, I still to this very day, I tell
35 his brothers, tell'm I need somebody to help me fight.
36
37 Marilyn Coulter: [Inaudible 27:34].
38
39 Rudolph Reyes: 'Cause he quit to go into farming, pig farming fulltime, so he quit and that
40 was a big day because he had like 17 years [thumping] seniority.
41
42 Marilyn Coulter: [27:45] He quit after 17 years seniority?
43
44 Rudolph Reyes: Yes. Uh, it was [knocking] a hard one and, and it was like, you know,
45 that's a question people ask when people quit here [tapping] to go on to
46 another fulltime job [crinkling] or something they like doing, is how can

1 you give up this job for another job. It's like leaving the security, like
2 leaving the nest for the first time. I mean you get paid [thumping] ever
3 single week. [crinkling] You're either – if you're laid off, [thumping] you
4 get paid. You get SUB-Pay, you know? Why [throat clearing] would you
5 ever give up this [thumping] job? Can't you do it on the side or can't you
6 do this but still do this job? And he left.
7

8Marilyn Coulter: Now you just said you get laid off and you get SUB-Pay. [28:18] Can you
9 tell me what SUB-Pay is, please?
10

11Rudolph Reyes: Okay. When you get laid off, you get unemployment and they [tapping]
12 give you so much money, maybe \$397 or \$300 and some and the SUB-
13 Pay makes up the difference abo-, of up to 85 percent, I say 85 percent
14 pay. So it makes up the difference because it's not our fault we're laid off.
15 [tapping] So somewhere in the agreement with the UAW management,
16 they've come to that agreement saying it's not our employees. We're
17 willing and able to work. It's something – you don't have work available
18 for us to do.
19

20Marilyn Coulter: [28:49] So this is a negotiated benefit?
21

22Rudolph Reyes: Negotiated, yes.
23

24Marilyn Coulter: [28:52] It's [tapping] ano-, it's another union benefit?
25

26Rudolph Reyes: Yes.
27

28Marilyn Coulter: [28:56] Um, [clanking] [papers rustling] [sighing] now do you have any
29 other jobs outside of working here [clanking] in the plant?
30

31Rudolph Reyes: No. 'Cause I was taught a long time ago that if you – you should put your
32 budget where your work – where you, um – 40 hours pay. Anything above
33 that, you just stick in the bank.
34

35Marilyn Coulter: Okay.
36

37Rudolph Reyes: 'Cause if you can't – to live on 40 hours pay and you can't afford what you
38 have, so I've always made the budget 40 hours and that's it. Matter a fact,
39 I had my wife ask me one time to go get another job and I told her no for
40 the same logical reason. If I can't live on 40 hours pay, then I can't afford
41 what I have.
42

43Marilyn Coulter: Okay. [29:44] So, uh, would you say that [thumping] most people just
44 work at Fisher Body or [was – had 29:49] – by virtue of what you've done
45 has never allowed you to expand on other avenues for you privately?
46

1Rudolph Reyes: No. I've gone to school and now that I'm getting ready to retire, I've taken
2 up a printing business. Eh, somebody called me one day and said did I
3 want to start a printing business and they – told'm give me a price and it
4 was a good price. I said yes. But then I went to a tradeshow and found out
5 I could buy brand new equipment for half price and couldn't get the equ-,
6 contacts that the printing people had, so I had the woman that had the most
7 contract-, the most contacts and [tapping] here I am. I have a union
8 printshop...
9

10Marilyn Coulter: [Hm 30:24].

11

12Rudolph Reyes: ...and some people kid me when they fir-, when I first tell them I have a
13 printshop. I had a management person say oh, yeah, and is it union, and I
14 said yes, it is and he was shocked. It was a union printshop but I'm a union
15 person, [inaudible 30:37] [clanking] it has to be a union printshop.
16

17Marilyn Coulter: [30:40] So you're gonna continue to be union?

18

19Rudolph Reyes: Yes. The union has paid me well. The union has taken care of me and
20 hopefully I can give somebody else that same benefit.
21

22Marilyn Coulter: Okay. [Inaudible 30:50]. [background noises] [clanking] [That's it]
23 [inaudible] [hit 30:54] this.
24

25Rudolph Reyes: [Inaudible 30:57].

26

27Marilyn Coulter: [Inaudible 30:57]. [Let me stop this 33:00]. [recorder clicking]
28
29
30/lo