

1 **MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY – SHAWN NICHOLSON**
2 **MARK VAN EPPS DISCUSSES HIS CAREER AS A**
3 **SKILLED TRADES TOOLMAKER AND UAW TRAINING REPRESENTATIVE**
4 **AT THE FISHER BODY PLANT IN LANSING, MI**
5
6

7 [recorder clicking]
8

9Cheryl McQuaid: This is Lansing Fisher Body Historical Team. Today is Monday, July 24,
10 2006. It's approximately 8 a.m. We're at the UAW Local 602 fr-, Frank
11 Dryer Greenhouse. Uh, my name's Cheryl McQuaid. Also present:
12

13Jerri Smith: Jerri Smith.
14

15Cheryl McQuaid: And today we're interviewing Mark Van Epps. [0:23] Mark, would you
16 state your name and spell it for us?
17

18Mark Van Epps: Yeah. My name is Mark Van Epps. It's Mark, M-A-R-K. Van Epps is V-
19 A-N capital E-P-P-S.
20

21Cheryl McQuaid: [0:34] And what is your address?
22

23Mark Van Epps: 9988 West Clark Road, Grand Ledge, Michigan 48837.
24

25Cheryl McQuaid: [0:41] Are you married? [0:42] Do you have children?
26

27Mark Van Epps: Yes, I am married and I have 3 daughters.
28

29Cheryl McQuaid: [0:46] Uh, where were you born and raised?
30

31Mark Van Epps: I was born in, uh, Lakewood, California. My, uh, dad was in the navy at
32 the time and I was raised in Grand Ledge, Michigan. [throat clearing]
33

34Cheryl McQuaid: [0:56] And what is your educational level?
35

36Mark Van Epps: Uh, graduated high school and I've taken several college courses but I do
37 not have a – any college degrees.
38

39Cheryl McQuaid: [1:07] What did your parents do in Grand Ledge?
40

41Mark Van Epps: My mother stayed home primarily and then worked at the public library
42 and my dad was a powertrain engineer here for Oldsmobile in Lansing.
43

44Cheryl McQuaid: [1:20] Were you ever in the military?
45

46Mark Van Epps: No. [tapping]

1
2Cheryl McQuaid: [1:24] And what did you do before you hired in to Fisher Body?
3
4Mark Van Epps: I worked at Lindell Drop Forge. I worked as a die-sinker.
5
6Cheryl McQuaid: [1:31] Um, when did you hire in? [1:33] What was...
7
8Mark Van Epps: 1984, August of 1984.
9
10Cheryl McQuaid: [1:38] And why?
11
12Mark Van Epps: Uh, the Lindell Drop Forge was a fabulous place to work and it's where I
13 learned my trade but they were very clearly going out of business and I,
14 uh, hired in to Fisher Body because they were, they were hiring and I
15 knew I had to make a move, so.
16
17Cheryl McQuaid: [1:56] How did you find out they were hiring?
18
19Mark Van Epps: Word of mouth from, uh, some other people that I worked with at the
20 Drop Forge.
21
22Cheryl McQuaid: [2:02] Was the hire-in process lengthy or...?
23
24Mark Van Epps: It was very brief. It w-, I s-, I submitted an application, got a call back
25 right away and, uh, came in for an interview and was, was told to report
26 for a physical the next day.
27
28Cheryl McQuaid: [2:17] So no long lines?
29
30Mark Van Epps: No. No. It was real easy.
31
32Cheryl McQuaid: [2:21] What was your first day like walking into the plant?
33
34Mark Van Epps: W-, my first day, I wasn't even, I wasn't even really sure what my job was
35 gonna be. I knew that I was being hired as a toolmaker to maintain, uh, the
36 tools and equipment on, on the production line but I – I'd never been in
37 that type of a manufacturing environment. The, the Lindell Drop Forge,
38 we made single parts and, of course, Fisher Body was a huge assembly
39 plant. So I didn't really even know what my, my job was gonna be but I
40 reported at the Verlinden Gate and, uh, I was met there by, uh, my first
41 supervisor, who was Pat [Finch 2:55] and Pat's nickname was Scooter and
42 Pat put me on the back of his scooter [sniffing] and drove me to about the
43 middle of the Body Shop to what was known as, uh, B car track and he
44 dropped me off and pointed on the other side of the line to, uh, a work area
45 where there was, there was 3 other guys sitting in the – and sent me over
46 there and that was my f-, eh, that was – I didn't even know what my job

1 was. If it hadn't been for the other guys, I don't know – I don't – I
2 wouldn't a found out what I was supposed to be doing but...
3
4 Cheryl McQuaid: [3:25] Can you tell us what your thoughts were as Pat was driving you
5 down to that body shop and seeing that environment?
6
7 Mark Van Epps: I was, I was real happy to be there. I, I was really happy [coughing] to get
8 that job. I wanted – it's something I had really wanted but I was pretty
9 intimidated 'cause, like I said, I had no idea what was expected of me. Um,
10 and I thought he was dropping me off to start workin' on something and I
11 wasn't sure what that was but he, he sent me over to these – the other 3
12 guys that I mentioned and it was my first partners. It was [Marv Bruner
13 3:55], uh, Dick Reynolds and, uh, Paul [Bennett 3:59] who also were
14 toolmakers and he sent me to that area and those guys showed me around,
15 showed me what my job was. So, um, they made me real comfortable and,
16 uh, invited me right in but, eh, it was pretty intimidating.
17
18 Cheryl McQuaid: [4:13] What shift were you hired in on?
19
20 Mark Van Epps: I hired in on the second shift.
21
22 Cheryl McQuaid: [4:17] And how old were you when you hired into the plant?
23
24 Mark Van Epps: I was 24. I, uh – my – I hired in in August and my birthday was in
25 September, so I was almost 25 years old.
26
27 Cheryl McQuaid: [4:25] Did you have any interaction with the people on the line?
28
29 Mark Van Epps: Uh, yeah. I had lots. That was – turned out to be really what my job was,
30 was to support those people and so I had a lot of interaction with'm.
31
32 Cheryl McQuaid: [4:36] What was your feeling about the line workers?
33
34 Mark Van Epps: Uh, they were obviously a, a hardworking, uh, good bunch a people. I had
35 a lotta fun with'm and, uh, they were a really good group, so.
36
37 Cheryl McQuaid: [tapping] [4:47] And how long did you do that job?
38
39 Mark Van Epps: I did that job – I'd have to guess a little bit here but on and off, I've done
40 that job my whole career, um, in various parts of the Body Shop.
41
42 Cheryl McQuaid: [4:58] So most of your time or all of it was spent in the Body Shop?
43
44 Mark Van Epps: Yeah. That's right. A little bit a time in Trim but almost all of it was in the
45 Body Shop.
46

1 Cheryl McQuaid: [5:13] Were there any new hire initiations or pranks pulled on you?
2

3 Mark Van Epps: No, not really. Um, it was a pretty friendly group that I settled in with, so,
4 um, eh, there weren't really any pranks. Uh, it was a big change over time.
5 The – there was an A line and a B line and the B line was the first to start
6 up. The A line wasn't even running yet, so when you weren't working on,
7 on the line you were assigned to, you were usually off working on a job
8 somewhere else, so the – there wasn't, uh, there wasn't any free time
9 really.
10

11 Cheryl McQuaid: Did – [throat clearing] I'm sorry. [5:46] Did you, um – what did you do –
12 can you tell me what a typical day was like?
13

14 Mark Van Epps: Yeah, I guess so. Eh, um, [tsk] a typical day was y-, I think the shift, if I
15 remember right, back then started at 4:48 and so you'd, you'd come in, um,
16 interact with the previous shift. You know, find out what – where the
17 breakdowns were, where the problems were, kinda, kinda circulate
18 through the area and look things over, talk to people, um, have a cup a
19 coffee and then it was mostly monitoring the, the production line waiting
20 for something to fall off and which is something always did break and, uh,
21 then you'd, you'd set about repairing it. So that, that was a typical day.
22 Every day was something different [belching] and, uh, it was – it stayed
23 pretty interesting for the first couple years, so.
24

25 Cheryl McQuaid: [6:34] Did you – what did you do for your lunches, your breaks?
26

27 Mark Van Epps: Usually just stayed right there in the area...
28

29 Cheryl McQuaid: [6:39] Brought in...
30

31 Mark Van Epps: ...and ate.
32

33 Cheryl McQuaid: ...a lunch?
34

35 Mark Van Epps: Yeah, brought in a lunch. I...
36

37 Cheryl McQuaid: Did...
38

39 Mark Van Epps: I couldn't find my way a-, uh, early on I u-, the place, the – the Drop Forge
40 was, you know, covered maybe 5 acres and, of course, f-, the Fisher Body
41 plant was, was a-, you know, a couple hundred acres probably at least and,
42 uh, to even go to the bathroom and find my way back to the work area
43 took me a couple a weeks of, of wandering around, so I usually kept my
44 lunch pail within sight, so I knew I could find it.
45

1 Cheryl McQuaid: [7:08] What did you think when you finally did venture out into – did you
2 ever go to the Paint Department, Trim?
3

4 Mark Van Epps: Yeah. I walked around and o-, got a chance to sightsee a little bit, so, eh,
5 the place was fascinating to me. I mean I, like I said, I came from a lot
6 smaller environment and it was really interesting to see all the technology
7 even at that time, uh, of what it took to man-, to, to assemble a car.
8

9 Cheryl McQuaid: [7:33] Did you, um, develop any friendships that extended outside the
10 plant?
11

12 Mark Van Epps: Yeah. I had, uh – I already had, uh, a group a gentlemen that came to
13 Fisher Body, uh, with me from, from Lindell Drop Forge, so I knew that
14 group and then, uh, the, the other tradespeople that I worked with every
15 day, I th-, you know, they were electricians and pipefitters and millwrights
16 and other trades. And we ended up, you know, you'd, you'd bowl in a
17 bowling league or, [engine humming] or play golf, you know, get out of
18 work and go play golf in the morning or things like that and I dev-, I made
19 a lotta friends in there, so.
20

21 Cheryl McQuaid: [8:09] So w-, during your working hours, if the line was [tapping] running
22 smooth and there was nothing to fix, what did you do?
23

24 Mark Van Epps: Usually could, uh, clean up your area, sp-, r-, you know, redo your parts
25 drawers, make sure, um, y-, you had all the spare parts you needed. A lotta
26 times, we'd make spare parts or stage a job for something you, you know.
27 The way it was back then particularly is you knew you had a job waiting
28 for ya at the end of the shift. Something would break and you'd patch it up
29 and you'd have to be ready to fix it after the line went down. Everybody
30 else would go home and then the tradespeople would stay and do their
31 repair job. Sometimes you'd stay till the day shift came back in but you'd
32 spend that time staging tools and staging parts, uh, quite often in order to
33 be ready to start working once the production crews went home.
34

35 Cheryl McQuaid: [8:59] You mentioned that your father worked at Powertrain?
36

37 Mark Van Epps: Yeah.
38

39 Cheryl McQuaid: [9:02] Did you have any other family that worked [at Fisher 9:04]?
40

41 Mark Van Epps: I had – my grandfather [engine humming] on my dad's side, uh, worked
42 at, at Oldsmobile and, and was a, a Local 652 member. My dad worked for
43 Powertrain Engineering. I had an – my Uncle [Dwayne 9:16] was a, um –
44 he was a fixture repair supervisor and he ended up when he retired he was
45 a maintenance superintendent at, uh, Oldsmobile on the 652 side. I had my
46 Uncle Bill also worked in engineering here in Lansing. My dad and, and

1 Uncle Bill both worked in, uh, Building 66 in, in the Oldsmobile
2 headquarters that are over on, uh, [snapping] on, uh, Elm and Townsend.
3 [throat clearing] Um, I had a – an uncle on my mother’s side, uh, that
4 works, uh – worked in Flint. [recorder clicking]
5
6 Cheryl McQuaid: [9:54] Um, did you ever do any government projects for line workers
7 or...?
8
9 Mark Van Epps: That was – yeah. Um, nothing really, nothing really big. Usually it was a,
10 you know, helping’m out with something. Maybe they, you know, they
11 brought a lawnmower blade in from home or, or a bad bearing or
12 something and they needed a little repair work done on it and it was kinda
13 one of those courtesy things that, that, uh, you had with, with the other
14 trades and with the production people where, you know, eh, they – they're
15 tied to the line and working every single minute and, eh, back – especially
16 back in the early days, everybody’s working 10 hours a day and you're
17 working Saturdays. A lotta times you're working Sundays. You're short a
18 time. So they'd, you know, they'd bring stuff in. If you had a few minutes,
19 you'd help’m out and fix something for’m f-, eh, you know, for maybe a
20 little project they had at home or something along those lines, so.
21
22 Cheryl McQuaid: [10:45] Did you ever, um, make any kinda tool, uh, that wasn’t an
23 everyday tool, it was something to assist them to help their job easier
24 or...?
25
26 Mark Van Epps: Yeah. Yeah, we – that was part of a toolmaker’s job, is, eh – and once
27 again, especially in the early days, a lotta stuff was done with hand
28 fixtures [engine humming] and, eh, eh, you know, everybody was always
29 looking for a way to take some of the workload off’a the person that had
30 to use that fixture all day long. So, eh, eh, I can't think of a specific
31 example but we were constantly, uh, modifying or, or adjusting things to
32 make the jobs a little more f-, user friendly, so.
33
34 Cheryl McQuaid: [11:25] Has a coworker impacted your family life at all? [tapping]
35
36 Mark Van Epps: I can't think of a specific example. I've got friends that, um – friends that
37 I've made at work, um, that have gotten to know my family and vice versa
38 but so I guess there's been an impact in that way. It's broadened our, our
39 circle of friends a lot and, and, uh, had a lotta fun with, with the, the
40 people that I worked with [clicking] but other than that, not really.
41
42 Cheryl McQuaid: [11:52] Did you view your coworkers as brothers and sisters?
43
44 Mark Van Epps: Yeah. Absolutely. Yeah. Especially in the plant and on the job. Um, eh,
45 eh, Team Build is the big, [tapping] the big deal today but it was always a
46 team, [squeaking] um, for most of us [clanking] in some form or fashion.

1

2Cheryl McQuaid:

Uh, I'd like to know a little bit about once again the area that you were in. [12:15] Did you participate in departmental dinners, uh, Christmas dinners? [sniffing] [12:21] Was that something that the Body Shop would enj-, would invite you into and department dinner? [12:27] Did Skilled Trades have their own dinners?

7

8Mark Van Epps:

Yeah. There was a, there was a pretty broad spectrum of those types of things. I worked all over the Body Shop during my, my time on the plant floor and, uh, [background conversation] probably the most interesting place woulda been the door shuttle, which was, um, kind of a new invention in the, in the late '80s, early '90s. Uh, they, they designed and manufactured a, a tool that was s-, just for puttin' the header on a door and the header, of course, is the s-, band that rolls around the top of the door that – and closes the window. And it seems like a really simple process but they, they built this enormous, eh, really complex machine and everybody that worked on the door shuttle was working 10 or 12 hours a day. Eh, the – it broke constantly and for – whether you were production or, or a, or a salaried person or a maintenance person, everybody on the door shuttle got to be really close friends and, and to the point of where the, the skilled trades guys were running relief for the production people because they were working so much.

23

So we all took turns doing each other's jobs. Uh, but that – in that environment, eh, you know, we had dinners all the time over there. Every time, eh, you know, at least once a week, somebody'd bring in fish they caught or s-, or a deer they shot or there was always something [background conversation] that people were bringing in, you know, to share with their coworkers. Um, kind of on a broader scale, as, as I moved around the Body Shop, there was [clanking] always an, an area dinner whether it was a holiday, you know, before Thanksgiving, before Christmas or Labor Day, Easter, all those things. There'd be a dinner, you know, in the area and then, eh, quite often the Maintenance Department would have a – have some kind of a big dinner also, so and, of course, [clanking] retirements, [squeaking] always had a big party for retirements.

36

37Cheryl McQuaid:

[14:16] How did you find the area, the space, the – to, to have these dinners? [14:21] I mean, how did you keep things hot? [14:23] How did you keep'm cold?

40

41Mark Van Epps:

Crockpot or back then we used to have – we had, we had made an – taken an old toolbox and we made an oven out of it, a warmer. Um, I don't remember what w-, I think we used a big light – spotlight for a, a heating element but we could – a lotta times for a really big dinner, we'd go [clanking] like almost have it catered, get chicken or something, eh, eh, a whole buncha chicken from a caterer and then bring it in and keep it in the

46

1 warmer and everybody would bring a dish to pass. So cooler fulla pop and
2 then a dish to pass. So it was pretty simple, just like any picnic or potluck
3 might be.
4

5Cheryl McQuaid: [14:58] So it was pr-, the management didn't have a problem with this?
6

7Mark Van Epps: W-, most of the areas I was in management participated.
8

9Cheryl McQuaid: Okay. [15:06] What about plant vending, um, people that sold food items?
10

11Mark Van Epps: Yeah. There was a lot. There was quite a bit of that. You know, a lotta pop
12 salesmen. Um, the third shift, when I was on midnights, there was a, a
13 millwright that had a store [engine humming] back in, uh, one of the cribs
14 and it was not a for-profit store. He sold, he sold pop and candy and gum
15 and all kinds a stuff but he, uh – every [engine humming] fri-, one Friday
16 a month – he'd – he had made enough money, he had bought a popcorn
17 machine and one Friday a month, he would make popcorn and give it
18 away to anybody that wanted it. So, eh, everybody from all over the Body
19 Shop could smell that popcorn and they'd come and get it. And then, uh,
20 he would have pizza parties or, you know, something along those lines
21 and, and then whatever money was left after that, he would always donate
22 to a charity of some sort. So it was, it was fun for the, for the, uh,
23 employees to be able to have an alternative to kind of a crummy vending
24 machine.
25

26Cheryl McQuaid: You mentioned, um, [thumping] Pat [Finch 16:13] was your first
27 supervisor.
28

29Mark Van Epps: Yeah.
30

31Cheryl McQuaid: And I never worked for Pat [Finch 16:17]; however, I did know him and
32 liked him. He was very nice man.
33

34Mark Van Epps: Yeah.
35

36Cheryl McQuaid: [16:21] Um, what made a good or a bad supervisor in your opinion?
37

38Mark Van Epps: In my opinion, uh, the good supervisor was a supervisor that trusted you to
39 do your job and didn't worry about what you were doing every second.
40 The bad supervisor was the one that took your chair away because it sent
41 the wrong message or, uh, didn't support you with the right tools to do
42 your job or, or w-, was, was constantly questioning your, your, uh, not
43 your, not your ability to do your job but your work ethic. You know, the,
44 the person that would come around, why are you doing that; what are you
45 doing; how come you're not over there. It's the – it was the – I tell you
46 what the best supervisor I think I ever had was a guy named Don Davis

1 [engine humming] and Don never – you never had to worry about whether
2 Don was gonna follow you around on the job and I tell ya, people would
3 go out of their way to do, to do a good job for Don because they liked him
4 so much and they knew that they didn't have to worry about, about
5 whether or not Don was w-, you know, was protecting them or had their
6 back as, as you might say. So that was the difference to me.
7

8Cheryl McQuaid: [17:29] Could [clanking] you tell us about, um, your worst supervisor?
9

10Mark Van Epps: I don't wanna mention his name but, yeah, I had a really bad supervisor
11 and I already kinda described him. He would, you know, he would be, he
12 would be at your work area about 1 minute after starting time, you know,
13 with a threat and a promise, uh, and, eh, eh, you know, [tapping] he was
14 just – he just was – his expectations o-, of his people were very unrealistic.
15 Eh, eh, you know, uh, it was more important for him that you looked busy
16 than you actually be busy and everybody knew it. Everybody knew that,
17 [engine humming] that if something went wrong he'd – he would blame
18 you and he would never take any responsibility for it himself. He would
19 write people up, um, just because he didn't like'm and, and, uh, he, he
20 frankly had no credibility either with his hourly people and he didn't have
21 any credibility with the other management people either, so.
22

23Cheryl McQuaid: [18:26] So did you go outta your way to do a good job for him?
24

25Mark Van Epps: I went outta my way to avoid him. [laughter] So o-, you know – and, and I
26 always, I always figured, [tapping] I always figured I had a job to do no
27 matter who I was working for. So I came to work the same day, eh, and I
28 worked, eh – I did my job the same way no matter who I was working for
29 'cause I was working for the people [tapping] who had to use the tools, uh,
30 in the area I supported and I wasn't working – I wasn't gonna make them
31 pay because the guy I was working for wasn't, wasn't a good supervisor.
32 So I came to work the same way every day but I would avoid a person like
33 that and, and, uh, just I, I would – I wouldn't do anything to help'm and
34 help, you know – anything out of the ordinary but I wouldn't make
35 someone else suffer because my relationship with him was bad. [clanking]
36

37Cheryl McQuaid: [19:17] Could you share with us one of your best memories of Fisher
38 Body?
39

40Mark Van Epps: Let me see. I think some of my best memories – let's see. I, I, I really liked
41 my job and I really liked for the most part the people that I was working
42 with. Probably my best memories woulda been, uh, [engine humming]
43 maybe when, uh, in the mid [tapping] to late '90s, um, I was on a bowling
44 league with a, with a couple of, uh, guys that had retired. It was [Jerry Post
45 19:56] who was a retired electrician, uh, Willie Campbell who was a
46 retired millwright and then there was a guy named Keith Sheldon whose

1 nickname was Red Wing and Red Wing was a material driver. And there
2 was the 4 of us and then every year we'd look for a fifth person. Used to –
3 well Scott Bates was a production employee was on our bowling team on
4 and off for a couple years.

5
6 But we used to – I used to bowl with those guys and they were all good
7 bowlers and they were all nice guys and, and, eh, I liked it because they
8 were the kinda guys that you go bowl, drink 2 or 3 beers and then go
9 home. They weren't stay at the bowling alley all night. Th-, you know –
10 and th-, and they didn't get in any trouble and [rattling] they liked to win
11 but if they didn't, you know, it wasn't a big deal to'm. Um, they – and
12 they were fun guys to work with too before they retired. And then we
13 would go outta town and bowl in city tournaments, state tournaments and
14 the u-, we always bowled in the UAW tournaments and stuff. So I think, I
15 think makin' – I made the friends in the plant but the m-, the – some of the
16 memories I guess were from the activities outside of the plant but.

17
18 Cheryl McQuaid: Lansing has always been known as the Capitol of Quality. [21:05] Why do
19 you think it's called that?

20
21 Mark Van Epps: I think it's called that because it's, it's legit. I think, I think that Lansing has
22 always built a quality product and I've always thought that the hourly
23 workforce, [engine humming] um, has always done whatever they could
24 or whatever they had to do to build a quality car. And I've always thought,
25 um, you know, it's not a contest but when it comes to change, you have
26 management needs to change and the hourly people needs to change and I
27 always thought the hourly people were more willing – ready, willing and
28 able to change and do the things that were needed to build a quality car
29 than management was. And management was always ready at some levels
30 but they had p-, they had a harder time adjusting to changes than [tapping]
31 the production people did or than the maintenance people did. And I think,
32 I think it's known as the Capitol of Quality because of the extortionary
33 links that people would go to to make sure that their jobs were done right.

34
35 Cheryl McQuaid: [22:06] Mark, could you tell us what your job title is now?

36
37 Mark Van Epps: Currently my job title is the Joint Training Representative.

38
39 Cheryl McQuaid: [22:13] And when did you take this position? [22:15] Is this right after you
40 left tooling?

41
42 Mark Van Epps: Uh, well I, I, like I said, I hired in in 1984 and I can't remember all a the
43 dates without looking at my resume but I worked there, I think it musta
44 been in the late '80s, maybe 1990, [tapping] somewhere in that range, they
45 had posted the job for a Suggestion Analyst and I was starting to get kinda
46 bored, you know, and looking for something different or maybe a different

1 perspective and it was a temporary position. They wor-, went in 2-year
2 cycles. So I applied and [tapping] and I got selected f-, as a, uh, as a
3 Suggestions Analyst, is what they called it. Um, did that, eh, for a couple a
4 years and then went back to, uh, being a toolmaker.

5
6 Um, the next appointed job I took, they had a, a committee called a Work
7 Practice Committee, uh, that was set up to help, uh, tradespeople work on
8 lines of demarcation issues. So I, I went on the Work Practice Committee
9 for a couple a years. From that, I went into, uh, [clanking] the training
10 activity. Um, they, they eliminated the Work Practice Committee through
11 the, uh, local negotiations that – when we had a local agreement, uh, or
12 local settlement and, uh, but they transitioned me into a needs [clanking]
13 analysis person for, uh, the training activities. So I did that for probably 4
14 or 5 years. Now the Joint Training Representative jobs really started about
15 2 years ago and my predecessor was Kevin Goff and Kevin, uh, retired
16 just at the end [clanking] June, um, [tsk] and they assigned me to work
17 with Kevin during this, uh, this launch for the Delta Plant in order to learn
18 the Joint Training Representative’s job. So it's really – I've been doing it
19 for like 2 years. Um, it – but Kevin was still around as a mentor for me,
20 so.

21
22 Cheryl McQuaid: You mentioned, uh, Lines of Demarcation. [24:16] What are Lines of
23 Demarcation? [24:18] What is [that job 24:18]?

24
25 Mark Van Epps: Lines of Demarcation are the work rules that exist between skilled trades,
26 uh, management people and production people that helps, uh, helps b-, all
27 parties understand what your job is and what your job isn't and f-, and an
28 ex-, and mostly [papers rustling] they're designed around, uh, safety of the
29 employee. You know, an electrician, for example, is trained to perform,
30 uh, specific functions and a lotta what they do is dangerous. Same thing
31 with a millwright or toolmaker or a pipefitter. Um, uh, an electrician’s job
32 assignment [throat clearing] is to do the things they're trained to do and in
33 most instances no one else should be doing that work because it's just not
34 safe for'm to do it. Well occasionally there, there’s issues that come up
35 and there’s disagreement over who should do what work or there’s, there’s
36 j-, it's just not real clear. So the Lines of Demarcation or the Work
37 Practices Committee was employed to review, um, the content of, of some
38 of the work, mostly the skilled trades work and help the Shop Committee
39 make a decision on what would be the most appropriate trade to assign
40 that work to.

41
42 Cheryl McQuaid: [25:29] And that was mostly skilled trades and did you – did that reach
43 into the production area?

44
45 Mark Van Epps: A little bit but not very often.

46

1 Cheryl McQuaid: And then you'd mentioned Needs Analysis. [25:39] Could you explain
2 that job a little bit?
3

4 Mark Van Epps: Needs Analysis is – [clanking] was a training function and the, the, the jest
5 of it would be, um, I, I [guess 25:52] one of the, one of the biggest jobs I
6 did while I was on there was to write, uh, task and needs analysis
7 documents for all the skilled tradespeople in the plant. I didn't do this by
8 myself. I had some other people helping me. But the idea was to take, for
9 example, a toolmaker's job and make a list of all the tools a toolmaker
10 would need to use to do their job, all the skills that that person would have
11 to possess in order to be – to, to perform at a high level and all the
12 knowledge that they would have to, to have in order to perform at a high
13 level. So that's what a, a – needs analysis would identify all of those
14 [tapping] things and then it would also, [engine humming] um, you would
15 use that along with a, um, [tsk] a skills assessment to help identify training
16 needs for an individual, so.
17

18 Cheryl McQuaid: You mentioned safety. [26:44] Um, did you ever see anybody, any
19 coworkers get hurt in the plant?
20

21 Mark Van Epps: Yeah. A, um – I'm trying to think. I saw a – yeah. I've seen 3 or 4 things. I
22 saw a guy, uh, [engine humming] in a manlift raising himself up, an
23 electrician, had his hand on the rail of the manlift and, uh, pinched his
24 fingers between the rail on the hand lift and a beam in the ceiling. Um, I
25 saw a guy, uh, rigging a transformer with the forks on a fork truck trying –
26 lifting a transformer and he was using an I-beam and the beam fell off the
27 forks and hit him on the head, which didn't – surprisingly it didn't hurt
28 him very bad but you [snapping] asked me [laughter] so I did s-...
29

30 Cheryl McQuaid: Sounds painful.
31

32 Mark Van Epps: I did see that. And then, uh, probably wor-, the worst one was an
33 electrician that got, um, got caught in, in part of the mechanical devices of
34 an underbody press and I didn't see the accident but, um, [background
35 conversation] [tapping] he was, he was in a place where no one could
36 see'm and we heard'm yelling and went up and found'm and he was, he
37 was injured. He was hurt really bad. Um, eh, he...
38

39 Cheryl McQuaid: [27:57] Mike [Quintery 27:57]?
40

41 Mark Van Epps: Yeah. And he, you know, he lived [engine humming] thank – very
42 thankfully 'cause he's a great guy and, uh – but that was really, that was
43 really, really sobering. That, that particular incident there was, was really
44 scary.
45

1 Cheryl McQuaid: [28:10] And what do you think about the Safety Department in the plant?
2 I've always heard that for every accident, there's a new safety rule. [28:16]
3 Is that how it works? [28:18] Do you think these accidents [inaudible]
4 28:20)?
5
6 Mark Van Epps: I think that, I think that may be – might've been the truth at one time but I
7 don't think it is anymore. When I, when I hired in to Fisher Body in 1984,
8 we had a better safety program at Lindell Drop Forge than we had at, at
9 the – at Fisher Body. Eh, you know, and in the Drop Forge, you would go
10 work on a press or, or, you know, some d-, similar tool and they were very
11 strict rules about lockout and about, uh, you know, isolating the
12 mechanical, eh, you know, movement and, and if you didn't, if you didn't
13 follow the rules, you got fired and that was just it. And then I hir-, when I
14 got hired at Fisher Body, there wasn't even a place to put a lock. They
15 didn't even have locks. [tapping] You would – I mean, you, you had all
16 this – and I don't know how it ended up that way but you had all this
17 automated equipment and, uh, you would go into, uh, into a tool and, and
18 there wasn't even any place to put a lock. You had a red tag that you hung
19 over the start button so that no one would push the start button while you
20 were in there, [background conversation] which happened to me.
21
22 Cheryl McQuaid: [Inaudible 29:27].
23
24 Mark Van Epps: That...
25
26 Cheryl McQuaid: [29:29] That happened?
27
28 Mark Van Epps: That's an interesting story. Yeah. Yeah. I had – there was a tool called the
29 milling drill, which the car would come in and it, and it closed up and
30 [tapping] it was big gates that closed on both sides [tapping] of the car,
31 clamped the car up and then it would drill 2 holes and machined off a flat
32 spot where they would mount the screws for the bottom of the front
33 fender. Well the drills always broke or got dull and you had to change 'em.
34 So I had shut it off and I turned off the transfer that ran the car in there and
35 I went in to change the drills. Well while I was standing in there [tapping]
36 and you had to stand in there and straddle. You were pretty much trapped
37 in the tool. While I was in there changing the drills, [tapping] I heard the
38 transfer come on and I looked up and there was a car coming down the
39 line into the station that I was standing in. So I had to – I had just enough
40 time to climb inside of the car while the mac-, while the tool did – ran its
41 process and then I had to ride it through 3 more stations before I could get
42 out on the platform where the production people worked. That was
43 pretty...
44
45 Jerri Smith: [30:29] So who turned it on?
46

1Mark Van Epps: A, a supervisor. A su-, a supervisor w-, had walked over there and moved
2 my tag and turned it on and then, [tapping] and then left.
3

4Cheryl McQuaid: Thankfully you weren't...
5

6Mark Van Epps: Yeah.
7

8Cheryl McQuaid: ...hurt.
9

10Mark Van Epps: Yeah.
11

12Cheryl McQuaid: [30:44] So did – when did you start seeing a change in the safety at Fisher
13 Body?
14

15Mark Van Epps: I th-, eh, it mostly was an engineering issue. You know, in 1984 was a
16 huge changeover in-, into lots of automated equipment. [tapping] I think
17 the next one was in '92 or '87 was, '87 was – [thumping] eh, every time
18 they brought in more automation, it got better and, and – but they never
19 could seem to quite [tapping] get everything interlocked so that using
20 lockout was practical. Um, the – there was the Robogate system [tapping]
21 in the car track area where I first started w-, working took like 26 locks to
22 isolate it, which w-, you know, it's just not a practical way to work. Uh,
23 but I think, I think there was always a desire on management's part and,
24 and on the hourly people's part to be able to use lockout effectively but
25 they never could engineer it into the system well enough to, to really make
26 it a hundred percent and I think we're probably there with this new Delta
27 project.
28

29Cheryl McQuaid: I th-, um, I think we s-, interviewed Steve that was with Lockout and he
30 had said [engine racing] that there were – because there were so many...
31

32Mark Van Epps: [31:55] Steve Pettinger?
33

34Cheryl McQuaid: Yeah.
35

36Mark Van Epps: Yeah.
37

38Cheryl McQuaid: There were so many locks, it was just...
39

40Mark Van Epps: Yeah.
41

42Cheryl McQuaid: ...too cumbersome...
43

44Mark Van Epps: Yeah.
45

46Cheryl McQuaid: ...to use.

1
2Mark Van Epps: See – right. At Fisher Body, we were always retrofitting a new tool into a,
3 into a site with a bunch a – of existing tools [sniffing] and plus I don't
4 think the technology existed in the industry to really support it the way we
5 would've liked to, you know, and the – a lot of the issues were you could
6 shut off the power to the whole area but we were going into an era where
7 things were controlled by computers and, [tapping] and, you know, th-,
8 this was early in that type of engineering and, and you'd shut down the
9 power on a robot and the computer would lose its memory. So, you know,
10 you just, you just – you couldn't do it, eh, as a practical matter even
11 though, eh, from a safety standpoint it was the right thing to do. You
12 couldn't reprogram every robot every time you had to go, you know, turn a
13 screw, [tapping] so.
14
15Cheryl McQuaid: Mark, I really wanna thank you for spending this time with us this
16 morning. [rattling] [32:51] Is there anything you'd like to share with us
17 that we've not asked you?
18
19Mark Van Epps: Eh, eh, just the only thing is, uh, I th-, I'm, uh, w-, when I got hired at
20 Fisher Body, I was really proud of that because – partly because I really
21 wanted the job and it was one of the first jobs I ever got where I didn't
22 know somebody. You know, I didn't have a, I didn't have, um, a neighbor
23 or a relative or somebody that got me in. I got in on my own merits and on
24 my own credentials and I was proud of that and I knew that, um, that it
25 was really an opportunity to improve the standard of living for myself and
26 for my family. Um, I, eh – and it's not always fun and, eh, you know, I've
27 had bad experiences at work like we all do but for the most part, eh, I
28 really like, I really like working for this company and I'm really proud of
29 my union membership and I'm really proud of our Local and the people
30 that, that work here. I, I think, I think Lansing is successful, uh, because of
31 those people and, uh, really I, I have, I have absolutely no regrets
32 whatsoever about choosing this as a career path and, and I feel very
33 fortunate to be here. O-, other than that, I don't, I don't have anything else
34 I need to share, so.
35
36Cheryl McQuaid: Well thank you very much.
37
38Mark Van Epps: Yeah. You're welcome.
39
40Jerri Smith: Yes, thank you.
41
42 [recorder clicking]
43
44Mark Van Epps: Okay. I'm back and I'm gonna, I'm gonna tell ya about my – how my job
45 interview [clicking] went and, uh, I had submitted my application for
46 employment and I got a call to come in [clanking] for a job interview

1 [papers rustling] and the interview was to be conducted by, uh, Jerry
2 Wateros, who is like a seventh level, uh, supervisor in the Layout
3 Department and, uh, Larry [Mesias 34:46] who was a – an hourly
4 supervisor for, for the toolmakers. So I went, I went t-, and they took me
5 to an office to do the interview and I sat down with Jerry and Jerry was
6 waiting for Larry. Larry was late f-, to the interview, which was typical
7 Larry as it turned out.
8
9 So Jerry talked to me about his kids and he talked to me about the war in
10 Vietnam, which of course was long g-, long over, and he talked to me
11 about a few other social issues. Uh, never asked me anything about my
12 work history or, or my background or my abilities and finally it got to the
13 p-, and Larry never did show up and it finally got to the point where I said
14 well, jeez, Jerry, I'd really like to work here if you guys have a job for me
15 and he said well, come on in for a physical tomorrow and that was my
16 entire, my entire job interview. I asked him what tools I should bring to
17 work with me and he said well, a hammer and a chisel and maybe some
18 Allen wrenches. And th-, that was it. So I – when I did finally come to
19 work, I was totally unprepared for, for anything. I had no idea what I was
20 getting myself [engine humming] into but, but it was – I'm glad I came
21 anyway.
22
23 Cheryl McQuaid: [35:56] Did you bring the hammer, the chisel and the...
24
25 Mark Van Epps: Yeah.
26
27 Cheryl McQuaid: ...Allen wrenches?
28
29 Mark Van Epps: Yeah. I brought a hammer, a chisel, some Allen wrenches [engine
30 humming] and I think I mighta brought a crescent wrench [rattling] but I
31 didn't – no one seemed to know what else I needed [squeaking] so I –
32 [laughter] that was all I brought. [footsteps]
33
34 Cheryl McQuaid: Well thank you for that... [thumping]
35
36 Mark Van Epps: Yeah.
37
38 Cheryl McQuaid: ...[final remark 36:11].
39
40 Mark Van Epps: You're welcome.
41
42 [recorder clicking]
43
44
45/lo