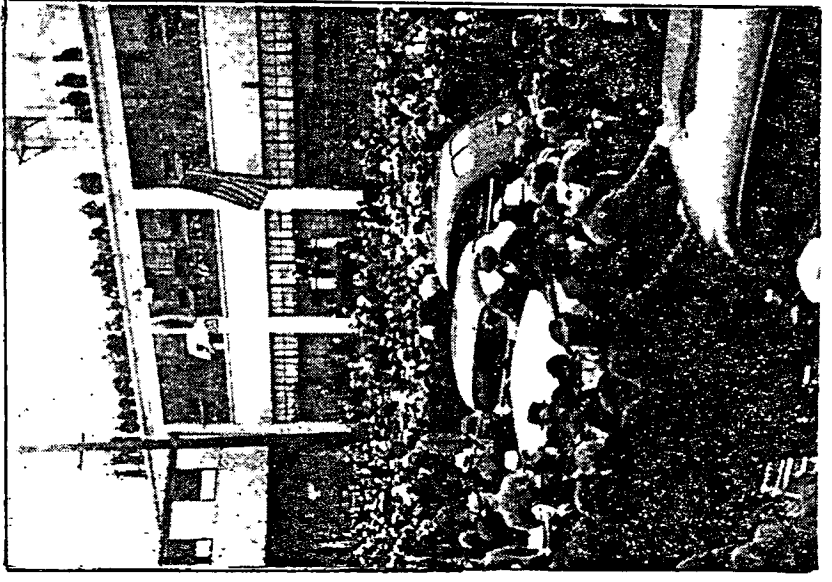


HOLDING THE FORT

A SIT-DOWNER'S

DIARY



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SIT-DOWNER'S DIARY

FORTY-FOUR DAYS INSIDE FISHER No. 2

Dec. 30, 1936 to Feb. 11, 1937

by a "Now Deceased Sit-Downer"

Cover Photo from the
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Limited first printing
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Issued in honor of the
Sit-Down Pioneers on
This the 50th Anniversary
Year of their Victorious
Battle
Dec. 30, 1936 to Feb. 11, 1937
August, 1986
Flint, MI

DEC. 30, 1936 to FEB. 11, 1937

DEDICATED

TO

FLOYD

KENNEY

"DOC"

DUDLEY

HERMAN

AND THE OTHER

UAW PIONEERS

WHO ARE DETERMINED

THAT THE HISTORY

AND THE TORCH

THAT THEY CARRIED

AT SUCH COST

WILL BE PASSED ON

THE LINE IS DOWN
by FLOYD HOKE-MILLER

No wheels' a turning;
No boilers' burning;
No juice past the panels!
The poor have struck
To change their luck
And rest their fetter;
To worse or better
Their short and simple annals!

No groans or grinding;
No flames' a blinding;
No men within the shops' a working!
The line is down;
No wheels go round
And silence reigns
O'er capital's gains
Where haunting fears are lurking!

Preface

A few years ago I met a sit-down pioneer from the Fisher 2 Battle of the Great Flint Sit-Down War. He asked if I knew that Fisher 2 was the first plant to sit down in Flint in December, 1936. He pointed out that most history books written about the Flint Sit-Down Strike deny this historical fact.

Looking at some accounts of the Great Flint Sit-Down Strike, the reader sees that, in fact, a false picture is commonly presented. For example, in a recent book put out by the Educational Department of the International Union, UAW, entitled We Make Our Own History (Detroit, 1986), the author writes, "After a quick strategy session, workers at Fisher Body Plant No. 1 sat down....Quickly the strike spread to Fisher No. 2." (p. 28)

In the book The Many and the Few by Henry Kraus (Urbana, 1985), the author describes the sit-down in Fisher 1 on pages 86 to 106 before reporting that "...a sitdown closed the small Fisher two plant at the other end of the ...city on the same day that the Fisher one strike began...." He adds (p. 26) that Fisher 2 "was by no means a key plant."

The other book length account of the Flint Sit-Down Strike, Sit Down by Sidney Fine (Ann Arbor, 1969), says "on Dec. 30, sit-down strikes occurred in both Fisher Body plants" (p. 144). The correct chronology is given but the author draws the conclusion that "the strike [in Fisher 2] appears to have been entirely spontaneous." While, in another book describing the period, The Brothers Reuther and the Story

of the UAW / A Memoir by Victor Reuther (Boston, 1979), the author writes "...in both Fisher One and Two, a sit-down strike was called on Dec. 30." (p. 147)

By most accounts of those who participated, the sit-down strike in Fisher 2 was not planned beforehand, nor specifically called, nor was it spontaneous. Rather, it was a long smoldering, collective response to deeply felt grievances, insults, speed-ups and disappointments. A "Now Deceased Sit-downer" wrote in his diary:

Dec. 30, 1936 -- 6:45 A.M. Men waving arms -- they have fired some more union men. Stop the lines. Men shouting. The strike is on.... This strike has been coming for years. Speed-up system, seniority, over-bearing foremen: You can go just so far you know, even with working men. ...We are right and when you're right you can't lose. ...Jan. 2, 1937.... We're just honest working men that have been pushed so far and so hard that we can't keep it up any longer... Jan. 18, 1937... For the past 5 years we have been meeting one disappointment after another. Is it any wonder these good men rebelled?*

In Fisher 2 as else where the grievances among the workers had been festering a long time. But a particular series of events contributed to the sit-down occurring on December 30, 1936. The UAW's efforts in mid-

*Reprinted as "History of Sit Down at Fisher #2" in the Headlight, Newspaper of UAW Local 599, May 20, 1942, p. 1 and June 29, 1942, p.3. All indented quotations are from this source; May 20, 1942 to July 29, 1942.

December, 1936 to meet nationally with General Motors had been rejected. GM told the UAW that complaints had to be submitted to local plant managers. The UAW knew that GM set its major policies on a national, not a local level. Nevertheless, the UAW went through the motions of appealing to local management. The UAW local in Flint drew up a tentative contract which was submitted to the Fisher 1 and 2 plant manager. On the same day, 3 inspectors in Fisher 2 were the object of what appeared to be retaliatory action. Management informed them they had to quit the union or go back to their old jobs as metal finishers. The next morning, December 30, 1936, these three inspectors indicated their continued union membership by wearing their union buttons. Management brought in plant guards to eject the three men from the plant. When their fellow workers saw this, they moved immediately with tools in hand to protect the inspectors. And this was the start of the sit-down. (See e.g., Rose Pesotta, Bread Upon the Waters, 1944, p. 235.) It was some 15 hours later, at about 10:00 p.m. that night, that the workers in Fisher No. 1 initiated their sit-down strike.

The author of The Many and the Few is not the only writer to claim that Fisher 2 "was by no means a key plant." But it seems that General Motors must have felt differently. For on January 11, 1937, GM tried to break the sit-down strikes by a violent attack on the defenders of Fisher 2. The sit-downers and their supporters successfully defended their occupation of Fisher 2. The events of January 11, 1937 have come to be known as the "Battle of The Running Bulls" because the police were forced to retreat at a run away from the object of

their planned attack, Fisher 2. Also, despite many historians' denial of the importance of Fisher 2, the National Guard Command in Flint in 1937 thought Fisher 2 of sufficient significance to include it within the military cordon established around Chevrolet Plant No. 4 after the crucial and masterfully planned and executed sit-down in that plant on Feb. 1, 1937.

The importance of the Fisher 2 sit-downers which is often denied, is that they knew what had driven them to rebel, and without fanfare or seeking notoriety, they did what they deemed necessary to end it. Jan. 19, 1937... these men that are here now are, in my opinion, the better workmen -- the men that have one or more children and they are all clean-cut fellows that think for themselves. Many have told me if they could only gain human conditions for their children this fight would not have been in vain.... Jan. 22, 1937... a bunch of brothers united in the same cause. Good men, honest men, trust worthy men. Men who mean no harm to anyone. Men who are determined that they will not continue working under the terrible conditions that have existed since 1929 and grow worse as the years pass.... Jan. 24, 1937 ... What have we to show for these many years of hard labor -- nothing but bills. Yes we'll have them paid all right when the lay-off comes, just to get back in debt again.... Jan. 25, 1937... Had a motion picture show [Modern Times] this evening. You should have seen it and got some idea of the speed-up system. It's exaggerated of course, but I'll swear on my word that our lines run nearly that fast and

there are no relief men either..... Feb. 2, 1937... All good men they are and don't want violence. We're not going out though....."

The Fisher 2 sit-down was the first and longest in Flint. It was the only sit-down openly attacked by the police. And it had to bear the heat being turned off and food being denied at least twice. Why then have historians and others diminished the importance of the sit-down strike in Fisher 2?

As 1936 was drawing to a close, the CIO leadership concentrated its efforts on organizing steel workers. Steel was considered by them to be the crucial link in unionizing mass production workers. The UAW leadership, while working toward an eventual showdown with GM, was not planning strikes, especially not until after January 1, 1937. Therefore the auto workers' strikes in late 1936 were initiatives from the rank and file. And it is this story of the initiative of the rank and file workers of Fisher 2 which runs counter to the common practice of writing history as the story of kings and generals. The Fisher 2 sit-down strike is mainly the story of foot soldiers like the "Now Deceased Sit-downer" whose forty-four day diary follows this preface. And it is this actual story of the many and not the often told story of the few, that sets the basis for understanding how the Great Flint Sit-Down Strike was won.

The fight today of the Fisher 2 pioneers for an accurate telling of history is a continuation of the struggle they were part of 50 years ago:

Feb. 3, 1937... 'Hold the Fort'
Feb. 4, 1937 -- Are they going to

starve us out?...Day and night it seems like something is always happening at Fisher 2. Why don't they go to Fisher 1...? Are there too many men there for them? ... Feb. 5, 1937 ... Lewis and Knudsen are in conference yet... Feb. 6, 1937 -- Friday has passed, pay Friday and no pay. Well, maybe we will make it up at the end of the year. We usually are laid off six to ten weeks at the end of the year. Funny no one tells how much we lose then. But the papers are mentioning how much we are losing now. General Motors is worried about us now but when we are laid off no one thinks anything about it....."
"Feb. 11, 1937... The boys have voted to accept the agreement and here comes Fisher No. 1 down the street.... Chevrolet Plant 4 is coming out and they are on the way to Little Fisher. Will be home soon now, dearie, and I've not deserted you after all. Two wars we've been through [W.W. I and the forty-four day Flint Sit-Down Strike] and this last one we knew what we were fighting for...."

A pioneer of the Flint Sit-Down Strike recently summed up this latest struggle, "The fight to bring industrial unionism to the auto workers was not an easy one. It is now a part of our heritage.... We must not allow authentic facts of this greatest of all labor struggles to go untold or [be] destroyed...."

(Kenney Malone, "Kenney's Caustic Comments", The Searchlight, Newspaper of UAW Local 659, May 30, 1986, p. 24).

JAY HAUBEN
AUGUST, 1986

The diary of the Now Deceased Sit-downer was printed in a serialized form in issues of the Headlight (the newspaper of UAW Local 599, Flint, MI,) from May 20, 1942 to July 29, 1942. The copy of the diary which follows was made from these issues of the Headlight. Microfilm of the Headlight is available to the public in the Michigan Room of the main branch of the Public Library, Flint, Michigan.

DIARY

December 30, 1936 -- 6:45 A.M.

Men waving arms -- they have fired some more union men. Stop the lines. Men shouting. Loud talking. The strike is on. Well, here we are Mr. Diary. Two sit-down strikers. This strike has been coming for years. Speed-up system, seniority, overbearing foremen. You can go just so far you know, even with working men. So let's you and I stick it out with the rest of the boys, we are right and when you're right you can't lose. What a lot of talk. Confusion. Curses. Now the fellows are settling down. I never knew we had so many entertainers in this little shop. Some are dancing, others have formed a quartet, fair singers, too. Now a snakedance, everyone is asked to sing a song, do a dance, or recite a poem. So the day is passed. It's 4:00 A.M. Time to go to bed. What a night. NOW I LAY ME DOWN TO SLEEP...

Thursday, December 31, 1936 -- 11:30 A.M.

Had a good sleep, was surprised for a minute to find myself here in the shop. What will happen today? I hope it will be over. Thinking of that party at my home this evening. I wonder if the basement is decorated for the occasion. Wonder how Sweet (the wife) and the children are feeling. Bet mother is worried about me. I felt so sorry for Dick today -- he wanted so to stay, but

when you're feeling good it's tough. Though here -- when you're feeling ill, it's too tough.

New Year's Eve

Wonder if my company has arrived yet for the party -- I bet they think I'm a swell host -- They know I've never been a heel yet and I'm too old to start in now -- Gee, I'm glad Chick and Junior are in with us -- They're always clowning and able to say something funny -- It's sure a help. Poor Ed over there looks blue -- his chin will be dragging the floor in an instant. Never expected to spend New Year's Eve in a shop, but here I am, for which I am glad.

There it is, twelve o'clock, whistles, cheers -- 1937. Peace on Earth -- Why must men in the world's most perfect democracy have to take such steps to survive? Well the wife and all my guests are out on the street celebrating with me. It's sure swell, but (somehow) a lump climbs into a guy's throat. My brother-in-law here beside me feels the same way. I can see we'll have to kid each other out of it.

Prayers and sleep -- it's harder to sleep each night. Thoughts march in and out, in and out, until dawn chases them away and we sleep. Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep. May our Heavenly Father watch over, protect us from harm and speed our return to our families.

January 1, 1937

Had a lunch but no appetite. Wonder how many traffic injuries last night. Wish I had a morning paper; maybe an agreement has been

made. The boys have settled down, not so much noise at night now. Did you notice the expressions on the faces? Drawn, pale, tired, and anxious. Do hope this can't last much longer for all of us are here to stay -- Now I lay me down...

January 2, 1937

Won't we ever have any rest? Sheriff Wolcott was here with an injunction. Did you know we were breaking a law? Did the fellows at Kelsey Hays in Detroit break the law in their sit-down strike? If so, why didn't the Wayne County Sheriff serve an injunction on them? Are the laws of Genesee so different than those of Wayne County? I never expected Sheriff Wolcott and his law-enforcement agents here.

We have done no harm. We're just honest working men that have been pushed so far and so hard that we can't keep it up any longer. They say we're lazy workers. Is a man lazy if he has not missed a day's work in two years, has not been late, and kept up with a line manufacturing forty-five bodies an hour all that time? Most of these men have done just that and our employment records prove it. I'm glad the Sheriff is gone. Wonder if he will return? On guard against violence, watch, watching all the time. No rest tonight. We don't want violence and yet we hear peace preached all the time by our strike leaders. Now I lay me down...

January 3, 1937

Well, the Sheriff never returned. Our prayers were answered. Thank God. Now we can have peace and rest. We need it. The boys are pleased that there was no trouble -- the

spirit is at the highest it's been since we sat down. Everyone is cheerful and all smiles. There is talk that we can return home without the danger of them scabbing our jobs. Home, Sweet Home... I think I'll buy a couple of dozen of those cards and hang two in each room of the house. I wonder if Patsy can ride the tricycle Santa Claus brought her, and Jerry the bike. I'd have some Christmas shirts I'd like to try on. Sweet probably wants the basement cleaned. Well to bed for me. Now I lay me down...

January 4, 1937

In time I guess men grow used to anything. Let me see how many days have we been here. One, two, three, four, five long days. Gee I thought weeks had passed. The fellows are in a playful mood. Some have a ball made of rags and are playing basketball, using an old pail for a basket. We have a volunteer barber now, and boy is he busy. This has been a swell day. I hope the night passes the same. Now I lay me down to ...

January 5, 1937

The Flint Alliance and anti-strike organization has been organized. What a night of wild rumors! On your pins, boys -- here they come up to the gate -- they won't take us out, we're sincere. All through the night, no rest, no sleep, -- jittery nerves, strained morale. The time and the conditions are taking their toll. One brother is acting queer. Should we ask him to go home? Another is sick of body, but his heart is all there. We'll have a car take him home over his own objections. Some of the weak are giving up. Wonder if we can rest today. We ex-service men don't mind it much. The breaking point

seems between 6 o'clock and 8 o'clock in the evening. My company was over this evening. Sweet and the children sure are loyal. They haven't failed yet. It sure helps to know the good wives are with you in thought and spirit, thank God for that. Wonder if we can sleep tonight. To bed... Now I lay me down...

January 6, 1937

Another day, Diary, and a fair rest! Suspicion seems to have taken hold. Each of us watch the other. Is he one of us, or is he one that is paid by our opponent? Watch him! Watch out for him. I hear all day and into the night. Day time seems like eternity and nights seem like minutes. Sorry that Boysen took the stand that he did. I always had respect for George, but I'm afraid it's gone now. Well, shades of night have long since passed -- let's try and rest tonight. Now I lay me down to sleep...

January 7, 1937

Well, Diary, Fisher No. 2 gets pretty cold when the heat has been turned off. I'm glad we have those blankets from home -- they sure come in handy. Play Pedro, sure helps pass these long days by. Never played much Pedro in my life -- I'll bid seven -- Just another day. Eat, no thank you. I'm not hungry. You don't have much appetite when all you do is walk back and forth -- one end of the shop and back again -- always thinking of what tonight will bring. Here it is evening again -- evils always come in the night -- be on your guard at all time, men. Are the guards on each door? Watch the back of the shop. They could come across the railroad bridge and sneak up on us from the rear -- be on your guard at all times, men.

They shall not take us out -- so through the night -- day-light has its silver streaks through the shadows and maybe we can sleep in peace. Now I lay me down...

January 8, 1937

Pay day -- yes, we have a few dollars coming -- but we're not interested in them now -- wonder what the early news flashes were. Our good Governor Murphy, who we have so much faith in is doing all he can for an early settlement. Some of our boys have rested much better since the Governor has taken hold. How much longer must this go on? If I were out I could sell a few suits tomorrow, and could we use the money! Well, tomorrow will soon be here. Night has dropped its blanket of darkness and the rumors are again making their rounds -- our men are on edge again -- there will be no rest tonight, I'm sure, but might as well lie down. Now I lay me...

January 9, 1937

This has been a very peaceful day -- had an invitation to dinner with the trimmers -- they have a kitchen of their own and T-bone steaks were on the menu. These trimmers are real chefs. I'll tell their wives about it when we get out. The men can prepare Sunday diners at home for a change.

This usually was Sweet's and my night out. (Sweet is the wife) and we usually made our weekly trip to the movies. I hope she can go tonight, she's been so good since I've been here and tomorrow I see the children. They think I've been working all this time. Here she is now... "Hello Sweet. How's everything at home? Do you have coal? How are the

children? That was a lovely dinner you brought down last night. Yes, we are feeling fine, most of us have colds, but nothing to worry about though. Well, I'm glad everything is O.K. We'll see you tomorrow. Good night, dear."

Well, might as well lie down now. Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord...

January 10, 1937

Sunday and I've missed mass. I'm sorry, but I missed mass during the World's war and this is war. Sunday always seems like a day of rest, but so many visitors are out in front. Some have sneers on their faces. Usually office workers. They know nothing of the working conditions in the shop. Others are here with encouragement. Would like to go down on the walk like the inquiring reporter and ask each one down there for their opinion of this whole affair... The fellows here seem more relaxed than they have been for days. Some are kidding the watchman. There goes a tray of hot coffee to the watchman. The men and the watchman are very friendly toward each other, -- after all, we are all just honest working men. Well, I guess I'll retire. Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord...

January 11, 1937

Had a good sleep last night, since our Governor has said there will be no violence we now rest better. I wish the Flint Alliance would disband. I believe they are only causing trouble. This issue is not an issue that can be settled in the City of Flint. It's a national issue,[can't read-ed] the Flint Alliance. So what? Well,

I see the heat has been shut off again, and it's getting quite cold in here. Well, let's wrap up a little warmer, we'll have no trouble about that. 6:15 P.M.... Here they come! --22 Factory Police, with their long night sticks, going to take the ladders, are you? Go ahead, but why carry those clubs. Surely you know you don't need them. We'll have no trouble over a ladder. Wonder why all the police are out in front. See, there's another car of plain clothes men, driving up to the curb. Watch them report to those scout cars that are parked across the road. Do they think we would start trouble? Men don't start trouble when they have been preached to, that there will be no violence and it has been two weeks nearly. What!! They have locked the doors and won't allow our dinners brought in. Why?? Those hot meals those ladies have out there will be cold in a few minutes. Won't they let our dinners from union headquarters in either? You men stay upstairs and let our Police Chief and his men go down and ask for the keys to the doors from Peterson. If he refuses we'll have to open the doors anyway. You can be cold, you know, but cold and hungry is too much. Won't give them...we'll push the doors. Open, there they go. The doors are open to us for the first time since this thing has started. Men are shaking hands with their brothers on the outside. Everyone is laughing. Let's sing a song. "Hail, Hail, the -Gang's All Here." Look out men the Police -- Bang! Bang! Tear gas bombs. Close the doors quick. Police in helmets with gas masks on. Why did they fire on us? Where did they come from so sudden? They have broken the glass in the front door. Bang! Tear gas fired through the broken glass. Get the fire hose. They say no violence, then they attack unsuspecting,

peaceful men. Defend yourselves as best you can. They have broken their words, so let them have it. Bring up those hoses. Come on, you pickets. Stones, bottles, bricks, hinges, bolts, flying through the air, not much for defense but that's all we have. Some of our men are down. Lousy, shooting a man when he has no gun. Over goes a car. There goes another of our men. More tear gas. Smarting eyes. Look out for that riot gun. Bang! Bang! Ahead men, they are retreating. Keep them on the move. Even policemen can't fight, and fight with a heart, with all their guns unless they know there's a just cause. More gun fire. It's terrible. Wild shouts and women crying for the safety of their loved ones. Ambulance horns. Reports of a shot gun fired very close. Bottles breaking on the street thrown from the roof. Our men up there are doing their bit. Now all is quiet. We have chased them back at last. Take care of our wounded, open those windows, let that gas out. You men who were out on the street, come and get warm. Put on some dry clothes. Boy, those hoses sure came in handy. And was that water cold! Look, my pant legs are frozen stiff. Don't leave the hoses, men, they are coming back. Come on, men, let's go and get them. To your posts, they are making another attack. Lord protect us. Who's that shooting from the bridge. Some coward that's afraid to come close enough so we can reach him. We got them on the run again. Don't stop now. Heavenly Father, stop this outrage. Now all is silent again. Is that all of this? Peace on Earth. Good Will Toward Men. What kind of peace is this, I ask you? Now stories of the attack. Tears running down cheeks, tears caused by tear gas bombs. Swollen faces, bloody clothes. What a mess. No one can sleep after this. But I'll say my prayers.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for stopping this outrage and thank you, too, for protecting us. We had to protect ourselves, Father. We are thankful it is all over for all times, we earnestly pray. Now I lay me down to sleep...

January 12, 1937

All is quiet on Chevrolet Avenue. Streets are littered with refuse...broken windows, dismantled cars -- all leave their story of the night before. We men are pleased the Governor is in town. We are glad the State Troopers and the National Guard are here. We have faith in them, maybe, we can trust them. We thought the same of the City Police and look...we want no violence, and will not seek any. Maybe the State Troops and the National Guards will act as our protectors from another attack. Tonight maybe we can sleep, what a good night's sleep will mean. I'm going to hit my cotton bed early. Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray...

January 13, 1937

Our good Governor seems to be doing everything in his power to bring our men and those of the General Motors together. If this man Boysen would have kept out of it, I believe a settlement would have been reached by now. Captain Lyons of the Michigan State Police asked to visit us today and we escorted him and his men through the plant. He said he was really surprised that there was no destruction of property and that the plant was in such fine shape, after all these hours our men have been here. There can be no destruction when our men watch everything so close, and no rules have been broken. It seems to me that each day brings us closer

to an understanding, and when an agreement is made we are ready to return to our jobs. We are seeing to it that nothing will have to be repaired before production can be got under way. Well, it's time to say good-night. A peaceful day. I pray for a peaceful night. Now I lay me down to....

January 14, 1937

News! News! Wonderful news. Governor Murphy, our President, Mr. Martin and Mr. Knudsen are to meet at 11 o'clock today at our State Capitol and we believe that something will come out of this meeting. The boys all feel good about it, but most of us are out of cash at home and our coal bins are empty. You can't put much away when you are working at the wage we receive and the cost of living so high. Out of work two weeks and we are broke. Everyone seems to be passing the day crowded around the radio, listening to news flashes from Lansing -- hoping they might tell us to return to our homes...The day is past. We have had word that the conference at Lansing still goes on. We are tired and some of us are going to retire. All guards at their posts. It's after midnight, so back to the cotton for me. Now I lay me down to sleep...

January 15, 1937

Extra! Extra! Men are to evacuate the plants -- General Motors and our Union are to meet Monday, January 18, and to come to some agreement in a period of fifteen days. We men can go home -- is that good news, or is that good news? The agreement that led to their future negotiations, as I understand them, are that we leave the plants and that General Motors do not remove dies or parts,

and do not attempt to resume operations in any of the strike-bound plants during the fifteen days of negotiations. Fair enough, I think, and my mind seems at rest for the first time since December 30 last year. That's a long time. Well, I'm sure I'll rest tonight. Now I lay me down to sleep. Thank you, Father, for the protection and help you have given us.

January 16, 1937

We are to leave the plant, Diary. The boys of Cleveland first, then Anderson, Indiana, then to Detroit, then Flint. There will be a celebration at each place and Sunday evening we will all be in our homes and are the boys pleased! I wonder how the furniture looks and the children's toys. I'll be so glad to be with them again. Boy, I'm even anxious to see Mike (Mike is the cat). Well, here they come -- newspaper reporters. Reporters from all over the world it seems. Ed. Lahey of Chicago, Louis Stack of the New York Times, Paul Benton of the Washington Times, Edward Angly of the New York Herald Tribune, Associated Press, United Press. Where did they all come from and the questions they ask. Let's get a picture of this. We want a picture of that. All through the day and the early hours of the morning. Gee! they're a nervy bunch. But I guess their jobs call for a lot of nerve. Don't feel like sleeping for tomorrow we go home, but may as well lie down. Now I lay me down to sleep. Thank you, Heavenly Father, for the help you have given us.

January 17, 1937: (Sunday)

Clean shirts, faces that show marks of an early morning shave. Most of the fellows

have neckties on today. Everyone seems to be up early. Some are washing their clothes, others are trying to make their shoes shine, everyone is in a happy frame of mind. Wonder when they will take us out. The band will be here from Cleveland and we are to parade down to the Union Headquarters. What a celebration. Already people are gathering in front of the shop. What a crowd. They seem to be as pleased that we are coming out as we are of going. 1:45 -- here comes the car with the loud speaker. Here comes the band. Music, laughter. What is that announcement? We have been double-crossed? We are not going to leave the plants? Gee! I feel dizzy. Not going home after all these preparations. General Motors would not keep an honest agreement. Boysen and his Flint Alliance. This thing would have been settled long ago and we would have been back at our jobs were it not for them. Peace on Earth, -- who, I ask you, is preventing that peace? Were we not ready and willing to carry out our bargain? Discouraged men. Heart-sick men. Men who had planned to go home, but who have decided to stay for our own interest. Again the long march from the front of the shop to the back of the shop. Back and forth until we are tired and then to bed. Now I lay me down to sleep...

January 18, 1937

Awake at the foot of the hill called disappointment. Men who were smiling yesterday have frowns today. Not much talking and no singing. These men are sick at heart. Now do you wonder why we trust no one? Can you tell us why we should? For the past five years we have been meeting one disappointment after another. Is it any wonder these good men rebelled? Reds, I see they call us. Reds, if

you will but I wish I could take you down the aisles of this silent factory about midnight and see these men on their knees at their cotton beds, asking their Heavenly Father for protection and blessings and I know asking the Father of Peace to guide them right. Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord....

January 19, 1937

Another day. The shock of Sunday's disappointment seems to have faded some. Some of the boys are greeting each other with a cheery good morning -- our police force seems to be better natured. Some of the fellows are humming as they get ready for their shower. Do you know, Diary, these men that are left, -- yes, many of our men have gone home -- just could not take it I guess but I notice one thing, the ones that have gone are the ones that were forever complaining and are the ones that had the most to say before. These men that are here now are, in my opinion, the better workmen -- the men that have one or more children and they are all clean-cut fellows that think for themselves. Many have told me that if they could only gain human conditions for their children this fight would not have been in vain. And do you know they don't blame Messrs. Sloan, Knudsen, or the Fisher Brothers, but their petty bosses who in their greedy way have been working for bonuses that they get at the end of the year and have forgotten that these good workmen are also human. Now I lay me down to sleep...

January 20, 1937: (Wednesday)

Just another Wednesday. I see some rabbits

out the back window and would like to go hunting. Nice day for hunting, too. We have a new radio and I know by heart when the news reporters are on the air. Listen all day. Sloan is to meet again in Washington, I hope something comes out of this meeting. I hope this is settled soon. Kangaroo court this evening. We use the court to punish offenders. The main offense is not washing dishes as soon as they are finished with them and not cleaning up the smoking rooms properly. Two of the fellows were found guilty after a fair trial and sentenced to scrub the dining room floor on their hands and knees. A severe sentence but order must prevail. The day is done and no good news as yet. Now I lay me down to sleep...

January 21, 1937

A new day and good news. Were there any extras out? Sloan is to meet Madam Perkins today. Maybe some agreement will come out of this meeting. Why is it so important we leave the shops? He does not intend to run them anyway, so he says. Extra! Extra! Sloan walks out of the conference. I wonder what his plans are now. I wonder what scheme he intends to use to get us out. I pray for no violence. Each time a conference is broken I have a funny sick feeling in my stomach. Guess I'll lie down. Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray...

January 22, 1937

The boys seem to take these broken conferences on the chin and standing up. We have a loud speaker installed now and some of the boys are getting good at the microphone. We have a string quartet who are planning on a minstrel show. The boys surely get along

well for being cooped up here so long. No arguments, no fights, only a bunch of brothers united in the same cause. Good men, honest men, trustworthy men, men who mean no harm to anyone. Men who are determined that they will not continue working under the terrible conditions that have existed since 1929 and that grow worse as the years pass. The day is done. Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord...

January 23, 1937

Saturday. Up and shaved, also had a shower, just as if I were going down town to do some shopping for Sweet, or maybe to a movie. It's a lovely day. If I were out we would drive to Detroit to visit some of our relations, but I'm not out, so what? We have a ping pong table in the shop now and it is in use continuously, -- it helps to keep us occupied and some means of recreation. Most of the fellows are between the ages of thirty and thirty-nine. I would say our ages average about thirty-five, so you see they are all quite active. You have to be active to keep up with the line. While we were working we had a lovely baked ham and some fresh rye bread donated to us today -- and was it good? Our meals are sent in three times a day by the Union and we have plenty to eat. Saturday night and time to go to bed. Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord...

January 24, 1937

Sunday and my turn on the fire patrol. I never cared about working on the Sabbath, but we must protect this shop from all damages. We have organized a fire protection brigade and it is our duty to see that there

are no fire hazards and that nothing is destroyed for we feel that we have an interest in this shop as much as General Motors has. Haven't we spent from five to ten years here? Shouldn't we feel interested in it? What have we to show for these many years of hard labor, -- nothing but bills. Yes, we'll have them paid all right when the lay-off comes, only to get back in debt again. Why don't we save our money, you ask me? When we have finished paying the grocer, the landowner, the insurance man, the gas and light bill, buying some clothing for the children and a little change for church, we end up with a couple of dollars to run us until the next pay day. Could you save some money with that amount? I've made many trips through the shop and everything is O.K. Glad to have something to do. The time passes more rapidly. I'm tired going up and down stairs from the first floor to the roof and back again. I found no fires and no fire hazards, so I will say goodnight. Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord...

January 25, 1937

Monday has rolled around again and we are still here. It's been a long time since I've rung a clock card. If I never ring one again I'll have as much money saved as I've had when I've never missed ringing in for work. I don't feel well, so will say good night. Now I lay me down...

January 26, 1937

More news that's not so good. Mr. Sloan declines Madam Perkins' invitation. Another, queer feeling in my stomach, just as if I had never eaten for a week and then gone for an airplane ride. Oh! Gee, won't this ever

January 28, 1937

end? The boys are trying to keep their spirits up but here and there you can see haggard faces that show nerves are about to crack. So our good President has rebuked Sloan. Wonder how the outside world feels about us. I hope public sentiment has changed for our good. I'm going to try and sleep as too many things are passing through my mind at once and none of them seem sensible. Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord...

January 27, 1937

Another Wednesday and the week is half over. Wonder how the children are, -- is Sweet feeling better. I know she's nearly a nervous wreck and mother as well. Gee! It must be tough on our wives and mothers, but they believe as we do, so they too are keeping their chins up. Today read that legislation has been asked to hold conferences in strike situations of this kind. We surely hope it passes. Today one of the fellows wise-cracked -- "President Lincoln freed the slaves, but we are forgotten." We have a new ping pong table today and the fellows are lining up for their turns. I suppose it will keep them busy for a couple of days and then it will have to be something different. Some of the fellows seem to read continuously but I can't seem to get interested. I can hardly wait for the daily papers and then read only the strike news, -- then for a walk, always talking, always in a hurry and not going any place. It's time to retire, no excitement, no attacks and good news. Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord...

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Lieutenant Governor Nowicki of the State of Michigan paid us a visit today. He said that he came to see for himself. He was quite surprised that there was no destruction after all he had read and said, too, that we men did not appear to be the violent characters that we were painted by some of the newspapers. We were glad to have him with us and I feel better that some responsible person had come in as we have nothing to hide. I wonder how my cousin Frank is feeling. He got injured in that car coming from Saginaw with all the police protection they were supposed to have. Hit and run driver, --didn't even mention it on the front page of the papers -- no license -- no clue. Can't the public see through such lousy schemes? Isn't there any law for the working man or must you pay the police for what you want done. Oh gee, I better try and sleep. Now I lay me down to sleep...

January 29, 1937

Mr. Sloan breaks his promise -- now what? Were those promises made? It does not seem possible that a man in his position would do that, or have they thought of another scheme to try? You will find that our Union is a lot stronger than most people think and that we can call out more shops if it is necessary but I do hope we won't have to. We'll try and rest now. At night it seems more peaceful but always that worry -- "Won't we ever get any rest?" Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep...

January 31, 1937

Today I'm going to try to forget strikes, forget General Motors, forget Union and pretend I'm home -- home with Sweet and the

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ERRATA

p.26 January 29, 1937 entry should read:

A new day and hoping for new and good news. I seem to feel better today. I believe my nerves were getting me down yesterday, but a good sleep and a new day helped. Mr. Sloan has promised to meet Madam Perkins, -- maybe something will come from this. Wonder what was said, wonder if they are friendly toward each other. Had a motion picture show this evening. You should have seen it and got some idea of the speed-up system. It's exaggerated of course, but I'll swear on my word that our lines run nearly that fast and there are no relief men either.

January 30, 1937

Mr. Sloan breaks his promise -- what now....[See rest of entry entered as January 29 in text.]

children. Well, it's getting near 9 o'clock -- better get cleaned up for church -- come on Sonny, get your hair combed and have your prayer book ready. I'll get the car. Are you ready, Sweet? Come Patsy, Daddy will carry you. Let's stop and get Mother and Dad, we don't want to be late. There are some of our friends -- its nice to see them. Seems like we have been away a long time, doesn't it? Well, mass is over and dinner time. That was a nice dinner, Sweet. I'll help with the dishes. All right, Sonny, I will take you down there but you will have to walk back, but it will be good for you and it's not far and Daddy can rest this afternoon. Six o'clock and time for lunch, had a nice rest. After lunch will read the paper and go to bed for tomorrow is labor day -- every Monday is labor Monday. Just a day of make-believing, but it helps my mind from thinking of this terrible mess and I'm glad I thought of it. Must go to bed as it is getting late. Now I lay me down to sleep...

February 1, 1937

Monday and a new month. Who would have thought this would go on so long? How much longer must it go? Four days have passed since Frank got hurt. Doesn't it seem funny that they never found the car that caused that accident? Three cars of police at the scene and not one got the license number and no arrests as yet. It stinks, I tell you.

What's the trouble, fellow -- you say they are taking over Chevrolet Plant Four? Look at those men go. Men running, men climbing over the fence, men cheering, the sound truck, men coming down the street with clubs. More blood shed, more tear gas, more riot clubs. Another riot and another shop

full of sit-down strikers. You heard me say we had more strength. More blood shed. Do men shed their blood if they are being treated right? Would men fight if they could bargain with the company and make fair bargains through the company unions? Do you think there are so many men that quit their work because they are lazy? Here comes the troops -- now maybe we will have protection -- now maybe we will have peace. Thank God they are here. We know the company police across the road and the many others in there with them will not attack us now. Tonight, fellows, we can have some peaceful rest. General Motors has asked for another injunction, but we can worry about that tomorrow. Peace on Earth. Good-will toward Men. Now I lay me...

February 2, 1937

All is quiet on the Chevrolet front, the National Guards have taken over the street. Major Ed Carrier seems to be in command. We have sung a few songs to the soldier boys and passed our time watching them change guards. Injunction has been granted and Sheriff Wolcott is coming down to take us out. We're not coming out. Waiting, waiting, won't he ever come? We can't get news from the outside and can't get news out. It's nerve wracking. Just waiting for the Sheriff and wondering when we go into action. I do hope none of us get hurt. All good men they are and don't want violence. We're not coming out though. 8:40 p.m. Here comes the Sheriff -- seal the doors, get the hoses ready -- let them start it first. I'll talk to him. "I have an injunction, will read it to you? -- Legal phrases, we don't understand. We have until 3:00 p.m. tomorrow to leave. O.K. Sheriff, we'll be here when you

come again. Thank God, that's over. More waiting, men walking back and forth. The expression on their faces show they are on the verge of a breaking point. No news -- if we only could hear from the outside. 1:00 a.m. meeting called, someone has to go through the lines. Will they be arrested if they go -- can't go back. Signals arranged. We'll signal from top of the hill or roof of shop. One of our men is leaving in the early morning. Hope he gets through O.K. Will lay down now. Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the....

February 3, 1937

Let's go to the roof and watch for signals. I don't feel like eating. See that white house on top of the hill, that's where he is to go. Look! He's waving his arms to attract attention. Here's the signal. "Hold the Fort", all day long the same signal. Crowds gather on top of the hill, coming down to see us get shot I suppose. 2:45 -- five more minutes and our time is up. Help us Oh Lord and protect us. 3:00 p.m. Governor Murphy has asked that the injunction be set aside until negotiations are over. Thank God. The tension is broken, men singing, men laughing, all is quiet on Chevrolet front again. You see smiles on men's faces. Again we can rest. Boy, am I tired? Now I lay me down to sleep...

February 4, 1937

Now how will we get news. Nothing to eat this morning. Are they going to starve us out? Men on the roof of Plant 4 calling to us. They have no heat over there and nothing to eat either. Day and night it seems something is always happening at Fisher No. 2.

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Why don't they go out to Fisher No. 1 and raise hell sometime? Are there too many men there for them? Look! Here comes our man we let out yesterday to signal us. He has a military pass, soldiers stop him, they let him through the lines. Boy, am I glad. Hello Buddy. Gee we're glad to see you. You can carry notes for us? Good! I'll write to Sweet and the children. Hope they are well. Tell them I'm o.k. and not to worry. She'll probably write me. Will you wait for an answer? Gee, thanks a lot. I feel a lot better now. Our mail man will be back in the morning. I bet I'll sleep now. Now I lay me down to sleep...

February 5, 1937

Had a dandy rest last night -- first one for weeks. We feel a lot safer knowing the guards are outside and our good Governor insisting there will be no violence. Wonder when our mailman will arrive. Boy! He'll be a welcomed fellow. Here he is now. Any word for me Buddy? Oh Boy!-- Thanks a lot. Sweet and the children are well and everything is lovely. Governor Murphy, Lewis and Knudsen are in conference yet. Things look good on the outside. Maybe we'll get out soon. I guess I'll find something to do. Maybe the time will pass faster. Well I've got a black jack braided. Hope I never have to use it. Some of the men are making knives and they sure are fancy ones too. Time to clean up the shop and then a shave and to bed. Now I lay me down to sleep....

February 6, 1937

Friday has passed, pay Friday and no pay. Well, maybe we will make it up at the end of the year. We usually are laid off six to ten

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weeks at the end of each year. Funny no one tells how much we lose then. But the papers are mentioning how much we are losing every day now. General Motors is worrying about us now, but when we are laid off no one thinks anything about it. Here comes our man with the mail. Good old mailman. The fellows sure give him the rush and are we glad when he has a note for us. You should see their faces brighten up when their names are called. Not much of interest today. The day is done, a peaceful day. Now I lay me down to sleep.

February 7, 1937

Sunday and here we are -- 30 days or is it 40? Oh, well! It doesn't make any difference, we're here and here we stay. Some of the boys are playing ping pong. It's an endurance contest I guess -- hour after hour they play. I guess they have been out of pennies or they are tired of playing penny ante. Chick has a new game. He has a lot of squares numbered from 1 to 10 -- if your penny falls on the square you get the number of pennies it calls for but if it hits a line Chick gets the pennies. It's a good racket for Chick and so the day goes. A few minutes here and there -- I don't seem to be able to stay in any one place long. I met Major Geers and Lieutenant Colonel Wiesenhaefer of the 125th Infantry today. Seen like nice men. Had a talk with Major Ed. Carrier -- I like him a whole lot. Well guess I'll say a few prayers for Sweet and the children and for our protection. Now I lay me down to sleep....

February 8, 1937

The conference in Detroit is still going

on. Boy! I hope they finish this thing soon. I have lost 26 pounds and it seems like I'm losing more each day. I'll probably gain it all back when I stop worrying and I'll stop when this is settled. Our Leader, John L. Lewis is reported ill. I do hope it is not serious. Wonder if they continue meeting if he's not there? The boys are taking up a collection for the flood sufferers and I'm surprised at the amount they have. Pennies amount up to dollars alright. We feel so sorry for those poor people. It is time to check in now. Now I lay me down to sleep...

February 9, 1937

New plans for a settlement. I wonder what they are talking about. How I pray that they won't break up. Always listening to news flashes. I wonder if the announcers really know what's going on -- I sometimes think they don't. We're sure Governor Murphy is doing all he can and we know Lewis will be reasonable. Guess I'll go to the roof and back -- my long walk in the fresh air. Gee, the sidewalk looks good from here. Wonder how it seems to ride in a car, and go window shopping. I seem to be sleepy all the time lately. Maybe it's because I can't find anything to do. Now I lay me down to sleep....

February 10, 1937

Conference still goes on. No news but the good Governor is smiling, they say. Well, no news is good news. It won't be long and the news reporter will be on again. Maybe we'll have some good news then. A short recess and back in conference again. All you hear is what do you think -- are they getting any place, do you think it will end soon? How I

wish I knew.. I can't stand this much longer. I'm beginning to jump at little noises -- the fellows say "look out, he's about ready to blow his top," -- I'm not that bad yet. Wish I could think of something to laugh about or even a smile might do some good. May as well go to bed. This has been a bad day. Now I lay me down to sleep...

February 11, 1937

5:45 a.m. -- McIntyre of the Detroit News was down in front and said the strike was settled. The guards have chased him away. The fellows are awakening, everyone up and having a parade up and down the aisles. If it's not true, it's going to be terrible. Wish our man that carries the mail would come. Hope the guard doesn't stop him today. Here he comes and he's smiling. He has a newspaper. Here are the headlines -- STRIKE IS SETTLED -- thank God. The boys are dancing with each other, everyone is laughing. At last we go home -- Home Sweet Home. The boys have voted to accept the agreement and here comes Fisher No. 1 down the street -- crowds of people, flash lights, flags waving, banners, shaking hands. Chevrolet Plant four is coming out and they are on their way to Little Fisher. Will be home soon now, dearie, and I've not deserted you after all. Two wars we've been through and this last one we knew what we were fighting for. Peace on Earth. Good Will Toward All Men.