

Lonsing Fisher Body Historical Team 5-1-06  
12:05 pm

Interviewer Cheryl McQuaid

Interviewee - Walter C Benefield

Seniority - 9-11-68 (B.D. 12-16-46)

Married - Yes 4 children (1) deceased

Education - 2 years College and H.S. Diploma

Military - U.S. Army 1965 - 1968

\* Born in Besmer Alabama, First worked as a truck mechanic and then his aunt called and said Fisher Body was hiring so he came to Lonsing and was hired.

# Reason for hire = He wanted to make more money and take care of his family.

His Uncle Archie states worked at Fisher Body

\* First Day = Very different, Overwhelming, but after this he thought it was O.K. He started in the trim dept in the wiring job dept, doing body wire install which was the hardest job, so new people ~~was~~ were placed on this hardest job to see how they did.

The clips were very sharp on this job also.

The first man to break him in was Charlie Carter. He worked well with Charlie at first Tom Brown was his first supervisor.

# After this he was asked to be "utility" which was a person to cover people who were absent or on vacation etc. This also meant that you would be loaned out to different areas of the plant.



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Books at that time there wasn't very many blacks or hispanics in the plant. Then he went to the glass installed job with windshields and books glass.

# Provals = Fill your gloves up with urethane, most of this was done in fun though. Also grease the phone on the easiere at the foremans desk and call him on it.

# Part Time = The union fought to get radios into the plant for people to listen too. Read the paper, or a books.

Walter didn't view his co-workers as buddies and sisters but just as co workers.

Walter said that when he went on utility he was one of the few black men on utility in the trim department. After about 10 years on the line he went on supervision for more money. The company was looking for more black supervisors to hire on.

So Walter agreed to try this job out. This was hard because you were working in a dept with many of his old co workers and this was really tough.

# He remembers the hardest thing as a supervisor was having to fire someone, or give someone time off. Books then there was alot of drinking at the plant and the first person he fired was for drinking in



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the plant. This gentleman had a ~~was~~ very bad problem with alcohol.

- # Not wanting to work, drinking, making unnecessary scrap, being late after lunch.
- \* Changes in the plant = No really major changes in material but then later there was just in time stock on parts.
- \* Typical Supervisors Day = Come in early before the employees, make sure there were enough people to run your group, make sure there were quality cars so nothing would go wrong, what you are doing to curb absenteeism, Talking and communicating with other supervisors. Back then there was 47 minutes for lunch. But also some people would bring their own liquor into the plant to drink. Sometimes back then the plant was working 10 to 11 hours a shift even on Saturday or Sun.
- \* Friendships outside the plant = yet he has, going fishing or shoot pool, but mostly Walter is a loner with only 2-3 co workers
- \* Dress code for supervisor = wanted to look very professional, dress shirt, slacks, dress shoes and a tie also, but later this changed. Sometimes you would get your tie cut off by your employees, or the line. People would make chairs, Christmas trees out of cardboard, make other things



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to use for decorations. The suggestion plan was there for people to make suggestions for their particular job or dept.

= Dinner - Everyone would bring a dish to pass and other things etc.

# In 1978 was when he met his future wife. He was installing wiper transmissions, Walter was already a supervisor. This was frowned upon by the company and the workers. They also had an interracial ~~was~~ marriage. This was hard for a little while because the people weren't used to this in the plant.

\* Good supervisor = Look past the ~~obvious~~ obvious, take care of your people, make sure good quality jobs leave your area or dept.

# Skilled Trades = all kinds of govt jobs were done, govt jobs were performed by tradesman for Walter over the years in and out of the plant. Most of these favors were returned to them.

\* Best time worker = a person that would learn the job he was on, and not just quit or give up and not try at all, also came to work.

\* Happiest Moment = when he finally retired in June of 2002, He was happy to be out.

\* Saddest Time = when he was fired as a supervisor. An altercation with another supervisor and he was fired but was rehired by the company.



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Fernand Moment - one of the M.C. had a "tail" put on him. Take a long piece of string and a cotton ball and tape it to his behind.

\* Injuries at work = a guy got part of his finger cut off in the trim shop. a boy ring through their finger in the cushion room that attaches the cover to the seat frame on a seat in the car.

\* Walter then went from trim to the paint shop and started making more money than he did in the trim shop.

\* Paint was different because something as you use cologne, deodorant, soap can cause problems in the paint on the cars. But paint had some downsides by the fumes and the chemicals used can cause problems later in life, like breathing and smells.

\* Trim and Paint Shop = Paint Shop upper mgmt was more relaxed than trim and the body shop.

\* Employees = injuries were different from trim to paint.

# Capital of Quality = Fisher got accolades because everyone wanted to see quality cars come from our plant and enjoyed this time.

\* Overall experience = people were good to work with had good and bad from union and mgmt, mostly good though, Walter enjoyed GM and it enhanced his families life and his life.