

# Lansing Fisher Body Historical Team

3-14-06

10:20 am

Interviewee <sup>Charles</sup> Dick Bennett

Interviewer = Cheryl McQuaid

tenure - 4-30-68

Education - High school, Labor Studies MSU

Married - yes (6) his own (4) step children.

Military = None

A. Dick moved around alot when he was growing up with his parents.

# He started working on farms when he was 13 years old during the summer. Then went to work in a hospital up until he went to work at a laundry company, then to a construction company at age 17. Then he was laying carpet, then a teamsters strike went on with no carpet to be used. Then on to Fisher Body. But at other companies he was not able to work at because of a car accident earlier in his life - But he was hired in at Fisher Body in 1968.

\* First job was wiping down cars at the end of the line. Next he was on utility - which was on absentee replacement person. This was a person that had a different job each day instead of doing the same job everyday after day. At this time Dick drove about 48 miles 1 way to work. But on his first day he got lost coming to work and the wrong

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street. Also the first day Dick went out the wrong gate and got lost outside.

\* Dick thought the plant was enormous and huge, he had never worked in a factory and was nervous. Most days there was on 10 or eleven hours a day shift 6 days a week. There were some older ladies that worked in the plant during the war. But not that many were there when Dick hired in. At this time there were some black people and a few mexicans but no asian people. Interaction in the plant was good until Dick got involved with the UAW.

\* Back then there was still a wagon that would come around 2 times a shift for 6 minutes each time. One time during a wagon they left a gun inside a vehicle and it got caught and the line started and the gun stretched and hit numerous cars and damaged them, and only one of the three employees was disciplined and then Dick decided to get involved in the UAW.

\* Pranks = water fell on Dick out of a box of stock. Guns were greased alot back then. A worker went to throw water on Dick but threw water on a General Foreman. Fighting your apron ~~up~~ strings on fire. screw your lunch box to your workbench

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Back then there wasn't a rule for safety glasses or safety rules. Back then it was hard to ~~get~~ get some safety equipment. But in the later years Occupational Safety Hazard Agency made rules for your safety equipment.

Dick moved all over the plant as a utility person, then he became involved in the local union, alternate committee, trustee, then committee, district, shop committee, then Bargaining Chairman. Then onto staff for the International Union for the last 10 years of work.

★ The first time in the Body Shop was a different place to work, sparks flying all over, it looked dangerous, real hot, and smoky.

★ Dick was married 5 times during his time at Fibre Body, usually because he was never at home. So his Fibre Body colleagues and co workers had an impact on his life.

★ Dick felt that he was raised that he should treat people like he wanted to be treated.

★ Best jobs - Team Dept had the Best jobs.

Most of the people in the body shop were black.

★ Communication - was the same for all areas where Dick was concerned except for the body shop where was noise and sparks.

Fibre Shop had the most people in the dept. Mostly during the night shift was when Dick had his problems with his life and. Then his

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family problems come together. Nightshift was the preferred shift to work because of less buses around and eventually radios came into play on each persons job site with no loudness.

\* Union involvement = Employee Participation Groups. QWL. Quality of Work Life. These were programs that were here to work toward a better goal of doing business. The plant floor was mostly the same so things had to be different on the plant floor level to succeed in business. Then Dick was approached about a job for production training that he turned down.

A few months later he was approached again and Dick then accepted this position. Dick also worked with Product Development Teams or PDT teams. Dick felt that these teams had growing encouragement from the company and for the Fisher Body plant. During these times Dick also felt that one reason for this was respect that was given to each other, mgt + hourly. The name Capital of Quality was originated from these programs that were in Warren Mich at the engineering dept in general.

\* Finally and the UAW locals got major recognition from the corporation for doing the mgt + labor business plan to go forward into the future right up until today.

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\* When the T car come into our workforce one stumbling block come up was the wagon which Fisher Body was the last plant to keep the wagon 12 minutes shutdown. This was where we lost the wagon break for this.

\* Worst Memories = The gun incident when Dick was a committeeman. A gentleman from another plant come to Fisher but this gentleman had never worked in car production. Tempers flared and the worker ~~went~~ went to his car to get his gun and Dick talked him out of this and eventually this gentleman went back to his other job.

\* The shift from large cars to small cars was a major concern for us because of the layoffs. This kind of change was very hard.

\* Skilled Trades = was a large issue also. No one wanted work taken away from them. This caused some ruff between some of the locals in the city, ~~not~~ without taking others skilled trades jobs from each other. This was hard to keep everyone happy. Always try to ~~for~~ take care of the majority of your class and sell this idea to the masses and hopefully this would win over the hourly people.

\* The Lushia room had a walpout staged one time and shut down the plant. Another one was blue Monday where a good majority

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Dick Bennett.

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would call in sick and shut down the plant. These people who were involved in this work stoppage were on probation for 5 years. The conditions improved somewhat in the canteen room but supervision was very unreasonable in this department.

\* Good Manager = Treat people the way you want to be treated, open to suggestions, giving you employees input on their jobs.

Bad Manager = Dick would go out of his way to hunt a bad manager, not listening to you employees or working with them.

\* Most appreciated benefit = Pension now, but also wages and benefits through the years.

= TAP - Dick used the Trenton Assistance Program in his studies with the union training.

\* In his involvement with the UAW his political views changed because he is more aware of the offices and what the right to vote really means to us. Also a positive influence on him + family.

\* Dick has a hobby outside the plant which is guitar playing and singing. This has led him to play in bands in the different cities in Michigan. Also he has had the opportunity to do fundraisers for people who have no insurance or terminally ill people to raise money for also.

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Plant Closing - Very sad. Fisher Body helped Dick grow in life, people he worked with, he represented, and encouraged him to be ~~involved~~ involved in the UAW.

He also says that knowing people outside the plant is a totally different type of lifestyle, Dick feels a new work ethic is coming forward with young people.

He also is thankful that we have a new plant to go to work at for our future to be spent in the company.

Dick also felt that the younger people need to get in and do the job and do the best you can do.