

Interview with Frank J. Dryer  
September 13, 2005

At: UAW Local 602 Union Hall, Michigan Avenue, Lansing  
Lead Interviewer: Doug Rademacher  
Also present: John Fedewa, Linda Johnson, Doreen Howard, Cheryl  
McQuaid, Marilyn Coulter, Michael Fleming.

Current Address: 211 S. Waverly Apt B8, Lansing, MI 48917 (371-3111)  
Marital Status: Single  
Children: One  
Nationality: American  
Military Service: Navy - medical discharge

Hire Date: August 7, 1969  
Pay Rate: \$3.65 per hour (\$23.00 per hour at Retirement)

Frank had worked on farms and expected to only be at Fisher Body for the Winter while farm work was slow and then return to farming in the spring.

Frank hired into the Cushion Room on Days. The first day of work he was met at the gate by Johnny Walker for Management and Kenny Fletcher of the Union. Management gave him a badge, the Union gave him a copy of the contract and said to read the whole thing so he would know his rights.

His first job was pressing seat backs in the Cushion Room. He was bumped to nights 45 days later where he turned corners on rear seats.

He felt his 6'2" height gave him an advantage on many of the jobs in that area.

In the Cushion Room the employees would have foot races in the aisles during breaks, water fights, glove fights.

In the Cushion Room there was tag relief and no smoking on the line. The only personal protective equipment provided was gloves. If you wore glasses you had to get safety glasses but non-prescription safety glasses were not provided.

Frank said people were helpful and respectful when he hired in. He commented on the night shift having more drugs and alcohol problems than the day shift.

Frank generally stopped at Joe's Bar (currently the Shop Stop) for 2 beers before work, had 2 beers at lunch and then got drunk after work.

Frank felt a major difference between 1969 and today was that there were more extra workers in the earlier days, easier to get a day off by simply asking your direct supervisor. Later there was more chains of command and it was more difficult to get unscheduled days off.

Strike:

In 1970 Frank participated in a strike that lasted 67 days. Employees walked out of the plant at 12:01 a.m. on September 14. They were striking for 30 and Out. Upon walking out of the plant he reported to the Union Hall to sign up for Strike Benefits and to schedule his time on the picket line. A single person received \$25 a week from the strike fund. This was very difficult for many people. Frank always had extra jobs and skills that kept him employed doing other things so it wasn't as difficult for him as for some others.

Trim:

Frank moved to C Trim where he did a variety of jobs. He liked Trim better than the Cushion Room because jobs were closer together and it was easier to talk to co-workers. He said the people were great and helped each other out. He heard sanitation workers who held the belief that "I'm going to screw you before you screw me" and he didn't like that attitude. Pranks in Trim included getting locked in a trunk or falling asleep in a trunk and having someone dump water on him.

There were other forms of entertainment such as Check Pools where the numbers on your payroll check were used to create a poker hand; shooting dice, playing cards and later football and basketball pools.

There were 3-4 Holiday dinners a year.

In 1974 Frank saw changes in the plant when they started adding work and cutting back on workers. More cars, less people. But he's proud of the fact that Fisher Body still maintained the same high level of quality.

Frank lost his job in 1986 for missing too much work due to alcoholism. Frank says: "I fired myself by not being where I was suppose to be at the time I was suppose to be there." He spent 18 months attending daily AA meetings to prove to the Union that they should fight to get his job back.

When asked if the Union takes care of people who don't deserve it Frank stated that Union & Mgmt need to get together and say "enough is enough" but that he feels that every person pays the same in union dues and deserves the same representation.

#### Sanitation:

Frank moved to Sanitation in 1994 due to bad knees. He ran a cardboard baler until he retired.

#### Coffee Shop:

Frank was famous for his "coffee shop". He sold or gave away coffee, donuts and candy. Every Monday he had free cookies and on Holidays he had free lemonade and free donuts. It was a gathering place for production and supervision alike.

#### Retirement:

Retirement is a drastic change on your system, says Frank. He was 58 when he retired and went from working 5-6 days week to doing nothing. Frank now volunteers his time as a substance abuse counselor for the Union. He is available 7 hours a day to talk with people, listen or just share a cup of coffee. He supervises the "Green House" which was officially named the Frank Dryer House in 2000 by the Local 602 membership. This facility provides meeting space for Alcoholic Anonymous Meetings 6 days a week, including a 2:00 a.m. Friday meeting that is often attended by out-of-town truckers who are in the area. Narcotics Anonymous and Cocaine Anonymous also meet at the Frank Dryer House. All meetings are open to the local community although he estimates 90% of those attending are Union members.

Frank's current hobbies include computer games which he has been playing for 4-5 years.

Through the years Frank has worked as a roofer, painter, sider or any number of other odd jobs. He often helped co-workers with home improvements and said he especially liked it when they pitched in and worked by your side.

Most appreciated bargained benefit: 30 and Out

Quotes:

*Everything I have today is a direct result of the UAW and GM, whether it's pension or benefits.*

*Every job I had was a preferred job. Any person can make any job a preferred job with the right mindset.*

*I would not work anywhere that didn't have a Union.*

*No amount of money can buy the experience I had in the plant for 30 years.*

*Co-workers are like brothers and sisters. You love some you hate some.*