

Lansing Fisher Body Historical Team

5-16-06

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am

Interviewer Doug Radmacher

Interviewee - Earl T. Nicholson Jr

Seniority - 4-30-63 Ret

Married - Yes 4 children 2 girls 2 boys

Education - High School - Lansing Comm College,

Military - US Army Jan 1953 - Dec 1954

Born and raised Columbia Tennessee in 8 of 1932

Parents were sharecroppers in Tennessee

9 children, 5 have passed on 4 alive.

Before Fisher Body from 1956 to 1963 worked at Kellogg Center in Lansing Michigan.

Reason for firing = mostly the wages which were higher than the Kellogg Center \$1.00/hr to \$3.00/hr

First hiring in Fisher Body was in 1960 for approximately 89 days. Then worked at Kellogg until 1963 and was re-hired at Fisher Body

First Day of Hire = Interview process at first, he had never been in a car factory before, this was a sight to see. and wanted to make more money for his family. He said Fisher was just like prison, you were stuck so you job until you were relieved.

Of all the black people hired in Fisher Body # 9590 were sent to the body shop. He was handling doors which were very heavy.

Body shop was more physical behavior than the trim shop or the paint shop

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Mostly 10 - 12 hours per shift at work
He was on spot welding, which he welded
parts together on the doors, each one weighed
about 50 - 60 lbs

Body shop was called the jungle because
there were guns hanging down just like
trees hanging in a jungle. There was also
alot of smoke from the welders

Once you 90 days was attained you were
given your full rate of pay and benefits
A union man Earl thought was the
most important person in the plant. Because
a union shop is much better than non union.
Earl then got a call for supervision and
instead went to the material. He was
also a minority in the supervision dept.

He was the 1st ~~supervisor~~ supervisor
Body shop was mostly black and hispanic,
Trim shop was mostly white, and loyng.
Also almost all women worked work in
the trim shop. Earl was the first supervisor
for material control.

In the trim shop there were many radiast.
Also in trim you could walk up the line,
you get far a break. and walk up the
line. In the body shop you could not
even to the bathroom like this

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Earl did get a spark in his eye one time. Then earl performed on intermittent refit time. This job was good at a time but became very abusive people used him. In material control he was the first black supervisor in material control. There were very few blacks, or hispanics in material control. The union fought for people to transfer to the material control from the outside. The union wanted to put anyone in that ~~best~~ jobs. The company wanted to control the flow of people with hispanics were given these requests. Belitene in the plant = 2 brother, 1 son also work into Fiber Body. When his son was 1 nephew also (Hired in in 1978.) Mostly back then you needed to know someone to get on supervision. Back then also it meant something to be on supervision. Their own parking lot, their own cafeteria, etc. They still had alot of pressure from upper management and also from employees. Tony Fibre asked him numerous times to be on mgt. ~~do~~ Also wore a white shirt and tie then. People he worked with were very upset when they found out Earl was supervision. Overtime he would pick up things on the floor he would get written up quite a bit. Then another person talked to his

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w-workers and they respected him after this. They just couldn't realize they had to work with a black supervisor. Earl felt that the civil rights movement had something to do with black people getting onto supervision in Fisher Body. The majority of his time was spent in Material Control Friends + Co-workers - he got along very well with his w-workers. But outside the shop ~~and~~ he did not stay out late with his people. Sometimes when Earl needed something he would need a ~~few~~ four from his superiors.

= Earl also felt that supervision was a stressful job but after about 5 years it gets better. Today the atmosphere is better than it was in the past. Earl would always try to think ahead, tomorrow or the next week etc.

Then they wanted Chassis and Fisher Body to be the same salary + hourly, so they took away benefits and his money. Some supervisors didn't agree with this company move. Company merging with Chassis and Fisher Body. All went with combined operations and management was downsized to accommodate this. Earl wasn't directly effected but because he was a black supervisor, people had seniority but not as much as Earl had and when the layoffs came as a result

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of this, the other supervisors were laid off.

Some supervisors went to Chrysler and some chairs came to Fisher Body, but Earl stayed at Fisher Body the whole time. He always thought that Fisher Body was his home.

* Good Employee = A person doing his job and if he has a problem, come to his boss that works problems out.

* Bad Employee - a person not doing his job always talking to the union steward and write a paragraph or grievance stating that the job was overloaded and too much work.

* Earl also believed that mgmt would know that some jobs were overloaded and not do anything about this.

* Salary Cafeteria = One big difference over the hourly cafeteria was you had waitresses and better menu food sometimes.

* Salary Parking lot = also a perk because it was close to the plant.

* Best memories at Fisher Body = Knowing that he finally had a job for life if the plant stayed open. Not being well educated but still having a lifetime job. Believing that doing a good job everyday would give him a job for as long as he wanted to work.

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* Food Moments - when GM decided that Toyota Honda were making 18 hours per car Ford was 24 hrs per car, GM was 33 hrs per car and GM was bound and determined to lower this # no matter what, cut manpower, constantly changing jobs from shift to shift and job to job. Mgt approached Earl twice to retire but he refused, the third time in 1993 he decided to retire.

* Capital of Quality - Mgt and Union had a very good relationship, work ethics, problem solving, absenteeism, but these problems were always worked out in the long run.

* Union - did not attend meetings but does remember walking on the picket line.

* Voting - Earl does vote and he votes straight Democratic. This administration is worse than Jesse James.

* Most appreciated benefit - Earl thought that he should have went back to hourly and then retired under the UAW agreement. In the years since retirement GM has not given Earl any increase in wages. Health care is also paid by GM but Earl still pays some of this premiums for prescriptions and doctors visits but still believes ~~he~~ he and his family are ~~more~~ blessed.

* Plant Closing = Earl felt that this had to happen sometime in this day & age. But you need to move on with the times

Advice = General Motors has given Earl a way of life - good wages, benefits, a good job. At first when he retired he wouldn't even drive by the plant, but later realized that GM Fisher Body was very good to his family and prospered over the years so he changed his mind.