

1     **Rusty Zeigler discusses his career as a production worker, UAW committeeman and**  
2     **member of the Bargaining Committee at the Fisher Body plant in Lansing, MI**  
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5Cheryl McQuaid: This is the Lansing Fisher Body Historical Team. Today is Friday, June 16th,  
6                   2006. It's approximately 1:00 p.m. We're at the UAW Local 602 Frank Dryer  
7                   GreenHouse. I am Cheryl McQuaid. Also here is...

8  
9Jerri Smith:       Jerri Smith.

10  
11Cheryl McQuaid: ...and we are interviewing today Rusty Zeigler. [0:25] Rusty, will you state  
12                   your name and spell it for us?

13  
14Rusty Zeigler:     My name's Rusty Zeigler; it's spelled R-U-S-T-Y Z-E-I-G-L-E-R.

15  
16Cheryl McQuaid: [0:34] And what is your address?

17  
18Rusty Zeigler:     9354 East Parks Road, Ovid, Michigan, zip code's 48866.

19  
20Cheryl McQuaid: [0:42] Are you married? Do you have children?

21  
22Rusty Zeigler:     Yes, I'm married with two children; one boy and one girl.

23  
24Cheryl McQuaid: [0:46] Where were you born and raised?

25  
26Rusty Zeigler:     St. John's. I was raised in the Ovid area.

27  
28Cheryl McQuaid: [0:51] What's your educational level?

29  
30Rusty Zeigler:     12th grade.

31  
32Cheryl McQuaid: [0:55] And were you in the military?

33  
34Rusty Zeigler:     No.

35  
36Cheryl McQuaid: [0:58] What did your parents do for a living?

37  
38Rusty Zeigler:     My dad worked at Fisher Body.

39  
40Cheryl McQuaid: [1:03] And what did you do before you, before you hired into Fisher Body?

41  
42Rusty Zeigler:     Started out workin' on a farm when I was 9 years old. When I graduated high  
43                   school, I travelled around Michigan and Indiana, little bit of Ohio with a taco  
44                   stand sellin' tacos at fairs. When I came back in Ionia for the Ionia Free Fair,  
45                   my grandfather told me they were hirin' at Midwest Abrasive in Wausau. I  
46                   went over there and applied on a Monday, got hired on a Friday, and started

1 workin' there the next Monday. Walked outta there, worked there for not quite  
2 a year, I kept puttin' lap cases in here at Fisher Body, kept puttin'm in,  
3 puttin'm in. Finally I got hired here on August the 8th of '76.  
4

5Cheryl McQuaid: [1:45] And can you tell me a little bit about puttin' your application in at the  
6 Plant? What was it like to do that?  
7

8Rusty Zeigler: Just come over – actually, when I came over, it was just walk in, put in an  
9 application, 'cause it wasn't really a big hiring thing, there wasn't no big lines.  
10 It was basically just walk in, go into Personnel, and put in an application.  
11

12Cheryl McQuaid: [2:06] Why did you want to get into Fisher Body?  
13

14Rusty Zeigler: The money.  
15

16Cheryl McQuaid: [2:10] And how did you know they were hiring?  
17

18Rusty Zeigler: My dad worked there so he kept tellin' me, "Hey, they're hirin', they're hirin'.  
19 Why don't ya put your application in?" Which when I first got outta school,  
20 they weren't hirin', but I still kept puttin' my application in anyway. Then in  
21 '76 they started hirin', so I got hired.  
22

23Cheryl McQuaid: [2:25] Do you think your dad helped with getting [coughing] [hired 2:27]?  
24

25Rusty Zeigler: Uh, with his reputation, probably not.  
26

27Cheryl McQuaid: [2:33] And do you have any other family members at Fisher Body?  
28

29Rusty Zeigler: Yes. I had my brother [Randy 2:40] worked here, which he ended up optin' to  
30 go to Saturn so he didn't break seniority. My brother [Robert 2:47] hired into  
31 Fisher Body, which now he's at LDT. My brother [Rod 2:49] hired in over  
32 here at Fisher Body, got laid off, and he ended up goin' time-for-time, so he  
33 no longer works for GM.  
34

35Cheryl McQuaid: [2:58] How old were you when you hired into the Plant?  
36

37Rusty Zeigler: 18.  
38

39Cheryl McQuaid: [3:03] And what shift and department?  
40

41Rusty Zeigler: I hired in at first shift, Trim Department, on the small system, building the  
42 [cars 3:11].  
43

44Cheryl McQuaid: [3:12] So the A System.  
45

46Rusty Zeigler: Yeah, A System.

1  
2 Cheryl McQuaid: [3:17] Can you tell me a little bit what it was like to walk into the Plant the  
3 first time?  
4  
5 Rusty Zeigler: Different. But I'd already worked at a plant, or factory when I worked in  
6 Owasso so I'd kinda knew what a factory was like. With my dad workin'  
7 there, he kinda told me. But the people were pretty decent. Walk in, they had  
8 no problems talkin' to ya. They, uh, broke ya in on the job real well. Actually,  
9 back then, you got broke in by "Here's what ya do" and the guy turned around  
10 and he's gone so you figured out how to do it pretty quick.  
11  
12 Cheryl McQuaid: [3:45] And how long did you do that job?  
13  
14 Rusty Zeigler: Uh, I hired in and was boltin' down seatbelts. When we had big ol' retractors,  
15 you had to bolt'm down through the side a the car. Oh, I did that job for a  
16 good 2 years. Transferred then to the Garnish Molding Area puttin' in the  
17 garnish 'cause that was a 3, 3-man team, and they were doin' a whole lot less  
18 work than I was. [coughing]  
19  
20 Cheryl McQuaid: [4:13] Do you remember the person that taught you your first job?  
21  
22 Rusty Zeigler: Yes, I do. Tryin' to remember her name. [Annie 4:22].  
23  
24 Cheryl McQuaid: [4:23] So there were some females workin' in the Plant...  
25  
26 Rusty Zeigler: Oh yeah.  
27  
28 Cheryl McQuaid: ...when you hired in.  
29  
30 Rusty Zeigler: Annie was a African-American lady. Lotta fun. Always joked around, had a  
31 good time. She was transferrin' to, uh, QC.  
32  
33 Cheryl McQuaid: [4:38] Tell me a little bit about the environment of the Trim Shop.  
34  
35 Rusty Zeigler: Pretty happy-go-lucky. Uh, guys were constantly playin' jokes. Uh, the guys  
36 on Garnish Mold, I remember we'd go get one a the, uh, ties you would go  
37 around a box and we'd screw it to the inside a their stock wrap then screw it to  
38 the bottom a the little stool they sat on, which was about a foot and a half  
39 long, maybe 6 to 8 inches high, had a little tray across the front that they put  
40 all the different screws in that they would use, so when they'd grab it outta the  
41 rack, take it off, and head down the Line with it, the, uh, little strap would  
42 come tight and stuff would go flyin'. [laughter]  
43  
44 Cheryl McQuaid: [5:13] Do you remember any a the other pranks that used to...  
45  
46 Rusty Zeigler: Oh yeah.

1  
2Cheryl McQuaid: ...happen?  
3  
4Rusty Zeigler: We used to climb up in the rafters at the beginning a the shift, put a bucket up  
5 there, and then put a Playboy centerfold on the back a the stock rack and wait  
6 for a supervisor or somethin' to come along, look at the Playboy centerfold,  
7 and the guy on the other side a the Line would pull the rope and we'd kinda  
8 dump the 5-gallon bucket a water down over the top a whoever was lookin' at  
9 the centerfold. And I remember when I hired in, uh, it was always a good  
10 thing about throwin' people in the trunk. Well, unfortunately, a few times –  
11 well, several times they threw me in, so I actually built me a tool I could open  
12 the trunk from the inside after a couple episodes. But one time they threw me  
13 in, somebody decided to take the keys to the car, so when they finally got all  
14 the way over to repair, they took a pry bar, pried the deck lid open, handed me  
15 in the tools to take the, uh, inside a the deck lid off so they could get me out,  
16 and I remember when I stepped out it looked like a salary convention, 'cause  
17 back then everybody always wore the same color shirt that day, they all had  
18 ties on, and I looked like I was outta place when I climbed outta that trunk.  
19  
20Cheryl McQuaid: [6:19] Was anybody disciplined for that or?  
21  
22Rusty Zeigler: Yeah, I spent a day and a half in the office. They were lookin' to fire the guys  
23 that put me in. But wasn't nobody gonna tell who did it.  
24  
25Cheryl McQuaid: [6:30] Ya kinda stuck together?  
26  
27Rusty Zeigler: Y-, oh yeah. Yeah, they were gonna stick together; they weren't squealin', and  
28 we told the guys if anybody ever did squeal or if the guys found out, we were  
29 all gonna take up the [inaudible 6:39] and make sure they paid their wages for  
30 the time they got sent out in the street anyway, so. We was gonna cover'm.  
31  
32Cheryl McQuaid: [6:48] When you first were hired in, did you – did they just tell ya to go to this  
33 area? How were you placed on the job?  
34  
35Rusty Zeigler: They just walked me up to the Line, said, "That's the job you're gonna do.  
36 She's gonna break ya in." So you started doin' the job.  
37  
38Cheryl McQuaid: [7:07] Can you tell us what a typical day is like in the Plant?  
39  
40Rusty Zeigler: Back then, it was fun when we hired in. Guys joked around, always were  
41 playin' pranks, people were always hollerin' up and down the Line, playin'  
42 cards on breaks, playin' chess on breaks. Lot different than the environment  
43 today. People don't joke around today because they're afraid somebody's  
44 gonna say somethin' or the attitudes are a lot different. The younger people  
45 hirin' in, playin' around is not somethin' generally you see too many of'm do  
46 anymore.

1  
2Cheryl McQuaid: [7:37] When do you think that changed? Why did it change?  
3  
4Rusty Zeigler: I'd say it started changin' around 10, 15 years ago, just the difference in the  
5 people comin' in. Ya know, the laws change where I can offend her now or  
6 offend him by sayin' somethin' about their long hair or their gender or their  
7 race or jokin' around and havin' fun with each other. Back then, we was all  
8 one. We really didn't care who you were or what you were; we just joked  
9 around and had a good time. Nowadays, ya look at the guy across the Line, he  
10 might look at ya and next thing ya know you're goin' to the office because I  
11 was starin' at ya too long. The attitudes have really changed.  
12  
13Cheryl McQuaid: [8:14] Back then, how did ya – what'd you do to pass the time? Did ya bring  
14 in a lunch? Did you go someplace for lunch? What'd you do on breaks?  
15  
16Rusty Zeigler: Back then I brung in a lunch. Then usually on break we just stood around,  
17 shot the shit, and, uh, enjoyed talkin' to each other and creatin' friendships. I  
18 mean, I created a lotta friends. Couple of us always used to go fishin' when  
19 we'd get outta work, we used to go to the racetrack together; uh, we did a lotta  
20 things together. Nowadays, you see that somewhat, but I don't think nothin'  
21 like what ya used to. Back then, we used to have departmental softball games,  
22 one department playin' another department. You don't hear of much a that  
23 happenin' anymore.  
24  
25Cheryl McQuaid: [8:56] And is it same thing? People just aren't as close?  
26  
27Rusty Zeigler: Yeah. I think people now when they get outta work just wanna go home, don't  
28 – I mean, you can run into some a the people ya work with in stores and they  
29 might look at ya but they don't talk. Back then, you ran into somebody you  
30 worked with, they introduced you to their wife, their families. Uh, I mean,  
31 you'll run into the rare person now that'll still do that, but nothin' like ya used  
32 to.  
33  
34Cheryl McQuaid: [9:24] Did you ever participate in the departmental dinners?  
35  
36Rusty Zeigler: Oh yeah. Back then, very few people never did. I mean, almost everybody  
37 brung in a dish to pass. Excellent meals, more to eat than you could even  
38 dream to eat. Uh, nowadays, most people still do. That's the one thing I think  
39 that still happens is departmental dinners. I just don't think we have as many  
40 of'm now as what we used to. I mean, back then, you had a departmental  
41 dinner almost every Friday. Some small areas now ya still do, and I guess  
42 that's one a the changes I'm seein' now that we're out to the LDT is I'm  
43 startin' to see it go back to the departments or areas havin' a Fri-, Friday  
44 dinner, uh, doin' things a little bit more together, because I think the  
45 environment is changin' a lot out there at LDT. It's more us, and I think the  
46 environment's really changing.

1  
2Cheryl McQuaid: [10:17] So you think maybe we'll get that back?  
3  
4Rusty Zeigler: Yeah, I do. I think right now you're seein' people form a lotta friendships, go  
5 do a lotta things together. I think you're seein' the people start to stick  
6 together more due to the fact, I think, because the people are gaining power to  
7 run the, uh, Plant more, and I think that's makin' the people feel a little better.  
8 I mean, when you create a friendly, fun workplace, and I know fun and work  
9 don't go together in the same sentence, but actually out there, I've heard  
10 people use fun and work in the same sentence, unlike the last 10, 15 years  
11 over here. So things are changin'.  
12  
13Cheryl McQuaid: [10:56] So 10, 15 years ago, that might put us right around the time when the,  
14 the Plant went through its major change from Fisher Body to BOC to LCA.  
15 Do you think maybe that had anything to do with it?  
16  
17Rusty Zeigler: No, because everybody still calls it Fisher Body. The only time ya had to  
18 remember what it was called [throat clearing] when ya was fillin' out your  
19 unemployment papers, or papers, and most people still wrote Fisher Body, and  
20 most a the companies around town or areas still knew everything as Fisher  
21 Body.  
22  
23Cheryl McQuaid: But we also had a lot of new supervisors come in at that time from the chasse  
24 side of the, of town.  
25  
26Rusty Zeigler: Actually, that's probably what started makin' it – most a the – back in the old  
27 days, if you were a supervisor, it's because you were one of us and you  
28 became a supervisor, and yeah, probably around that transition period's when  
29 ya seen'm start hirin' these college kids, the younger generation a supervisors  
30 what's came in and management would say, "Well, you gotta do this, do this,  
31 and do this if you expect to go anywhere," and I think they came in thinkin'  
32 they had to go right straight by the rulebooks, there was no fun and games. If  
33 they felt they were gonna work up the Line, and when I think, uh, GM  
34 changed it where you want such-and-such a college education, you gotta be  
35 such-and-such a degree now to become a manager, unlike before; you worked  
36 on the Line, next thing you know, you were a supervisor. They were us. There  
37 was no difference. Then that's about when the time were, "Well, I'm hirin'  
38 you 'cause you got a 4-year college degree and etc. and etc., and I think that's  
39 probably when it started changin' the [throat clearing] environment.  
40  
41Cheryl McQuaid: I wanna touch on the environment in the Plant now. [12:38] Did you have a  
42 radio?  
43  
44Rusty Zeigler: No.  
45  
46Cheryl McQuaid: [12:41] How did you feel about radios [inaudible 12:43]?

1  
2Rusty Zeigler: I didn't like'm. Well, my past history with radios is I could care less if a guy  
3 played a radio, but when I got elected on as a union official, radios were one a  
4 the things where it created fights and animosity between people because  
5 everybody had a radio and everybody felt that they wanted to listen to their  
6 own station. So the people, one guy's turnin' his up, the other one's turnin' his  
7 up on a favorite song, and the next thing ya know, somebody's cuttin'  
8 somebody's wires, their antenna's comin' up missin', uh, and it started to  
9 create problems 'cause people just wanted to play their own song, and ya get  
10 the younger generation in here where they gotta crank it up. I don't know if  
11 it's 'cause they're partially deaf or it's just a fad, and that started creating  
12 people with the older guy that used to have a set here listenin' to the country  
13 music or whatever ya listen to. When the new guys came in, had to keep  
14 crankin' it up all the time, it did start creatin' some animosity. So my idea  
15 behind the radio, I could really care if we ever have a damn radio in the Plant.  
16 [laughter]  
17  
18Cheryl McQuaid: You mentioned that you were a Committeeman. [13:50] What year did you  
19 become a Committeeman and why?  
20  
21Rusty Zeigler: Why did I become a Committeeman? 'Cause of the few times I logged  
22 frequent flier miles goin' out the door.  
23  
24Cheryl McQuaid: [14:01] So you were put on disciplinary.  
25  
26Rusty Zeigler: Several times.  
27  
28Cheryl McQuaid: [14:04] Why?  
29  
30Rusty Zeigler: Why? Because I had a big mouth. I had a habit a tellin' people what I thought  
31 and some managers didn't care for that. So yeah, one time I went out the door  
32 and I looked, and I worked on one side a the Line and was bein' thrown out  
33 the door for somethin' that was done on the other side a the Line. I thought,  
34 "Hm." So I volunteered to be a alternate, alternate, just to see what it was like.  
35 Kinda enjoyed it, so they I ran for Alternate Committee. Alternate for a couple  
36 years, then I became a District for a few terms. Then probably the stupidest  
37 move I ever made is when I ran for Shop Committee, because then you're not  
38 workin' with the people on the floor, and I actually really enjoy workin' with  
39 the people on the floor more than I did bein' on the Shop Committee, which  
40 now I'm back as just an Alternate and I enjoy the crap outta workin' with the  
41 people on the floor.  
42  
43Cheryl McQuaid: [14:53] What were s-, what are some a the problems that the people on the  
44 floor have? Why did they need a Committeeman?  
45

1Rusty Zeigler: Why? Job might be overloaded. Uh, basically, though, most a the time, a  
2 person needs representation on the floor is 'cause they gotta a shitty attitude,  
3 they got a bad boss, absenteeism problem, and absenteeism's probably your  
4 number one reason you gotta go out and represent people, 'cause they don't  
5 like to come to work. Uh, just issues like that. Can't get along with other  
6 people.  
7

8Cheryl McQuaid: [15:29] Did you ever participate in Plant vending and foods, drinks, those  
9 types of items?  
10

11Rusty Zeigler: If somebody was sellin' somethin', once in a while I'd buy somethin', but I  
12 never sold anything. Only.  
13

14Cheryl McQuaid: [15:38] What kinda things could ya buy in there?  
15

16Rusty Zeigler: Oh, you could buy burritos, hamburgers, breakfast sandwiches, uh, a variety a  
17 things. Somebody always had a coffee pot set up where you go over and get –  
18 usually, next thing ya know, the coffee pot would lead into crackers, cheese  
19 and crackers and, and donuts and everything else that the guys start to bring  
20 in, and some a the guys actually made pretty good money. Even if a guy  
21 brings in 50 breakfast burritos for a buck apiece, he's makin' some pretty  
22 good money every day. And usually it was their wives who'd get up and make  
23 it and then they'd just bring it in and sell it.  
24

25Cheryl McQuaid: [16:13] And was that ever a problem bein' a Committeeman?  
26

27Rusty Zeigler: Oh yah. 'Cause it was against the Plant rules to sell stuff, have coffee pots, uh,  
28 and things of that nature, but little more laid back at Fisher Body. A lotta that  
29 was kinda overlooked unless the cafeteria would start complainin' about  
30 somebody doin' somethin' or somebody would get sick, but generally  
31 management would buy just as much stuff as anybody else. Now, I know  
32 when we transitioned to LDT, the two guys already in and done it and they've  
33 already been stopped. But basically that came from a complaint from the  
34 cafetorium, 'cause the cafetorium we do have is more like goin' to a family  
35 restaurant. I mean, you can go up and you get quite a wide variety of meals,  
36 uh, very nice round tables to set at, nice chairs; it's more like a decent  
37 restaurant. Price ain't bad and meals are good. So I can understand them not  
38 wantin' the guys standin' outside the door sellin' burritos in the mornin' when  
39 they're tryin' to serve breakfast. So, I mean, they gotta make money too.  
40

41Cheryl McQuaid: [17:19] Has a Skilled Trades person ever done a government job for you?  
42

43Rusty Zeigler: Yup. If you got a good relationship with Skilled Trades, the best way to get  
44 things done is just go talk to a Trades guy and get things done, because, ya  
45 know, when I needed a fan moved or somethin' like 'at, it's so much easier if



1 you got a decent relationship with a Skilled Trades person. So yeah, I've had  
2 several government jobs done for me.  
3  
4 Cheryl McQuaid: [17:44 ] What is a government job?  
5  
6 Rusty Zeigler: Where ya don't fill out a work order and it's basically somethin' he shouldn't  
7 be doin' because the work order stuff's not filled out, things aren't logged.  
8 Oh, maybe I even need a little thing [inaudible 17:55] for my racecar. I might  
9 bring somethin' in, maybe somebody'd go down and turn somethin' down, or  
10 maybe I needed a nut and bolt back then, and the guys would go help me out  
11 and take care of it. You needed a bench changed, somethin' rack moved,  
12 instead a doin' the work order, you just, the guys would show up and do it for  
13 ya, which is decent, and I think at LDT, you're gonna see a big change in that  
14 too, because now we have Team Leaders for Skilled Trades and Team  
15 Members just like we do on the Line, and we're actually all out there together.  
16  
17 They're right there in the same group room right by us, and since we've been  
18 out there, you've got the Skilled Trades Team Members as Team Leaders  
19 right there working with the, uh, team leaders and team members from, uh,  
20 Production tryin' to form that relationship again so you don't have to monkey  
21 around with work orders; you can just, you become one again, and that's  
22 where I'm seein' a lotta the old ways comin' back over there, and the  
23 communications and people workin' together again for a chance instead a  
24 you're a Trades Worker [inaudible 18:53], we don't want nothin' to do with  
25 you 'cause ya sit on your butt all day.  
26  
27 Cheryl McQuaid: [18:57] And is that why – do you think that's why, um, Production had a  
28 problem with Skilled Trades? They viewed them as sitting on their butts all  
29 day?  
30  
31 Rusty Zeigler: Sure is. You walk by a Skilled Trades, uh, cubby hole, half the time, there's  
32 where your microwave is that just came up missin' outta one a the break  
33 rooms. Uh, they always had dinners in there cooking and stuff like that, and  
34 walked by and see that Trades guy settin' in there sleepin', and Production  
35 people aren't happy when the Trades guy just settin' there doin' nothin' all  
36 goddamn day and that guy out there's actually buildin' the cars, the one that's  
37 actually makin' his wages for him. And now I think things are gonna change. I  
38 think you're gonna see the relationship come back again.  
39  
40 Cheryl McQuaid: [19:38] When you were on a, as Committeeman and then you went to be a  
41 Zone – is that – did I say the right thing? What was...  
42  
43  
44 Rusty Zeigler: Yeah, you did.  
45  
46 Cheryl McQuaid: ...what was the difference between those two positions?

1  
2Rusty Zeigler: When you were a Committeeman, you dealt with the people on the floor.  
3 When you became a Zone, you didn't deal with nothin' until it was too late,  
4 the problem was already there, and then ya had to figure out who was lyin'  
5 and who was tellin' the truth from both sides to actually try to resolve the  
6 problem. So usually when you were there, all hell'd already broke loose, the  
7 problem has already been exploded, and it was a lot harder to try to take care a  
8 the issue. When you're out there on the floor, you can deal with the issue and  
9 it doesn't always need to get to, to the Zone. You're a good District, take care  
10 a your own shit; it don't need to move up. It made it much more fu-, I love  
11 workin' with the people on the floor, 'cause a liar's a liar, asshole's an  
12 asshole, drunk's a drunk; tell'm, issue's over. Don't baby it and go write the  
13 guy a grievance 'cause he's half-ass drunk and they threw him out the door for  
14 a week. Guy's drunk, he's drunk; he'll learn his lesson.  
15  
16Cheryl McQuaid: Do you remember – no, not do you remember. [20:52] When you were the  
17 Zone or the Committeeman, what was a good boss to work with? What made  
18 a good supervisor or a bad supervisor?  
19  
20Rusty Zeigler: What made a good supervisor is wan-, wanted to run his own area and you  
21 could sit down and talk to, work things out, because he's know a drunk from a  
22 drunk too and he didn't wanna see the guy lose his job either, or an asshole  
23 from an asshole, but ya still needed to get a day's work outta these people, and  
24 he'd be more than willin' to help try to get him into programs or work with'm,  
25 'cause sometimes when a good guy turns into an asshole, it's a family  
26 problem or somethin' on the outside a here, and usually a good boss, you  
27 could set down with him and the guy would talk. If ya had a shitty boss, it  
28 didn't make no difference; that boss was just gonna throw'm in the street, he  
29 could care less. He just didn't have the heart and the feelings; he'd just soon  
30 turn, "Ah, my boss says I'm a throw'm in the street and didn't, didn't deal  
31 with his own problem."  
32  
33Cheryl McQuaid: [21:48] Can you tell us what is one of your best memories of Fisher Body?  
34 [papers rustling]  
35  
36Rusty Zeigler: Back in the days where we just used to go play ball together. Uh, we used to  
37 go picnic together. A lotta of us used to go fishing together. We just used to  
38 go and do a lotta things together, even outside a the factory, not just inside a  
39 the factory, and a lotta that went away, and I hope to see it come back.  
40  
41Cheryl McQuaid: Jerri Smith.  
42  
43Jerri Smith: [22:12] By play ball together and fish together and picnic together, do you  
44 mean management and?  
45  
46Rusty Zeigler: No, just us guys.

1  
2Jerri Smith: Just the...  
3  
4Rusty Zeigler: The...  
5  
6Jerri Smith: ...the workers.  
7  
8Rusty Zeigler: ...the, workers. We'd get together in a department, we'd challenge some other  
9 department for a softball and who was gonna pay for the keg a beer or our  
10 wives would show up, ya know, we'd have a little picnic. And we had  
11 [inaudible 22:36] little tournaments, ya know?  
12  
13Jerri Smith: Each department.  
14  
15Rusty Zeigler: Yeah. We'd play another department. It was fun. And I know now, at LDT,  
16 last summer, actually the Quality Console, which it consists of management  
17 and union, uh, rented the, uh, Francis Park Pavilion and we had all the group  
18 leaders, which are the supervisors, and the teams leaders and the team  
19 members, we all went over there for a picnic one afternoon. We had a meeting  
20 at the shop at 10:30, 11:00 and the next meeting was scheduled for Francis  
21 Park and that's we worked the rest a the day. So ya see a lotta that changin'  
22 again.  
23  
24Cheryl McQuaid: But once again, the people that are actually doin' the job on the Line didn't go  
25 to that picnic.  
26  
27Rusty Zeigler: Oh yeah we did.  
28  
29Cheryl McQuaid: Everybody went.  
30  
31Rusty Zeigler: We all went.  
32  
33Cheryl McQuaid: There were no jobs on the line, right.  
34  
35Rusty Zeigler: Right then...  
36  
37Cheryl McQuaid: So.  
38  
39Rusty Zeigler: ...there was no jobs on the line but management paid the wages [coughing] for  
40 the day [coughing] and our work that day was set at Francis Park. We went  
41 over there, uh, area managers showed up, the, uh, plant managers and all them  
42 showed up, we cooked the hotdogs together, the hamburgers together, we sat  
43 there and ate together.  
44  
45Cheryl McQuaid: So a true company picnic...  
46

1Rusty Zeigler: It.  
2  
3Cheryl McQuaid: ...from the '50s.  
4  
5Rusty Zeigler: Well, I wouldn't say it was true company; it was us. It – right now, over there,  
6 if you walk the floor, you will not tell one manager from a team member.  
7 They all look alike, they all dress alike, and, well, anybody you walk up to can  
8 give you the same information whether he's management or union. You  
9 would not know one person [tapping] from another now, like the old days  
10 were. They wore a suit, tie, jacket, shirt; walk in over there now, it's back like  
11 it used to be.  
12  
13Cheryl McQuaid: [24:10] Um, one thing that used to happen in the '70s, '80s, used to have a  
14 [tapping] lotta rumors in the Plant. Could you touch a little bit on some a the  
15 rumors and?  
16  
17Rusty Zeigler: Oh you mean like rumors where the news hires go down and get ya turkey for  
18 Christmas? [laughter] Uh, "rumor is that line's gonna shut down," "The rumor  
19 is so-and-so just got fired," "The rumor so-and-so is screwin' so-and-so's  
20 wife." All them rumors still exist. Ain't changed one bit about the rumors.  
21 And the rumors are the biggest enemy of any company. People that start  
22 rumors with somebody, I'll stick a hot poker up their ass [laughter] because  
23 rumors will destroy things, and tryin' to put out rumors, you could spend 50%  
24 a your week tryin' to destroy rumors. It's because like to start rumors, and  
25 that's usually your naysayers, or if somebody didn't listen well in a meeting,  
26 they were halfway sleepin' or just wasn't payin' attention, or they didn't  
27 understand somethin' so instead of asking a question so they understood it,  
28 they go back out, they try to say what they think they heard, and that starts  
29 rumors. Rumors are bad. And you'll never stop rumors.  
30  
31Cheryl McQuaid: [25:24] So do you think that communication is better so that it's not, the  
32 rumors aren't comin' from upper management; it'll be more of a floor thing, a  
33 joke?  
34  
35Rusty Zeigler: It ain't a joke thing. It's just somebody didn't understand somethin'. Or you  
36 got some people that would just as soon start a rumor just to see what it  
37 sounds like when it got back to'm. There's people who do that. But, uh,  
38 nowadays though, uh, it's union and management standin' there together to  
39 try to destroy the rumors. You see union and management workin' together  
40 and walkin' together instead of "it's them and us." It's now "us," period.  
41  
42Cheryl McQuaid: [26:01] Do you have a saddest memory of Fisher Body?  
43  
44Rusty Zeigler: Yeah. When we closed the damn doors and walked out. I mean, it was sad. I  
45 mean, a lot of us had been there for our whole lives, knew nothin' else. But I  
46 guess the happiest moment was, we actually walked outta there, which was

1 pretty sad for a lotta pe-, I seen a lotta people cry. I mean, they just didn't  
2 know what to do 'cause we was walkin' outta there. But the bright point to  
3 that was, it was happy as hell 'cause was walkin' outta there and walkin' into  
4 a new facility, hopefully a new beginning; totally different environment and  
5 somethin' new. I mean, I've had guys over there set there and sayin' when  
6 they walked in that they thought they just woke up out of a 25-year, uh, coma  
7 [coughing] because they can't believe the attitudes and I can't tell one person  
8 from another, and the environment's changed, and I hope it continues to  
9 change. That's we've agreed to work jointly, gonna do everything together  
10 over there; teach all the classes together, we do the things together so  
11 hopefully we walk the talk.  
12

13Cheryl McQuaid: [27:04] And how 'bout a funniest moment?  
14

15Rusty Zeigler: Watchin' somebody get thrown in the barrel upside down, somebody tappin'  
16 on it with a hammer 'till they tipped it over and rolled him out. I remember it  
17 used to be funnier than shit watchin' that happen. Or somebody getting' that  
18 bucket a water dumped on their head. It used to be fairly humorous. I mean,  
19 there was a lotta good funny things'd go on in there.  
20

21Cheryl McQuaid: And you mentioned that there used to be pinups on the walls.  
22

23Rusty Zeigler: Oh yeah. You used to see Playboy pictures hung up, uh, all kinds a things like  
24 'at. Calendars hung up. You don't see none a that no more.  
25

26Cheryl McQuaid: [27:38] When did that...  
27

28Rusty Zeigler: You actually...  
29

30Cheryl McQuaid: ...change?  
31

32Rusty Zeigler: ...hang somethin' up like 'at now, ya find your ass sittin' in the street, just due  
33 to I think our work environment's changed and laws have changed, people are  
34 sue-happy now. Uh, people can say they're offended just to try to get outta  
35 workin' so they can get money for somethin'. Uh, back then, people didn't do  
36 that. You didn't sue each other just 'cause you looked at each other crosswise.  
37 Now people sue people. I mean, you got people out there sue people every day  
38 just to try to earn a living. Things have changed.  
39

40Cheryl McQuaid: [28:14] Lansing is, was known as the Capitol of Quality. Why do you think  
41 that is?  
42

43Rusty Zeigler: 'Cause the people cared. They cared about the product they put off the end a  
44 the line, unlike a lotta areas. Plus I think the union and management  
45 relationship in the Lansing area is probably far surpassed most a the union and  
46 management relationships in a lotta the other plants and stuff I've ever walked

1 into. It's "Let's try to work together." I guess maybe that's why we got the  
2 new plant, unlike a lotta places that are closing, because they can't get along,  
3 and we said, "Hey, this is what we gotta do. We'll work on that." And  
4 watchin' things right now that we did to have to get that plant and watchin'  
5 the changes already to get back to where we used to be on transfers and  
6 vacations and things a that. Management sets up there and they understand  
7 that, and a lotta them were there when they negotiated the contract, and they  
8 knew we just did what we had to to get the plant, and things are changin'  
9 already. They understand that. So I think that makes a big difference in the  
10 quality when people work together.  
11  
12Cheryl McQuaid: [29:19] Speaking a the quality, you mentioned that when you were a  
13 Committeeperson you had, you'd have to go out and, ya know, if you liked  
14 workin' with the people, a drunk's a drunk. Was drinking a big issue there?  
15  
16Rusty Zeigler: Oh yeah. Hell, I remember back when hired in, we used to sneak out at lunch,  
17 put rubber bands up on my leg, bring back 2 or 3 pints, a fifth. [coughing]  
18 Drinkin' back then, everybody drank and nobody got in trouble for it.  
19 Everybody covered each other and they did their jobs.  
20  
21Cheryl McQuaid: Rubber bands [throat clearing] on your pants? I don't understand.  
22  
23Rusty Zeigler: Up under the, under my legs to hold the bottles to my legs underneath my  
24 pants...  
25  
26Cheryl McQuaid: Oh.  
27  
28Rusty Zeigler: ...so they didn't fall out goin' back through the guard check; take'm back,  
29 stash'm in your toolbox. I mean, you had'm tucked in your belt, you, you  
30 stashed a bottle – 'cause I mean, one guy might go out and bring back a bottle  
31 for 8, 10 different people, so everybody wanted somethin' different so you'd  
32 bring back more than one bottle. One bottle doesn't go very far with a whole  
33 buncha people drinkin' out of it. I remember that one day, we's bringin' back  
34 some, uh, gin, and that smells like pine, and, eh, one guy accidentally dropped  
35 a fifth on the floor and it broke – didn't get to drink much of it either – and  
36 that boss come walkin' down there and he smelt that and he lookin' around.  
37 'Course we had the glass all cleaned up, but he knew damn well we's drinkin'.  
38  
39 Ya know, and I had this one old boss that we'd set there on Friday night and  
40 we'd all drink. Every time I turn around, I found my glass empty, and I'm  
41 tryin' to figure out why my glass empty. I'm thinkin' one a my guys are  
42 drinkin' my damn booze and my pop, ya know? Finally I kept watchin'; the  
43 supervisor was comin' around there drinkin', ya know, and set the cup back  
44 half empty, ya know, and I'm goin', "Well goddamn." Ya know, he'd come  
45 up and, and he noticed I seen him, so I went and got me another cup, poured  
46 me another drink, mixed it up, set it there, and he'd come down and he'd pick

1 that cup and he sniffed it and he goes, “Ya know,” he said, “I don’t think that  
2 pop’s any good comin’ outta the machine.” He said, “I think it’s stale.” So he  
3 dropped it in the trash can. ‘Cause he knew all, most of us had enough to  
4 drink, we was already gettin’ in bad shape, and he’d come down and just  
5 smell and say, “Oh, that’s bad pop outta the machine. I’ll call and tell’m to get  
6 you a new pop,” then the asshole would throw our pop away, which had our  
7 booze in it. [laughter] [tapping]  
8  
9 Ya know, I’ve seen guys pass out and we stuffed’m in the stock rack till we  
10 could wake him up and go home. [tapping] That don’t happen no more. You  
11 get caught drinkin’ now, your ass is headed for the street. [tapping] You still  
12 got the guys come in drunk, but off to Delta, you ain’t gonna have the drinkin’  
13 problem like you used to have. Harry’s don’t exist.  
14  
15 Cheryl McQuaid: [31:46] What’d you think about Harry’s?  
16  
17 Rusty Zeigler: Harry’s? Created a lotta grief.  
18  
19 Cheryl McQuaid: [31:51] Did you ever go there?  
20  
21 Rusty Zeigler: That man got rich over a lot of our people goin’ over there and losin’ their  
22 paycheck. I mean, he would cash our checks. Some people, by the end a the  
23 week, would just go over and give him the paycheck. I know some guys when  
24 they got ready to go to break, the pitcher a beer already set there, 4 or 5 shots  
25 set there, and it was like they couldn’t get through the day if they didn’t run  
26 over there and have their shot and their beer. Harry got rich off GM and the  
27 guys in that plant. Some a those guys that used to run over there would realize  
28 how much money they blew every week over there, it could sure make their  
29 lives different, and a lotta guys, because it was so convenient, were just  
30 hooked. If they didn’t get to run over and have their beer at break, didn’t get  
31 to run over and have their booze at lunch and their breaks, [coughing] they  
32 actually couldn’t get through the day. One thing about LDT, it’s paid lunch.  
33 You wanna punch out, go ahead, but there ain’t no bar close enough for you to  
34 get to in a half-hour. [tapping]  
35  
36 Cheryl McQuaid: [32:47] What about drugs? Were drugs ever a issue in the plant?  
37  
38 Rusty Zeigler: Oh hell yeah. We used to set there and I’d watch guys smoke, pass a joint up  
39 and down the line. I mean, a guy’d light it, pass it up and down the line, just  
40 go at it steady. There was more than just pot in there. I remember one a my  
41 experiences were – hell, I’s a kid, I didn’t know. I’s a farm boy. Drugs  
42 weren’t somethin’ we did; we worked. And this one kid, guy at work crossed  
43 the line from me comin’ in one day with a hot loaf a zucchini bread, says,  
44 “Hey, here, have a couple slices.” Shit, I was down in the bathroom by lunch  
45 pukin’ my guts, I seen bugs crawlin’ up the wall. That’s back when the true  
46 statement of seein’ pink polka-dotted elephants walkin’ around. [laughter]

1 They said 3, 4 times that night I walked out and they'd go get me and drag me  
2 back, 'cause I didn't know what the hell I was doin', and they'd just – ya  
3 know, most a the guys that he knew knew it, that he laced it with more than  
4 just pot, but hell, I's a farm boy; I didn't know any better. He just gave me  
5 two pieces, so I ate it. It was good bread, didn't taste like nothin' but zucchini  
6 bread. Sure would kill ya, though. [tapping] I puked green for a long time that  
7 night.  
8  
9 Cheryl McQuaid: [33:54] Any idea what he ever laced it with?  
10  
11 Rusty Zeigler: Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. He had pot, ya cook it in butter, and some a the  
12 stuff ya used to spray it with to make it grow. 'Cause he raised it right in his  
13 cornfield, right in the cornrows. He was a good – he raised a lotta pot.  
14 [tapping] Shit would hurt ya. [tapping]  
15  
16 Cheryl McQuaid: [34:16] Rusty, as we get ready to close this interview, is there anything that  
17 you'd like to share with us that we've not asked you?  
18  
19 Rusty Zeigler: No, we've covered a lotta stuff. But it was just a good time. Good memories. I  
20 wouldn't give up these memories I've got from workin' in that plant or  
21 workin' with these people for anything. Uh, I mean, I got enough time right  
22 now to retire, and nope; I, I enjoy workin' with those people out there. And I  
23 do got a lotta things I do outside a here; I race cars, I got my own weld shop,  
24 but I started in that plant and I started this new plant, and I'm gonna finish it.  
25 I'm gonna make sure that car, that damn thing builds cars. Uh, but the  
26 memories, wouldn't trade'm for anything. Most of'm are all good, and the bad  
27 ones, forget the hell about'm; just remember the good ones. Who gives a shit  
28 about the bad memories? Remember the good times.  
29  
30 Cheryl McQuaid: I have one more question for you, Rusty.  
31  
32 Rusty Zeigler: That figures.  
33  
34 Cheryl McQuaid: [35:06] What was one of your favorite jobs in the Plant and one of your worst  
35 jobs?  
36  
37 Rusty Zeigler: Well, I guess I got two fa-, I love doin' garnish mold. When I used to do  
38 garnish mold, it was fun. Good buncha guys to work with. But I love bein' on  
39 committee, I love workin' with the people. And I think actually my least  
40 favorite job was probably when I was Zone. I mean, I love the work, love  
41 doin' it, I love tryin' to make the place what it was, but it wasn't as much fun  
42 as just right there firsthand workin' with the people. I just, I enjoy work-, I  
43 enjoy pickin' on people, I enjoy goofin' around, which I still do. Lotta the  
44 new people come into that plant there don't know me, and I don't mix too  
45 many words and I hate bein' misinterpreted, sometimes "go to hell" is better  
46 to say than a 20-minute political speech 'cause a drunk's a drunk and that's



1 just the bottom line. [laughter] Asshole's an asshole. [throat clearing] Let's  
2 just make it, [laughter] lay it out. So I enjoy it. I mean, I wouldn't trade it for  
3 nothin'. There's a lotta other things I could go do. Nope. I enjoy it.  
4  
5 Cheryl McQuaid: Well, Rusty, thank you so much for spending your afternoon with us.  
6  
7 Jerri Smith: Yes, thank you very much, Rusty.  
8  
9 Rusty Zeigler: Oh, this was fun. [recorder clicking] Was that okay?  
10  
11 Cheryl McQuaid: You did awesome. We knew you would.  
12  
13 Rusty Zeigler: Ugh. [recorder clicking]  
14  
15  
16/rt