

10:15 am

Fisher Body Historical Team

1-13-06

Interviewer = Marilyn Coulter

Interviewee = Calvin Sturdivant

Seniority - 11-8-1949 \$1.18 hr

Married = yes (4) children

Military - No

Education - High school and some college (LCC, MSU)

First Day = He wanted a job very bad then.

First job was cleaning the tracks where the cars go down the line. 8-10 years

Born in Arkansas (High school was in St Louis) working in a shoe factory with a union shop. Came to Michigan at the age of 23. First job in Michigan

was Michigan Fertilizer at .85-.95 & hr

But this was just a seasonal job and layoffs came each year during slowdown. Fisher was a good paying job in the 40's and 50's \$1.18 per hr.

Calvin was raised a sharecropper in Arkansas and he vowed never to be a sharecropper for his whole life.

Atmosphere = Very few black people in the plant at this time. Most people were the wet deck, sanitation, broom cleaner with only a few people that worked on the line. Calvin began to wonder why there was so few black people in Fisher Body. So he

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began to look out for himself, when he transferred to Material Control there was only 1 black person in this dept. Boils then supervision would control the transfer applications. so if they didn't want you they wouldn't let you transfer.

(1963) E eventually he wrote a letter to Walter Penner and did receive a response for writing about discrimination at Fisher Body.

Then he wrote a letter to management about the discrimination from supervision.

E eventually he went to the Labor Relations Dept for this letter writing but he still didn't get the job he transferred to. Daily Routine in the plant: no one would bother you too much. Then the Fisher Body had its first black foreman. Eventually other black people began moving to the preferred jobs in the plant.

Then he went to the scale dept and worked for about a ~~month~~ month and was told he was layed off and a lower security person was brought in. Calvin called a committeemen and was placed back on his job.

Later on the Head engineer was talking to him and looking at his work.

(1970+) then he went into skilled trades in jig & fixture repair and remained until

③ about 20 years later in 1987. This job was working together with the tool makers in Fisher Body. Cal was the first black man in this skilled trade. This was on all white trade. Most of the people got along with Calvin all. felt good about the spat with the fellow co-worker. General forman spoke harshly to Calvin and then spoke to Joe on the side. Cal called his union Rep and the union told General forman that that wasn't right! Speak to both employees! End result was we got along pretty good for awhile Mgt started looking at Cal with a positive eye then. When did you see a change in the race and sex population in the plant? Early 1964 started blacks on the line in production. Women increase about 1966-1967 1st Black woman 1963 Velma Dukes. She didn't stay long 2-3 months then she quit. She was a big girl and it was too much for her. A white lady was put in the body shop in the 70's I think her forman was prejudiced against woman. She messed up! I felt sorry for her! She was fired that night! I remember one incident A white woman was always complaining Her forman told her Like: you know what you can do with it. She told on him and he was fired that night.

(4)

my sister was fired because she hit her
foreman.

Mexicans were in the plant when I
was hired. There were 2 or 3 hispanics on
the gang! They were on the production line.
Where did you learn to type? At home, my
daughter and wife helped me. Schooling - 0-12?
I had a teacher that told us: we could be
Anything we wanted to be. We just have to
study. I believe I had the tools to get
started in life. I wasn't interested in
College. I wanted to make money! I went
to LCC and a term at MSU After I
Retired. One day in May 1987 I was looking
at a Detroit Newspaper! Joe Lewis knocked
out Jimmy Braddock. I thought it would
be nice to write about some of my
stories. The day after I retired I was
watching the Price is Right at Noon. I
was late for school at LCC. I was
embarrassed. I wouldn't look at anybody!
The prof asked if ~~any~~ everybody had a
syllabus.

Retired at age 63. I wasn't active in the
union. I did attend some of the meetings.
Environmental Changes: Getting more Automatic
stuff in the 60's putting ^{more} machines and
doing the job of employees. Just a few.

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They were good about turning down my suggestions. I won some of them, the \$25 ones. One suggestion I put in Mgt used and they sent me a bond for \$25.00. I returned it and said my suggestion was worth more, at least \$75.00. I finally accepted the \$25.00. The next 3 suggestions I put in weren't worth anything but they paid me \$25.00 for each one of them. I think they were making up for the suggestion they didn't pay me for. They knew it was worth more.

Strikes? 1970 was a long strike about 2 months. 11-14-1970 we went out. Cost of living, pay increase. I didn't want to strike, I moved to East Lansing and taxes were pretty high. Picket duty was out front of the plant 8-12. The guys made me captain. When someone came to the plant they had to see me. This ~~that~~ lady wanted to go to the office. I told her she needed to go to the union hall and get a pass. She might have been a plant to see if we would ruff her up.

We walked that night and we were told to leave everything as we found it. So Mgt didn't have any reasons to accuse us of destroying anything.

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My happiest moment was when I was hired
And also when I was promoted into the
Skilled Trades Department. I knew I was
going to get that job.