

At about age twelve I detected a trace of tuberculosis and then I had to attend an open-air school. The open-air school was located over in the Clifford-Michigan area which was deep in the heart of the Polish neighborhood in Detroit at that time. I went to school at Clifford Open-air for about two years and I was deemed as being healthy enough to go back to public school.

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The feeling was that the more good wholesome food a person got and the more rest, the more apt he was to recover. So when they would find a child with tuberculosis or the trace of tuberculosis they would segregate him into the open-air school. The main difference was the curriculum was the same except there was no gym. The authorities saw to it that you got a very wholesome breakfast and a very wholesome midday meal and that you got at least an hour rest. Now it was called an open-air school because the top had a big cage like heavy wire top that opened-- open-air. When the weather was permissible they would open up the roofs and you'd get the open-air, so, that's where the name open-air came from.

In those days I recall to those of us who could not afford a dental treatment. I was sent to the clinic on Michigan Ave. I was so afraid of gas that I think two or three of them had to hold me and just snatch my teeth out.

Prior to WWII the ill child and the needy child was taken care of through the school system. I suppose that's one reason why I always go to a millage regardless of the merits.

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It wasn't the question of the black children being segregated in the class or when you go to the dentist, "black children only", that was not the case.

Well, I attended the Condon Middle School then I attended Northwestern High School. I graduated from Northwestern High in June of 1939 and a few months later I got a job at the Ford Motor Company. My dad was able to go in and talk to Don Marshall. 39.

Don Marshall was a black man, a former policeman, who Henry Ford met. I believe he met him through some of the Episcopalian Church officials. At any rate, Mr. Marshall was given what is known as a star rank which made him, more or less, on the general staff of the Ford Motor Company. Mr. Marshall had the power to hire and to fire. He hired all blacks at the company. Mr. Marshall also had the authority to, when there was a problem, if a Black person could convince him that he had been discriminated against or mistreated, rectify the situation.

Well, I've known of people who got laid off or they'd get fired, and Marshall would investigate and determine that they were maltreated, and the people were put back to work. That's the good side of the coin. The other side of the coin was Mr. Marshall was anti-union and he'd use his influence to do his very best to keep the UAW from becoming organized. Marshall had tremendous influence with the Black ministers and black leadership in Detroit because he's the guy who held the key to

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"who gets the job." And he who worked for Ford in those days, even though they were almost slave-like conditions, economically, was looked up to. The wages were higher then, practically the end of the American industrial enterprise.

At Ford you..... not only Ford, the American industry was not organized in the mass production industries. The employers got as much work out of a man as they possibly could and you had to almost run to keep up with an assembly line job. And I was so shocked. I was hired at the age of eighteen and about five months. After I was hired there was a layoff, and I assumed that being one of the latest hired, I would be the first to go, and I didn't understand it. Being only eighteen years of age and, at that time, in wonderful health, I didn't realize that I was probably performing the work of two or three men and doing it satisfactorily. Well, I never got laid off, and it amazed me. The boss seldom got on my back. I didn't understand that that alone was proof that my work was very satisfactory, but I was young and I was strong.

I wanted to keep the boss off my back and I had the strength and I had the health and I did nothing but eat well, come in from work and then go home and sleep. I didn't drink or smoke. I can realize now that in those days the average man, forty or forty-five years of age, actually, was almost at the end of his rope.

The advances in health care hadn't been made, then, that

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are made now and medicine hadn't been developed to prolong life. Again, those who had to work in industry had to work in desperate conditions because employers at that time didn't particularly provide proper ventilation-- they didn't provide proper safe working conditions, healthy working conditions.

Ironically, the Ford Motor Company was a place where you could almost eat off the floor-- at the Rouge plant they employed possibly 90,000 people, and old Henry Ford wanted his plants clean and so they were kept clean. There were about 5,000 people in the janitorial division, which is a huge number of people. And almost every time that there would be a breakdown, maybe for half a day or half an hour, instead of being sent home we would assist in cleaning up or paint over and paint over again. The place was much cleaner then than it is now. That's a fact.

I vividly remember the grey depression years in Detroit. I have seen people foraging in garbage cans. I have almost been trampled to death, as a little fellow I didn't know what I was doing. I'd go up to the packing house and, in those days certain parts of the animal, such as a heart, kidneys, lungs or chitterlings or the intestines, that are sold now and converted into sausage. They dumped these parts in a tub and then threw them out to hungry people. I almost got trampled one day.

Well, we'd go to the packing house and they'd bring out two or three tubs of kidneys, hearts and all the intestines

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and just put them in some type of a bag and just throw them out into a crowd of people and the people would be scrambling. We did have a welfare system and it was organized but there was no ongoing permanent thing like ADC.

The first welfare system, I'm just going from my personal memory as a youngster, if it did not originate during the depression here in Detroit, it's the first time that it ever operated on a large scale. People were given a script, Detroit printed it's own money for awhile. Paid it's own employees in script, schoolteachers, policemen, firemen. I would dare to say that a good seventy-five percent of the black community was receiving welfare. Because when the automobile plants went down, except for the few who had jobs in the service sector, that was it.