

James Richmond Transcription

James: Yep I was in this dry clean business and, for about a year. I also worked at the Geneva Foundry for about a month.

Kathryn: Oh did you? Didn't like it, huh?

J: well, the work didn't bother me but somehow I decided to walk out.

K: You, are you going to tell me about that?

J: (laughs) Well I worked the night shift went to work about two o'clock in the evening and we finished about eleven o'clock at night.

And at this you know you have to rake the iron out of the coal and I got kind of stopped up with the smoke and I went to the door and the foreman came over and says 'Richmond' says, you, what are you doing?

I says I got stopped up I gotta get some air.

He said you can't do that.

I said oh yes I can.

I says you can take this job, I'm all done. I went to the shower and I left.

K: A lot of people, I mean I've heard a lot about the occupation hazards of working at the foundry.

J: That's right, that's right. And then I saw a sign as I was walking down the, in fact I was unemployed for about a week or two, maybe two weeks.

And I was walking down the street and said let's see if I can go find some work and I put in some applications and I walked into Firestone and asked a fella about a job, said I would like to fill out an application.

He said you ever worked at a gas, pumping gas, or fixing tires before or worked on cars.

I said no, I said, but I can learn.

He said when can you start work?

I said right now.

(laughs)

So I started pumping gas.

K: So who was that? Who hired you?

J: This is at Firestone.

K: Yes, yeah I mean who, what's the name of the guy?

J: Oh he's, George Karl.

He hired me and so I started pumping gas and they taught me how to fix flat tires and stuff like that.

Then eventually he said well we'll have somebody else pump gas and you fix tires. And I started, I learned how to fix all kinds of tires. Even the big tires on yukes, you know, and farm tractor tires, and I would fix all the tires, truck tires. And...

K: did you go around and do that or did they bring tires there?

J: Well they brought tires in then they get a truck and I drive the truck. I'd go out and take the calcium out of the tires and farm tires you know to fix those tires.

I was pretty good at it, I guess.

And then I, I said well I, I'd like to learn something else. and they said okay, what would you like to learn? Then I, they taught me a little mechanical work, brakes and finding alignments and all that stuff. I got pretty good at that.

And then they says, I'll tell you what, Jim, says we will pay you I think it was something like a dollar apiece for each tire that you sell. And then I started selling tires, working in the shop. I would sell a customer a tire and I was so happy when I would receive an extra thirty dollars a month for selling tires and I was only receiving a dollar thirty five an hour. at that time. I think I started at a dollar a quarter.

And at that time it was a dollar and thirty five

and then I started learning how to fix brakes and they'd pay me bonus for, at the end of the month if you went over a certain percentage.

And that's where I saved my money to buy my home, to put a down payment on my home. and then, I did that for a short while and I says, I talked to the manager, I says I'd like to get a job inside the store.

And he kept putting me off and putting me off and putting me off.

I said, I'm qualified I have the education and the talents. So he kept putting me off. So one day the district manager came down.

K: from where?

J: from Syracuse. and he walked back, I was underneath a car and fixing a car and I was clean dressed and the place was nice and clean. He came back says gee, the place is real nice, everything is put away Jim, so you looking good. Says, how's everything going? I said, everything's fine, but I'd like to talk to you. I said, would you have time to talk to me? He said sure, says come on let's go in the office so we went to the, all the way in the office, in the back.

He said what can I do for you? so I told him, I says I gave him a story, look I want to get ahead, I'm qualified to be a salesman inside the store. I says, I'd like to get into that, I'd like to get in the office management. so when I finished talking to him, he says, you going to lunch now?

I said yes. He said, I'll talk to you when you come back

So I came right home to lunch, sitting there having my lunch and he called me up. Says, Jim, says, look I gotta get back to Syracuse, he says, take off the old clothes and put on nice shirt and tie and nice pants and come back.

and that's when I got promoted from a mechanic, or a tire changer, to a budget manager, budget man

And I was a budget man for about six months and I was promoted to budget manager, okay? And I became acquainted to accounts, and etcetera.

At that time we did a lot of repossessing and all that kind of stuff and then from there to office of credit manager and then from there to manager. I worked there twenty nine and a half years.

K: and you're retired from there now?

J: I'm retired from there yeah, at fifty, age of fifty.

K: and how do you know that you were the, what did you say, second black manager of a Firestone?

J: yes, well they told me. in fact they wanted me to be the first. they, everybody was rooting for me to be first, but this fella in Chicago, no in New York City that beat me out about forty days

K: really? that's too bad.

J: and, then I was, they wanted to promote me to Chicago. So they flew me, my wife and I out to Chicago for three or four days. wined us and dined us out there, they wanted me to run a store for one year which was having a little problem, on Miahaga Boulevard. and after that I would supervise 27 stores.

Came back all enthused to do that, of course. and my boys they, my oldest boy specially was involved in the band. he was a wrestler. Anyway they didn't want to leave Geneva.

Had a sign out, took the sign down called them back up and told them I wasn't going to come. So then I stayed here.