

1       **Shelton Tyson, an African American, discusses his career as a production worker**  
2       **and UAW member at the Fisher Body plant in Lansing, MI**  
3  
4

5Marilyn Coulter: Uh, Fisher Body Historical interview with Shelton Tyson. [tapping] Today is  
6                   December [background conversation] 21st, 2005. The time is about 9:00 A.M.  
7                   We're at the Jobs Bank. Uh, lead interview Marilyn Coulter.

8

9Doreen Howard: Doreen Howard.

10

11John Fedewa: John Fedewa.

12

13Marilyn Coulter: [0:20] Um, Mr. Tyson, can you please say and spell your last name for us?

14

15Shelton Tyson: Shelton Tyson, T-Y-S-O-N.

16

17Marilyn Coulter: [0:28] And your address? [background conversation]

18

19Shelton Tyson: 824 Vine Street.

20

21Marilyn Coulter: [0:31] And that's in? [background conversation]

22

23Shelton Tyson: Lansing, Michigan. [background conversation]

24

25Marilyn Coulter: [0:35] Um, and you're a male? Um, are you married, Mr. Tyson?

26

27Shelton Tyson: Yes. I'm married. [background noises]

28

29Marilyn Coulter: [0:40] And children?

30

31Shelton Tyson: Uh, three daughters; 23, 20, and 17.

32

33Marilyn Coulter: All right. [0:44] Were you b-, where were you born?

34

35Shelton Tyson: Detroit, Michigan.

36

37Marilyn Coulter: [0:47] And were you also raised in Detroit?

38

39Shelton Tyson: Yes.

40

41Marilyn Coulter: Okay. [0:51] Um, when did you come to Lansing?

42

43Shelton Tyson: Uh, 1974.

44

45Marilyn Coulter: [background conversation] 1974. [papers rustling] [0:55] What brought you to  
46                   Lansing?

1  
2Shelton Tyson: Um, school. I had a uncle that was at Michigan State and I came up for  
3 school.  
4  
5Marilyn Coulter: Oh, okay. [1:03] So now, your education, you did some college, I take it, or?  
6 [background conversation]  
7  
8Shelton Tyson: Yes...  
9  
10Marilyn Coulter: [Inaudible 1:06].  
11  
12Shelton Tyson: ...um, certification is for corrections officer and still studying criminal justice  
13 geared towards juvenile counseling.  
14  
15Marilyn Coulter: [1:14] And you're taking that where?  
16  
17Shelton Tyson: Uh, Lansing Community College.  
18  
19Marilyn Coulter: Okay. [1:18] Um, were there any military background?  
20  
21Shelton Tyson: No. [background conversation].  
22  
23Marilyn Coulter: [1:20] Um, now what did your parents do?  
24  
25Shelton Tyson: Um, I was raised by my [coughing] grandparents. I was raised by my  
26 grandparents. Um, my grandfather owned a restaurant and a furniture store  
27 [background conversation] and my grandmother was a, um, domestic worker.  
28  
29Marilyn Coulter: Okay. [1:37] Um, what'd you do before you hired into Fisher Body?  
30 [background conversation]  
31  
32Shelton Tyson: I worked for, uh, United Parcel Services for 4 years.  
33  
34Marilyn Coulter: [1:43] You, 4 years, and you, uh, you delivered packages...  
35  
36Shelton Tyson: Uh...  
37  
38Marilyn Coulter: ...[inaudible 1:48].  
39  
40Shelton Tyson: ...it's considered, uh, Pre-sorter, um, maintenance [clicking] person that  
41 washed and [background conversation] fueled vehicles.  
42  
43Marilyn Coulter: Okay. [1:58] Um, [background conversation] what year did you, um,  
44 [background conversation] hire into Fisher Body?  
45  
46Shelton Tyson: Um, November 19th of [papers rustling] 1984. [background conversation]

1  
2 Marilyn Coulter: [2:09] Um, [background conversation] why did you hire into Fisher Body?  
3  
4 Shelton Tyson: Um, the opportunity for benefits for my family and myself. [background  
5 conversation]  
6  
7 Marilyn Coulter: [2:17] So, um, uh, how did you know that they were hiring?  
8  
9 Shelton Tyson: [background conversation] Um, word of mouth, um, friends that found out  
10 that, um, they were gonna be takin' applications. [background conversation]  
11  
12 Marilyn Coulter: So what was your process [background conversation] that you had to go  
13 through? [background conversation]  
14  
15 Shelton Tyson: Um, I went up to the, uh, [background conversation] Unemployment Office  
16 on Cedar, I believe, and, [background conversation] um, got in line and put in  
17 an application. [background conversation]  
18  
19 Marilyn Coulter: [2:39] How long'd you have to stand in line? [background conversation] Were  
20 there a lotta people there?  
21  
22 Shelton Tyson: Oh yeah. Um, lotsa people and, actually, probably stood in line maybe 6  
23 hours.  
24  
25 Marilyn Coulter: 6 hours. [2:52] Um, how long did it take you to find out that you had a job  
26 there?  
27  
28 Shelton Tyson: [background conversation] Um, probably 24 hours.  
29  
30 Marilyn Coulter: 24 hours. [3:06] And so you – what was your process once they contacted  
31 you?  
32  
33 Shelton Tyson: Uh, went in and took a physical and, [background conversation] um, went  
34 from there. [background conversation]  
35  
36 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm. [3:15] Uh, how old were you at the time? [background conversation]  
37  
38 Shelton Tyson: 24.  
39  
40 Marilyn Coulter: [throat clearing] [background conversation] [3:21] So once you came in, um,  
41 what department shift did you [background conversation] hire in on?  
42  
43 Shelton Tyson: Um, I started in in Metal Finish, um, Body Shop, first shift. [background  
44 conversation]  
45

1 Marilyn Coulter: [First shift 3:31] [3:31] So what was your first [background conversation] –  
2 [sighing] um, [background conversation] how do you feel? I mean, what,  
3 [clicking] uh, what'd you feel when you first walked in the Plant?  
4

5 Shelton Tyson: [background conversation] Um, I had grew up around General Motors  
6 factories in Detroit. Um, [background conversation] [throat clearing] and I had  
7 always said that I wouldn't working a factory, um, [background conversation]  
8 but once I walked into one [background conversation] officially as an  
9 employee, it was a good feeling.  
10

11 Marilyn Coulter: It was a good feeling?  
12

13 Shelton Tyson: Yeah.  
14

15 Marilyn Coulter: [3:57] What'd you think of the Body Shop, all the metal?  
16

17 Shelton Tyson: Um, I was amazed of the setup, um, [background conversation] and how safe  
18 it was, considering the equipment and the material that you're around every  
19 day. [background conversation]  
20

21 Marilyn Coulter: [beeping] [4:13] So, um, [background conversation] how did they [throat  
22 clearing] give you job selection? [background conversation]  
23

24 Shelton Tyson: Um, we did a little training period, and the supervisor got to know, you know,  
25 the individuals that were placed in his area. He was a old-school supervisor,  
26 [Charlie Palmley 4:32], [background conversation] um, and I ended up bein' a  
27 Relief Person for him, [background conversation] um, and he explained to me  
28 that the selection of me becomin' a Relief Person [throat clearing] for him  
29 [background conversation] was based on, uh, my job experience and my, uh,  
30 dedication to my previous job.  
31

32 Marilyn Coulter: [4:54] Can you tell me what is a Utility Person?  
33

34 Shelton Tyson: Um, a Utility Person [sniffing – well, actually, a Relief Person is where I  
35 started. A Relief Person, um, went around and gave fellow employees, um,  
36 breaks of, uh, 15, [background conversation] 20 minutes, [background  
37 conversation] um, 2, 3 different times a day, um, for them to, ya know,  
38 [tapping] do what they needed to do to eat and use the restrooms, or just to  
39 rest.  
40

41 Marilyn Coulter: [5:17] Now, isn't a Relief job considered a preferential job?  
42

43 Shelton Tyson: Yes.  
44

45 Marilyn Coulter: [5:22] And how did your coworkers that they had had more time than you take  
46 to you bein' a young person coming in fresh off the street getting a Relief job?

1  
2Shelton Tyson: Great question. Um, there was a lotta animosity towards myself and the  
3 supervisor that he made in putting me in that position. Um, but over time,  
4 [background conversation] um, coworkers understood where he was comin'  
5 from [background conversation] in trying to fit the individuals to particular  
6 jobs.  
7

8Marilyn Coulter: Doreen, did you have a question?  
9

10Doreen Howard: Yes. Um, Doreen Howard. [5:56] Um, [throat clearing] you've touched base  
11 on the Body Shop. What was the surroundings like in there? When you got  
12 into there, what was the physical surroundings of the Body Shop? What was  
13 the size and what was some a the things that you saw as, as an, uh, new  
14 employee comin' in there?  
15

16Shelton Tyson: Um, it was a large, very large area, um, set up very nicely, although it was a  
17 old facility. Um, just all the metal in itself in the Body Shop, [background  
18 conversation] um, was amazing to me, but it was [background movement] a  
19 great area; great supervision, um, good management. [background  
20 conversation] Um, I was kinda blessed that I ended up in that area first.  
21

22Doreen Howard: [6:41] Also you touched base on, um, your supervisor, your first supervisor.  
23 You talked about him as being an old-school supervisor. What's a old-school  
24 supervisor and what was some a the, the things that an old-school supervisor,  
25 uh, valued versus maybe some a the more, uh, up-and-coming supervisors  
26 may have, uh, done for their areas?  
27

28Shelton Tyson: Um, what I mean by old-school, and [papers rustling] I say that in a respectful  
29 way, um, nothin' negative. He was a individual that expected you to stand up  
30 and be accounted for, um, be on time, have your equipment ready to go, um,  
31 be responsible to yourself and your fellow employees, ya know, give respect,  
32 get respect, and I just felt from my bein' raised by my grandparents that that  
33 was a good [sniffing] way to be. [throat clearing]  
34

35Doreen Howard: Okay.  
36

37Marilyn Coulter: [7:44] Um, so, Shelton – Marilyn Coulter – Shelton, what was your first day  
38 like?  
39

40Shelton Tyson: Um, very excited. Um, I had a lotta anxiety, um, just feelin' blessed and  
41 grateful to have the job. Um, [background conversation] first day was, um, ya  
42 know, getting to meet different people and, um, getting the feel for, um, such  
43 a huge facility and the conditions that you would be working under and, um,  
44 understanding what was expected of you, but it was a great experience.  
45 [background conversation]  
46

1 Marilyn Coulter: [8:20] Um, when you came in there, um, do you remember who the first  
2 person that you met or I should say befriended when you came in the Plant?  
3

4 Shelton Tyson: Um, I had high school friends that were already employed, so I was already  
5 familiar with some people that were already established with General Motors,  
6 um, but I did meet some new people that, um, were excited as I was to, um, be  
7 a part of General Motors' family.  
8

9 Doreen Howard: Doreen Howard. [8:59] Um, when you first came in, was there any new-hire  
10 pranks that were pulled on you and, or did you see anyone else getting pranks  
11 pulled on them?  
12

13 Shelton Tyson: Yeah, um, you know, when people already knowin' each other, they did  
14 different things like, uh, [background conversation] take an individual's  
15 gloves when they were on break and putting glue in'm and [laughter] water or,  
16 um, particularly in the, uh, Grinding Booth in the, um, Metal Finish  
17 Department, [background conversation] um, we had to wear what we call, uh,  
18 space suits, um, that you received your oxygen through a tube. Um, people  
19 would put water in those tubes and reconnect'm to ya and you got a shower.  
20 [laughter] So there was some creative things that were done as pranks that we  
21 did to one another.  
22

23 Doreen Howard: Things to pass the time. [throat clearing]  
24

25 Shelton Tyson: Yeah, get to see how your fellow employees take things and [laughter]  
26 [background conversation], um, pass the time and just become closer.  
27 [background conversation]  
28

29 Marilyn Coulter: [10:08] So, um, for the time you've been there, have you always worked in  
30 the Body Shop? [background conversation]  
31

32 Shelton Tyson: Um, no. I've, uh, moved around, [background conversation] um, the Body  
33 Shop, Paint, [papers rustling], Trim, [sniffing] those areas.  
34

35 Marilyn Coulter: [10:20] Out of those three departments, was there a department that you  
36 preferred and why?  
37

38 Shelton Tyson: Um, after bein' experienced and movin' around, um, I think I would prefer the  
39 Body Shop, Metal Finish. Um. [background conversation]  
40

41 Marilyn Coulter: [10:38] Okay, out of those three departments that you worked in, [background  
42 conversation] would you say that the culture of the people was primarily the  
43 same in each department or was there a difference, and if so, what was that  
44 difference? [background conversation]  
45

1 Shelton Tyson: I think in the Body Shop you had, uh, more individuals that were, uh, more  
2 sturdy and rugged, if I may, um, where in Paint and Trim it was more finesse  
3 and laid back. [background conversation]  
4

5 Marilyn Coulter: [11:08] When you say laid back, what do you mean?  
6

7 Shelton Tyson: Um, in Paint and Trim, I think some a the jobs and the setups, um, people  
8 adapted to how they could, um, not really have to be physically demanding,  
9 [background movement] so it wasn't a lot of stress or pressure on the body, so  
10 to speak, so they were kinda like relaxed jobs, so the people were kinda  
11 relaxed.  
12

13 Marilyn Coulter: [11:36] So, when it, when you worked in those departments, what types of  
14 things did you do for lunch and breaks? [background conversation]  
15

16 Shelton Tyson: Um, sometime I would go out for air and visit the bar and get food or, you  
17 know, have a beverage. Um, [background conversation] just have the family  
18 come up and sit in the car and chit chat, see how the kids are doin' for a  
19 minute, um, read newspapers, magazines, talk with fellow workers.  
20

21 Marilyn Coulter: [12:03] So I know that there were a couple of establishments around Fisher  
22 Body. Was there one in particular? I know that there was Gus's, there was an  
23 Irish Pub. Was yours Harry's?  
24

25 Shelton Tyson: From bein' in different departments over different periods a time in my 21  
26 years there, I've, [background conversation] uh, frequent both of Harry's and  
27 Gus's. [background conversation]  
28

29 Marilyn Coulter: [throat clearing] [12:27] And, um, now you said that you also had your family  
30 come up. Now, were you working day shift at that time or night shift?  
31 [background conversation]  
32

33 Shelton Tyson: Uh, shift didn't matter. Um, whatever shift I was on, there would be at least a  
34 couple days out of the week that, um, ya know, once the wife did take the  
35 buyout and leave General Motors, she would bring the kids and herself up to  
36 visit me. [background conversation]  
37

38 Marilyn Coulter: [12:47] So, now you said when she left General Motors. Did you meet your  
39 wife there?  
40

41 Shelton Tyson: Yes.  
42

43 Doreen Howard: Oh.  
44

45 Marilyn Coulter: Oh.  
46

1Doreen Howard: Okay. [laughter]  
2  
3Marilyn Coulter: [12:53] So, [throat clearing] let's hear about it. [laughter] So how did you  
4 meet your wife?  
5  
6Shelton Tyson: Um, through a mutual friend that, um, I had known before I, [background  
7 conversation] myself and her hired into General Motors. Um, she was dating  
8 my roommate and her and my wife now, um, were coworkers in Trim  
9 Department.  
10  
11Marilyn Coulter: Oh. [13:17] So you were in Body Shop and she was in Trim?  
12  
13Shelton Tyson: Yes.  
14  
15Marilyn Coulter: And so you met there and.  
16  
17Shelton Tyson: Um, we actually met at Gus's.  
18  
19Marilyn Coulter: You met at Gus's.  
20  
21Shelton Tyson: Yeah.  
22  
23Marilyn Coulter: [13:24] So how did that work? Did you go up in Trim Shop from the Body  
24 Shop or on the outside?  
25  
26Shelton Tyson: Yeah, once we, uh, met, um, on my breaks and lunch, um, when we both were  
27 still working there, when she was still there, I would go up and visit her, she  
28 would come down and visit me. [background conversation]  
29  
30Marilyn Coulter: [13:40] How long would it take you to get from – was it a long walk?  
31  
32Shelton Tyson: Yeah, it was pretty long and, [background conversation] um, there was, you  
33 know safety-wise supposed to be no running allowed, but I had to run.  
34 [background conversation]  
35  
36Marilyn Coulter: [laughter] So you ran to meet her. [laughter] [13:54] Was it difficult, um,  
37 [background conversation] having and [papers rustling] sustaining a  
38 relationship with a coworker? [background conversation]  
39  
40Shelton Tyson: Um, I think it was helpful, but yet still difficult in some ways. [background  
41 conversation] Um, I think it was helpful that she understood the, um, the  
42 tangibles of, um, having a factory lifestyle. Um, so I think that was a plus.  
43 [background conversation] But on the other hand, the two of being away from  
44 the children all at once, um, was a challenge. [background conversation]  
45  
46Marilyn Coulter: [14:37] And when you say it was a challenge, what do you mean by that?



1  
2 Shelton Tyson: Uh, we're both, both family-oriented people and neither one of us was  
3 comfortable about, [background conversation] um, leavin' kids at home  
4 without either one of us during the night time, which is prime time for family  
5 to be together; you know, after school, after your 9-to-5. Um, so that was a  
6 challenge. [background conversation]  
7  
8 Marilyn Coulter: [15:01] So how long did it, um, [background conversation] was it a challenge  
9 before your wife left General Motors?  
10  
11 Shelton Tyson: Um, she stayed 7 years, um, took the buyout. [background conversation] Um,  
12 I think it was 7. Maybe 5. [background conversation] But, um, [background  
13 conversation] she ended up takin' the buyout and became a at-home mom for  
14 a couple years and then got in with the City of Lansing and Lansing School  
15 District. [background conversation]  
16  
17 Doreen Howard: Doreen Howard. [15:31] Um, as a working couple here, um, you talked about  
18 some a the challenges that you were face with both of you being employed.  
19 Um, what were some a those challenges that you, you had to overcome, um,  
20 and, ya know, did you work out the shifts? How did, how did you manage the  
21 family aspect?  
22  
23 Shelton Tyson: Um, while we both were still working and working nights, um, [papers  
24 rustling] my mother-in-law babysat the children because we felt we needed to  
25 have a family member do it, um, for those hours and that it would better off  
26 for all, we would be more relaxed about a family member that we trusted  
27 [papers rustling] doin] it. Um, [background conversation] just the overall  
28 lifestyle of bein' a factory employee and bein' on nights, um, you had  
29 challenges such as, um, [background conversation] substances bein' a way a  
30 life for most of your coworkers and yourself and if you didn't indulge before  
31 you got there, you maybe have dabbled and dabbled while you were there.  
32 Um, so that was a challenge. And, [background conversation] um, both of us  
33 were able to successfully control that and not, um, let it get to the point a  
34 rehab or any of that. Um, challenge of getting the kids to understand that mom  
35 and dad love them but yet we still had to work to provide for them. Um, the  
36 education of trying to [background conversation] learn on the job about  
37 people and life and, um, just different things [background conversation] that  
38 come with the lifestyle of bein' a factory worker, um, and I wouldn't trade the  
39 experience for anything. [background conversation]  
40  
41 Marilyn Coulter: Marilyn Coulter. [17:19] What were some a the things that you say that you  
42 learned about people? [background conversation]  
43  
44 Shelton Tyson: Um, in learning about people in this area of, uh, work and life, I learned that  
45 General Motors, um, and BOC Fisher Body particularly [background  
46 conversation] had a good attitude about caring for one another and helping

1 one another and, um, doin' the best that we could on any level to all be  
2 successful.  
3  
4 Marilyn Coulter: Doreen?  
5  
6 Doreen Howard: Doreen Howard. [18:01] Um, touching base on, uh, having coworkers, uh,  
7 impact you and your family in the way that they did, what is some a the things  
8 that, um, you did during work as, like, a, a family, a work family? Were you  
9 involved with any of the dinners or, or collections for different, um,  
10 organizations or, or what type of things did you do, uh, during your, your  
11 lunch hours or, or anything like that that, um, on a personal basis with your  
12 [throat clearing] coworkers?  
13  
14 Shelton Tyson: Um, [background conversation] we both would contribute to the Un-, United  
15 Way, um, every year. Um, we're both pretty active in the neighborhoods. Um,  
16 as far as things at work, like the coat drives or food bank drives and things of  
17 that nature, or any donations that were asked of us, we would always try to  
18 contribute. Um, and the other question was?  
19  
20 Doreen Howard: As far as like, um, during your, your lunchtimes? You said sometimes you  
21 would go out and, and have drinks. Um, did you ever, um, do anything in the  
22 Plant? I know a lotta people would play cards and, and socialize at  
23 lunchtimes. Were you ever involved in any a the other activities that people  
24 would do during the lunchtimes?  
25  
26 Shelton Tyson: Yes, um, fortunately, we had a basketball court up in Paint, um, so, um, when  
27 I was in Body and Trim, if I had the time, I would go up to Paint and shoot  
28 baskets, um, or when I worked in Paint I would. Um, there was days you  
29 played cards, you know, winter weather, you stayed in if you didn't want fresh  
30 air or didn't have the visitors come up, the family come up. Um, chess,  
31 checkers, um, arts and crafts. [background conversation] Just a large variety of  
32 things in which, you know, people were creative about either having already  
33 there or bringin' in to, uh, enjoy your time away from home.  
34  
35 Marilyn Coulter: [20:14] What types of arts did you do, Shelton?  
36  
37 Shelton Tyson: [background conversation] Um, like, uh, your, uh, drawings or colors of, uh,  
38 tryin' to think of the, uh, particular, uh, name that they called this, but it's like  
39 drawings of different things and you just color-code and fill'm in.  
40  
41 Doreen Howard: Oh, okay, like [toll 20:42] painting or [inaudible 20:44]?  
42  
43 Shelton Tyson: Somethin' like that.  
44  
45 Marilyn Coulter: Oh, okay.  
46

1 Shelton Tyson: Um, so they were really nice. They were simple to just have your colors and  
2 know what went where, and you just sit down and do it and...  
3  
4 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
5  
6 Shelton Tyson: ...ya know, the kids got a kick outta that if I did'm at work and brought'm  
7 home. "Well how you, how you have time to do this?" [laughter] You know,  
8 "You said you were workin'".  
9  
10 Marilyn Coulter: [21:02] So, um, what are some a the things that you did to pass your time  
11 while you worked? Um, did you read, did you listen to music? What types of  
12 things did you do?  
13  
14 Shelton Tyson: Basically my thing to pass time was conversation, um, to learn about my  
15 coworkers and have them teach me things that they were interested in that I  
16 didn't know or vice versa; um, talk about sports, talk about school, talk about  
17 politics, um, raising children, marriage.  
18  
19 Marilyn Coulter: [21:36] So, what would you say was one of the most interesting things that  
20 you learned while you were working there, from a coworker? [background  
21 conversation]  
22  
23 Shelton Tyson: Um, one of the most interesting things that I learned from a coworker...  
24  
25 Marilyn Coulter: Uh.  
26  
27 Shelton Tyson: ...while working there. That females were able to do as good [sniffing] or a  
28 better job as the males and still had the energy, the strength, and the  
29 intelligence to raise children also. [background conversation] I mean, I was  
30 really amazed. I mean, I would go home and sleep and my wife would get  
31 kids up for school [background conversation] and she would be able to still  
32 come back in and do a 9, 10-hour shift and I would be complainin' that I'm  
33 tired and she would be like, "That's pitiful." [laughter] "I'm raising children  
34 and gettin' up in the middle a the night with a baby and I'm still doin' the  
35 same hours you're doin', so if you're tired, what do you think I am?" So that  
36 was one a the things that I learnt about coworkers and from coworkers is that  
37 a lotta individuals, especially the females in this f-, area, field of, [papers  
38 rustling] uh, employment are very strong will-minded, um, dedicated  
39 individuals. [background conversation]  
40  
41 Marilyn Coulter: [22:57] Um, outside of your wife, did you have other coworkers that, uh,  
42 impacted your life and [chair squeaking] affected your life outside of the  
43 Plant, [background conversation] ya know, friendships that extended outside a  
44 the Plant?  
45

1 Shelton Tyson: Yes. [background conversation] Um, like I said, some before I went in that  
2 were [background movement] already established, um [papers rustling], that  
3 were established there and, um, still [papers rustling] real close to the same  
4 people today. Um, anyone – and you want names, or?  
5

6 Marilyn Coulter: Well, if you have some people that you became particularly close to.  
7

8 Shelton Tyson: Um, Marilyn Coulter, um, [Charmane Price 23:32], um, [Craig Johnson  
9 23:36], [Craig Sanders 23:37]. [background conversation] Um, there's quite a  
10 few people. [background conversation] Um, I don't know if a lotta people  
11 remember some a the older gentleman, but [Kirk Young 23:48] and, um.  
12 [papers rustling]  
13

14 Marilyn Coulter: [23:52] So Kirk Young, [papers rustling] the one [papers rustling] he was also  
15 considered Body Shop Kirk? [throat clearing]  
16

17 Shelton Tyson: He's considered Body Shop Kirk, [sniffing] but he worked in Trim as a door  
18 hood and trunk adjuster.  
19

20 Marilyn Coulter: [24:02] Now, he was one who retired many years ago with I believe 36 years  
21 of, uh, uh, employment. Can you s-, tell me something that a man who was  
22 old enough to be your father at the time, or grandfather actually, um, might  
23 have, uh, how he impacted your life? [background conversation]  
24

25 Shelton Tyson: With Mr. Young, and I don't wanna get emotional here, he's now deceased,  
26 but, um, [background movement] my relationship with him started outside the  
27 Plant. Um, when I moved here from Detroit, he didn't, um, stay too far from  
28 me; um, [background conversation] couple doors, maybe, and around the  
29 corner. Um, I went to school with his children [coughing] but, [coughing] uh,  
30 work ethic, from a work ethic standpoint, um, [background conversation] I  
31 took notice how a single father [chair squeaking] was raising a large number  
32 of children, I believe 7 or 8, and still was able to do [background  
33 conversation] 9, 10, 11-hour shift at General Motors, and didn't miss a day,  
34 for many years, [background conversation] and I observed that as a teenager,  
35 and when my opportunity came to be employed with Fisher Body, um, and  
36 was able to actually go and see him do his job performance and talk to him.  
37 Um, like you said earlier, father figure, grandfather figure that, ya know, not  
38 only taught me things outside work but took me under his wing and taught me  
39 things inside work about the lifestyle and the culture of a factory employee.  
40

41 Marilyn Coulter: [25:49] As a factory employee, [background conversation] um, what's one a  
42 the things that he impacted you on?  
43

44 Shelton Tyson: Um, [throat clearing] bein' the best at your job. [background conversation]  
45 Um, bein' the most [background conversation] depended upon person  
46 [background conversation] possible. Um, [background conversation] ya know,

1 he taught me that if your supervisors had no worry about you bein' to work or  
2 bein' healthy to do your job or, um, not having personal issues [background  
3 movement] that you brought in the Plant, then you will have a very successful  
4 career and very few bumps along the way.  
5

6Marilyn Coulter: Um, just for the record, um, **Kirk** Young was known as Body Shop **Kirk**, he  
7 was a Repairman, and, um, [background conversation] he worked 36 years in  
8 the Plant and he never took a sick day or vacation, and that was one a the  
9 things that they had put in our in-plant newspaper at the time, 'cause he was  
10 one a the first persons that they said had never been sick and never took a  
11 vacation in 36 years. [background conversation]  
12

13Doreen Howard: Can you imagine that? [laughter] That's a lot. [throat clearing]  
14

15Marilyn Coulter: Doreen?  
16

17Doreen Howard: Doreen Howard. [27:09] Um, during your time at Fisher Body, what were  
18 some a the significant changes that you saw happen within the facility?  
19 [background conversation] What, what, uh, changes did that, as far as like, um  
20 [papers rustling], supervisors or maybe women in the workplace, minorities in  
21 the workplace. What, what changes did, did you see and how did they impact  
22 you?  
23

24Shelton Tyson: Um, going back to how strong a lot of the females in this field are and were,  
25 um, those were changes for me to see, and from '84 up to now, [background  
26 conversation] there's still a lotta positives [background conversation] of those  
27 changes that I'm still seeing. Um, [background conversation] just the impact  
28 of such a [background movement] possibility of havin' a good job, of a  
29 positive impact it's had on the [background conversation] families.  
30 [background conversation] Um, those are a few.  
31

32Doreen Howard: [28:21] Um, as a minority male in the facility, did that ever affect any of your  
33 work history...  
34

35Shelton Tyson: No.  
36

37Doreen Howard: ...in any way?  
38

39Shelton Tyson: No. Um, [background conversation] I think I was, uh, [background  
40 conversation] given a fair opportunity to be and individual [background  
41 conversation] and, um, either put up or shut; [background conversation] keep  
42 a job or get to steppin'. [background conversation]  
43

44Marilyn Coulter: [28:50] Um, when you were there, did you ever have any what we call  
45 "government job"? **Inaudible** 28:54] Skilled Trade person ever do something  
46 special for you to make your job better, make anything for you?

1  
2 Shelton Tyson: In terms of, um.  
3  
4 Marilyn Coulter: Mi-, might be a toolbox, might be [inaudible 29:06].  
5  
6 Shelton Tyson: Hm. Um, I've had some Skilled Trades people who have, um, like, uh, Mr.  
7 [Bob Sanford 29:16].  
8  
9 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
10  
11 Shelton Tyson: Um, [background conversation] um, [background conversation] Mr. [Stanton  
12 29:23]. Tryin' to think of his first name, but, [background conversation] um,  
13 Stanton. [Levon Stanton 29:28]. Um, those are just two individuals that, um,  
14 [background conversation] contribute to, uh, [background conversation] ya  
15 know, bein' on Skilled Trades and making toolboxes or whatnot that I could  
16 put radios in or pop or my own personal stuff just to keep in a certain area  
17 close to my work bench.  
18  
19 Marilyn Coulter: [29:48] So was the radio a big part of your night?  
20  
21 Shelton Tyson: [background conversation] Very much so. Um, if I had a radio and I was able  
22 to keep myself motivated, um, it made the night go by faster when I wasn't  
23 trying to learn from my coworkers or them from me.  
24  
25 Doreen Howard: Doreen Howard. [30:07] Um, you talked about having, [background  
26 conversation] for example, pop. Um, I know there was quite a few people who  
27 had businesses within the business. Can, can you talk about that and the  
28 culture behind that [background conversation] in the Plant? [background  
29 conversation]  
30  
31 Shelton Tyson: Yeah, um, [laughter] I ended up bein' one a those people that experimented  
32 with that, of having a little snack shop set up. Um, it was a learning  
33 experience and it wasn't for the money; it was to, um, have things in your area  
34 that, um, you enjoy to consume, [papers rustling] um, and to help your  
35 coworkers out and that, as well. [background conversation] Um, I think  
36 beverages and snacks are a big part of our, uh, culture within the Plant and,  
37 um, ya know, some things are healthy and some things aren't, but you need  
38 both. [laughter]  
39  
40 Marilyn Coulter: [31:07] Um, [laughter] were you ever active in your union?  
41  
42 Shelton Tyson: [background conversation] Um, not as much as [throat clearing] I should have  
43 been and I'm ashamed to say that, um, and I need to be more, um [papers  
44 rustling], but [background conversation] a lot of people in which I'm, um,  
45 friends with, good coworkers, good people that I know that are involved. Um,

1 I think if they put the heat to me a little more, I would get involved.  
2 [background conversation]  
3

4Doreen Howard: Doreen Howard. [31:41] Um, early on, uh, you talked about some of the, the  
5 benefits and, as the one a the reasons why you came to work for, uh, Fisher  
6 Body and, um, the benefits that you had and your wife also had in working  
7 here. Um, what do you feel was one a the more important benefits and, uh,  
8 that you received from working here? And, um, you talked about your  
9 education. Were you ever able to, um, use the tuition assistance program to  
10 help [papers rustling] further your education?  
11

12Shelton Tyson: Uh, yes. Um, the benefits package in [papers rustling] terms of health was my  
13 main, um, target, you know, outside of the rate of pay, but with health  
14 coverage bein' a issue in America, um, that was one a the reasons I opted  
15 from UPS to General Motors; um, a better health coverage package and with  
16 the, uh, tuit-, tuition assistance program and EOP when you're out here in the  
17 job bank, um, I've taken total advantage of it and, uh, especially last 2 years  
18 that I've been laid off. Um, previous to that, I did use it some, um, when I was  
19 laid off [papers rustling] for about 13 months. I used it to get, um,  
20 [background conversation] certification for a, um, [papers rustling] corrections  
21 officer certification. Um, the EOP program is, um, [background conversation]  
22 Employee Opportunity Program, [background conversation] um, for  
23 education, and, um, [background conversation] I think, um, General Motors  
24 and, [background conversation] um, our union representatives, um, have  
25 gotten together and done a great job of giving the workers an opportunity to,  
26 um, do some positive things with their time, um, to better themselves  
27 educational-wise, career-wise, and even on a personal level, [background  
28 conversation] um, you know, to, um, just overall better our lifestyles.  
29

30Doreen Howard: [33:59] Now, was your w-, your wife, uh, able to, uh, use any of the benefits  
31 in, uh, as far as education? [background conversation]  
32

33Shelton Tyson: No. Um.  
34

35Doreen Howard: I know she was busy having children and children and quite busy...  
36

37Shelton Tyson: Yeah.  
38

39Doreen Howard: ...outside the [inaudible 34:14]...  
40

41Shelton Tyson: Between...  
42

43Doreen Howard: ...[inaudible 34:14].  
44

45Shelton Tyson: ...between 9, 10 hours at the Plant and raisin' children, um, she felt like that  
46 was education enough.

1  
2 Marilyn Coulter: [34:24] Um, as we come to a close, are there, um, are there any areas that we  
3 haven't touched on that, um, you'd like to speak of?  
4  
5 Shelton Tyson: Um, yeah, I think, um, when you mentioned the involvement in the union, um,  
6 as I said earlier bein' ashamed of [papers rustling] my lack of support of doing  
7 more things, [throat clearing] I think [background conversation] something  
8 needs to be done to kind of force some employees to participate more.  
9 [background conversation]  
10  
11 Marilyn Coulter: [34:24] How – being someone [background conversation] who, who is active  
12 in the union, how can people – [background conversation] what would you  
13 suggest we could do to get people active in the labor union?  
14  
15 Shelton Tyson: Um, I think if like we're into the team build concept.  
16  
17 Marilyn Coulter: Mm-hm.  
18  
19 Shelton Tyson: And I think we could take that and [background conversation] use it also in a  
20 way of having our employees like not only rotate on the job, but when there  
21 are certain things that the union needs help with, [background conversation] I  
22 think that [background conversation] each group [background conversation]  
23 should have to send a member to something in participation with the union  
24 whenever and however they need'm, and if you do it on the rotation base,  
25 everybody gets involved, um, it's mandatory, and I think from there, you will  
26 get some people [papers rustling] who may not have otherwise even wanted to  
27 take a interest in the union, that they would.  
28  
29 Marilyn Coulter: [36:23] One other question. Um, when you hired in, did you have any union  
30 awareness classes? [background conversation] When you first hired in or did  
31 you go straight into the Plant?  
32  
33 Shelton Tyson: Straight into the Plant.  
34  
35 Marilyn Coulter: [background conversation] So that's [inaudible] 36:39].  
36  
37 Shelton Tyson: Right, lack of information and, [throat clearing] um, how important it is  
38 [background conversation] to be involved.  
39  
40 Marilyn Coulter: [36:48] Do you vote in your union elections?  
41  
42 Shelton Tyson: Yes. Yes, I do.  
43  
44 Doreen Howard: Well, I guess, um, [background conversation] Doreen Howard. [37:00] As the  
45 time has closed on the Fisher Plant, is there any, uh, special memory, uh,  
46 happy, sad, funny that, that you can recall that you'd wanna share with us?



1  
2Shelton Tyson: Sure. Um, probably 99.9% [tapping] of my experience at Fisher Body was all  
3 good. Um, I was fortunate enough to meet my wife there; um, good person,  
4 good mother, hard worker. Um, I was also able to meet other individuals, um,  
5 have gotten to know them well. Um, an experience that jumps right out at me,  
6 uh, we were on strike one year and when it was my turn to walk the picket  
7 line, um, at the time, my youngest daughter was probably 3, and she wanted to  
8 come up and walk with me. So, um, I have pictures of that and, um, since  
9 Fisher Body has closed, I have, um, taken a video camera and I've gone from  
10 the Irish Pub, up Verlinden, and filmed the backside a the Plant, parking lot,  
11 um, Harry's, the front a the parking lot, [background conversation] um, all the  
12 way around to Michigan and Sexton and Gus's and the Union Hall. Um, one a  
13 my more recent fond memories is, um, the year before I got laid off, um, my  
14 first grandchild, a son, a boy, um, he's 4 now, he would come up and to this  
15 day he remembers that building, um, who works there, um, and what it stands  
16 for. [background conversation] So I've taken him back and taken pictures by  
17 signs and different things like that, put it in a scrapbook for him.  
18  
19Marilyn Coulter: [39:12] How does it make you feel knowing that in a very short time that  
20 building's gonna be totally gone?  
21  
22Shelton Tyson: Um, it's devastating, um, in an emotional way, um, not just economical, um,  
23 but I was kind of, uh, unfortunately prepared for this because, um, prior in the  
24 interview, like I spoke of, um, I grew up around General Motors factories in  
25 Detroit. Um, Fisher Body Plant that built the Cadillac Fleetwood and, um,  
26 some other plants there, and when General Motors pulled out, um, one a those  
27 buildings was torn down and 2 of'm are still standin' today as eyesores. So,  
28 I've kind of already seen, [throat clearing] ya know, and been able to get that  
29 [papers rustling] emotional feel for what it means not only to myself  
30 personally but to the community. And it, it's sad, but yet, you know, if, if  
31 they're going to do something positive to, uh, make sure that the, uh,  
32 [background conversation] the safety of the community around it is good, then  
33 I'm rollin' with the flow.  
34  
35Doreen Howard: Doreen Howard. I had one last question. [40:34] Um, you, you talked about,  
36 uh, how General Motors affected you as a young man. Um, what, what type a  
37 vehicles do you drive and have you ever purchases any a the vehicles that we  
38 build here at Fisher Body?  
39  
40Shelton Tyson: Um, I personally have not purchased a vehicle in which we have built, um, at  
41 Fisher Body ourselves, but my very first probably 6 months of bein' employed  
42 with General Motors, um, probably 4 a my family members ran out and  
43 bought, um, the Buick Skylark and, um, a Grand Am and an Achieva and, ya  
44 know, things of that nature.  
45  
46Marilyn Coulter: [41:17] But do you, do, but do you buy General Motors products?

1  
2Shelton Tyson: Yes, I, um, [laughter] I actually collect, um, Cadillac Sevilles, General Motors  
3 products, um, between the years of 1976 and '79, I currently own six of those.  
4 Um, a Chevy 20 conversion van. Um, I just recently purchased a, um, 1999  
5 Cadillac Catera for my 17-year-old. So, I won't drive anything but General  
6 Motors vehicle.  
7  
8Doreen Howard: Very nice.  
9  
10Shelton Tyson: And a Chevy truck.  
11  
12Marilyn Coulter: Well, thank you.  
13  
14Doreen Howard: Thank you, thank you very much for your interview.  
15  
16John Fedewa: [throat clearing] Thank you.  
17  
18Marilyn Coulter: Thank you, [inaudible 41:53].  
19  
20Shelton Tyson: Thank you all.  
21  
22  
23/rt