

Vern Cook  
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- IA: ... make sure this tape is gone far enough. This is February 6, 1992, Reo Olds Museum, Shirley Bradley, Lisa Fine. We are going to be interviewing Vern Cook on his Reo memories.
- IB: Don't know until it happens. Okay, this is for Vern Cook, February 5, 1992, 9:30.
- Cook: Now what do you want me to do?
- IA: We'll just start asking you some questions and then we'll start rolling your way.
- IB: Why don't you just tell us to start off when you worked at Reo.
- Cook: Okay.
- IB: When you started and
- Cook: I started in 1944 because I turned 17 in 1944.
- IB: Okay.
- Cook: And very shortly, either a month or two after then I got to working at Reo. Ironically the only way I could get in there was to be a sweeper, which was a good job and ah, but it wasn't very long before I transferred over into stock control. And ah, so then I was a stock chaser around the final assembly line. I had an area that I covered was the frame line and ah, I had to do is go all through the plant and get bolts and nuts and parts and I had a series, a section in there that I had to keep supplied with all the different stuff that they use to assemble a truck. They were building Army trucks, the 6 by 6 Army trucks. And ah, I worked at that until I got drafted. And then I went in the Service and I come back in a couple years.
- IB: Oh so you were drafted late in the war.
- Cook: Yeah.
- IB: Because you were young.
- Cook: Yeah. I was drafted in '45.
- IA: Yeah, that's like my dad.
- Cook: And ah so and the war wasn't completely over with, but it ended before I got out of basic training and then ah, I came home and went to New York and took off for Germany and ah, spent a year in Germany.
- IA: After, during the occupation?

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Cook: Yeah, and your dad there too about then?

IA: Yeah, that's right.

Cook: Okay.

IB: You already told me about the destruction.

Cook: Yeah it was terrible.

IA: Yeah, it was very devastating.

Cook: And so anyhow I came back. It must have been '47 and ah, I worked until 1948 and then I left and went to work for the State. Because of the Reo was ... down and I was only working like a half a day a week or something like that and so I got an opportunity to go to work for the state. Fortunately, I took that. (laughter)

IA: What kind of wages were you making before, when you went in at the age of 17 and then what did you make when you came back from the Service?

Cook: As near as I can recollect, at my start in as a sweeper, it was about like, it was around \$1 an hour. And then when I went to work on the line, I was making well I was working stock chaser on the line. I was making about \$1.10 an hour, which was maybe just a very little bit less than the people working on the line actually. And ah, then when I came back from the service I was, I went to work in the export department as as stock chaser yet. But I had to use an electric truck to go all over the plant and pick up stuff and then I ah transferred into the motor plant and I had a group of men that were machining different parts and I had an electric hand truck that I took stock to their machines and then I'd take the machine parts away and put the other. They were a great group of guys and had been there for umpteen years, they just treated me awfully nice.

IB: Old-timers?

Cook: Old-timers.

IA: Do you remember any of their names?

Cook: Ah, no I can't really remember their names.

IA: But they were nice to you huh?

Cook: Oh they were exceptionally nice to me. And

IB: And they taught you the ropes?

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Cook: Oh huh, huh, I used to stand around and ah, if one of their machines would break down, well maybe automatic ah, device on it or something like that, why I'd stand there and help holding buttons so they could get their number of pieces out. They were piecework.

IA: Right.

Cook: And actually, I would made just a very little bit less than they did. I just didn't have to sweat it quite the same way.

IA: You didn't have to make production.

Cook: Yeah, and they hated foreman especially hated and I wished I could think of his name. He was a nice guy.

IA: This is when you first started.

Cook: No when I came back.

IA: When you came back. Would this be in export?

Cook: No, in motor plant.

IA: In the motor plant.

IB: Oh in the motor plant.

Cook: And ah, they wanted me to stay, but they couldn't help it, they had to lay me off.

IA: Why was there a layoff?

Cook: Well, because it was after the war and the truck production, the military contracts were gone. And ah, so they just didn't have that many orders for the regular trucks at the time.

IB: There were several strikes too in that period of time, weren't there, coal, steel and railway, that slowed production a lot.

Cook: Yeah, there was a lot of that kind of stuff, but just everything was generally slowing way down. And so ah, when I quit I ah, got this opportunity to go to work for the state, which I had already worked in the same place originally before I went to the Reo. I kind of made a circle.

IA: I see, ah huh.

Cook: And ah, I was making \$1.46 an hour and I went to work for the state at \$1.06.

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IB: A little lower, yeah.

Cook: The difference is, of course, I wasn't getting in oh maybe four or eight hours a week work at the Reo and ah, at the state I was getting 40 hours a week consistently so, actually making more money, which is really what I had to have.

IA: When you ah, went in at the age of 17, did your dad help you get into the shop or?

Cook: Oh yeah, he used what little influence he had to help get me in. Because, of course, they really didn't want to go ahead and put hire somebody at 17 to bad, because you were restricted as to what you could do. In other words, technically I wasn't suppose to be driving any kind of power equipment, but I drove all the time because I had to on my job. I had to move stuff around, so

IA: Nobody ever challenged you?

Cook: They never bothered me. Interesting thing at the time, of course, was the war going on. We all had a badge that ah, had our picture on it and you had different color codes on it. And I had one that I could go all over the plant. I thought that was pretty neat, because, well of course, I had to do that anyhow.

IB: And that's what the badge was signed to show who could go where?

Cook: It would be, I think I had a gold badge and that meant gold stripe underneath it and that meant that I was able to go in restricted areas, all different parts of the plant and if you had a say a red stripe in there, you was maybe in the roller plant, if you had a yellow

IA: Is that for security for the war?

Cook: Yeah. Yeah. Security purposes. So I thought that was pretty neat then .... (laughter)

IB: Yeah.

IA: When you came back after the war and went back to work, you didn't have to have that type of badge?

Cook: No.

IA: You just had a general

Cook: No, then we just had a badge with a number on it.

IB: So they knew you were an employee.

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Cook: Yeah, but you'd just go in and punch in and ah, so I got around a lot of different places, of course, and ah,

IA: Were there a lot of women working there during the war?

Cook: Oh yeah, I met my wife there.

IA: Oh you did.

Cook: Yeah.

IA: Another one.

Cook: She

IA: Not another wife, I mean

IB: Another one who met his wife at the Reo?

Cook: Yeah. She was working on the transmission line. And ah, then we had an inventory, so ah, she was writing, doing the writing for it and I was doing the accounting and that's how I come to meet her. In most cases I didn't really get friendly with too many of the women, because they were a great deal older than I was.

IA: Ah huh they were already

Cook: .... they were

IA: Married and had families already.

Cook: Yeah.

IA: Yeah.

Cook: Even a woman when you are 17, even a woman at 25 or 30 seems pretty old. (laughter)

IB : Sure, sure.

Cook: It does at 17.

IB: Sure.

IA: Seventeen, you had graduated from high school?

Cook: No. I quit school.

IA: What grade did you quit school in?

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Cook: I was in the 11th.

IA: And you quit so you could get a job.

Cook: Yeah, because I couldn't concentrate on that. I wanted to get out and get in the service and my folks had to sign for me to go in, I was going in at 17 .....

IA: Oh they didn't want you to go in? They wanted you to get

Cook: No, my brother was already in there and you know, a lot of friends getting killed and so on and they wouldn't go for it. And, of course, I was just totally unhappy. And

IB: You felt left behind.

Cook: Oh yeah, I really hated that, so had they signed I would have went, but so I just had to sweat it out then.

IA: My dad had to have his parents sign for him too. Yeah.

Cook: Oh yeah. When I got drafted that was the happiest day of my life.

IA: Isn't that something.

IB: My dad was delirious when he enlisted.

Cook: Oh yeah.

IB: He really wanted to go.

Cook: Yeah.

IB: He already started at a little college, but he quit to go overseas.

Cook: Ah huh sure. That was a common thing.

IB: Yeah.

IA: Oh sure it was.

IB: My husband's father in the first World War wanted to get into the first World War and America wasn't in yet. And he was going to the U of M. So, he heard of a program and he could go in with the Canadian forces.

Cook: Oh sure.

IB: So he ah, he and a group of his fraternity brothers did that and he served with the Canadian forces for quite a period of time before America got into it and he transferred over.

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Cook: They had them in the same thing for World War II. There was a lot of people in the Canadian forces.

IA: Yeah.

IB: True. True.

Cook: Fliers and what else.

IA: Um, so you were born and lived in Lansing most of your life, all of your life?

Cook: All of my life, ah huh. Born right in the north end of Lansing.

IA: And your father

Cook: Well now he was born in Bay City. And ah, he came to work in Lansing. He worked at the old Auto Body at first, when he first came here.

IA: The Auto Body?

Cook: Now that was down on ah, on Turner Street.

IB: Oh in north Lansing.

IA: Oh.

Cook: In north Lansing, the big old building there and that was

IA: The corner of Turner and Grand River.

Cook: Turner and Grand River.

IA: Oh sure.

IB: Victor Auto Body.

Cook: Yeah, that's where he worked.

IB: Brings up something I heard last week from a lady.

Cook: Oh really?

IB: You know around what year he came from Bay City? Did he come

Cook: No.

IB: You don't know.

Cook: I don't honestly know.

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IB: Okay, but he came to work.

Cook: He came here to work, yeah. And then my mother came from ah, St. Johns and how they came to come in contact, I have no idea.

IB: What was your dad's name?

Cook: Ralph, Ralph Cook. Ah huh. ....

IB: And then he went from Victor Auto Body to Reo.

Cook: Ah huh.

IA: What, about when would that have been do you think?

Cook: Well, I'm guessing that he I think he worked at the Reo all the time that my, that my sisters were around as near as I can figure out. .... My older sister is 74, so now if you deduct 74 by .... what do we got.

IB: Pretty close to 1920.

Cook: Okay, and then I'd have to say it was right in that area.

IB: Well a little early, 1919, 1918 or something like that.

IA: Like at the end of the first World War.

IB: Yeah, around the time of the war.

Cook: Yeah. Yeah, I would guess that's probably when he went over there.

IA: Yeah.

IB: Do you remember what he, as he told you as you were growing up what he did when he worked at the shop? What he started out doing or what the conditions were like or

Cook: The conditions were extremely bad. And he worked in the punch press department and ah, he worked in the punch press department all the time that he worked there, but of course, before he got done he ah, he was doing a great deal less laborer's work. Because, of course, he'd gotten older. He got injured, he had the end of his finger nipped off in the punch press.

IB: What kind of benefits did he get, did they

IA: Didn't help him, nothing.

Cook: Nothing, no.

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IA: What about doctor bills and that sort of thing for the finger?

Cook: You know, I never asked him about that.

IA: I was just curious.

Cook: I don't know how that worked out, but he had time off for it to heal up and when it healed up, he went back to work.

IB: Well at least they kept his job.

IA: That's more than most

Cook: That's about the extent of the benefits they had.

IA: You said things were really bad, what?

Cook: Well you know, the working conditions were extremely bad and then, of course, if a foreman or if they had a great dislike for you in any way, why they didn't have any antibrutal situation at all, they could just push you out the door. And ah, so that puts you in a position of really busting it and he worked ah, longer hours in the day than what we do now, of course. And I'm not sure just exactly what that ... I would guess it was 10, 12 hours a day.

IA: Maybe six days a week?

Cook: And six days a week and minimal

IB: Did they have night shifts?

Cook: I don't know if they did or not, I don't recall.

IB: Okay.

IA: I don't know about myself, that's why I'm curious.

Cook: Gee, I don't know. I never even give that a thought to tell you the truth.

IB: Well they certainly do now, you know, they keep those factories going all the time.

Cook: Yeah, I know. And ah, he said that, of course, well the Reo in itself when I worked there where they had lots of old stuff around, it was an old, old ... building anyhow. And, of course, it wasn't what you'd call the best place to work ah, cleanliness and so forth.

IB: Safety.

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Cook: Safetywise. Yeah.

IA: Up to date.

Cook: Yeah, because it being built old, it wasn't really ah, accommodate the equipment they finally got in there to use. So, ah, and then I say they could just kind of bump you out the door if you didn't make your production the way you should. And ah,

IA: Or if your job was too dangerous, you wouldn't get to complain maybe or

Cook: Well they didn't have the safety devices lots of people got. It wasn't an uncommon thing at all for people that worked there to have fingers off and hands off and stuff like that. I used to watch them run the big, excuse me, watch them run the big shears that they'd cut heavy metal with, you'd stand there watching, when I first started as a sweeper I was fascinated. .... showing that stuff, thing shoom, coming down and cutting

IA: ...

Cook: Oh man if they'd

IA: Did they have to put their hands in the machine?

Cook: Well, of course, they were trying to avoid that as much as possible.

IB: Did they have to feed that sheet of metal in quite a ways.

Cook: They had to feed that darn stuff in there. My gosh, you know, if they would have made a miscue,

IA: That was a big machine and it had

Cook: Huge, bigger than this room, great, great big long thing and a huge thing that went up in the air and come down, well it cut it cut at least a quarter, quarter inch steel or bigger in some cases. ... something like that.

IA: So you can measure what that would do to a person's hand.

Cook: Yeah, put your hand or finger in there it would take it right off, wouldn't even miss it.

IB: Right.

Cook: Yeah, wouldn't even know what happened.

IB: .....

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Cook: There were a lot of people that, actually there were a lot of people that got killed in those places. I don't know necessarily about the Reo, which brings a point in mind that I'll add to it. My brother did get hurt, seriously at the Reo, in a fluke.

IB: What happened?

Cook: Well, he hadn't worked at the Reo before he went in the Service because at the time he went in, well you couldn't buy a job anywhere, you know, he was 20 years old and couldn't get a job nowhere. And that was because he was older than me, see. And ah, when the war started, well then he got drafted right away. So,

IB: I see.

Cook: he come back out after five years in the Service and he got a job at the Reo. Well this is the normal pattern that people would follow. Ah, the boys in the family would generally go right to the factory where the father worked. It was, well you know, just a preconceived idea, that's what you'd normally expect to do. So, we were all three working there at the same time, but he didn't get hurt at that time. I hadn't ....

IB: The three of you, you, your dad and your brother?

Cook: Yeah, we worked there all at the same time.

IB: Yeah.

Cook: And ah, but I had left to go to the Liquor Commission and ah, my brother was still working there and he was, he was a master mechanic. Educationwise, he couldn't cut the education business at all, but he was a genius at assembly or mechanical.

IB: Did he learn that in the war? Or did he have that before?

Cook: I don't know, he just kind of

IB: He just had it.

Cook: Yeah, well, actually when he was in the Service, well then he was a range sergeant, so he could take any kind of a weapon they had and tear it apart and put it together without even being taught, so he just had the talent for it. But anyhow, he was working on the line, final assembly line and ah, he was a fill-in man, whenever somebody had to go to the restroom, when they had any kind of an absentee for whatever reason, why then he would be the person to fill in at that particular job. So, he filled in in this job this morning where, right where they'd lowered the dump bodies for military trucks, now, and the ring that was holding it broke and it hit him in the back. It was amazing

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it didn't kill him. But anyhow, it severed his spinal chord in his back. So he was paralyzed from here down for 15 years.

IB: Oh.

Cook: And it was bad.

IB: What kind of, how did the Reo react to this, what kind of help did they give him?

Cook: Well he drew, he drew compensation, he drew workmen's compensation and he drew a nonservice connected disability.

IB: Right, but that's not connected to Reo. That's just national programs.

Cook: Right, right. They offered him settlements, but the type of injury that he had required that he would spend six and eight weeks and even more at times. His medical bills were unbelievable, so he had the option of signing, taking what would be considered a large sum of money, which wouldn't last long or he had to go ahead and take the compensation to hang on to the medical.

IB: Yeah.

Cook: So that's what he chose to do. He didn't have a choice.

IB: But this was all done through workmen's compensation?

Cook: Yeah.

IB: Not the Reo, Reo made no

Cook: No.

IA: Twenty years before that though there wouldn't have been any workmen's compensation.

Cook: Nothing.

IB: That's right.

Cook: Nothing.

IA: There wouldn't have been anything.

Cook: He would have been just completely out. So, what happened is that there were times when groups of people from, men from Reo would go ahead and help ah, by doing or helping, he had to have special ramps and so forth to get in and out of his house and the car, and he drove his own car. He adjusted well.

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IA: But you are saying people at the Reo helped?

Cook: There were times, you know, it wasn't a lot and it wasn't often, but periodically they would come along and give him a lift and getting some kind of a thing accomplished. So their heart was in the right place.

IB: Sure.

Cook: But it wasn't the peoples fault.

IB: No, and that kind of harks back to what we've been hearing right along ah from other people who worked at Reo, the family feeling.

Cook: Yeah.

IB: They cared for each other.

Cook: Yeah, they did. You know, they were supportive as they could be and it was a fluke, you know. And they misgauged, they welded a ring that should have never been.

IA: Yeah.

IB: And the weld didn't hold or something, is that?

Cook: .....

IB: This was a whole truck body that fell on him?

Cook: Dump body from a military truck, which really was a hefty you know.

IB: Oh the dump, would be the back of a dump truck.

Cook: Back end, yeah.

IB: Okay.

Cook: And they lowered that from the, from another area coming in over the final assembly line. Just as a fluke why that broke and you know 15 minutes before or 15 minutes after he wouldn't have been there. But it would had been somebody else.

IB: True, true. Yeah.

Cook: .. it was going to come down in that area. And I think he was 33 at the time. Ah, so that was pretty tough business there. Yeah.

IB: To get to go back a little bit to your dad's um, time there. Do you have any memories as a child of all the different kinds of things that the company sponsored, like the clubhouse and

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Cook: The clubhouse I was well acquainted with, because we went to that practically every week.

IB: You did?

Cook: You did and of course, back in those days then you'd have the transportation, we didn't have a car. I can recall many, many times when we lived on north Washington Avenue, 1200 block, we walked all the way up to Reo... Ah, I can remember diving in and out of the stores uptown (laughter) I was just a little kid, see.

IB: Yeah.

Cook: And I remember going in to the reo clubhouse and seeing a movie. I seen some silent movies there, actually.

IB: Right.

Cook: And ah, I remember this little car that the miniature car that is like

IB: For the kids, yeah.

Cook: 1907. It was here a while.

IA: Oh the Baby Reo.

Cook: Baby Reo.

IA: The Baby Reo.

Cook: Then, of course, as a little kid well I was totally fascinated with that. You could just dream about having one.

IB: Now where did you see the Baby Reo?

Cook: It was in the Reo clubhouse, right in the lobby.

IB: On, just on display? You wouldn't get in it or

Cook: Oh no, no, you couldn't touch it or anything.

IB: But just to look at it.

Cook: Oh, it was wonderful. And ah, and then I can remember that there was a big, big crowds of people going there. And I remember they had a concession stand and my folks always somehow managed to come up with some money for us to have a little bit of candy to go in the movie with.

IB: Right.

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Cook: I'm sure they had very little. Of course, ah, I was born and raised in that era, I didn't expect too much, so I got along fine. I enjoyed it very much. And so, and I remember that the large organ and I remember the piano where the mood music was played for the silent films.

IB: Sure.

Cook: And ah, then I also remember that down in the basement was where the ah, bowling alleys were. Of course, now ladies and little kids couldn't go down there.

IB: Oh is that right.

Cook: That was strictly a man's world.

IA: Is that right?

Cook: Oh no. A lady wouldn't go down there.

IA: That's interesting. Did your dad bowl on any of the leagues.

Cook: No, to my knowledge he never bowled or anything like that.

IB: Or any of the sports teams, because you know they had lots of sports teams.

IA: Did they have a football team and a baseball team?

Cook: No if he did, I never knew.

IB: You never knew.

Cook: Yeah. My dad was a wood carver by hobby. So he did lots and lots and lots of that. And ah, in fact, there is still a lot of it over at my sister's house. She has the home place and much of the carvings are still there. Hopefully, some day they will get old enough to be strictly real valuable. They are different.

IB: Antiques.

Cook: They are beautiful. They actually are all hand work and ah, because he came from Bay City where they built wooden ships, his father and his grandfather had worked in shipyards and he worked there for a short period of time before he came to Lansing.

IB: Oh that's interesting.

IA: Yes it is.

IB: Oh yeah.

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Cook: So I guess that wood business just kind of goes down through the generations. I work with it a little bit.

IB: Would the core still, the core still have wood components when he stored it?

Cook: Yes.

IB: It did. So he was, would he be working on that?

Cook: Ah, I'm not sure that he had anything to do with the wood part of it. I think he worked all, to my knowledge, he worked all of his time right at the punch press department. Now, I've seen his certificate and I think it is still over to my sister's where he finished. Apparently he took an apprenticeship as a machinist,

IB: He did?

Cook: because there is a certificate over there

IA: Through the company?

Cook: Apparently so.

IA: Okay.

Cook: Yeah, because he had, there is a certificate over there where he became a machinist.

IA: Yeah.

Cook: And then that was

IA: They had an apprenticeship program through the Reo.

Cook: Right through them, apparently. And ah, see I'm a little at a disadvantage. In fact, in history in comparison to my sisters, family history because I was the youngest one.

IA: I see.

Cook: They already got it all talked out before I got there I guess (laughter). I keep asking my sister lots of things, because I like to pass some of it down to my kids. They are good telling me about it as far as I'm concerned.

IB: How about um, the big picnics they used to have for the Reo employees?

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Cook: I actually don't recall going to them. I wonder if maybe I was too young to remember em or if maybe they had discontinued them by the time. See now I was born in '27.

IB: Oh they dis, yeah, they would have been.

Cook: I think they were gone, see by then.

IB: Yeah, yeah.

Cook: That brings to mind an interesting thing though. I think over at my sister's is a picture of me at five years old, chubby little skunk I was. (laughter) But anyhow, I'm all dressed up in a suit and that suit my mother had made out of material that my father had gotten from Reo. Now I assume they

IB: They used for the upholstery?

Cook: the strap material. It was suppose to be upholstery in the car.

IA: For the seats?

Cook: Seats and on the insides and around. And he had gotten some of that either bought it or they give it away, I'm not sure exactly how they went about that.

IA: Yeah.

Cook: She made that little suit that I got my picture taken on.

IA: Oh I'd like to see that.

IB: Did your parents own their house in north Lansing or did they rent it?

Cook: No, they rented it.

IB: Rented it?

Cook: Ah huh, and ah, and then they moved up, then we moved up to Eureka Street.

IB: Oh I know where that is.

Cook: And then I went in the Service from Eureka Street and during the time I was in they moved and bought a house on Pennsylvania Avenue.

IB: So they were eventually able to buy.

Cook: Yeah, let's see, well that would have had to be '45 when they bought it.

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IB: Okay.

Cook: My dad got injured at the Reo. At the time when I went in the Service, ah, he was in pretty tough shape. He had hurt his back.

IA: On the job?

Cook: Yeah. Ah, he had a couple discs injured in there. He had to have an operation. Well, of course, it was not that good an operation, it isn't that good now.

IB: No those are hard.

IA: Tricky, tricky thing.

Cook: So he never really totally recovered from that part of it, but he still managed to keep his job. So, what he really did was run one of the drill press all the time up until after that more or less until he ah, retired. But I used to be able to pull around. I remember before I went in the Service, I would go in and visit him. He was running a, that's where he hurt his back on that machine, he was running a punch press straightening .... axles. .... It was fascinating. He done it so much that he just set one in, but they were like 60 some odd pounds to get up and set it in this press and give it a couple spins and go tunk like that and run a gauge out and be straight. Now if I done that I'd have to hit it four times each way probably, but he just run the gauge over it and spin the think around and trip the lever as you come down, tunk, like that and it would be all straight.

IB: Was it that those axles came in a little bent or something?

Cook: Yeah, they come in from heat tree and it caused them to warp a little bit, see.

IB: So then he'd straighten them.

Cook: Straighten them and put them down .... used them on trucks.

IA: Did you guys drop change a lot from when you started?

Cook: Yeah, um, actually I think that when he was running those there, those big heavy punch presses when he was younger and he gradually went along to become working on the different machines that were a lot lighter and progressed up the line. Of course, after the union came in, why seniority reigned and you could get a better job then. I mean if you had a lot of seniority like he had, why then you'd naturally would be able to qualify, fight for a better job.

IA: Ah huh.

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Cook: Where new people had to take the tough ones.

IB: Yeah, you brought up the union also, that is what I was going to bring up next.

IA: Did he join the union when it came in? Was he

Cook: Oh yeah, when the strike ah, went on, that was an experience I had, I was 10 years old then in '37. And we lived on north Washington Avenue at the time. And I remember two or three times that he would take me with him to spend the day down there.

IB: Oh during the sitdown.

Cook: During the sitdown.

IB: So you went inside the plant.

Cook: Oh yeah.

IA: Is that right?

IB: Oh tell us what it was like.

Cook: It was quite an experience because we would walk through, I can remember going through the door into the plant and it was really kind of scary and ... in a way because they had these big electric trucks and these huge dyes on them and weighed tons and tons, totally prepared to block that doorway if they ever tried to come in.

IB: If the guards came, if they called in the National Guard or something like that.

Cook: Yeah, they had it totally prepared see.

IB: Wow.

Cook: And then ah, I remember that ah, they had ah, lots and lots of people around and there was a couple of the guys that especially liked me for some reason, just because I was a little kid I suppose. They probably had their own kids. But at any rate, they took me all through the plant now it wasn't working, but I remember the cars, or not the cars, the trucks and everything, because they quit making cars in '36.

IB: Right.

Cook: But the trucks and everything in different stages of being assembled and they took me all through that plant just to show me, something to do, something to see and ah, and I remember ah, I remember eating down

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there, that was kind of a fantastic thing, because most of the merchants I think in Lansing supported that strike.

IB: That's right. They donated food and

IA: That's right.

Cook: Eat good. (laughter) It was better .... than in ... Yeah. So I remember that. It was very

IB: And women also

Cook: Oh yeah.

IB: bring stuff in they cooked at home.

IA: And do I remember that the men were locked in the plant or they stay and didn't come out until the strike was over or what?

Cook: They stayed and of course what they did is took turns, you see. Each person had a oh maybe he had a certain day or a couple of days that he was suppose to stay there. And so that's how it come to be where I would have been. He would take me with him. He had to spend say Wednesday at ah, it was his turn to take his shot at a duty and so he'd take me along. Two or three times I went down.

IB: You didn't have to stay overnight, you just stayed through the day ...

Cook: No, we didn't stay over night any. So I imagine, well there had to be some of them stay over at night.

IA: Yeah, I think so. Or maybe a night shift or something.

Cook: Maybe that was it. Maybe some of them took turns going in at night.

IA: Yeah, you didn't see any problem, any violence or

Cook: No, no I didn't see anything like that at all, everybody seemed to be having a good time.

IA: All the workers were, so they were pretty much for this union coming in then.

Cook: Oh yeah, they had to be because, of course, if they, if there would have been any big descent against it, why it would never have succeeded at all. No, they were all convinced that that was what had to come, because their conditions weren't that good.

IA: Did they know about what was going on in Flint?

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Cook: I'm sure that's what brought it on.

IA: Yeah.

Cook: I'm sure that's what really started the whole thing.

IB: Flint ... started and then kind of spread, huh?

IA: Yeah.

Cook: Yeah, because they had their .... talking about, so my dad became a steward in the union.

IB: Oh he did.

Cook: And then he went for that for quite a number of years as a steward and then he became a committeeman. And then he was a committeeman up until he retired.

IB: Which was when, '50's sometime or late '40's?

Cook: Oh that would take some figuring. No, he retired, it must have been ah, I'm going to say probably '62.

IB: Oh really?

Cook: Yeah.

IB: He was there for almost 50 years.

Cook: No, no, he was there

IB: He started in the late teens, 40 years.

Cook: Yeah, .... very close to it. Ah huh.

IA: That's a long time.

IB: That is a long time.

IA: A big chunk of your life.

Cook: Oh yeah, well I put 36 in and I keep telling everybody that's where I grew up and it is not wrong either, it is a fact. I spent more time there than anywhere else.

IA: Um, did your dad see the incoming, and I realize that if he was there and left in the '50's or the '60's I mean, but did he foresee the problems coming that maybe the Reo wouldn't be able to survive?

Cook: I don't think he ever really would have believed that the Reo would become nonexistent. I don't think that possibility ever entered his mind. He thought it would go forever. He just thought that it was a downside and that ah, sooner or later it was going to come around and come back up, because I don't think they ever thought that the possibility existed, no I doubt it.

IA: The military commitments for the U.S. to put out Army trucks to meet demands around the world where we were stationing troops, maybe they still had Army contracts to build trucks.

Cook: At that time they did and ah, and that's really the only thing that kept the Reo going in the last years that it was in existence was those military contracts. As soon as they quit coming through and so forth, why it fizzled right out. It couldn't compete because they already got so much in their capital. .... and ah and they were a good truck too. It was a good truck.

IA: You still see them on the road, the older Reo trucks.

Cook: You couldn't beat them, but that was our stock manipulation they are talking about now days that is something, that isn't new.

IA: Right. That's right.

Cook: They called it different but it amounted to the same thing.

IA: Right. To go back a little bit to um, '30's again, do you remember at all the labor holiday that took place that June? There was a big um, in June of 1937, so it was maybe a couple months after the strike, there was a big labor holiday. Lansing's Labor Holiday it was called, the whole city shut down for a day. Do you have any memories of that at all?

Cook: I guess I just don't remember that.

IA: Okay. Just one day, so you know, if you weren't around or you weren't in school, who knows what.

Cook: I was 10

IA: Right.

Cook: I was so busy I wouldn't know.

IA: You were probably on the baseball field.

Cook: I had a lot of fun with those kids. (laughter) .....

IB: Do you remember that I remember there being a train wreck.

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Cook: Oh Grand Trunk?

IB: When I was a little girl of about four or five there was a train wreck right there on the north side of the Reo plant.

Cook: Yeah, I went down and seen that. Yeah. Um, the train had car or something had jumped the track and hit the depot and took the little house that was there out.

IA: Oh my. ....Lansing, this is north Lansing.

Cook: No,

IB: Right in front of the Reo.

Cook: Yeah.

IB: On the north side of the clubhouse.

IA: Oh, oh.

Cook: Ripped up the tracks and there was boxcars and stuff scattered all over. And I knew my brother and I went down there to see it. See he was five years older than I was, so

IA: He took you down there?

Cook: Yeah.

IA: You were living on north Washington then, maybe?

Cook: I guess we were. I imagine we were. What was the year that would have been?

IB: Well I got to think about that, '36, '37 maybe.

Cook: Yeah, it would have been.

IB: I'm trying to think I was four or five, I think, we didn't have a car either. We lived in Holt, but it was a big excitement, somebody took us down there so we could see it.

Cook: Ah huh.

IA: Did you listen to the oh maybe not have been going by then either. I was wondering if you listened to the WREO.

Cook: The WREO.

IA: The WREO.

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Cook: I vaguely remember, vaguely remember something about that on, we had a big old Zenith ..

IA: You did have a big radio, I was going to ask you if you had a radio.

Cook: Bit old Zenith radio. And it could only get one or two stations, very difficult to get them. And I got to believe one of them must have been WREO.

IA: Really?

Cook: Ah huh, it must have been. And ah, then, of course, as the time went along with it, the station began to get more powerful and I guess WREO went off.

IA: That's right, that's what I was wondering if it went out before you were aware of it.

Cook: I think I must have been listening to it when I was real little, but then ah, I don't remember a time when it went off.

IA: Ah huh, ah huh. Do you know if um, people felt differently about Reo than for example, Olds or other companies in Lansing?

Cook: Well I think

IA: Your dad stayed there a long time, so

Cook: Yeah, I think there was a lot of, and I didn't really realize it, I guess I didn't realize a lot of things about it until actually came down here and talked to people, but ah, there was a certain ah, difference there. Ah, like Reo was ah, orphan maybe. I think maybe after Olds went. I think ..... had a tendency to change some of the

IA: The father figure.

Cook: Yeah, ah, I can remember my dad and mother talking and stuff.... Reo, but he didn't impress me at the time. I wish I could really get it straight in my mind if they were discussing it.

IA: Ah huh, ah huh.

Cook: I think my dad was ah, not an Olds fan.

IA: Oh well that's interesting.

Cook: Well because I think, you know, he what he did that he did that my father disagreed with as near as I can recollect it about it is that Olds wanted to provide their welfare program. He wanted to go ahead and provide an almost a case of where certain requirement that you be

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involved with certain activities. And I think my dad thought that was infringing too much on his freedom.

IA: Oh R. E. Olds expected the workers to contribute to some kind of a welfare fund or

Cook: No he provided .....

IA: Oh he would provide it.

Cook: And he provided these recreational activities that he not only provided for them, but I think he almost expected that everybody was going to enter into it and if they didn't they weren't one of the boys.

IA: Oh okay.

IB: So that he had, he felt a little bit pressure

Cook: Pressure and obligated to get into it, to have to be involved in these things in order to maintain your job situation. And I think that is one of the factors that

IB: That he was more individualistic.

Cook: I guess so, independent and he didn't agree with that, he didn't think that, he thought when you got down working, he didn't have to be obligated to

IB: Ah huh, obviously it didn't hurt him though with the plant,

Cook: No.

IB: because he was able to keep his job and respectable and all that.

Cook: He managed to keep it all the way through and ah, so but, of course, ah, that is part of the reason why I think that Olds left Reo. My thinking about it is correct, I think he could see where the unions were going to come in and he strictly was against the unions.

IB: Right. That's right.

Cook: It depends on how you look at it, you know, ..... right and they measured it wrong but

IA: There has always been a division between management and labor.

Cook: Yeah, ah huh.

IB: Do you think a lot of the other workers felt that it was um, like your dad?

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Cook: I'm sure they did, they wouldn't have cooperated with ..... union coming in.

IB: Right.

Cook: Because I think that, that ah, they wanted to be ah, independent in their job, they wanted to be secure and they wanted the wages and better conditions for themselves. But they didn't want to have to get it by, by the means that they had had to get it. I think they wanted to get it straight off. You know, just because of their merits or something.

IB: Ah huh, ah huh, now on the other hand, all the stuff that I've read about when your dad, conflict when your dad was there, um, a lot of these workers liked those kinds of programs.

Cook: A lot of them liked it, I'm sure they did.

IB: Yeah, that doesn't mean they necessarily felt that work that Olds was right.

Cook: Yeah.

IB: But they figured if you'd given it to us, we'll take advantage of it, right?

Cook: Well it was a revolutionary idea because other plants didn't do that.

IB: Didn't do that. That's right.

Cook: So it was a very revolutionary thing.

IA: We had come out of the Depression too and it afforded families a chance to have some recreation, free.

IB: Right.

Cook: Ah huh.

IA: So it ..

Cook: There was good points to it and what I'm saying about, you know, that wasn't the case in all the situations.

IA: Right.

Cook: And because that was too far back for me to understand all of it.

IA: Yeah, sure.

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IB: Yeah.

Cook: I'm going to miss some. Easy enough. But I know that ah, there was a pro and con for it.

IA: That's one of the things I'm very interested in my work is how the workers responded to these programs.

Cook: I think it ah, certain parts of them I liked, I think that ah, probably that's the reason why a lot of them went to work for Reo.

IA: Right. Why they chose.

Cook: In the beginning, it might have been the reason why dad went there. Ah, I think that in some cases well then it might have got to be too much for them.

IA: The company to keep it up, you mean?

Cook: Well that was part of the reason why they had to drop a lot of it off, because it became too expensive.

IA: Especially during the Depression, yeah.

Cook: It was a great idea. In fact, this old fellow that I, I used to deliver meals to, he played in the Reo band, of course he died last year this month, a year ago.

IA: I was going to say give him our name.

IB: I remember when he died.

Cook: Yeah, quite an old guy.

IA: That brings up something I have been thinking about, the band, did Reo, Reo supplied the uniforms and the instruments I wonder? Or did, I wonder if this man had his uniform ....

Cook: Well, I don't honestly know.

IB: Somebody donated a real band uniform here to us back when Sue Neller was director here and so I just got to thinking maybe

Cook: There is ... out there and stuff like that. He had a clarinet he was always thinking he wanted to give me, but I hate to take anything like that.

IA: Sure, yeah.

Cook: He is 94 years old or something.

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IA: And you weren't sure if he really should.

IB: Yeah.

Cook: Well, I didn't so I tried to discourage that. But anyhow, he used to tell me about those.

IA: Ninety-four,

Cook: .... where it was at, but he finally went to Olds, you see.

IA: Oh he transferred over to Olds.

Cook: Yeah, because many of the people transferred over and went to work for Olds.

IB: Got a chance to earn a little more .... My father transferred too for the same reason, they offered him a little more money. Ah, do you recall your dad ever mentioning R. E. Olds, other than he kind of thought he shouldn't be kind of running his extra kind after work or

Cook: No.

IB: any impressions he ever, okay.

Cook: I never, never heard him say anything about ever having personally ..... I got a cousin that used to be in contact with him.... when he was here at this building, ah, working with ah, machine jobs

IB: Who,.....

Cook: No, no, after or during World War II.

IA: Oh.

IB: And here in the museum?

Cook: He was involved in diesel engines and stuff and he was

IB: Oh, Hill Diesel?

Cook: Probably.

IB: Whether it was Hill Diesel here in or out in the back of the museum.

Cook: My cousin I was talking to him the other day, and he was telling me that he used to run into a lot of contacts with him, he talked with him many times.

IB: Oh is that right?

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Cook: Interesting yeah, he didn't work for Reo or anything like that, he had his own independent business that he was, he was a subcontractor during the war and ah, but he was right around in this complex, working in these buildings. In fact, I might have worked for him down here once. I worked for him for a short period of time.

IB: For your?

Cook: Cousin.

IB: Cousin.

Cook: And ah, but then I went to work at the commission so I left there... and I'm almost positive Bobby was right here. It is so long ago I don't remember exactly where it went. He took me wherever it went.

IB: This building has undergone a lot of changes over time.

Cook: So that's about the experience that I have with it. Ah, there are some ah, I remember having a jock yellow like this ..... donate a lot of stuff. I knew him, he was in the stockroom when I was and, of course, I had to go to the stockroom and pick up bolts and nuts and washers and all kinds of stuff. I kept them guys stocked right up with it. I never had a complaint or never had anybody, in fact, they used to tell me how well I keep the place .... (laughter)

IA: The stock truck now was that different from the other, they had a truck called the Go-Devil?

Cook: Well,

IA: Was yours a forklift truck so you could lift up bins of things on your carts?

Cook: No, I used to have to use one of those once and a while to get something down or get it where I could get to it, but ah, ah, really most of the time I walked and carried bags of stuff with me. And if I had to get anything bigger they had a little three-wheeled buggy and the more I think about it, the more I think it was built like one of these here curved dash Olds out here, pretty near. It was three-wheeled and had the engine you set on top of it. You cranked it up from the side, it was ... it had a lever here for the clutch, and it was about like, the same principle as one of these here. Of course, I didn't realize it then.

IA: No, they didn't throw away the print or blueprint did they?

Cook: But .... it had a platform on the back and you put stuff on there.

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IB: Now what would you do when you went into work in the day you'd go to a certain department and they'd say we need X amount of parts and

Cook: Well I had to give an area. I had the frame line, it started out where the first ... down to start putting and they put it down upside down.

IB: The frame?

Cook: The frame for the truck and it would come down and make a curve and go down here. They would be installing all of the equipment underneath there, the springs, the shackles and everything to be bolted to be put on and then it would get down to this area and they called it the turnover, because that's what it was. Then they would raise that up in the air and I always thought it was pretty dangerous. I guess it was. Anyhow, they'd raise that up in the air and they'd flip over like that. Turn it up.

IA: Right side up.

Cook: Then they'd set it down, back down on the line and then they'd proceed down the line and they'd put all the other little goodies on it that you see, the cab and the it would go down a little further where my wife was working and where the transmissions come out. Then after they are mounted to the motor, you come down from the other place and install that and then the cab and so forth. And then they'd take those, those trucks out and they test run them for I don't know how many miles of drive.

IA: Take them out on the road.

Cook: Yeah. Then they'd bring them back and tear them down in export department.

IA: Oh yeah, we heard about that.

Cook: .. and ship them overseas.

IA: Yeah, we heard about that.

Cook: I used to, that was one item there that .. shackle bolts and it is amazing, ah, I had to continuously use the same ones over and the barrel and I'd have to make a mad dash to the export department to get some to get them back to keep the line going. Because you don't want to shut it down.

IA: Oh you don't stop the line.

Cook: And that was the only one I had a problem trying to keep that supplied. But, so I had all that, so the first thing I would do when I went in to work was to make a visual inspection of all the area and I'd write down

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what was getting down. Now my method and it apparently worked all right, they had bins, metal, metal

IA: Stock bins.

Cook: stock bins and they bolts, nuts, washers and stuff in there that they'd use. And there are also other stock people bringing in the larger stuff and with forklifts ... trucks and so on. And so, I would visually inspect up and down all during my area that I had to cover and ah, then I would go to the stockroom and I'd ah, get another batch, whatever I needed or thought I needed and bring it back and I kept an extra one down underneath. Not only kept that one full, but I kept an extra one down underneath, so there was no way they were going to catch me. When I had to take the one from the bottom and put it in the top and I had another one for the bottom.

IA: Good planning. Did you have to sign a voucher or anything when you went into the stockroom for all the parts or did you just get what you needed and take it back to the line.

Cook: Just went and got it.

IA: Just put it

Cook: They didn't pay any attention.

IA: I just wondered.

Cook: Yeah, just went in and picked up anything I needed. And

IA: ... if you want to continue, because I don't want to .....

IB: Go ahead, no I think I have what I need.

IA: Um, you said a couple of times in different context that um, your family wasn't real wealthy.

Cook: Oh no.

IA: Just sort of made

Cook: No, we were in tough shape.

IA: Oh yeah, tough shape. Because I got the sense that you could make it, but

Cook: Well, we were making it, because of course, my dad was laid off for long periods of time.

IA: In the '30's?

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Cook: Ah yeah.

IA: When the Depression hit?

Cook: Ah huh.

IA: Yeah.

Cook: He was laid off a long period of time, but he was an ambitious person and he was capable of doing lots of different things. So he done little odd jobs here and he did odd jobs there and he done anything and everything.

IA: Yeah.

Cook: And I often wondered how he managed, how they managed to raise us like they did. But somehow

IB: You said you had a brother and two sisters?

Cook: Ah huh. Yeah. They were all older than me. Now my sisters they know more about that because, of course, they were old enough to realize when the Depression

IB: What it all

Cook: Yeah. I come along at a time when I didn't have anything to start with, so I couldn't possibly miss anything. I didn't miss a thing. I had a ball. And we lived

IB: My parents always said, my mother always said, I thought we were rich.

Cook: Yeah.

IB: Because you know, she could do this, she could that and what else did she know?

Cook: Sure.

IA: Same for me. My parents were the same.

Cook: But see I was born right on north Grand River Avenue in the 1200 block, and then we moved over to the 1200 block of Chestnut Street and then moved back over to the 1200 block of Washington Avenue, so I never got out of the general area and knew all the kids in the area. I went to the same school, I never changed school or anything. So it was no traumatic thing for me until we moved from Washington up to Eureka Street.

IA: Eureka.

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Cook: Now that was a different ballgame, I had to change schools.

IA: These were all rental?

Cook: Yeah, ah huh. All rental.

IA: Yeah. And the people who all worked in Reo went in and out of the Reo during the Depression, they were all sort of in the same boat.

Cook: Same thing, we were all in the same boat. Yeah. Everybody scratching along trying to make due and ah,

IA: Now some people I've talked to and also read about ah, came from farm backgrounds, some of them went back to farms.

Cook: Farming.

IA: Yeah.

Cook: That brings to mind I mentioned how I wondered we survived like we did, but as it develops my aunt and uncle had a farm out by Stockbridge and I remember going out there many times and apparently they gave us endless amounts of food.

IA: Oh that's great.

Cook: Because I remember bringing back. My mother was

IA: Is this your mom's family or your dad's family?

Cook: My mothers family.

IA: Your mother's family.

Cook: Ah huh.

IA: Okay.

Cook: I remember bringing back lots and lots of stuff. That was we finally had a '29 Chevrolet. And ah, we had thousand times my dad had to overhaul that before we could go anyplace. But sometimes we'd get out, I can remember two or three different times that we got stalled out in the country. That darned old thing. Spend a whole day at some farmhouse where he was fixing it. And then we'd go on and they were extremely nice to you. They were awfully nice. And but ah, and then I'd spend a week or two out at that farm and my brother would spend practically the whole summer out there. He'd work.

IA: Helping out, yeah.

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Cook: Yeah. And ah, ah, that's probably how we got by.

IA: Ah huh, ah huh.

Cook: But my dad was capable of doing carpenter work or anything and everything. And I think people kind of stuck together pretty good then too, because, of course, I was born in the house right next door to the Coberts. Now Coberts, long since gone, but where Beemans is at on the corner of Washington and Grand River now,

IB: Ah huh, ah huh.

Cook: Well that was Coberts originally and I was born right in the house next door to em. Well, of course, they weren't in dire straights as quite the same way that we were, but they were always furnishing some kind of work for my dad. I think they, you know, really helped out that way. Some of the first jobs that I had, and I had little jobs, helping in the store and ah, I'd go in and out of there and down and all around, you know, I was just like one of the kids. And ah, but he got a lot of work for them and ah, repaired places in their house and built a beautiful rock garden for them and I imagine they needed a rock garden like I need a hole in my head. I think they done that just purposely to give him a job.

IA: To give him a job, yeah.

Cook: I honestly believe that.

IA: Yeah.

Cook: I can remember picking cherries in the big cherry tree and ah, they would give us so much for picking the cherries and they'd sell them in the store and they could have got anybody to do it, but they had us do it.

IB: People got by that way in the Depression. Because a lot of people did not want to go on welfare.

Cook: No, that reminds me another way that we succeeded two, three or four summers. We went up north and picked huckleberries and we ... going back and sold them, yeah, I can remember doing that. .. I probably didn't do very much, I was too little. (laughter) I think I ... the rest of them worked.

IB: You ate em. But I remember my father and my grandfather cutting wood, digging ditches, anything, they did not want to go on welfare or on the dole as it was called.

Cook: Yeah. Anything.

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IB: Your father probably felt the same way. It was almost a shame, wasn't it?

Cook: Oh yeah.

IB: If you couldn't support your own family.

Cook: The house right at the end of Washington Avenue used to be Langs Hospital, now it is a state, Langs Hospital, well Dr. Lang lived right up right by us just the first house from Estes.

IB: Yeah.

Cook: And my dad and him were real friendly. I remember going over there many times and can you imagine in the back, of course, it doesn't look like that now, but there was a huge area back there and my dad and him would partnership put a garden in. You know how he planted the garden? He spaded it all by hand. Nothing

IB: No tillers or anything like that?

Cook: How can you imagine a place as big as this building, or not the whole building, but I mean this office area.

IB: Part of an acre in other words.

Cook: And spade that all up by hand. Man, I can't spade around my bushes hardly. And do that, oh. I wasn't any help. I was just goofing around.

IB: You were a little guy, that was your time to do that.

Cook: ... my brother might have helped, but I'm not sure. I remember him putting a garden in. I remember over there talking to the doctor and I remember they had an old car, boy would that have been a beauty to have had. It was one of those kinds that reminds me of one of those electric, real high, I don't know whatever happened to it.

IB: Your mom stayed home with all of you.

Cook: Always.

IB: Yeah.

Cook: Always. She ah,

IA: I'm sure she had her hands full.

Cook: Oh she sure did. But, let's see, Monday was wash day, Tuesday was ironing day, and ah,

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IA: Wednesday was mending.

Cook: Yeah, and Friday I think was baking day or something like that.

IA: For the week.

Cook: For the whole week. And she made bread, she made pies and cakes. I remember one time some how or another my dad had traded around in his doings and come up with a half of a pig, hog, which was a fantastic thing.

IA: Yeah.

Cook: So they proceeded to how did they

IA: They'd cure it, I guess, huh, smoke it.

Cook: Cured ..

IB: Maybe she canned it up or something.

Cook: Something like that and then I remember the biggest thing that I remember about it is because of having all of that lard left over. That she made donuts. And I probably, oh I must have just eaten millions. They were so good.

IA: Oh yeah, fresh donuts.

Cook: And she was awful good, you know. She would just make all kinds of stuff like that. I don't know where she come up with em. But she made them. But she was born and raised on a farm where it was tough going and that's what she knew to do. And she was quite capable of handling all of that very nicely.

IA: Did that change over time, like it became easier to buy things at the stores?

Cook: Yes, ah, when we moved, moved away from Washington Avenue to Eureka Street, that was a definite step up in status and apparently because of the war .... because of the war... well then I think the money became to come in better.

IA: Right, so she could trade off going to buy a loaf of bread rather than ...

Cook: Yeah, it got to where she got away from quite so much of that, it was much more modern and everything. And ah, so then we got on Eureka Street, why then my dad was able to buy a car. Believe it or not he bought a '36 Reo.

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IA: Cars?

Cook: It was in '39 when he bought the '36 Reo and

IB: You must have all been thrilled.

Cook: Well it was like brand new because the car had belonged to ah, George T. Smith's wife, had the Market Basket.

IB: The Market Basket grocery stores here in Lansing.

Cook: Well he bought that for her and she never drove it very much, so it had very few miles on it. It was like brand new. It was really spotless. And so he bought that car and we were able to go out and, of course, by that time the radio was right into its being then, you know, they had all these serials on the radio and so forth and we just loved it. It was the greatest thing in the world. So we were able to go out and travel all around the countryside and had a radio in that car. We could even hear, we were really living. Boy it was great, you couldn't beat it.

IB: Did that car hold up better than your Chevrolet, your '27 Chevrolet that broke down.

Cook: Are you kidding me, that darn thing they had that until 1950, all through the war time.

IA: Wow.

Cook: And ah

Side 2

Cook: I took my wife on many a date in that old car and I remember one time before I got out of school with it, they came up to summer vacation and ah, my dad let me take that car to go get my last report card. I just had to go in for an hour or so. I got to drive that car.

IA: To school.

Cook: Yeah to school, yeah. Well I used to come home from school and go down and get my dad from work. He wouldn't drive it to work.

IA: Oh he wouldn't, why is that?

Cook: I don't know, he always just walked.

IA: Oh and maybe he didn't want to park it down there and get it bumped into or something. What model was that Reo, do you remember what color it was? Was it a

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Cook: It was black, yeah it was four door and it was just like this one out here. The Flying Cloud.

IA: The Flying Cloud, it was a Flying Cloud.

Cook: Yeah.

IB: Huge.

IA: It was the luxury car.

Cook: I can also remember a couple times that my brother and I would ride our bicycles from the north end up to bring my dad's lunch to him when he was working in the summertime. Because he usually didn't even take anything. And we'd meet him outside the plant and I think we ate more than he did. He just walked, he never

IA: He just wanted to get some air.

IB: So men that walked a lot to work, my dad worked from Holt, walked from Holt into Lansing when he worked. Not very many people had cars in the early days and you just walked.

Cook: You couldn't afford a bus or a streetcar. You couldn't afford to spend the money.

IB: That's right, that's right.

Cook: So a lot of things come in my mind. I hadn't even thought about.

IB: That's what this is all about.

IA: I still have one more thing about Lansing. Did your parents you know, ever think about leaving? Like when things were hard, times were hard, the jobs weren't available. Did they ever think about leaving Lansing?

Cook: Well if they did, I never knew.

IA: You never knew about it.

Cook: Never heard them mention anything about it.

IB: They felt that this was their home and they'd stay here.

Cook: Apparently so, apparently so. And they were, they were staunchly in thinking of north Lansing as being the greatest. I mean because it was quite fantastic place at the time. And ah, they thought that was really the place to be.

IA: No I hate to see it torn down.

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IB: I know.

Cook: Yeah.

IB: On Turner, it is unbelievable, it is beautiful.

Cook: I know it. And so they apparently thought that was the ideal place for us to be and that's where and until we moved away to Eureka Street and, of course, ..... downhill by the time we got ready to go, but ah

IA: North Lansing had.

Cook: Yeah, somewhat, you know, stores kind of went out of it and so forth. I can remember selling Kool-Aid at the corner by Estes Furniture Company.

IA: Is that right?

Cook: Yeah, I did that in the summertime, yeah. Right there by the bus stop. They couldn't get away. (laughter)

IB: Very enterprising.

Cook: Oh yeah. So,

IA: Because they liked the community, they liked the kind of people that were there,

Cook: They knew everybody.

IA: everybody.

Cook: Having been on Grand River and then moving a couple blocks over to Chestnut and then moving four blocks back this way to Washington Avenue. We just knew everybody in the whole area.

IA: The neighborhoods were different then because moms were home and their kids grew up, you were stable, you stayed you grew up with the same kids.

Cook: I never remember going home from school and my mom wasn't there. Never. And when I went to West Junior, I used to ride bicycle and I didn't even go home for lunch because you had what an hour and a half or something like that.

IA: Yeah, when I was a kid I used to come home for lunch too. So,

Cook: Riding a bicycle home.

IA: Yeah.

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IB: I thought it was a big deal when I got to stay at school for lunch

IA: Right.

IB: ..... I can stay at school.

Cook: Yeah, yeah.

IA: Did your dad ever say anything, you know, ah, later on when he was getting older in years about ah, how he felt about how the town changed or how Reo had changed, because you saw big changes from when he started?

Cook: He saw some big change and I have to say that, of course, my brother getting hurt such as he was that changed my dad's attitude considerably. He had what was considered quite a bitter attitude and then my mother became ill and she was 61, that would have meant he was 63. Of course, he couldn't retire at 62 then, you had to go to 65 and she had cancer and ah, he wanted to retire to be there with her, but he couldn't because he had to work to keep the insurance going. So I think unfortunately his attitude was very bitter.

IA: Towards the end.

Cook: In everything in general on Reo and status quo, because like I say, she died at 61 and he was 63, he had to go two more years before he could retire and he went the ... norm route, he went seven years and ....  
.... Now .....

IA: Yeah.

Cook: He thought that that was bad the way that my mother had to survive. But I got to say he was smart for doing it the way he did. Because there were doctor bills .....\$100,000.

IA: Right, later on that wouldn't have been taken care of.

Cook: So, ah, before that though, ah, it was a total different ballgame. Just those events come along and because, of course, when I left the Reo to go to work for the state, why I was just kind of quite a rebel in the family for a while.

IA: For not staying there?

Cook: Oh my. They thought I was a .... Indian.

IB: Did they all try to talk you into staying at the Reo? Because they

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Cook: They thought I was a real nut, you know, I was leaving 40 cents an hour cut and Reo was going to take off any time now and I would lose my seniority and

IB: That reminds me, that brings up something. You were able to keep your seniority while you were in the Service?

Cook: Oh yeah.

IB: And your job was there when you got back, or a job.

Cook: Right, and they were forced to take you back on within 90 days after you were discharged, they had to give you your job.

IB: Within 90 days. Was there any resentment on the part of say some of the women who now had the jobs when you came back and maybe you had to bump them.

Cook: They were all gone by the time I got back. There weren't many women there.

IA: Oh.

IB: When you came back the second, for the second time.

Cook: Yeah. Very few women around, they had already gone.

IA: Oh okay.

Cook: And like my wife, for example, she was laid right off immediately.

IA: Going back to the kitchen so to speak.

Cook: Yeah, well of course, see I wasn't married to her then. No, she had to go out and get another job.

IA: Oh I just meant the women in the shop.

Cook: Yeah, that's basically what the idea was.

IB: Did she go to another factory?

Cook: No, because there wasn't anyone hiring.

IB: No factory jobs.

Cook: No factories was hiring then see. They had to go to other types of jobs. And ah,

IA: Like secretarial, that kind of thing?

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Cook: No, she wasn't trained for that. She had to go into a clerking type.

IA: Clerk.

Cook: Yeah. That's what she was able to do and then even that was tough for a woman to find because there was a lot of women suddenly all looking for jobs.

IA: Right.

IB: Men could go for 10 jobs, only women could go for like two or three, so they all got ..... together.

Cook: Narrowed it down considerably, there just wasn't the opportunities there. So, but then it wasn't long before I got home we got married ...

IB: Then she got busy doing other things.

IA: Dusting, cleaning. (laughter) Women's traditional role.

Cook: Yeah. Sure, that's true.

IB: That's the way it was then.

Cook: That was normal procedure.

IB: That's right.

Cook: I mean instead of her out working, well then I worked part time jobs along with my regular one to keep going. I did that a lot. I worked in .... to work weekends painting and fixing anything with the commission I could. And ah, worked in a parking lot for a buck an hour and scrubbed floors for ten years and mopping job. I still got a callus ... I needed it. Of course, the first thing I did was build a house anyhow.

IA: Your own house?

Cook: Yeah.

IA: That's great.

Cook: I don't know. Boy I really worked

IA: At least you know what's in it, right?

Cook: No I don't own it now, we sold it and we bought a different one, but ah

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IB: But you know this whole thing suggests to me the work ethic that came from your father's time and your grandfather's time, ... you, this work ethic.

Cook: Exactly, right. The first job I ever got was working in a gas station and I made \$15 a week and I'd give my mother \$5 a week and I'd put \$5 in the bank and I spent \$5 and that's kind of the way it went along and when I, when I got to working at the ah, liquor commission, of course, I was making like 80, 90 cents an hour and ah,

IB: The first time, before you went to the Reo the first time.

Cook: Right. And so then I gave her I think \$7 a week and some in the bank and I spent the rest of it.

IA: Oh when I tell my students that when kids used to give their parents part of their salary, they go no.

Cook: Yeah and then I went to work at Reo.

IA: They don't do things like that anymore.

Cook: I think I made \$1.10 an hour when I worked at the Reo. But I worked 10 hours a day and the line, they had two lines, two shifts on the line. And we stocked for both shifts on that 10 hour day. So, ah, I made more money, so I gave my mother \$10 a week, you know, as my money went up, I gave her more money. So much in the bank and blew the rest of it.

IA: That goes back to the Reo family.

Cook: Yes, oh yes, I grew up thinking

IA: ... and whole family helping each other staying together, supporting each other.

Cook: My mother and my dad never once mentioned anything about having to pay board and room or anything, I mean you just assumed you automatically, that was the first paycheck ... expected that's why..... It was your normal procedure.

IA: Did all the kids stay home with them until they went and got married themselves or

Cook: Oh yeah, ah, in fact, I had one sister that never did get married, she was with them all the time. And ah, the other sister stayed until she was married and my brother

IA: Same thing.

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Cook: Of course, he didn't get married until after he got out of the Service. And ah, we were all there ah, they were all at home when I got out of the Service. And then we all started getting married.

IA: Just about like everybody else in the United States. .. having kids like me.

Cook: Well my wife and I were engaged anyhow before I went in the Service, so we were married 44 years and I knew her three more before that, so it would be like 47 years, a long time.

IA: Longer engagements in those days. You had to wait until you had a good job.

Cook: Yeah, yeah, well, I wouldn't get married while I was going in the Service because, of course, you didn't know what the circumstances were going to be.

IA: Yeah.

IB: Ah huh, the cold war set in right away too, so we still didn't know what the future was going to be for anybody.

Cook: It was '47 before I got married. Not too long after I got out of the Service really. But not immediately. (laughter) I got in trouble immediately and come home and I hadn't seen my brother for a long time and we went up north deer hunting (laughter) about two days after I got out of the Service. My wife didn't like that, I can't figure that out.

IA: That just brings up something else I read about in a lot of that stuff I read about the Reo at the University they talk about a lot of the guys going hunting in the fall from the plant.

IB: Well we used to take .. hunting too.

Cook: My dad used to do that. Because I went with him. Yeah.

IB: They used to give you time off to go deer hunting and to go pheasant hunting too, didn't they?

Cook: Apparently they did, because we couldn't have afforded to do it otherwise.

IA: Unless the company said go ahead take a week or take a couple days or something.

Cook: But then he couldn't have afforded to lose the money, I don't suppose, I don't know.

IB: Yeah, they weren't paid days off.

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Cook: But I remember going hunting with him a lot of times.

IA: I remember when I was small the men in the neighborhood, my friends fathers got one day off to go pheasant hunting in the fall.

Cook: Yeah, that was kind of a normal way to do it.

IB: I'm sure it wasn't a paid day off.

Cook: Oh no.

IB: They wouldn't have done that until they had, you know, they were a little more secure moneywise, but this probably was in the last '30's.

IA: Yeah, it helped if you killed something, it helped the family too, because you can eat it.

Cook: Yeah, because there was a lot of game around and yeah. I can remember my dad hunting and bringing it home.

IA: Pheasant it good.

Cook: Rabbits you got, I remember eating lots of em. It probably helped us survive I guess.

IA: Well times are tough.

Cook: They sure were. But I can remember many times that there would be some guy that was out on the road down on his luck and would stop by and I don't recall him ever turning him down, that tells you something, I don't know what.

IB: Hobos would come to the doors.

Cook: Yeah. I remember that happened a lot of times.

IB: You sure wouldn't do that now.

Cook: No. No, no.

IA: The world changed though.

Cook: Yeah.

IA: You can't do that now.

Cook: People bumming around. That's all they had to do.

IB: There was a difference between a hobo and a tramp too.

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Cook: Yeah.

IB: One would work for his food and the other probably

IA: Just sort of expected it.

IB: Well I don't have anymore questions do you? Vern thank you very much.

Cook: Oh you are welcome.

IB: We've enjoyed you sharing your memories.