

Jack Down  
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IB: This is February 18, 1992. We're at the R.E. Olds Museum, Shirley Bradley, Lisa Fine, interviewing Jack Down, volunteer at the R.E. Olds Museum and Photo Archivist. We're going to be talking to him about his REO memories.

IA: The first thing we need because we haven't gotten this information from you before is just, you know, your address and your phone number.

Down: Oh, 2510 Haslett Road.

IA: Okay, you're out by me.

Down: Yeah.

IA: Is that in Haslett...

Down: East Lansing.

IA: Or East Lansing?

Down: East Lansing.

IA: Oh, so you're right near me.

Down: Where are you?

IA: In Whitehills.

Down: Oh.

IA: ..... Curtis is where I live, and your phone is?

Down: 351-6751

IA: 6751. Okay. And were you born here in Lansing?

Down: Yeah. I was the first caesarean in Sparrow Hospital.

IA: Oh, my goodness.

IB: That's really interesting.

Down: Yeah, it's fascinating.

IA: Oh, my goodness.

IB: Was this a new procedure or they just hadn't done it there before?

Down: No, they just hadn't done it.

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IA: So were you coming out feet first, is that it?

Down: I wouldn't come.

IA: You weren't coming.

Down: I got stuck.

IB: .....

IA: You said, I like it in here.

Down: It was nice and warm in there.

IA: And what year was that?

Down: '24.

IA: 1924, Sparrow Hospital. Were your parents from here, around here, too?

Down: My mother's from Alma. My dad was from Perrington, Ithaca area.

IA: Okay, and were they farm, farmers up there? Did they keep their farm?

Down: No, my mother's brother, brother got the farm.

IA: When they came to Lansing?

Down: No.

IA: Oh?

Down: My grandfather made a deal with him that he'd take care of him in his old age and so he gave him the farm much to the annoyance of the rest of the family.

IA: Oh, yeah, he didn't want to divide it all up amongst the...

Down: He didn't want to divide it so my cousin still has it.

IA: Oh, that's, up north of here?

Down: In Alma.

IA: Oh, great. Um, so how long did they stay there and, you were born in Lansing .....

Down: Well, my, my father came to, went to Michigan State, became quite a well known agriculturalist. In fact, when he died, we were kind of

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amazed, I think my mother and I were both impressed, death notices from California and Florida and all over were sent to us.

IA: Did he teach over there or just worked in Extension or...

Down: He worked, he worked in farm crops, experimental, but he did a lot of teaching .....

IA: That's fascinating, when it was the Michigan Agricultural College.

Down: When it was MAC and ah, and when it was MS.

IA: And this was like in the '30 or '40 or...

Down: No, he was there from 1917 till he died in the '50s.

IA: Oh, quite a long time then. He saw change a lot. Yeah, that's interesting.

Down: He was head of the department for a little while. He didn't want that.

IA: Um, this is different than the other stuff we've encountered so I don't know where to go from here. So they, so they, he was able to make a living from this work that he did through the University?

Down: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

IA: Did you go to MSU too?

Down: Yeah.

IA: You did?

Down: Um, hum.

IA: Did you go in engineering?

Down: I went first in liberal arts 'cause I didn't know what to do. Then I went to engineering and couldn't make it, at least I wouldn't work hard enough to make it so then I went to business administration and got a degree with a minor in engineering which turned out to be a rather unusual, at that time, degree...

IA: Very good now.

Down: and a very useful one.

IA: Yeah. They encourage that now, in fact.

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Down: And then my next one was in school administration and engineering and then my last one was in international education and development and a minor in psychology.

IA: Wow, that's a lot of degrees.

Down: So it makes a very, or made a very good combination.

IA: Yeah, and so did you go straight from school to REO to work?

Down: No, I was office manager of Technical Drawing and Design.

IB: Is that here in Lansing?

Down: That was in East Lansing which was a little, aborted thing that a professor of mine tried and, well, people would come in and I want this design and then you'd go out and you'd have a list of engineers and so forth that, at MSU, that, and students too, who would then design it for you and you'd, they'd charge you so much to design it and you'd charge that person more. But ah, they didn't know how to run it. They really didn't. Every customer they got, the scared him away and I could see the handwriting on the wall, it wasn't gonna go and, because I had several customers very happy to come in and leave their job with us and then the boss would come in, he'd say, well, I'm sure if we can do that and so on and so on. Well, are you sure you can get someone to do that and then, of course, the guy, well, oh, you can't. Well, and the next thing we knew, the job was gone.

IA: Yeah.

Down: I don't think we ever did complete a job except a couple I completed.

IA: So you moved on from there?

Down: I moved on from there. I heard REO was looking for an assistant sales engineer and I went and I worked with R.M. Palmer, Robert, I think it was, M. Palmer and I was there a year and a half and sales engineering is the go-between between sales and engineering and we had to put out all the booklets and drawings and body clearance diagrams as they would call them where you have a drawing of a chaise and you know that your wheels are gonna come up so far and this was gonna open so far and this has to be here and when someone is making a body for a chaise, which REO sold a lot of those, they have to have this body clearance diagram. I made those.

IA: What year did you start there?

Down: Oh, you know, that's the thing. I went there in '40, um, I can't tell you whether I went there in '47 or '8. Then I was there about a year and a half.

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IA: Were you in the service at all?

Down: Yeah.

IA: You were? During college?

Down: I, I joined the Army Air Force in '41, '41, went in in '42 and got a disability discharge and was out before the end of '42 and then I worked at Nash Kelvinator here in town.

IA: Oh, okay.

Down: Airplane propellers.

IA: ..... war work.

Down: Um, hum, but I went to school at the same time.

IA: Oh, you went to school, too. Did you just apply to REO because it was a place to get a job or did you want to work there?

Down: Both.

IA: It was both. They were looking for work..

Down: I had, when I was in the Army, I had bought a 1912 REO from a junk yard here in where, well, it's an empty building now, on the corner of Jolly and Okemos Road.

IA: Oh, sure, I know exactly where that is.

Down: And, ..... it was, and I bought a 1912 REO there and I had always been interested in REOs and I don't know when I got my second REO, whether I was there at REO or not but at one time I had every model that REO ever built except the Flying .....(coughing), no, except the REO Royale.

IA: Ah, huh, the one they made in the '30s.

Down: Um, hum. Well, I had a Royale, too, 'cause I had that '36 REO but I mean the big, boxy '30s.

IA: Yeah, the gangster car.

Down: The gangster car, yeah.

IA: So it was an appealing place to work for you 'cause you liked...

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Down: It was an appealing place to work for my and I was driving a '22 REO at the time which intrigued them and be an indestructible car, why I drove it for years.

IA: That must of attracted a lot of attention.

IB: It was well built, it was a well built car.

Down: It was a well built car. I always tell the story, I was driving down Michigan Avenue and saw somebody I knew, waved at them and they didn't see me so I waved more madly and then when I looked around, here was a Willie's Americar (?), dead still in front of me for a stop light. I did lock my brakes, all two of them, and hit him, bent his frame. He couldn't shut his doors. Smashed up the back of his car. He got out of his car holding his neck and his back.

IA: Oh, my goodness.

IB: Oh, no.

Down: And I didn't even scratch my bumper. I didn't break a headlight. I didn't dent anything on that REO.

IA: My goodness.

IB: I can just imagine.

Down: Well, the police reports, damage to Willie, extensive, damage to REO, none. Built just like their trucks and it just ran and ran and ran.

IB: Built to last.

Down: It was built to last. It's still running but I don't have it.

IB: Oh, where is it?

Down: Aw, it was in Texas the last I knew.

IB: Oh, you sold it. And how many REOs did you say you've had?

Down: Well, I had a 1908.

IA: Oh, my.

IB: Oh, my gosh, you did?

IA: A '12, a '16, a '22, a '27, and a '36.

IB: Do you have any of those still?

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Down: No.

IB: Don't you wish you did?

Down: Yeah, now I have a '33 self-shifter but it's a, what they call a basket case. I mean, it's a genuine basket case but it's all there. It's complete if I ever get started on it.

IA: So how long did you work there?

Down: Just a year and a half.

IA: Just a year and a half. And what happened then?

Down: Well, then I went and worked for Standard Oil and that was such a retched company. To this day, I won't buy anything from Standard Oil.

IA: But that was your, the extent of your work at REO?

Down: That was the extent of my work at REO and one of the jobs I had, I mean, I was a gopher, no doubt about it, I mean, I was just a young kid who could do all the mechanical drawings that they needed and who liked to write and still do and so putting out the sales literature and putting out those body clearance diagrams suited me real well.

IA: Yeah, how come the job ended? Did you just think you could get a better opportunity somewhere else?

Down: Ah, they hired someone else who was a very good engineer and I don't think to this day they wanted an engineer in that department but it made me kind of mad and Standard came along and offered me a good job and I took it.

IB: You didn't have any seniority or anything so far to worry about 'cause you hadn't been there long enough.

Down: Yeah, yeah.

IB: Who did you work for?

Down: R.M. Palmer.

IB: R.M. Palmer. I'm sorry, you did tell us that. What kind of pay scale was there for you then?

Down: Oh, enough so that a couple years later I went into teaching and I wasn't making \$3,000. It was an increase.

IA: Oh, so it wasn't a very good...

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Down: Well, nobody was.

IA: Yeah, after the War.

Down: Yeah, in the late '40s, I mean, if you made \$2,500 a year, you were paid well enough and you could live on it.

IA: Um, hum. Could you support a family on it?

Down: Well, I don't know about a family but my wife was teaching and we didn't have any kids for four years. We saw to that and one Christmas, we raised Boxer dogs and our dog had 11 pups and we sold 'em for \$75 to \$85 a piece.

IA: Wow!

Down: I've never been so rich in my life to this day.

IA: Yeah.

Down: I mean, if we saw something that cost, of course a couple hundred dollars then was a lot of money, if we saw something that cost a couple hundred dollars, we bought it if we wanted it. She was driving a car that cost \$200. I was driving a car that cost 25, dollars, and then my REO and neither one of 'em ever took any expense. Our mortgage payment was \$32.

IA: Oh, God, that's unimaginable now, \$32.

Down: Our taxes were nothing.

IB: And you could buy reams of groceries for \$10.

Down: Oh, yeah. We lived like king and queen.

IA: Did you live in Lansing or in East Lansing?

Down: Ah, Meridian Township.

IA: Meridian, so it was pretty out there.

Down: Well, we lived right near where Marble School is. That was Meridian Township then.

IA: Oh, sure, sure.

Down: Then the city came out and grabbed us and brought us in so we moved out again and that's where we are.



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IA: Yeah. Was, you sort of, have been implying that the REO was a good place to work.

Down: I enjoyed it.

IA: Certainly compared to Standard Oil, later.

Down: I started to say I was a gopher and every time that somebody of any importance, I know Cain(?), my job was to take him through the factory.

IA: Oh?

Down: And I know one time I took the president of Volvo through. I remember that. But I took a lot of people through and I used to get out into the factory probably once every week and maybe more and I'd take somebody through and so I got to know the factory even though my job was up in the front office.

IB: You were giving tours. You'd go through most of the main plant?

Down: Oh, I'd take 'em through the whole thing. It was a big plant. See, REO was exceptional in that it staffed its own bodies and made its own engines where most of the, I mean, they weren't the hugest truck manufacturer at the time although when I was there, we were consistently putting out 125 trucks a day.

IA: And a lot of them for the Army, right?

Down: And a lot of them for the Army. Not so much then 'cause the Army didn't need them.

IA: Already over, yeah, the War was over.

Down: The War was over.

IA: But they picked up again later from what other people have said.

Down: They picked up again.

IB: For Korea.

Down: Oh, at one time, REO and GM were the suppliers for the Army. Later on, as I understand it and I wasn't there, REO made a point of making Army trucks at cost to keep the line going and that was when they were putting out 125 trucks a week.

IA: So production had dropped?

Down: Production had dropped considerably and, oh, REO was a busy plant when I was there and so they had, they put out the Army trucks at cost.

(coughing) They were trying to make money on the civilian trucks and, of course, that was what basically happened. They slipped on one of those, one of those biddings to the Army and were losing money hand over fist on one of their big jobs and they asked the Army to increase the amount and where, when Chrysler Corporation asked for something very similar, they got it...

IA: REO didn't.

Down: REO didn't. As I read about this man, I don't know how they pronounce his name, I call it Cappart but someone the other day...

IB: Cappart.

Down: called him Cappart.

IB: The men we've interviewed have called him Cappart.

Down: Cappart, yeah, I mean, Cae looks like .... to me but ah, I have a sneaking suspicion because I've been so critical of the man that when he bought it, he really meant to make it go.

IA: Oh, really?!

Down: I think maybe he did.

IB: In the very beginning you think so?

Down: In the very beginning because he did a lot in making REO a real beautiful truck. I mean, it was already a good truck.

IB: He changed the design or the ...

Down: Well, you could buy more paint combinations and really fantastically beautiful designs and so forth. The truck was an eyecatcher. A lot of chrome on it. Every now and then you see a truck on the road now that you know the man who's driving it owns it and he's got the bumpers chromed and the exhausts are chrome and it's painted with the old circus curlicues and so forth and it's a work of art. Well, REOs, you could buy them that way and I don't know whether he went into it saying, well, if it doesn't go, I'll wipe it out and make money that way or whether that came up later. I really don't know because in the end he was a real bastard.

IA: Yeah, so we've heard.

IB: I've got some interesting literature you might like to look over later. I brought in that Mr. Rankin...

IA: Yeah, it was Mr. Rankin...

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Down: Well, the State of Michigan passed the law against what he did after he did it.

IA: Oh, is that right?

IB: About taking the employees' pension fund, you mean?

Down: Taking the employees' pension fund, within the year, I think it was within the year it was illegal.

IB: Sometimes it takes an injustice to bring about a law that should have been in place in the first place.

Down: I've always been surprised that one of those workers didn't just go and shoot him.

IB: I've heard that there were several threats against his life and that he had bodyguards and that he still has bodyguards and he lives in, he's back in Vicksburg, Mississippi where he came from.

Down: Oh, well, he was from Alma when he came here.

IB: That's true. That's true. He came from Vicksburg, Mississippi.

Down: Oh, he did?

IB: Um, hum, yeah, he did and he's quite an entrepreneur and he owns the town practically down there from what I've heard and read.

Down: This last summer I visited the REO plant in Harrisburg.

IB: Oh, I wanted to talk to you about that.

IA: The one in Pennsylvania.

IB: Tell us about that.

Down: In Pennsylvania. You see, the Osterlunds(?) were their biggest dealer and I don't know, it probably took them a long time, I didn't really, he was busy and I didn't really sit down and talk with him although he was awfully nice, took me through the plant, Jim Osterlund, who is the son of the man who started the factory. My guess is it took him awhile to get their nerve up to do it. I mean, that's quite a...

IB: Why is that?

Down: Well, I mean, here REO had just gone bankrupt and now they're gonna take that name or Diamond REO and take that name and start another factory and you don't do that lightly.

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IB: When would that have been, in the mid-'70s?

Down: Oh, that was '78 I believe.

IB: They weren't producing those, any trucks or anything like that before this, before...

Down: No, they were just a sales...

IA: Dealer.

Down: The dealer.

IB: They were the dealer.

Down: In Pennsylvania and the east, they were the east coast distribution point.

IB: Then they decided to start producing their own.

Down: So they started producing their own REO.

IB: Well, that's a change from being a distributorship to being a...

Down: Quite a bit but they waited nearly four years in there before they started and they've been, I think they feel they've been quite successful. Now this last year, they only produced 200 trucks 'cause everybody is down and, but he says, we made money on every one 'cause we don't build one till it's sold and ...

IA: That was the old REO philosophy.

IB: Yes, yes.

Down: And do you know what Mack Truck lost last year?

IB: No.

Down: I think it was \$280 million.

IB: REO trucks are made in just about anything anybody would want like they used to be. If you had a special order...

Down: No, no, no.

IB: No?

Down: You buy their standard truck. It's call the REO Giant and, their Diamond REO Giant and it is. It's seven feet to the name plate. The name plate was this far about my head and you have to buy that. But

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then you can buy that in any length, wheelbase for the practicality or body style without a cab, with a cab, whatever you want.

IA: Different specifications.

Down: Different specs, yeah.

IB: They've been making cabs that would haul, rigs, like the...

Down: You can get non, you can get a non-road rig. You can get a sleeper if you want.

IB: Delivery trucks?

Down: And, well, nothing small.

IB: I didn't, no, I really meant the bigger delivery trucks but smaller than a sleeper.

Down: Basically what they're building is off-road delivery trucks for gravel...

IB: Oh, okay.

IA: Oh, really, the big, heavy duty things.

Down: Big, heavy duty things. They have a local company that they discovered a couple of years ago that now will make a package dump body and I forget how many tons, huge.

IB: Did they have, how could they go ahead and use the name again?

Down: They bought it.

IB: They bought it. They bought the rights and the patents and whatever. Hum, that must of been an expensive proposition to get started.

Down: To get started, you bet. That's why I think that they waited so long.

IB: Where in Pennsylvania is this?

Down: Harrisburg.

IB: In Harrisburg.

Down: Well, I, I looked in the phone book and I couldn't find it and, 'cause I was there and I wanted to see it and then I looked under truck manufacturing and sure enough, what did they call it. They had some other name and I called up and the girl on the phone, she says, Diamond REO and that sounded so nice.

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IB: How nice to hear that again.

Down: Yeah, and they have 1911 REO sitting in their showroom.

IA: Oh, yeah?

IB: Oh, they do?

Down: Um, hum.

IB: How many people does this factory employ would you think?

Down: They were, as he said, an a no sales vacation. They had closed down for two weeks. Nothing was going on while I was there. There were four or five employees. I really don't know but there'd have to be quite a few dozen.

IB: I was just curious. I was just thinking from the old days of Diamond REO.

Down: Oh, when I was there and we were making 125 trucks a day, there was thousands of employees. That was a busy plant.

IB: Do you remember anything about safety or working conditions or...

Down: Well, it was an awfully old plant. Remember when it caught fire, when it was burned, whatever, after the thing was empty, I really think it was burned.

IA: We've heard that from other people, too.

Down: Yes, I know.

IA: Usually off the record though.

Down: I have no proof. I've just, that's just my own suspicion.

IB: Suspicion, um, hum.

Down: Um, and especially your stories that you've told me confirm it.

IB: Why did, why did you think that perhaps it had been set?

Down: To get rid of it.

IB: For, because it would be cheaper than tearing it down?

Down: Cheaper than tearing it down and also probably it was insured, I don't know.

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IA: To get the insurance money.

Down: Yeah, probably a little bit but it was an awfully old plant. In fact, when we'd come out of the offices, the first part of the plant we went into was the original 1905 plant, wood floors and everything. That's why it burnt.

IB: All that oil soaked into all that wood.

Down: Just like our, just like our Bates Building here, big wooden beams, wooden ceiling.

IB: Was that the portion that would have been, say, Cedar and Baker, right in that corner?

Down: No.

IB: Would that have been the original ...

Down: No, it was the one along, it was the one that went along the railroad tracks.

IB: Okay, okay.

Down: Right behind the...

IB: Right across from the depot.

Down: Right across from the depot.

IB: And behind the clubhouse.

Down: Well, behind the clubhouse and, see, the clubhouse originally, that was a big kind of a park if you look at the old pictures.

IB: Oh, really?

IA: Yeah, yeah.

IB: Before they built, when did they build the clubhouse?

IA: The fields, the REO field, 1917, 1917.

Down: Was it '17?

IA: Yes.

Down: See, they'd been going more than 10 years then.

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IA: Right, that's right. I've read a lot about how the, the boys, after work would go out into the field and play games, sports and things like that.

IB: I've heard that but I couldn't picture where the fields were 'cause I didn't think about it being where the clubhouse is.

Down: And then the main office was the next building south. Then the engineering building had been built later. I don't know when.

IA: Is that where you worked, in the engineering...

Down: No, I was in the main office.

IA: Oh, you were in the main office building.

IB: Right there facing Washington?

Down: Um, hum.

IA: Did you ever go to the clubhouse for events?

Down: Ah...

IB: Were they having much in the '40s?

Down: I don't remember them having much. Yes, there were things went on there but I didn't.

IA: You didn't really go over there?

Down: Uh, huh.

IA: Did people use it though?

Down: Yeah.

IA: Other people, workers, the line workers?

Down: Yes. It was a place you go to movies.

IA: Movies there.

Down: I think the radio station was in it.

IA: Yeah.

IB: Oh, the radio station was still going?

Down: WREO.



IB: At one time, it was in the building across the street, I've been told.

Down: Well, I don't know, I'm sure it was there but I never went up to it.

IB: I don't remember my mother saying much about the clubhouse either. She worked there from, before the, during the War, until early '50s.

Down: We had some friends that lived down on Baker, in that area, and I remember walking up from their house to see the movies in the REO Clubhouse when I was a little kid, in the '20s.

IA: Um, hum. Oh, in the '20s you went to see the movies there? Yeah. We've heard a lot of people have memories about that and how wonderful it was to be able to go and people sneaking in to see the films, even if their parents didn't really work there.

Down: Yeah, and of course, it was perfectly safe to walk up and down the street then, too.

IB: Yes, that's another piece, another way that things have changed.

IA: They, you were saying earlier that you had some memories of the strike and the Lansing Labor Holiday?

Down: Well, I, yeah, I remember that. My father was very conservative and so, therefore, was I and, of course, they met down here in Lansing and then they walked out...

IA: This is for the Labor Holiday or the strike?

Down: It's the Labor Holiday.

IA: In June, in June of 1937?

Down: Yeah, they walked out. They walked down Michigan Avenue and walked out to East Lansing. I'm not sure where they were met by the college students but I would say it's pretty close to Harrison.

IA: Right, the Red Cedar, because they called it the Battle of the Red Cedar.

Down: They called it the Battle of the Red Cedar and the students threw some into the Red Cedar.

IA: Did you see any of this or you just heard from your dad?

Down: No, I heard it.

IA: You just heard it.

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IB: What did your dad seem to think of it, do you remember?

Down: Oh, he thought that was great.

IA: That the students whooped 'em, right?

Down: The students whooped 'em.

IB: Oh, so he, he didn't see it from the workers' end of it?

Down: No, no.

IA: Were people in Lansing frightened by it, at all, because you know, there was a lot of strikes and sitdowns and things going on at that time.

Down: ....., of course, was the center of a lot of the more violent things. I don't remember Lansing being too violent. No, I don't remember anything about people being really upset.

IA: No, no. It seems to me that if you call it a Labor Holiday, it wasn't that kind of thing people were real worried about. You know, it wasn't like a takeover or a...

Down: No, i don't think we really thought anything too drastic was gonna come from it and I think, I think that a lot of people, at least in our, in our group and this would be mostly college, really felt it was illegal to sitdown in a plant and take it over and that was their basis. Whether the people had more wages coming or not, that was illegal so you don't do it.

IB: So that's why the students were...

Down: That's why the students, ah, huh...

IB: they were coming at it from the other side of the coin.

Down: I think so, um, hum 'cause I don't think anyone begrudged people getting paid a decent day's wage. I never heard that. Never heard, well, they're making so much money now and they weren't.

IA: The working people didn't make very much money then either.

Down: No.

IA: Especially in '37, right.

Down: Yeah, and we had, we had people in our own family, now our family was lucky that we had this family farm so nobody ever went hungary and my uncle, when you come, you stop there and you go home loaded with apples

or whatever was available, milk. He saw to that. So we never went hungry but I had a, I had a uncle who was a stubborn old coot who was a blacksmith and would not do anything but blacksmithing and he had a horrible time financially.

IA: He didn't see the handwriting on the wall.

Down: No, well, he wouldn't, yeah, everybody pointed it out to him but he was blind.

IB: During the period of time that you were working there, maybe some of the big strikes were over but I'm thinking right after the War there was the coal strike and the steel strike and the railroad strike and the, ah...

Down: But nothing much in Lansing that I remember.

IB: I mean, well, people were out of work.

Down: Oh, people were out of work.

IB: Yeah, because of these other things. I don't mean.....

Down: But '48...

IB: ..... the REO was down.

Down: See, I graduated in '46 and I was a hot commodity because, see, a lot of the Army people were still in school and I was out.

IA: You were out already.

Down: I was out already and getting a job was just no problem if you had an education at all. Now, I don't know how many people were out of work really but things were moving then. I mean, like a 125 trucks a day. That was, that's rather astounding production and I know we used to sit and watch the production figures of White because White seemed to be the most equal company that we knew of.

IA: White Motors?

Down: White Motors.

IA: Yeah.

Down: And, of course, even while I was there, White was trying to buy the REO engine.

IB: Oh, it was?

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Down: Plant or at least the rights to it and White was producing just about the same as we were and I think most companies and, of course, there were a lot of little companies producing. I mean, Duplex was here in town producing madly.

IB: Well, it was a good time to work in 'cause there was employment.

Down: Um, hum.

IA: And REO was a very Lansing associated...

Down: REO was a family.

IA: Family oriented, yeah.

IB: See, even he knows, even he felt that in working there just a year and a half.

Down: Yeah.

IB: We keep hearing this.

Down: REO was a family.

IA: Yeah, a Lansing based, I mean, it was local.

Down: A Lansing based family, yes it was.

IB: It's interesting to me because R.E. Olds sort of started that feeling and then he wasn't even there much after 1906.

Down: No, he wasn't a part of it.

IB: He just felt like he had done and he didn't want to change with the times and there was no more challenge and he just more or less left everybody else to run...

Down: See, when did he die, '50....

IB: 1950, June of '50.

Down: '50. It must of been '49 then, I met him.

IA: Oh, you did?

Down: Yeah.

IB: Oh, tell us about that. How'd you meet him?

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Down: Well, well, I was interested, I met all the old Lansing people except Durant. I mean, Frank Clark who built the, who built the first REO ..... Olds with, Olds...

IA: Yes.

Down: I knew him. Edmonds of the Bates and Edmonds was a good friend. I used to go to his house every now and then. We used to, I'd just drop in and he'd, awww, and we'd sit down and gab.

IB: What kind of a person was Mr. Edmonds?

Down: Dried up old man but he was fun. He was alive.

IB: How'd you happen to meet him.

Down: I went, I made a point to meet him. I met Bonet with the Bonet Steamer.

IB: Was he living here in Lansing?

Down: Yeah, he was living here. He had drivers license number one for the State of Michigan.

IA: Oh, my.

IB: Is that right?

Down: So proud of that, yeah. That's still the, Bonet Electric is still the same family.

IB: Yes, yes.

Down: And ah...

IB: And Clark now, he was the, the young man who he and R.E. wheeled the little three wheel car out of his dad's shop.

Down: Yeah, yeah.

IA: In the 1880s, 1890s, right?

Down: Yeah, yeah.

IB: 1880s, in the '80s.

Down: But what was interesting was all these people disliked him.

IA: REO, Olds?

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Down: Olds.

IB: Disliked, disliked Olds. Why did they dislike Olds?

Down: They felt, I think to a man, even Horace Thomas...

IB: Who was?

Down: He was his chief engineer, even the Thomas family felt that R.E. climbed on their backs.

IA: Oh, for his own personal gain?

Down: Yeah, and used them. I think that was it. I worked in a place the Auto Body. Not the original Auto Body factory but an Auto Body shop and the man who was their upholsterer was the man who upholstered the car out here.

IB: The REO Royale?

Down: No, the, the 18...

IA: Oh, the original.

Down: The original Olds.

IB: Oh, the 1897 Olds?

Down: 1897...

IB: He did the upholstering on it?

Down: He did the upholstering and he and Clark, in fact, I think that's why I went and met Clark because he was telling me, well, Clark's still alive. He lives in Mason and I think that's why I went to meet Clark was because, and I can't remember his name for the life of me.

IB: The man who did the upholstery?

Down: The man who did the upholstery hated him, too.

IB: And did he say why or just because of bad business dealings?

Down: Well, his comment was, Olds published a book about that, those first days, he said, and he never even mentioned me.

IB: And Clark felt the same way?

Down: And Clark felt the same way. Well, Clark told me that Olds stole his truck. See, he was building the Clarkmobile Truck and I've looked at,

I've looked at Clarkmobile Truck pictures and I've looked at Olds or REO Truck pictures and I can't see that they're that similar.

IA: Similar, they're not, huh?

Down: No, I don't think so but Clark told me himself, REO, he said, I sent my truck over to Olds and before he was building trucks and sent my truck over and said, R.E. why don't you market this with your car. He said, and he kept it and he kept it and I began to send him messages, send my truck back. He said, finally I had to go over and get it. He said, the next year, out he came with the truck and he said it was my truck.

IB: And there was no way he could prove it or...

Down: No, and I don't think they really looked a lot alike but anyway, Clark felt that way.

IA: What kind of things did you talk with Olds when you met him?

Down: Well, I wrote him and asked if I could meet him and I got a postcard back from Florida. He was down in Florida and, you've got that card here somewhere, I mean, the Museum has it.

IB: Oh, good. I hope it's in our records.

Down: Yeah, well, I gave it to the Museum.

IB: Oh.

Down: And he said, I'll be home so and so time, give me a ring, somethin' like that. So, I called and he said come on over and I went over and...

IA: Where'd you go?

Down: To his house.

IB: On the corner of Main and Washington?

Down: Yeah, yeah, and what I found out after I'd been there about 20 minutes was he wanted to know if I knew, you know what the Baby REO is?

IB: Sure.

Down: Yeah.

IA: Where it was?

Down: Where it was.

IB: He wanted to know its locality?

Down: He wanted to find it and he wanted to get it and I, frankly, at the time had never heard of it.

IA: Oh?

Down: See, it's been about 49, something like that, and I told him, no, I didn't know where it was and quick as he found that out, he was done and I...

IB: He had no further use for you?

Down: He had no further use for me and so the interviewing was over and that's when I began to think that maybe Clark and some of those people had a point.

IB: You, what did you, you were in the living room of his house or in his den or...

Down: Oh, we were in, not in the room with the pipe organ. We were in a, downstairs living room.

IB: I understand it was a beautiful place inside.

Down: Well, it was dark and dreary.

IB: Was it really?

Down: Yeah.

IA: Old fashioned?

Down: Old fashioned, heavy...

IB: Lots of dark paneling on the walls...

IA: Victorian, yeah.

Down: Um, hum, very.

IA: Things had already changed a lot since then.

Down: It was a, it was a shame that they tore it down.

IB: I think so too. I, someone was telling me about the turntable... (tape is turned off)

Down: So anyway, he didn't remember it at all and I never did find out.



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IB: Did R.E. Olds appear to be a very friendly man when you first went in?

Down: No, very formal.

IB: No warmth there in his greeting to you or...

Down: I, he was proper.

IB: Just business like.

Down: Business like, ah huh, but once we got done and I didn't know where the Baby REO was, why he....

IA: Where is the Baby REO? Does anyone know?

Down: Oh, yeah. It's out...

IB: ..... Tieg owns it.

Down: Tieg, isn't Tieg dead now?

IB: Oh, I didn't know.

Down: Well, I thought he was.

IB: Richard Tieg, no, I didn't know that.

Down: Well, maybe he isn't.

IB: That's possible. That's pretty possible, in California, anyway.

Down: In California.

IA: Oh, it's out in California.

Down: There was, you know this, this very nicely bound magazine, it's a hardbound magazine called Automobiles? They had an article on it and he has the full size REO just like the Baby. He has 'em both.

IB: We had them both here for a time on display.

Down: Yes, they were both here in the Museum.

IB: Back in 1985.

IA: 'Cause I've seen pictures of the Baby REO. They're adorable.

Down: They're cute.

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IB: We had 'em both here, I don't know when they came. They were here when I came in '85 and they were here till '86, I think.

IA: Now, did you ever meet Richard Scott?

Down: No.

IA: You didn't?

Down: No.

IA: I don't remember when he died but...

Down: I think previous to the times that I was trying to meet people.

IA: Okay. It's possible because he wasn't around after the '20s anyway, so.

IB: When you met Mr. Edmonds, you said he was a, he was very old then. What kind of person was he?

Down: Well, as I say...

IB: Did he say much about being...

Down: Oh, yes, ..... one of the stories he told me 'cause when I first met him, I said, I was trying to get pictures of everything and I asked him if he had pictures and I can see this now, I know the building and so forth, he said, oh, he said, you know, Bates and I, he says, I suppose we made 25 cars and we lost our pants.

IB: On the Batesmobile?

Down: On the Bates and he said, when we decided to quit that, he said, we were so sick of that venture, we took all the papers for the Bates and Edmonds Company and threw them in the middle of the floor of the factory and burned them right there.

IA: Oh, Lord.

IB: Is that right? All that history.

IA: Right, and it makes a historian like me cringe to think about such a thing.

IB: Yes! and the factory was out here, of course.

Down: And the factory was here, yeah.

IB: And the little building that's inside, it was the office portion?

Down: Um, hum.

IB: And then the warehouse out in back was the actual factory where the cars where built. What period of time was he, were they building cars?

Down: Oh, they were building cars...

IB: Like 1910 or...

Down: No, before.

IB: Oh, before.

Down: I think. I think probably I'd say 8 to 11, somewhere along in there. We could look it up here if we wanted to know exactly.

IB: I wonder if there's any of those cars that have survived?

Down: No, I don't even know of any...

IB: Is that right?

Down: Even, of course, he built a tractor ..... and they built engines.

IA: Did any of these old timers talk about what they thought were the big changes that, you know, occurred, how things have changed from the time that they got started at the beginning of the century? You know, how the guys who owned the companies changed or how the workers had changed?

Down: No, I never heard anything on that particularly. I think the one thing and I, I don't think a lot of people realize this, when they think of the car companies from 1900 to say 19, to the World War I...

IA: Yeah, the first two decades.

Down: And was one reason why there were so many of them. Anything that was built that would run could be sold.

IA: Yeah, and it didn't take much capital to get going, either.

Down: No, no.

IA: It's not like building a multimillion dollar plant. You could just get a couple guys together in a back room and turn it out.

Down: And especially if you had an engine to buy and there were engines for sales, I mean, Olds was making 'em for one and for example, there's the Snyder car which belongs, the last I knew, to the people over in Lake Odessa. I can't say their name. Anyway, they bought it but the Snyder

car was built here in town. Now, he put a motor on a buggy. He built a very fancy automobile. I met him and ah, then of course, there was the Green Leaf.

IB: The Green Leaf?

Down: Which was Smith Clawson. Remember Clawson Floors?

IB: Yes, here in Lansing.

Down: Smith Clawson was the engineer.

IB: Oh?

Down: And they built at least three but they were a bicycle company.

IA: Yeah, that was very common.

IB: Yes.

IA: In Europe particular, to go from bicycle to cars.

IB: Start with the bicycles.

Down: Bicycle.

IB: The bicycle and the carriage, you put it together and put an engine on it.

Down: The Pope, Pope Toledo, all that was bicycle.

IA: Ah, huh.

Down: And um, let me see, I'm trying to think, 'cause there was the Neway Engine Company here in town.

IA: .....

Down: And Frank Newborough and I forget the other guy's name but his name was Wave...

IA: What a wonderful name.

Down: And, of course, they bought Clark out and nobody is sure whether there actually was a Neway car or whether it was a Clarkmobile with a different name on it.

IB: Oh?

Down: And no one's real sure on that.

IA: Why did it all happen here? Did anyone...

Down: It didn't much, very much happen here.

IA: In Lansing, I meant.

Down: It didn't. Lansing was, Lansing, as far as numbers go is rather pale compared to a lot of places.

IA: Well, certainly when you compare...

Down: It just happened that two of them went...

IA: Got bigger?

Down: Got bigger.

IA: I see, okay.

IB: They got the financial backing.

Down: They got the financial backing. They built a good car. 'Course Oldsmobile nearly went under in about 1910 to '12 when they went into that great, big Limited and Oldsmobile just squeaked by and...

IB: Then R.E. went down when he wouldn't come up with anything new and then came back up a little bit.

Down: Yeah, yeah.

IA: But Lansing, back then in the teens was considered an important producer, center for car production.

Down: Yeah, of course, now it's the biggest in the United States.

IA: United States, that's right. I know that. That's right.

Down: And ah, which is surprising. I mean, I think when they say Detroit now, they just mean the car industry.

IA: Right.

Down: 'Cause there's nothing in Detroit.

IA: There's not much in Flint anymore either.

IB: Well, they just moved the while V6 line to Flint but...

IA: Oh, back there, huh?

IB: Yeah, the ..... out of BOC here. The building's empty. It's all been taken over to Flint.

IA: But I'm just very curious, I mean, obviously the people have talked about Michigan, you know, why Michigan but so much in the history that I read, they always talk about Detroit, Ford, Detroit, Ford, GM, Flint, but never Lansing.

Down: Never Lansing. I mean, 'course for a little while with the Durant, Lansing was big.

IA: And the '20s with REO and Oldsmobile, it was huge.

Down: Yeah, Durant and Oldsmobile and REO and Duplex although Duplex never was big and Fisher Body.

IA: Fisher, right, that's right.

Down: And Pruden(?) and Motor Wheel.

IB: Oh, the Pruden Wheel began Motor Wheel.

Down: Yeah. I think, I think it was just, I think you'd have a hard time putting your finger on whatever really did it.

IA: Specific things.

Down: Other than there were some good people and General Motors when and so therefore, Oldsmobile went and Fisher Body went.

IB: Durant was a big moving force in that.

Down: And Durant .....

IB: And, too, the times were right. Everybody was scrambling to produce cars and...

Down: Well, of course, the late '20s was a great time for a lot of people. I think that probably the '20s was the first time that the working man actually began to really get money.

IB: Oh, I think you're right. They were coming off the farms and...

Down: And they were coming off the farms...

IB: being able to work where they could make some money.

Down: and they were working in the factories and they were buying cars for the first time.

IB: Life was improving for their families.

Down: Life was improving. They were getting nicer houses and they were sending their kids to college or at least thinking about it and all that sort of thing. I think probably the '20s was a pretty important year, I mean, decade.

IA: Yeah, that's what I'm concentrating on in my own work, actually.

IB: It's almost a huge revolution, isn't it?

Down: Yeah, I think it was.

IB: From agriculture to machines.

Down: And ah...

IA: A lot of the production techniques changed in the '20s in the factory, too, right?

Down: Oh, yeah, yeah, mass production really.

IA: That's right, that's right, came into its own then.

Down: Came into its own, although of course, the fire arms industry had done it...

IA: In the Civil War, a long time before that.

Down: A long time, 50 years before.

IB: And even before that, in Europe they had a production line going. So R.E. Olds capitalized on that, too. It, it strikes me every time I talk about this or think about it that there's nothing new under the sun, ..... but there isn't. Whatever has been produced before you, you take that idea and you make it better and then the next person takes your idea and makes it better and nothing's really brand new.

Down: I got a letter from a man the other day and he was saying, well, after all, he says, fuel injection has been here 40 years. Heck, it's been here since, I think it was the Knox in 1904 had fuel injection.

IA: Is that right?

Down: Yeah.

IB: Where was the Knox produced?

Down: Oh, I don't know.

IB: I mean, was that a Michigan...

Down: No.

IB: Oh, Ohio or somewhere else.

Down: I think it was Indiana, Ohio, one of those. But I have an ad for a fuel injected and I think it was a Knox.

IB: And what about, do I want to say automatic transmission?

IA: Yeah.

Down: Well, my, I have a REO now that I say is a basket case. It's got the automatic transmission.

IA: Right, and REO was the first car to have that, right, in the United States?

Down: Yeah. Well, no, no.

IA: No?

Down: No, oh, no. You get, you'll find some car that had it before 1910. There, the Carger(?) car was a variable speed clutch. There were all kinds of innovations before 1915.

IB: Didn't Benz have one like that?

Down: I don't know. But REO's self-shifter was a little different.

IB: The self-shifter. That's what I was trying to think what it was called.

Down: And ah, I've got two of 'em, two self-shifters. Now, I don't know as you're getting the kind of things you want.

IA: Oh, sure.

IB: It's interesting, too, because each interview we do, some other little piece comes out that we hadn't, we talked to you about some of the auto pioneers that you met. We've not had that experience before. It all fits into the big picture.

Down: Well, when I met Frank Clark, 'course, Frank Clark left Lansing and I think went to Pontiac. Anyway, he built a truck there which was, for a while, relatively successful and when I met him in Mason, he had a shop out behind his house and he was producing one at a time...

IA: Oh, my. In the '40s?



Down: In the, in the '40s, one at a time house trailers.

IB: Oh, he was?

Down: Um, hum.

IB: Hand built almost?

Down: Hand built, wooden frame with a metal skin.

IA: Oh, my goodness.

Down: They looked quite a bit like, as I remember them, quite a bit like the Airstream.

IB: I was just gonna say an Airstream, the rounded, in the middle.

IA: And that's how he was making a living...

Down: That was what he was doing when I talked to him. He was very busy working on his...

IA: Now, see, that's a, I see as a huge difference between the early guys who pioneered in the automobile industry and the ones who came later.

Down: Like Tucker, you mean?

IA: These, these, well, at least later, these early guys, they were the hands-on engineers.

Down: They were. I mean, Olds had no training.

IA: That's right. The later guys were more business administrators.

Down: Yes.

IA: They knew how to oversee large corporations.

Down: Olds had no engineering training and yet he realized, I think, how badly he missed it when he, when he gave MSU the money to...

IA: For the engineering...

Down: Build a new building when it burned. My dad was there in that period.

IB: He was?

Down: My father had a clothes pressing shop on the campus right next door to the Olds Building, or the original engineering building. Of course, when they rebuilt it, they built it so it looked just like the other

one and he said that he and his partner picked up their steam presses and carried them out of the building 'cause they thought it was gonna burn and the next day, he said, it didn't burn. They wanted to take it back in, it took six people to carry the same press back in.

IB: Isn't that, that adrenalin rush.

Down: That adrenalin.

IB: How did the fire start?

Down: I don't remember.

IB: And it totally gutted the building.

Down: Gutted it.

IB: And then it was...

Down: It really gutted it.

IB: He donated the money and it was rebuilt?

Down: Yeah, um, hum.

IA: But to get himself started in business, he didn't need that, you know, at least in those, the early days.

Down: No. His father was building engines.

IB: Just took over his dad's shop. Forces his brother Wallace out, moreless, is what I've heard.

Down: I don't know if he forced him out but knowing...

IB: Bought him out.

Down: knowing what the others thought of him, maybe he did.

IA: Yeah. Now, I've read some very shady accounts of his brother in the early teens and how his brother tried to organize a union among the workers and that was a point of big contention between them.

Down: Contention and that's why he bought him out or got him out, wanted him to go.

IA: The machinist's union, in fact, because in those days, of course, most of the workers were, considered themselves machinists, you know. You don't know anything about that, huh?

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Down: Well, I know they did.

IA: Except, except what I just told you, yeah. But that's about all I can find out. It's very tantalizing.

Down: I don't, oh, about his brother?

IA: Yeah.

Down: No, I probably read some of the same things you have.

IA: Same things, yeah.

IB: There weren't too many records anywhere or articles that I've read about him other than just to hint at things like that.

IA: Right, that's right. It's very, it's very interesting.

Down: And then I understand, too, as Olds got older, he embellished the stories.

IA: Oh, I see.

IB: Yes, that's why the...

Down: That's why the first biography was...

IB: The Yarnell book.

Down: Yeah, not considered a very good book.

IB: No, and there's some things out of the Neimeyer book, too, that aren't, I just ran across something the other day I was gonna mention to you, but I think everybody realizes that the other one, the Yarnell book was really ghost written by R.E., to make, and as you look at things back down the years, you want to recall the good things and you want your record to go on looking good.

Down: Well, and maybe you just simply want some propaganda out there, too, and I'm sure he was aware of how some of these people felt. Now, down in the State Library, are the two photo albums of the Clark family.

IA: Oh, I'll have to check that out.

Down: Oh, they're...

IB: Where, the State Library?

Down: Yeah, they're down in Joanne's bailiwick.

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IA: Oh, in the Lansing State...

IB: Oh, in the Lansing Public Library?

Down: Yeah, yeah, but it's called the State, I don't know why.

IB: In the Lansing History room?

Down: In the Lansing History room.

IB: Downstairs, okay.

Down: And ah...

IB: You have to be quick if you're gonna do that...

IA: I know.

IB: ..... pretty soon.

Down: There are pictures in there of parties given by Clarks and the Olds's are there and there's pictures in there of Clarks and Olds and the women and the men out in their car and their children, doing things together.

IA: Take drives and stuff.

Down: Taking drives, yeah.

IB: Maybe on a social level they could maybe...

Down: So they were, they were friends up till at least '10 or '12 and I'm sure that he realized that these people wouldn't speak to him anymore.

IB: And they really wouldn't speak to him?

Down: And they really wouldn't, no. They didn't like him and I'm sure, you know, he wanted to...

IA: He was also setting his sights beyond Lansing.

IB: Well, he was...

IA: ....., too.

IB: a business entrepreneur, too.

Down: Yeah, he was.

IB: Cars were just a means.

Down: Well, he actually got tired of the cars.

IB: Not that he really loved car, right, after he'd pioneered it and done what he wanted to do, then he, then his interest left. It wasn't as exciting anymore and I've just read that...

Down: Wasn't exciting anymore and real estate was exciting to him.

IB: Um, hum.

IA: Yeah.

IB: And traveling.

Down: And maybe he, and maybe he changed because he did a lot with trying to make life better for some people.

IB: He did a lot for Lansing, didn't he?

Down: Well, he did a lot in Florida with his retirement places and so forth. He was gonna make money at it, sure, but also he knew it was a gamble and he wanted retired ministers to have a place to go and I don't know whether he wanted retired Olds, ah REO people to have a place to go. I don't know.

IA: He originally wanted it to be a place where his workers could go, too, I think, from what I read.

IB: Sort of a utopian community.

IA: Yeah, you know, after they'd put their time in, long years at the REO that they would have a place that they could go.

Down: A place to go.

IB: There again, that paternalistic thing comes through again.

Down: Yeah, it does.

IB: I think it's so interesting to think that this started so long ago but this feeling persists all the way down through the '70s. You spoke about it even.

IA: Yeah. Did you see it when you were working there or from people that you knew that worked there, did you see any of the kind of programs that the REO offered the workers. You know, I've asked you already about the clubhouse but other kinds of things?

Down: No, I didn't.

IA: Okay.

Down: I don't know why, I didn't feel a part of that.

IB: Maybe you weren't there long enough.

Down: Well, I might not have been there long enough and my boss was not there very long.

IA: Oh, okay.

Down: And he...

IB: Mr. Palmer.

Down: Yeah, Mr. Palmer.

IA: 'Cause, you know, people have talked about sports teams and there was a benefit, a mutual benefit society. People could get money...

Down: Oh, band...

IA: There was a band and, right.

Down: They had all those kinds of things.

IA: Right.

Down: One thing you might want to hear is there was a football star from MSU named John Pringle. I think there was an R in it, not Pingle but Pringle, I'm sure. He came to REO as sales manager while I was there.

IA: I think we've heard about this from somebody else, didn't we.

IB: Last week we interviewed Hilda Smith. I don't know if you ever had a chance to meet her. She was in personnel.

Down: I don't remember her.

IB: And there's, when she retired, they gave her this big party and the big beautifully leather bound album and there was a picture of him in there and her and then the little cartoon sketch of him chasing, behind her with this football and she's saying, no, no, I don't want to talk about football again and he was sales.

Down: Well, we, a lot of us at the time thought he got the job because of his name but he was an awfully nice person. Now how good a job he did, I don't know. He was there probably six months overlap with me.

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IA: Okay, and was he hired for his skills on the field as opposed to in the office?

Down: Genasepa?(French saying)

IA: Let the record note that he made a face 'cause you can't see those on tape.

Down: Yeah, he was a very nice person. I liked him and we seemed to enjoy each other a little bit.

IA: But the company was still interested in those kind of activities, too, obviously and not to even look into hiring somebody for their sport skills. In the teens, of course, they were really into having good football, ah baseball teams...

Down: Baseball...

IA: for the city leagues.

IB: That's right, we heard about that from someone, didn't we.

IA: Yeah.

IB: That they would hire people that were good in those areas.

IA: And REO won the city championships.

Down: Did they?

IA: Yeah, in the late, '13, '14, '15, something around there, yeah, and that was very important to the company, apparently that they would do that, make a good showing. So.

IB: That pulled togetherness, too.

IA: Yeah.

Down: Well, yeah, out in the plant there was, there was a feeling of we.

IA: Ah, huh, even with the union being there.

Down: Oh, yeah.

IA: Okay. So it wasn't necessarily was them or, against us.

Down: No, no.

IB: Like it is now.

IA: Right, right. You can't possibly have loyalty to the company if you belong to a union.

Down: No, there was, I never, ever feel that. I didn't join 'cause there was no union of the office workers but the men out there were together. I mean, I think everybody felt we were making a good truck and we want it to be good.

IB: Pride.

Down: Um, hum, pride.

IB: Do you remember, I suppose you were living in Lansing then when the big train wreck was right there on the north side of the clubhouse?

Down: I sure do because I was right down there.

IA: Really, you saw it?

Down: I didn't see it happen but I was right there afterward. My best friend and I, we jumped our bicycles and we went right straight down there. I've got some very nice pictures of it.

IA: Oh, my!

IB: Have you really?

Down: Oh, yeah.

IB: I recall something about it taking out the switch tower.

Down: Yeah, took off the switch tower. Killed a little newsboy.

IA: Oh.

IB: Oh, I didn't know that.

Down: Yeah, killed a newsboy who was standing there on the platform.

IB: Oh, at the railroad depot.

Down: At the railroad depot.

IB: Ready to deliver papers or...

Down: And, of course, it went right through the end of the depot.

IB: Oh, it did?



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Down: And there was a man sitting in his car, I have a picture of this, there was a man sitting there in his car and waiting for somebody at the depot and he saw it start to happen and he leaped out of his car and ran as hard as he could and a freight car rolled right over his car and here is this car just engine high and a door sticking out from under that freight car. I have that picture, that I took it.

IB: Oh, I have to, goodness sake.

Down: And ah...

IB: There were cars all over, I mean, railroad cars...

Down: Yeah, railroad cars all over. It took off the signal tower.

IA: And was this in the '30s?

IB: '36.

Down: Must of been right along in there.

IB: I think I was four or five when it happened.

Down: Well, I was an avid photographer then and I went down with my camera and took pictures.

IA: Oh, my goodness.

IB: We didn't have a car and we lived out in Holt and the neighbors, I guess the general telegrams or whatever but everybody suddenly knew about it and somebody came and took us down so we could see it.

Down: And I remember we were walking along and all of a sudden we realized we were walking in something and it was going squish, squish and it was red and we thought, oh, my God...

IA: Hope it's not blood.

Down: but it was grapes.

IA: Oh, that were in the train.

IB: Oh, that...

Down: Had been crushed.

IB: In one of the fruit, or cars.

Down: Um, hum.

IB: And the engineer or any, I can't...

Down: No, just the one kid was killed.

IB: The one little boy, just in the wrong spot.

Down: Just in the wrong spot at the wrong time.

IA: Oh, that's awful.

Down: Yeah, but it went through the end of the wall of the depot and, of course, showered people with bricks and so forth but, and a lot of people were hurt but one boy was killed.

IB: Gee, that must of been a big panic.

Down: Oh, it must have been.

IA: Thought that you were being bombed or something, you know.

IB: You know, and now we have all this emergency equipment to respond to those things but in the '30s.

Down: The '30s didn't.

IA: I just have a couple more questions.

Down: Yeah, yeah.

IA: Um, I still want to get back to this feeling about the company and the family feeling that you mentioned, that you had a lot of pride in, in the production of this good truck and I just want, want to know if you can speak a little bit more how, and I know you weren't working down there making the trucks or anything but do you think that the workers that did had a sense that the company was gonna reward them for their loyalty and their good service, you know, so it was not just that they were making a good truck but that the REO took care of its people.

Down: REO took care of its people. REO had this very much anticipated retirement program, that REO was not going to let them, ever abandon them.

IA: Right, so if they put their time in, they were okay.

Down: They'd put their time in and they had earned it and REO was gonna do the right thing. I'm sure that was the way they felt and the other thing that you or I was always kind of impressed was was how young I was compared to most of the workers. See, those workers there or a lot of them were 30s and 40s and 50s and 60s.

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IA: Yeah, right. So they just didn't let guys go just because they got older. They kept them on.

Down: They kept them on. If they could do anything and wanted to, they kept 'em on.

IA: We've heard that, too, even when people got disabled. They may not have been able to pay a whole lot for their hospitalization or their lost wages but people mentioned that if they couldn't work the line, they would work an elevator or they'd find something else for them to do.

Down: Find something for them to do.

IA: Yeah.

IB: So, R.E. Olds really ....