

Eileen & Harold Janetzke

February 26, 1992

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IB: This is February 26, 1992 at the R.E. Olds Museum, Shirley Bradley, Lisa Fine. We're interviewing Mr. and Mrs. Harold Janetzke on Reo Memories.

IA: Okay. Usually we just start by asking, you know, when you worked at the Reo and, you know, the years that you started and what you did when you were there and how long you were there. So, Mr. Janetzke, if you want to start.

Harold: I started in December of 1936.

IA: Okay.

Harold: It was three months after they discontinued the production of the passenger cars.

IA: Three months after?

Harold: Three months after.

IA: Okay, and what did you do when you started there?

Harold: I was, started as a mail boy.

IA: How old were you when you started?

Harold: I was 20.

IA: Twenty years old and were you out of high school at that point?

Harold: Oh, yes.

IA: Yes, okay.

Harold: I had one, one term at Michigan State.

IA: Oh, okay. And you started out as a mail boy and obviously you didn't stay a mail boy there the whole time you were there.

Harold: No, after a few months, they transferred me to the timing, timekeeping

IA: Timekeeping department. Okay, and how long were you there for?

Harold: I was there, on and off. We were laid off quite a bit of the time, from 1936 till 1940 but in that time, I went back to the mail boy job.

IA: So, when times were slow, you went down...

Harold: The next, the next year for about a month and then back to timekeeping again.

IA: Now, timekeeping, that means you were in charge of those, where people punched in.

Harold: Taking care of the clock cards.

IA: The clock cards and calculating what people were owed for their hours?

Harold: Right.

IA: And at that point, were people on hourly wages?

Harold: They were.

IA: Already, yeah, they had switched over?

Harold: Yes. I was, I did timekeeping mostly in the maintenance department and those men were all hourly employees.

IA: So you were mostly in supervisory, that was kind of a management, supervisory?

Harold: No, it was a salaried position.

IA: A salaried position, okay. So you weren't part of the union when it came through in '37? You didn't have anything to do with that?

Harold: Yes, in '37, the, I became a member...

IA: You did?

Harold: of the union.

IA: As a timekeeper, in the time...

Harold: Now, wait a minute, no, I didn't either.

Eileen: No, not in '37.

IA: So you, the big strike was in '37.

Harold: It was much later.

IA: You joined the union later?

Eileen:

Harold: Very much later because...

IA: Okay.

Harold: I was off work the whole year in '39 and in January of '40, they called me back to be representative between the accounting department and the machinery sales group 'cause they were selling the surplus machinery to repay the Reconstruction Finance Corporation \$2.5 million that they borrowed for...

IA: Getting geared up?

Harold: Getting back in gear, you know.

IA: Right, for the War, which we were going to be entering soon.

Harold: Then a year later, I transferred into the engineering department. I was a detail draftsman.

IA: Oh, okay. Did you get the skills that you needed for that when you were at MSU? Did they teach you the drafting?

Harold: Well, I had taken it in high school...

IA: Oh, in high school, too.

Harold: and Michigan State. I was taking mechanical engineering at Michigan State.

IA: That's hard.

Harold:

IA: Engineering's hard stuff.

Harold: I learned quite a bit in that first term.

IA: Did you do any of your apprenticeship work over, through Reo?

Harold: No, I didn't, no. Let's see. In January of '39, I went back to Michigan State and got some more...

IA: Training.

Harold: studies under my belt.

IB: More drafting classes, engineering classes?

Harold: Yeah, engineering classes and then as I said, in 1940, they called me back to work and it was my job to check the prices that they

were selling at against the assess, or the estimated prices that were set down in the book.

IB: Selling of the cars and the trucks, you're saying?

Harold: No, no. This was the machinery.

IB: The machinery.

Harold: The machinery 'cause they had a lot of machinery that they didn't need any more that was used for passenger car manufacturing.

IA: Oh, because they had given that up, yeah. I see.

IB: And they sold those to different factories around the United States?

Harold: They sold them to machinery dealers and a lot of it went overseas.

IA: Oh, that's interesting.

IB: I wonder if any of it went to Japan and Germany.

IA: Yeah, right, got some good stuff.

Harold: quite a bit of it.

IB: Quite a bit did?

Harold: Yeah.

IB: That's interesting, isn't it?

IA: And they probably used it for their war effort.

Harold: Yeah, shot it back at us.

IB: Yes. We haven't changed much, have we.

IA: Oh, that's interesting.

IB: While you were laid off that year of '39, was, you were laid off because of things weren't selling, the Reo products weren't selling?

Harold: The plant was mostly down.

IB: Was it?

Harold: Yeah. They had just finished, I believe, a big order of busses in December of '38, the coaches, for the City of Lansing.

IB: Oh, the City of Lansing.

IA: Oh, that's right, they did do the busses.

IB: Bus contract.

IA: Yeah.

IB: Of course, they hadn't made cars since '36 so they were making busses and trucks, were they?

Harold: Oh, yes.

IB: '37, '8 and '9.

Harold: Yeah, they went into busses and trucks.

IB: I wonder if any of those old Reo busses are still on the road?

Harold: I wouldn't know.

Eileen: We've seen some of the Reo trucks.

IA: Yeah.

IB: Oh, yes.

IA: We've heard that, that there are some of them still around, yeah, and you said you joined the union a little bit later. You were sort of working up to that.

Harold: I can't remember.

Eileen: It was after you came back from the War.

Harold: Well, it was later on. I was...

IA: Oh, it was after, in the '40s, late '40s.

Harold: It was later on. engineering department. This was when the union, when the officer's union

IA: Yeah, we've heard that from other people, too, that they had an office worker's union there which I was very surprised about. That's pretty rare.

Harold: It was UAW.

IA: It was a UAW union.

Harold: Yeah, it was a, they call it, the office and technical workers.

IA: Workers, and so you joined that?

Harold: Um, hum.

IB: I imagine pretty much everybody did, didn't they?

Harold: Well, they did, yeah.

IB: It was to their benefit? Things, were things better?

Harold: Except, except for the employees that were on what they called a confidential salary list, the supervisory...

IB: What was that, confidential salary list?

Harold: Well, you didn't, you didn't know, you knew what you were getting in salary but you didn't know what anybody else was getting. So there might be two people there doing the same work, one of 'em getting \$100 a month and the other one getting \$200 and \$300 a month, you know.

IA: Special deal.

IB: Was that because they had more skills or...

Harold: Not necessarily.

IB: I'm thinking somebody in times, in future times will be listening to this and wondering...

Harold: The old, the old saying is, the wheel that squeaks the loudest gets the grease.

IB: Aw, that's great.

IA: Or maybe if they were friends of the person who made the decision, too.

Harold: That's true.

IB: And so those people that were confidential salary did not join the union.

Harold: No,

IB: Because it wouldn't be to their advantage.

Harold: Because they were considered supervisory.

IB: Okay.

IA: I see.

IB: Alright.

Harold: Supervisory employees were not part of the union.

IB: Well, that's interesting.

IA: Um, hum.

Harold: But the relationship between the people was still good.

IB: That's interesting.

IA: Regardless.

IB: Isn't that interesting. You'd think that...

IA: Yeah.

IB: Because obviously those of you that weren't confidential salary knew the other person was making more but still there was a good feeling. No one held it against 'em. I think that's so interesting.

IA: During the '37 strike, you just stayed away or did you go to work?

Harold: I was, at that time, I was keeping time in the maintenance department.

IA: But, of course, there was nobody working that month. It was on walk out.

Harold: The next day, I stayed home.

IA: You stayed home. You had a little holiday.

Harold: And I stayed there until the strike was over and then I went back to the same job after the strike was over.

IA: So you just stayed away and let it blow clear.

Harold: Well....

IA: You didn't have much choice.

Harold: I wasn't allowed there.

IA: Right, that's right. Okay.

Harold: So...

IA: So you didn't have any contact with what was going on at the plant or anything during that time?

Harold: Oh, I knew, I knew what was going on by word of mouth. I didn't participate in it or anything like that.

IA: What kinds of things did you hear about that were going on?

Harold: The people actually were living right in the plant. It was a sit down. They had mattresses in there and just lived there.

IA: Right, and no, they weren't afraid that there would be any troops called in 'cause, of course, in Flint there was lots of violence when the workers sat in on, at the Buick plant but they weren't afraid of that kind of thing happening at the Reo?

Harold: No, no.

IB: How did they receive food? Did somebody bring in food?

Harold: People would bring it, bring it to them.

IB: They were allowed to come in with it.

Harold: Their family members would bring.

IB: Oh, family members were allowed to bring in food?

Harold: Well, they would pass it through the windows...

IA: Pass it through the windows.

IB: Oh, okay. Okay. How long a period, off the top of my head I've forgotten, how long a period did that strike...

Harold: And I can't remember how many months that strike went on.

IB: Oh, it was...

IA: It was a month.

IB: A month?

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IA: Yeah, it was one month.

IB: Okay.

IA: It was the month of March.

IB: That's a long time to stay inside an old factory.

Eileen: Was your father working at that time?

Harold: No, no. Dad worked there from 1906 till 1930.

IA: Okay, 1906 till 1930. What was his name?

IB: Oh, think of the changes.

Harold: Adolph.

IA: Adolph.

Harold: We called him Shorty.

IA: I don't think they called too many people Adolph after 1940. That wasn't a very popular name after that.

IB: 1906, he worked there...

Eileen: His sister, his sister worked there, too, I think.

IA: Oh, is that right? Your sister did, too?

Harold: Yes, my sister worked there 1921 to I think 1936.

IB: Was she married at that time?

Harold: The year that I started.

Eileen: No.

Harold: No, she wasn't married at that time.

IB: Single lady. Did she...

Eileen: When she got married she quit.

IA: What was her name? What was your sister's name?

Harold: Matilda.

IA: Matilda.

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Harold: Tilly

IA: Tilly, okay. So did your dad...

Harold: My dad was a production worker.

IA: He was a production...

Harold: Worked on the line.

IA: Right, almost from the very beginning 'cause it...

Harold: Almost.

IA: Yeah, 'cause it started in 1904 so he was there almost right from the beginning.

Harold: Yeah, a couple of years after it was started.

IB: He must of worked on the Reo Runabouts.

Harold: Oh, yes.

IA: Did, was he born here in Lansing, your dad?

Harold: No, no. He was born in a German community in Poland.

IA: A German community in Poland.

Harold: And he immigrated in the late '80s.

IA: Did he come straight here, to Lansing?

Harold: I'm not sure whether he did or not. He never knew...

IA: He probably came through the east coast but...

Harold: my folks never talked too much about it.

Eileen: Didn't they live in Northville for a while?

Harold: They lived in Northville 'cause my dad's sister lived there before him.

IA: Did he come to Lansing to work at the Reo?

Harold: No, I think his first job, he was in control of the beer wagons...

IB: That seems kind of in keeping, doesn't it, with the German background, I always think of...

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Eileen: how he met your mom, when she worked in a hotel.

Harold: Yeah, that's why he met my mother.

IA: Oh, we had another story about a German immigrant who opened up a hotel and a bar in Chicago. I can't remember who that was now...

IB:

IA: I can't remember now but somebody's grandfather did that or father did that.

IB: And your mother was working in the hotel and your father came in and sold her on a bill of good, huh?

Harold: My mother was doing housekeeping to repay her passage.

IA: Oh, from Germany also?

IB: Oh, they have to repay their passage?

Harold: Yeah, Germany, yeah, the old country and my dad met her when she, she was doing housework to repay her...

IB: What would passage have cost, I wonder.

Harold: I have no idea.

IB: And then they, they could get a contract or something and then repay the loan or, oh, that's interesting.

Harold: 'Cause certain people advanced payment for passage.

IB: They probably made a little bit on that.

IA: Yeah, they sure did. They sure did.

IB: Oh, isn't that interesting.

Harold: But the real details on how they came to...

IA: To Lansing, you don't know.

Harold: 'cause they never talked about it.

IA: They never talked about it. Probably wasn't easy. Did they do any farming when they came here or he mostly worked labor?

Harold: Well, my dad did some, some work on the farm.

IA: At first, when he came.

Harold: My uncle had a farm in Northville.

IA: Oh, in Northville, they had a farm, okay. And the work at the Reo obviously was good since he stayed for 24 years, right, or he felt he was making a good enough living there.

Harold: Well, in 1930 the Depression hit.

IA: Oh, that's right.

Harold: So that let him out.

IA: That was when he stopped working there.

Harold: Right.

IA: 'Cause of the Depression.

Harold: It was layoff 'cause of the Depression.

IB: What did he do then, go back to farming?

Harold: No, he just was out of a job and got a few odd jobs.

IB: Those are tough times.

Eileen: Had a family of seven.

IA: Oh, my.

IB: A family of seven and he had seven children to worry about.

IA: Did your mom work at a job outside the house?

Harold: No.

IA: No, she stayed home and took care of these kids.

Harold: No, she was always a housewife.

IA: Which is a job, too. What did your dad think about working at the Reo? I mean, obviously he wasn't real happy when they laid him off but...

Harold: No, but, I don't know what you mean by what did he think about working there.

IA: Did he think it was a good place to work?

Harold: Well, it was a job, you know. Maybe he felt he had to do it. I remember there were times when he would walk all the way, you know where Bancroft Park is on Clark Street, well, we lived in between Grand River and Sheridan on Clark Street and if you're real familiar with that area...

IA: I'm not real familiar.

Harold: Gausens, there was a Gausens Bakery.

IA: Do you know this, Shirley?

IB: I remember Gausens Bakery.

Harold: And we lived next door to that.

IB: Oh, really? It later became Roscamps and, I can't remember what else.

Harold: There were times when my dad would walk from there over to the Reo to work and he'd work overtime and then walk back home.

IB: My dad, we lived in Holt. My dad did the same thing, walked in from Holt. Did your father ever see R.E. Olds during the early times? Did he ever mention R.E. Olds or Dick Scott or...

Harold: I don't know, I have no idea.

IB: Okay, just curious.

IA: 'Cause it wasn't a big plant in those early years. It was a couple hundred people, that's all.

IB: In the early years, R.E. Olds was there more often, taking more of an active part and I just thought I'd ask.

IA: The plant also, the company also when you were working there, too, had almost from the beginning, all sorts of programs for the workers. You know, they opened the clubhouse in 1917 and they had sports teams and benefits, societies...

Harold: Oh, yes...

IA: Did you or your dad do that kind of...

Harold: They had a radio station.

IA: WREO, that's right.

Harold: WREO and they made their own newsreels.

IB: Oh, they did?

IA: That's right and that's what's at the library.

Harold: They were Reograms.

IB: Reograms.

IA: Reograms. That's what they have at the library.

IB: What sort of things, like, like regular newscasts?

Harold: Yeah, just like

IB: Events of the day.

Harold:

IA: Right, and they showed those at the clubhouse, right?

Harold: Yes, they showed them at the clubhouse, yeah.

IB: Ah, and there are still some of those available to look at in the archives at the

IA: So as a family you all took advantage of those kinds of things that the company provided?

Harold: Oh, yes. We went to movies at the clubhouse and so forth. As a matter of fact, when I started working there, they were still issuing clubhouse cards...

IA: This was in '36?

Harold: which entitled the family to participate in...

IB: That was like a pass.

Harold: the clubhouse doings.

IA: The whole family.

Harold: Yeah.

IB: And you come into any of the events by using that pass card?

Harold: Yeah.

IA: We've heard that also people who didn't, whose family didn't necessarily work at the Reo sometimes snuck in, too, to see films.

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Harold: Oh, yes.

IB: Especially kids, 'cause I think Glen Green was telling us about...

Eileen: Well, didn't they, 'cause a neighbor of my sister's where I'd always come visit during the summer, their daughter would go and she'd take me as a guest.

IA: Oh, is that right?

Eileen: Yeah, so...

IA: You could take a guest.

Eileen: I think they could take a guest...

Harold: On Fridays, Fridays after school hours, they had a matinee for the children and they let any kids in.

IB: Oh, whether their fathers worked at Reo or not.

Harold: Yeah, that's right.

IA: Oh, that must have been a lively time, I bet, with all those kids. Times, you know, I know that in the early years the times weren't, the times were tough, even when it wasn't in Depression, but your dad was able to take care of seven kids pretty well on what he could make at the Reo?

Harold: Yeah.

IA: I mean, you know, you didn't have a lot of frills but...

Eileen: Didn't have a car.

IA: They didn't have a car.

Harold: He never, never owned a car.

IA: Yeah, my grandfather didn't either.

IB: Is that right?

IA: Yeah.

Harold: Of course at that time, there was streetcars and later on busses.

IA: People didn't live out in the suburbs that much then either.

Harold: No.

IA: So, and there were no malls you had to drive to. No malls.

IB: That's when downtown

IA: Yeah, yeah, that's right.

Harold: corner grocery stores that were really grocery stores
.....

IA: 7-11.

Harold: 7-11.

IA: Not chain stores, the locally owned people stores.

IB: Where the grocer knew you and you'd give him your list and he'd
assemble your groceries.

Eileen: That's right.

IB: Did you, mostly father and mother, did they rent their houses or
did they eventually buy a house?

Harold: No, they, my folks bought their house

IB: In the north end that you were talking about. We've heard that
you could arrange loans to buy a home through Reo through the
budget department or finance department.

IA: I don't remember.

IB: Where they would help you get a loan.

Harold: I don't remember anything like that.

IB: They wouldn't loan you the money but they would help you get
.....

IA:

Harold: There was still some owing on the mortgage of the house at the
time my dad was laid off and home owners
loan corporation...

IA: One of the New Deal programs?

Harold: Yeah. The government had set up and then they...

IA: Helped him out.

Harold: Helped him out.

IA: Good.

IB: So they didn't lose their home. When you went back to work in '40, your wife said something about going in the service. Were you back to work and then you went into the service during the War or...

Harold: Ah, yes, I was, entered the Army through the Draft.

IB: You were invited by the Draft.

Harold: I was invited, yeah, by Uncle Sam.

Eileen:

IB: What year did you go into the Army?

Harold: In '44.

IB: In '44.

IA: Oh, late, very late.

Harold: Yeah, it was late.

IB: And then you had to stay on with...

Harold: Until '46.

IB: Till '46. They sent you to Germany, did they maybe?

Harold: Pardon?

IB: Did you go to Germany, perhaps?

Harold: No, I was assigned to the medical corp and I spent my time at General Hospital, just outside of Chicago.

IB: Oh.

Eileen: That's as far as he got.

IA: Not too bad.

IB: Oh, that's alright.

Eileen: That was fine. He could come home at least once a month.

IA: Yeah, really. Oh, that's wonderful.

IB: Great. We have a volunteer here who went in about the time you did from the Reo and was sent to Germany and he was there with the occupation troops and he was telling us, you know, just, there was nothing left, just rubble and it was so hard for him to cope with, seeing hungary children and there just wasn't any food and the Army fed them as much as they could. So I think it's nice you got to stay here.

IA: Here, safer.

IB: Then you came back in '46 and your job was waiting for you?

Harold: Yes, I went back to work at the Reo in product design drafting room.

IA: After you'd had the additional training at MSU that helped out. And how long did you stay there after '46? Till?

Harold: Until Mr. Cappart ran it into the ground.

IA: Oh, boy, till '74, '75.

IB: Oh, you were there right till the end.

IA: All the way to the end.

Harold: Till '75, right to the end.

IA: My goodness. Did you stay at the same type of position.

Harold: I stayed in the...

IA: Engineering?

Harold: engineering.

IA: Okay, wow. So except for a couple of years off, laid off and a couple of years in the Army, you've been there since the mid-'30s basically.

Harold: Right.

IB: Did you have an indication that Mr., that the place was going to go bankrupt? Did you all sort of feel like it was going...

Harold: Ah, the day after it was announced that Mr. Cappart was buying the place from the White Motor Company, the vendor's representatives coming in and talking to us said, we'll give you about one year

because they knew what his track record was for all these other companies he had gobbled up around the country.

IA: And they were afraid.

Harold: They were mobile home companies that he had purchased and bought and about a year he'd get ahold of 'em, they'd be bankrupt.

IB: A wheeler dealer. I've heard a little bit about his secretary or his henchman, a Mildred Johnson.

Harold: Mildred Johnson. I never became acquainted with her.

IA: That's probably good for you.

IB: From what I've heard, yes.

IA: From what we've heard, yeah.

IB: Yeah, she did the firing. I've seen some copies of letters, too, that were, where the workers were promised that thing would stay the same and everyone would keep their jobs and production would go up, up, up and apparently all the while, that was just rhetoric. Apparently he never really meant that. We've been told how they let people out in the supervisory capacity so that no one would then, new people were coming in, wouldn't have any idea what was going on.

IA: Now you stayed, obviously you stayed...

Harold: There are a lot of, I understand a lot of the firing there was done due to gossip, too.

IB: Due to gossip?

Harold: Gossip to Mrs. Johnson. She absorbed the gossip and bingo.

IA: Whoever was badmouthing her got it?

IB: Or badmouthing Cappart.

Harold: No, no. I mean, just gossip about certain people would impress her to fire them.

IA: She'd make a judgement about who was good and, oh, I see, based on the gossip.

Harold: Yeah.

IB: Basis on what she heard. If she heard that Mr. Jones was not doing a good job or was doing this or that, she'd fire him, just by, without investigating.

Harold: But the details were no idea.

IB: Somebody told us and I don't know if it was Louie Garcia, someone told us that she promised Mr. Cappart that she would cut his, his expenses by thousands of dollars by the end of the first year that they were there and apparently that's one of the ways she did it, by cutting out a lot of the people who were making the higher wages.

Harold: That could be.

IA: Since I'm an historian, you know, over at State, I'm very interested in what the changes were at Reo from the times that you, around the time that you started there...

Harold: The time I started...

IA: Yeah.

Harold: I can say this, I started working for the Reo Motor Car Company which was the original name and I worked for every company name...

IA: The Diamond Reo and Diamond...

Eileen: Reo Motors Incorporated.

IA: And White...

Harold: It was Reo Motors Incorporated

Eileen:

IA: Yeah, Reo Motors Incorporated.

Harold: And at one time, various other outfits to Reo
..... Printing was in there.

IA: Right, and then White.

Harold: And White...

IA: Motors.

Harold: White Motors and the name was changed a number of times while White Motors

IA: So it went through a lot of changes in terms of the structure.

Harold: It was called the Reo Division and it was called the Lansing Division after the old Diamond up here.

IA: Um, hum, from Ohio. Wasn't it Ohio?

Harold: Chicago.

IA: Chicago.

Harold: Chicago.

IA: Okay.

Harold: And that was...

IA: From the way that you're talking about it, you don't sound like you were real happy about all those changes. It would have been better if it'd just stayed the Reo Motor Car Company.

Harold: The move of Diamond, Diamond....., the was no planning connected with it. They just backed a bunch of trucks up to the docks in Chicago and loaded the material on 'em, brought it up and dumped it on our docks and said, you're going to build these trucks on your line.

IB: Oh. Did that mean a lot of adapting machinery to do that?

Harold: And ah, the parts list which are very important in the assembly of cars, of course, were going through a change and Diamond and they were at the mid-point using some old parts lists and some new parts lists and...

IA: That was a little confusing.

Harold: headache.

IB: Was that because the parts that you needed to put all these things that were dumped on your dock, the parts you had wouldn't fit on these things and or?

Harold: Well, just, we had to know which parts went on what truck.

IB: I see. That must of been kind of a nightmare time for everybody.

Harold: It was a nightmare.

IB: So that was one of the big changes you saw.

Harold: Right.

IA: And like I said, you don't sound real happy about it. It wasn't a good thing.

Harold: No, I can't, can't say that I was happy.

IA: Okay, and part of it was because it wasn't handled very well but also it wasn't a local controlled thing anymore. It was from outside.

Harold: No, that's right. That's right.

IB: Were there a lot of supervisor changes when they came in and...

Harold: Oh, yes, yes.

IB: A lot of the people you were used to working with were no longer there?

Harold: Well, a lot of the Diamond supervisors got the jobs from the Reo people and they were...

IA: Oh, they were replaced then, yeah, the Reo people. That must of been hard, too.

IB: It must of made it difficult for the rest of you. Your loyalties would have been with the people you were working with before.

Harold: That was a hard time.

IA: How about the plant itself and the kind of people that worked there. Did you see any big changes in that respect, too, 'cause in 1936 it was still, a lot of old kinds of machinery.

Harold: Well, in '36, the trucks were built on the corner of Mt. Hope and Washington Avenue. That was the truck plant and, of course, through years after it quit passenger cars, it brought it over to the main plant.

IA: Ah, huh, because that became the main thing that they did, yeah.

Harold: They still used quite a few of the buildings. We were at the truck plant.

IB: Is that where the motor...

Harold: No, the motor, the motor plant was right along Cedar Street and Baker.

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IB: Baker and Cedar.

Harold: Baker and Cedar.

IB: Okay.

Harold: plant

IA: Now, in the '30s, of course, things were slowed down because of the Depression so there weren't very many workers there but in the '40s, things really picked up a lot.

Harold: In the '40s, yes.

IA: 'Cause of the War.

Harold: Yeah, because of the War.

IA: So the plants got real busy and employed a lot more workers in there.

Harold: Right.

IA: Were they same kind of workers that were employed before, the same kind of people?

Harold: Oh, yes, yeah, the same people...

IA: Yeah, they pulled a lot of 'em back in.

Harold: Got a lot of new ones, a lot of new people came in and, of course, we were building military trucks.

IA: Right, right.

Harold: And also one of the other things was Navy bomb fuses.

IA: Yeah, somebody just told me about that yesterday, about the Navy division.

IB: The Navy division, was that over on, was that Washington and Baker?

Harold: It was on Washington, just south of the engineering building.

IB: And they were employed in making bomb fuses for the Navy. Did they make something else, too, in that department for the Navy?

Harold; No, that's, that was...

IA: That was it?

IB: That was the primary thing.

Harold: made various components for other vehicles, too.

IB: Oh, they did?

Harold: plant.

IA: Somebody told me, who worked in there...

Harold: Some tank parts...

IB: Tank parts.

Harold: and ah, engineering, they were also working on a, maybe I shouldn't even mention this but it was a personnel carrier. I forget what it's called now.

IA: Was it classified? Is that why you're worried about it?

IB: Is that the Beaver?

Harold: Classified

IA: Classified stuff.

IB: Was that the Beaver?

Harold: No, no.

IA: That wasn't the Beaver.

Harold: No, the Eager Beaver was, was a two and a half ton truck. That was developed during the Korean War.

IB: Oh, that's right.

IA: Oh, that's right.

IB: Well, the other one you were just speaking about, that was developed during the Second World War and it was a different type of personnel carrier? Was it kind of a secret thing?

Harold: No, the one I'm thinking of never really got into production at the Reo.

IA: Oh.

Harold: But ah, some of the sales reps told us that a similar vehicle was being built down in Detroit.

IB: Oh, at the Ford Plant maybe.

Harold: I don't know what plant it was.

IA: Now, after the War was over, did the plant still stay as vigor, you know, as lively with as many people or was there some demobilization because of the switch to peace time?

Harold: I really couldn't say how many...

IA: How many there were. Okay, we know that...

Harold: We switched back to peacetime production.

IA: Production, yeah, although there were still government contracts for Korea and Vietnam we've heard, too.

Harold: Well, Korea and Vietnam, Korea came along in 1950.

IA: Right, pretty quickly.

Harold: So that was....

IB: And did the Reo have, the Reo have military contracts for probably trucks and...

Harold: Ah, yes, they built a lot of the Eager Beavers for the government for various uses.

IA: Now, I'm gonna try to get...

Harold:, too.

IA: I'm gonna try to get Eileen into this a little bit, too. Is that alright? She's just sitting and nodding her head and I feel so bad.

IB: Yes, absolutely.

IA: But I think a good way to do that is, you mentioned earlier that it was kind of a family place, you know, that Reo was a family oriented place. Did you just mean the clubhouse or...

Eileen: No, no....

IA: were there other things, too?

Eileen: The people, the workers, there were so many generations, you know...

IA: Like his father and, yeah.

Eileen: and families that worked, yeah, yes, well, I guess, Ernie worked there, too, didn't he?

Harold; Yeah.

Eileen: Brother...

Harold: My two older brothers worked there.

IA: Oh, two older, your two older brothers, too?

Harold: Um, hum.

Eileen: Isn't that where Ernie met Peg, too?

Harold: Yeah.

Eileen: He met his wife there. That's how we met.

IB: I was just going to ask if you two met at the Reo.

Eileen: Yeah.

IB: Did you work, what kind of a job were you doing?

Eileen: Well, I was secretary to Mr. McKim. He was the secretary of Reo.

IB: Oh, and you were his secretary?

Eileen: And I started there in January, 1940.

IA: 1940.

Eileen: He would call in and find, I'd have to look up a Dunn-Bradstreet, a certain company, see what their status was and so forth and when, that first day, then he came in and it's the first time I met him, 'cause I had been talking to him. I worked at a trucking company before and I'd been talking to him on the phone and he didn't know it because he'd call and send over.

IB: What trucking company did you work for?

Eileen: Well, Michigan Indiana Norwalk.

IB: And they produced trucks, did they or...

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Eileen: No, no, they....

IB: Oh, they shipped things in their trucks.

Eileen: Yeah, he was shipping the machinery.

IA: Oh, I see.

IB: And that's how, why he called you later?

Eileen: Yeah, um, hum, but I didn't know that until several months later but I worked for Frank and for, until I quit, which wasn't long but it was in August of '43.

IA: Oh, so you were just there for a few years?

Eileen: Yeah. I stayed until I was pregnant for our first child, until I couldn't get to the typewriter anymore. Wait just another month, just another month. I was right in the front office and I didn't think it looked very good.

IA: But they obviously didn't mind it.

Eileen: No.

IA: Which is pretty enlightened for those days.

Eileen: Yeah, 'cause he kept saying, if you need to go up stairs to the lounge, just go up any time you want. He was a wonderful person to work for.

IB: Mr. McKim was?

Eileen: Yeah.

IA: That's wonderful.

Eileen: Yeah, he was, Frank was wonderful.

IA: I know 'cause my mother was working as a secretary around that time, too, and she was, this was in the '50s I guess, when she got pregnant with me, she tried to hide it for such a long time. She was afraid she'd get fired.

Eileen: Well, now they didn't, well, I don't know, were there any others at about the same time. I don't think so. They were, if they were, you know, you didn't know but...

Harold: Well, there was a number of

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Eileen: You didn't work, usually...

Harold: got married the same time we...

Eileen: Yeah, but there were about six couple of us got married at about the same time. One Saturday we had weddings...

IB: Oh, didn't someone tell us that one Sat, there were like six weddings...

IA: In a row.

IB: Saturday, Saturday, Saturday.

IA: And did you get married at the, did you get married there at the clubhouse?

Eileen: No, no.

IA: Did you have any

Eileen: No, no, we didn't have, we had it right at the church.

IA: At a church.

Eileen: We got married at Bethlehem Lutheran.

IA: Oh, okay. Now, are you from the Lansing area?

IA: No, you're not?

Eileen: I graduated, I went to Eastern and graduated from high school but I came from over near Saginaw.

IA: Okay.

Eileen: Saginaw County.

IA: Okay, but you went to Eastern High School?

Eileen: Ah, huh.

IB: What year did you graduate, '39?

Eileen: January, '39.

IB: That's when we used to have January, June graduations.

Eileen: Yeah, um, hum.

IA: You did your secretarial course at the high school?

Eileen: Yeah.

IA: Or did you go to business, business college...

Eileen: No, no, no.

IA: You got everything you needed?

Eileen: Yeah, um, hum.

IA: And were your family from farming backgrounds or...

Eileen: Yes.

IA: They were?

Eileen: My folks lived on a farm.

IA: Did they come to Lansing for other types of work or...

Eileen: No, no, no, my sister was living here.

IA: Oh, so you went here to go to the high school?

Eileen: Yeah, um, hum. So I just came to Lansing. They stayed on the farm.

IA: And then you were a single career woman in Lansing, right for a year?

Eileen: Yes.

IA: Until you met him.

Eileen: Well, for two, three years.

IA: Two years, three years?

Eileen: We were married in '42.

IA: Oh, okay.

IB: How did you happen to go to the Reo from the trucking company?

Eileen: Well, I, they, my hours at the trucking company, they were having me come in in the morning and then go home and come back when, to send the trucks out at night and I, it was over on Pennsylvania Avenue and I had an apartment over on the corner of, at that time,

St. Joe and Grand and that was quite a long, at night, to go home so while I had the time during the daytime, I decided I'd go to the Employment Office so I went there and when I went in, they gave, a man they had me talk to. He says, well, as soon as I find something, I'll, hear of something I'll call you. Well, he called me the next day and he said that the secretary of the Reo needed a secretary and he would like to have an interview. So I called him and he said, he had just hired somebody. This was on a Wednesday, I guess, and I felt real bad because I wanted to get out of the trucking company so I thought, well, I'll go back again. So the next, the next week, well, that Saturday morning, Mr. McKim called and he said that the girl he had hired had to leave and take care of her mother and would I, could I come to his house and he would interview me and he wanted to know if I knew where Grand was and I said, yes, and he says, well, I live between Grand, or between St. Joe and Hillsdale, and I said, well, I live on the corner. So I went down and I met his wife, Alice, and so he said, can you start to work Monday. So I went to work Monday.

IB: Oh, wasn't that wonderful.

Eileen: So I said, I guess it was what it was suppose to be.

IA: That's right.

IB: What kind of a salary, were you salaried?

Eileen: Oh, yes, I was salary.

IB: And did you, what kind of money did you make in 1940?

Eileen: I think I made \$120 a month.

IA: That's not bad.

IB: Not for those days.

IA: No.

Eileen: No, and I made a

Harold: I think I was making about \$135.

Eileen: It was much more than what I was making at the trucking company.

IB: And regular hours.

Eileen: Yeah.

IB: Now, you must of seen a lot of interesting things being the secretary of the secretary of the company?

Eileen: Yeah, it was...

IB: You probably were in on a lot of things that were going around?

Eileen: No, not too much. No, usually the president's secretary was usually in on the meetings and so forth more than I was.

IA: I see.

IB: I guess I was thinking of the correspondence that you would be responsible for and a lot of information flowing...

Eileen: When I first started, he was assistant secretary and treasurer, was he or just assistant secretary, Frank?

Harold; I think he was treasurer for a while, too.

Eileen: Yeah, an assistant and then he...

Harold: 'Cause he was involved with those, some of those, like the stock.

Eileen: Yeah, 'course he had the, 'cause worked in the office and she'd, same office and she took care of the stock and I didn't have anything to do with that except send him the letters that he would want sent but, and then I also did the orders and so forth for export for Tony ...Rose was there and then I'd have to take, go through, go out in the plant and the first time I went out there, it was so scary going through that dark plant and you didn't know where you were stepping because it was wooden, bricks were, some would be out...

IB: Oh, the floor...

Eileen: and you had to be so careful.

IA: Yeah, we've heard that that floor was a little old and a fire trap.

Eileen: And oily.

IB: And it was probably so noisy.

Eileen: Well, not the, the part where I went through was empty. Nobody was there and then I had those winding stairways to go up. I had to go over the Marshall Graham's office.

IB: And who, Marshall Graham, what did he do?

Eileen: What was Marshall's title, Marshall Graham?

Harold: He was the traffic manager.

Eileen: Yeah, and I have to take orders and so forth over there.

IB: So you'd have to walk through that long, dark, spooky building and up those spiral stairs.

Eileen: Yeah. When I first went there though I didn't have to because they had the, oh those things that you put in, what do you call them?

Harold: Neumatic tubes.

IA: Oh, the tubes, sure.

IB: Oh, to send your messages that way.

Eileen: Well, then when they did away with that, but then when I first went there, we were on Washington Avenue and then they changed the offices over on Baker Street.

IB: Oh, so your office was then on Baker.

Eileen: And so then before I left they changed it back on Washington again so we never knew where we were gonna be.

IB: Is that right? Was there, did you have a large staff that worked with you?

Eileen: No.

IB: I mean, were there other secretaries that you were...

Eileen: No, I was just his only secretary.

IB: You didn't have a sec, someone working under you?

Eileen: No.

IA: Somebody else we interviewed who was a secretary, now who was that?

IB: I was just trying to think of that.

IA: Oh, it was Doris Dow.

Eileen: Oh, Doris, yeah.

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IB: Oh, sure.

IA: She said they didn't have...

Harold: She worked in engineering.

IA: Right. She said they didn't have typing pools, that individual secretaries worked for bosses.

Eileen: No, no.

IA: And that's the way it was at the Reo. They didn't have a big...

Eileen: No, no...

IA: pool or anything like they have nowadays in companies.

Eileen: No, we, I was just his and...

IB: Did either one of you come in contact with Hilda Smith who worked in personnel?

Eileen: Oh, you bet.

Harold: Oh, yes.

IB: What do you remember about Hilda>

Eileen: Oh, she was just the sweetest person, I think, that I've ever met.

IB: Is that right?

Eileen: Up until about the last year, we had birthday cards every year from her. She just, she sent birthday cards to everybody that worked at the Reo that she knew.

IB: Up until the last year, before the place closed you mean?

Eileen: No, just about a year ago now.

IB: Oh, a year ago she was still sending you cards? Well, we had the privilege of going out and seeing her...

IA: Yeah, we went to see her.

IB: at Tender, she's at Tender...

Eileen: Is her mind still strong?

IB: Yes, I thought it was.

IA: It is. It is. She doesn't say as much as, you know, what's going on in there but you can tell she understands.

IB: You can see her struggling to re, and she'll come up with it.

Eileen: I know the last time she was at one of the Reo, I think it was over to the Coral Gables...

IA: Oh, in the summer.

Eileen: I hadn't seen her and she was in a wheelchair and I went over and I says, Hilda, and she said, oh, Eileen. I mean, it's just, you know, her memory, I thought was, for her age...

IA: For all those years and all the people that she knew, that's amazing.

IB: In her room at Tender Care West there's a big bulletin board right where she can see it from her bed and it's just loaded with cards and...

Eileen: I believe it.

IB: and things. She never had any children, did she?

Eileen: I don't think she ever did.

Harold: No.

IB: We were just talking about this yesterday that she comes, came from a large family and helped her mother with all the other children.

IA: She worked in personnel, is that right?

Harold: Yes.

IA: So she interviewed people who were coming in?

Eileen: Yeah, um, hum.

IA: So just about everybody ran into her at some point along the way. So, in 1943...

Eileen: I quit.

IA: when you had your baby, that was it?

Eileen: Yeah.

IA: And then you stayed home?

Eileen: I said I'd never work for anybody else because nobody would be like Frank 'cause he was just such a wonderful person.

IA: Oh, yeah.

Eileen: And his wife was, too. She was very sweet. She was the nurse and until he was made secretary and she quit because she didn't feel, 'cause I guess he had charge of hiring and she didn't feel she should be working for her husband so she quit and I think that's when Ardith went in, isn't it? Did Ardith go in right after Alice?

Harold:

IB: Oh, Alice McKim was the head of the first aid then before Ardith Pappon?

Eileen: Um, hum.

IB: Oh, that's interesting.

IA: Yeah, we haven't heard that before.

IB: What were your offices like? Did you have the latest equipment, latest typewriters and ...

Eileen: No, not really. They weren't any, you know...

Harold: Just ordinary typewriters.....

Eileen: Yeah, just ordinary and it was just a, at first Frank and Laurena and I were all in one big room when I first went there to work, in one big office and then when we went over on Baker Street just Frank and I were in the room and my desk was right next to his.

IA: Oh, is that right?

Eileen: Then when we went back again, then ah, well, I had a separate office and Laurena had an office for the stocks and then Frank had an office. then, well, the time we got married it when

IA: You said before we got started officially with the tape that you, your kids used to go to the clubhouse, too, when they were young.

Eileen: Yeah, when we had, they had Christmas parties and the families were invited and they always had Christmas gifts for the kids and up until, what were they, when they were teens then they gave 'em

money instead of a toy or a gift or somethin' and I know one year our youngest son was tickled pink. He'd been teasing for a camera and they gave him a camera and he was so pleased but...

IA: How'd they find out? How did they...

Eileen: I don't know. It's just the gifts that they could give 'em.

IA: Wow.

IB: He just couldn't.....

Eileen: And they'd have a wonderful meal and everything, you know, and Santy Claus and everything. It was really...

IA: This was for the children of all the employees?

Eileen: All the employees.

IA: No matter where they worked in the plant.

Eileen: Yeah, that's right.

Harold: Right.

Eileen: And then they had ladies' night for the men's club that they had and I...

Harold: Steering Gear...

IA: Steering Gear, oh, you were in the Steering Gear, too?

Harold; Yes.

Eileen: And I know one year where they had Bud Guest and he was such a wonderful speaker and I guess what made me think of it is we were in Florida, the lady had plaques she had made and she had forms with Bud Guest...

IA: Now, I don't know who Bud Guest is.

Eileen: He was a ...

IB: Poet?

Eileen: Poet from Detroit.

IB: Yes, he was on WJR in Detroit and he's, a lot of his books in the library. He's a humorous poet.

Harold: Bud, Bud Guest, Bud Guest was Ed Guest's son.

IB: Yes, that's right.

Eileen: Edgar Guest was the one that came and I know he gave us all a book of poems and autographed the book that night but they had wonderful dinner parties and speakers and everything that was...

IA: Ah, huh, that's like things for...

Eileen: Yeah, then you got acquainted. I mean, it was like, you know, the fellowship of everybody that worked there and, of course...

IA: Did a lot of your friends come from that, those groups of people, too?

Eileen: Well, yes, we had some close friends that...

IA: From the Reo?

Eileen: Yeah.

IA: People you worked with or met through those functions.

IB: I guess I'd like to ask both of you this question. What were some of the major problems that you recall and do you recall how they were solved, some, maybe major problem with production or maybe, can you remember any particular thing? I suppose so of the problems would just be the change overs from, as you were taken over by new companies all the time.

Harold: Yes, and that was a problem. Well, it didn't, it didn't affect us, too, much until till they moved that was the biggest problem right there.

IB: 'Cause there'd been no communication ahead of time and you were just something, taken over...

Harold: No advance, no advance planning.

IB: When there was going to be these big changes, they never called you together in the auditorium at the clubhouse, saying, or to introduce the new people and this is what we're going to be doing?

Harold; No, no.

IA: It just all of a sudden happened?

Harold: Just announce it...

Eileen: I never knew what he was going to say when he came home at night, was going to be...

IB: Is that right?

Eileen: Yeah, it was really a...

IB: I saw, Mr. Rankin and Doris Dow have given us different memorabilia to look at and I don't recall which one of 'em, I think, maybe it was Doris, but there were pictures of meetings with some of the new people as you were taken over each time but that was, must be that it was just for upper level management.

Eileen: Probably.

Harold: That's right.

IB: They were the only ones that knew about it and got to meet the new people and...

Harold:

IA: Right.

Harold: upper management.

IB: And then, then all of a sudden, here they were and you all were kind of in shock for a while till things settled down again. So, I was gonna ask, how were plant communications handled. Doesn't sound like plant communications were handled too well. I suppose the letter would come down from the top and maybe sometime you'd see it somewhere in some meeting or?

Harold; Well, there were letters passed around every once in a while, major announcements.

IA: Like memos from the head office?

Harold: Yeah, the head office.

IB: What do you remember, too, about the working conditions? I'm thinking about safety and...

IA: We're very interested in that.

IB: Equipment that you worked with, how safe was it? Did you, do you remember any real problems with that?

IA: Or did you hear about accidents or things?

Harold:

IA: You weren't involved in that kind of stuff?

Harold: I did happen to be on one thing that shocked me, I did happen to be out on the repair floor and one of the workers working on the truck was trying to solve something on, he had a heart attack. That was a shock to me.

IB: You would be called out sometimes on the floor if there was a problem with a vehicle?

Harold: Occasionally I'd have to go out on the floor and find out why they couldn't get the truck put together.

IA: Check it against the plans, the prints to see what was going on?

Harold: Against the part drawings and stuff.

IA: Parts drawing.

IB: Oh, parts drawings, yes. And I suppose a lot of the parts that the factory used were, where were those bought from, local Lansing area factories do you think or shops?

Harold: Some of the raw material was forgings, forgings were bought, different forging plants here in town.

IB: Atlas or...

Harold: There was a machine at Reo.

IB: Oh, I see.

IA: They were, oh, at Reo itself? But some things were imported in from other states or...

Harold: Yeah.

IA: Somebody else said, not other countries.

Eileen: No, I don't think so.

IA: No, mostly it was USA stuff.

Harold: No, it was USA stuff.

IB: Well, those were the good old days.

IA: That's right. Everything was made right here. Um, I have a couple of more things, still, to ask. Sometimes when you say things, it reminds us of other things that we're interested in. First thing is about the technical and clerical office staff union. Now, I can't remember who we talked to who was also a member of it, may have been Doris, I can't remember.

Harold: Doris...

IB: I think it might have been. She's the only other woman we've talked to.

IA: She couldn't remember if there was any problems when contracts had to be renewed or negotiations about terms of employment.

Harold: Such as strikes or something?

IA: Yeah. Now she said there were no strikes.

Harold: There were no strikes.

IA: Right, so what I'm asking is if there was any times when contracts would expire and there was difficulties between the company and the union about what the terms of employment would be 'cause obviously you resolved them before there was a strike.

Harold: They apparently were negotiated.

IA: Okay, but everything always went very smoothly.

Harold: Satisfactorily, seemed to.

IA: Okay, alright. That's also very unusual.

Harold: I can't remember when I did go into the union because it was, well, I was in the engineering department.

Eileen: It was after you came back from the War.

Harold: Oh, sure

IB: '46 or '47 or something?

Harold: No, no, no.

IA: After that even?

IB: Even after that?

Harold: Much later than that. It was in,

Eileen: Must of been in the '60s.

Harold: '60s.

IA: The '60s Did you ever go to a meeting about the union or you just were a member in it?

Harold:

IA: Were there any meetings?

Harold: They used to have meetings meetings.

IA: You went to some of those?

Harold: Yeah.

IA: It was mostly, mostly a lot of women, right, in those meetings?

Harold: Quite a few, quite a few.

IA: Quite a few. Who was the leadership in that union?

Harold: Well, there were several and I can't remember their names now.

IA: Okay, alright. I could probably look it up.

Eileen: Didn't have something to do with that?

Harold:

Eileen: No,, Leo

IB: Who was that?

Eileen: Leo Sardow.

IB: Leo Sardow?

Eileen: Yeah, I don't know what made me think of talking about him.

IA: I just find it so interesting that the UAW organized the office staff, too. That's very interesting to me.

Harold: There was one thing, in my case, I got a substantial raise when the union came in.

IA: Um, hum, so it was good for you?

Harold: It was good for me.

IA: And what about benefits and so forth, like health care and pension funds and things like that?

Harold: Those, those were already in effect.

IA: They were, through the company?

Harold: Yes.

IA: Okay. Did they transfer over to the union when the union came?

Harold: When I was, early employed, we would, the Reo was one of the first plants in the United States that got into the Blue Cross.

IB: Oh, it was, one of the first.

IA: Is that in the '50s, that that...

Harold: Aw, it'd be earlier than that.

IA: Even earlier.

Harold: About the time I started, maybe way back in the '30s.

IA: Oh, my, okay.

IB: Oh, I didn't know that.

IA: Yeah, I didn't know that either.

Harold: We, we contributed a certain amount to the premium...

IB: Out of your paycheck.

IA: For the health care?

Harold: For the health care.

IA: Great.

IB: And then they matched it or something?

Harold: And then the company gave

IA: Even during the hard times, they kept up?

Harold: Yeah.

IA: Good, that's good. Now, when the union came in for your office positions, did the company take over that or did, the union...

Harold: The company had taken it over long before that...

IA: I mis-spoke. Did the union take over those functions like with the health plan and the pensions and stuff or did the company still keep it?

Harold: No, the company kept it.

IA: Kept it still, okay. Alright, so the union mostly helped you with your wages?

Harold: Right.

IA: Right. Okay, that's very interesting, too.

IB: I just wanted to ask a quick thing right while I'm thinking of it. I remember being taken to the first aid. My dad worked at Reo and I remember being taken to the first aid once when I had sustained an injury out ice skating. Was there any charge to the families, say if one of your children became ill and you took 'em, or cut themselves or whatever and if you'd go to first aid, was that covered under your benefits or?

Eileen: It never happened.

Harold: I wouldn't know. We never had occasion to take our children to the Reo.

IA: To the Reo.

IB: 'Cause I knew usually that's just for the workers in the plant but he came and, we didn't have a car, so he got a cab and took me down and they took care of my injury and sent me home and I didn't think much about, oh, I'm sure I did but I'm thinking back now with the benefits, if, you know, instead of going to the emergency room at the hospital, I'm thinking that people do now with their Blue Cross card, I'm just wondering if maybe, we'll have to ask Ardith Pap..... about it.

IA: Yeah, we'll have to ask her.

Eileen: I don't remember.

IB: You never had to use the first aid clinic?

Eileen: No, we never had to go for...

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IB: It seems like I remember it was on Baker Street.

Eileen: Yeah.

IA: The other question I had was about how many children you had?

IB:

IA: You've had three?

Eileen: Um, hum.

IA: And did you live at the address that we have now, Loraine when...

Eileen: No, we rented an apartment when we got married from one of the fellas that worked, what was Art Hemstead's, he was in the cost department.

Harold: Cost department.

IB: Who was that?

Eileen: Art Hemstead.

IB: Hemstead, Art Hemstead, okay.

Eileen: Ah, huh, and he had an apartment for rent...

IA: You took it.

Eileen: Right, and rented from him.

IB: Was that near the factory so you could walk to work?

Harold: No, no.

Eileen: No, no, and we went to work every, he'd drive one day and Art would drive the next and Art drove a Reo.

IB: Drove a Reo?

Eileen: He drove a Reo.

IA: Isn't that nice.

IB: I wonder what year that was?

Eileen: Well, probably about the last one they made.

IB: '35, '36 or something.

Eileen: Because this was in '42, so.

Harold: I think it was a '36.

IB: The rounded style.

Harold: '36, yeah.

IA: That was a great car.

Eileen: Then I went up to the farm and stayed with my folks when he went into service 'cause Chris was only six weeks old when he went.

IB: Oh, I wondered about that.

Eileen: And then I stayed until Labor Day and then he could come home weekends. He couldn't take the trains up there...

IA: Oh, so you'd meet here.

Eileen: He, I moved back to Lansing and rented a house until he came home from service.

IA: And then you could buy, then did you buy a house?

Eileen: Well, when, what was it, about a year later, two years later we bought a house.

Harold: '47

IA: '47.

IB: The Lorraine Street house?

Eileen: Um, hum.

IA: Is that the one

IB: So you've been there ever since?

Eileen: Yup, been there ever since.

IB: That's great.

IA: And, I think you mentioned before that your kids didn't go to the Reo to work.

Eileen: No, no.

IA: They would have been too young, right?

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Eileen: Yeah. Our oldest son is a teacher in Colorado.

IB: Do you have a daughter?

Eileen: Yes.

IB: Helen?

Eileen: No, I have a daughter, she lives in Detroit. She's supervisor of AAA Travel in Detroit and our youngest son is director of Christian, of Youth and Christian Education in Iowa, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Our oldest one is a Lutheran teacher in Brighton, Colorado.

IB: Golly, your family is kind of...

IA: Went into education, it sounds like.

Eileen: Yes.

IA: education.

IB: It's interesting that they didn't want to go back into, say, working for Oldsmobile or something.

IA: Yeah.

Eileen: No, they just wanted to be, doing church work and our daughter is, well, she sort of fell in with the AAA job. Our neighbor was a, worked there and he got her a job in travel in the Lansing office and she was transferred to Detroit so she's been down there now about 12 years.

IA: Great.

IB: When the plant closed in '75...

Harold: '75.

IB: We were talking to Doris Dow and she said they had no idea. They went to work that morning and the place was padlocked and she said it was such a shock. How did that happen for you? I mean, how did you find...

Eileen: You were out on sick leave.

Harold; Yeah, I happened to be on sick leave.

IA: Oh, my.

Eileen: Had a shoulder operation and he was out.

IA: So you don't show up for a few days and look what happens.

Eileen: didn't go in, you know, like they do.....

IB: Did you hear it over the radio and you heard they closed or you heard it, saw it in the paper or how did you know?

Harold: No, by word of mouth.

IA: You heard from your friends.

IB: Oh, someone called you and said, guess what. Were you real surprised?

Harold: Not really, no. This thing was brewing from the end of '74. As a matter of fact, they told us to turn in our vacation time coming and I was sappy enough not to so, it was seven days of vacation pay that ...

IB: That you didn't get.

Harold: That I never got.

Eileen: Plus his pension.

IA: I was just gonna say, and the pension probably wasn't what it should have been.

IB: Yes, I was going to ask you about that.

Eileen: Cut in half.

Harold: No, the pension was just about half.

IA: That's better than a lot of other people we've talked to in some cases.

Harold: I know. I talked to a fella last night. I think he said he was getting \$80 a month after 33 years.

IA: Oh, is that right?

IB: Well, what did Mrs. Alspaugh tell us yesterday, \$50 a month was what they drew?

IA: Yeah, something...

IB: We talked to Melvin Alspaugh's widow yesterday. She said they got \$50 a month...

IA: And he'd been there for about 30, 40 years.

IB: Yes, 36 years, wasn't it?

IA: Thirty-six years, that's right.

Harold: And there's no increase for inflation.

IA: No, it's the same for every year. That's amazing.

IB: And someone else told us that there were people who were so despondent over this that they committed suicide and others that went into deep mental breakdowns.

IA: Depressions.

IB: Those that had spent as many years say as you did and to suddenly have it all gone.

Eileen: I said we were fortunate though. We had our house paid for and that was the last year for Barry in college so I said, we really were.

IB: If it had to come, at least it came at a better time for you.

Eileen: Yes, he graduated in '75.

IA: Oh, my.

IB: Big shock. I can't get over even now and I drive by there and it's gone.

Eileen: Oh, I know it. When our son came home from Colorado when he had his heart attack she says, mom, before I go home I want to drive by where the Reo used to be and I said, you really want to go by and he says, oh, I can't believe...

IB: Yeah, it hurt (end side 1)

IA: Not very many people feel that strongly. You know, they feel such a close feeling about it, as the people that we've talked to about the Reo, almost every person, no matter whether they worked in the factory or they were supervisors or secretaries, no matter what it is and one of the things I'm very interested in is why. What was so special about the Reo that made people feel, and even children of people, like your children who get sad, you know, what it is about it that made it a different type of place.

Eileen: I think it was the closeness...

IA: Of the people.

Eileen: Of the people, yeah, the workers.

Harold: At various times there was something that went on there, there seemed to be a migration of workers from the Reo that went to Oldsmobile and

IA: Go in waves.

Harold: Yeah.

Eileen: Well, at one time, some of those engineers went over to, went to Detroit, went to Chrysler, remember?

Harold: Well, yeah.

Eileen: Two or three and they wanted to try and talk you into going.

IA: Why did they leave, for better money?

Harold: For more money.

IA: For more money.

Eileen: That was before the union came in.

IA: Oh, I see.

IB: What did you do after the plant closed? Did you then retire or did you go on into something else?

Harold: Of course, I retired from the Reo.

IA: Whether you wanted to or not.

IB: Yes,

Eileen: At the age of 60.

IA: Oh, Lord.

Harold: What?

Eileen: You were 60, weren't you?

Harold: No, I wasn't. I was 58...

Eileen: Oh, you got your job 60.

Harold: I was out of work for about year and I went over to Motor Wheel in the drafts..... there. '76 and I stayed there for seven years.

IB: Good, I'm glad you were able to relocate.

IA: Yeah, that's very impressive at such a, you know, it's harder when you get older to get a job.

IB: Yes, that speaks a lot for his abilities.

Eileen: Doing the same thing as he did at the Reo.

IA: At the Reo.

IB: And there were still people left if you needed recommendations, people you'd worked for. Some of your bosses, I was thinking, would still be there if you needed a recommendation, not the factory, but I mean, they're still in Lansing.

Harold: I don't know whether they ever checked any applications or anything. I filled out the application Reo.

IA: Well, there were plenty of people they could call probably around.

Harold: The boss in the drafting room at Motor Wheel happened to be an old high school buddy.

IA: Oh, well, that helps, I'm sure. Doesn't hurt.

Harold: Might of been...

Eileen: We have a joke, his cousin's husband was working when he retired and so he went and took his place.

IA: Took his job, still keeping it in the family, huh? Do you think that that the fact that it started out as sort of a Lansing owned company, you know, from the start and that the owner was in the community for a while and a lot of the people lived in the community made it more comfortable to work there, that people were known to each other and got together at different clubs like the Steering Gear club and there was also a club for the women...

Eileen: The ladies...

IA: Yeah, did you do that, too?

Eileen: No, I wasn't, they didn't have it when I was there.

IA: Oh, it was later.

Eileen: It was later, yeah. The women's, well the girl's...

Harold: Reo Girl's Club.

Eileen: Girl's club, but I did join, when they started the getting together once a year...

IA: You started to go to that?

Eileen: I was starting to go into that. When we'd go to the Elks in October and we'd go.

IA: It just seemed like there was a lot of social, you know, ways for the company to get together socially and that may have made a difference. I, I don't, I am not studying Oldsmobile so I don't know but I don't know if they did things like that over there.

Eileen: I think they were bigger.

IA: So that made a difference?

Eileen: I think that was a big difference.

IB: They're so large. But I wonder even in, within the departments if there's the loyalty and the togetherness and, you know, that there was at the Reo.

Eileen: I don't know, and I think, my daughter has always talked about when she worked here in Lansing at AAA, she says there was always that backbiting in the office where she said, where she is now, it isn't but I can't remember any of that at Reo. We girls all got, I mean, we all seemed to get along as far as that goes. I don't think there was any problems between anybody.

IA: Yeah, we have never heard, in fact, people said, even if two men, for example, would, you know, a foreman and a worker would have a difficulty, the minute they walked out that plant door, they were Reo workers, you know, no matter what the circumstances were, they would stick together which to me is just amazing.

IB: Someone else, I think so, too. Someone else told us that there was a real pride you felt you worked at Reo that kind of made you feel part of the community and you felt good about it, you know, and someone would say where do you work? I work at Reo, not, I, oh, I work over at the Reo, kind of thing.

Eileen: Well, they used to say, too, that you had, it may not pay much but you had a steady job.

IA: It was security.

IB: Now, that's interesting.

Harold: That's one of the reasons why I stayed there.

IB: Is that right?

Harold: Because Reo would be operating while the other plants in the city were down.

IA: You mean, in the short term, like they would have down times so they'd shut the plant down for a while?

Eileen: The other places, yeah.

IB: The other places.

Eileen: But Reo never did.

IA: But Reo tried to stay open.

Eileen: Reo was always open.

Harold: Reo kept open.

IB: Even if maybe you only have four hours of work a day for a while, you were still working.

Harold: I wasn't ever on shorted hours.

IB: Oh, you weren't?

IA: Oh, you weren't even on short hours?

Harold: No.

IA: So they just kept people going.

Harold: Um, hum.

IA: Yeah, that makes a big difference, too. Okay. We don't want to keep you too long.

Eileen: No, we got an appointment at 11:30.

IA: Oh, my, okay.

Eileen: No that's alright.