

Mabel McQueen

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McQueen: Too bad you couldn't a got Marge ..... across the street.

IA: We're gonna see her this afternoon.

McQueen: I know, that's what she said.

IB: This is Shirley Bradley and Lisa Fine. We're at the home of Mabel McQueen and this is June, what's the date today?

IA: 16th.

IB: June 16, 1992 and we're going to be talking about Reo memories.

IA: Okay. The, this is just a biographical information form so that we get some background about you, some biographical information about where you grew up and where you were born and things that give us some contacts for you work records at Reo. So if, were you, were you born in the Lansing area?

McQueen: Um, hum, in Okemos.

IA: In Okemos, when it was still farms, right?

McQueen: Yeah, that was a long time ago.

IA: Is that what your parents did, were they farmers there? Did they farm or...

McQueen: My dad worked at the college.

IA: Oh, he worked at MSU? Oh.

McQueen: He worked there then and then he went to farming in the Lansing area and then he went back to work at the college. He was a grounds ..... Worked there for many years.

IA: And your mom was at home, did she help at home?

McQueen: Um, hum, ..... housewife.

IA: Did you have, which was a very big job in and of itself.

McQueen: Yes, back then.

IA: Did you have a lot of brothers and sisters?

McQueen: I had two brothers and one sister.

IA: Okay. Did you go to school in Okemos?

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McQueen: No, no, we moved away from there before I started school. I went to school at, when I started school, was a Horsebrook(?) School out at Delta.

IA: Oh, I'm not familiar with that school, are you?

IB: Oh, the Delta Mills area.

IA: What was the name of the school?

McQueen: Horsebrook.

IA: Horsebrook? And that was...

McQueen: It was right at the end of Delta River Drive there in...

IB: In Clinton or something?

McQueen: No, no, this was Delta River Drive and Grand River.

IB: Oh, okay.

McQueen: We lived on Delta River Drive.

IB: You did?

McQueen: See, the school, the school, the school now is on the north side of Grand River and it used to be, when I started school, of course, it was a one room school and it was on the south side.

IB: South side?

McQueen: Um, huh, just east of Delta River.

IB: Oh, okay. I know where it is, where Delta, if you're going down Grand River, Delta River Drive angles off like that and it would be on the, just before you angle off on the Delta River. Yeah, the building, there's still a...

McQueen: There isn't anything there where the school was.

IB: Where the original school was.

McQueen: But see, they built a school across the street, later.

IB: And I think that building is still standing.

McQueen: Oh, yes, ah, huh.

IB: I'd forgotten about that school.

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IA: How come your parents moved from Okemos out here, to that area?

McQueen: Well, I guess, farm...

IA: Oh, they were farming then, too?

McQueen: Ah, huh, and then, they had a farm.

IA: So he had a better, got a better ..... and did you go to high school there too?

McQueen: No, I went to high school in Lansing at Eastern, Walter French and Eastern. See, after we left there, we moved over on Miller Road and I went to school at Maple Grove.

IA: They weren't farming there, then?

McQueen: Yes, ah, huh.

IA: They were still? Wow.

McQueen: And they moved to another farm.

IB: Used to be all country around Lansing.

McQueen: Oh, yeah.

IB: It's all subdivisions now.

McQueen: Yeah, there on Miller Road it's all townhouses now where, on the farm we had.

IB: Isn't that amazing.

IA: So your parents can farm and you could still go to a city school.

McQueen: Well, it wasn't a city school then. Well, we went to city school, yeah, but of course, we had to pay tuition.

IA: Oh. So you must of had to go quite a ways to come in every day?

McQueen: Oh, yeah. Yeah, from Miller, do you know where Miller Road is?

IA: No, I don't.

IB: You know Jolly Road that you...

IA: Yes.

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IB: That's just south, ..... Miller is again, another mile south of that.

IA: Oh, my, okay. Oh, so that was quite a commute then. You drove in to school or got drive into school?

McQueen: Got a ride, you know, there was several of us and parents would, you know, arrange to get us there and then part of the time, I worked for board and room to go to school, when I went to Eastern. Well, quite a few of us did.

IA: And you stayed downtown?

McQueen: Um, hum.

IA: All by yourself?

McQueen: No, no, in a home...

IA: In a family, with a family?

McQueen: Yeah, 'cause I did, you know, do, help take care of children or wash dishes or, you know, help with the housework. The mother needed extra help, why they'd, a lot of times they'd take some of the students in during the week and then we'd go home on Friday night and come back Sunday night.

IA: Hum, did you miss your parents when you did that?

McQueen: Oh, sure, but, you know, it was a way to go to school.

IA: To get a better education.

IB: And that's what everybody was doing, too, so it wasn't that out of the ordinary.

McQueen: Um, hum, yes, everybody that could, you know and, of course, there was a lot of 'em that couldn't pay that tuition that you had to pay and it was hard, you know, 'cause the farmers didn't make a lot of money. But anyway, I made it.

IA: Did you go, work at the Reo after high school or were there some other things that went on in between?

McQueen: Oh, yeah, a lot of things went on in between. I work for the State for a while and I didn't go to work for, to Reo until 1953.

IA: Okay. When you worked at the State, what did you do for the State?

McQueen: Typing.

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IA: Typing, secretarial. Did you....

McQueen: Um, hum, clerical.

IA: Did you learn typing and steno in school, in high school?

McQueen: In school, yeah, I took bookkeeping.

IA: Bookkeeping?

McQueen: Um, hum.

IA: Did they have a pretty good course they offered in the Lansing schools for that?

McQueen: Um, hum.

IA: Was it two years or four?

McQueen: Well, it was three years in high school and one year in...

IA: In business...

McQueen: No, junior high. No, did .....

IA: In high school.

McQueen: See, our, I went to Maple Grove through the eighth grade and then we had to go into town for the ninth and ...

IA: 10th through 12th, yeah, and you got all that training that you needed through there. Great, 'cause a lot of schools didn't have, you know, a lot of those kinds of courses...

McQueen: Oh, yeah, Eastern did.

IA: So you worked for the State and then...

McQueen: Well, I worked at Motor Wheel for awhile during the War. I worked on inspection there.

IA: Okay, so that wasn't a clerical.

IB: Where those wheels for the Army trucks there, that you were inspecting or?

McQueen: No, shells.

IA: Oh, my.

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IB: Shells, oh...

McQueen: I worked on the shells.

IB: Oh, they did the same as Oldsmobile did then, produce shells. Oh, I didn't know that.

McQueen: There for a short period.

IA: Did you switch 'cause of the money or 'cause the War or...

McQueen: The War, well, of course, I had quit and got married and had a youngster and, you know, and then we moved to Florida. We were in Florida four years and then we came back to Michigan and I finally decided I wanted new furniture and new stuff so I thought, well, 'course Reo was hiring then and so I said, well, they'd had ads in for typists and all that and, of course, it'd been a few years since I done any of it. Anyway, I applied and I got in.

IA: In '53?

McQueen: Um, hum.

IA: So when you started at Reo in '53, you just had the one child or...

McQueen: Um, hum.

IA: He was already school age?

McQueen: Um, hum, well, he was, was he through school then? He must of been, no, he wasn't through school but, yeah, but he was...

IA: School age, he was going to school then?

McQueen: Oh, yeah.

IA: And when you came back, did you buy a house in Lansing?

McQueen: Um, hum.

IA: And what neighborhood did you live in in Lansing?

McQueen: At that time, we lived on the east side and then we moved over on the west side.

IA: Did your husband work at Reo, too?

McQueen: No, he worked at Olds.

IA: Oh, he was at Olds?

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McQueen: And then he was a contractor.

IA: Oh, okay, then he went into business for himself.

McQueen: After, after the War...

IA: John ..... 's wife worked at Oldsmobile and he worked at Reo.

IB: ..... say it was a good thing because when Reo closed, at least there was still somebody who a job for a while till he could get his feet under him again.

McQueen: My father-in-law worked at Reo.

IB: Oh, he did?

McQueen: Um, hum.

IB: How long did he work there?

McQueen: Oh, gosh...

IB: Long, long time?

McQueen: Yeah, he was there a long time.

IA: He was one of the old timers?

McQueen: Um, hum.

IA: Did he work in the plant?

McQueen: Um, hum. My son-in-law worked at Reo. He lives down the street there a little ways. So we, I had a lot of people, I had a cousin that worked there. In fact, I had two cousins that worked there.

IA: Which department did you work in when you went in as a secretary?

McQueen: I wasn't a secretary then. I went in in the billing department. I was a typist. When I hired in, I hired in as a typist.

IA: A typist in the billing department. Okay. And what did that, what did the building department do? I don't think we've heard about the building department before.

McQueen: It, oh...

IA: We really haven't, the building department.

IB: Billing.

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IA: Oh, billing.

McQueen: No, billing, billing.

IA: Sorry. Billing department. I think we've heard of that.

McQueen: Yeah, that's what I thought, that's strange.

IA: Okay, and so you were just a typist?

McQueen: A typist, ah, huh.

IA: Did they have like a pool, a typing pool?

McQueen: No, huh, ah.

IA: You were just one person with a...

McQueen: Well, there were several of us in the department that did the typing, invoicing.

IA: And did you have a woman supervisor over you?

McQueen: I had a man.

IA: Oh, really?

IB: Do you remember who that was?

McQueen: Ah, when I hired in it was Bill Luoma.

IB: Bill?

McQueen: Luoma, L U O M A.

IA: He was the supervisor of the billing department?

McQueen: Um, hum.

IA: And how long were you at Reo? From 1953 till like it closed?

McQueen: Well, I retired in, February 28, 1975.

IB: Just before the end, huh?

McQueen: Um, hum.

IA: And where did you, you didn't, obviously didn't stay a typist in the billing department the whole time.



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McQueen: No, no, no. I was a, let's see, I was a bookkeeper, went into bookkeeping and then I was transferred into export.

IA: Oh, we knew somebody there.

IB: Oh, yeah, was it Art Fromm, export?

McQueen: No, no. Art Fromm wasn't in export.

IB: I'm trying to think who we interviewed that worked for export.

McQueen: Ah, Chuck Dunford?

IA: No.

IB: Go back a ways and maybe I can find it.

McQueen: Let me think. See, the ones that I worked for in there are, they're all gone now. Irene Larowe. She she's been gone quite a few years and Marsh Mollet and he's gone. Chuck Dunford's the only one I think alive that worked in export when I came in. I worked in the truck department and there was a parts, export parts, too. I was trying to think, Ed Rankin...

IB: Oh, that's who it was.

IA: Ed Rankin, that's it.

IB: Ed Rankin, yeah, I was just getting back here.

McQueen: Yeah, he was, yeah, he was in export parts.

IA: That's right.

IB: Oh, yeah, here it is right here.

IA: We talked to him a few months ago. I knew we talked to somebody in export. So you were in charge of keeping track of the billings and the bookkeeping in the department?

McQueen: Yeah, the documents and all that type of thing. Then I transferred, then I was transferred back to payables and that's where I worked when I, let's see, was I working in payables then? No, I was in receivables when I retired. They, you know, they'd get short of help when they'd, you know, lay somebody off and then they'd transferred you around or you could, you know, 'course, when the union came in, why, when a job came up, you could, but I was in, I was bookkeeper when, you know, at the end there, when the union came in, I still was bookkeeper.

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IA: When did the union come in, the UAW union, right?

McQueen: Yeah. I don't remember.

IA: You don't remember? Towards the end of when you were there or closer to when you first started in the '50s?

McQueen: Oh, no. It was closer to the end.

IA: Towards the end, in the '60s sometime?

McQueen: Probably. I can't remember when. Must of been late '60s, early '70s. I really don't know. I can't remember. It really was a mistake anyway, when they put the union in the office. Of course, they had it in the plant...

IA: In the plant...

McQueen: Yeah, but in the office, why...

IB: How did it change things? You say it was a mistake?

McQueen: Well, you know, it was, there was a lot of bickering and, you know, I'm not gonna do that 'cause it's not my job. .... this thing going.

IB: That's alright.

IA: If you want, we'll turn it off.

McQueen: No, but you know how it is, you know, I mean, and before, if one person got behind a little bit and needed some help, whoever had a little time, you would just automatically help and then when the union came in, especially the newer employees, they didn't...

IA: They didn't have that same philosophy.

McQueen: Huh, uh. It's not my job. I'm not gonna do it. I'll sit here and just do nothin'.

IA: Do you think that most people wanted the union to be there?

McQueen: I don't think so. Not the office.

IA: Not within the office group, staff. But it just was something that had to...

McQueen: Yeah, well, there was enough that wanted it so it carried.

IA: Yeah, oh, there was a representation .....

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IB: Did you feel like you got more protection for you job or your job security, given the fact that I know Reo was kind of on shaky ground but do you think the Reo gave you a little more job security?

McQueen: With the union in?

IB: Um, hum.

McQueen: I don't, not myself. I know there was some that it, it helped but to me, it didn't.

IB: That's usually the reason people want a union. They say it will...

McQueen: Well, see, you know, and like you say, like they say, they don't want to, you know, they want to do just what they're gonna do and they don't want to do any more.

IB: So actually that would hinder production in a way, wouldn't it, what you could produce out of your departments.

McQueen: Just some of us, you know, that had been there several years and, I don't know, we all kind of worked together to help one another if, you know, if the workload got heavy or if somebody was off ill or something, why you just pitched in and helped and thought nothing of it, you know. You didn't say, well, you're getting paid for that. You do it.

IA: And you think the people who had this attitude of it's not my job description so I'm not gonna do it was more the young people coming in?

McQueen: Um, hum.

IA: They're the ones that seemed to...

McQueen: Take advantage...

IA: .....feeling, I imagine. Women mostly 'cause the office staff was mostly women.

McQueen: Yeah, ah, huh. Well, there was fellows, too. But, of course, naturally there were more women working in the office.

IA: And they just didn't have the same...

McQueen: Not the same feeling.

IA: Feeling about the company.

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McQueen: No, we were all, you know, all friends and just, you know, just wanted to help one another.

IB: Sure.

IA: You said that you hired in in '53 because you saw lots of ads 'cause the Reo wanted...

McQueen: Well, they were, the ad they had in for typists and I was kind of looking for work 'cause, you know, we'd just come home from Florida and trying to make, you know, get settled in again and so I, well, I'll go to work 'cause I wanted some new furniture and I was only gonna work for a year.

IA: And you ended up working for 20.

McQueen: Twenty-two.

IA: Twenty-two.

IB: 'Course you liked where you were and...

McQueen: Pardon?

IB: I say, you liked where you were and...

McQueen: Oh, yes. I, oh yes, I, oh, yeah. I loved my job.

IB: And the money must of been satisfactory.

McQueen: Yeah, it was, ah, huh.

IA: Did you pick the Reo specifically to work in? I mean, did you say, if I could I'd like to work here...

McQueen: No, no.

IA: You didn't?

McQueen: No, just...

IA: It just happened to be advertising so you went in there. Do you think it was different, you had a different experience 'cause you ended up at the Reo, at all and then let's say if you had hired on at Oldsmobile or some other company in town?

McQueen: Well, of course, I don't know because I didn't work there...

IA: You didn't work there.

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McQueen: But ah, I was, I was happy at Reo. I was happy in my work. I had good supervisors.

IB: Makes a lot of difference. We hear so much about the family atmosphere at Reo and obviously it was in the offices, too.

McQueen: Um, hum, oh yes, and, well, a lot of us are all just friends. I mean, we meet once a month, you know, and have lunch and get together in between sometimes and...

IA: Did you and Marjorie Koehler work it out so that you'd live across the street from each other or was it just a coincidence?

McQueen: Well, she kind of, see, I had, I've been here 15 years, 15 years last week. Well, she'd been out here different times, different ones of the girls, see there was quite a few that worked, lived in the park ..... from Reo, even before I moved over here 'cause I, when I sold the house, I lived on St. Joe in Gettysburg Estates. I don't know if you're familiar.

IB: Um, hum, I know where that is.

McQueen: And so anyway, I was, when I moved from the house, I had to do something. Of course, my husband passed away in '68 very suddenly and I lived there until '77.

IA: So, right after you retired, you...

McQueen: Well, shortly. Well, it just was, you know, I had such a great big lawn and a big home and it just, it was too much to keep up and everything and at that time, why, 'course I wasn't old enough to get all the benefits from taxes and all that and, anyway, this, the lady that lives over here, we were friends for many, many years and that's what got me over here.

IA: Okay, and so some of the other ladies...

McQueen: And then Marge, she, you know, she had her house and she'd been wanting to get away from downtown there 'cause you know there's a lot of problems down there and gettin' worse, I guess, and so she'd been out here lookin' at different times and then one of my neighbors that lives across the street, or lived across the street at that time, was over and we were talking, well, she'd made a deposit, not a deposit but an agreement to the sale of one over here to buy and I was telling my neighbor one morning when she was over here for coffee and talking about it and she said, well, she said, they're gonna put theirs up for sale, too. She went home and she was telling her husband about Marge, you know, my friend and he says, well, why

didn't you tell her this was for sale 'cause they wanted to move to Florida and she says, well, she says, I told him I didn't think you wanted to go until, for a year yet and so he, anyway, he said, well, you tell her so if she's interested. Well, so I thought, well, gee, I don't know. I had, 'cause these friends, these people over here were friends of mine too and I didn't want to...

IB: Kind of in the middle.

McQueen: Ah, huh. So anyway, I told her and so she said, oh, she says, I've looked so much, she says, I'm satisfied. I don't think I'll look. I don't know, we talked a little bit, not about the home or anything and finally she says, well, maybe I'll come out and look at it. So I said, well, it's up to you. Well, she went into it and she fell in love with it. So anyway, she went down. She hated to go down and tell these other people but they understood.

IB: Oh, that was nice.

McQueen: So anyway, those people just, you know, just out of the clear blue, sold theirs and they were nice neighbors, too. I enjoyed them but Marge and I have enjoyed one another. We go together all the time.

IA: Yeah, it's nice to have somebody close by like that. I guess I'm interested in sort of your, you know, the family kind of thing that we've talked about, the, I guess why you stayed when you were only intending to stay a year why you ended up staying 22 years. I mean, what was good about the job and what you thought about the company and the other thing I'm really interested in is if you participated in the girl's club activities and, you know, what kind of things they did and um...

McQueen: Well, had a lot of good things going. Yeah, I belonged to the girl's club.

IA: Did that start right at the beginning? Did you participate in that right from the start, when you first came in or...

McQueen: Not when I first came in but shortly afterwards I joined.

IA: Okay, it had been going on though?

McQueen: Oh, yes.

IA: And it was mostly office workers?

McQueen: Mostly, ah, huh. There were some from the factory.

IB: Oh, were there really?

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McQueen: Ah, huh.

IB: Well, that's interesting to know.

IA: Yeah, we hadn't heard that.

IB: I hadn't heard that before.

McQueen: Yeah, there were some that belonged but it was mostly office.

IA: And what kind of things did you all do when you met?

McQueen: Talked and ate!

IA: And ate, the same kind of things you still do over at the Golden Gate, right?

McQueen: Um, hum.

IA: And just had a way to get together on a regular basis?

McQueen: Um, hum, yeah, really that's what it was and sometimes they had entertainment. Of course, they had mother and daughter banquets and...

IB: Oh, that's nice.

McQueen: You know, all the things that you do.

IB: Is that where the Christmas baskets and things like that were assembled and did girl's club help with...

McQueen: Yes, ah, huh.

IB: We talked with Hilda Smith and she was so proud of being able to put the Christmas baskets together.

McQueen: She was the sweetest lady.

IB: She is, isn't she?

McQueen: We always called her the sweetheart of Reo.

IB: Is that, oh, really?

IA: The sweetheart of Reo, really?

McQueen: Um, hum.

IA: You know, I've been noticing you have, you should see this, Shirley.

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McQueen: Oh, that's what I got when I retired.

IA: The trucks...

IB: Oh, my goodness.

IA: and the cars and the ramp.

IB: Was that something that they made there and you were able to get 'em or...

McQueen: I don't know. They had, they had those plaques, they got, they had...

IB: For the record we should say they're plaques of Reo trucks...

IA: There are three plaques of a Reo, Diamond Reo truck and a ...

IB: And a 1904, maybe, oh, no, 1905 or 6...

IA: Reo car and there's another Speedwagon...

IB: And like a delivery truck, a Speedwagon. Oh, those are wonderful.

IA: They really are very beautiful.

McQueen: I know, you know, they always gave you a gift when you retired, they always gave you, and they always, they were giving these pen and pencil sets, you know, desk pen and pencil sets and, of course, I knew the personnel man and he said, when I was gonna retire or something and I said, I don't know, something was said about it and I said, I don't want one of them pen and pencil sets. I said, I want one of them, a set of those plaques and so nothing more was ever said and so when he...

IA: He probably thought, boy, we got a live one here.

McQueen: So when he came and brought my gift to me, 'course you know, we our picture, in fact, I got my pictures out there, I'll show you, and that, he brought it to me and he says, well, Mabel, he says, you said you didn't want one of them damn pen and pencil sets...

IB: Well, this would mean more to you 'cause this represents what, exactly the things that...

McQueen: I know it, I, well, and it's, I don't know, a pen and pencil, where would I put it. Of course, I didn't...

IA: In a drawer.



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McQueen: Yeah.

IB: And then the ink dries up over time.

McQueen: And unless you got a desk and everything, why, you know, you don't really...

IB: You can't really display it.

McQueen: I've had more pen and pencils, anyway. I didn't need any more and I did want those and at the time, we, I had a big rec room in our basement and I had an ideal spot to display 'em there, too, over the fireplace and...

IB: And this is a big chunk of your life. These represent a big chunk of your life where you worked.

McQueen: Yeah, I've really enjoyed, I know different people, of course, unless you get over here, you don't see them. But I like them because, you know, it isn't something that hits you in the face when you come in 'cause it's a little, well, not really commercial...

IA: Oh, not at all.

IB: Oh, no, I don't think so.

McQueen: But anyway...

IB: Are those made of metal?

McQueen: I don't know what, I think they are...

IB: I've just never seen any like 'em.

IA: They are quite nice. I particularly like the one in the middle, the old fashioned one.

IB: Yeah, it looks like a ..... looks like one .....

IA: Beautiful.

McQueen: And then my little name plate in here, I retired, is on a little thing, I don't know if you can see it. Maybe, it's on this truck here.

IB: Oh, I see it. It's just down below it.

McQueen: Can you see it?

IB: Yes, I can, just down below the Speedwagon.

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IA: Oh, yeah.

McQueen: Yeah, I just love those.

IB: They had a car...

McQueen: Did I break it?

IB: I don't think so. Nope, it's going...

IA: Oh, there you are.

IB: Oh, and there you are holding your truck and these are all, a lot of these gals are office gals that you worked with?

McQueen: Ah, huh.

IB: And who are these two gentlemen here?

McQueen: Let's see. He was my supervisor. What the devil was his name? Isn't that awful? I forget and this was, he was personnel director, Mike, hum...

IB: He looks like he might have been some of the new men that came in.

McQueen: Yeah, he hadn't been there too...

IB: They both look quite young.

McQueen: Yeah, this one was new. He worked, he was head of crafts.

IA: This is a book they put together for you or did you put this together?

McQueen: Well, some of it they put together and some of it I did. Let's see, which was the, I got a picture of ..... to show you. I've got a lot of interesting...

IA: Oh, there's Reo's girl's club.

IB: Oh.

McQueen: Did you ever see the .....?

IB: No.

McQueen: We just have to laugh at all that stuff.

IB: Reo Girl's Present. Was this a little play or something they did?

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McQueen: This was one of our later...

IA: There's a Reo Girl's Club prayer that says, oh God, grant me live my days with kindly thoughts, words and deeds. May he help me meet my fellow men with patience and tolerance and to do unto them as I would have done unto me. Then the pledge says, I pledge allegiance to my club and agree to abide by the rules and regulations governing it. I promise to loyally and efficiently serve the club to the best of my ability and actively encourage others to maintain our purpose of friendship and service and this is from the Reo Girl's Club 1960 Handbook of Mabel McQueen and here's all the different people in the club.

IB: And every member had a book?

IA: Everyone had your own book?

McQueen: Um, hum.

IA: Oh, look, here's your name printed on the cover.

IB: I had to learn that when I went into the 7th grade, the first day in 7th grade I had to learn that and I've always kind of made that my credo.

IA: And here they are. It's just like a yearbook with all those pictures.

IB: That's wonderful.

IA: This is terrific. We've never seen one of these.

McQueen: Oh, really?

IA: No.

IB: No. I wonder if we see folks in here we've met?

McQueen: Oh, I'm sure.

IB: I bet there are.

IA: Not yet.

IB: Not yet but I bet there are.

McQueen: Oh, yeah, there's got to be somebody.

IB: I see some have passed away. Oh, it's impossible to think about that happening, isn't it?

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McQueen: I know it.

IB: Oh, there's Marge.

McQueen: Marge Koehler. Oh, yeah, there's several that you...

IA: Well, we've met Ardith Pappon.

IB: We have and we're hoping to get to speak with her. She's a busy lady.

McQueen: Oh, yes.

IA: There's Mabel there.

IB: Oh, yes. Oh, I like your hairstyle. I remember those hairstyles. And these are kind of pictures .....

IA: Candid shots, yes.

IB: ..... having fun and getting together.

IA: Oh, this is great.

IB: ..... autographs. Oh, that is so nice.

IA: Did these come out every year?

McQueen: Um, hum.

IA: These come out just about every year 'cause it says 1960.

McQueen: Well, we didn't, we didn't have our pictures every...

IA: Every year, I see, so this is a special version of it. Great.

McQueen: The only thing I haven't got pictures of is the fire.

IB: Oh, you know, I've got a chance to get some pictures of the fire. I've got to call that woman.

McQueen: So you how Reo looked way back, these are all my retirement, some of them you might get a kick out of, crazy stuff.

IA: Well, the firm didn't last much longer after you retired, did it, 1975?

McQueen: No, they, that's right.

IB: I see you've clipped out some headlines and articles about the Reo.

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McQueen: Um, hum.

IB: Who are these gentlemen?

McQueen: Ah, that is Harry Elsenheimer. He's still alive and this is Enno Schraft.

IB: Oh, okay, I've seen the name a lot.

McQueen: He's passed away.

IB: He has?

McQueen: Um, hum. Here I am with my little machine, one of 'em. There's another one .....

IA: ..... bookkeeping machines.

McQueen: Yeah, I run those.

IB: Oh, you did?

IA: Now that's all on computer.

McQueen: Yeah, this is the old kind, way back.

IB: Was it hard to learn to run?

McQueen: Well...

IB: You didn't learn on...

McQueen: when I got this, this was simple. You know, I mean, everything was, you know, more modernized and that was, let's see, what did they call this one. I can't remember now. This was the old 78, it was Burroughs. I ..... 77, 78 both.

IB: I've never seen a bookkeeping machine.

McQueen: Haven't you?

IB: No, and you probably didn't have those in the high school commercial classes so this is something you had to learn after you went to Reo.

McQueen: Oh, that's one of my grandbabies.

IA: Cute, that's a great poster. I like that.

IB: What a sweet baby.

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McQueen: How come it got in here.

IB: Aw, that's a good place for it.

McQueen: There's more of my, well, where is that picture that I really wanted to show you.

IB: Is that a real fire truck?

McQueen: I don't know what that, if that is or not or if that's, I can't read, I can't see to read it.

IB: Let me see if I can. South Elgin and County Side Fire Protection District, Diamond Reo.

McQueen: Is it?

IB: Here, it's our Diamond Reo truck.

McQueen: Oh, yeah. I figured it probably had to be and this money was from a party that they had when they had the foreign dealers over for some, you know, like a convention deal and, dealer's thing and then a bunch of us were out one night and...

IB: Has pictures of the .....

McQueen: the guys, some of the guys signed, they had, like a Las Vegas night.

IA: Oh, I see.

IB: Oh, this says Beirut.

McQueen: Yeah, one of the fellows ...

IB: Must be that man was from Beirut and these are the Reo trucks.

IA: Did they have that upstairs in the clubhouse?

McQueen: Um, hum.

IA: Those kinds of receptions up in the clubhouse?

McQueen: Um, hum, in the Steering Gear Room.

IA: In the Steering Gear Room.

McQueen: I can't figure out what I did with it.

IB: We're still curious about where the big Steering Gear chandelier went when they tore the clubhouse down.

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McQueen: I always wondered what become of the ball that was in the ballroom.

IB: One of those that threw the lights all around?

IA: Oh, wow.

IB: I don't know.

McQueen: I don't know what become of that either. Now, that's got to be here. I'm probably lookin' right over it.

IA: Well, I'm looking with you so...

IB: We've been given the name of the clubhouse manager, maybe he knows.

McQueen: There it is, right there, is the one I was lookin' for ya.

IA: Oh, it's an old postcard from 1906.

McQueen: It was one that was sent to my folks.

IA: Oh, my. Well, we got home alright, sleepy and tired. Walter got a little lonesome Monday but now he is alright. It says, he don't care if this don't come, this something don't come.

IB: This looks like this might be Washington here 'cause that looks like...

IA: I've seen this picture. This is an old picture.

IB: And then the tracks must of gone back this way. Yeah.

IA: Who's this?

McQueen: Oh, that's a friend of mine.

IA: Oh, she looks real happy to be with you.

IB: Robert Block supervisor.

McQueen: Yeah, he was one of my supervisors.

IB: And Myrna Austin.

McQueen: And she was a friend. She worked in my department. Here, I'll let you go through if you want to look at it, see it from the beginning.

IA: Okay. I like that girl's club. That was wonderful. Here's another thing that says, hello Reo Girls.

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McQueen: Yeah, we got one, every, once a year we had...

IA: A little booklet?

McQueen: Ah, huh.

IA: To announce the activities?

McQueen: Yes and who was, you know, in charge and all that stuff.

IA: Oh, there's Doris's name.

IB: Oh, Doris Dow. She's an organized little lady, isn't she?

McQueen: Oh, yes, yes. She's...

IB: She's nice. I get the feeling that she was very efficient because she seems to be very efficient now.

McQueen: Yeah, she does a lot for the union.

IA: Oh, here's the union...

IB: Oh, the local 6....

McQueen: See, that's my retirement book for the things that we, that they did.

IA: Oh, I see. So the union also participated in your, well, they announced it in there, in the union newsletter.

IB: Oh, this certifies the Mabel McQueen is a retired employee of Diamond Reo.

IA: Which mean you were entitled to whatever benefits went along with that through the union.

IB: This is where your union hall was, 1010 River Street. I remember that well. I don't think the building's there anymore.

McQueen: Isn't it?

IB: I'm not sure. There are some businesses down that way now. There's a big printing firm and...

IA: This is what the office looked like that you worked in?

McQueen: Um, hum.

IB: Oh, isn't that interesting?



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IA: Yes, I'm very interested in this.

IB: The pant suits that were popular then. Women started being able to wear pants to work.

IA: That's nice.

IB: She looks like she's eating a chicken wing.

McQueen: Yeah, they had chicken.

IB: Oh, I guess it.

IA: See, they had old, the different types of typewriters at the same time because it was just starting with the electric.

IB: Oh, gee, this really gives us a bird'seye view into the old offices. Were there several different officers or were there several combined in one big room?

McQueen: It was a big room and...

IB: It looked like it, though didn't it.

IA: With different sections...

IB: Different sections.

McQueen: Ah, huh. Later years, why they put, you know, dividers up but in the beginning there, it was all one, you know...

IA: All the office workers in one big...

McQueen: Um, hum, but you had your own department in certain sections.

IA: And so how did you communicate with the boss? Were they all in offices around you, smaller ...

McQueen: No, they weren't, they weren't in offices at first.

IA: Oh, okay.

McQueen: In later years, they divided them up and put 'em in their own  
.....

IA: Okay.

IB: But in the beginning, they were just all in this big room with you?

McQueen: Um, hum.

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IB: I wonder if that got confusing with all the typewriters and the phones ringing and...

McQueen: Didn't seem to.

IB: Didn't seem to.

McQueen: I guess we...

IA: It was nice to be all together.

McQueen: grew up with it and...

IB: That would be another thing that had the togetherness feel because you weren't shut away behind partitions.

McQueen: This is my son and daughter-in-law.

IB: And did you say that he also worked at Reo?

McQueen: No, huh, uh.

IB: Oh, it was your son-in-law, perhaps.

McQueen: My son-in-law, um, hum.

IB: He must of worked there close to the very end, then.

McQueen: Yeah, he did but he had, I think 25 years in.

IB: Oh, he did? Twenty-five years in. What did he do there, do you recall? Was he down on the, in the shop?

McQueen: He was in the plant.

IA: Who took all these pictures for you?

McQueen: Oho, different ones that....

IA: And the camera was just sort of around and people snapped?

McQueen: Um, hum. Some were in the office and some were, see, they had my party down at the Cozy .....

IA: Now, these are the more formal things.

IB: And here's the curtains that we saw in the...

IA: Yeah.

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McQueen: Yeah, these were the pictures that, see, this is, this was, this was my office back here. There's my machine but they took most of the pictures 'cause we had a big window here and then the drapes and it was kind of a open deal. So that's usually where they took the pictures. Irene Boynton, I don't know if you've talked to her or not.

IB: No. That's a new name to me.

McQueen: She was not here so, she's in a different area.

IB: Where were your offices in relationship to the shop? Were you along Washington or...

McQueen: Well, you know, the main building on Washington, right next to the clubhouse...

IB: Next to the clubhouse...

McQueen: Well, I was in that building, that main building, the original.

IB: I see, okay.

IA: This is a much older picture.

McQueen: Um, hum.

IA: You can just tell from the outfits.

IB: Oh, I like that.

IA: What's this a picture of here?

McQueen: Well, let's see, that was the...

IA: This looks like it's from the '50s.

McQueen: Must be when she retired 'cause I, I took her job when she...

IA: And who is she?

McQueen: Frances Salas. She's gone now, too.

IA: Frances Salas.

IB: That's not Hilda, is it?

McQueen: No, that's Myrna Austin.

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IB: Oh, okay, I was just going by the shape of the face and the eyebrows.

McQueen: This is Bea Wecker. She goes to the, that annual dinner.

IB: Does she?

McQueen: Uh, huh, and this is Norma Jean Moray and this girl is Arlene and I can't remember her last name. There's me back in there.

IB: Oh, just peeking through.

McQueen: And Grace Bilby, it's Elsenheimer now. You probably met her at, have you been to the dinner that we have out at Coral Gables?

IA: We will be.

IB: No, we're going, we're going there in August.

IA: We'll be there in August.

McQueen: Usually, she's...

IA: She's a pretty lady.

McQueen: Ah, huh, and this lady Kathleen DeWitt.

IA: So you have this in here because you took her job?

McQueen: Um, hum.

IA: She was the, and was this when you went into the bookkeeping?

McQueen: Bookkeeping, ah, huh.

IB: She must of started at quite a...

McQueen: Yeah, she was right out of high school, she started there.

IA: In the '20s probably.

IB: Yeah, I was just thinking.

IA: And these are all just clippings from the end of the Reo.

IB: Diamond Reo, quiet giant.

McQueen: I got ..... that...

IB: Eaton tried, couldn't turn Reo around. Oh, now when did...

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McQueen: He was a vice president.

IB: Was he?

McQueen: Um, hum.

IB: He was the vice president.

IA: He looks so young.

McQueen: Yeah, he was young. ....

IA: No, we haven't heard from him. ....

IB: No, I haven't either. Boy, you've got a lot of history of Reo in there.

IA: Okay.

IB: I'd love to Xerox some of those newspaper clippings. Would that be possible, Mrs. McQueen?

McQueen: Oh, sure, if you'd like to.

IB: I'd love some, just, we would just keep the Xeroxs in the records at the Museum. I'm sure we don't have anything like that.

McQueen: I wish I had more room to put more .....

IA: Sesquicentennial.

IB: Sesquicentennial. Ex-owner of Reo and U.S. settle feud. Oh, here's Fred O'Brien, Charles Rei..... Somebody said that he's in a rest home now?

McQueen: Yeah, he's at .....

IB: That's what I just heard. .... news conference Wednesday to announce an out of court settlement with a former owner of Diamond Reo Trucks.

McQueen: So you see why I ..... Reo?

IA: Oh,yeah. It looks like you all had a nice group together.

McQueen: When I retired, they did, they used to always say that they was gonna have my retirement party at the Civic Center. No place else was big enough.

IB: This was to settle the pension fund.

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IA: Oh, it ..... about the .....

IB: Yeah, former owner of the Diamond Reo Trucks and the U.S. government have settled a pension feud out of court opening the door after 10 years for former Diamond Reo employees to settle their claims.

IA: Oh, my.

IB: And it goes on about Mr. Cappart. Those are some wonderful...

IA: So you got out right before the, all the problems started. You were very lucky.

McQueen: Yeah, I am.

IA: 'Cause a lot of people we've talked to have been very, you know, were very disturbed and upset, you know, by all the finagling that went on at the end. Did you, did you think something like that was going to be happening?

McQueen: Well, it didn't look good.

IA: From what you could see?

McQueen: Um, hum.

IA: Yeah, and you were always involved with the money so...

McQueen: And I was eligible for retirement so, you know, with my age and my points, so.

IB: Oh, they built up a point system?

McQueen: Um, hum.

IB: How was that arrived at?

McQueen: Well, your age plus your years of service.

IB: Oh, I see.

IA: So seniority and age.

McQueen: Um, hum. You had to have so many points to retire which I had.

IA: Was that the company's plan or did the union devise that?

McQueen: I think that was a company, I think we had that right from the very start.

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IA: I see, okay.

IB: So you were able to retire and get your benefits?

McQueen: Um, hum.

IB: Before all the problems started.

McQueen: For a while .....

IA: Oh, and so then, then they became diminished when the company went under.

McQueen: Um, hum.

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

McQueen: Yeah, 'cause when I retired, see, I had, my insurance was paid, life insurance and medical, Blue Cross and then, you know, our pension, of course you got, you know, and then we got that extra little deal that you get. I can't remember what they called it now.

IB: Profit sharing?

McQueen: Something, no, it wasn't profit sharing. I don't remember now. I can't remember.

IB: Like a cost of living, maybe?

McQueen: No.

IB: But some other little fund.

McQueen: It was a, well, then when you were a certain age then that quit and Social Security took on or something. I can't remember what.

IB: Something that took you through that gap of time.

McQueen: But see, when they folded, then I lost all my...

IB: You lost your insurance, your medical insurance and you lost your retirement benefits.

McQueen: Life insurance.

IB: Life insurance.

McQueen: So now all I get is just a straight pension and Blue Cross takes, oh, just about all that.

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IB: That's what we've heard from other folks that what they get from what's left of their pension just about covers their insurance.

McQueen: Yeah, that insurance is terrible.

IB: Oh, it's terrible.

IA: Yeah, I hear that from my parents, too.

McQueen: Sometimes I wonder do I need all that and yet you...

IB: And yet you don't dare be without it. So you were there during the last turbulent years when Reo was going from one ownership to another ownership. How was that for you girls in the office?

McQueen: Well, it was hard 'cause you never knew from one month to the next if you were, if you had a job.

IA: Oh, 'cause you were concerned that you might...

McQueen: If somebody else bought, like when White Motors bought it, you know, you didn't know if they were gonna bring all their own people or if, you know, what would happen or if they'd move everything to, you know, their...

IB: Chicago or some place. So you went through several changes.

McQueen: Oh, yeah.

IB: Diamond Reo, White first, I guess. I get confused about which order.

McQueen: I can't really, I can't either.

IB: At any rate, two or three different changes within a short period of time.

McQueen: Yeah, I worked, yeah, I worked...

IB: What did you think of Mr. Cappart when he came and took over.

McQueen: I didn't think too much of him, and Mildred either, you know, I mean, they come in there and started cracking the old whip and letting this one go and that one go and firing 'em right and left for no reason at all.

IB: Just to cut the payroll, do you think?

McQueen: That and break the union.



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IA: Oh.

IB: Oh, they wanted to break the union?

McQueen: In fact, they said that.

IB: Oh, they did?

IA: The union that you were in or the one in the plant?

McQueen: Well, the plant. I can't, I can't remember if we had our union when they came in or not. I can't remember what year we, something happens to you up here!

IB: I know, forgetting things...

McQueen: If you've been talking to any of the rest of the people...

IB: It's getting terrible. I bought a book on how to improve your memory but I can't find it.

McQueen: Well, that helped a lot.

IB: So you see how bad things are.

McQueen: Yeah, I know it. I just, it's terrible.

IA: But they were hostile to unions regardless of whether it was in the office or in the shop?

McQueen: Yeah, I think that they just, you know, I don't know. I really don't know what they...

IB: Well, they probably couldn't of had as much as, as much control as they wanted over things if the union also had control and they had to abide by what the union said was gonna happen. I wonder if they were successful in breaking the union? Maybe they were.

McQueen: I don't know. I always wondered, you know, when they had a, when our last contract came up, I probably shouldn't say this in front of everybody...

IB: Do you want this off?

McQueen: Yeah, let's shut that off.

IB: You were talking about the military contracts.

McQueen: Yeah, when they, when we got the military contracts, of course, that carried us through and so they did...

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IA: When did the military contracts start to come back after World War II. I mean, obviously, there was a lot...

McQueen: I can't tell ya. I can't ...

IA: You don't know.

IB: Probably Korea.

IA: ..... from the beginning when you started in '53?

McQueen: No, no.

IA: Okay.

McQueen: Not then.

IA: But some time after.

McQueen: After, ah, huh.

IA: See, 'cause see, Korea was '50.

McQueen: Was it?

IB: '50, through till '52.

IA: Yeah, and she started '53.

McQueen: I don't recall of it anyway. Of course, I...

IB: 'Course the military would keep a contract, they would want to keep...

McQueen: Yeah, they had to keep some, yeah.

IB: Had to keep building their supply of trucks.

McQueen: And Reo did get a lot of their contracts so, you know, that was basically, I think, what kept Reo...

IA: Going.

McQueen: on top, ah, huh.

IB: And finally when those ran out, that really helped to signal the end, too, didn't it. Money wasn't coming in.

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IA: Did you have, did you deal a lot with the military, the payment to the military and the things in your dealing with bookkeeping and billing and export?

McQueen: Well, to a certain extent.

IA: So you knew some of the materials you were working with were connected to the military production. It was all included in the...

McQueen: Yeah, because see, I did the statements that went out to the different dealers and, you know...

IA: And they were all over the world. They were all over and also military installations?

McQueen: Um, hum.

IA: So that wasn't done in a separate place? It was all part of the regular billing for the company that did that.

McQueen: Well, each department had their own, you know, they had their military section.

IA: Section. Oh, I see, that's how they did it. Each section...

McQueen: But see, I run the statements that went out for the...

IA: The billing?

McQueen: 'Cause I got all the invoices in.

IA: I see and so some of them would go to military installations and would get trucks or other types of material and some of it would go to private dealers or other people who needed parts, you know, private citizens.

McQueen: Yeah, there was parts and trucks.

IA: Right, so it was both that you dealt with.

McQueen: Domestic parts and foreign parts and foreign trucks.

IA: Now, we've heard a lot about the different countries and I can't remember who it was. Maybe it was Ed Rankin, he said he went to Iran or Iraq or some place...

IB: Iran, I think it was and got sick and had to come back.

IA: Somebody went to Pakistan. You know, they were all over the place, tracking down these trucks and what they needed and...

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IB: Being in the position you were in there, you really saw all of the business that Reo had, I mean, that Reo was doing. You were really in the know on what was going on. Probably a lot more than a lot of people.

McQueen: ..... uh, huh.

IB: Seeing the bills come in and the statements go out. I've often heard a secretary knows more about a business than the boss does.

IA: There's no question about it.

McQueen: Well, that's true.

IA: There's no question about it.

McQueen: You know, because, in fact, they run the place practically.

IA: Absolutely.

IB: I can see where a...

McQueen: But it was an interesting job. I really enjoyed my work.

IA: It didn't get boring to do it?

McQueen: It kind a got hectic at times but...

IA: But it wasn't, it didn't become routine, though. Some times it did...

McQueen: You mean boring?

IA: Well, just like doing the same thing, you know, over and over and over again.

McQueen: No, not to me it wasn't. It was, of course, there were separate accounts, you know, like you had to keep all the trucks separate and the parts and the miscellaneous, you know, all the other stuff that's involved.

IA: The person that we talked to last week was one of the industrial engineers who was involved with the ...

IB: Oh, Mr. Chamberlain?

IA: Mr. Chamberlain, I don't know if, you may not have known him. He was involved in the time and motion studies, the work studies.

McQueen: What was his first name?

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IA: Calvin.

McQueen: Oh, yeah, Cal.

IA: Right. Did they do any, did he and his department, you know, they were involved in making the work go faster and better and smoother and more efficient. Did they do any of that kind of study for the office workers or was it just in the plant?

McQueen: I don't know. I don't know. I don't really know.

IB: Nobody ever came...

IA: So they didn't do anything like that with you?

McQueen: Not that I know of. If they did it, it was, you know...

IA: Other people.

IB: It'd be a little difficult, wouldn't it, to be a time study on...

IA: It's been done though.

IB: Has it really?

IA: Yeah, and it's being done a lot more now with word processors...

IB: Oh, I was, well, of course, yeah. Okay.

IA: But I was just curious since you worked all the way up to '75 and there was already electric, there were some more electric typewriters and fancy...

McQueen: And IBM came in...

IA: machines.

McQueen: while I was there.

IB: Did it?

IA: Right, that's right. Did they have, oh, what are they called?

McQueen: Key punch?

IA: Key punch. Did they have that too?

McQueen: Yeah.

IA: But you didn't work on those?

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McQueen: No, no.

IA: But those keypunch operators, they had to do a certain amount per minute, per hour.

IB: Yes, so many cards per hour. Is keypunch anything like comptometer?

IA: Comptometer is an old business machine, accounting, bookkeeping machine.

IB: Okay, forerunner of keypunch cards?

IA: Yeah, oh, it's from the 1920's, comptometer operators are .....

IB: 'Cause I know even through the '30s and '40s, I would hear people going to comptometer school. In fact, I think there used to be a school in the Michigan Arcade upstairs.

IA: Yeah, that's an old fashioned machine.

McQueen: Yeah, that was something too. I never learned to run, not efficiently.

IA: But the things you worked on were already much more advanced than comptometers anyway so, 'cause those were like, just, calculators, you know, old fashioned types of calculator machine.

IB: Oh, were they? They weren't any kind of a keypunch card?

IA: No.

IB: Okay. I've always been curious about that.

IA: No, but I was wondering since it did get more, you know, the technology started to come in already by the '60s, I was curious if they did any of that kind of efficiency work in the office at all.

McQueen: Not that I know of. See, when I first started there, we did the billing, you know, by typewriter. First we had just a plain old...

IA: Right, you stuck it in the machine...

McQueen: Yeah, and, manual. Well, then we got electric typewriters and boy, that was something.

IA: It sure is.

McQueen: Yeah, you just touched the thing and you.....

IB: Very, very light touch.

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McQueen: But used to, your fingers would get, I remember when I first went to work, my fingers would get so sore on the ends from typing on the manual and, you know, you put out a lot of...

IA: It's a lot of energy, that's right.

McQueen: And especially when you, and my wrists would get so sore. Of course, once you get into it, why then they get tough and then after that, then we got billing machines which was, you know, much easier, too, you know, 'cause it did all the adding and everything on everything.

IB: Oh, they do?

McQueen: Ah, huh, and then when I went into, well, it was in receivables at that time, when I went on to the bookkeeping machine and I had a old, let's see, I can't remember if it was a '77 or '78 Burroughs that I started on which had a big long carriage and I think there were 18 registers and, of course, you had ..... That was interesting.

IB: You had to line 'em up or something?

McQueen: Well, you could set it up and it automatically like punch in certain keys, it would go to the register and print the amount that should go in that. See, it did the billing and did, for the statements and then it broke down in the different categories, different accounts that it was charged to. Certain parts would be, you know, maybe there'd be two or three different accounts that it would be charged to like miscellaneous or whatever.

IB: Did those machines ever screw up, put the wrong...

McQueen: Well, not unless you did it.

IB: I was just wondering 'cause you know, computers, of course, there again it's human error.

McQueen: Oh, the machine would sometimes break down or act up, you know. Maybe it wouldn't stay where it was suppose to and then you'd have to call a repairman but ordinarily, they worked pretty good as long as the operator...

IA: Those are like the machines that I used to work when I was a teller in a bank, are the same things, you put the bank book, remember people used to walk around with their bank books, that kept track of what their savings account had and you put it in and it would go, shhh, shhhh, shhh and enter all the different things and the interest and everything and make a total at the bottom and put the date on it. So it was the same...

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McQueen: Yeah, it would balance, you'd have to balance across and you'd have to balance down.

IA: Right, down, that's right.

McQueen: And that was interesting, you know. Sometimes you'd, my biggest problem was transpositions.

IA: And what's that?

McQueen: Transposition of figures, like instead of 449, I'd put 494 or something.

IB: Oh, okay. Transcribing, you might make a mistake.

McQueen: That was one of my...

IB: One of the things that you had to watch out for.

McQueen: I just did it, you know, I still do it. But usually it was divisible by 9, I think it was.

IA: The totals?

McQueen: Ah, huh.

IA: So you could check that.

McQueen: I mean, that was one of the first things you checked, or I did because that was my, my think I'd guess you'd call it today.

IA: And how would you find out if you made a mistake? Would the customer come back and say, ....

McQueen: No, no.

IB: It just wouldn't balance.

McQueen: Your sheet wouldn't balance.

IA: Wouldn't balance, okay.

IB: The down totals wouldn't match the totals across and then you knew you had a problem.

IA: And then when did the next, sort of generation of technology come in after that Burroughs machine?

McQueen: After the Burroughs? Well, that's when I worked on that last...



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IA: Oh, that big machine, the big billing machine.

McQueen: Sensimatic.

IA: Sensimatic. That was more like a computer really.

McQueen: Right. Well, I guess, I don't really understand the computers but it was a lot simpler. It was easier, you know, I mean, it wasn't very hard to, just did it.

IA: You just punched it in?

IB: When you went from one machine to a newer machine, did someone come in and train you on the new machine, someone from the company that made the machine?

McQueen: Um, hum, .....

IB: Did Reo ever send you to take any courses, any kind of office courses to help you on your job?

McQueen: Huh, ah.

IB: 'Cause we've talked to a few that have been sent out for specific...

IA: Yeah, mostly supervisory people.

IB: Um, hum, but I didn't know where they also might send some of the secretarial pool to learn new procedures or...

McQueen: I don't know about the secretaries but as far as I know, they didn't.

IB: Well, I guess I meant...

McQueen: I suppose with the comp operators or, you know, back when they had them, they might of sent them, I don't know. All mine was on the job training.

IB: On the job. Sometimes that's the best way.

IA: So you didn't really have to deal with kind of public, in your job, receptionist or phones or any of that kind of stuff?

McQueen: No, I had my own phone but not to the outside.

IA: Did you ever think that there was any ways you could, you know, move up to management types of positions outside of clerical?

McQueen: I had no desire, really.

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IA: You didn't want to?

McQueen: No, I was contented where I was. Of course, I'd moved up from where I started...

IA: Right, from a typist...

McQueen: right up to top bookkeeper.

IA: Yeah, right, and that was, that was, that was a pretty high level office job within the group there.

IB: I'm thinking you must of been pretty good with figures though because you had high school bookkeeping courses and to go from that into being able to do this high level bookkeeping, I'm thinking you must of not only got good instruction in high school but you must of been pretty good with numbers and liked to do that sort of thing.

McQueen: Yeah, I liked it.

IB: You must of been, probably got good grades in that in high school.

McQueen: Um, hum, yeah, I had, that was my, you know...

IA: That was what you liked to do.

IB: 'Cause most people now have to go, say, to get an associate degree or something...

IA: Yeah, my mother had to go to business college. She took bookkeeping in business college.

McQueen: Well, of course, you know, if I'd a done that, 'course, you know, by getting into Reo early, I mean, I kind of graduated with the work load, I mean...

IA: Right, you learned it as it changed itself.

McQueen: I learned from, from doing.

IA: That's right.

McQueen: Where if I'd a went right into bookkeeping, why then I probably would have had to have some training, you know.

IA: Right from the start, yeah.

McQueen: But I had the basics of bookkeeping from school.

IA: So you had the foundation to learn the other stuff.

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McQueen: 'Cause I took all the courses of typing and bookkeeping and all that.

IB: This big room that you mentioned, that had all the different departments in, would personnel be maybe at one end of the room and what you did maybe...

McQueen: No, personnel was over on Baker Street.

IB: Oh, it was in a separate building.

McQueen: Um, hum.

IB: I just wondered if they had everything clerical all in, all along in that main building.

McQueen: Well, mostly see, on the side I was on in this building, this main building, let's see, there was receivables and payables and (end side 1) ..... then, of course, down, I worked on second floor and then on first floor, they had purchasing. They were kind of, you know, everybody was in one big room but still we were divided into our...

IB: Into departments. Were there two floors to that building or three?

McQueen: Three floors.

IB: Three floors. What was up on third? More offices?

McQueen: Ah, huh, ..... up there, military was up there for a while.

IB: Oh, I see.

McQueen: And I think Marge worked up on third floor.

IA: We'll have to ask her.

McQueen: Yeah, I'm sure she worked up on the third. I know military and export parts was up there.

IA: Did you go, besides for the girl's club meetings and activities, did you go over to the clubhouse very much, the Reo Clubhouse? Was there a lot of activities going on there?

McQueen: The charity ball.

IA: The charity ball.

McQueen: You head about that?

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IA: No.

IB: No.

McQueen: Oh, haven't you really?

IB: Tell us about the charity ball.

McQueen: Oh, that was the highlight of the year.

IB: Oh, it was?

McQueen: Ah, huh.

IB: What time, was it held always, say at Christmas time or something?

McQueen: Ah, huh, ah, huh, before Christmas.

IB: Before Christmas. Was that a fancy dress formal ball?

McQueen: If you wanted, ah, huh. Usually everybody, you know...

IA: Was everybody invited, the whole plant or...

McQueen: Ah, huh.

IA: Really? And they sold tickets for charity?

McQueen: Ah, huh.

IA: Where did the charities go to, do you know? Just to...

McQueen: Well, like the Christmas baskets and...

IA: Oh, I see, the things the company did.

IB: So it was in house kind of things?

McQueen: Um, hum, yeah, and the families, you know, that worked there that had, you know, tough times or illness or, it all went for, for our own people.

IA: To help, I see.

IB: There again, it's the family thing and the family helps the members.

McQueen: Oh, that charity ball was, you know, it was with big ballroom dancing and...

IA: And had a band?

McQueen: Ah, huh. Yes. They always had prizes.

IA: How many people would go, hundreds?

McQueen: Oh, gosh, that place would be packed.

IA: Packed.

IB: Really?

IA: Yeah, I'm surprised we haven't heard about that.

McQueen: I am, too, 'cause that was the big thing. Everybody looked forward to the charity ball.

IA: Ah, huh. Do you know how long it had been going on when you got there? Was it something new or had been going on a long time.

McQueen: I can't remember. I think it had...

IA: Had been going on for a while.

IB: Oh, we'll have to ask when we're talking to folks that have been there since the '30s or the '40s.

IA: Did you go to the picnics 'cause I know they used to have company picnics, too?

McQueen: I can't remember if I ever went to any picnics or not.

IA: Okay.

IB: But you're saying the charity ball people from all over the plant and the offices....

McQueen: Oh, yeah, everybody.

IB: Get a big representation across ...

McQueen: Yeah, the place was always full.

IB: My mother worked there, too, but I never heard her mention the charity ball. She worked out in the plant but...

McQueen: It was one of those bring your own booze or whatever you wanted you wanted to drink. They had big, you know, tables set up for people to sit at.

IB: Did they have food, too?

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McQueen: I think just what you took for your, you know...

IB: Oh, you kind of brought your own snacks and...

McQueen: Um, hum, I think that's the way we did it but I know you brought whatever you, you know, wanted to drink and I think they had the mix there, you know, so they made a little profit on mix and they may of had, you know, like chips and stuff like that.

IB: But it wasn't a dinner dance?

McQueen: No, huh, ah.

IB: Buffet kind of thing at the end of the evening or, okay, well, of course, that would of cut down on what the...

McQueen: It was strictly, well, you know how the red stocking dance used to be.

IB: I remember the red stocking dance but I don't know...

McQueen: It was just about the same.

IB: Same kind of thing.

McQueen: Not quite as formal but if you wanted to go formal, but, you know, a lot of us did.

IA: Got all dressed up.

McQueen: In long dresses.

IB: Did you?

McQueen: Oh, yes. In fact, I've got, I think I've got the last dress, last formal that I wore. I don't know why I keep it.

IB: Well, sentimental reasons.

McQueen: It's, well, it's a nice dress.

IA: That's a good reason to keep it. You never know.

McQueen: I probably couldn't even get into it anymore but anyway, what do you do with it otherwise.

IB: You keep 'em in the closet and once in a while you look at it.

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McQueen: Yeah, yeah, remember, yeah. Yeah, it was a, it was a big family deal, you know. You invited your family. I know my kids used to go.

IA: Oh, you mentioned a son. You had other children besides your son?

McQueen: I have two step-daughters.

IA: Oh, and two step-daughters. Okay.

McQueen: Yeah, their kids used to go and they just loved it. One of the girls and she wasn't old enough to go, you know, when they closed down and she was so mad 'cause she never got to go.

IA: She didn't get a chance.

IB: 'Cause that was quite a place, the civic center of its day sort of.

McQueen: And that was a shame that they let that place go down. That should of been kept for historical...

IB: I agree with you. That would be the perfect place for the R.E. Olds transportation museum. What better place than right there, on the grounds of the Reo. As a matter of fact, the people that started the Museum tried to get that building.

McQueen: Did they?

IB: Um, hum, and the city owned it and they just kept throwing up road blocks and finally they said that, then if the people wanted it, they'd have to do all this remodeling and they'd have to bring it up to code for handicap accessible which, of course, is understandable but that wouldn't have cost that much. It would just have required some ramps and that kind of thing 'cause they would have only used the main floor but they just kept throwing, it was as if they didn't want them to have it. They just kept throwing up road blocks and finally it got to be so expensive by the time they added this and this and this that the people just, you know, they said, well, we just haven't got that kind of money, you know. We're just a group of individuals and we're trying to start a museum to honor Lansing built transportation.

McQueen: I know, it's a dirty shame...

IB: It is a shame.

McQueen: that that wasn't...

IB: We talked to someone along the road, it's not someone we've interviewed yet but it's...

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- IA: Oh, the man who has all the memorabilia?
- IB: Well, no, what I was thinking of is somebody who said that, maybe it was the ..... that the day that the, the last day, the final day when the place closed down that they hadn't known it was gonna close, they knew it was gonna come sometime but they didn't know when and she went to work, in front of the building where you worked, obviously, and the doors were padlocked and she was really nonplussed and she thought, well, they'll open tomorrow so she went back the next day and then she didn't know it till she read it in the paper.
- IA: I don't remember who it was either but I do remember the story.
- IB: I don't remember either but they hadn't, obviously hadn't come to the office, the people that owned it or sent down any kind of a directive or a bulletin or anything.
- McQueen: Yeah, I remember that that they, you know, they didn't know...
- IA: 'Cause you were still in touch with all your friends, you were still probably, many of them working there.
- McQueen: Yeah, they padlocked it.
- IB: Without ever sending a letter or coming around and saying, Friday's your last day
- McQueen: Oh, yeah.
- IB: Isn't that strange. Just kind of indicates the kind of people that were running it at the last, doesn't it? Mr. Bowles, I think said to us the other day that he just cried. A lot of people really had difficulty with it.
- McQueen: Yeah, I know, I know my supervisor, when they let him go, he just, of course, you know, they let some other ones go and then when Bob come out and he walked by my desk and he said, bye Mabel and I knew then, you know, I mean, I just, I just almost cried myself 'cause he used to say when we, you know, well, Mabel, he says, they just, can hang on just a few more years, he says, we'll have it made, he says. We'll get our pensions and then it happened to him and he just went downhill. Well, that's what took him, I think.
- IA: He didn't have a lot to live for. So many of the men who were supervisors or in, you know, management positions were in their 50s, such a difficult time to try to find something new, you know, at that point.



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McQueen: I know. Well, my son-in-law, when he, he had a hard time finding a job and he was in his '40s then. Yeah, he was out of work a long time. Well, finally he got in at Lansing Drop Forge. In fact, he just, he just retired from there in February.

IA: Most drop forges haven't been doing too well either. Oh, dear.

IB: It used to be, several years ago when all the drop forges were going and the Atlas, you could hear those big hammers going and it was just part of your life to hear those going all night long and during the day you didn't hear them as much, of course, but...

McQueen: With all the other noise.

IB: at night, you could always hear 'em, especially on summer nights 'cause you had your windows open. It was just part of Lansing. You mentioned the fire. We have an opportunity, I hope it's still there, to get photographs of a, a private citizen who took photographs of the fire.

McQueen: Oh, do you? Well, I'd like to have one, you know, to put in my book, to complete it.

IB: Well, I'll have to get in touch with her and see if she's still willing to let me take 'em. She doesn't, she couldn't find the negatives and I've been stalling, hoping she'd find the negatives because she moved from one place to another and things were packed away, you know, how it is when you move and she just didn't know where they were. She thought she knew but when she went through and they weren't there but she's got photographs so I think I'd better call her and see and if I'm successful in getting the photographs then we'll have to have negatives made and prints from that and if I'm successful, I'll see that you get one.

McQueen: I'd pay for one of 'em.

IB: Oh, well, a print wouldn't cost that much.

McQueen: Well, I know, but you have to do very many, I mean, if you do bring one, I'd like to have one for my book.

IB: Well, I'll trade a photograph for you for the chance to Xerox some of your Reo and newspaper articles.

McQueen: Oh, okay. Okay.

IB: That would be really wonderful for the Museum to have those in their archives.

IA: Yeah, 'cause it's hard to find, you know, the only other way to find them is to flip through day after day 'cause the Lansing State Journal's not indexed or anything so you can't just look 'em up. It's hard to find them.....

IB: Oh, really, I've never tried to, in fact, I've wondered what, is everything on microfiche down at the State Journal?

IA: It is but there's no index.

IB: Oh, my goodness. You just go through date by date?

IA: Yeah and if you're interested in an event like the fire, obviously you look at that particular date but the Reo, you know, its changes and its demise was a long term process. I mean, this one day obviously it was closed but if you want to find out about Cappart coming in and this one coming in, you really have to almost look at years worth to get all the information from the Journal so but if somebody's already cut 'em out, makes it, have your work, you know, already done so that's very good. The only, the only newspaper that's indexed in any really good way is the New York Times which would probably have a little bit about it when the Reo closed maybe or something but it wouldn't have all the specifics that the Lansing State Journal would have, obviously.

IB: I would think they would have been, you know, on the Stock Exchange or something so there'd be some notation...

IA: Right, yeah, there would be some indication...

IB: They wouldn't have been very high on the Exchange I wouldn't think in the last few years.

IA: No, and it might be, you know, the article might be this big, you know, and it wouldn't have very indepth information but still, so this is great. That's really very helpful to have that. I just have a couple more questions. Since I'm a historian, I'm very interested in, you know, particularly with people like you who worked at the same place for a long time, 22 years, what your feelings are about how things changed over time because that's really all historians are interested in is how things changed over time. So just, you know, how your feelings about, you know, working at the Reo was like when you started in 1953 till when you ended in '75, what you think the biggest differences were in, you know, in the working conditions or the company itself and the philosophy or people, you know, anything that you think is important to about what changed.

McQueen: I don't know.

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IA: Most people don't think in those terms but that's the only way historians think.

McQueen: I mean, it, it just was so gradual it seemed like and, of course, in the position I was in, it was just a...

IA: The technology is changing.

McQueen: Ah, huh.

IA: You mentioned the young people coming in. Did that change a lot of the atmosphere?

McQueen: I think so, you know, their attitudes were different.

IA: Different and that was through the '60s, you think that that started a lot or was it happening the whole time?

McQueen: No, just in later years.

IA: The later years, yeah. Other people have mentioned, because of the government contracts, the affirmative action hirings changed things.

McQueen: Well, yeah.

IA: That the kinds of people that were hired maybe weren't as high quality or weren't necessarily ..... company, didn't care as much.

McQueen: Didn't care, you know, they were there to get their...

IA: Paycheck.

McQueen: which I guess, we was all there to get our paycheck but you still, you know, you had a job to do and you felt you owed, you know, owed the company a good...

IA: A fair day's work. Yeah, we've heard that from other people, too.

McQueen: We had a lot of privileges, you know, I mean, I just can't complain. I guess I was fortunate.

IA: Well, no, we haven't heard many complaints from people.

IB: Actually, we haven't.

IA: Not many.

IB: We've heard people say they were proud of what the product that was turned out that they were part of it and they were, the fellowship

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and the feeling of being part of something that was ongoing through the years and...

IA: How about the area like the Lansing community during the time that you lived there, you know, when you were living and working at Reo between '53 and '75, were you living in Lansing the whole time that you worked at the Reo or did you move?

McQueen: Yeah, I lived in Lansing.

IA: In the city.

McQueen: Except for...

IA: When you were in Florida.

McQueen: Well, let's see, in 196., well, no, I went to Florida before I went...

IA: Before.

McQueen: And I lived in town there from '53 to '60 then I moved over here on St. Joe. Used to live there on the east side and then moved out on the west side, lived on Durant Street. We lived there till I moved out here in .....

IA: Okay, so...

McQueen: Things have changed.

IA: Yeah, the community of Lansing itself has changed a lot.

McQueen: Boy, you ....., you know, ..... St. Joe when we moved out there, there wasn't anything out, there was three houses I think in that subdivision and St. Joe was just a little two way street.

IB: Two lane, it was a two lane street.

McQueen: And Creyts Road was all, you know, in fact, they had a murder over there while I lived there.

IA: Oh, my goodness.

IB: Things have really changed.

McQueen: Ah, huh, and now look at it. It's all built up and just, I didn't really want to move out there in the first place because I said it was way out in the country.

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IB: Why out in the country. Waverly Road, from Waverly Road west it was country right up until, oh, gosh, through the '50s anyway.

McQueen: See, when I, when I was, well, when I first started school, we lived there just up, let's see, it would be just the first farm west of Waverly on Delta River and now, well, the house is gone. The barn's gone. The silo's gone now, too, but I can remember that farm.

IB: Right there on the corner of Delta River and Waverly?

McQueen: Ah, huh.

IB: Yes, I, it hasn't been too many years since they took that house and barn and everything. It was just there one day and gone the next.

McQueen: I know it, ah, huh.

IB: That was a beautiful farm.

IA: What was your maiden name?

McQueen: Shreve.

IA: S C H...

McQueen: S H R E V E.

IB: I'd like to ask about the clubhouse just one more time and also about the office that you worked in. The buildings were very old. Were they deteriorating, you know, like did you feel like, gosh, these buildings are so old. These offices are so old.

McQueen: Of course, they kept them up, you know.

IB: Did they?

McQueen: Um, hum and, of course, we had all windows so really you had very little wall space for anything.

IB: I had heard reports before that the floors in some parts of the complex were, you know, getting weak and had to be sured up and that they didn't put much money back into the building and that it was deteriorating.

McQueen: Well, that's true, some parts were worse than others.

IA: It looked like you had, from the pictures, pretty updated office equipment. You know, the desks looked like they were up-to-date and all of that looked pretty, for the time. Now it looks a little old fashioned to us but I know from the time, that was, actually I know

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that it was up-to-date then because that's what we still have at State from 1975 and so it looked, you know, for the, for the time period, it was good stuff. It seemed like it was adequate. You were going to ask one more thing about the clubhouse.

IB: Well, I was just thinking about the clubhouse itself and along the same lines, you know, up toward the last, was it beginning to look shabby or?

McQueen: The clubhouse?

IB: Um, hum.

McQueen: Well, yeah, the clubhouse was going downhill. It leaked a lot, you know, and that porch...

IB: The roof leaked.

McQueen: that porch, you know...

IB: That faced Washington?

McQueen: Ah, huh...

IB: That was what?

McQueen: That got, you know, the roof would leak on that and then, of course, it ruined the inside of the, yeah, it was deteriorating.

IB: That's interesting.

McQueen: The clubhouse was so, there's so many good memories, I mean, you know, we all, you know, anybody that worked there could have like weddings and receptions and my son's reception was there.

IB: Didn't cost you anything to rent the halls so to speak?

McQueen: All you had to pay for was the, was the fellow that did the clean up which wasn't very much.

IB: Twenty, \$25 or something.

IA: That's a wonderful service to have for your employees.

IB: Gosh yes.

IA: 'Cause it must of been a very impressive place to hold something like that, too.

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McQueen: Well, see, they used to have, you probably have heard where they, they used to have the Reo shows there.

IA: Oh, yes.

McQueen: See, when I was a kid going to school, we'd go Friday afternoon. You know, everybody, all the kids could go on Friday afternoon to the matinee but at night, you had to have parents that worked there so you had to have ticket or whatever but...

IA: Have a little card or, yeah, I wish I could just see that, the sight of all those kids at the matinee. That would of, must of been really something.

McQueen: Well, it was, you know, well, a lot of us would never got to went, go to shows, movies...

IA: Otherwise.

McQueen: And as soon as we'd get out of school, why, boy, we'd all just hike, sometimes we walked all the way and sometimes they would have rides.

IB: From the Miller Road area.

McQueen: Um, hum.

IA: Going to see the picture show and also live shows, too, you had entertainment shows, too.

McQueen: Well, they had a lot for the employees that went on back then, you know, 'course that was before I worked there. But I know one of my friends that went to school before I did, her dad worked at Reo and they always could go to all that stuff. 'Course they'd invite me to go. They took a friend. They had five youngsters so it wasn't very often I got to go. .... took their own ..... somebody else.

IA: We've heard from people who snuck in, too, you know.

McQueen: Oh, yeah, that's true.

IA: People would sneak in and the guards, I guess, would look the other way sometimes and .....

McQueen: Yeah, it's always been a family, you know, place.

IB: Some time and I don't know where we got the man's name but the man who managed the clubhouse...

IA: Yeah, we're going to have to find him.

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IB: We need to, we're going to have to...

McQueen: Vern Haite...

IB: Pardon me?

McQueen: Vern Haite.

IB: Vern Haite, that's it.

IA: That's right.

IB: That's right, and we hope to get to talk to him.

McQueen: He lives out in Williamston, I think.

IA: Right.

McQueen: It's Williamston or Webberville.

IA: Right.

IB: Yeah.

McQueen: Yeah, you could get a lot of dope from him.

IB: But maybe, what I was thinking is he might, yeah, true and I was thinking he might also have some insight into what happened to some of those art, you know, like the ball and the chandelier and some of those things.

McQueen: You might find some of it out there.

IA: Out there, exactly.

McQueen: .....

IA: Probably figured it was coming to him.

IB: Well, if it was gonna be trashed...

IA: Why not.

IB: Which sometimes happens. For instance, the Women's Clubhouse that R.E. Olds donated the land and the money for the building downtown, when they tore that down, or didn't tear it down, when they gutted it out to make the office complex about two years ago, things in there, chandeliers and just, out into the dump.

IA: We were just in there Peter and I.



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IB: Were you?

IA: 'Cause we went in there to do our mortgage and there's a big plaque, the donation plaque, you know, that says this has been donated, this building's been donated by Ransom E. Olds, da, da, da, da, and there's a little saying and stuff and I asked the guy, I said, what are you guys gonna do, 'cause it's just laying on floor.

IB: Oh, it was.

IA: Yeah, propped up against the wall and I, you know, I said, what are you guys gonna do with that? Oh, I don't know, you know, as if it was nothing.

IB: There you go. Gee, I wish they'd donate that to the Museum.

IA: They should do, even downtown, to the State of Michigan Library Museum. Somewhere.

IB: Some place where people are going to see this.

IA: 'Cause as a historian, when I see something like that, it just makes me sick.

IB: Um, hum, me too, and that's what made me sick when I heard, well, for one thing, of course, the clubhouse being torn down, we have two chairs from the clubhouse at the Museum.

McQueen: Oh, do you?

IB: Um, hum, a little church, Pentecostal church, I think, on South Cedar, apparently at some time, maybe when the clubhouse was being dismantled, I don't know, obviously, the old fold up wooden chairs, you know, that would have been, probably had 'em for years and then maybe eventually had enough money, anyway, they called us and they said, we've got these two chairs that are stamped on the bottom property of Reo Clubhouse, would you like 'em? Yes! So that's the only thing, and visitors come in and they all mention the clubhouse and it's as if their childhood home had been torn down and they couldn't go back.

IA: You don't think, the fact that you had such nice memories of the clubhouse as a child made any difference when you were trying to find a place to work later on ....

McQueen: No, I don't think so.

IA: You don't think so.

McQueen: No, at that time, you know...

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IA: It was long, it was ancient history. Okay.

IB: Well, I don't think I have anything further. Thank you very much.

McQueen: Just a minute, I was gonna...