

Marvin Grinstern

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IA: I think I'm alright. I'm just gonna check.

IB: This is December 3, 1992 and this is Lisa Fine, Shirley Bradley at the R.E. Olds Museum and we're going to interview Marvin Grinstern.

IA: The first thing that we usually start with is just to get some background information. We don't have your address since you contacted us by phone, so if you could give that to us.

Grinstern: 2700 Eaton Rapids Road, number 276, Lansing, Mich, 48911

IA: And were you born here in Lansing?

Grinstern: Right, I was born where the airport is right now.

IA: And you went to school here, too?

Grinstern: Yes.

IA: Did you go to high school?

Grinstern: Graduated from Lansing Everett.

IA: Oh, okay.

Grinstern: '41, Ervin and I went to the same school.

IA: Okay.

IB: You went into the Army and he went into basketball.

Grinstern: Yes.

IA: Oh, you went into the Army after high school?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IB: 1941, he probably was drafted.

Grinstern: Yeah, I was drafted in '43.

IA: Oh, in '43, just like my dad, a late comer. Okay, and did you start working at Reo after the War, when you came back?

Grinstern: No, I didn't go to Reo till 3/4/65.

IA: Oh, okay, 1965 and between 1943 and 1965, I mean, when you came back from the War in 1965...

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Grinstern: I started Hill Diesel(?) in '41.

IA: Here, in this building?

Grinstern: Yeah, and then I went in the Army and I worked for three months in '46 after I come back and then I went in farming and then I went back in '51 for a year when they folded up and then I went to farming.

IB: '51 when the Hill Diesel folded?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IA: And you went back, did you always have the farm or did you sell the farms and...

Grinstern: No, I went to live with my grandmother.

IA: Oh, you were at your grandmothers.

IB: And she had a farm.

Grinstern: Yeah.

IB: Out near Eaton Rapids?

Grinstern: Out to Perry.

IA: And then stayed there farming until '65 when you came back to the Reo.

Grinstern: '65, yeah.

IA: Went to Reo, okay, and what did you start at at Reo doing, what kind of job.

Grinstern: Was a janitor.

IA: You were a janitor, okay.

Grinstern: Best job in the shop.

IB: You can get all over the shop that way, get to know a lot of people.

Grinstern: I was a janitor mostly on, yeah, Baker Street where the hospital and the personnel offices were.

IB: Oh.

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IA: And which particular shop was that that you were the janitor or did you just get around, all over the shop?

Grinstern: Well, yeah.

IA: All over the shop, okay. And who were you, who'd you answer to? Who was your supervisor?

Grinstern: I had several.

IA: You had several at the time you were there. And you stayed from 1965 to?

Grinstern: June of '75, I guess.

IA: '75.

Grinstern: Just before, after they folded, yeah.

IA: Okay. You moved to Lansing when you began to work at the Reo? You didn't come...

Grinstern: No, I lived out to Perry then.

IA: Oh, you stayed out in Perry, also. Okay. Did you ever marry?

Grinstern: Yes.

IA: You did, okay, and you lived out there with your wife?

Grinstern: Yeah, I went through a divorce in '87.

IA: Oh, okay. What year did you get married?

Grinstern: '54.

IA: 1954, okay. Any children?

Grinstern: I had one daughter, 29. She lives in Phoenix, Arizona.

IA: Okay.

IB: Out where the sun is shining.

IA: Yeah, right.

Grinstern: Born on Christmas Day, weighed 3 pounds, 15 ounces.

IB: Oh, a preemie.

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Grinstern: Yeah.

IA: Well, we've had experience with that, both of us.

IA: Yeah, both of us.

Grinstern: Really?

IA: Yeah, my daughter's a preemie, too, but she looks great now.

Grinstern: Little girls got a big world to grow in.

IA: And so the period between '65 and '75, you were out in Perry?

Grinstern: Right.

IA: Okay. And did you work also on the farm still when you were working at Reo?

Grinstern:

IA: You helped out on the farm, too. What kind of farm, kind of things did you do out there?

Grinstern: Oh, crops and beef.

IA: Oh.

Grinstern: I quit milking cows in 1958.

IA: Okay. Why did you work at the Reo? Why did you decide to work there?

Grinstern: Did what?

IA: Why did you decide to work there?

Grinstern: I had to have a job.

IA: And it just happened to be the place there was an opening.

Grinstern: Yeah, I had a friend who lived out here, foreman and he got me in over there at the Reo.

IA: Oh, okay. The fact that your dad worked there didn't...

Grinstern: No.

IA: have anything to do with it?

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Grinstern: No, no.

IA: 'Cause we've heard a lot of different, from other people, that lots of different families, you know, get their kin in.

Grinstern: Yeah, I suppose. No, Peter Eymann got me in there and a couple years later he got killed there.

IB: In the shop?

IA: He got killed?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IB: What happened?

Grinstern: Well, it's a long story, I guess.

IA: That's alright.

IB: We've got time.

Grinstern: He was in charge of salvage and scrap and stuff and this Clare Loundenslager come in and try to do some shady stuff and Pete didn't go along with it and so he got fired and he was off, I don't know, a year or two and finally got called back and, of course, he'd been a foreman for years and they demoted almost like say the yard gang and it was, these long railroad, or truck frames that are probably 20, 30 feet long and they were piling 'em, they had a stack probably about that high and the overhead crane had a sling and after they piled them, when the crane got movin', the sling caught the pile and tipped the pile right over on Pete.

IB: Oh, my.

IA: Was that common, that kind of thing happening?

Grinstern: No.

IB: No.

IA: It was unusual to have those kind of accidents.

Grinstern: Yes, it was one of them things.

IB: Good heavens. His name was Clare Eymann?

Grinstern: Peter Eymann.

IB: Oh, I'm sorry, Peter Eymann.

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IA: And so he was your contact to get the position at Reo?

Grinstern: Yes.

IB: He was your friend and neighbor and then, I M M A N?

Grinstern: E Y M A N N.

IB: E Y M A N N. Later on if someone has to type this up and they won't have any idea how to spell things. That's why I ask. So when he came back, he was demoted. He had been a foreman in what department?

Grinstern: Be over salvage and scrap.

IB: Salvage and scrap, that's right, you did say that.

Grinstern: Of course, there was a lot of underhanded things going on. Loudenslager had been there before and he got fired out of there once before and when he come back, why, same boat.

IA: Why did they have a disagreement to begin with? Was it personality or worried about doing things?

Grinstern: No, I don't know, Clare was trying to get stuff out of there and Pete didn't go along with it.

IB: Take stuff out, you mean?

Grinstern: Sell stuff out of his...

IB: On his own?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IB: I guess I've heard some place about him taking things up to a north woods cabin or something, materials, building materials?

Grinstern: Yeah, the carpenters go up there and build cabins for him out of things that Reo purchased. That was no secret, I mean...

IB: We've heard it several times.

Grinstern: Sure, sure, I know you have.

IB: And so that's maybe one of the reasons Mr. Eymann objected to what he was doing?

Grinstern: Well, he was a strong Catholic man and just didn't believe in that kind of thing. In fact, Clare had a place out here on Holt Road

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where he got stuff out of the Reo and was selling it out of there to truck drivers and stuff.

IB: Just anything, parts and materials, any kind, anything.

Grinstern: Gas tanks and batteries.

IA: Oh, my gosh.

IB: Gas tanks and batteries.

Grinstern: Of course, see you could take these aluminum gas tanks stainless steel.....

IB: Worth something probably, huh?

Grinstern: Sure.

IA: Probably doesn't make you feel real loyal to a company when the supervisors or managers are doing things like that?

Grinstern: Well, see, he got fired out of there, I don't know, probably in the early '60s and then when, right after White Motors probably come back, they hired him back. 'Course he's a pretty sharp man.

IB: I was just wondering, why would they hire back somebody that had a bad record but...

Grinstern: He was sharp.

IB: but he was a good organizer and whatever, could get the work done. That's why they wanted him. I suppose they didn't want to stop and get somebody and train somebody or work somebody up. They knew they weren't going to be there that long, maybe.

Grinstern: Well, he had been there a long time. I think he worked there before the war.

IB: I think so, too.

Grinstern: It's no secret what went on there. I'm not telling any stories

IB: No, you're not. We've heard a lot of this before. I didn't know what kinds of things, you know, he took.

IA: And that kind of thing was going on more towards the end?

Grinstern: Well, it went on there earlier, too.

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IB: Oh, it did? Well, today in GM, workers take home parts. I don't know if they're doing it as much as they used to.

Grinstern: Well, the workers don't take as much out as the big guys do.

IB: Oh, I suppose they had more of a way of doing it.

IA: As a janitor, did you belong to the union?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IA: The regular local with the rest of the

Grinstern: Yeah, 650.

IA: 650, right. We haven't heard a lot of activity after World War II on the part of the union. There didn't seem to be much going on in terms of striking against the company or anything like that.

Grinstern: No.

IA: Before the War there was some, of course, you were just mentioning...

Grinstern: Yeah, well, when the union first started in in '37 but, oh, I guess there was trouble and stuff but they seemed to settle it, I guess. Of course, the Army contracts, they had the Army contracts all the time.

IA: How did that affect the labor, you know, relations?

Grinstern: Oh, I think so, I think so, yeah.

IA: How did it, what kind of effect did it have?

Grinstern: Well, they were guaranteed work all the time.

IA: The workers were.

Grinstern: Yeah.

IA: They always knew that there was going to be something to do.

Grinstern: Yes.

IA: Yeah, and so that, that might make them, put 'em in a better position though to ask for higher wages or things.

Grinstern: Well, yes and no, I guess, that Reo was never the highest paying place in Lansing anyway.

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IB: That's true.

IA: Right, like from the beginning.

Grinstern: Yeah.

IA: Yeah.

IB: And when those contracts were out there wasn't work and they'd have to lay you off.

Grinstern: Well, they had pretty steady contracts up till the end.

IB: Up till the end.

IA: From the Navy, right?

Grinstern: No, the Army trucks.

IA: It was the Army trucks.

IB: During the War they had a contract with the Navy, too, to make detonators, I think it was.

Grinstern: Oh, I suppose, yes.

IB: You mentioned earlier that your father was there in the strike of '37?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IB: What do you remember about that? You must of been just a little guy.

Grinstern: I was 14 but I can remember we used to go there and talk to him through the windows.

IA: Now, when did he start to work at the Reo?

Grinstern: In the late '20s, probably.

IA: Was it his mother that had the farm?

Grinstern: No, it was my mother's mother.

IA: It was your mother's mother that had the farm. So he, was he a city guy?

Grinstern: No, my dad come to this country in 1916.

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IA: Oh, he came, he was an immigrant. He came in 1916.

Grinstern: Yeah.

IA: Where'd he come from?

Grinstern: Out of the Ukraine.

IB: Oh, that's interesting. We've got some Ukraines in our family.

Grinstern: Well, they were Germans out of Russia, the Ukraine at that time, of course, we went through two wars since then but I didn't realize at the time but I've met a lot of people that were German that come out of Russia. Of course, the Bolsheviks run 'em out of Germany and then they had the Bolshevik Revolution in when, 1916, some where in there...

IA: '17.

Grinstern: Yeah.

IA: Right after that but there was what, trouble way before.

Grinstern: And then they run him and his folks out of Russia.

IB: My gosh.

IA: Did he come straight here?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IA: He came to Lansing?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IA: Why did he come here? You don't know.

Grinstern: A relation was here.

IA: There was already a relative, and he got some, he was young then actually so...

Grinstern: Well, he was 16.

IA: Yeah, he wouldn't work right away, maybe.

Grinstern: He went to Lansing Company. Lansing Company hired all them.

IB: Lansing Company, what...

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Grinstern: They made wheel barrel down there on the corner of Cedar and Saginaw where the apartments are now.

IA: Oh, sure.

IB: Yeah, Riverfront Apartments.

IA: Yeah, right by the river. So there was a shop there that made wheel barrels?

Grinstern: Wheel barrels and platform carts, you know, to pile stuff on.

IB: Like the baggage carts for the railroads?

Grinstern: Yeah, yeah.

IB: 'Cause we had one on display here for a long time and I didn't connect where it came from.

IA: And then he went from there to the Reo?

Grinstern: Yeah, I think so. I think so.

IA: And he met your mom here?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IA: Did she work at any of these places?

Grinstern: No.

IA: No.

Grinstern: No, she worked at Freeman's Iron for a while. They had a few women pickin' rags and stuff in the wintertime.

IB: Picking rags?

IA:

Grinstern: Yeah.

IA: What was that? I've never heard that one before.

IB: Me neither.

Grinstern: Freeman's Iron and Metal on the corner of, well, it'd be Center Street and Maple.

IB: Oh, Freedland...

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Grinstern: Yeah.

IB: L A N D?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IB: I think I've heard of it and picking rags, what is that?

Grinstern: Well, they, I don't know, they'd get rags of different size and color and stuff and I suppose they'd had to sort of 'em out into bags and stuff.

IB: Oh, like cleaning rags and such?

Grinstern: Yeah, yeah.

IB: That's interesting.

Grinstern: And I think she worked at American Dry Cleaners when she was a girl.

IB: A young girl.

IA: But she wasn't from Ukraine?

Grinstern: No, no, she was born here.

IA: Okay, and then your dad went to the Reo some time in the late '20s, you think?

Grinstern: Yeah, I think it was.

IA: What kind of job did he do there?

Grinstern: He was a machine operator.

IA: Oh, so he must of got some skills?

Grinstern: Well, I suppose they...

IA: Somewhere where...

Grinstern: Well, they looked after one another. looked after

IA: Somebody from his country, you think, took him into the shop and showed him what to do?

Grinstern: I don't know. I've got a magazine here somewheres that...

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IB: Oh, do you?

Grinstern: That guy there, come out about the same part of the old country. It says there he come out of Poland but he come out of the same area that my folks did, my dad did.

IB: Andy Ristow. Oh, that looks like an interesting article. Saga of long time Reo This must be, Poland

IA: Yeah, yeah.

IB: Oh, the old lawn mowers. It's kind of shocking to go by the Reo grounds now, isn't it?

Grinstern: Look across there, of course, they got two buildings there now, finally.

IB: What is that, yeah, what is that new one on Washington?

Grinstern: That's not a new, wash rags and shop rags and towels and stuff, I think.

IB: That huge new building, is that right?

Grinstern: Yeah, yeah.

IB: It doesn't seem like it'd need that much space.

Grinstern: Well, Lansing Sanitary Laundry or something like that, isn't it.

IB: Oh, is that what it is?

Grinstern: I think so.

IB: Oh, okay. That makes sense then.

IA: That's interesting.

IB: Yes, oh, I'd like to have a chance to read that.

Grinstern: I found one magazine where my wife's granddad was in there.

IA: Oh, is that right, a Reo Spirit.

Grinstern: I think got in in the late '20s. He was 86 or something, died a couple days, or worked up till a couple days before he did.

IB: Is that right?

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Grinstern: Yeah, yeah, we were quite surprised going through the magazine find his picture there.

IA: So your wife's grandfather also worked at the Reo?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IA: What was, do you know what his name was, what her maiden name was?

Grinstern: Jimmy Hayes, I think.

IA: Jimmy Hayes, H A Y E S?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IA: So her grandfather worked there and your dad worked there. He worked there from the late '20s till?

Grinstern: Well, you know anything about Reo, you know they get a contract for busses and they'd work day and night for maybe two weeks and then you wouldn't see 'em again for, they'd be laid off for three, four months and he worked off and on there up till, probably till about '40 and then he went to Hill Diesel.

IA: Oh, he did, too.

Grinstern: And after Hill Diesel folded, he went back there for a little while again.

IA: When you were a child and a teenage, did you, did you all go to the clubhouse and...

Grinstern: Oh, yes.

IA: take advantage of all the things that the company had?

Grinstern: The free shows, yeah, yeah.

IA: The movie pictures, they had there.

Grinstern: That was quite a place, a radio station, a bowling alley and everything there.

IA: That's right, that's right and your family participated in all those kind of things?

Grinstern: Yeah, we lived on Center Street down here. 'Course we didn't have any money. We walked down there to the Reo Clubhouse.

IA: And they had sports teams, too, other kinds of stuff.

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Grinstern: Oh, yeah.

IA: Did he, did your dad do any of that?

Grinstern: No, no.

IA: No? They were in the city leagues. I remember reading about that, that their baseball team was in the city leagues. Did he think it was just a job or did he think it was a pretty good place to work.

Grinstern: No.

IA: He didn't like it?

Grinstern: Well, he liked it. You had to like it. Back in them days, there wasn't much choice.

IA: But like, as opposed to working at some of the other automobile shops that were in town? Didn't make any difference?

Grinstern: No.

IB: This is a fascinating magazine.

IA: Yeah.

IB: I'm just noticing the car out here. We've got one on display out there like that. That's a '09, a 1909 Reo,..... 1915 Reo. Fascinating.

IA: We were just talking about the pictures in the clubhouse and the sports teams, you know, all kinds of activities that the...

IB: That they used to engage in.

IA: they had in the '20s mostly.

IB: I was just noticing some of the activities here in the clubhouse later with the girl's club and the Steering Gear and all that. This isn't something that the average worker really took part in.

IA: No, not later on.

IB: I know my mother didn't.

Grinstern: The Steering Gear Club was mostly supervision.

IB: Supervision.

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IA: Supervisors.

IB: And the girl's club was mostly the office staff...

Grinstern: Office staff.

IB: secretaries and stuff. You mentioned working in the, being janitor in the unit where the hospital was and we have yet to be able to talk to anybody that was in the, near the hospital unit. I kind a perked up my ears when you said that.

Grinstern: Ardith Pappon, she was a nurse there for years. She's still alive. I saw her the other day at that dinner over there.

IB: We have tried so hard to interview her. We had...

IA: She's a busy lady.

IB: She is busy and we had an appointment all set up, what, August...

IA: Sometime in, yeah...

IB: And...

IA: September, I think.

IB: She came down with the flu or something.

IA: She got sick.

IB: And then I called her a month later and she was on her way out of town so we're gonna try again.

Grinstern: She had a lot of authority there at one time.

IB: Did she?

Grinstern: Oh, very much.

IB: She was the head nurse over the entire hospital?

Grinstern: Yeah, yeah. 'Course back in the early days when they had, I don't know, 1,000 people working there, there's probably stories in here about her but they had several nurses and I think even had a doctor there.

IB: I think they did, too. Then they had a Reo doctor downtown somewhere that they sometimes would send people to, it seems like I remember.

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Grinstern: Well, I don't remember.

IB: If something was more serious they would send them downtown.

Grinstern: Probably, probably, back in those days, yeah.

IA: So your dad participated in the strike? He sat down for a month.
Did he stay there the whole time?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IA: He did? That must of been hard on your family having him away
that long.

Grinstern: Yeah, but see, there was five of us kids.

IB: Oh, there were?

Grinstern: And we had every disease, chicken pox and 'course back in those
days, they quarantined the house, you know.

IB: Oh, yes.

Grinstern: 'Course he lived in the front part of the house and they even had
the doorway, they had tape on the door, you know, so you couldn't
go from one part of the house to the other and I remember mother
and dad used to talk through the keyhole.

IB: So he was used to separation.

Grinstern: Yeah, yeah.

IB: Oh, golly. Yeah, we've heard about food being sent in by the
community to the men in the shop.

Grinstern: Oh, yeah.

IA: We even had, one guy told us his dad was there and he brought him
in, just to look around for a little while to see it and he said
it looked like they were having a lot of fun in there.

Grinstern: Oh, I suppose for a while but, you know, after...

IA: Yeah, it gets old after awhile.

Grinstern: after a few days when you ain't got any money in your pocket.

IA: But he believed in the union.....

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Grinstern: Well, that was their only recourse at that time when the union started.

IA: Right. There had been some movements for the union a couple of years even before the strike, apparently.

Grinstern: Apparently. But see, people don't realize back in those days, they could fire and hire at will, you know. You had no security whatsoever.

IB: I wonder maybe there weren't any kind of benefits either, like health or...

Grinstern: Oh, no. There wasn't any unemployment or anything like that at that time.

IB: If you got hurt and were out of work, you were just out of luck.

Grinstern: Sure.

IA: Did your dad and mom have a house for the five of you? Did you all live in a house?

Grinstern: Yeah, my dad lost the house...

IA: On Center Street, you said.

Grinstern: in the Depression.

IA: He lost it in the Depression. But up till that point, you were, paying, he had a mortgage on a house?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IA: Yeah, that must of been hard, too, so you had to move to an apartment or rent a house?

Grinstern: No, they bought a little, five acres out on Miller Road. I was raised on Miller Road after that.

IA: I don't know where that is.

IB: It's south of, you know where...

Grinstern: You know where Meijer's store is?

IB: Meijers on South Cedar...

Grinstern: On South Pennsylvania...

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IB: South Pennsylvania and Cedar.

IA: Oh, sure, yeah.

IB: Yeah, Miller's there.

Grinstern: I've got to tell you a little story about that.

IB: Good.

IA: Okay.

Grinstern: Where the Meijer store is, there used to be a farm right there on the corner of Miller and on the farm there used to be a creek running down through there. I used to trap muskrats right where Meijer's store is right now.

IB: My dad used to work for, I'm trying to think, there were two farmers, Grabowsky and I can't think of the other one and they had property right out there in that area, too.

Grinstern: Grabowsky's was on Jolly Road.

IB: Um, hum.

Grinstern: Yeah, I went to school with the Grabowsky boys.

IB: Did you?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IB: At North Street School?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IB: Yup, that's where my dad went.

Grinstern: What was his name?

IB: Russell Albert. He's a lot older than you. I think he's 84.

Grinstern: I don't remember the name.

IB: No, he's...

Grinstern: Did they live around there?

IB: Well, he lived with these, he lived with Grabowskys.

Grinstern: Oh, really.

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IB: He was out on his own when he was 11 years old and he had to find a place to work, a place to live. It was really, it's a long story but he worked for Grabowsky for awhile and Grabowsky was pretty hard to work for so then he went to the adjoining farm...

Grinstern:

IB: Went to the adjoining farm and worked for Batenfield.

Grinstern: Dewey Batenfield?

IB: Yup. Oh, this is...

IA: My gosh.

IB: Hey, we're having old home week here.

Grinstern: I have, the Lord has blessed me with my knack for remembering names and faces and people and stuff and...

IB: Yeah, he and Stewart were good friends, my dad and Stewart. Now, Stewart was killed during the War.

Grinstern: See, the, the two Grabowsky boys are fairly smart and then they had a brother and a sister and they were just left out.

IB: And I think, didn't some of them work at the Reo, the Grabowskys 'cause some of them moved in on the south end of Lansing out by the Atlas, what used to be the Atlas Drop Forge, lived in that area and I think they worked at the shop. Let me see, where are we in the scheme of things.

IA: Well, I was, we were talking about his dad and the union mostly and I guess the next thing I was gonna ask was that things changed for the better after?

Grinstern: Oh, I suppose they did.

IA: They did. Did you, do you remember anything

Grinstern: Well, not too much, no. I suppose, they had security and, of course, then what, the Wagner Labor Act come in and they got overtime and stuff after that.

IA: And he stayed there through till the War and then went back to Reo?

Grinstern: No, they laid off in about '40 and then he went to Hill Diesel here in about '40. Of course, I got out of high school, I was 17,

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I couldn't get a job nowhere so I set pins in a bowling alley down in Detroit.

IB: Oh, you did?

Grinstern: And then after Pearl Harbor, why they started hiring at the Reo or Hill and I was probably second, third person to get hired in there. Originally they only had a crew probably about 20 and it's that way for years, I guess.

IB: And then you started right in working on...

Grinstern: I was a tool crib operator.

IB: Oh, okay.

Grinstern: Run the tool crib. But see, they went from probably 20 people to about 5, 600 during the War.

IB: To produce engines...

Grinstern: 'Course they had a place had a building there and they had a building along over on Kalamazoo and they had a place over there by Clara's Restaurant. They had a little place in there.

IB: Oh, they did?

IA: By the tracks.

Grinstern: Yeah.

IB: And they all, all these little buildings all belonged to Hill Diesel and they built engines.

Grinstern: Well, they leased the other three out.

IB: Oh, I see. They needed more room because they had a bigger contract and they had to have space.

Grinstern: Yeah.

IB: And they produced engines that were used for...

Grinstern: Auxiliary engines and then, I don't know, they done a lot of wrappin' and packin' of parts and stuff down here. 'Course I was gone at the time. I didn't pay that much attention to it.

IA: Did any of your brothers or sisters work at Reo?

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Grinstern: No.

IA: No.

Grinstern: No, they were all smarter than I was.

IB: They didn't think it was a good place to get it or the pay wasn't that good or...

Grinstern: One brother went to the Olds and retired out of the Olds and the other brother, he's a, oh, backhoe operator.

IB: Did your sisters ever go to the shop to work?

Grinstern: No, no. One sister worked for the State of Michigan for a while but, then the other one stayed right to home with the kids. But her husband worked there.

IA: He did?

Grinstern: He had 28 years in there. Draws about \$126. I draw \$50.36.

IB: This is what was left to you from the pension debacle, huh?

Grinstern: Well, the Guaranteed Benefit Pension Corporation, whatever, pays me. They guarantee 10 years.

IB: Ten years worth of work you're saying?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IB: Boy, a lot of people really...

Grinstern: I was quite fortunate. I got into the post office shortly after that.

IB: Oh, you did?

IA: Oh, you got a job at the post office after it closed. That is good.

Grinstern: But there was a lot of 'em was 58 years old or so that couldn't, where was they gonna go. Too young to draw Social Security and nobody wants to hire anybody 58.

IB: No, I've even heard of, well, we had a volunteer here for a while, I can't think of her name right off the top of my head but her husband just went all to pieces.

Grinstern: A lot of 'em did.

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IB: Nervous breakdowns. He was never able to do anything after that and they got, like you, just a tiny bit out of it. She said it was a desperate time for them and I've heard of suicides and...

Grinstern: Oh, have you?

IA: Yeah, we've heard about some suicides. Did you see it coming?

Grinstern: I did, sure, sure. The handwriting was on the wall, especially after Hill Diesel, I could see it. A lot of people didn't want to believe it I guess but...

IA: And you weren't, obviously you stayed till the end till
.....

Grinstern: Well, I wanted to get 10 years in.

IA: Oh, I see.

Grinstern: I wanted to get 10 years in.

IA: You did what you could When you worked there, what were your, you know, your hours and...

Grinstern: I worked nights all the time.

IA: You were a night worker.

IB: Four till midnight or something?

Grinstern: Yeah, 4:30 till one or something like that, I guess it was.

IA: 4:30 p.m.?

IB: So you start just after that afternoon shift.

IA: And five days a week?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IB: Did you, were you ever able to get overtime and double time and all of that good stuff.

Grinstern: Very little, very little.

IB: Very little.

Grinstern: Repair foremen

IB: Oh, really? Why do you say that?

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Grinstern: Oh...

IB: They purposely ...

Grinstern: Well, I don't know whether they purposely done it but they got all the overtime and bled the company.

IA: The repair, is that what you said, the repair shop did that?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IB: Well, I can see where they would jam up parts or something, send them to salvage and....

Grinstern: Well, no only the jam up but they had so many trucks, at one time they had over 500 trucks in the park lot over on Washington Avenue waiting for parts and stuff. Maybe a truck would go over there with one or two parts missing and then they'd get another hot truck and they'd go over there and steal parts off of that truck to finish this one up.

IA: Oh, my gosh.

Grinstern: For you got through, maybe that truck over there was a skeleton, see.

IB: Oh, a hot trucks, what...

Grinstern: Well, somebody that...

IB: Somebody wanted it, it was ordered?

Grinstern: they had to have it...

IB: Had to have it right now?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IB: So they'd go over and scavenge parts off the one sitting on the lot.

Grinstern: Yup, sure, sure.

IA: That doesn't sound like a good way to run a company.

Grinstern: Well, what were they gonna do?

IB: This was towards the end when ...

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Grinstern: Of course, the trucks, see, were all specialized. They weren't, just every truck come down the line, wasn't the same.

IB: Oh, is that right?

Grinstern: Oh, yeah. Just like these big trucks you see on the highway, you know. One's got airhorns on and the other one don't and one's got chrome exhaust pipes and the other one don't.

IB: These were all like preordered so they had already specified what they needed.

Grinstern: Yeah.

IB: Okay. Well, that's interesting. I guess I just thought they all came out the same and then something was added to it later.

IA: I think somebody once mentioned to us that that was one of the features of the Reo truck.

Grinstern: One of the strong features.

IA: Right, that you could get what you wanted, you know, there was a lot of made to order, a lot of special specifications that they could do for you. But then it made it harder to get 'em ready 'cause they all required special attention.

Grinstern: Well, yeah.

IB: Especially toward the end when they didn't have maybe the money to get all the stuff they needed. As you went around the shop, you probably, you know, you're talking to everybody so you could get a real sense of what was happening in the shop and that the end was coming.

Grinstern: Yeah, but nobody seemed to really care.

IB: Oh, yeah?

IA: You don't think so?

Grinstern: No, I don't think so.

IB: You didn't hear a lot of panic and worry?

Grinstern: Somehow they thought it was all scare and they couldn't believe.

IA: Even the workers on the line?

Grinstern: Oh, yeah.



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IA: Really?

Grinstern: Yeah. I don't, that was my opinion. Everybody thought, you know, it could happen to somebody else but it ain't gonna happen here. But you know yourself, how many people are getting ready to retire and there's nothing there. The pension plans have been, another company bought 'em up, bought the pension plans out. Just like right here, the man didn't take anything out of the pension fund. He just signed promissory notes for \$5 million and never paid the note.

IB: That was here when, this was...

Grinstern: Frances Cappart...

IB: Museum was...

Grinstern: No, that was...

IB: Oh, Cappart from the Reo.

Grinstern: Yeah. No, it was people thought that, you know, it was gonna be there forever...

IB: Well, he, sounded to me like from what I've heard that he was a good one for making promises and making good speeches, making things kind a like a politician.

Grinstern: he bought up American Seating and this isn't the only outfit he ever bought out broke. He had a track record for that.

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

IB: We have.

IA: That he, that was his specialty.

Grinstern: Sure. He owed \$16 million for parts. Those parts went into a finished truck somewhere so he had his money.

IA: 'Cause he got paid for the trucks?

Grinstern: Sure. Sure.

IB: I see you've got a lot of nice pictures and things there.

Grinstern: That was taken down to the motor plant. That's my brother-in-law there.

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IB: Oh, your brother-in-law worked there, too.

Grinstern: Yeah. Charlie Young there. He worked at, in personnel.

IB: Does he look familiar?

IA: Yeah.

Grinstern: That guy?

IB: Yeah.

Grinstern: I don't know what his name is. I saw him at the retiree dinner the other day.

IA: He looks really familiar.

IB: He looks like somebody we've talked to.

Grinstern: And that guy there, Ernie Nostrand, he ended up going over to the Olds. He was a janitor over at the Olds to start in. He was superintendent, I guess, of the motor plant.

IB: Oh, he ended up at GM as a janitor.

Grinstern: Yeah.

IB: Lot less pressure.

Grinstern: Yeah, but his age, see, probably pretty lucky to get in there even.

IB: Oh, I guess that's true, yeah.

IA: Reo Items.

IB: Was this like a monthly news, I've never seen this one.

IA: No, I haven't either.

IB: Was this like a monthly newsletter that you got?

Grinstern: Oh, this, see, back in 1951, '52. I think there's some duplicates you can have.

IA: You have these 'cause of your dad?

Grinstern: No, I got them when I was janitor and they was getting ready to fold up.

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IB: '53.

IA: Oh, they were just laying around somewhere?

Grinstern: They had 'em stored, yeah,

IB: Oh, this wasn't something that everybody got a copy of?

Grinstern: Everybody did back in those days, yeah.

IA: But he wasn't working there then.

IB: Well, this is '53.

IA: So that's why I was, right, so that's why I was, you know, curious about how he got it.

IB: That's right, he didn't go in till '65, he said.

IA: Well, that's interesting. So they were just sitting in a corner in a box somewhere.

IB: This looks like it was a parade downtown, maybe, in Lansing.

Grinstern: I don't know. There must be a story on the inside there about it.

IB: Another Reo eager beaver. Was that big, was that that truck?

IA: That was a truck.

IB: The truck that went in the water or something.

Grinstern: Um, hum.

IA: Now, there's Ardith Pappon.

Grinstern: Yup, yup, attractive woman, very attractive.

IB: We've met her, you know, through the luncheon and things and I have that opinion, too. She seems very nice.

Grinstern: Well, she's no kid no more either.

IB: None of us are.

Grinstern: Don't tell her I said that. Don't tell her I said that.

IB: No, we won't. Write that down.

IA: Turn off the tape.

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Grinstern: I'm gonna revoke it.

IB: Free chest x-rays will go to all employees.

IA: Oh, my goodness. This is from March, 1933. Oh, this is a part of the Reo Spirit.

Grinstern: Here's one, June, 1932.

IA: Wow. I have not seen this.

IB: Look at the art work.

IA: Yeah, wow.

IB: Cy Raff, we've heard his name quite a bit.

IA: Yeah.

IB: Oh, here's an article by Red O'Brien. I noticed he passed away.

Grinstern: Charlie, yeah, he just died here a short while ago.

IB: Yeah, three, four months ago or something.

IA: Do you remember seeing these when you were a kid. I mean, did your dad bring this kind of stuff home?

Grinstern: Yeah, yeah, I never, 'course...

IA: You didn't pay much attention to it, though?

Grinstern: No.

IA: Wow. Well, there's Clare Loudenslager.

Grinstern: Yeah, yeah.

IB: Oh, yes...

IA: He looks kind of like what you described him.

IB: There's Ardith again. Joseph Scheer, president of Reo Motors.

IA: Wow. These are really great.

IB: They sure are. Well, this whole article is about the Scheer
..... Reserve officers tour the Reo Plant.

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IA: Now, this was by Arthur Sinclair. He was the one who managed the clubhouse.

IB: Is that right?

IA: Um, hum, in the '20s.

IB: And does he, we have his name, don't we?

IA: I don't think so. I don't know if he's still around. I'll have to check.

IB: I know we had two names.

Grinstern: That lady right there.

IA: Hilda Hill.

Grinstern: Name was Hilda Carter at one time. She was in plant protection for years and years.

IB: I didn't know they had women on plant protection.

Grinstern: Started 'em in during the War and she was one of the very few that stayed, I think.

IB: Is that right? What, plant protection, I know they were out at the main gates checking people coming in with their badges but....

Grinstern: Well, did mostly fire watch, when there was nobody in the shop, like nights and weekends, they had certain clocks they had to punch around the clock. 'Course, they would make their tour, see, check if there was any fire or anything.

IB: Oh, they would completely make a tour of the plant on their shift and check everything.

Grinstern: Yeah.

IB: Oh, I didn't know there were women on plant protection. I think that's so interesting.

Grinstern: Probably during the War they had quite a few of 'em, I don't know.

IB: Oh, I wouldn't doubt it.

Grinstern: But I know that she...

IB: She stayed on.

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Grinstern: Yeah.

IB: Oh, isn't that interesting.

IA: And they didn't give her any problems because of that?

Grinstern: No. Yeah, she's, quite a lot of harassment.

IA: Oh, she did?

IB: Oh, she did go through harassment.

Grinstern: Yeah. Maybe you ought to talk to her.

IB: Is she still alive?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IB: Oh? What is her name?

IA: And what's her name?

Grinstern: Hilda Carter, now I think.

IA: Carter.

Grinstern: Yeah, she got remarried and she lives on Donora Street here in Lansing.

IB: Oh, I used to live the next street over.

IA: What's the name of the street?

IB: Donora, D O N O R A. That's where Burt Reynolds used to live.

IA: Oh, wow.

IB: I tell you what, the neighborhood's changed a lot since I've lived there, too.

IA: That's very interesting. We've been trying to find more women who worked during World War II.

IB: And we've had a difficult time doing that.

Grinstern: Well, that's 50 years ago.

IB: And not just, oh, I know, but there are lots of the office staff gals around and we've talked to lots of them but to find a woman

who worked on the line or worked, say, plant protection which I didn't know or worked in the hospital, first aid.

Grinstern: Well, see most of 'em got laid off after the War.

IA: Right, right and then went on to do other things. Some of them may have been unmarried then...

IB: Or their husbands came back from the service.

IA: and then changed their names.

Grinstern: Are those the same.

IB: Yeah, those are duplicates.

Grinstern: You can have one of them.

IB: Well, thank you.

Grinstern: If you want it.

IB: Oh, love to have it, you bet. Ah, plant protection.

Grinstern: And there should be another one of those somewhere.

IB: I've got one over here. Is that what you're looking for?

Grinstern: Well, I should have one here, too. I have this one here. You can have this, too.

IB: Oh, okay. These are both duplicates. Oh, wonderful.

IA: We could keep 'em right here in the Museum.

Grinstern: That's alright, that's alright.

IB: Thank you.

Grinstern: I promised one of these to my daughter so.

IA: Does she have a certain feeling about the Reo?

Grinstern: Oh, yeah, she kind a likes that stuff, I guess.

IB: We have been hearing from various people that we've talked to that everybody sort of felt like family. Did you feel that way, too, like you belonged?

Grinstern: No, not working the night shift

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IA: But you've kept all this stuff all these years.

IB: I think that's great. It's amazing to me how many people kept a lot of stuff when the place started going, you know, saving things from the scrap.

Grinstern: Oh, I didn't realize that.

IB: A lot of the, a lot of the people we've talked to, I'm drawing a blank on names right now but the man that, the two women that we interviewed Mabel McQueen and the other lady across the street, in the trailer court...

IA: She had pictures, she had albums and albums filled with pictures.

IB: Well, the albums, yeah, and, well, the albums belonged to her boss and he let her borrow 'em so we could see 'em and he had 'em again at the summer dinner.

IA: That's right.

IB: I can't think of his name.

Grinstern: There's someone else, a young guy around town here that, I think, a couple years ago is an antique buff or something, had quite a lot of old stuff there. I don't know what his name was or anything but he had a table full of stuff there a couple years ago.

IB: We've been given a couple of names of men that either managed the clubhouse or something...

Grinstern: Vern Haight?

IB: Pardon me?

Grinstern: Vivern Haight from Webberville.

IB: Yes.

IA: Oh, yeah, that's it, that's right.

Grinstern: He had the best job in the shop.

IB: Did he? Why's that?

Grinstern: He really had nobody to account for.

IA: He just did what he wanted to do?

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Grinstern: He got paid for buying the liquor for these parties, whatever was left over, he had.

IA: Oh, my.

Grinstern: Whatever food was left over was his.

IB: Sounds like a pretty neat...

IA: This was after the War, right. He was doing this mostly in '60s?

Grinstern: Well, yeah, all the time I was there, he was there. He was in the clubhouse before that.

IB: Oh. It will be interesting to talk to him.

Grinstern: He came and went as he pleased and no clock to punch. I suppose he punched a clock but...

IB: But he wasn't kept track of and he kind of was a free, kind a free wheel.

Grinstern: Well, how would I put it? It's just like a guy that's head of a convention bureau or whatever. He sets up, well, maybe like the Civic Center here. The guy that runs that, all the fringes he gets out of the deal.

IA: Right.

Grinstern: No, Vern had it made.

IB: That's interesting.

Grinstern: But he had the same classification as I did probably, janitor or whatever.

IB: Classification, how, were they...

IA: Were they union classifications?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IA: Yeah.

IB: Were they ranked like 1A, 2A or something like that?

Grinstern: No, no, like maybe a machine operator and a forklift operator, truck driver, whatever.

IB: Oh, I see.

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IA: But a job description.

Grinstern: No, Vern had it made down there.

IA: Let me ask you this question. You know, we've asked you a couple of times how you felt about the Reo and you didn't, you say it's nothing special but you do keep up with a lot of people that used to work there.

Grinstern: No.

IA: No? Well, at least you go to their reunions every once in a while.

Grinstern: Yeah, well, most of the people are younger, they're still working. You know yourself, the reunion, how many young people were there?

IA: Yeah, there quite a few even at our table. Yeah...

IB: That were maybe just starting in there toward the end, in '75, '76.

IA: Right, so it's not...

IB: I'm surprised how many of the older people are still, you know, involved in, with it, you know. We talked, did you know Hilda Smith in personnel?

Grinstern: Sure, sure.

IB: Did she hire you in or do your paperwork?

Grinstern: No, she was, she was pretty well on her way out or just working part time when I hired in there, I think.

IB: I see, she was getting older by then.

Grinstern: But see, if you understand anything about farming, you've got to have another job to keep the other job going and I had one farm and I wanted to buy another one so I went to Reo to help pay for it.

IA: Okay, so this was the way to help you

Grinstern: Sure. It wasn't my life's work or anything.

IB: Farming was where your heart was, maybe.

Grinstern: Yeah, I was, what about 42, I guess, when I hired in there, whatever. It was just to make some money to keep the farm going.

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IB: Sure. I know a lot of people like that worked...

Grinstern: Everybody, everybody.

IB: Sure, people that would drive down from Portland and Clarksville and...

IA: Yeah, we went out to Milliken, that guy that we interviewed

IB: Interviewed, yes.

IA: In Milliken.

Grinstern: Who was that, Forest Gardner?

IA: No.

IB: No...

Grinstern: Jim Vanburen.

IB: Not Chamberlain.

IA: Chamberlain, he was the time and motion study guy. Fuller...

IB: Fuller, that's right.

IA: Fuller.

Grinstern: I don't remember him.

IA: Yeah, I don't even remember where he.....

Grinstern: 'Course, see, working nights all the time, I didn't really, 'course, like I say, the Lord blessed me with a knack for remembering names and faces and stuff like that...

IA: But if they weren't there when you were there, you might not know 'em.

Grinstern: Yeah, no, no.

IB: Charlie Griffin is the other clubhouse name I have.

IA: Okay, and that's probably why you wanted night work, too, so that you could work days on the farm. That makes sense, too. Was your grandmother's name, the farm you were on, her last name was Hayes, too?

Grinstern: No, that was on my wife's side.

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IA: That's right. But, oh, I see, I'm sorry. Yeah, I'm getting confused 'cause there's a lot of different people involved here. It's your mother's mother.

Grinstern: Mother.

IA: Right, and what would her, what was her last name?

Grinstern: M A L Z O N.

IA: M A L Z O N, Malzone?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IA: And that farm was out in Perry?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IA: Okay. Has that, has that farm been in the family for a long time?

Grinstern: No.

IA: Oh, it hasn't? Okay, 'cause we've interviewed other people who've had farms but nobody has said exactly what you've said, that...

Grinstern: Really?

IA: yeah, that the job at Reo was the way to keep the farm. They did both, you know, when they talked about working in the shop and then going back and working on the farm which we were astounded at how much work that all would be. But, so this is very interesting to us 'cause we haven't really come across this before.

Grinstern: No, I never realized how much the farm cost me till I retired.

IB: Oh, is that right? Yeah, when your income's reduced.

Grinstern: Not, you don't have any income. You got to keep this other job to pay the bills here. Every year you think that's gonna be the year and you have a hell of a crop and the price ain't worth a darn and then you don't have any crop and the price shoots up.

IB: Farming is a very, boy, you must have to have an awful lot of faith.

Grinstern: Oh, this year here is gonna...

IB: And a strong back.

Grinstern: button up a lot of 'em.

IA: This past year 'cause it was such a bad growing season.

Grinstern: Well, the corn never got, matured...

IB: No, it's still standing in the fields.

Grinstern: Well, it never matured. It's not ripe.

IB: Because of all the rain and the cold.

Grinstern: 'Course the price is \$1.77. By the time they get it dried, it's, you get about 77 cents out of it.

IB: Pay to grow it.

Grinstern: It costs about two dollars and a half to raise a bushel of corn so how can you sell it for 77? And, 'course see, like when I went, I didn't believe in a huge debt. These young guys today are in debt a half million dollars.

IA:

IB: With all the big pieces of expensive machinery.

Grinstern: Yeah, a tractor costs \$160,000. You use it one week of the year and you're paying interest on it for 51 weeks, no way you can make it.

IB: I'm amazed just at the cost of seed and fertilizer and all the other things that you have to put on the fields.

Grinstern: Yeah. 'Course, I never bought groceries till I got out on my own now, after the divorce and stuff, I can't believe...

IB: How expensive things are.

Grinstern: One grapefruit, 80 cents or whatever.

IB: How about a box of cereal with that same stuff you grew on the farm, it cost 70 cents a bushel and the cereal prices keep shooting up.

Grinstern: Three dollars something, yeah. Loaf of bread, three, four cents worth of wheat in a loaf of bread and it's selling for a \$1.19, whatever.

IB: Or a dollar and a half.

Grinstern: Yeah, I just can't believe it. I was trying to figure out something the other day. Well, like grapefruit or something, 80

cents a piece and it figures out to about \$50, \$60 a bushel. Well, you know darn well them people down in Florida ain't gettin' no where near that. Somebody is along the line but...

IA: Well, everybody takes a little piece.

IB: Yeah, the packager, the...

Grinstern: Yeah, but even at harvest time, say like the onion and carrots raised around here, Stockbridge, 40, 50 cents a pound or whatever. I can't believe it but I got to believe it because it's true but...

IB: It's frightening. In fact, I don't even know how young people now do it when they're raising families.

Grinstern: They're not gonna make it.

IB: You can see why both people have to work and I'm tired of hearing criticism about women don't work, but they have to, besides the fact there may be personal satisfaction but they just about have to.

Grinstern: Well, maybe, maybe my generation was wrong. We went without till we got the money to pay for it and the young people today buy \$150,000 home with \$1,000 down and as long as they make the payments, they can stay there. It's just like rent.

IB: And they didn't have VISA then either and that's another.....

Grinstern: Yeah, well, if they lose it, they haven't lost anything. They go on welfare or ADC or whatever. They never buried nobody on top the ground yet. So, maybe my generation was wrong.

IB: Well, because we came from the generation before that believed in hard work.

Grinstern: But we made the young generation the way they are.

IB: You know, you keep saying, I don't want my children to have to struggle...

Grinstern: The way I did.

IB: thus and so and I think everybody that finally made it said that, I don't want my kids to do it and now that's filtering down.

Grinstern: Well, my folks would have given me stuff...

IA: If they could.

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Grinstern: But it wasn't there.

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

IB: And I think if you're hungary you're gonna get out and push yourself and get ahead. Speaking of getting ahead, I'd like to talk a little bit about Hill Diesel when you came here and what it was like and what you made and what kind of shop it was to work in, etc., etc.

Grinstern: It was dirty.

IB: You mean as far as greasy and dirt on the floor or...

Grinstern: Yeah, everything was dirty.

IA: Reo wasn't?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IA: As the Reo?

Grinstern: Oh, the Reo was dirty, too, yeah.

IB: 'Cause I've heard the Reo was pretty dirty.

Grinstern: Yeah.

IA: Toward the end

IB: 'Cause it was old and no money went back into upkeep.

Grinstern: Getting back to, we was talking about women, I think that's where everything went to hell was during the War when the women went into the factories.

IA: You do? How come?

Grinstern: They left their family to home, a 14 year old girl, no way is she qualified to run a family.

IB: Then when the War was over, they didn't want to give up those jobs.

IA: Oh, she was a teenage daughter who was left to take care of the...

Grinstern: Yeah, mother and dad both working, probably opposite shifts and there was nobody around home and the kids were on their own and the husband would say, we're not gonna buy this and the wife says, go to hell. I've got my own money.

IB: Well, I think there is something in that and a lot of women didn't want to give up their job when the War was over and a lot of the men came back to the shops. I remember hearing a lot about that. My mother was a single mother trying to keep us together and she was terrified that she'd lose her job. She couldn't afford, you know, some of the men that came home that could get their jobs back, the women obviously would be supported but my mother wasn't. I remember there was a lot of unrest during that period. A lot of strikes, too.

Grinstern: Of course, Hill Diesel was a lot like Reo. Most everything was handmade.

IB: Was it?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IB: And you did what when you were...

Grinstern: I was a tool crib operator.

IB: Oh, that's right, you told me that. I forgot. And so you worked right in this very building.

Grinstern: I was over in the other building over there. This here part in here was the shipping department in here.

IB: Oh, this complex here.

Grinstern: Yeah, but there had to be a building in between here that must a been torn down some time.

IB: I think so because I've seen some of the early pictures.

Grinstern: They went right next to Richert's Lumber Yard there, right down to the bridge here.

IB: Richert's Lumber Yard was where Impression Five is now, do you think?

Grinstern: No, I think Impressions Five is part of Hill Diesel.

IB: Okay, okay, and then Richert's was further north.

Grinstern: Yeah.

IB: Where you pull in what used to be Mill Street, you pulled in and go there.

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Grinstern: Yeah, well, it was down there right next to Sear's parking lot. Richart's Lumber was in there.

IA: Oh, okay.

IB: I think back hard enough, I think I can remember that.

Grinstern: 'Course like I say, I haven't been back in here 30, 40 years in here either.

IB: So this is a trip down memory lane today. You said that this building, not only was it two separate buildings but this building itself extended to the river.

Grinstern: This was all one building. It was all...

IB: Oh, all one building.

Grinstern: It was all cobbled up all the way through here.

IB: Oh, just one thing added to another.

Grinstern: So they must of, where you parked back in here, that must a been all tore out of there. I can remember one time distinctly, 'course we lived out to Miller Road and we'd come up Cedar to Michigan and want to make a left turn here, we got down here one morning and they had big sign up, no left turn, on to Mill Street off of Michigan Avenue but that only lasted a couple of days.

IB: Because there was so much human cry about it?

Grinstern: Well, you'd have to go down and make a U-turn somewhere on Michigan Avenue and come back and make a right here to get down here. That was some traffic engineer's...

IB: Idea.

Grinstern: Yeah, and of course, I don't know, can you drive underneath the bridge now to get on to Kalamazoo Street?

IB: Ah, no.

Grinstern: Well, see, we always used to, when we left here, we went underneath the bridge and...

IB: And then you came up...

Grinstern: Kalamazoo and the Cedar.

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IB: No, you can't do that and you said that this building extended west right to the banks of the river?

Grinstern: Yeah, you could reach out and touch the water almost

IA: So you don't come down to Lansing very much, huh?

Grinstern: I never go uptown. You couldn't make me to go uptown.

IA: 'Cause things have changed too much?

Grinstern: Nothin' here.

IA: Yeah, it's pretty dead, that's true.

Grinstern: Nothin' here but crime.

IB: Like a lot of city where everything's moved out to the, I think malls have a lot to do with there being less and less
.....

Grinstern: Well, you go out to the mall and you might have to walk four blocks but you can drive right into a parking place.

IB: Yeah, that's my husband's bugaboo, the parking down here and he said, just doesn't understand...

Grinstern: But there's nothing uptown.

IB: No, there isn't for one thing.

Grinstern: LCC, they got the mall, the streets are closed, you can't get into 'em.

IB: Well, it's open all the way down through there now.

Grinstern: Is it now?

IB: Yeah, you can drive

Grinstern: You don't dare drive in the parking ramps without holding on to your back pocket. With a woman, it's even worse.

IB: Especially at night.

IA: At night, yeah.

IB: If you have a night class or something and you come out of LCC into the ramp, you go with a group.

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IA: Did you notice any changes in the Reo from the time that you were there, between '65 and '75? Nothing serious?

Grinstern: No, I don't think so.

IA: It was pretty much the same from the time that you went in to, no new ways of doing things or...

Grinstern: Oh, they hired a guy in there, I forget what his name was now and they had a couple old, ancient elevators that carried stock up and down the three floors and they tore one out and put a line through there and, of course, that raised hell with the other elevator. That was bottled up all the time.

IA: So they tried to modernize a little bit.

Grinstern: Yeah, but ah, there wasn't no money for it.

IA: So a lot of the old equipment and ways of doing things stayed the whole 10 years that you were there?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IA: How about turnover of, I know you were there at night so you probably didn't see too many...

Grinstern: Oh, I don't think there was that much turnover in...

IA: In the last few years?

Grinstern: No.

IA: Okay.

IB: In the way of personality...

IA: Yeah, just in terms of who's working there and the kinds of people that were there.

Grinstern: Well, 'course some of the guys, personnel, they tell me how great they were, how many guys that they saved their jobs and stuff but I was probably a person that came in and done my job and didn't get in any trouble or anything and they seemed to protect the person that really didn't care, who was in trouble all the time and I think, 'course I think it's that way in every place.

IA: The union or, yeah...

Grinstern: Well, union and personnel and, of course, the union went to work for 'em but ah, when I, I was talking to you about the repair

floor, 'course they couldn't work one person in the came classification over 32 hours more than the next person, see. If they worked one person say 40 hours, he'd get 8 hours pay on a grievance and time after time, 'course they wanted these trucks right away and they couldn't fool around trying to find the guy to work overtime or whatever so almost week after week they'd pay \$2, \$3,000 in a grievance.

IB: Oh, because they had worked someone over the...

Grinstern: Thirty-two hour.....

IB: 32 hour.

Grinstern: Yeah, but say like I work nights and the only way, that was the only reasons we got overtime is because the day shift would maybe shovel snow in the morning or whatever and it would put 'em out of the cushion so they'd have to pay us so then they'd bring us in to work, maybe we'd work Friday night till 1 o'clock and then if we had to get overtime, we'd have to come back in 7 o'clock the next morning.

IB: They would figure that they'd make enough money on that truck that they could absorb that grievance fine.

Grinstern: Yeah, or whatever, I don't know.

IB: Kind of a strange way to do things, isn't it?

Grinstern: Well, that was part of management.

IB: I suppose it's like the Army where all these odd things happen. We talked to, I forget who it was, in charge of shipping parts during the War and he would say that the Army would call him and say I need such and such a part immediately and he'd say, I sent you crates of those two months ago. Well, they're in a warehouse and we haven't got time to go get 'em so it would cost the government that much more to ship this new part out immediately.

Grinstern: Well, I think just like Hill Diesel and all these places during the War, it was all cost plus so they didn't care. They didn't care how much overtime that they worked. It was all cost plus.

IB: 'Cause the government subsidized Who did you work for when you worked here at Hill Diesel when you hired in?

Grinstern: Clifford Payne.

IB: P A Y N E?

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Grinstern: Yeah.

IB: And he was the supervisor?

Grinstern: Yeah, he was over the tool room, too.

IB: And was he a pretty nice guy to work for?

Grinstern: Oh, peach of a guy. The little things I didn't think of he did. We had raffles going at the holiday time. We'd raffle, 10 times a day we'd raffle off \$10.

IB: Oh, really?

Grinstern: Oh, that was, we had a lot of fun, good place to work.

IB: It was?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IA: You seem to be more excited about Hill Diesel than Reo as a good place to work.

Grinstern: Well, it was smaller.

IB: Smaller so you knew people.

Grinstern: Yeah.

IB: And did they have a night and a day shift, two shifts during the War?

Grinstern: Well, they, during the War they had three.

IB: Three shifts during the War.

IA: Wow.

IB: And I'm sorry, when did you go to work there?

Grinstern: December of '41.

IB: Oh that's right, '41. What was I gonna say?

IA: I don't know.

IB: I'm still thinking about Hill Diesel. What happened to some of those folks when Hill Diesel went down? It went down in '51 did you say?

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Grinstern: They were mostly all older people.

IB: So they just...

Grinstern: After the War, they just went right down, all the younger people got laid off again so they went back to their own original skeleton crew so they was, they were all old guys when I went back there in '51.

IB: So when this big, rattling bunch of buildings, there weren't very many people left to work after the War and contracts stopped.

IA: There were so many locally owned Lansing businesses that don't really exist anymore like Hill and Reo...

Grinstern: Nobel...

IB: Nobel, yeah.

Grinstern: John Beam, Trainer...

IB: Yes, yes.

IA: There's so many.

Grinstern: Lindberg Screw.

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

IA: Yeah, and then just all, you know, over the years they've all vanished.

Grinstern: Well, just like Dial soap and all these other, how many other ventures have they got into other than the soap business or whatever. The reason I say Dial soap, my daughter just started working for them and they just bought out Greyhound Bus Line.

IB: That's incredible.

Grinstern: Well, how many of these other countries, or companies have bought interest in something that you never...

IB: Oh, certainly, like Pepsi.

Grinstern: Yeah.

IB: K-Mart.

IA: But the ones you mentioned, they went down. They didn't, they weren't bought out by bigger companies.

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Grinstern: Yeah, most of 'em went down.

IB: Some just plain went out of business.

IA: They just went under. Maybe the competition from those bigger companies got to be too great.

Grinstern: Well, see just like Hill Diesel, Detroit Diesel and Cummings and all them, just had all the modern equipment.

IA: Right, so these guys...

Grinstern: They was lucky here if they got six or seven motors out a week, see.

IB: Oh, at Hill Diesel?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IB: Under government contract, I wonder how many motors they put out?

Grinstern: I have not idea but...

IB: Production was really up though.

Grinstern: Well, they had a lot more people working, a lot more people.

IB: What kinds of things would those engines be used in 'cause I don't know much about engines, so, in fact, I know thing about 'em. I know if they, turn 'em on they should work but...

Grinstern: Well, in trucks and auxiliary generators and stuff and...

IB: Oh, okay, so wherever they'd need power away from the source they could....

Grinstern: Yeah, yeah.

IB: It's amazing. You'd think there'd be a lot of those, well, I suppose somebody's making lots of 'em now.

Grinstern: Well, Detroit Diesel and Cummings and...

IB: They're still in business and they were in business then?

Grinstern: Oh, sure, sure, sure. See, R.E. Olds, didn't he originally start the Hill Diesel?

IB: I think he had an interest in it from his dad's machine, office machine shop where he got his start. Who would the

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to, somebody, at any rate, there were a lot of stationary engines being built at one time.

IA: Well, I filled up my sheet.

IB: I guess I can't think of anything else either. I guess I want to just touch base one more time on the end of Hill Diesel. You're saying that, not only did they lose your government contracts but there was mismanagement at the top?

Grinstern: Well, this guy from Massachusetts, I don't know what town it was now but he had a little industrial park there, see...

IB: In Massachusetts?

Grinstern: Yeah, and of course, he ventured out and bought Hill Diesel out...

IB: Much like Cappart bought Reo.

Grinstern: Yeah.

IB: There's quite a similarity there.

Grinstern: Well, although I think this guy and I forget what his name is now, that was 50, 40 years back but he took the original parts back to Boston in a little shop there and Bill Wheelan, he was superintendent of everything, he had spare parts and stuff. He had a house over, the last house remain in the Olds parking lot. Well, he had four, five of the guys out of the tool room, they'd go down there and work nights in the basement. He had mills and lathes and drills and stuff down in his basement and...

IB: And they were doing, making...

Grinstern: the spare parts. Of course, he worked right on the inside. He knew what spare parts was gonna be needed and instead of doin' 'em here at Hill Diesel, he done them on his, at his own home.

IA: Oh, my goodness.

IB: And then he would sell 'em back to Hill Diesel or?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IA: That's not a way to run a company either.

IB: That's pretty tricky.

Grinstern: Well, it's just like everything, politics, you know.

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IB: So the man then that owned Hill Diesel owned it right up to the end? (end side 1)

Grinstern: one time and this Mr. Hill which the engine was named after, he was there for a long time.

IB: Yeah, I think R.E. Olds was a backer.

Grinstern: Yeah, I think so.

IB:backer, help him get started. I'd have to look that up.

Grinstern: See, in '42, they organized the union in there, too. I went on strike there in 1942 at Hill Diesel.

IB: Oh, you did? What kind of a problem was that, getting the union in?

Grinstern: Wages...

IB: Was wages?

Grinstern: Yeah, they never made much at Hill.

IB: Do you remember what you made and hour?

Grinstern: In 1951, I made \$1.60.

IB: And you got hospitalization and...

Grinstern: No.

IB: That was it, no benefits, just, that was it.

Grinstern: No, there was no benefits back in them days.

IB: When you worked at Reo, do you remember what you were making?

Grinstern: Made \$2.05, I think.

IB: Toward the end, that was like top wage?

Grinstern: Yeah.

IB: But you had the option of getting overtime there sometimes?

Grinstern: Well, our classification didn't get much but maybe the plant would work overtime and everything and make twice as much dirt but they never gave you no time to clean it up.

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IB: Oh, that's quite a

IA: Yeah.

Grinstern: 'Course, you know, when a plant lays off, the janitor is always the first one to go.

IB: Oh, is that right?

Grinstern: Sure, sure. They don't take off the top unless, it's like Engler's doing now but it's usually the low guys on the totem pole that get laid off first.

IB: Sure, sure and people with low seniority and whatnot. Your job included, not just sweeping but did you have to clean engines and...

Grinstern: No, no, no. No, it was just the offices.

IB: Oh, the offices, okay. I pictured you out on the production in the shop, having to...

Grinstern: No, I, oh, for a couple times there they needed a power trucker to haul the trash wagons and stuff around and I'd do that and then when they'd start to layoff again, I'd get bumped back on to janitor again.

IB: When I worked in a shop, we had to do our own, I think I'll just turn