

Otto Aves

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IB: This is January 4th, Shirley Bradley and Lisa Fine interviewing Otto Aves. This is January 4th and it's 10 p.m., 10 a.m. and this is the new year, 1993.

IA: Okay, Mr. Aves, you told us out in the showroom there that you were born here in Lansing?

Aves: Yup.

IA: Okay.

Aves: In 1926.

IA: Okay, and were your parents born here as well or in the United States?

Aves: Yeah, in the United States.

IA: They're from the United States, okay.

Aves: Yeah, they're from Sunfield, Mulligen area.

IA: Okay, so they're from sort of the outlying areas of Lansing. Were they farmers?

Aves: Um, no, well, yeah, we're all farmers 'cause we were all on a farm. I was born and raised on a farm.

IA: Okay.

Aves: And my mother was born in Lake Odessa on a farm.

IA: So you were born on a farm in Lansing?

Aves: I was.

IA: Yeah, a farm in Lansing. When I think of Lansing, I just think of, you know, downtown...

Aves: I'm probably, probably 500 yards from where I was born.

IB: In

IA: And it was a farm. Wow. So where was that?

Aves: On West Saginaw.

IA: Okay.

Aves: Do you know where All Star Bowling Alley is?

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IB: Yes, I do.

Aves: Right across from that.

IB: Oh, was that, were do you live? I go by there a lot. We go back and forth to Grand Ledge a lot. Goodness sake. Well, next time I go by, I'll toot the horn.

Aves: It's a red brick house and it's on the south side of the road right across from Hilton, right across there and then the first house west of that was my mother and dad's house and that's where I was born.

IB: Oh, isn't that interesting. Well, how many people in this day and age are still near, even near where they were born.

IA: I sure am not.

IB: No, you're not.

IA: So the family was all from the area, little towns outside of Lansing and they were all farmers for the most part.

Aves: Immediate family.

IA: Immediate family, okay. How far back do they go around here?

Aves: Go, how far back?

IA: Yeah, like your grandparents, great grandparents...

Aves: Grandparents, my grandparents, one of 'em was from Lake Odessa and the other one was from Portland.

IA: Oh, really, so you go far back in this area.

Aves: Yeah, but there's also people out in Kansas my brother's wife just did a...

IA: Oh, a genealogy?

Aves: went to England and checked that and they go to Kansas and all that stuff so she just came out with a book of the whole family.

IB: Oh, how wonderful.

IA: So you trace back to England? You can trace some of your family back to England? Oh, that's wonderful, terrific.

IB: Exciting.

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Aves: Yes, her goal in life was

IB: Oh, that's wonderful though. We're trying to do that right now, too, with my husband's family.

Aves: She should of done it 10 years ago when, like my mother and father were alive..

IA: Were still alive, yeah.

IB: Could of given more information. Better late than never though.

IA: When did the first, was it Aves that you're talking about, the Aves family?

Aves: Yes.

IA: When did they first come over from England, do you know?

Aves: I'd have to look at the book.

IA: But it was a long, it was a while ago?

Aves: Oh, yeah, 1800s.

IA: In the 1800s, alright, great. And so you went to school in Lansing?

Aves: Ah, yes.

IA: Did you go through high school?

Aves: Well, I went to a small one room school house which is on the corner of Canal and Saginaw, fire department, there's a fire department there and the schoolhouse used to be there.

IB: Sure, right where the Delta Fire Department is?

Aves: Yeah.

IA: I know where that is, yeah.

IB: Oh, isn't that interesting.

IA: It was a one room school house there?

Aves: My mother was the school director and I was a janitor there.

IA: Your mother was a school director at the one room school house?

Aves: Um, hum.

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IA: Interesting.

Aves: And I used to go down there like on Sunday night and build a fire and clean the toilets, they have chemical toilets that you put water and stuff in. Well, when I first started doin' it, they had 'em outside....

IB: How old were you when you did that?

Aves: Hum?

IB: How old were you when you went...

Aves: When I was a janitor?

IB: Ah, huh.

Aves: Nine, 10.

IB: Nine and 10.

IA: And you went to school there, too?

Aves: Yeah, till the 8th grade and then I went, after that I came into Lansing, okay.

IB: It's a Center now.

Aves: And I went to Central.

IB: When did you graduate from Central?

Aves: It was in 1942, '43 and then Central changed to Lansing Catholic.

IA: Right, that's a beautiful old building.

Aves: And I graduated, I was also going to Sexton because I was in a trade class.

IB: Oh, sure.

Aves: So I say I graduated from Central, Lansing Catholic...

IA: And Sexton.

Aves: And Sexton which is true.

IB: Sure.

IA: What kind of technical program was it at Sexton that you went to?

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Aves: I was taking drafting.

IA: Drafting. That was like a vocational program?

Aves: Vocational.

IA: Yeah. Did you get any other schooling besides that, you got, besides after you graduated from Sexton?

Aves: Ah, no, I went right to work.

IA: That was it, then you went right into...

Aves: I was going to go as a draftsman and I found out they didn't make any money.

IB: Oh, is that right? Oh.

Aves: So I started out in 1944, I hired out at Reo as a sweeper.

IA: 1944 as a sweeper at Reo.

IB: And you were just, what, 18 or 19?

Aves: Yeah, 18.

IB: 18.

IA: You didn't go into the War, you weren't in the Army or the service at that time?

IB: In the service, he wasn't old enough probably.

Aves: No, I was but I had, my leg was badly burned when I was about seven years old.

IA: Didn't work out.

Aves: I wanted to go but I was afraid, they were afraid because it has a lot of scar tissue on it that they wouldn't be able to, you know...

IB: That you might be in their hospital more than you'd be out in the field.

Aves: Yeah, yes, which I don't think was true but...

IB: How did you happen to burn it?

Aves: Well, ah, we had a dog which was very, pet dog, back in those days you had a lot of woodchucks around and the dog had been digging up a

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woodchuck back in the field and he chewed the dog up pretty bad but he finally ended up killing the woodchuck. So we had an old ground warming, stove settin' outdoors that we used to burn our papers and stuff in like that, so I put the woodchuck in and I siphoned the gasoline out of my father's car in my sister's play cups, carried it out and poured it on there. And, the old farm matches, I scratched it on the side and I had coveralls on. Actually, they were coveralls that button up in front, you know, just one piece and I was saturated with gasoline and away it went.

IB: And you couldn't get that coverall off quick enough probably.

Aves: Well, no you couldn't and I started running towards the house which is a bad house and my older brother tripped me and rolled me over and he put part of it out and then my father was coming up with a team of horses he was driving and the grabbed me and dumped me

IB: Probably saving your life, both of those actions.

Aves: Oh, yeah, that's true and ah, at one time, well, that, my heel was right up against my hip and they were talking about cutting the cords in my legs to straighten the leg out and my mother wouldn't let them do that. So in about a year's time, I got to the point where I could my foot on ground and step my toe on the ground great.

IB: Wow.

IA: Mr. Aves, I'm gonna shut the door.

IB: Why don't we move...

IA: That's okay. It's just that there's a lot of background noise coming from out there. There we go.

IB: I think I'll move this chair, too, out of the way.

IA: So you started as a sweeper after you'd gotten all this training to be a draftsman?

Aves: True.

IA: At the Reo. I guess I have to ask you why.

Aves: I took any job that I could get into.

IA: Okay, on the ground floor, literally.

Aves: Yeah, I worked from the bottom up. Of course,

IA: And did it matter that it was Reo?

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Aves: Yes, my father worked there.

IA: Your father worked there.

Aves: Mother worked there.

IB: Your father and your brother?

IA: His mother.

Aves: Mother.

IB: Mother, oh. What did they both do?

Aves: Oh, my father worked in engineering department, mechanic in engineering department and my mother worked at rockets, doing rockets and bomb fuses.

IB: Oh, for the Navy department then.

IA: Oh, she was a World War II worker.

Aves: And then after that, she worked in lawn mower.

IB: She did?

IA: So it was a Reo family so it was natural for you to start there.

Aves: Right, my grandfather worked in department and I had brothers...

IA: Your grandfather must of started right almost from the beginning.

IB: That's what I was wondering. When, how long did he work there?

Aves: I really don't know whether he went there first or not. He had a blacksmith shop in Sunfield and so he...

IA: Oh, he started as a blacksmith. Oh, that's interesting.

Aves: And my father worked in the blacksmith shop, also, and he came to Reo and worked in heat treating department there and I think my grandfather came after.

IA: Oh, I see, after your father did, too. And all this time that they were working at Reo did they still live on farms, too, so that they would work at home on the farm and work in the Reo?

Aves: Well, my father did but my grandfather didn't.

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IA: He didn't.

IB: Because he had had the shop.

IA: He had a blacksmith shop, right. So you started in Reo because of the whole family thing and you started on the ground floor.

IB: Do you remember how much you made when you started out?

Aves: Sixty-five cents an hour.

IB: And were you able to get overtime or anything like that?

Aves: Ah, not the sweeping, no.

IB: Okay, I just wondered.

IA: Did you sweep a department, an area?

Aves: Yeah.

IA: Which one?

Aves: Repair floor.

IA: In the repair floor, okay. How long did you stay there, doing the sweeping?

Aves: About three months.

IA: Okay, and then you moved up. Then you started moving up. What did you do next?

Aves: I drove trucks off the assembly line out into the parking lot.

IB: Was that an increase in pay as you went up...

Aves: Oh, yeah.

IB: What were you making during

Aves: I don't know. I can't tell you now but I've got the paycheck stubs.

IB: Oh, you have? You saved those? Isn't that interesting.

IA: So that was the next thing and you just, that was just making sure that they could go from point A to point B at that point, right?

Aves: bring 'em in, they come off assembly line and then you start them up and you had to put 'em somewhere so you either drive 'em

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into a stall where a mechanic has to work on them or you do okay, then you drive 'em out in the parking lot or you drive 'em around to what they call a radio room. And we mostly were building military trucks and the radio room is, you drive the truck in there and they run a test on it, the engine and stuff to see that the electrical system is not giving off signals that the enemy can pick up, see.

IB: Oh, for goodness sake.

IA: Oh, oh, that's interesting.

IB: That is interesting.

Aves: So, yeah, I was driving trucks to, off assembly line, take 'em out and take 'em to wherever they were and then walk back and pick up another truck.

IB: Where was the radio room located? Some place right on, right near where you drove off the end of the assembly line or was it over in a different location entirely?

Aves: Yeah, it was probably 50 yards, 60 yards away from the assembly line.

IB: Oh, so it was still in the Baker Street, Washington area?

Aves: Right. The repair floor was in that area and also the radio room.

IB: And was, and then, they were ready to be loaded on boxcars or whatever or flatcars and shipped out. The railroad used to go right through there, didn't it?

Aves: Yes. No, but they had to go out on a road test, too. We had to do road tests. I did that, too.

IA: So the next thing was driving and then, how long did you stay with that?

Aves: Oh, it was probably six months, something like that.

IA: And then you moved on to something else.

Aves: Then worked on the assembly line.

IA: Oh, then you were on the assembly line.

Aves: Um, hum.

IA: Okay, so by that, so that was like 1945 that you started assembly line. And where did you work on the line?

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Aves: Final, on final assembly. I graduated from driving the trucks to being mechanic, to get to be able to start it.

IB: Oh, that was your job on the final?

Aves: Um, hum.

IA: To get it started.

IB: Make sure that the engine would run.

Aves: Sure, because they'd have gas lines, maybe somebody didn't have time to tighten up and it had a leak or quality or something like that.

IA: Did you have to identify at that point what was the problem?

Aves: Yes.

IA: Okay, so that was, you

Aves: And repair it.

IB: And repair it.

IA: Oh, you had to repair it, too?

Aves: Yeah.

IA: So this is a very serious and important job.

Aves: Yeah.

IA: Yeah.

Aves: And then we, trying to think what, I lost it...

IA: Oh, okay.

IB: Was there a production quota, too, for that?

Aves: Yeah, that's what I was gonna say. At one time we were running about 40 trucks a day. At one point close to 100.

IA: Were these all government trucks?

Aves: Yes.

IA: Okay, so that was, the line was just putting out those government trucks?

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Aves: No, not necessarily because commercial vehicle which was a real pain. We had three different military trucks

IB: Three different models?

Aves: Three different models.

IA: And then every once in a while there'd be this clunker coming through, right?

Aves: I didn't think, I didn't so. I thought that was the beautifulest thing I ever saw.

IB: What's that?

Aves: this olive drab and all of a sudden you either saw a green one or a red truck because that was the two basic colors that Reo put out.

IB: Oh, really, green and red?

Aves: Um, hum, green and red.

IB: That's interesting.

IA: So it was a nice change to see a coming down?

Aves: Oh, yes.

IB: And were they different mechanically, too. I mean, would the military truck be more heavy duty?

Aves: Yes, it would be. You're talking about, military truck is 6-wheel drive and the commercial vehicle was only two-wheel.

IB: Oh, okay. Oh, sure.

IA: Was there anything sensitive, you know, in terms of military secrets or anything for what you did with those trucks? No? They didn't say, don't talk about this or don't talk about that or anything?

Aves: Not at that

IA: Not at that point, okay.

Aves: Well, they had designated orders you couldn't go into. You'd have,the fuse to bombs andfuse and rocket department, you were not suppose to go into.

IA: That's where your mom, that's where your mom worked?

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Aves: Um, hum.

IA: Yeah.

Aves: And later on, I ended up so I could really

IA: And did you work with a group of guys that did basically the same thing you did?

Aves: There were three of us.

IA: There were three people who did this job on final assembly, okay.

IB: And this was, day shift, did they still have the three shifts when you were at this point?

Aves: No, they only had two.

IB: The two shifts at this point. The War was over basically so, well, no it wasn't.

Aves: Well, no, no, because..

IA: No, '45...

Aves: in fact, when I first started there, they only had one shift and then they ended up putting two shifts on.

IB: They never did go to three?

Aves: Never did go to three.

IB: Okay, graveyard shift they used to call that third one.

Aves: Well, it was basically the same because a lot of percentage of the people wouldn't show up in the night, the afternoon shift so you might expected to work eight hours a day and you might end up working a double shift so you could work 16. You go home and get some rest and come back here to work the next morning.

IB: Oh, you must of felt like you lived there on those occasions.

Aves: Well, this gets back to the other thing 'cause I was running the farm at that time, too.

IA: Oh, you were?

Aves: farm.

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IB: So you were trying to squeeze all that in and the crops aren't gonna wait, are they, sometimes?

Aves: Yeah, that's right. I've lost a lot of crops...

IB: 'Cause you couldn't get 'em in?

Aves: Yeah, my alliance was to Reo first. Those were the people who were supporting me War effort and everything else. So if I come to my crops 'cause I had to go to work regardless.

IA: What'd you grow?

Aves: Corn, beans, wheat.

IB: Grains mostly.

IA: Basic stuff. Did you have livestock, too?

Aves: At one time while I was still home, we had about seven or eight head of cattle and horses and we did our farming on horses.

IA: Oh, you said your dad drove, your drove up on the, with the horses, yeah. That must of been, you know, just thinking, I grew up in a big city so this is a little strange to me but to go from a factory in the day to a farm, it seems like a real contrast in your life, you know, to go from one extreme to another almost.

Aves: It really was because when I started out, I was still walking behind a single plow to plow. We had the team of horses. Then you'd go down to the end and you'd have to let 'em rest and then turn around and come back. You did all the cultivating. We had what you call fitting the ground which was dragging and all that stuff and then before the corn came up and stuff, we cultivated it with horses and stuff like that.

IA: Um, hum, and then turn around and go ahead and make trucks, right?

Aves: Yeah.

IB:

Aves: I worked, yeah, I worked on a thrashing machine one summer before I started working at Reo and I used to go out and stack hay, binders to bind up the straw and, you know, wheat and throw it in the thresher, the thrashing machine.

IB: That's hard work, too, isn't it?

Aves: Hard work, no, it's a lot of fun.

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IB: Oh, is it really? I'm thinking of all day long.

Aves: Oh, well, yeah, but it's your job and, you know, you do it...

IB: Well, true.

IA: You're outside...

IB: And your strong then when you're young.

Aves: The hard thing that I really got into, that I loved that too, was carrying the grain, well, machine to the grainery, dumping it in. We used to have these big two bushel sacks and that's 120 pounds put up on your shoulder and you carry it to and dump it and it was just a steady stream of people, guys doing that, maybe five, four, five guys.

IB: And probably kiddin' each other about how, I'm better, I'm faster than you are and all that

Aves: Not towards the end of the day.

IB: No.

Aves: 'Cause I was what, 155 pounds and just solid muscle and just, I just loved that kind of work, any hard work.

IA: So let's get back to the final assembly. You worked with three, two other guys, it was a group of three?

Aves: Um, hum.

IA: Did you have a supervisor or did you all, or did you, who'd you work under, I guess is what I'm asking.

Aves: Yeah, I'm not trying to say, I don't remember.

IA: You don't remember. But you had somebody that you had to answer to?

Aves: Well, yeah, the fellows name....

IB: Inspectors maybe or...

Aves: Roy Archer, I guess, is, was the fellows name assembly line at the time and....

IA: Okay, so whoever was head of the whole assembly line process was the person you answered to?

Aves: Um, hum.

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IA: Okay, was it a good...

Aves: And it had group leaders like, but the group leaders basically all they did was fill in while somebody was off sick or ...

IA: Right, so to pick up the slack if somebody was out?

Aves: Yes.

IA: So you had to know what you were doing in a lot of different places to do that job?

Aves: Oh, yeah. I could, at one time, they got up to six people went the whole assembly line and I was one of the six and I could do any operation from starting 'em up, painting, or whatever, air piping, anything you wanted me to do, I could, I can build a whole truck myself.

IA: There aren't many people who can say that today, I imagine.

IB: No, because you learn this one little boring job and you do that eight hours a day or whatever, week in week out, year in year out and you don't see any part of, your job might have been a little more satisfying 'cause you got to see the final product.

Aves: (whispering)

IB: Yeah, I mean, you know, there's job satisfaction....

Aves: Any time you're learning, any time you're learning that's fine so my philosophy was, if you get to a point where you're not learning anything, change jobs.

IB: That's interesting.

Aves: And I did.

IA: Was this a good group to work with? Did you enjoy the group of people there that you worked with on the line?

Aves: Um, hum, as long as they do their job.

IA: Right, okay, and you didn't have to pick up the slack for them?

Aves: Sometimes but I just didn't like sloppy work that's all.

IA: Um, hum, so for the most part, were they good workers?

Aves: Yes, very good. You'd be surprised how many women are on assembly lines.

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IA: Even then?

IB: Is that right?

Aves: Oh, yeah.

IA: Was that 'cause of the War or just...

Aves: 'Cause of the War.

IA: 'Cause of the War, ah, huh, and they were okay, too, and you don't have to say anything, you don't have to change your answer 'cause of us.

Aves: I'm not, I'm not.

IA: Okay. They were good?

Aves: Yes.

IB: You don't remember any pressures on 'em because they were women working there or any problems that they encountered?

Aves: No.

IB: Of course, during the War, everybody was united in this effort so...

Aves: The only problems that I ever heard of concerning women was this fellow, he used to chew tobacco and spit...

IB: And they didn't like it.

IA: I understand that.

Aves: He would spit on the floor and they finally left with him a box of sawdust. So that cleared that problem.

IB: That solved that problem. I don't blame them. My dad talked about women who still wanted to wear their rings and jewelry and running machines and he had problems getting them to realize they can't wear this new diamond ring 'cause they'd get their hand caught and that caused some problems for a while.

Aves: They taped a lot of 'em.

IB: Did they?

IA: Oh, they taped, oh, that's interesting.

Aves: A lot of assembly line and stuff like that, they wore gloves anyway.

IB: And they had protection to keep the hair back out of the way of the machines, those hats with the net at the back.

IA: Did they stay on after the War, some of these women?

Aves: Some of the women, not very many.

IA: Right, kind of like that.

Aves: The electrical, if they did the electrical wiring and stuff like that, they kept the women up there for that and, wiring, things like that.

IB: Well, maybe their smaller hands or...

Aves: Lawn mowers, yeah, because women are a lot faster with their hands than men are. Let's face it. And doing tactical work and things like that.

IB: I know a lot of 'em were in the lawn mower department because my mother was there

IA: So how long did you last at this job?

Aves: That job, probably, I don't know, probably three months or something like that.

IA: Oh, is that all, three months on this one. And then?

Aves: Back farther on assembly line.

IA: Oh, still on the assembly line.

Aves: Well, I spent 15 years, I think, 14 years on assembly line.

IB: In different places on the line?

Aves: Yeah, working my place way back towards the end of it.

IB: Towards the beginning of the process?

Aves: Right.

IB: What did you like the best on the assembly line, which position? Or maybe you like them all.

Aves: Yeah, I probably was more interested in test driving and things like that. I was a test driver.

IB: When, was this also while you were on assembly line, you were test driving or was that before you started on the assembly?

Aves: At one time, it was after the War and everything and they had, no, they still had, no they still had, were building military vehicles. I worked on what they call rolls which was on the end of assembly line and they were big, large rollers and you'd drive the trucks on those and you chain down to that so it wouldn't go and you shift through all the gears and stuff like that and get it up to 35 or 40 miles an hour and then you set there and let it run. You were in the truck checking all the gauges and all that kind of stuff and you'd let it run for probably 10 or 15 minutes, something like that, check it out to make sure everything was alright and you're writing all the time while you're doing this and I kind a liked that on assembly line the best.

IA: You had a list of things you had to check for each vehicle to make sure that they were in working order?

Aves: Well, yeah, they had a worksheet.

IA: A worksheet, yeah.

Aves: And I've had a lot of pride in doing that because you knew that that's either going to go to the repair station or it's gonna go right out into the parking lot for delivery. The shipping department which was right next door, and boxed 'em up

IA: And you're the one that made that decision?

Aves: Yes.

IB: I wonder if in the tearing down and the boxing up so they could be shipped out if that ever caused any problems, that the trucks didn't work once they reassembled them wherever or were they so well made that they would tear down easily?

Aves: Only in one instance that I know of and I'm trying to think of the name of the country that when they got the boxes with the vehicles in 'em, they were, they were road tested and everything else before they ever went into the boxes but they did run into an assembly problem when they got 'em over to where they was gonna go.

IB: I was wondering about that. Would somebody in a foreign country know how to put these things together?

Aves: They're suppose to have sent somebody along. In fact, I almost ended up doing that.

IA: In some foreign country?

Aves: Um, hum, but we found out what they were doing is, they didn't have any docks or anything else. They didn't have any buildings to build 'em in and they were just and with a big broom, they were

knocking the big boxes containing all the trucks out on deserts and camels come along and were hookin' on to 'em and pullin' 'em out and they'd get 'em out so far away and all of a sudden they'd take the boxes apart and assemble 'em with sand and everything else

IB: That's what I was kind of thinking when you said they dumped 'em in the desert, all this sand going in the parts and stuff.

Aves: Oh, yeah, yeah.

IB: I wonder how effective that was.

Aves: So they had problems on that.

IA: Yeah, I can imagine.

IB: It's amazing.

Aves: And, I'll think of the name of the place that it was. They asked me if I would go over there and get something set up. So, that has nothing to do with assembly line.

IA: No.

IB: No, but it is interesting. Box 'em up, how big a box are we talking about? How many pieces did they break a truck down into?

Aves: Well, see, they could put a whole truck in a box that was twice the size of this room. This dimension here,

IA: And they probably put the, you know, they would use cranes to pick that up.

Aves: Oh, yeah.

IA: and put it on the ships and things.

IB: The chassis would be one part, I suppose. They wouldn't take that apart would they?

Aves: They took everything apart.

IB: Isn't that amazing. You worked so hard to put it all together and then you have to take it all apart.

Aves: Well, they take the axles off and everything else because that would...

IB: Make it that much wider.

Aves: Yeah, and actually the boxes were probably not the full width of what this is, just enough to put the width of the cab which was the largest part and they would take the axles and set 'em in racks and stuff in there, in the cab, would fit into a certain place and the chassis would set in a certain place.

IA: Now they had to do this for the trade regulations?

Aves: Yeah.

IA: For other foreign countries? They wouldn't accept the trucks unless some of their local worker were able to...

Aves: And they were loaded in the boxcars, too, so My older brother worked in the export

IB: Oh, he did?

Aves: In the shop.

IA: Is that, what department? Is that

Aves: Um, hum.

IA: We have to get ahold of him. We have to talk to him, too.

Aves: He's in Florida.

IA: Oh, alright. We'll have to wait till he gets back.

IB: Oh, is he the one that called us? Oh, yes, okay. We haven't been doing this since before the holidays and I have to reprogram my mind in thinking about the folks we've talked to.

IA: Was there, you were on the assembly line so for 15 years, you said, from like around '45 to '60.

Aves: '45, '46.....

IA: We talked to a guy who did time and motion stuff for Reo.

Aves: Time what?

IA: Time and motion studies.

IB: Time and motion studies, efficiency expert type of thing.

IA: Right, efficiency.

Aves: Time study.

IA: Time study.

Aves: watch and

IA: Right. Did they do that stuff for you, to you?

Aves: Yeah.

IA: Was there any change in that time in terms of the pace of the work that had to be done?

Aves: Well, when I first started in with 'em, it was piece work, all piece work.

IA: Right, that's right. That changed in '46, that's right.

Aves: Right and then they went to hourly work later on.

IA: Right. There was a strike 'cause of that, wasn't there?

Aves: What?

IA: Wasn't there a strike 'cause of that?

Aves: Oh, we had lots of strikes.

IB: There were a lot of strikes weren't there, right after the War? How did that affect your work? Were you off from work a lot during these, like the steel strike or the coal strike and the railroad strike?

Aves: Really I wasn't because when, basically when they had the strikes, see, I was a field servicing mechanic and a lot of other things.

IB: So they kind of needed you some place there.

Aves: So they were gonna send me out on the road.

IA: they send you out, right?

Aves: Yeah and, but you haven't got union approval to do it, see, so I would be out on the road fixing trucks or something like that and when I got back into town, if I got back into town, then I had to picket duty, yes. But...

IB: Picket duty, for the strikes?

Aves: Um, hum, and one time, when I was in the bus department building busses, inner city busses, they took me in to finish up busses because if they didn't get it done then they would have lost their contract.

IB: So they were behind schedule or something...

Aves: Behind deliveries, yeah.

IA: I can't remember whether I read this somewhere or somebody else told us that the switch from the piece work to the hourly wage was a, as a result of a strike, a specific strike, that was a wildcat. Was that a wildcat strike?

Aves: Yeah.

IB: How long was that, time duration are we speaking about?

IA: I haven't heard very much about it. That's why I was hoping Mr. Aves could tell us a little bit about it.

Aves: A wildcat strike.

IA: Yeah. So some of the guys just were fed up with piece? Was it because they were speeding people up or...

Aves: No, I don't think they had as much people and stuff like that but piece work was a, was a thing, you worked on assembly line, you really but they also had these little subassembly lines in there where these people were making all the money because they allotted so much like I worked on piping air, brakes you got so much a piece for doing it. You could do a lot more than what the time study guy, you'd slow down when the time study man came. So if you really worked, you could have the money that you're allowed to make by 2 o'clock in the afternoon so we had two hours in the afternoon that you could do anything that you wanted.

IA: And so a lot of people could make more money by continuing to work the extra hours.

Aves: Yes, but you didn't dare turn it in because went down and turned it in then the

IA: The time study guy would be there.

Aves: time study guy would be there.

IB: And he'd up your production.

Aves: Yeah.

IA: Was there, do you think?

Aves: They time study.

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IA: Oh, he worked with, too?

Aves: Yeah. So, they were nice guys. A lot of people hated 'em and stuff like that but you could always slow down just enough so that you could, even after piece work went out, there was still time studies.

IA: Right, that's right. Right, 'cause they wanted to set quotas for how much you could do in a certain eight hour day or whatever.

IB: Or make your job efficient, less wasted motion.

Aves: Well...

IB: Supposedly.

Aves: You take the laziest person there is in the whole place and you put him on a job and he's gonna find a shortcut to do on the job. All you got to do is be smart enough to put him and watch and see what he does 'cause he's gonna the easiest way it can be done.

IA: But so, there were some members of the line, some of the workers that didn't like the difference that some people could make a lot and some people couldn't make a lot with the piece, was that it, and that was the problem for why they went on the wildcat, one of their basic problems?

Aves: That was one of the basic problems, yeah.

IA: So it wasn't equal. People couldn't take advantage of the system equally.

Aves: Right. So the wildcat strike ended up that turned around to be everybody had an hourly wage. Piece work ended.

IB: Was that in '46?

IA: Yeah.

IB: How long was, what was the time, what was the duration of the strike? Was it just a short time, a week or two weeks, do you think?

Aves: I would say it was probably about a month, somethin' like that.

IA: Oh, it was a month.

IB: Okay.

IA: Did you participate in that?

Aves: Yes, I did.

IA: You did, in the wildcat.

IB: You were union, weren't you?

Aves: Pardon?

IB: Were you union, you were union so you had to do your picket duty and whatnot.

Aves: Yeah, we had a closed shop and that was another thing, too, it was a closed shop because if we're see somebody that's gettin' all the benefits and stuff...

IA: Without work, yeah, paying your dues. But the union wasn't behind, it was a wildcat, the union didn't call it. The workers just walked out, right? Maybe for it, right?

IB: Oh, you're saying that maybe, maybe the union inspired this, you're saying?

Aves: I don't say as they inspired it but they knew about it.

IA: Right, and they weren't saying no but they weren't saying yes.

Aves: walk off their job...

IA: Without some support.

Aves: Right.

IB: Without knowing that they wouldn't...

Aves: A little consolation....

IA: Alright. Well, that's good to know.

IB: They kind a knew the union would back 'em up and keep their jobs for 'em?

Aves: Yes.

IA: We've heard both, people in favor of the piece and against it, in favor of the hourly, both sides of the story. What did, did you think, did you think it was an improvement to change to hourly or, what was your...

Aves:

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IA: You obviously went out on strike so you wanted to change it at the time?

Aves: Well, it just, it just, not really because I was

IA: You were? But you went out because the rest of the guys went out?

Aves:

IB: And if you're union, you pretty well do...

IA: Well, it's a closed shop, right. I mean...

Aves:

IB: Gonna do, I see.

IA: Yeah. Did it hurt you in terms of how much you made?

Aves: I lost four weeks pay...

IA: No, I don't, besides the strike. I mean, in the long run to switch from piece to hourly?

Aves: I think any strike hurts anyone, everyone. No, because I can still the only thing that hurt you is they kept pushing you to put more production out and more production out and you didn't make more money.

IA: Right. That's a complaint we've heard from some of the other people, too, that if I work hard, I know I can make the money.

Aves: You had a certain amount of people who aren't gonna work, period.

IB: And they're making the same money you are.

Aves: They're just there from 8 o'clock in the morning till 4 at night, where there's people who are willing to put out a little extra effort and stuff like that, I think you should have gotten paid

IA: Yeah. And there were a lot of other strikes, too, you were saying.

Aves: Oh, yeah.

IA: Why are you laughing?

Aves: Well, I think there but we never got to that point

IA: So you don't think that the grievance system worked really well? You know, people had grievances or problems that didn't...

Aves: Well, whenever they had a contract coming up and negotiating and stuff, a lot of those grievances something else so how

IA: Right. Now, I've also, this I know I've read from my own work on the Reo that the Reo local was not considered as important as time went on as some of the other locals 'cause the shop was small so they were overshadowed by, you know, some of the other factories so they weren't considered as important.

Aves: Well, still, you still have that Oldsmobile and Ford and General Motors and

IA: Right, just over power

Aves: Because you have one company that's going to strike and that company is gonna set precedent for all the rest. Most of the strikes that were at Reo wasn't over wages and things like that. It was basically over conditions or grievances or whatever.....

IA: Like interpersonal, like so and so didn't get along, wasn't getting a fair shake from somebody else, that kind of thing?

Aves: Right.

IA: You mentioned the conditions when we were outside. They were, we've also heard from other people that they were not modern.

IB: What kind of problems did you see due to the, condition problems? Were, did the line break down a lot? Was the equipment you hadstandard?

Aves: Yeah, assembly line broke down a lot, that's true and then, ventilation stuff, you got all these trucks starting up no ventilation.

IB: Did that make people sick breathing in those fumes?

Aves: I would assume so, yeah.

IB: No ventilation?

Aves: Some, some people get accustomed to that, I think, carbon monoxide and we're talking about gasoline engines and so on,

IB: You know, it would seem like with the union, somebody's gonna be around, somebody from the health board or somebody, well, it seems like

they'd be around checking. But maybe that wasn't a consideration then, in the late, in the mid-40s.

IA: No, not till the '60s.

Aves: Never heard of it. Yeah.

IA: Yeah, Occupational Health and Safety Acts, those kind of things.

IB: Came along later, yeah.

IA: instituted, they weren't as, there weren't as many inspectors, you know, came around as often until more recently.

Aves: I don't think I ever saw one one if you had a problem you could go to your supervisor and tell him about it

IB: It may not go anywhere from there. He could report it but they may not do anything about it, you're saying?

Aves: No, nobody'd do anything about it. The only one that could get anything done was Ardith Pappon.

IB: Oh, really?

IA: she said that it was unhealthy?

Aves: Um, hum.

IA: Yeah.

IB: And then they would listen to her? They might change a machine or something?

Aves: Sometimes, yeah.

IA: Hum, that's interesting.

IB: Did you have machines that were unsafe, too, to operate?

Aves: Oh, sure, yeah.

IB: 'Cause I worked in a shop where there was personal hazards to your hands and your face.

Aves: They tried to make it as safe as what they wanted to. My mother worked in a press room, also.

IB: Did she?

Aves: Um, hum, and they had straps around 'em

IB: Supposedly to pull your hands back.

Aves: Well, in most, most of the accidents and stuff as far as I know and I worked also in press room. fellow assembly line got off of production piece work but you still had piece work in press rooms and stuff like that.

IB: Oh, is that right?

IA: Oh, that's interesting.

Aves: And it used to be, it used to be would tie a press down. In other words, you had two buttons you had to put your hands on but they would lock the buttons down so that machine continue to and like they were making lawn mower blades, I had 20 foot you just push them lawn mowers.

IB: The blade?

Aves: Yeah. You just push those right straight through and some of the blades come out the other end were that long and some were that long, all different sizes. had one thumb left. He had all his fingers cut off.

IB: Because he was shoving that sheet metal through there?

Aves: Yes.

IB: unsafe.....

IA: Oh, my gosh.

Aves: So,

IA: Oh, gosh. It's not worth your fingers, not from my perspective.

IB: That's where I worked, on punch presses and things.

IA: Oh.

IB: So I know what you're talking about.

IA: So part of it was just the way the people used them, too?

IB: Part of it and part of it was....

Aves: It was on both sides. people
their biggest concern.

IB: And the, well, somebody would be misusing a machine like that, the
foreman wouldn't notice it or he wanted to make production so he didn't
really care or?

Aves: Well, I inspector in the press room at one time and, of
course, I, the minute you turn down whole skid loads of these,
this guy came up

IB: And they all had to go to salvage or something.

Aves: Right. Then the supervisor would be interested in it but outside of
that.....

IB: Because that was hurting his production record.

Aves: Right. I've got all this scrap. What am I gonna do with it?

IB: Right.

Aves: sort 'em all out
and after he got done balance and all that
stuff.

IA: So Reo didn't do any real significant modernizing of its plant or
equipment or anything works on the line?

Aves:

IA: Yeah.

Aves: Press room was pretty, pretty, they had gotten to a point where we were
doing presses and things like that.

IA: Ah, huh, so they did a little bit of updating. But the line that you
worked on before?

IB: You're talking about the assembly line?

IA: Yeah, the assembly.

Aves: Not really.

IA: No, not a whole lot. I mean, it was, it wouldn't have been all that
different walking in when you first started from when you left, 14, 15
years?

Aves: No.



IA: Wouldn't have looked all that different.

IB: 'Cause we've heard that not much money was put back into keeping the shop up or updating it.

IA: Right.

Aves: We had more sublimes and stuff coming in. They also had a waterfall spray unit on there.

IB: What was the waterfall spray? Was it to keep, clean the parts or?

Aves: Well, what it did is ah, frames came down this assembly line and you had to paint the frame

IB: Oh, spray painting?

Aves: Yeah, we had a lady on the other side that had a spray gun and I had a spray gun tanks and stuff so you had to spray and we started out, I would spray the opposite side, the inside and the frame stuff and she would spray on this side so we were shooting at both....

IA: Did you wear anything, any masks or anything?

Aves: Oh, yeah.

IA: Oh, good.

IB: You had...

Aves:

IB: So you did have some kind of protection against the paint or the fumes?

Aves: Yeah, and also this waterfall came down and it also captured the spray paint.

IA: Oh.

IB: Oh, all the particles that are in the air?

Aves: Yeah.

IA: Oh, that's interesting.

IB: Was it like, big filtration kind of system, then?

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Aves: Yeah, well, no. It actually, all it did was, anything that was leaving the booth or would have normally left the booth, ended up in this waterfall.

IA: Right.....

IB: I see, okay. That's really interesting.

Aves: But inside, inside the booth itself...

IB: It was everywhere.

Aves: Yeah and that's one of the complaints I had about women. She sprayed me more than she did the...

IB: I was gonna ask you if you ever sprayed each other, you know, go home olive drab.

Aves: Very definitely. And then it went through heating lights and stuff heat lamps and stuff...

IB: To dry the paint...

Aves: and then they had what you call a turnover and it picked the frame up and turned it over and sprayed it again, the outside. but you're only operating turnover, was chain but

IB: I wonder if that open to get a little in here, alright.

IA: Getting.

IB: It is stuffy and I think we'll cook our visitor.

Aves:?

IA: Yeah.

IB: I can take the cold better than I can take the heat.

IA: After 1960 or so 'cause you said you were on the assembly line 15 years, then?

Aves: Then, okay, I was on assembly line but I was also working in the bus department doing busses inner city busses. I was also test driving trucks for military and commercial and I was what they call person that coordinated between the military inspectors and stuff. If they drove the truck and they found something that they didn't figure was, was unacceptable or whatever or they

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then I would get with the government people and take the truck out for a ride and decide one way or another.

IB: So you took that out on the road like around Lansing and wherever?

Aves: Um, hum. And then every once in a while, you had one that came off the assembly line that went 50 miles or another one that went 100. At one time we were doing 500 miles a day.....

IA: This is what you did after you left the line, is test driving the military stuff?

Aves: Um, hum.

IB: So you would drive all over the state of Michigan then to do the 500 mile test or you just did a lot of

Aves: Sometimes we'd go out of state.

IB: Out of state?

Aves: Um, hum.

IB: Oh, isn't that interesting.

Aves: Wherever up.

IA: Pick a point on the map, 500 miles from here, right?

IB: And I was thinking, too, maybe different terrain just to see what it would do.

IA: Yeah, right.

Aves: And I worked in repair floor on what they call special equipment which was, on commercial vehicle, if they wanted a fifth wheel, you know what a fifth wheel is?

IA: You probably do, right?

Aves: It's where the semi comes up and it fasten to...

IB: Fastens on to it. You've see the, you've seen 'em onfield campers and that kind of thing.

IA: Right, right.

Aves: Okay. I would do that or if they had, my specialty was electrical work, if they wanted a red flashing light on the top or anything that

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had to do with electrical and then, turn signals or whatever the cust, turn signal was, you know, optional at that time.

IB: That would have been '46, '47, some place, you're talking about the turn signals being optional? Interesting. I wouldn't think that...

Aves: No, this was back in, this is back in the '50s.

IB: In the '50s, okay.

Aves:

IB: I was trying to think when turn signals came out, really.

Aves: Middle '50s or something like that.

IA: Definitely, I've always

IB: I know they, what, the turn signals for the, for residential or for just a car, what was that, maybe late '50s?

Aves: Um, hum, I would think so.

IB: 'Cause we used to stick our hand out.

IA: Right, actually now, I do remember this

IB: And the joke used to be, is she signaling to turn or drying her fingernail polish.

IA: Oh, gosh.

Aves: They still do that, when motorcycle

IA: So, let me just make sure I have things clear that after 1960, you mostly did test driving outside of the shop, took the military vehicles out and test drove those. How long did you do that for?

Aves: Probably about two years.

IA: Okay, then what?

IB: Well, was this after the Korean War, then, that the military contracts were....

IA: This is the '60s already.

IB: Oh, you're talking 60 not 50. I misunderstood.

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Aves: Somewheres around there. I don't know. worked in there
..... then I went to building busses.

IA: Okay.

IB: Where were those built?

Aves: In a place they call 3A. I don't know if you ever remember that. It's
ah, building between assembly line

IB: Oh, over in the corner, Washington-Baker area?

Aves: Um, hum.

IB: And that's where the Navy department had been bomb fusing before and
then it went to busses. Oh, okay.

IA: That's, working on the city, on the, it was the city busses,
right?

IB: They got the contract for the city busses.

Aves: Inner city busses.

IA: Inner city, okay. So, how long did you work for Reo, you know...

Aves: Twenty-eight years.

IA: Twenty-eight years, so that means till...

IB: He went there in what, '44?

IA: Right. So till '6....

IB: Close till the end

IA: No, till, '44, it's 28 years, so it was the early '70s that you
.....

IB: And so you...

Aves: Then I went to commercial engineering garage and I did test driving and
a mechanic and towards the last I could see that they weren't
gonna go anyway...

IA: Probably, so was the early '70s already, you know, '44...

IB: '44 and you worked there 28 years.

IA: '72.

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Aves: We used to build the vehicles, the prototypes and all that and then we'd take 'em out and test drive 'em, see, and all of a sudden they decided that they weren't going to run a test program anymore but theythe people who bought the trucks test 'em out and report back to them. So I left there and went to military

IA: They had military contracts all the way through?

Aves: Oh, yes, all the way through.

IB: But weren't there times when the contracts, you were between contracts and the work went down? People were laid off?

Aves: Could be, I don't know.

IB: Oh, you didn't personally experience that, okay.

Aves: I think I went four weeks or so, the longest I was off and

IA: In all that time?

Aves: Yeah.

IB: Oh, is that right 'cause we've talked to people that, you know, mentioned that when the contracts were gone and fulfilled, then the work was, till the next contract came in. Well, that's good that you didn't have to go through that.

Aves: Well, they were, it seems like something would come up like, okay, we're gonna build busses, you know, or we're gonna, we've got field work to do so they would send me out all over the United States, bases doing what they call and so on, something that they had a crew on and wanted to incorporate it into I military bases about trucks to work on.

IB: Oh, is that right? By yourself?

Aves: No, there was a crew, normally of about five people. So, you know, I military bases, places I never heard of.

IB: That must of been interesting.

Aves: They had stockpiles of military trucks and stuff like that.

IA: So you really became a specialist in these military vehicles and the servicing and the engineering and all of that

IB: And you did that right up to, close to your leaving?

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Aves: Um, hum, yes.

IB: And you retired from there or did you leave because you...

Aves: No, I left, actually what happened is, the military engineering was purchased by American Motors so I had the option of staying with Diamond Reo or going with American Motors and so I did.

IA: Went with American Motors in '1972?

Aves: Yeah.

IB: Did you do that because you, as you mentioned, you could sense that things were coming to an end as far as the Reo was concerned?

Aves: Yeah, it bothered me because they were leaving the commercial people and like, okay, if you put an axle in the vehicle, at one time we would test it to make sure it worked before it went through the Okay. As it was, they would sell it to the people, the truck, the vehicle truck and if there was some problem with that or something like that, they would go back to the manufacturing or whatever, whoever did the axle and I didn't think that that was the way to do it. I thought we should get into a truck and if you're gonna build a truck, you should test it and be sure it's gonna be alright before you pass it on to the consumer which they weren't doing. So I said, okay, if you're not gonna do your test work or any improvement on it, I'm gonna military engineering because they're doing all sorts of

IA: Testing, yeah.

Aves: yeah, so that's what I did.

IB: They were putting out a better product and you felt better about being part of it.

Aves: Right.

IB: I'd like to go back just a minute and ask, you mentioned earlier that your mother worked in the factory and what did you say she did?

Aves: She worked in the Navy department.

IB: Bomb fuses.

Aves: Bomb fuses.

IB: And then after the War, she went into the lawn mower department?

Aves: Right.

IB: How long did she stay at Reo?

Aves: Till the lawn mower division went out. also built

IB: Mid-50s, something like that?

Aves: Yeah, somewhere around there.

IB: And then they built what?

Aves: They also built cow swing sets and all that stuff.

IB: Oh. Yeah, I think somebody must of mentioned that to us, the cow swing sets and they made that in where they had been making lawn mowers?

Aves: Um, hum.

IB: That's neat. So did she retire then from Reo or was she there, close to the end, too?

Aves: Well, she's, she was laid off when they did away with lawn mowers, so yeah, she was...

IB: Oh, she was laid off when the lawn mower division went down. Oh, I see.

Aves: So, I would think she got a retirement out of it.

IA: That must of been hard after 28 years to leave.

Aves: Yes, it was.

IA: Especially the way that you had to, because you didn't think that the company was doing its job properly anymore.

IB: We've talked to a lot of people who felt job satisfaction and to finally come to the place where you couldn't feel that good about your product, that's got to be a bad feeling.

Aves: I did right up until that point, till we started
I worked on some of the trucks afterwards they would be 'em in and I would do the tune up on the engines and things like that, you know. oil company, I'm trying to think what the name of it is now. The engine, you would install it and after we, we installed it, we required that they come in for inspection every so many thousand miles. So I would reset all the valves and do the engine tuning and so on and so forth on it and
..... and I thought, I don't know what that guy does with that truck, whether he's or whatever and why should I feel proud about it. mechanical and prior to that, we

would run a truck 100,000 miles. We'd bring it in and we'd tear it completely down, everything fromengine, the whole works, so we would know where the wear patterns were, what was satisfactory and what wasn't and so we'd know when we designed a new truck...

IA: What you could do better.

Aves: What you could do better, right.

IA: Yeah, well, that's really interesting.

IB: Gee, I think that's wonderful. It's too bad they don't do that with cars

IA: Really.

Aves: They used to.

IB: Did they?

Aves: Yes.

IA: When they made their cars, they did that, too?

Aves: Yeah.

IB: Up until '36?

IA: Yeah.

Aves: Oh, this, this after '36 because Milford down here, proving ground, the one time, the month that I was off, they knew I was a test driver down to unemployment office and they wanted me to go down to Milford and drive for Oldsmobile...

IA: Oh, Oldsmobile did it.

Aves: on the Milford track.

IB: On the test track.

Aves: And I'm thinking, drive all the way down there and all the way back?
.....

IB: So you didn't go?

Aves: No, because I had a family here and I had and everything else to keep up. I just couldn't do it.

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IB: How much, you mentioned your family, did your wife work also? Did she also work in the shop?

Aves: Uh, ah.

IB: She was on the farm doing lots of work?

Aves: No.

IB: No?

Aves: She was being a mother (end side 1)

IB: How many?

IA: Two, three, four?

Aves: Two, three, four...

IA: four, okay.

Aves: Yeah, three boys and a girl.

IB: And did any of them, did you want any of them to not work in a shop? We've talked to people who said, I don't want my son working in a shop. I don't want him to be a shop rat.

Aves: No, but...

IB: You sound like you had a good...

Aves:

IB: Pardon?

Aves: No, but none of them do.

IB: Oh, really?

Aves: Um, hum. My one boy's head mechanic at Ryder out here.

IB: Ryder Trucks?

Aves: Hum?

IB: Ryder Truck.

Aves: Um, hum.

IB: Oh, okay.

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Aves: He's as high as you can go in the mechanical end of it. I have one son who is a stone mason. I have another...

IA: Oh, that's nice work.

Aves: son who has a sport shop up in Ludington and my daughter takes care of people.

IB: For goodness sake. Everybody's busy and active. You sound like you had a good experience and your years at Reo were good years.

Aves: Oh, yeah, um, hum. Yeah, I wouldn't of had a, if they would have wanted to go, that would have been their choice but the plant, when I left was...

IB: Not the same plant as when you came in.

Aves: Not the same.

IA: I want to ask you about hunting.

Aves: Hunting?

IA: Now, I've read lots of places that you couldn't find somebody to work at Reo during hunting season.

Aves: That's true.

IB: Pheasant and deer.

Aves: I was one of 'em.

IA: You were one of them, so what did they do? Did they give you a week off or something during hunting season, let the guys just go?

IB: Did you just get sick?

Aves: That was the only vacation that we had.

IA: But that was the only vacation you had, they gave you the hunting season off?

Aves: Um, hum.

IB: You didn't get a two week vacation or a vacation pay or anything like that?

Aves: Well, yeah, we had a Christmas bonus back in those days.

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IB: Oh, you did? Right up toward the end, were you still getting that Christmas bonus?

Aves: No, no, no. This was way back...

IA: In the '40s, '50s.

Aves: Right.

IA: Yeah. But lots of, give me an idea of how many people we're talking about here on the line and would go, take that week or two off.

Aves: I don't know. I wasn't there.

IA: You weren't there!

IB: I remember when I was in school...

IA: But they must of had, it must of been a significant amount.

IB: everybody's dad was gone hunting.

IA: People, they were all gone, right?

Aves: Um, hum. They would either shut the line down or do inventory or something else. Boy, I thought somebody was knocking on here.

IB: It's just noises.

IA: They would really shut the line down for that week or two? That was around Thanksgiving.

Aves: Well, I don't know really.

IB: Really, that's amazing to think of doing that, you know, that's the last thing, shut the line down is like the end of the world.

IA: There must of been, some guys were still there.

Aves: Oh, yeah, I think there probably were. There were some guys who didn't hunt.

IA: Who didn't hunt, just a few.

Aves: Just a few and basically, all the way through all my employment is, hunting's first. I mean, I'll work for you but I

IA: Right, so you said, Reo took priority over the farm but hunting took priority over the Reo.

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Aves: You're only talking about a week.

IA: A week, that week.

IB: Yeah, we're only talking once a year maybe or twice. Did you go pheasant hunting, too, in the early days?

Aves: Oh, certainly.

IB: That used to be a big thing, pheasant hunting.

Aves: I had a, pheasant in my sights last week.

IB: Did you?

Aves: Hunting season was over but that's the first one that I saw on the fly
.....

IB: But you couldn't pull the trigger.

Aves: Oh, no, I wouldn't do that. I only saw two rooster pheasants out there all summer long so walk right across and I was out walking that day and I walked as far as the dump and they just were as bold as the dickens and walked across...

IB: They knew you couldn't shoot 'em.

Aves: That was the days when you go out and probably in a hour and a half you could have your limit for pheasants.

IB: Gosh, it's amazing, they'd come back, they're coming back well, aren't they?

Aves: Um, hum, and deer, we go deer hunting and you were lucky, I saw six deer season this year and you could a seen anywheres from 45 to 50 in the morning and same amount in the afternoon, day after day so we had property up there, too.

IA: Oh, for hunting purposes?

Aves: Um, hum.

IB: How far up north?

Aves: It's Atlanta...

IB: Clare...

Aves: do you know where Atlanta is?

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IB: I do know where Atlanta is.

Aves: Yeah, my mother's father had the property and when he passed away,
..... and I went together and bought

IA: Wow.

Aves: So.

IA: So you always had a place to go during that week.

Aves: Oh, yeah. Back in those days, we used to go with tents and, you know,
all that kind of stuff but now, then shortly after that we got the
house trailer and put that up there and now we got a cabin and it
sleeps 14.

IB: Wow.

IA: I don't think you'd call it a cabin if it sleeps 14. It sounds like a
house.

Aves:

IA: I see.

Aves:

IB: And the women aren't gonna go up there and tent all year round but they
will go....

Aves: Women?!

IB: Oh, you don't...

IA: They're not allowed.

Aves: All of a sudden, we're getting back into discrimination.

IA: I just think it's so interesting that the company, this was not
negotiable, you know, for many of these guys. I mean, they negotiated
all sorts of things but not this week, every year.

Aves: See, you always had the threat of you're gonna be fired but then you
..... back, you can't get along without me.

IA: And I think probably 'cause so many of you did it, you know, if it was
just a couple guys...

Aves: We requested it, we requested it. It was a vacation, a scheduled
vacation.

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IA: It was a scheduled vacation.

IB: So you could request it ahead of time?

Aves: Yes.

IB: Did anybody ever get fired for going or was there anybody ever said, no, you can't go this week, I mean, you know, turned down?

Aves: Everybody said that, you know, they all said you can't go..... talking about the foremen and stuff like that.

IB: I bet some of the foremen went, too, didn't they?

Aves: Sure they did.

IA: This is so funny to me. It's great.

Aves: And even to place, when I worked for as transportation supervisor and that was one of the stipulations. I said, yeah, I'll work for you but, I go to Colorado or Wyoming or some place like that, In fact, just the last year that I worked for 'em, I had

IA: Oh, my.

IB: So you, in the final years at Reo, you went through some changes, I mean, the factory went through some big changes, ownership wise and what they were producing...

IA: The quality...

IB: Yeah, and I guess what I'm wondering is how you felt about the changes in the ownership and what you saw going on.

Aves: The ownership, they came in to, as far as I was concerned to buy the, well, the first thing I noticed they started selling things out.

IA: Divisions and parts of the company.

Aves: Yeah.

IA: Yeah.

Aves: They said you had too large a inventory and all that stuff but when and all that kind of stuff, man, we was just selling stuff like mad

IA: Yeah, I guess I did. That's why we have back-up tapes. Did you hear it click?

IB: I didn't either.

IA: Seems like a long time.

IB: You can take my tape home with you and play yours and then play mine if see, hear something on mine, I'll make you a new tape.

Aves: It was interesting when when they bought and brought that down for engineering. That gave me a little more revitalization so you get to the point where you don't do the road test or anything like that, It was real interesting because when we used to do our test driving stuff, we used to drive a semi down to Michigan City, Indiana and we would stop at the different coffee stops where the truckers stopped and truckers, what kind of a engine you got in that and our orders were W..... we got on the highway which were all two lanes back in those days and we had 40,000 pounds of concrete mounted to a trailer. We would go all the way down through there unless we stopped for coffee or whatever and we had places we'd stop. But it was fantastic to be able to talk with truckers, hear their concerns and so on and we'd carry them back and while I was in the garage, I always said, unless you worked assembly line, you wouldn't, couldn't be an engineer or a mechanic because you have to literally experience this on assembly line in order to know what you have to do in engineering to make that

IA:, yeah. I don't think that goes on too much today, either.

IB: But the truckers who knew what they wanted from a truck respected the Reo truck and its engine?

Aves: Oh, yeah. They and when they first came out, the that they had, that was really the rage. But also we over to things diesels and a lot of diesels towards the end...

IB: Diesel engines?

Aves: Yeah. And we justbusses, too, when we built the inner city busses, we'd have what you call the a pancake floor. And the first lawn mowers that, when they took 'em out to show them was inner city bus that we had built and it also had clear glass door, plexiglass door...

IA: Wow.

Aves: So you'd walk in here and look down and see the engine down

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IB: Is that right? And it would take that out for, dis....., demonstration, I was trying to say distribution and I knew that wasn't what I wanted, demonstration.

Aves: Then we had another bus that we built out there and they would put all the lawn mower products in and they would tour the country with that.

IB: Oh, really?

Aves: have some power plant use it and have the lawn mowers inside the busses so that they could walk down a little aisle and out the back and see the lawn mowers on both ends.

IB: Where would, now where would you take this, this vehicle?

Aves: I didn't do it.

IB: No, I mean the, whoever took it, what types of places would they be demonstrat...

Aves: Fairs, county fairs...

IB: County fairs.

Aves: or any public gatherings and they also had the Reo I don't know if you remember that but it was radio controlled. So the guy would sit back here and the lawn mower back in those days.

IA: They probably figured, oh, that's the way it's going to be in the future, right.

IB: Yeah, I remember when I was in grade school, we all thought we were gonna, that, the world in the future was going to be...

IA: All automated, yeah.

IB: yeah, and we'd be flying instead of driving and the cars would be on a, those that did drive would be on some sort of a metallic track, or electronic track so there would never be car accidents. You'd, you know, and you'd just get on this track like a train on a rail and go to your destination and they have in

Aves: We built, the bus one time, it was at, built up to be like a

IA: Oh, ah, huh.

Aves: And had places underneath bottom of a golf cart,

IA: Was this custom?

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Aves: Um, hum.

IB: I've heard before that they built things, custom things for celebrities like Dale Robertson with his horse...

Aves: I met Dale Robertson.

IB: Did you?

Aves: Yeah.

IB: Were you involved in working on some of the specialized horse trailers and things he bought?

Aves: No, it was basically the truck engineering when he first came to pick 'em up.

IA: I have some questions about, when you were...

Aves: Did Reo ever make a farm tractor, yes.

IB: What kind of a, tell me about the farm tractor. What was it called? Did they actually build it or did they con...

Aves: No, they...

IB: was that subcontracted?

Aves: Well, no, they contracted I think but as far as I know, they only built six or eight of 'em.

IA: When was this?

Aves: Oh, it's a long time ago.

IA: It was in the old days.

Aves:

IA: Right.

IB: Was that while you were working there?

Aves: Yes.

IA: Oh, okay.

Aves: Was a six cylinder

IB: That wasn't the sampson tractor, was it?

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Aves: I don't know what they called it.

IA: I was gonna ask you about the clubhouse.

Aves: Loved it.

IA: You spent a lot of time there when you were a kid and older, when you were older, too?

Aves: Sure because they had free shows.

IA: Free movies.

Aves: Free movies, you bet.

IB: And your dad worked...

IA: And your parents took you there and you spent time there?

Aves: Yes and all the banquets that we had, you had the Reo banquets and they a circus there and...

IA: Oh, the circus, oh, I didn't know that.

Aves: Well, it was like a fair like because the people got together and, like and things like that. We happened to have a parrot and we take the parrot and the monkey and we would take 'em down to there, exhibits, you know, so the from could see 'em and they had all their handicraft and everything out there.

IA: From the different people who worked there?

Aves: Yes.

IB: So it was within the Reo. They produced the circus. This wasn't a traveling circus like Ringling Brothers.

Aves: Yes, oh, no.

IB: It's a

IA: Oh, I see.

Aves: It's, well, it's behind the clubhouse, next to the

IA: Oh.

IB: Was that always there, just, was there one time or...

Aves: No, it was about four years that I know of.

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IB: Oh, that it was there that people could go in and out and take things and...

IA: Did you read the Spirit?

Aves: Yes.

IA: Your dad would bring it home or your mom bring it home?

Aves: What do you mean, I worked there, too?

IA: No, I know, but I meant when you were younger even 'cause the Spirits I read from, were from the '20s and '30s so.

Aves: Well, Reo Items, too.

IA: The Items, that's right. We've seen those.

IB: Oh, that was the other one. Somebody gave us...

Aves: In fact, our family pictures on, we had a cover of it for Thanksgiving issue...

IB: Your family?

IA: You don't remember what year, do you?

Aves: No, I don't remember what year.

IB: That was on the cover of the Reo Items?

Aves: Yeah.

IB: How old were you then about, do you think?

Aves: I'd just gotten married and had a child so I was, let's see...

IB: Probably some time in the '50s then, early '50s?

Aves: Somewhere, '46...

IA: 1946?

IB: What year did you get married? We'll pin him down on, when's your anniversary?

Aves: '44.

IA: Okay, so some time in the mid-'40s, okay, we'll have to look for that one.

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IB: That's what I was thinking because we have some back here.

Aves: I have it somewhere. We got, I had a lot of stuff down the basement, pictures and stuff and we got flooded. Had one of those big and they

IA: Oh.

Aves: Two freezers full of venison and hams, all that stuff.

IB: We're talkin' a big loss here.

Aves: Picked

IB: You talked about driving or owning one of the old Reo ambulance vehicles. Tell me about that vehicle.

Aves: Well, it was brown in color, brownish gray. It had fender wells, tires in the fender wells. Outside of that, it was basically the same, cloth covered seats...

IB: What model, what year would this car have been, you think?

Aves: I would say it was about a '31, '32.

IB: Oh, okay, we're talking big, square cars, then.

Aves: Oh, yeah.

IB: And it was yours for...

Aves: It was what they called a hospital car. Actually, it was, if they had somebody injured, to transport them either to a doctor or hospital or whatever. That's all I know.

IB: And then how did you happen to buy it?

Aves: They were discontinuing it and using taxi cabs and stuff.

IB: Oh, really?

Aves: So, it was up for sale. How much did I pay for it? Three hundred dollars.

IB: Three hundred dollars, and do you still have it?

Aves: No, I don't have it. I

IA: If you, it'd be worth a lot more now.

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Aves: It was a beautiful car.

IB: Was it?

Aves: Oh, yeah.

IB: I wonder whose job it was to be the chauffeur of the hospital car, back in those days. Maybe Ardith Pappon will know. We're certainly hoping to talk to her.

IA: Did you participate or anybody in your family participate in any of the teams? Reo had a lot of sport teams like baseball teams and bowling and things like that.

Aves: Just the picnics.

IA: Just the picnics, you guys just went to the picnics.

IB: Where were they held?

Aves: Ah, Grand Ledge, Fitzgerald Park. some at Lake Lansing...

IA: Right. Those were in August, right? They had those big ones in August.

IB: Maybe that's why they still get together in August

IA: Yeah, yeah. They had lots of, I've read about them. They had, lots of people would bring things from their farms and women would bake stuff, you know, like they'd have a pie contest and things like that.

IB: Oh, that sounds like fun.

IA: Yes.

Aves: Well, we did

IB: And the kids all had games to play and prizes, maybe.

Aves: Yeah, they gave a lot of gifts and stuff. They would issue tickets and stuff and they had a lot of nice things, you know, I mean, I'm talking, well, I don't really remember now but they were nice, back in those days as far as I was concerned.

IA: Yeah, certainly

Aves: All kind of pop and ice cream.

IA: You went to those as a kid?

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Aves: Yeah.

IB: If you went to Lake Lansing, did you have tickets, free tickets so you could ride the rides or?

Aves: Yeah.

IA: Oh, I didn't know that. A carrousel and...

IB: It was a big amusement park. They had everything.

Aves: They would take they just took over the whole amusement park...

IB: For the day.

IA: Oh....

IB: And so you could ride the...

Aves: Well, it was more out there to Lake Lansing Park but over to Fitzgerald Park,

IA: Another company.

IB: Oh, I see. Oh, okay.

Aves:

IA: Right. I've always been interested in if there was, like you felt your allegiances were torn with things like that or that you just took advantage of whatever either of them...

Aves: My was what?

IA: Whether your allegiances were or torn...

IB: Company or...

IA: Between union and company. I mean, obviously they're contesting with each other but they also give the workers lots of different things, you know, these kinds of

Aves: I was more for the company.

IA: You were?

Aves: Basically, yeah, because coming from a farm and things like that, the earning's good as far as I was concerned.

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IB: You were satisfied with your wages and...

Aves: Yeah, if I didn't, I'd get another job.

IB: Sure. I was going to ask you earlier if you ever considered going to Oldsmobile during the years you were at Reo. If you thought the pay was better or the work was more steady or...

Aves: Well, we had a chance and I'm trying to think what it was, the option of going there at one time and I don't remember what it was and I decided to just take the layoff and not worry about it. My younger brother did go to Oldsmobile. He worked on, I had a older brother and younger brother and both of 'em worked in export at Reo.

IB: Oh, really? So you really were a Reo family.

Aves: Oh, yeah.

IB: And everybody was satisfied with the wage and you could support your families quite well on what you were making.

Aves: Yeah, we were, I had a father-in-law, a sister-in-law, brother-in-law.

IA: Oh, your wife's family, too.

Aves: Yeah.

IB: Golly.

Aves: 'Cept I couldn't get my wife to go to work.

IB: I was just going to ask, was she at the Reo. Was that how you met her. I just thought maybe, you know, she might have been...

Aves: No, I met her at Motor Rollerdom.

IB: Oh, the Rollerdom. Oh, I remember that. That was right down here near where R.E. Olds father's machine shop was.

IA: Oh, my.

IB: Oh, yeah.

Aves: She was a classy gal and was doing skate dances and I was interested in her and so I, a fellow by the name of Ross, I don't know if you, did you go roller skating?

IB: Um, hum.

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Aves: Okay, a fellow by the Ross would skate dance and so that's how we met.

IB: I never got good enough for skate dancing. If I could just stay up off the floor, I was happy but, oh, I loved it. That was such a fun place to go. A lot of Reo families went there.

Aves:Goldie, gal who played the organ.

IB: Oh, okay.

Aves: Remember her?

IB: I remember the organ being played, yeah. But your wife's family all worked at Reo or quite a few of them?

Aves: Um, hum. Not as many as mine but In fact, at one time there was a rule, regulation that you did not, like if you had a father or someone who was a supervisor, the son couldn't work for him. In fact, that's what kept me out of engineering garage for a while 'cause my dad was over there Anyway, when I was doing road tests, they brought my father-in-law to the motor plant. He was inspector, he was over inspection in the motor plant and the brought him over and put him over in charge of road tests and I was working for him but I was also a union representative and I filed a grievance on him....

IB: Was this before you were married?

Aves: This was after I was married.

IB: And he said to his daughter, you made a bad choice.

Aves: Well, yeah, but when they had some of these 50 mile or 100 mile tests that had to be run on these military trucks, every so often, he would, I telephone so he would call these other test drivers in the line of duty and, to notify them that he wanted somebody to run his testing, that they would do it and the way he would do it, he would call 'em late at night and he figured they were in bed, about the second ring, hang up but then he gets in his car and drives clear out to my house which is about six or seven mile, wake me up and say, I've got a 50 mile or a 100 mile tomorrow morning at 6 o'clock. I want you in there.

IB: And he could say, I called you but you didn't answer.

Aves: That's right.

IA: Oh, geez.

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Aves: And I usually didn't.....

IB: How did that come out, that grievance that you wrote up on that?

Aves: I won it, of course.

IB: Oh, you did?

Aves: Um, hum.

IB: And how did he feel about that?

Aves: I was really disappointed because he didn't feel that bad about it.

IA: He knew he was wrong. He knew that wasn't right to do.

IB: You mentioned test driving and the thought pops into my mind, the beaver truck that was built during the War...

Aves: Eager Beaver.

IB: Pardon?

Aves: Eager Beaver.

IB: Eager Beaver, yeah. Did you have anything to do with that or?

Aves: Yes.

IB: Tell me about that. Did you drive it?

Aves: Oh, yeah. I did a test, did you know that they, that was a six wheel drive vehicle.

IB: It was a what?

Aves: Six wheel drive.

IB: Six wheel.

Aves: Did you know that they had a eight wheel drive vehicle?

IB: An eight, well, no, I didn't. Was that also an Eager Beaver?

Aves: Yes.

IA: Is that the one that went land, water, it went...

Aves: No, well, that was floater.

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IA: Oh, okay.

Aves: I worked on that, too.

IA: Okay.

IB: That was the floater, the one that would go on the land and then down into the water and back out. That was called the floater?

IA: The Eager Beaver was just a very strong, all terrain type of vehicle that could go on any type of terrain, is that it, 'cause of its...

Aves: It floated.....

IA: Oh, it did, floated, too?

IB: Isn't that the one they tested on the Grand River?

Aves: No, they tested it in the gravel pit out north, out south,

IB: Oh, really? Out there at the Jolly Road area?

Aves: Yeah.

IB: Yeah, okay. I used to swim there when I was, um, wow, okay.

Aves: Know what happened when they first put it in the water? Quit runnin'.

IB: Oh, it did?

Aves: Because when it went down underneath the water, you're dumping hot fuel back through the engine. This was a multi-fuel engine, okay...

IB: Oh, we heard about the multi-fuel engine.

Aves: So you always have a bypass on it because fuel injectors and stuff would just take so much fuel in in the engine so the excess fuel was pumped back into the fuel can and it comes back and it's hot. So if you dump that tank in cold water, it's gonna suck the water into it. So we ended up having....

IB: Seems like it would crack or something.

Aves: we got it out in the water and it quit. So we found out we had the air pressure three to six pounds of air pressure on all the axles and all the fuel tanks in order to, well, suck the water back

IB: That air pressure, that air pressure, putting that in those various places of the vehicle, kept that from being...

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Aves: Water getting into the axles and the fuel system and so on and so forth, it's pressurized.

IB: That's interesting.

Aves: Also, when it did run when we got it to the water, seeing that the engine was submerged in water, it automatically cooling and when a diesel gets cold, it shoots big plumes of black smoke out and we, they first did the testing and I thought, if I was an enemy, I would just black...

IB: Plumes.

Aves: smoke, yeah.

IB: And know they're coming.

IA: So you had to do something to take care of that, too.

Aves: I don't think they ever did.

IA: They never did, huh?

IB: That was...

Aves: Those floaters, there are some of them over by Coleman, Michigan.

IB: Oh, there are? In a private collection or...

Aves: Um, hum.

IB: Huh.

Aves: Because the guy contacted me and asked me if I knew how they were designed and so on and so forth and I says, yeah, I got a book on 'em.

IB: You do?

Aves: No, I did.

IB: You did.

IA: It got lost in the flood.

Aves: No, it didn't. He asked me if he could have a copy of it. So I sent it down to him. He's go it.

IB: And that's in Coleman?

Aves: No, in Colon, Michigan.

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IB: Oh, Colon.

Aves: He's got quite a few military trucks.

IA: You were a union representative for a while? You mentioned you wrote up your father-in-law.

Aves: Yup.

IA: Was that the same as a steward?

Aves: Yes.

IA: You were the steward. Were you a steward for very long?

Aves: No, not very long there committeeman. chairman of the bargaining committee.

IA: You were? When was this?

Aves: When I worked for American Motors.

IA: Oh, American Motors, okay. Not when you were at the Reo.

Aves: My father was also a committeeman.

IA: At the Reo?

Aves: Um, hum.

IA: That must of been after '36, obviously.

Aves: Yeah, he was there when strike.

IA: He was, in '36?

Aves: Yeah, we used to hand food into him because inside, they were sittin' down, called a sitdown strike.

IA: Right, do you remember that? You weren't, you were only 10?

Aves: No.

IA: You don't remember it too much?

Aves: But I remember him talking.

IA: He used to talk about it, yeah. Yeah, we've had some people who remember their parents in there. One guy who went in, who was brought in as a kid remembered being in the plant.

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IB: Yeah, his dad took him in with him.

IA: Yeah.

IB: His dad took him inside.

Aves: My dad used to, the Reo car that you have out here, he used to test drive those. They made some blankets up in the seating room and stuff up there out of seat material and, well, what they would do, is like whatever you call it, mohair, whatever they call it but he used to stop and pick us up, the kids up and he would take us up to Alma where the, you got all the chocolate shake you could drink for 50 cents so we would fill up with that and then he had to continue on and get so many miles they'd put us in the back seat of the car, he would put us in the back seat of the car put mohair blankets and I think I have a mohair blanket.

IB: That was made from the fabric on the, the seat covering?

IA: So he used to take you on some of the test drives?

Aves: Um, hum.

IA: Oh, that must of been fun.

Aves: Yeah. Always wanted to be a test driver so that's what I ended up

IA: I think we've taken up quite a bit

IB: Yeah, I think so.

Aves: Don't worry about my time.

IB: I can't think of anything else that I need to ask except I

Mr. Aves went on to say, talking about military trucks and the test driving that he did. He went on to tell us that the military trucks that he test drove had no heaters in and in the winter, if there was snow and ice and blowing winds, it was pretty cold in those, and some of those cabs were open and so they used to hook up a type of a hand heater and plug it into the, where a cigarette lighter would be and he also said that they had to coat the windshields because there was no defrosters. They had to coat the windshields with a glycerine type of product that would keep it from icing over while they drove it and this is the end of the interview with Otto Aves, January 4, 1993.