

Vivern (Vern) Haight

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IA: This is February 4th, Lisa Fine, Shirley Bradley. It's 10 o'clock in the morning and we're going to interview Vivern (Vern) Haight about his Reo memories.

Haight: Well, back in Lansing in '26, we used to always walk on the west side of South Washington Avenue and that way we could stop and see R.E. Old's home.

IA: Oh, this was when you were a kid?

Haight: Yeah, and we'd stand there and look through the iron gates they had there all the way around the fence and we'd see the fella, the old man working in the shrubbery, rakin' and all that. Then we'd go down towards the clubhouse and we'd be on the west side. Well, I'd have to take hold of my brother's hand so that I wouldn't get hit with a car or streetcar and we'd go in and see the movies. But, then they would play the organ while we were setting in there and...

IA: Did your parents work at the Reo, too?

Haight: My dad worked at the Reo over on East Michigan where they sold the Reo Flying Cloud, see, when they made the Reo Flying Cloud car.

IB: They made it on, in a factory on East Michigan?

Haight: No, no, they made it right down there where they made trucks and cars.

IB: But the dealership was on East Michigan?

Haight: Yes. So they'd always play that organ, beautiful organ and that organ came from R.E. Old's home and he got it in 1914. There was two of 'em brought from New York and one of 'em dropped, the chain broke in the harbor in New York and one of 'em went down in the water. Well, the one, they saved and so I listened to that organ a good many years after I started working there. So, in 1945, I started working at the Reo and shall I go on and tell you, shall I go on and tell you, I was out of work and they called and wanted to know if I would come in for a day and help 'em on the clubhouse and I went in and they said they had called 23 people for the job. They were all drawing unemployment and they didn't want to ruin their unemployment so they said they didn't want to come in for a day. So they asked me to work for a day and they'd give me \$10. Well, at that time, that was pretty good money 'cause I was working out, helping fellas on their farm filling silos up here where Meijers is and that was all field, you know, and Mr. Dale Sheppard was a farmer there and I worked for him that day. So I went in and they said, would you work, come in Saturday and help us and I said, yes, I will. So I went in that day and I worked awhile and we set up parties and swept and cleaned and done different things that they wanted me to do and they

said, well, will you come back on a Monday. I thought, boy, 20 bucks, that sounds like a lot of money to me so I went back and when I got ready to go home that night and they said, do you like this job. I said, yes, I do. They said, well, why don't you keep coming back as long, till we don't want you anymore. I said, okay. So, I walked into that job and I stayed there for 30 years.

IA: From 1945...

Haight: To, yes, till '75.

IA: Till '75.

Haight: Yes. And so, about the clubhouse, when I went in there, years ago, there was a bowling alley in back and they had a library and they used to show movies and so when I went in, the library was there for a few, few months and they took that away but ah, there used to be, ah, the bowling alley went out too. So when I was in there, we had the telephone office up above. There was two women that worked up there, Ruth Hurlbut and Helen Spencer.

IA: They did the switchboard?

Haight: Yes, and so then when you went down, then we had the main lobby and pictures, main lobby and then when you went down in the basement, they, at that time, they moved in a printing department. That's where they used to play shuffleboard. They quit that and brought in the printing department and then there was a...

IA: Wasn't there a cafeteria?

Haight: There was a cafeteria down there. It was run by Bob Meyers and both their boys worked for him, Eddy and Bob and Elsie was the mother. Then we had a, the girl's club was down in the basement, too, and there was an insurance company called the Reo Benefit and you could always tell fellas that worked there. There was nothing to go there at the time and fellas had 50 years seniority and you could always tell fellas that worked there for years 'cause when these trucks come down the line, they would get up and crank the trucks and it'd backfire and break their arm and throw it over their shoulder and when they put it back, they would, in those days, they never set the elbow. So...

IA: So you mean, it pulled out of its, like socket.

Haight: Yeah, so they're always going around with a stiff arm. So, at one time, Reo was the first broadcasting station in Michigan, WREO and we used to sit and listen to it on crystal sets.

IB: At your home?

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Haight: Yes and when...

IA: In the '20s, starting when it started to broadcast in the '20s?

Haight: Well, we used to listen to Amos and Andy and then out in back, they were tearing out the foundation for the antenna that used to be clear up there. So that's, and so we had the Steering Gear Club for the men.

IA: It was up in the, in the upstairs?

Haight: Yes and then we had the Reo Girl's Club and we were the first to start the Red Stocking Club here in Lansing. Remember the Red Stocking? They used to, you probably didn't know that, that's years ago and amateur boxing was there and...

IA: So they did a lot of community things for the Lansing area?

Haight: Oh, yes, we let, yeah, we let and in 1945, we had 800 kids there for the movies, Laurel and Hardy was the last movie we showed but there was so many and they were so loud, you know, climbing, just full of life and they said, no more.

IA: They stopped the movies then?

Haight: Yeah, they stopped the movies in 1945. It was Laurel and Hardy...

IA: That was about when you started, around the time you started.

Haight: Yes, yes. So then we let out the clubhouse for, oh, Oldsmobile, Motor Wheel, different organizations in Lansing. Anybody wanted to rent, they could.

IA: That was your job to schedule things?

Haight: Well, I worked with a fella by the name of Charlie Griffin, when I went there.

IB: Griffin?

Haight: Yes, and Jerry Burn was personnel director. Did anybody ever tell you about him?

IA: Charlie Burn?

Haight: Jerry Burn.

IA: Jerry Burn, I'm sorry.

IB: Jerry Burn, B U R N S

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Haight: Byers, something like that.

IA: No, we haven't, I haven't heard that name, have you Shirley?

IB: No, this is a new one to me.

Haight: Jerry Burn, but ah...

IB: Did you say there was, did you ask us if we'd ever heard of Jerry Burn?

Haight: Yeah.

IB: No, we haven't.

Haight: He's personnel director. Well, then alright, then I'd better tell you that when I went there, that Henry Hun was president and then after he left, Joe Scheer came in and then got involved with the Reo and then John Tucker was president and then in come Hanson. Did anybody tell you about Hanson?

IB: Hanson.

Haight: C.R. Hanson, yeah, and then Heinesch came in, Jack Adams and I worked for all these fellows.

IB: Were they, were they good to work for? Do you remember any problems with any of them?

Haight: No, no, they treated you like a human being. They were, they were gentlemen and Eaton was another president and then in come Cappart and Mrs. Johnson and I worked for all those people so I must of done something right.

IB: What was your opinion of Mildred Johnson?

Haight: She treated me very nicely.

IB: She did?

Haight: And I met her sons and I met the boy, ah, her brother, beautiful woman.

IB: Was she?

Haight: Yes, I have her picture out here at the house but you got me at the wrong time 'cause I have yard sales. After I retired, I've had yard sales for 19 years, something to do, so a lot of my pictures are covered up out there in the garage but I'll show you what I do, that I have got. But, no, no, Mildred Johnson treated me very nice.

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IB: What about Mr. Cappart? Did you meet, you met him, you say?

Haight: Oh, yes.

IB: What did you think of him?

Haight: He was a gentleman to me all the time.

IA: He was.

Haight: He always talked about his family.

IA: Oh, he did?

Haight: Yes. Talked about his family and so I can't say nothing bad about him and that's true.

IB: What exactly was your job at the clubhouse?

Haight: Well, I went there as a janitor and then after Charlie Griffin quit and went to the State, I took over his job and it still classified me as a janitor. They wouldn't change it because there was a lot of fellows that wanted my job and they thought, well, you keep him at that, that's it. I...

IA: But you ended up doing all the scheduling kinds of things...

Haight: Yes, so I ended up doing all the scheduling, renting and anything was to be done, that was my job.

IA: To oversee what went on in the clubhouse.

Haight: That was my job. They never bothered me. It was like I run it, it was like my own place.

IB: So you were the manager really.

Haight: Yes.

IB: But you had the janitor classification on your papers.

Haight: That's right.

IB: Isn't that interesting.

Haight: Yes, that's what they done to him, so I didn't care because that was, that's the way it was and I belonged to the union.

IB: Oh, you did?

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Haight: Yes, and ah...

IB: Was that optional or did you have to belong to the union?

Haight: I had to belong to it. When I went there, I belonged to it but...

IA: So you were there when they had all the strikes in '46?

Haight: Yes, yes. But all these presidents that was there, they were gentlemen and I used to work, how I got into with these presidents and doing this work, I knew a fellow by the name of Otis, a colored, a black man. Is that alright to say?

IA: Sure, yes.

Haight: And ah, so, oh, what a gentleman. Oh, he was so loved by everybody and he took me under his wing and he'd say, now listen. When I need somebody to chauffeur, you go with me and we'd go a lot of places where we'd meet different, two cars at a time, and so we got to be pretty close friends.

IA: Was that his position, was to drive....

Haight: He was a janitor, too.

IA: Oh, he was a janitor, too.

Haight: He was classified as a janitor but we both were classified that way and nobody would ask for our jobs over at times because they all heard of all the banquets and parties and the music and oh, you know, we'd have...

IA: We heard a lot about the dances that went on at the...

Haight: Oh, yeah, and...

IB: So it sounded like fun.

Haight: It was, I loved it. Now, that's all, that, I just live it and I still dream about the Reo. I'm working with these fellows that I worked with for years. It's terrible. My wife was just telling me this morning, she said, why do you do it and I said, well, I go to work in the morning at 8:30 and I'd set up all these parties and then I'd be, and I'd stay right on and I'd work from 8:30 until 12 at night and I don't know how I ever done it because I worked day after day after day, year after year.

IB: You never had any layoffs or...

Haight: No, no.

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IA: It was steady.

Haight: Yeah, and well, I'd have to practically beg to get my two weeks vacation because everybody'd say, hey Vern, we're coming in for a wedding reception. We're coming for dad's. We want you there and I'd say, hey listen, I got to get away. I've got to get away for a week and what went on after I'd leave I could care less but when I'd come back the job was always there.

IA: The clubhouse made Reo special, didn't it?

Haight: Yes.

IA: The fact that they had the clubhouse and all the things that went on there.

Haight: Yes, because that was the only place. Civic Center wasn't there. You didn't have nothing but there was girl, a woman's clubhouse up three or four blocks from us that R.E. Olds had and...

IA: It's still up there, too. They have offices in there now.

Haight: Yes, yes, but you know what was kinda bad? They never took one brick from the Olds house and kept it. They just tore it down.

IA: You mean his residence, where he lived?

Haight: Yes, yeah.

IB: Did you see it being torn down?

Haight: No, no. I didn't want to see it.

IB: I don't blame you.

Haight: And I didn't go back when, in my 30 years, I never was laid off and I never went back to watch 'em tear down the clubhouse. When I handed the keys over, it was an awful empty feeling, believe me.

IB: Was it?

Haight: But we used to have Woody Herman, Counte Bassie, Stan Kenton come there with their bands.

IB: Oh, is that right?

Haight: Yeah, and Governor Williams was always there for talks and speeches and he'd call square dances.

IB: Oh, he did?

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Haight: Oh, sure. Oh, and ah, I met, I've been around a lot of the governors. I'm trying to think of the other one, the one that had the wooden leg.

IB: Kim Siegler(?)

Haight: Oh, yes, I saw him but I...

IB: I'm trying to think, too.

Haight: Talk about a neat looking man, Kim Siegler was.

IB: He was very dignified and distinguished.

Haight: Oh, yes.

IB: Oh, Swainson, Governor Swainson?

Haight: Yeah, that's what I want to tell you. Now, he lost his legs, you know, in the Korean War and when he'd come up those steps and there was a lot of steps to get up there in the clubhouse...

IB: There were?

Haight: Yes, and with those wooden legs, he'd walk up those steps, you wouldn't believe it, get out and dance and he'd have his pictures taken, we always had two old cars in the main lobby and he'd get up there in the car and had his picture taken. That's when Hanson was president and Biggie Munn was always there.

IB: Oh, yes?

Haight: Yes, Biggie Munn was always, he and Hanson were good friends.

IB: Hum, they were?

Haight: Oh, yes, very close and high up in Boy Scouts.

IB: Oh, really?

Haight: Duff Daugherty and what's the name of the baseball field there, Kobs?

IA: Kobs, isn't it Kobs Field?

IB: I think so.

Haight: Well...

IA: The one up at State?

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Haight: Yeah, well anyway, he used to come there a lot but oh, Biggie Munn, oh my, when he came in there, see, he was one of the first that won the championship to the Rose Bowl for State and we used to have the, oh, the big banquets for all the coaches, the Downtown Coaches Club...

IA: Oh, that used to be at the clubhouse?

Haight: Oh, yes and when he'd come, the place would be packed with coaches from all over, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Indiana...

IB: All the Big Ten coaches?

Haight: Yes, oh, and all the people that belonged to it and when he walked in and he'd walk down towards the podium, you wouldn't believe it. They just separated just like the Lord was walking in, big aisle. Aw, he was something.

IB: Oh, that's amazing.

Haight: Oh, he was something.

IA: He was well liked?

Haight: Oh, yes and then...

IB: And you got to meet him?

Haight: Oh, I was with him, tended bar at his house.

IB: Oh, really?

Haight: I tended bar...

IB: He had you come to his house to help with some parties?

Haight: Yes, and out to Hanson's and I tended bar and run the movies. I done everything and still I was considered, that was my, and anybody see me, they'd introduce me to their wives and they all said, this was the janitor at Diamond Reo.

IA: Oh, dear. Doesn't that kind of bother you?

Haight: Well, sometimes but in order to get around that, a lot of times they'd say, well, what is your position at the Reo and I'd say I'm a sanitary engineer, you know.

IA: Well, you did a lot more than that, though.

Haight: Oh, yes.

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IB: Oh, he managed and directed that clubhouse. When you had a banquet, say you had a banquet coming, what did you have to personally do? Did you have to arrange for the food and the decorations or...

Haight: Ah, Mr. Meyers downstairs would serve the food and I would set 'em up, 800, 900, 1,400 at a time and they'd bring in some help to help me.

IB: I was gonna ask what kind of a staff you had.

Haight: Well, I was the only one so it all depended on me, it had to be done and so Mr. Meyers would bring in boys to help me set up and get the microphones. I'd have to get the microphones, the speakers, everything had to be done.

IB: Where did he get, did he draw from the factory for people to help you?

Haight: No, no. No, he'd hire people.

IB: He'd hire people from say a catering service?

Haight: And he had, yeah, he had a big staff down there.

IA: We've heard the food was good.

Haight: Oh, Lord, and from, good?

IB: It's beginning to make me hungry.

IA: Yeah, I know.

Haight: And you know all those years, I never had to pay for no meals and a lot of my clothes is furnished.

IB: Oh, really, like uniforms? Did you have to wear a uniform?

Haight: No, no. No, when I, and we'd have to have our red jackets and all that and when we tended bar, we, I'd always hire Otis, that I talked about and...

IB: Otis Neumas?

Haight: Yeah, and ah, I can't think of the other's name. We worked together 25 years. Well, anyway, from the Olds, every day they walked over from the Olds, 80 people, every day that I was there, they never missed coming from the Olds to eat at the cafeteria.

IB: Is that right?

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IA: For lunch or supper?

Haight: Lunch.

IA: For lunch.

IB: People that worked at the Oldsmobile came to Reo?

Haight: Oh yeah, talk about food, Lord, and so many bowling banquets, big thick steaks, you know, and maybe 35 to 50 bowling banquets. We were known all over and Howard Sober's men would come and bring truckloads to eat there.

IB: He owned a haul away business, over the road haulers to haul the cars from state to state.

Haight: Yes, yup, he did.

IB: My gosh. Gee, you just met all the greats and near greats, didn't you?

Haight: Well, yeah, and then Gerry Burn was a very strong Republican and Al Zimmer that was a, Gerry Burn was a Democrat and Al Zimmer was a Republican and I want to tell you, that wasn't good.

IB: Why is that?

Haight: Well, Al Zimmer was just a full Republican and I mean, when ah, when a Governor Williams got the last term, he was so sick he had to go to bed. Yes...

IB: Because a Democrat was in.

Haight: No, Republican, yes, 'cause a Democrat was in. He wanted Republicans in there.

IB: Oh, he was really a staunch party man, wasn't he.

Haight: Yeah, he was, he was a general manager out in the shop, Zimmer.

IA: Right, we've heard his name, too.

Haight: Yes, and he could be rough?

IB: Could he?

Haight: Oh, yes.

IB: Very strict disciplinarian?

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Haight: Strict, yes. He would go through the shop at night and if anybody left a light on over their machine, he was there to tell ya. But ah, he was a nice man but he was strict.

IB: He expected good performance from you?

Haight: You better believe it and I want to tell you, they put the trucks out. He was a good man and after he left, why Clare Loudenslager took over.

IB: What do you know about Clare Loudenslager?

Haight: I worked for him and another thing I had to do was to take 17 cars a week over to have it washed and their cars gassed and see, that was taken care of.

IA: For the people who were high up in the management.

Haight: Yes, yes.

IB: Oh, I see, not company cars but the executive's personal cars?

Haight: No, no. The company cars.

IB: Company cars, okay.

Haight: But he was a good man and I mean to tell you, he was strict.

IB: Was he?

Haight: Oh, when he give an order, you better jump because he wanted things done right and when he, when the Reo went down and he went with CATA, and he's the one that put CATA on the map...

IB: Oh, really?

Haight: in Lansing.

IB: Oh, that's interesting.

Haight: So, this Hanson, oh, what a man. Don Heinisch, all those fellows, you just can't believe when you rode beside 'em, driving along beside 'em, they always treated you as a gentleman and then out in front of the REO, there used to be, we used to have an old car, 1933, it was black and we would take that car out and I would have to go out and chauffeur and pick people up from the airport. You asked me if I worked, I done everything. So this car was a 1933 flat head, 8 cylinder and I used to have to go out and at one time, we were owned by White Motor and I'd have to go out and pick up the president and I

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remember him saying to me one time, he said, who you gonna vote for, Nixon or are you gonna vote for Kennedy?

IA: This must have been in 1960.

Haight: And so I want to tell ya, that put me on the spot because I didn't know what to say. Well, I said, I guess I might as well not lie to you. I'm voting for Kennedy and he said, so am I. He said, you're my man from now on. Come out and pick me up and there was another little fellow that used to come in there. I can't think of his name, it's terrible. I can't believe I'd forget that man's name and much as he, and he come through the cafeteria and I walked over to him and I said, do you care if I carry your tray to your, I never knew the man, I said, do you care if I carry your tray over to the table. Oh, he said, I'd like to have you. So come to find out, he was chairman of the board at White and he was in there setting around, seeing what was going on.

IB: Oh, from White Motors?

Haight: Yes.

IB: 'Cause they were getting ready to buy?

Haight: Well, they, they owned it.

IA: They already had it bought.

Haight: They already had it and so I got, and he was chairman, and he had something, he was chairman of the board and we used to pick up the president and, well, I didn't know who he was but one day they had a meeting there and we had meetings from, they were there from all over the United States, their salesmen and one of the presidents, I'd rather not mention his name...

IA: That's fine.

Haight: Didn't introduce me. He said, ho, ho, wait just a minute. He said, Mr. So and So, who is your man that, look what he's doing for this company. Your main stay and you didn't introduce him. I felt that high, you know, because I knew all the fellows. I didn't think nothing of it but he did and he also was part owner of the Cleveland Indians so he was a, isn't that awful, Mr. Black was his name, Mr. Black but oh, would you ever like him. He's a little short fellow, wore dark suits and he would, what a gentleman. You wouldn't a believed it. From that time on, I could walk all over that shop, I didn't even need a badge.

IB: Is that right?

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Haight: Plant protection never said, Vern, you can't, where I went, it was it and you know, what made it kind of bad, I belonged to the union and a lot of people was afraid to talk to me 'cause they was afraid that I'd run back and tell management and I never did. They never asked me nothing and I never run back and talked. That wasn't what I was hired for.

IB: Mr. Black was the chairman of the board or he was the president?

Haight: He was the chairman of the board of White.

IA: White.

IB: Of White Motors.

Haight: And he was also an owner in the Cleveland Indians. But you know, we made, at the Reo, we made the Reo Flying Cloud. We made the trucks. We made lawn mowers. We made toys. Did anybody tell you about the toys?

IA: No.

IB: What kind of toys?

Haight: Well, kids toys.

IB: Like wagons, scooters...

Haight: Yes, yes, we made toys at the Reo and across over where John Beam is now, the Reo used to own that, too, you know, and down on South Washington, that would be Mt. Hope and South Washington, we owned that building, too.

IB: Was that the truck plant?

Haight: Yeah, it was a truck plant.

IB: That was the truck plant. Where were the toys made, in what plant? Downtown on Baker and Washington?

Haight: No, it was, I think it was, I'm not sure but I think it was there where the lawn mower, and then one day, and then see, and then my job, when I went there in '45, the agreement was, I worked in the clubhouse six months, I worked on the lawn the other six months.

IA: Oh, outside.

IB: Outside doing yard work.

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Haight: Yes. So I got pretty good at it. In fact, I was taught by the man that worked for R.E. Olds, the old man that worked up to his home.

IB: Oh, his gardener?

Haight: Yes.

IB: Oh, really.

Haight: Yes, so he came down and showed me how to take care of the shrubbery and that clubhouse was by the tracks, you know, the railroad tracks and at the time, I'd work one block and that would be down, years ago there was a fire department down there.

IB: That's right, there was.

Haight: Yes.

IB: Right on the corner of Baker and Washington.

Haight: That's right.

IB: Southeast, yeah, southeast corner.

Haight: Yeah, and so I was taught by this fellow and so one day I was working there and putting in some tulips and in drove a car and out come an old man and it was R.E. Olds and I had my lawn mower running and he come up to me and he's a little bit of a short fellow.

IB: He was?

Haight: Yeah, he was short.

IB: Oh, really?

Haight: Wore glasses, gray suit, black shoes, I can remember him, and he said, how's the lawn mower work and I said, just fine. He said, let me try it and I said, oh, I don't know and I let that clutch out of that lawn mower and I want to tell you, he flew, and run up along side it and shut it off and he turned around and went back to the car and that's the last I seen him at that time.

IB: He didn't say anything to you?

Haight: No, no.

IB: He just turned and went back to his car.

Haight: I think it surprised him, shocked him.

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IB: That that would go that quickly.

Haight: Yeah, because he was probably used to a hand mower.

IA: He wasn't a young man then either.

Haight: No, no he wasn't.

IB: And he hadn't worked a power mower before.

Haight: So later on and then, do you want me to tell you all this?

IA: Sure.

IB: Yes, absolutely.

Haight: Well, anyway...

IB: These are the kinds of things I love to get.

Haight: Well, Gerry Burn was a, oh, he was a big fellow, good sized and smoked cigars and oh, he had class. Oh, he had it and his secretary Fern Placeway worked for him.

IA: Oh, we know Fern. We've met her.

Haight: Oh, she's a nice lady.

IB: We're hoping to interview her very soon.

Haight: And some time, tell her you was out here.

IA: Okay.

Haight: But ah, Fern Placeway was a nice lady and at that time, and Hilda Smith was in there too and she just passed away here ...

IA: Oh, she did?

IB: I didn't know she passed away.

Haight: Oh, yeah, she passed away.

IA: Oh, 'cause we went to visit her out at Tender Care.

IB: Tender Care.

Haight: Yeah, well, I did too, and so she passed away and then there was a nurse by the name of Mrs. Meade.

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IA: We haven't heard that one yet.

IB: Oh, in the first aid?

Haight: Yes.

IB: Mrs. Meade?

Haight: Yes.

IA: You're gonna write that, right?

IB: Yeah.

Haight: And oh, she was a nice lady. You couldn't a found a nicer person. She loved everybody. So when she left, Ardith Packet came in.

IA: Right, we've been in touch with her, too.

Haight: And talk about class. When she had her uniform on and the little, white hat, she had class. Loved by everybody, I mean, there was class. So, but there was so many out in the shop that, foremans that worked for Clare Loudenslager, there's Don Bashore and then over in the personnel office there was, and the fellow just passed away, Al Axelane. He just passed away.

IA: Right.

IB: I saw that in the paper.

Haight: And Bill Terrell, did you ever talk to him?

IB: Bill Carroll?

Haight: Terrell.

IA: Terrell, no, but we met him at one of the reunions.

Haight: Bill Terrell, there's another one that had class. But everybody had class. They were just a big, happy family. I don't care who you were, you were one of the gang.

IA: And it had that feeling the whole time you were there, you think?

Haight: Oh, yeah, well, it changed as time went on.

IB: Towards the end?

Haight: Towards the end because a different, different class of people come in and things didn't go just right but ah...

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IA: The last few years, when did that start to change, do you think?

Haight: Oh, probably a year, the last year for me.

IB: '75?

Haight: Yes.

IA: Starting in the '70s?

Haight: No, no. No, probably, I say probably '74.

IA: Oh, I see, just a year before.

Haight: '73, '74 but ah, no, when you talk about Mrs. Johnson, pretty woman, class and all the money that Cappart had, he treated just like a, like a janitor. I used to take him up to Alma, his college, you know, he was, had quite a lot to do with the school.

IB: With Alma College?

Haight: Yes.

IB: He did?

Haight: Oh, yes.

IB: He was on the board or something?

Haight: Yeah, he was on the board up there and he had a nice big planes that they brought in, that he bought from England.

IB: Planes?

Haight: Plane, he had a plane and it would hold 90 people.

IA: Oh, my.

Haight: But he took all those seats out, we took all those seats out and that was all nice davenports and chairs, the bar in there and someone told me that it took 90 gallons of gas to just get it off the ground. It was that big.

IB: And he used it to...

Haight: Go back to Mississippi.

IB: Oh, to go back and forth to Mississippi.

Haight: Yup, he and Mrs. Johnson.

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IB: Did you ever get a chance to ride in it?

Haight: I've been in it. I was always afraid to ride in the planes. I had chances to go to Washington, Chicago, all those, and I just didn't like planes but now, I do now, after my son-in-laws got me going to Las Vegas and different places but then my daughters, I had two daughters and one of 'em had their wedding reception at the clubhouse.

IB: Oh, what year was that?

Haight: Oh, whew, and then, I got to think that over. Then I had another daughter that, she's teaching school up here, she's still there today, 29 years and she used to bring her tricycle and spend the day with me and both the girls would bring their coloring books and spend the day with dad. That was a big deal.

IB: Oh, isn't that wonderful.

Haight: Oh, yeah. I got their pictures out here but I'm sorry you come at this time because there's so many, so much of the things that I gather up during the winter time, start out selling, a lot of pictures are covered but I have pictures of R.E. Olds and I have...

IA: Did you live out here in Webberville when you were working at the Reo?

Haight: Yes, yup.

IA: You always went back in, back into town...

Haight: Two or three times a day.

IA: Two or three times a day.

Haight: Yeah, I was on 24 hour call.

IB: Oh, you were?

Haight: Yup. If I'd get home and they'd say, Vern, can you go, can you come back and I'd have to go back up and have something that had to be done for 'em or I'd have to go take their cars and go to Metropolitan Airport to pick up people

IA: And then you'd have to go back into town and take 'em in.

Haight: Yes, oh, never knew.

IB: That'd make it a little difficult for your wife trying to plan meals and...

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Haight: Well, no, because my wife went with me.

IB: Oh, how wonderful.

Haight: Yup, my wife went with me and always spent some, if I had to work, I spent so much overtime that she'd come in and get a chance to see all the entertainment, all the eats and so we spent all the years together. We've been together 53 years.

IB: Oh, that's wonderful.

IA: But your daughters went to school out here, Webberville?

Haight: At Webberville, yes. My oldest daughter was valedictorian, got the, was it DAR, something like that for good, I can't tell you.

IB: DAR award for good citizenship...

Haight: Citizenship, yes.

IB: And high marks.

Haight: Yes. Yes and she's been up here 29 years teaching. She'll retire next year and my other daughter is at Lansing Community College, secretary. She just got her 20 pin so I educated the girls good, got good jobs but then the second time that I met R.E. Olds, I was out in the yard again and I was always, from the clubhouse to the main office, back and forth, back and forth and he drove up and he was so old then and he brought a truck up and he was so old they had to pick him up and set him in the truck.

IB: Oh, really?

Haight: Yup, in a truck and that was the last that I saw of R.E. Olds.

IB: That must of been close to the end of his life.

Haight: Yup, it was and we used to have a canopy out in front where they drive, oval, oval drive and that canopy, then Gerry Burn, he was classy and he wanted, we always had, every year, a 21 foot Christmas tree.

IA: In the clubhouse?

Haight: In the clubhouse.

IB: In the clubhouse.

Haight: At Christmas time and when I started, and my job was to go out and get these 21 foot Christmas trees. Well, there were Christmas trees

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that were little bits of things and every year, you know, they grow here, they grow a foot and by the time I left, they were tall and so I never had to worry about finding 21 foot Christmas trees.

IB: Are you saying that they bought live tress and planted 'em right outside the clubhouse.

Haight: Yes, yes, and we'd have to...

IB: Clarify this for the tape.

Haight: then we'd have to put, we'd take a truck out, take a truck out, lay 'em on this truck and bring 'em in and then we'd have the carpenters come in and put these trees up in the corner so that, and put wires on 'em so they couldn't fall over and that went on for years and years and one time, the Steering Gear Club, we always had Christmas parties there and that little kid come in and said, Mother, they never took down their Christmas tree from last year. See, they were the same size. So Gerry Burn said, well, why don't we put a 21 foot Christmas tree on top of the canopy and so we got a truck over, what do you call 'em...

IB: With a high arm or something on it?

Haight: Yes, to pick it up and when they put it on there...

IA: It would hold it?

Haight: it dropped right on through.

IA: Yeah, that's what I...

Haight: It was rotten, the roof...

IB: What was the canopy made out of?

Haight: Well, it was wood.

IA: Oh, it wasn't a canvas thing.

Haight: No, oh, no. It was all...

IB: But it was, had been there many years.

Haight: Well, you'll see it when you go out, pictures that I've got and it was made of wood.

IA: And it went right...

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Haight: It went right on through and dropped to the floor, or to the ground. Well, that's when you took the canopy off. So...

IB: Had you said to 'em before hand, I don't think it will hold it?

Haight: No, no, oh, no. You didn't, you never told them. They told you. That's why we got a lot But this Otis, I was gonna tell ya, he was just like I was. He washed cars and he used to make awful good money and he was a janitor there. When they wanted anything done, they called him and I'd always say, Otis, I'm gonna take your job from you and he said, go ahead, try it, 'cause he was so well liked there was 100s of people there at his retirement party.

IB: And that was held in the clubhouse?

Haight: Yes, all these parties but ah, and then one time I was telling you about this Zimmer that was so religious or was so Republican that he heard that that, our president, Nixon and Pat and Eisenhower and his wife was going to be stopping at the crossing at Grand Truck so he come over and he said, I want to tell you something. He said, I want this porch all cleaned and I mean clean and we used to put flags out and it was chairs out in front where people come and set. I mean, it was nice.

IB: On the porch.

Haight: Yes, and I said to him, he said, I want you to put the flags all out and in a joking way, I meant as a joke, I said, do you want me to put 13 flags out. Oh, that didn't go over too good. That didn't go over good. Well, anyway, so up come, and so the train come in. It was Eisenhower and his wife and Nixon and there was Pat and he talked for a while and he let the whole shop out and that was something unusual. He let the whole shop out so they could come over and be there when Nixon come in.

IB: So they were lined up all along the track, then, the workers were?

Haight: All over. All Lansing was there.

IB: And did you have a good spot where you could see?

Haight: Well, I, I went up above so that I could look down, yes, I had a good spot because that was my job to be around 'cause when they, I'm right there and I mean, you better be there. That's my job for 30 years. So, we had a lot of hockey players, hockey teams there, the baseball teams, all Detroit teams used to come there for, when the kids, so that they could see the Tigers and all the, the hockey, Ted Lindsay and Howe and all them fellows but when Governor Williams come down, they had a big doings uptown and I got a chance to see President Kennedy.

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IB: Oh, you did?

Haight: Yup, I saw President Kennedy.

IB: Did he come at the same, the Grand Trunk crossing, too?

Haight: No, no. No, he was uptown in front of the, they were parading him around Lansing.

IB: So you saw him in front of the Capitol?

Haight: Yes, I went up there to pick up my daughter at Community College. She commuted back and forth. She, for 30 years, I had the same hours, from 8:30 till 5 and then if, when I worked overtime, then the girls would stay right with me or my wife would come in, years ago all the time on the bus, Greyhound, and I'd go pick her up and we'd spend our time, 8, 10 hours at the clubhouse and that all had to be cleaned up for the next morning for I ever went home. And then I was up the next morning at 8:30, right back to work. That went on year, like I say, years. But I, so I did get a chance to see the end of it. So this Mr. Hanson come to me one day and he says, say, I got a job for you. I said, fine. He said, I want you and your wife to go down to Detroit. I can't go and I got these tickets and I want you to see Eisenhower. They're having a big banquet down there and the Senator, there was some Senator, and when I got down there, there was 300 and some people setting on a podium, or setting at the head table. They had three tiers and so when it got down, we were suppose to go down on the train and I said, I think I'll drive. So my wife and I went and we drove, I got a chance to sit beside Eisenhower and eat because when they got down to Novi, the truck hit, ah, the car hit a truck and so it held 'em up so Ingham County people got a chance so I pushed myself up to be just as close as I could to him. I've seen a lot of the presidents and I saw Kennedy and I saw Truman and I've seen President Roosevelt and his wife.

IB: All here in Lansing?

Haight: Yes.

IB: Oh, how amazing.

Haight: Yeah, and I saw Truman and then my wife and I drove out and we saw Carter. We've been out to Carter's home, Plains, Georgia and anyway, well, I've seen so many of 'em.

IB: What did you think of Eisenhower? Was he as tall as you thought he would be or...

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Haight: Yes, yes, he was a tall man. I read a lot about Eisenhower. In fact, I've got my book here on Richard Nixon. So, but ah, yeah, I saw a lot of 'em. Truman.

IA: You were in a position to have this kind of an opportunity.

Haight: Yeah, it was my, it was what I done and you see, years ago, in '26, I saw Tom Nix and Hoot Gibson...

IB: You did? Did they come to the clubhouse?

Haight: No, they were in Lansing. So I got a chance to see 'em.

IB: How did that happen? Where were they?

Haight: I was going to Oak Park School and you remember the old, the park there, it's still there, across from Motor Wheel and I see a crowd out there and I went out there and there was Tom Nix and his horse Tony.

IB: Oh, you must of been just a little guy.

Haight: Yes, I was but that was a thrill.

IB: How exciting for you.

IA: Now did you, you grew up in Lansing?

Haight: We left in '29.

IA: You left Lansing in '29?

Haight: In Depression time, we, yeah, we came here. My dad was a blacksmith.

IB: Here in Webberville?

Haight: Yes, and he used to shoe horses and I've seen him shoe horses many, many times and throw 'em on their side 'cause they were mean. You had to stake their legs to the ground so they, so you could shoe 'em. I went to school here in Webberville.

IA: But you said he worked at the Reo, too?

Haight: At East Michigan, at the sales department.

IB: When did you start there?

Haight: Pardon?

IB: When did you...

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IA: That was, that was his dad.

Haight: That was my dad.

IB: Oh, your dad, that's where he went?

Haight: Yes.

IB: Okay.

Haight: That's where they made the Reo Flying Clouds and my dad on Sunday, his job, too, was to take 'em for trips to see how the brakes worked and how the car worked and we'd always head for Holland, Michigan and I want to tell you, we'd really go. That was his job.

IB: So he was a test driver?

Haight: Yes, yes. He was foreman, too.

IB: Oh, he was.

Haight: But that was his job.

IA: Was this before or after he was a blacksmith 'cause I'm just trying to get...

Haight: No, before.

IA: He worked at the Reo before was here.

Haight: Oh, yes.

IA: Did he...

Haight: '26, '27.

IA: Okay, and did he lose the job at the Reo because of the Depression?

Haight: Depression, well, yeah, everybody. Everybody lost their job and down there in that Reo benefit, that, those two fellows had been there for years, Jess Stanley, he's dead and a fellow by the name of Monroe, he's gone, but ah, it was the place to work, believe me.

IA: Your dad thought it was a good place to work, too?

Haight: Oh, yes. Yeah, everybody, it was just, it was a, they called it when you worked at the Reo, you just call it the old soldiers home because you had a job there for life and everybody liked each other.

IB: Did any of your other relatives work at the Reo?

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Haight: My brother-in-law, Ike Bennett and my father-in-law worked there, Roger Bennett. So...

IA: So when you showed up for work in 1945, you weren't going some place strange 'cause you had a lot of people you knew that already worked there?

Haight: No, I didn't know nobody.

IA: Oh, you didn't.

Haight: They were strange to me.

IA: But your dad had been there and...

Haight: Well, I didn't know nobody though.

IA: Right, you didn't personally know, yeah.

Haight: No, no.

IB: How did you happen to go to the Reo?

Haight: I was working at Sears and Roebuck.

IB: What were you doing there?

Haight: I was manager out in their garage and when I went there, I didn't pass for the Army and they said you'd better get into a place where they're making parts for trucks, for Army, something to do...

IB: War material.

Haight: Yup, and so went out in the shop for three months and I worked for, on a lathe and when that three months was up, the War was over, the Second World War and so I got laid off and I was laid off for a long, long time.

IB: Oh, you were?

Haight: Yes, and ah...

IB: What did you do during the interim, while you were laid off?

IA: That's when he was working out at the farm, right?

Haight: Yeah, I worked.

IB: Oh, that's right. We talked about that.

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Haight: At Okemos, yeah, I worked out there and then I went to Oldsmobile in 1940 and I worked on the line and I was there when the last, when they took all the spare tire off the car and all the chrome and I worked there nine weeks. You know what they always did, they always worked you nine weeks and how they lay 'em off so they can't get with the union and start drawing money and so when I got laid off, I was drawing \$7 a week unemployment and it was tough going because we were expecting, paying rent and...

IB: And having to drive back and forth, the gas and everything.

Haight: Yup, yeah, and so that's why I went to Sears. I had a choice of going back to Olds but I didn't like it there.

IB: You didn't like it. Why, why was that?

Haight: Nope, I didn't like working on the line.

IA: Oh, it was line work.

Haight: Yeah, I just didn't like it.

IB: Monotonous?

Haight: Well, I just, no, it wasn't that. I just didn't like it. I didn't like shop work. So I went to Sears and go in good with them and stayed two and half years. Then I stayed, when the shop went down at the Reo, I had a lot of parties that was booked and so they said, well, you stay until these parties are over with and then give us the key. The clubhouse will be done. So after, so this Eaton come by and he said, Vern, I understand you're, that you was ready to retire and I said, yes, I have my 30 years and three months. So he went to Mr. Shelly and, that worked at Reo and he said, Shelly, he said, take care of him and so I went over to John Beam after retired.

IB: Oh, you did?

Haight: Yes, 11 years.

IA: Oh, you worked there 11 more years.

Haight: And I worked on 11 more years for Mr. Shelly.

IB: What did you do at the John Beam.

Haight: Some thing. Washed their car. I was just like a marble, you just throw the marble in the room and it just rolled all over and what job was to be done, it was mine and I used to go to the bank for 'em. Go to bank, wash their cars and anything that they had to be done and I'd work three hours, 8:30 till 11:30 and they paid me good enough

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that my wife would go in with me, set in the car and wait three hours for me and then we'd go out to eat, go to shows and go to Las Vegas.

IB: You enjoyed life.

Haight: Yeah, yeah, so I got a chance to see Woody Herman, Counte Bassie, Stan Kenton, Liberace, Elvis Presley, Wayne Newton, Tom Jones, Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis, Jr.

IA: Oh, these people at Las Vegas?

Haight: Yes, they come to Lansing, a lot of 'em, too.

IB: Some of 'em did.

Haight: And Detroit so I got a chance to see 'em all, Tom Jones and Tony Martin, or Tony Bennett, oh, just so many of 'em, country music.

IB: How was the Elvis show? Was it pretty good?

Haight: There were 62,000. That, when I retired in '75, Elvis was at the Pontiac Stadium, there was 62,000 of us there that night.

IB: Close to the end of his career then?

Haight: Yes, and my son-in-law was a cousin to Elvis Presley.

IB: Really?

Haight: Yeah, and I'd been out to, I'd been out to Graceland.

IB: In Memphis.

Haight: Yes, and I've seen Mickey Rooney.

IB: Oh, you have?

Haight: Alice Faye, oh, I liked her, Alice Faye.

IB: Wasn't she lovely?

Haight: Yeah.

IA: Did you know any, I'm gonna change the subject a little bit. Did you know any of the people who worked in the clubhouse before you? Were there some of the other people around...

Haight: I've heard his name. His name was Harden and I guess he was so bad of having rheum, arthritis and it just took him minutes, hours sometimes to even get out of the car to get inside.

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IB: So he really couldn't do much of a job then?

Haight: No. I don't know, and all that nice equipment that we had at the Reo, the projectors, they gave that to Civic Center.

IA: Oh, they did?

IB: Oh, they did?

Haight: It was all gived to the Civic Center.

IB: When the clubhouse closed?

Haight: No, no, while I was there.

IA: No, they stopped showing the movies.

Haight: They quit showing the movies and they gave all the projectors to Civic Center.

IB: Oh, okay. I'll catch on in a minute.

Haight: And you see this clubhouse was built in 1917 and it was built for the employees and they had a huge stage, four dressing rooms. It was 115 foot long and 68 foot wide and we used to have a lot of bingo parties there and Gerry Burn would be up there calling the numbers but ah, I just, I just can't tell you the feeling there was. You never said, I never had a feeling, I don't want to go to work. Never. You talk to anybody and they'll tell ya, Vern Haight was always on the job, whether I was sick, hurt, I was there.

IB: What happened to all the things in the clubhouse when everything ended, when the Reo went out of business?

Haight: Well, there was a, I have a picture of it out there, there was a, an auctioneers come in and auctioned it off. I understand that the old car, the '33 went to Portland. The fellow that runs the elevator over there bought it and I have a lot of, that organ up there, that they brought from Olds' home, I have seven of the reels that...

IA: Oh, the tapes.

IB: The rolls.

Haight: Rolls, yeah.

IB: Oh, you do?

Haight: Yup, I never knew where that organ went.

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IB: Well, I think that it went to Idaho.

Haight: Went to Idaho?

IB: The reason I think that is because, let me see, '89, in '89 or '90 when I was managing the Museum there, I got a phone call from a museum in Idaho and I cannot remember what city. They had the organ and they wanted to sell it and they wanted to know if we would buy it since, you know, we're the R.E. Olds Museum and we kicked it around for a while but it would have been so expensive and it's so big we didn't know, how could we afford to ship it back here. Where would we put it when we got it where it could be...

Haight: And it didn't work.

IB: It didn't work?

Haight: No, not at the very end. Maybe 10 years it never worked. They had everybody working on it and it just, you're better off without it because it just didn't work.

IB: Hum, that's interesting.

Haight: They would come up there at noon hour and work on it, fellows that worked in the engineering and all that, they just couldn't get it to work right. But it did work at one time but I do have the rolls upstairs. I have a film upstairs of fellows that went over to Africa and they got up there in the hills, mountains, I guess, and they, it's a picture of, and when they're riding along, the black kids, you know, they never seen a truck and the lions would be laying along side the road and giraffes and they got up there in the hills or mountains, there is mountains in Africa, isn't there?

IA: Oh, sure.

IB: Yes.

Haight: Alright, okay, well, they got up there in the mountains, they was trying to go up these hills with this, with this truck and they'd get stuck. They have to put chains on the truck and keep pulling with other trucks to get the truck out. I have that in a film upstairs.

IB: Were those Reo trucks?

Haight: Yes, yes.

IB: Who went on this expedition? Someone from the Reo?

Haight: Yes, Lonnie Hudson was in charge of it.

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IB: So several men that worked there went on this safari?

Haight: At the Reo, yes, Lonnie Hudson was in charge of it. Now, he's passed away and his son worked at, in engineering. But ah...

IB: I wonder how the Reo trucks got to Africa. Had they been, I wonder if they'd been sold there to a safari company or something?

Haight: I don't know whether they drove them there...

IB: That's interesting.

Haight: But see, and they would go over the mountains and go up there and they would see if they could climb the mountains and how much power they had.

IA: Like an endurance test.

Haight: It was to test, it was testing.

IB: That's what I was just thinking. Maybe that's what it was. It was testing them.

Haight: Yes, testing them.

IB: Hum, that is so interesting. I never knew they did that.

Haight: Yup, so, it, ah, oh, there's so much, if I sat here and told you, you'd be here a long time but it was a place.

IB: Everyone that we have talked to right, even one person we didn't, everybody we've talked to has said the same thing. It was their home. It was a family. Everybody cared about one another and we have one person we interviewed that started out saying, didn't like it there, so on and so on, didn't have that family feeling. He didn't agree with that. It was just a place to work but he said at the end of the interview and he kept all kinds of pictures and memorabilia, you don't keep things unless it really meant something to you and toward the end of the interview, he was saying, I kind a miss it.

Haight: Did you ever interview Leberette?

IB: Who?

Haight: Leberette.

IB: No.

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Haight: Well, there's a fellow you should talk to because he's out in the shop. He just lived Reo.

IB: What, I guess I don't...

Haight: Leberette.

IB: Lowberette?

Haight: Leberette.

IB: I wonder, how would you spell that?

Haight: I don't know. Leberette.

IB: Leberette, okay, and he lives in Lansing, do you think? Well, that's alright.

IA: Well, I'll spell it the way it sounds.

IB: Yeah, I did, too. Perhaps somebody else might know, too.

Haight: I should know it.

IB: That's alright.

Haight: Leberette, in fact, he had his wedding reception there, in the clubhouse up in Steering Gear Room and you know, I was trying to think...

(Woman) Lowell

Haight: Lowell Leberette.

IB: Thank you.

Haight: And he works, last I knew, he works over near the Capital Airport. (end side 1) Press department, he was one of the formens and his boy just got killed. He was in service and he just got killed in an automobile accident.

IB: Here in the states?

Haight: Yes, yes.

IB: Oh, for goodness sakes.

Haight: And I knew his wife and he has two daughters that's working for Meijer Thrifty Acre and I used to hold that little kid in my arms, the boy, and he had beautiful kids. Oh, them girls, they were, you

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know, the Mexican girls, they were pretty girls. He raised a nice family.

IA: Yeah, we had a nice time talking to him. He works over at Demmer. We went over there to talk with him there.

IB: We talked to his wife on the phone and she just seemed so friendly and nice.

Haight: Oh.

IA: We met her at the reunion at Coral Gables.

IB: Yeah, that's right, we did.

Haight: Yeah, she's a little gal.

IB: Do you go to the Reo reunions?

Haight: No, I've never been to one. When I gave the key, I just kind a said, that's it.

IA: You moved on.

Haight: Yup and they've asked me and asked me to come but, a lot of times, we've been traveling a lot and ah, now you're lucky to find me here today because we were, I have a son-in-law that has property up across the straits near, and ah, we would have been up there. But I have pictures out in the garage that I have been collecting for 50 years. I have pictures of R.E. Olds' dad and mother, his family but the time, like I say, you've come at the wrong time. I'll back my car out and let you see 'em.

IB: We'd like to.

Haight: And the big band, I have their picture of the Reo band, two pictures of 'em and I have a picture of the whole Reo years ago that shows the South Washington and North Washington, all the people that worked at the Reo and all the women that worked in the office, they're all standing on this canopy. Thank God it didn't drop through.

IB: Right, oh.

IA: When it was good.

Haight: Yes.

IA: Oh, my.

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Haight: Oh, I was gonna tell ya. There was, there was, when Henry Hunt was there, there was, oh dear, there was a fellow that, author, a poet that used to come from Detroit.

IB: Oh, Edgar Guess

Haight: Edgar Guess and I met him there.

IB: Oh, you did?

Haight: Oh, yeah. Edgar Guess, oh, when he came, man, you better be on the ball.

IB: Oh, really?

Haight: Yes.

IB: Why is that?

Haight: Well, he's, he was Henry Hunt's friend and everything had to be just right.

IB: Henry Hunt, H U N T?

Haight: Yeah, and his son, oh, the president, his son worked in engineering and everything had to be just so, so. You know, Joe Scheer came one time. He was the second president that I knew and they went and had a nice picture of Henry Hunt made and they put it, hung it up in the Steering Gear Room and they put a cloth over it, you know, and everybody stood around there and thought it was a great deal. They pulled that down, ohhh, talk about a man being mad. He said, holy Christ fellows. He said, I ain't dead. He said, I'm not dead. Get that picture down and don't never put it up again so we put it up in the attic and after a few years, then Mr. Tucker took it down to Detroit where Scheer lived. Oh, was he mad. Oh, they all stood there, you know, everybody cheerin', all that. Well, that cheering didn't go over so good. Another, one day, they said to me, Dale Roberts is coming here.

IB: Oh, yes.

Haight: You know who he is?

IB: Yes, I do.

Haight: And they said, we're gonna have him spend the day so get the clubhouse all in good shape. So he came to the clubhouse and most all Lansing was there and he bought a lot of trucks 'cause he had a lot of horses and he moved these horses around in these trucks down in California but talk about a good looking guy.

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IB: Yes, he was. I wish I'd been there that day.

Haight: He was handsome. Well, you've seen him on television now, haven't you, where he drives that big car around, his hair is gray and has big, long horns on the front of his car.

IB: He's from Oklahoma.

Haight: Yeah, he was...

IB: The Reo special built some of his horse vans and his trucks and things for him.

Haight: Yes, yup. Bought a lot of 'em.

IB: So you got to meet him or you just saw him?

Haight: No, no, no. Talked with him.

IB: Did they have a banquet for him or a lunch or...

Haight: No, no, he just came in and I talked to him.

IB: Did ya?

Haight: Oh, yeah.

IB: What'd you two talk about?

Haight: Well, we just talked about his horse and the movies he made and a lot of kids came in and they said, well, Dale, where's your horse and he said, I left it back in Hollywood. They said, we wanted to see your horse so bad. Yeah, and some even had..... time to come, they come a week ahead of time, the kids.

IA: They were so excited.

Haight: So excited to see him, yeah. And I seen Blackstone.

IB: The magician?

Haight: Yeah. Boy, I've seen so many.

IA: Sounds like anybody who was famous who came to Lansing ended up one way or another at the clubhouse.

Haight: Well, somewhere, now, somewhere along the line, you got a chance to see 'em but a lot of 'em we'd go to Las Vegas and we'd go to, oh, what's that other place.

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IB: Atlantic City?

Haight: Atlantic City and then we saw Mickey Rooney in Chicago or in Detroit, New York, the Sugar Babies.

IB: Sugar Babies.

Haight: Yup, and he left there and went to England. A lot of 'em.

IB: A lot of 'em came through the clubhouse, though, didn't they over the years?

Haight: Yes.

IB: A lot of important people, local and statewide and countrywide.

Haight: That's right, anybody that was something and then when the Civic Center come in then it gradually begin to go down and that's when it began to hurt.

IB: When did the Civic Center first get built?

IA: Some time in the '60s or '50s?

IB: Sometime in the '50s...

Haight: '50s, '60s, somethin' like early '60s, yeah.

IB: Late '50s, early '60s.

Haight: And now, now they're going down.

IB: Yeah, they have a new one.

Haight: Yup, they're going down.

IA: Mr. Haight, I just have a couple of questions. One of the things that I like to know about is family background a little bit. So there's just a couple more things. I know a little bit about your dad but I wanted to know, was he born in Michigan, too, like you? Was he born he?

Haight: Dakotas.

IA: He was born out in the Dakotas? Were they ranches or settlers out there?

Haight: I don't know. All I know, my dad was 13 years old when he left home.

IA: He left without his family on his own?

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Haight: Well, yeah, he just wanted to go out and do something. He run away from home when he was 13 and he went to shoe, horseshoes at Ringling Brothers and Barnum Bailey and then he'd been over the Panama Canal and shot a lot of the mules and he said they used to die there by the hundreds.

IA: 'Cause of the malaria.

Haight: Yeah, and working so hard and it was so hot.

IB: Oh, the mules died.

Haight: Yes.

IA: And how did he end up here after all those adventures?

Haight: Well, I don't know unless he got to ramblin' around and kind a liked Michigan and then my mother was born in Indiana.

IA: Okay.

Haight: There's a funny thing. My dad had a glass shoe and my mother had a right shoe, ah, glass and when they got together, they were mates. They were mates.

IB: My goodness sake. Oh, that's kind a spooky.

IA: Yeah.

Haight: So my dad shod horse around Lake Odessa and Mulligan. I was born in Mulligan. Then we went, I think I lived there about a month and then we went to, lived on Thompson Street, 1905 Thompson Street.

IB: In Lansing?

IA: In Lansing on the north side?

Haight: Yeah, Lansing, yup.

IA: So you don't know how they both ended up here, your mom and your dad?

Haight: Well, yeah, because the Depression come on and my dad went back shoeing horses so the horse, right down here at the end of the street, there was a blacksmith shop.

IB: Oh, really?

Haight: Yeah.

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IA: What I meant was how he ended up in Lansing, you know, from all of his travels and everything. He just came.

Haight: They just met and he shod horses in Mulligan and...

IA: Oh, I see, in the area.

Haight: In that area.

IA: Where'd he meet your mother?

Haight: Pardon?

IA: Did they meet here, your dad and your mom, did they meet here? I mean, in the mid-Michigan area?

Haight: Yes, they were married in Charlotte.

IA: Oh, okay.

Haight: So, and my dad used to go out, over here to Fowlerville Fairgrounds and shoe horses and I was with him the day the horse kicked him.

IB: A horse kicked him?

Haight: Yeah, one of the race horses and there weren't, years ago, those old buildings, in '29 and it pretty near pushed him right out through the side of the building and he said this is the last horse I'm ever gonna shoe. None of the other horses ever kicked me. So he quit here and went to Oldsmobile and he was a smart cookie and he was on the line and then, I don't, something about engineering, I think that was it, for he got through, well, where they make tools.

IB: Tool and die?

Haight: Tool and die, yup. He died in 1962. No, I'm wrong, 1952. My mother and dad are buried up here in Webberville Cemetery.

IA: It sounds like he had a very interesting early life.

Haight: Yeah, he'd been around.

IB: I think you've had a very interesting life so far and it's still going.

Haight: The only part about this, when I retired I was 56.

IB: Oh, you took a retirement from the Reo or Beam?

Haight: Well, when it went down...

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IB: Oh, that's right, of course. I keep forgetting.

Haight: When they went down in '75, I was 56. Now I'm 74. So you see, but I'm pretty lucky to have all these years of retirement. And I married a nice gal here.

IB: Did you get any kind of, I know a lot of the people that worked at Reo lost the benefits, retirement benefits and everything else in what happened at the very end. Did you get retirement benefits or were you caught up in that situation, too.

Haight: No, no. No, I, I got my retirement.

IA: You did, oh, good.

Haight: Because I had my 30 years and three months.

IB: And so you retired before they closed the doors?

Haight: No, after.

IB: After, but you were lucky enough to get your retirement?

Haight: Yup, and I invested money and bought a lot of stock and different things and...

IB: We've talked to so many people who didn't get anything from, you know, in the bankruptcy lost their retirement benefits and maybe eventually got \$100 a month or whatever.

Haight: Well, I know a lot of the fellows that lacked maybe a week of gettin' their retirement and I think some fellows, a couple fellows shot themselves.

IA: Yeah, we heard about that.

Haight: And they turned out to be alcoholics and a lot of 'em, divorces because a lot of women say, well, you ain't got nothing. You've worked all these years, you haven't got anything. We're gonna call it quits. It was sad. It was a sad deal.

IB: Very tragic.

Haight: Yes.

IB: Especially when you worked your entire life thinking you're going to retire from that place and you'll have enough to live on and then suddenly the rug's pulled out. We had a volunteer at the Museum whose husband was in that same position and he went, didn't do good.

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Haight: What was his name?

IB: Let me think a minute, and he had a nervous breakdown and he was never the same after that. His wife said eventually they got, you know, with the settlement they got a little, \$130 or \$150 a month or some such thing and she said it cost more than that just for insurance. I'll have to think about her name. I can't recall it at this moment. He's passed away now.

Haight: There's Bob Montague. Ever interviewed him?

IB: Bob Montague?

Haight: Yes. His wife just passed away. He was a handsome man. He had class what he walked. God, the women just loved to see him. I mean, he was, they used to dress good. I was trying to think of the, there was a club in Lansing, Clark's, Clark, what is it.
Clark

IB: He's so worried but it's fine.

Haight: Yeah, it was Clarks. What we would do, the Steering Gear Club would go up Clark's Tailoring...

IB: Oh, Clark Tailors.

Haight: On Allegan. There used to be on Allegan. They've moved now. The guys would, I mean, they would dress. They really had suits and when we'd have the card parties, the girl's club would put it on and I mean, we had a lot of pretty women and I tell ya, they were something.

IA: We've heard about some pretty wild, they had parties up in the Steering Gear Club and we were told that they had lots of parties up there.

Haight: Yes.

IA: Louie used to tell us...

Haight: Oh, Louie liked to drink. He liked his drinks.

IB: I can he's a party guy.

Haight: Oh, yeah. Oh, he was a nice fellow.

IB: Yes, he is. We liked him.

Haight: Oh, you couldn't help but like Louie but I tended bar up there in the Steering Gear Room and when some of the fellows come in, I knew 'em.

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You know, you knew every foreman. You knew everybody and when I'd come in, they'd say, well, we want a triple shot, a triple to calm 'em down, 'cause you know, all keyed up during the day and they'd have double shots and we'd have parties up there. They'd play cards, a lot of cards till one or two o'clock in the morning but you never saw anybody get boisterous, want to get up and fight. They were all buddies. That's all there was to it. They were friends. We all were.

IA: Did the Steering Gear have its own, or the clubhouse have its own separate liquor license from the city, you know, or was it just like a regular restaurant getting a liquor license?

Haight: Well, gee, that's my job to take care of it. I don't think we had, yeah, we had a liquor license.

IA: I guess you would have to.

Haight: Yeah, we'd have to. Yeah, we had to and they'd bring, we had a lot of steps come up along side the building and they would drive up with their truck and we'd have to carry all that Schlitz beer up there and that was another one of my jobs and carry that Schlitz beer up there and have it all cold and iced for 'em. Well, when they'd come in there, boy, they were ready to, and then they'd go down in the basement, down in the basement and sometimes in the main lobby or in the big ballroom and that's where they had the banquets and we had that big, huge screen. Oh, it was just like, it was as nice a screen as some of these movies got today. They were huge that would show 115 foot and big pictures, that we'd show movies and different things. It was educational for the foremens and speakers and one time, we had in Bo, from Michigan, University of Michigan, Bo Schembeckler.

IA: Oh, Bo Schembeckler.

IB: Oh, Schembeckler.

Haight: Yeah. You know the fellow that used to announce over the radio how...

IB: Ernie Harwell?

Haight: Well, we've had, I got a ball out in the garage area signed by Ernie Harwell, but ah, we just, well, I was gonna tell you about Biggie Munn and when he was up to the podium talking and he said to the boys, the white boys, black, too, he said, I'm gonna tell you fellows. He said, do you see these black boys what they're doing? They start up at J.C. Penneys and they run the whole length out to Michigan State University, you boys, you white boys don't start doin' that, you ain't gonna be on the team and look at 'em today. Look

who's taking over today. The black are good athletes but he said, you guys get in these busses and ride out there. He said, get off them busses. You start walking, or start running.

IB: You're gettin' soft.

Haight: Yes, but so while he was standing there, Oldsmobile had brought over, after they won the Rose Bowl, they brought on the stage this beautiful Oldsmobile. You never seen so much chrome on an automobile in your life and when I pulled open the curtains his knees buckled. That was his.

IA: Oh, wow.

IB: It as a gift to him.

Haight: It was a gift and another good speaker was Daugherty.

IB: Oh, really?

Haight: Oh, when he had a few drinks in him...

IB: Duffy Daugherty.

Haight: Daugherty could talk.

IB: Could he?

Haight: Yes, he was good. You just couldn't help but like Duff Daugherty.

IB: Well, look at the Perles who doesn't know how to speak but it's still fun to listen to.

Haight: But Daugherty was Irish and he loved to tell stories.

IB: He had the gift.

Haight: He could tell 'em. Roll right out of your seat on the floor but he was good. I talk too much?

IA: No, I was just, I'm getting anxious to see the pictures 'cause you keep telling us about them.

Haight: Well, you want to go out?

IB: Yes, we'd love to.

Haight: Well, why don't you wait here just a second till I move my cars out. It's kind of cold out.

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IB: I'll back mine up. I think I'm parked right behind you.

Haight: Got to move two cars there.

IB: Okay.