

Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 1

IA: This is Shirley Bradley. I'm at the home of Russell Alberts. We are going to be talking about Reo memories and this is April 16, 1992. And we are in Farwell, Michigan. Okay, um, when did you start working for Reo?

Alberts: June 18, 1928.

IA: And how did you happen to go to Reo?

Alberts: Well I went around with the kid that I went to school with and his dad was the superintendent over at a motor plant and ah, he got us a job there.

IA: What did you do when you first started?

Alberts: I worked on or as a trucker, 40 cents an hour.

IA: Is that right? What were you doing on the truck?

Alberts: I was pushing stock around.

IA: Pushing stock around.

Alberts: Yeah. But I worked up until January of that year or the next year and then I went on production. I was spraying paint.

IA: On trucks?

Alberts: Yeah, no.

IA: How did you do that? What did you use?

Alberts: Spray gun on a five gallon pail.

IA: Did anybody show you how to do that or they just said, here is your gun and go to it or

Alberts: Well you learn by error, I guess, you might say, without spraying wheels for the trucks. And our paint was, we had to go get our own paint and we had to do our own mixing.

IA: Oh you did?

Alberts: Now we sprayed all of a five gallon pail hold up on a block and tackle.

IA: It was overhead and it fed down through something?

Alberts: No, we had to hold it up to the girders and then tie a rope down below, a gravity .... they called it.

Russell Alberts  
4-16-92  
Page 2

IA: Ah huh.

Alberts: And then after that, they come in with a pressure tank, long after that.

IA: Did that make it easier?

Alberts: Oh yeah it made it easier, but we still had to mix your own thing.

IA: You did? Did ah, you have a certain proportion and what did you mix the paint with?

Alberts: Well it was spray and oil finish, we had to mix it with Japan dryer.

IA: What was that like a lacquer?

Alberts: Turpentine.

IA: Turpentine, it made the paint dry faster?

Alberts: It was suppose to, yeah. The Jap dryer is what made it dry faster.

IA: Oh really, what was that? Was that a

Alberts: Ah, I don't know what it was, what the mixture was, I don't know.

IA: Like it was a chemical.

Alberts: All I know is we called it Jap dryer.

IA: I see.

Alberts: But it set it up faster.

IA: And these were just for the wheels.

Alberts: Yeah, and I don't know. All the same thing process went on the .... they spread those upstairs, but ah, it was the same deal, same mixture.

IA: Ah, what do you remember about the people that you worked with? Were they friendly, did they show you how to do the job?

Alberts: Oh it goes, it is like, I worked with a three man crew ah, one guy was name of Lloyd Miller, he was finishing while I was priming it. And then when we came downstairs in the new plant I worked with ah, someone by the name of Abel McCord and ah, Hugo Hymes, a little fellow that I don't remember his name anymore, but they were a three man crew. But ah, liquid spray and paint in 1935 only .....

Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 3

IA: It was bothered beginning to bother you?

Alberts: Oh yeah. I got where i couldn't eat anything.

IA: Is that right? What kind of precautions or safety devices did you have? Did you wear a mask or no.

Alberts: We were spraying in section booms with odor driven fan. We had to clean our own booms out every night.

IA: Clean all the paint up?

Alberts: We had to pull all the, there were lined with paper, we had to pull all the paper off and put new paper in it and then we had to take a club and beat on the stacks outside and knock all the overspray down and clean that out.

IA: Like big filtering stacks that supposedly took the paint fumes out?

Alberts: Oh great big stacks all up the outside of the building, all that paint fuel going up the stacks. But it would catch on the side and pile up and then we had to knock it lose. But I ....

IA: You did that once a week.

Alberts: Yeah, on Friday night.

IA: Hum, what kind of hours were you working? Were you working

Alberts: Ten hours a day, five days and a half a week.

IA: Is that, and what year was that when you started doing that?

Alberts: Nineteen twenty-eight when I, I went to spraying paint in 1929.

IA: So production must have been pretty good if you were working

Alberts: Yeah it was, but I don't know what sells, but production was pretty good.

IA: It must have been. It must have been.

Alberts: And I worked in the spray .... until 1935 and I had to get out of there and I went down in the frame assembly room working on an air hammer.

IA: What were you doing with that? What were you working on?

Alberts: That was fastening frames together.

Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 4

IA: Oh, fastening frames together. With rivets?

Alberts: Oh we had an .... of rivets put them in the holes and the .....  
drove them down.

IA: Was it hard work?

Alberts: Oh but it was noisy. I think that's what wrecked my ears.

IA: You didn't have ear protection or anything in those days. Were you  
ever hurt on the job?

Alberts: No. We had to turn our own frames over by hand after we riveted one  
side we had to turn them over and rivet the back side.

IA: Oh.

Alberts: They all had to be turned over, two men on one side and two men on  
the other side and the two men to pick the frame up and stand up on  
its side and the other two guys would catch it going down.

IA: Is that right?

Alberts: Ah huh. Yeah, they finally put a chain hoist in to help us out a  
little bit. We had to argue with them, that was before the days of  
the union.

IA: Yes, I'm interested ah, before I talk to you about the union, I  
wanted to ask about your own background. Ah, how far had you gone  
in school? What was your educational background before you started  
working?

Alberts: Ninth grade.

IA: You went to the ninth grade. Where did you go to school?

Alberts: I didn't go through the ninth grade, I went to the ninth grade.

IA: Oh to the ninth grade. And what school was that? Where was that?

Alberts: Over at North School.

IA: In south

Alberts: Over on Miller Road.

IA: On Miller Road in south of Lansing. Um, what did you do, you quit  
school then at the end of the eighth grade, why did you quit?

Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 5

Alberts: Well it was either quit or starve, one or the other. I was working for a farmer and ah, I got as far as you go in school and it was interfering with my working, you know, on the farm and that's where I made my home. So I just quit school.

IA: Were a lot of boys at that time quitting school and going to work on the farms or

Alberts: Yeah, a lot of the farm boys they go to the eighth grade and they quit. But ah, those that went on to high school had to go to Holt.

IA: Ah huh. How long did you stay on the farm?

Alberts: I left there in 1925 and went into the Army or Air Force.

IA: Army-Air Force. And how old were you when you went into the Army?

Alberts: Oh I was there three years.

IA: You went in

Alberts: Nineteen twenty-five and discharged 1928.

IA: Oh, what did you do in the Army?

Alberts: I was an electrician.

IA: Oh you were. You hadn't known how to do that before they trained you?

Alberts: No I learned that on the job.

IA: Hum, and so then you were discharged in 20

Alberts: I was discharged in May 1928 and I went to work at the Reo June 18, 1928.

IA: So you weren't out of the Army very long.

Alberts: I was out long enough to get broke and then I had to go to work.

IA: Ah let's go back and talk about the union a bit. You said you worked in the shops before the union came in.

Alberts: Oh yeah.

IA: What was that like working without a union? Do you think the

Alberts: It was anything but pleasant.

Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 6

IA: Why was that? What

Alberts: You didn't have any, anything on your side. I've known of a foreman coming down the assembly line say eny, meny, miny mo, you don't get your time. The guy said what did I do, he said go get your time, he had a friend that wanted a job.

IA: You are all done, you are out.

Alberts: That was, he had no recourse, I mean ah, they just pushed you out. The working conditions weren't the best. We had no relief set up for people to go to the john. We had ah, we had no relief during the working hours.

IA: Is that right and you working 10 hour days there for a while.

Alberts: We were working a 10 hour day with her.

IA: Well you just got a lunch break and that was all? Huh?

Alberts: But ah, I don't know, it was, there was a lot of bad about em, there was probably some good to it, we all belonged to what they called the old Reo Association. We paid 10 cents a week out of our paycheck for a benefit association. Ah, we got a ticket to go to the movie, they had movies once a week.

IA: At the clubhouse?

Alberts: At the clubhouse.

IA: What other benefits did you get for your 10 cents a week.

Alberts: Huh?

IA: What other benefits were you suppose to get for that 10 cents a week?

Alberts: (laugh) We got death benefits for our youngsters or anybody that died in your family. I think when your sister died, I got \$50. That paid for the funeral.

IA: Oh is that right?

Alberts: But aside of any other benefits, there wasn't any.

IA: What about safety on the job? You talked about having to turn the frames over by hand.

Alberts: There wasn't any safety.

Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 7

IA: If somebody got hurt.

Alberts: If they got hurt they took them to the hospital up town.

IA: Sparrow Hospital or something.

Alberts: I got hot scaled .... in my eyes one time and ah, flash off a rivet and they took me over to the main plant to the hospital and they sent me up town to an ear, eye, nose job doctor and he ah, it seared itself into the retina of my eye and he dug that out of there and put a patch on it and sent me home or back to work, whichever you want to call it.

IA: You probably didn't dare be off from work to long did you?

Alberts: But no,

IA: Would they let you go if you were off for a few days?

Alberts: Well no not really, I mean if you were off through illness or something like that, but if you just .... took time off, you'd come in the next day, you might not have a job. This all happened before the days of the union.

IA: Before the days of the union. Were you there in was it 1935 when they had that labor holiday?

Alberts: I just, there was a piece in the paper about it, or my union paper, I don't know whether you got it or not.

IA: No, but I'd like to see it.

Alberts: Well I'll get it for you.

IA: About the labor holiday.

Alberts: Well it was an illegal holiday really. Lester Washburn was the president of the .... Metal, ..... and he was out of town on business and his wife, Leva, ... children lived down on south Cedar at the time, she was in bed asleep and the sheriff told Mike McDonald he just busted in the door and grabbed her out of bed in the nightcoat and took her downtown and throw her jail. And he did it to get Lester to come back to town. So Lester got back to Lansing about 2:00 in the morning, she was in jail.

IA: My gosh that was

Alberts: They called the union authorities and they declared a city-wide strike. They closed everything up. Lansing was closed tighter than a drum. And we worked up until 11:30 and then at noon they shut the

Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 8

plant down and send us home. There wasn't anybody, ah they had a big assembly crossways of Washington Avenue down by Arbaugh's. They had another one over on the north end of town. Ah, they all congregated down around the jail, the police disappeared.

IA: Is that right?

Alberts: Oh they got off the streets.

IA: They didn't want anything to do with it.

Alberts: And my father had, what really started it was this strike over at the Lansing, City of Lansing Wrecking Company. Ah, they had a bunch of pickets out there and they been battling with the people ahead of the wrecking company and ah, they put the pickets in jail along with her. They had to let them all out, or that would have torn that town apart.

IA: That was really illegal taking her like that, wasn't it?

Alberts: That was it was tided up tighter than a drum.

IA: Did you safe that or did you send it home with Jim?

Alberts: Huh?

IA: You went to school with

Alberts: What .... what school..... His wife was one of the Canfield girls.

IA: And this talks about

Alberts: Your aunt, Thelma, married one of the Canfield clan, but that is a whole ...

IA: This is an interesting article. Remember Lester Washburn leader of the 1937 general strike. That's the general strike, okay, the labor holiday, that was a different thing, wasn't it? Hum, this is interesting, I'd like to read that all.

Alberts: That picture down there, I think that is taken out in front of the, out in front of city hall.

IA: Yeah, it says traffic ground to a halt as union members from every part of Lansing walked off their jobs.

Alberts: Town tied up so tight you couldn't squeak.

IA: Is that right. And so that was in protest

Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 9

Alberts: Forcing them to let those people out of jail.

IA: That was really what did it.

Alberts: They had no business putting her in jail in the first place. The only reason they did it was to get him back to town.

IA: Isn't that something. Boy. Um,

Alberts: You haven't got this turned on have you?

IA: Yes.

Alberts: Well turn it off for just a minute.

(Tape turned back on)

IA: And Washburns lived on south Cedar, in the south part of Lansing, fairly close to the shop then. A lot of people that worked at the Reo lived right, kind of around.

Alberts: Well ..... the south end of Lansing.

IA: How did you get to work, did you have a car in those days?

Alberts: Streetcar.

IA: A nickel a ride?

Alberts: Oh you walked down to the main drag and caught the streetcar.

IA: Oh. A lot of people I've talked to either most all of them walked to work or

Alberts: A lot of them walked to work, yeah.

IA: Yeah, yeah.

Alberts: Of course, very few of us had automobiles.

IA: Cars were expensive then and what kind of wages were you making when you were working

Alberts: I got, 40 cents an hour when I was trucking stock and when I went on piece work, you could make 60 cents an hour. If you made any over that they had a time setter right on your back.

IA: Oh really?

Alberts: That's one reason why I quit when I did the first time.

Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 10

IA: When did you quit the first time?

Alberts: They sent this guy by the name of Patterson up there to time us out and the only timing he done was when you pull the trigger on the spray gun he started the watch and when you finished your job spraying, he shut the watch off. If you had to go and get stock or if you had to go up for the paint, paint department and get your paint, that was free gratis, you didn't get paid for that. The only way you got paid for it would be turn .... time.

IA: You had to go get your own supplies?

Alberts: Get your own stock and your own tank. When he put the lunch on there, the only time I went to the ... was while you was actually spraying the paint. When they turn around they cut our rates, they cut it so bad we couldn't make 25 cents an hour and so I and the guy was finished with me both quit.

IA: In protest.

Alberts: I lived across the street from a truck plant at that time, and ah I went home.

IA: The truck plant was on south Washington

Alberts: Yeah.

IA: and Mount Hope, kind of in that area?

Alberts: South of Mount Hope Avenue.

IA: South of Mount Hope and then Washington.

Alberts: But ah, I had to get downstairs and sit down there on a porch swing ..... across the street from a truck plant and a guy by the name of Bert Street was the superintendent, and he used to come out there on the ramp and he'd look over and he'd see me sitting out there and I guess it kind of irked him a little bit, but they wasn't having any luck on getting any production, because they had a crew hiring in and the crew working and a crew quitting all the time. And they couldn't make any money.

IA: That was because....

Alberts: And ah, it went on for about 10 days and finally one day, Cup came over with a slip of paper in his hand and he said you take this over to the main plant to the office and get hired back in again. Ah, that was about 9:00 in the morning and I said well I'm in no big a hurry. You haven't given me a fair deal, so I'm just going to let you hang. So I got over to the main plant about 11:00 that morning

Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 11

and this Helen Smith that you are talking about she was the secretary of the employment office and I got in line with a great big long line of guys and she spotted me down there and she come out there and motioned me in. Chewed me out for standing out there waiting. I got signed up and she says you take this and go back over to the truck plant, they are waiting for you. I got over there about 1:00 that afternoon and run right in to the visiting superintendent and he stomped all over. I sent for you at 9:00 this morning. I said I was in no hurry to get over here, I said you wasn't in any hurry to raise my rates, so what they done they just reinstated all the old rates because they couldn't, guys couldn't make any money.

IA: So it went back to 60 cents an hour.

Alberts: ... effect, went back to ..... They would allow you to make 60 cents an hour. That was the limit.

IA: Oh, that was as much as you could make an hour.

Alberts: What caused the guy to come up .... they was running a bank, well we had stockpiled up what we had already done that we couldn't turn in, and we just keep track of it as if we had a bank up there ...

IA: Oh I see, you kind of overproduced and then

Alberts: We had a day where we didn't run out of stock, we'd draw out the bank.

IA: Oh. Ah huh.

Alberts: That was .... to come over.

IA: Oh I see.

Alberts: A guy by the name of Pat Patterson. .... run into him down the street, I was going to flush him down the drain. But any rate, I have .... I went down to the frame room and I went to working down there with a crew and I worked there until the .... everybody from the truck plant over to the main plant. They ah, rebuilt the main plant and they quit building pleasure cars, that was 1938.

IA: Six.

Alberts: Seven, they moved us all over to the main plant. We worked over there for about about a year when they shut the plant down, it went bankrupt. And they sent everybody home, they laid everybody off. In '39 I got a job over at the Fisher Body and I stayed there.

Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 12

IA: What did you do at the Fisher Body?

Alberts: Sprayed paint.

IA: Sprayed paint. Were the conditions, when you went from Reo to Fisher, did you see a change in conditions for spray painting?

Alberts: Not really.

IA: It was

Alberts: Ah, ..... when he built the Star over there back in the '20s. Now they were dirty you'd go in there in the morning with a clean coat on, and come out looking like so much ..... But, we had showers, that much we had. We could change our clothes.

IA: Did that get better over time? Did the working conditions get better?

Alberts: Well as long as we were up there, when they built the new ah, night shop downstairs, they moved us all down there, it was supposed to be all air-conditioned. And that was a lot better deal. Of course, that was after the unions came in, we had relief then.

IA: Ah ah huh, and maybe some better working conditions.

Alberts: Oh yeah.

IA: Um, going back, you mentioned strike again, and I wanted to know and unions, after the union came in to the Reo did things get better for you as a worker?

Alberts: No not really. I guess you could say it did some.

IA: What ways would you think of as better?

Alberts: We went out on strike, we was first sit down strike in Lansing.

IA: Were you involved in that?

Alberts: Oh yeah, I sat down around my backside for a month during cold weather. And ah,

IA: You were inside the building during the

Alberts: Oh yeah, we run everybody out and ..... run them right out into the streets. Now we just took over the plant.

IA: Were you a little bit worried about how that was going to come out?

Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 13

Alberts: We cleaned machinery. We swept the floor, we cleaned the building.

IA: Oh that's interesting.

Alberts: We kept busy.

IA: Oh I didn't know that.

Alberts: We had our own kitchen. We had our own minister on Sunday.

IA: You did?

Alberts: By the way that minister almost lost his congregation over that. They wasn't approve of it.

IA: Is that a fact?

Alberts: It was a minister from East Lansing and, of course, they were dead set against it, organized labor out there at the college. He was a minister of that Unitarian church out there. But at any rate,

IA: And he would come in to, he was allowed to come in.

Alberts: He preached a sermon.

IA: He was allowed to come in and go out, nobody tried to stop him.

Alberts: But nobody else was allowed in, nobody. We were fixing to go home one day a week.

IA: Oh you could? Oh I didn't know that either.

Alberts: But we didn't get any strike pay or anything like that, we laborers or some people like that simplified with the unions activities, whatever they donated or things like that, but we never got any strike pay like they get now.

IA: Well you said you had your own kitchens, where did you get your food?

Alberts: Went out and begged or go around to the stores told who we were, what the deal was. They contributed.

IA: Reo was important to Lansing's economy, so I imagine the merchants

Alberts: Yeah they were, but they were going downhill

IA: Reo was, you are saying.

Alberts: Yeah, they built that Reo .... in 1931 and that's what ... kids.

Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 14

IA: And you had the Depression and everything else speeding into it.

Alberts: They never come back. And then they quit, they quit building the pleasure cars in 1937 I think was the last one they built.

IA: We've got a 1936 Flying Cloud at the museum and I've been told that that was the last model that was put out. It was stripped down, it didn't have all the luxury items on it, because he thought it wouldn't sell if he had it

Alberts: That one that was down there when I was there?

IA: Yeah.

Alberts: Well that's a Royal.

IA: Oh we have that too, we also have a 1936 Flying Cloud.

Alberts: Oh well there was another one they built, they built the old Reo Wolverine.

IA: Oh the Wolverine, yeah.

Alberts: Yeah, that was a four door sedan.

IA: It was.

Alberts: They never built, they only built the sedans, they didn't build any cabs or anything like that, they just built a sedan.

IA: I see.

Alberts: A two door and a four door and that was the only thing they built. But, they built a good car. They built a darn good truck. You couldn't wear those things out, it was impossible. Ah, my stepdad had a Reo, a Reo wagon they called Speedwagon.

IA: Yeah.

Alberts: Ah, the old Reo T6 was a four door sedan and it was just a, it was a truck chassis and loader with a pleasure car body mounted on it, really that was all there was.

IA: Really?

Alberts: But you couldn't wear them out. And that was one I think one of the reasons why the Reo kind of went haywire because there was no replacement. But they had a foreign shipment for its truck plant that Ford Motor Company tried to invest them to buy it and Reo wouldn't sell it. They shipped trucks all over the world.

Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 15

IA: And what did Ford want to do?

Alberts: He wanted the truck business. He didn't want the plant, he just wanted their ah, foreign shipment business.

IA: He wanted their foreign markets?

Alberts: Yeah, because they were shipping trucks all over the world.

IA: So he wanted to buy it out or something?

Alberts: He wanted to buy it, he wanted to buy that part of the business out.

IA: And they wouldn't sell it.

Alberts: No they had to good a thing going there.

IA: Oh sure.

Alberts: Shoot, that plant was working seven days a week. That's where this Washburn worked, he was a carpenter over there. They .... they'd take these jobs over there after they come off the line, they would run them over there and then they would dismantle them and pack them in these great big long packing boxes. And they were loaded on ships or hauled out of there, loaded on ships and sent out. They had a worldwide market on that and Ford he wasn't doing to good with his trucks, he tried to buy it, but they wouldn't sell it.

IA: I interviewed somebody recently who worked at the line next to where those trucks were broken down and they said that women, women were working on that line and they were breaking the trucks down and packing them. And he said they could take a truck apart

Alberts: Women?

IA: That's what he said. He said they could take a truck apart in no time.

Alberts: There wasn't any women work there.

IA: That took the trucks apart that were put into the packing cases?

Alberts: The only women, there wasn't any women working there that I know of except the war.

IA: Oh really? It was just mostly men, you never saw any women in your department.

Alberts: I never saw any women anywhere at the truck plant.

Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 16

IA: Is that, in the truck plant, okay.

Alberts: No, I never saw any women around there. If there were, they kept out of sight, because we never had any.

Wife(?): He said during the war, honey.

IA: No, no I was talking

Alberts: No, no,

IA: Well, maybe this did happen during the war.

Alberts: Nothing before the war.

IA: Um, let me see now, what do I want to ask you next. Oh, I know what I want to ask you. We mentioned the clubhouse just briefly and you went to the clubhouse, you had a movie pass you could go to the clubhouse.

Alberts: Ah once a month I think it was or once every three months, I forget which it was. They give you a card that was your pass to the movies or pass to the clubhouse. You could go to the movies on Thursday night and ah, use the clubhouse and club rooms. They had a big bowling alley downstairs.

IA: Did you ever go down there?

Alberts: No I never went down there. They had a family room where people would bring their children. They had a cafeteria, it was a beautiful cafeteria, all over the clubhouse.

IA: Oh really? What about the radio station? I've heard about WREO?

Alberts: Well they built that radio station when radio first came in and it was up on the top floor of the clubhouse, way up in the top of it.

IA: What was that a three floor building?

Alberts: I don't know how many floors there was, but this radio station was clear up at the top of the building.

IA: I see.

Alberts: And they had two great big masts that one set on one end of the building and one on the other end. Michigan State Police bought one of them, I don't know whether it still stand up there in Houghton Lake or not.

IA: Oh the tower?

Russell Alberts  
4-16-92  
Page 17

Alberts: Yeah the tower.

IA: Is that right? That's interesting.

Alberts: One kilowatt transmitter and they broadcast, they had their own orchestra and they broadcast on Thursday nights chamber music. I forget how long the program run but I was a kid on the farm when they brought that in and I had gone down to Laraby and I bought a part for a crystal set and I and a kid where I was living, we put that thing together. And ah, we run the antennae from the old silo over to the house upstairs bedroom and on Thursday nights, we'd tickle that old galena(?) crystals until we could find the music and then we'd have one..... part of it and we'd listen to the Reo.

IA: Oh that must have been a real treat.

Alberts: But ah when tube radios came in, I bought a one tube radio, a Crosley, from Whereabys ..... and ah, I got a battery and the whole ball of wax and then we can listen to the stock reports and the grain reports out of the college, WKAR, and on the Reo on Thursday night and once and a while we pick up an east coast station. But ah, ..... I'll tell you when you stop and look at them now, but at any rate, we were up there one night listening to the radio and a storm came up and lightening hit the antenna and it melted that antenna into a million pieces and it knocked the headphone right off our head and burnt up the crystal set. And we didn't have any ground on it, but that ended that for a while.

IA: Oh you were the ground.

Alberts: Yeah.

IA: It is a wonder it didn't fry your ears. My gosh, what a shock. Um, next to the Reo clubhouse, this was in the '30's, but I remember there was a big train wreck.

Alberts: Yeah.

IA: What do you remember about that?

Alberts: Yeah, I was coming down Washington Avenue and went across the Grand Trunk railroad tracks and I was headed south, I don't think I was more than a block away when ah, that train come through there, hit that tower. There was a kid peddling papers out there in front of the station, passenger station,

IA: Ah huh the depot?

Alberts: When that train jumped the tracks, it wiped that station pretty near wiped it right off the map.

Russell Alberts  
4-16-92  
Page 18

IA: Is that right?

Alberts: It killed him.

IA: Oh it killed that little boy.

Alberts: I couldn't have been more than a block away from it when it happened.

IA: You must have been pretty shocked, all this noise going on behind you?

Alberts: I heard it crack, the commotion, but I didn't stop.

IA: Oh you didn't?

Alberts: But this train come through and I don't really remember what caused the wreck, but it jumped the tracks.

IA: The entire train.

Alberts: And it went right in to the track side of the station, knocked that tower down.

IA: The signal tower, I guess they used to call it. What about the man inside the tower, I wonder if he'

Alberts: I guess he survived it alright.

IA: He did.

Alberts: But ah,

IA: Did it damage the clubhouse at all? Or did everything go on the north side of the cars

Alberts: The south side of the tracks, were on the south side of the station.

IA: Ah huh, ah huh, and the clubhouse was on the other side.

Alberts: The clubhouse was out in front of the Washington Avenue.

IA: Ah huh.

Alberts: The only thing that ah bordered the tracks that belonged to Reo was the former Chipwood(?) building.

IA: Oh okay.

Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 19

Alberts: But anyway, it wiped that station, the front of part of that station right off the map.

IA: What year would that have been, do you think, 1936 or somewhere in there?

Alberts: Oh lordy I don't remember now just what it was.

IA: It seems like I was about five and that would have been '36.

Alberts: I think it was right around there somewhere.

IA: Ah huh, I remember that we went down, our neighbor took us down in their car so we could see it later in the day it was raining, I remember that. I remember seeing those cars laying all over.

Alberts: I don't remember what year that was.

IA: Yeah, yeah, hum. Um, let's see here. Do you remember ah, having ever seen in Lansing the, you've seen the Reo Olds home, I'm sure, did you ever see Mr. Olds himself? Never did?

Alberts: No. Oh we were youngsters, we used to go uptown to the show on Saturday and Reo Olds lived in that big mansion on the corner of Main Street and Washington Avenue and they'd have garden parties out there.

IA: Oh.

Alberts: And us kids would hang around that hedgerow out there on Washington Avenue and watch them.

IA: So, all in all, your years at Reo probably you weren't any worse than they would have been working anywhere else say?

Alberts: No, I don't know, about the same, I worked there 11 years. And then ah, I went back and worked during the war, but

IA: You went back to the Reo during the war? When did you go back, '41, '42 or

Alberts: Well they shut us down, they transferred 600 of us from Fisher over to Olds

IA: Oh you oh.

Alberts: to finish up car production.

IA: Oh really?

Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 20

Alberts: And then ah, I worked over there, I think, about a couple months.

IA: At the

Alberts: At the Oldsmobile.

IA: At Oldsmobile, finishing up cars.

Alberts: And when they finally shut it down, they laid everybody off, ah, I was on my way home and I run into this Hilda Smith that day and she stopped me and she says, wanted to know if I got laid off and I say yeah, she said I suppose my husband did too, he works at Fisher. I said I don't know, I said he probably did. So I went on home, about 5:00 that next morning, somebody started pounding on my front door and I got up and went to the door, and there is Charlie Cobb.

IA: The Lansing policeman.

Alberts: Reo.

IA: Oh Reo policeman.

Alberts: And he had a ... exam said you are suppose to be over at the Reo at 8:00 this morning. I didn't ask her for a job, she ah, that was when they was putting on Navy ordinance into production.

IA: Oh.

Alberts: And they had one shift on it and they put a second shift on, so she just arbitrarily went back in and made out a hiring slip and told the club to bring it over and give it to me. So I went over there and went to work.

IA: What did you, and you went into the Navy Department? What were they doing in there?

Alberts: Building bomb .....

IA: Oh really? What was your job?

Alberts: I was a machine setup man.

IA: Oh you were. That's like, is that like tool and dye or is that putting the dyes on the machine.

Alberts: No we had to set the machines and keep the tools from going. Ah, we had to make out the time for it was all group work, we had to make out the time at night.

IA: Group work?

Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 21

Alberts: What they call a group work. You all worked in a group and ah, when you made out the time ... you took the final count off the last operation and ah, divided it into the number of people in the group.

IA: Oh really? Isn't that interesting.

Alberts: It was all fish(?) work at the time.

IA: I see.

Alberts: They never would ah, you couldn't get the .... to agree.... work. It was all fish(?) work. But anyway I worked there until the war ended and then I went back over to Fisher.

IA: You were transferred back or you had to rehire back in?

Alberts: Oh I got recalled to Fisher Body.

IA: Oh after peacetime production started?

Alberts: Go back to ..... and ah, well I didn't have to rehire, I got signed in again. Because I had a leave of absence for the duration of the war.

IA: Oh for the duration of the war.

Alberts: I decided to go over and turn my leave of absence in and got reassigned.

IA: What did Fisher do during the war, what did they produce?

Alberts: They built anti-aircraft gun mounts and rear stabilizers for these big bombers.

IA: Oh I didn't know that. And Reo made trucks.

Alberts: Reo, they wasn't going to do anything, they were going to mothball the plant.

IA: Oh they were?

Alberts: And they didn't want to tear it apart. The union, I was over at the Reo when that happened. But ah, the union threw a big picket line around the plant and they manned it. They availed themselves ..... war work that was ... flat out and they had quite a run over there with them, but they finally gave in and remodeled the plant and they made, I don't know whether body plant, where they built the bodies, they turned that into a big long line where they wielded gun mounts for the naval aircraft for our naval ground forces. And then

Russell Alberts  
4-16-92  
Page 22

ah, they got this contract for rear stabilizer fins for the big bombers.

IA: That's interesting. No one has ever told me that.

Alberts: Well they wasn't going to, they wasn't going to take any war work, they was just going to mothball the plant,

IA: Just shut it down.

Alberts: but they got the union forced them into it.

IA: And they got a contract from the government?

Alberts: Huh?

IA: And they probably got a contract

Alberts: Yeah they had all kinds of work. But ah, I got they called me back to work over there and sent for me and I went over, I was working at the Reo ..... plant at the time and they sent for me and I went over on a Saturday morning. They were going to send me over to the old Rand Bowen plant on sandblasting, and I wouldn't go. And I said no, I'm not going to take that job, I'm already working in a machine shop over at Reo. And so we didn't have any labor relations at that time, but we had a personnel director,

IA: Oh you didn't.

Alberts: so they send us in to see old man Burrough.

IA: This was at

Alberts: He wanted to know what the problem was, I said well I says I'm employed there in ... over at the Reo and I said ah, they've sent for me to send me over to Rand Bowen to sandblasting and I'm not going to take it. I says I don't have enough, I didn't have enough seniority there to worry about and he said well he said if you are working on a war job, you don't have to. So he made me on a leave of absence for the duration. And I signed it and the next day I got it in the mail.

IA: Oh.

Alberts: So when they notified the union that they sent for it and come back to work and he didn't show up, you were automatically fired. Well, of course, I refused to take the job over at sandblasting. What were were doing is sandblasting a big shell casing. And ah, the union and the government got into it and the government says if they

Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 23

are working on war work, so be it. They are going to lose it, they was going to cancel our seniority,

IA: Is that right?

Alberts: General Motors was. And they said well, if they are working on war work at Reo or wherever, they don't have to come back. So I got a leave of absence from Fisher and went to work for Reo, but when they sent that notice out that we had to come back over there or we'd lose our seniority, that's when they went to bat with the government. The War Labor Relations Board took it up and they told General Motors that their employees that were working on war production at other plants was entitled to their seniority. They couldn't fire us. So when I went back there in the fall or winter of '45, I had all my seniority back.

IA: Great.

Alberts: I didn't lose anything over it.

IA: That is interesting.

Alberts: We had just gotten back and gotten our feed numbers when they told on strike, and we were on strike all winter.

IA: After the war? Ah huh. There were a lot of strikes right after the war I remember.

Alberts: Oh yeah, well.

IA: Coal strikes, steel strike and I suppose, do you remember what kind of money you were making during the war when you were working in the Navy ordinance?

Alberts: A dollar and ten cents an hour.

IA: Boy that was quite a jump from 60 cents.

Alberts: That was day rate. The rest of the operators, machine operators were drawing peace work, but I was on day rate.

IA: So you were making more?

Alberts: I got a \$1.10 an hour and when I left there and went back to Fisher Body I only got \$1.00 an hour.

IA: Oh you had to take a cut.

Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 24

Alberts: And then we got a raise, I went to \$1.05 and then I went to \$1.10 an hour and then it just kept going up to when I retired I was getting \$6.00 an hour and that's 22 years ago.

IA: What kind of changes did you see from the very beginning when you were painting truck wheels to when you retired? What kind of changes did you see in the process of painting?

Alberts: You talking about changes, all you got to do is look at the cars today to see the changes. Working conditions was considerably better. Over to Fisher we had our own shower room, our own locker rooms.

IA: This was after the war?

Alberts: Oh we didn't have that at Reo.

IA: What kind of safety equipment for the worker? Any kind of ah, masks or any kind of anything to keep you from inhaling?

Alberts: Just what plant are you talking about?

IA: I'm talking about the Fisher, I guess now. You said at the Reo there wasn't any.

Alberts: We had a respirator you wore over your face. Our blowers were, we had big blowers take care of the paint, but they done a poor job of it.

IA: Oh did they really?

Alberts: Yeah, when we were upstairs in the old paint shop, they didn't work very good. But when we moved downstairs, everything was sucked down into the water. We worked over big water tanks.

IA: Oh really? And this was after the war, much later. Ah huh.

Alberts: Once a week they cleaned those tanks out. I don't know where they hauled that stuff, but they cleaned it out.

IA: You didn't have to pound it with a hammer anymore once a week to clean it out.

Alberts: But over at the Reo we didn't have anything. Ah, we'd come out at the end of a day's work and everything we had on was all orange, because everything got painted orange over there.

IA: Oh it did. That was a primer?

Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 25

Alberts: They only had two colors, one was orange and the other was green, pullman green.

IA: Hum.

Alberts: And we painted all the trucks and the wheels were painted orange, unless it was scheduled different.

IA: I see.

Alberts: But we come out of there at night and you couldn't tell us from a bucket of orange paint. We didn't have any place to change clothes and no, no place to wash up or anything like that.

IA: What kind of, when it was lunchtime, did you have to eat right there on the line or

Alberts: Oh no, we had a, when it hit the old Reo, we had an hour off at noon. At Fisher we got a half hour.

IA: That is not much time.

Alberts: Well when I first went there, we only got 15 minutes to be honest about it.

IA: And you weren't getting any breaks like a morning break or an afternoon break.

Alberts: Oh we had a, we got a release man, but you only got I think it was two jobs in the morning and one in the afternoon, because the morning, the morning hours were they were right around five hours before it shut down for noon. And then the afternoon, they'd run the balance of the eight hours and we'd get only one ..... They could just about make it around the corner and back.

IA: Yeah. Um, but at the Reo you worked right straight through. You had an hour for lunch, but you worked, otherwise you worked right straight through.

Alberts: Now they worked right straight.

IA: And did you always work ah, a day shift at the Reo before, I'm talking before you quit and went back during the war?

Alberts: No, I during the time that I worked there, forced to live there(?) and worked there it was all days.

IA: All days. When did you go

Alberts: During the war I worked nights.

Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 26

IA: During the war you worked nights. They had what, three shifts during the war?

Alberts: Yeah.

IA: Days, afternoons and

Alberts: That's how I got, that's how Hilda got me signed up in there was when they put the second shift on and then they eventually put the third shift on. We were running 24 hours a day.

IA: Amazing. I remember the, we used to hear the big hammers and the drop-forges going all over Lansing and we used to smell the stuff when we'd go by the shops.

Alberts: Well and the funny thing about them, right across the street from the old Federal Drop-Forge and I got to where those hammers didn't bother me a darn bit. I could drop right off to sleep at night. And one night they had an accident or something over there and they shut the place down and I woke right up, right out of a sound sleep. There was nothing wrong with me, it was just the thought those hammer had quivered, hammering over there and ah, the silence woke me up.

IA: Um, let me see, I had something else in mind, what the heck was it. Oh I know. Everybody that we've talked to or almost everybody has talked about Reo being a kind of a family place. They felt

Alberts: It was.

IA: Did you feel that way too?

Alberts: It was family, we used to get a magazine called, The Reo Family.

IA: Oh you did?

Alberts: Reo Spirit.

IA: Reo Spirit. Ah huh.

Alberts: Yeah, it was more or less a family. I mean the, you were entitled to all the clubhouse privileges and the movies and the bowling alleys and the reading room, the family rooms and cafeteria. Ah,

IA: Did you feel like you knew some of the management. That if you had a problem you could go to them.

Alberts: No, .... the management. We didn't get in contact with them. During the war, I knew one guy that had taken over the head of the Reo, .... Steinbauer.

Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 27

IA: Steinbauer?

Alberts: Yeah, but he ah, he got tangled up with some chick down around the line practically forced him right out of a job. He got playing around and he dumped her, I guess, and she made a great big howdy do of it right there on the line that one day. .... who'd believe him.

IA: So he left.

Alberts: I guess they let him go.

IA: Huh. Um, when you were working there during the war and the women started coming in and working in the shops, do you remember there being, that was kind of new to have women working on the line. They hadn't been before. Do you recall that they had any problems with the women coming in?

Alberts: Well I told you always have problems when you have a mixture like that. Ah, they were no different than anybody else that employed male and female workers. They all had problems.

IA: You don't think the women were treated badly or singled out for any kind of a

Alberts: No, I didn't think they were. Ma worked there in the Navy plant during the war

IA: I want to ask her about that.

Wife: Don't ask me, because I don't really remember.

IA: Yes you do.

Wife: I don't either.

IA: Well I thank you very much, is there anything else you can think of that ah,

Alberts: Well that I hate to see the big vacant space out there where the Reo could have been something that it should have been.

IA: I agree with you.

Alberts: But they got tangled up with the ..... out on the east coast. They sent a guy by the name of White down there ah, .... on the east coast wanted ..... Reo, that was 1931. And when they built that Royal. And they sent that guy down here and he took it over and that was a fiasco right from the word go.

**Russell Alberts**

4-16-92

Page 28

IA: The Royals weren't, ah they were in production, but they didn't make a lot of those, did they?

Alberts: No, it wasn't any good.

IA: Why wasn't it any good?

Alberts: Well the body was too big for the chassis for one thing.

IA: Is that right?

Alberts: Ah, you go around the corner and the doors would fly open.

IA: Were those the doors that opened from the front backwards like the old suicide doors as I've heard them called?

Alberts: Probably were, I don't remember now.

IA: But you are saying that those didn't stay shut.

Alberts: All you got to do is look at that one they got down there, now you can tell which way the doors open.

IA: Ah huh, yeah, they open from the front.

Alberts: From the front, well that was it.

IA: Yeah, but that's a deluxe model and they must have made, were all the Royals a deluxe car?

Alberts: Oh yeah.

IA: They all were, okay.

Alberts: A guy by the name of Tide Royce was a test driver.

IA: Tide Royce?

Alberts: Yeah, he was a test driver for that Reo Royal and he lit out of there one day on Old 27 towards St. Johns and all he had was just a chassis and the motor and four wheels and a turning gear

IA: And something to sit on.

Alberts: he didn't have no body or anything on it. He was out there like cold air. And a state policeman gone after him. Well he was in St. Johns and turned around and headed back when the state police pulled in. So they stopped and what in the name of sense are you driving there? He said a Reo Royal test chassis, why? He said I never did could catch up with you. All he had in there, he had a, I

Russell Alberts  
4-16-92  
Page 29

think it was a eight cylinder engine if I remember right, either that or a six, but it was stripped down just a chassis and they took the Royal from Lansing to St. Johns and back just to check them out.

IA: That was their test track so to speak.

Alberts: But ah, no they didn't build it to long, it ah, it was a belly up job to begin with. I mean they ah, they sunk everything they had into that Reo Royal and I think that's really what put them on the skid. But ah, they wanted a bunch of us to transfer truck plant over to the main plant to work on that Royal and I wouldn't go. Because I just had a sneaky feeling that wasn't going to work.

IA: And then you'd be

Alberts: So I refused it and those guys didn't work to long and it went out of business. .... They were supposed to be the ultimate. But I remember they built the Reo Wolverine.

IA: What kind of a car was that?

Alberts: It was a six cylinder car, four-door sedan and then they built the ah, one in between and then they built the Royal.

IA: That Wolverine was a

Alberts: The one they called the Wolverine, the Flying Cloud and the Royal.

IA: Yes.

Alberts: Well the Wolverine and the Flying Cloud were, they were a good car, you could ..... But the last one they built was the Flying Cloud was ..... and ah, they just quit building it though ... built the Royal, but that was a fiasco right from the word go. So they really ah, done themselves dirty when they did that. They lost their personal touch, that Reo was a family of .... management right on down. But when they ah, begin to sell stock, a bunch on the east coast got control of it and they sent this guy White down there, he was a ... and he really finished it up.

IA: It went through several changes and it ended up being managed by F. L. Cappert and he ran it into bankruptcy.

Alberts: They merged with ah, White Motor Company I guess, White Truck Company and ah, then they merged with some other outfit.

IA: It was Diamond T for a while.

Alberts: But it didn't work out, 1938 when they went belly up. As I said laid everybody off, they went through bankruptcy.

Russell Alberts  
4-16-92  
Page 30

IA: When it was White Motor Company probably.

Alberts: Well I went over to the Fisher and went to work in '39 and they got their bankruptcy all cleaned up and they had an appointed overseer, a buy by the name of Frye, at one time he was secretary of state or secretary of the treasury of the State of Michigan. And he took, they appointed him as a boss really, he took the whole plant right over and they paid off their debts. And then they went back to production. Well I had top seniority in the frame room and they couldn't hire anybody unless over the union contracts unless I either quit or came back to work. And I went back to work there one summer during the changeover at Fisher, but ah, that fall when Fisher went back to production, I got called back, I quit.

IA: You quit the Reo.

Alberts: And I went back to Fisher Body. But, I either had to come back to work or I had to quit, one of the other, because they couldn't hire anybody unless I did one of two things. But it didn't work out. The only thing that saved them was the war. They would have gone bankrupt before that again, had it not been for the war.

IA: Getting that big truck contract from the Army.

Alberts: But the war put them back on their feet.

IA: Did you ever see the Eager Beaver that Reo made during the war, that amphibious truck?

Alberts: Yeah, they built a lot of those experimental jobs. One of them they had there, I think would go like grease lightening, but ah, I guess one shell in the right place and it would just fly apart.

IA: Oh really?

Alberts: They weren't what you would call good material.

IA: Oh.

Alberts: Yeah, they build a lot of experimental jobs there down on Baker Street, down in the old motor plant. But I don't know, they had one they built at the airport and that was a most huge piece of machinery you ever looked at. It had two engines in it, one engine drove it, the other engine drove the plow. And they built it for the Air Force.

IA: Oh to plow the runways?

Alberts: Plow the runways.

Russell Alberts  
4-16-92  
Page 31

IA: Oh I see.

Alberts: But it cracked the runways. It was so heavy.

IA: Is that a fact.

Alberts: Oh it was a huge piece of machinery and they had it stored out on the north side of the ... Reo. And it sat out there for a long time and they finally went out there one day with a crew and cutting torches and they cut it up.

IA: Hum. That's interesting. I haven't heard that before.

Alberts: Oh yeah, that was quite a piece of machinery. Ah, the only trouble with it, it was to heavy, it cracked the runways.

IA: Huh. I was just thinking about, I remember that there used to be an overhead tramway or runway or something between the Reo and the

Alberts: Yeah, that was the runway, that was the .....

IA: The What?

Alberts: Polish(?) one.

IA: What was that?

Alberts: It was where they polished the paint after they come out of paint.

IA: Oh after they dried? I was going to ask you that. After you painted it, where did the vehicle go or where did the truck go after you got through painting its wheels.

Alberts: Oh, it is like the wheels went on a conveyor but upstairs. They put them on the truck up there.

IA: The wheels went up, okay, then where

Alberts: They had a good layout production wise, but ah, I think the highest they ever built an hour was there was geared for 130 jobs a day, I don't think they ever built that many.

IA: That's a lot of trucks though.

Alberts: But everything was laid onto it, I mean as far as that, ah, our friends were all, when they got down to the end of the line, they were painted and then they went up on a big chain that hoist upstairs, put on the line. But had the thing worked the way it was laid out to work, it would have been a good deal, but it wasn't

Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 32

because we had to go out of, the frame we built had to go outside and be stacked up because they couldn't handle them upstairs.

IA: Too many at

Alberts: Too many. They weren't running that amount of production.

IA: Oh.

Alberts: Now they had a good layout, there was no doubt about that, but that was one they built after they built the new plant. See the old plant, the old Reo Truss Plant was the original Duplex Truck Plant.

IA: Now that was south Washington again.

Alberts: Yeah, they built the old Duplex Truck over there.

IA: Oh yes, I guess that's right.

Alberts: That was a chain drive truck.

IA: Chain drive.

Alberts: Yeah, they had a chain on each side of the back wheel and the chain drove the wheels.

IA: Oh okay.

Alberts: But they sold that to the Reo over on ah, it was over there where the welfare office was.

Wife: Was that on Mount Hope?

Alberts: No, no, no, no. I can't think of where they moved that Duplex to.

IA: South Cedar?

Alberts: But they built it, they were all hand built .... that they built.

IA: They were, the Duplex.

Alberts: They weren't built on an assembly line. They were built hand by hand. They were a good truck, they used them on the highways, that's what they were for. But they finally went out of business. I can't think of the name of the street, but they set up a shop over there.

IA: Would it have been South Cedar?

Russell Alberts  
4-16-92  
Page 33

Alberts: No it seems to me what runs in my mind it was east off of north Cedar.

IA: Oh okay.

Alberts: It was, I can't think of the name of the street now, but anyway they bought a small plant over there and those trucks were all hand built. They were big monsters as far as that went. They used them on the highways and

IA: What about Porter Street, is that

Alberts: Huh?

IA: Porter Street.

Alberts: No, no, it wasn't.

IA: Because that's where exhibit display is for Oldsmobile, but that's a very old building and that's why I got to wondering.

Alberts: I don't remember now what

IA: Okay. Well that's alright, it doesn't matter. Yeah, it is strange to go by Cedar and Baker and Washington and that's all

Alberts: I know it, I hated to see them tear that out of there.

IA: And everybody that I've talked to feels so bad about the clubhouse being torn down.

Alberts: Well General Motors at one time, Oldsmobile to be exact, wanted to buy or they did use part of the old truck plant, that was the old plant, or not the old plant but the new plant they built, ah, I don't know what Oldsmobile had in there, there was stock or what it was, they had leased part of that old truck plant. The word was that they wanted to buy it at one time, but I guess that didn't work out.

IA: Hum.

Alberts: Now Motor Wheel used that plant for a long, long time, they built stoves, .....

IA: I see.

Alberts: I think that was what we call the new plant, south side of the old plant. I think Motor Wheel had that plant for a long time. They built those ah, furnaces down there.

Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 34

IA: Oh, that's interesting, I didn't know that. I hadn't heard that about the furnaces before. Well I thank you very much. You've shared a lot of interesting, interesting things with us.

Alberts: Well a lot of the stuff I don't remember anymore.

IA: Well you remembered a lot, thank you.

Alberts: They came in the back end of the plant, on the ground floor.

IA: The union people?

Alberts: Ah well, they had ..... one side of the tracks and the Reo Truck Plant was on this side of the tracks, the short tracks.

IA: Okay.

Alberts: And ah, all you had to do was walk down the tracks and go in the back end of the building, because there wasn't any watchman down there.

IA: Oh.

Alberts: And this guy came in the plant was it was almost noon, he had a whole thick sack of cards and he started passing them out. He was an organizer for the ah, AFL-CIO.

IA: Oh. What were these cards about?

Alberts: They were application cards to join the union.

IA: Oh. Oh.

Alberts: And everybody that I knew signed them. There was almost 100 percent.

IA: Did you sign yours?

Alberts: You are darn right I signed it. At any rate, when the management found out about it, they run the guy out of there. And the plant protection owner took him out. But he had distributed about all the cards he had.

IA: So he had done his job.

Alberts: And then we started having meetings up town, up over the Old Plaza Theater.

IA: On north Washington.

Russell Alberts  
4-16-92  
Page 35

Alberts: Yeah.

IA: Ah huh.

Alberts: And ah, discussing what they could and couldn't do ... Reo

Side 2

Alberts: ... in there, they organized a company union. And the ridiculous part of it was that we had a great big meeting over there in the old Reo clubhouse in the auditorium and ah, had a guy in there, he was a company man and he was walking up and down the aisle and asking you what you wanted, you want it, we'll get it. Well my god we had begged and begged and begged to get off.... on a day rate, nothing doing. But all of a sudden they are ready to give in, see, they give you anything you want. You want more money, we'll get it for you. If you want better working conditions, we'll get it for you. Well it didn't work. It just

IA: Nobody believed him?

Alberts: No, they didn't believe him. They had worked there, some of them guys had worked there long before I ever worked there. And they had gotten used to this whole line of guff.

IA: Oh it had happened before?

Alberts: They just didn't take it, they wouldn't go for it. But anyway, they used to have union meetings up town over the old Plaza Theater and ah, I remember when they took the vote to strike, an old fellow, he was a maintenance man from the main plant, and old bull-headed guy, and they had the votes, they had these big tacks where they put you down after you voted, and they were running two shifts over in the main plant and ah, they wanted to open the ballot boxes as soon as the vote was over for the day shift, they wanted to open the ballot boxes and this old man went over and sit down on one of them. He said there ain't nobody going to open these ballot boxes until both shifts have voted, period. So, of course, that went over.

IA: Overwhelmingly probably.

Alberts: Well there was a lot of them that didn't believe in the unions, you got a son-in-law that don't believe in them. Yet he is taking the ..... But ah, he is like his dad, Tony, you know, he never could talk unions, Tony.

IA: Well, of course, Tony never worked in a shop either.

Russell Alberts  
4-16-92  
Page 36

Alberts: No, but his boy is the same way. Ah, the only reason he votes the unions is because they had them. But it hadn't been for the unions, he wouldn't be working today. He'd be out on the street.

IA: So there is a lot of good things about the union and

Alberts: There is more good things than there is bad things. There isn't anything that you can think of that is organized that there isn't a good part and a bad part to it. The churches, the government or whatever, there is a good and there is a bad part of it. It is up to you to differentiate between the two of them.

IA: After the union came in, and you guys voted it in, were you treated any differently by supervision?

Alberts: .....

IA: They didn't, because they weren't part of the union, the management wasn't, so

Alberts: No.

IA: I wondered how they

Alberts: They weren't allowed to join the union at all.

IA: Did they resent it because you had, were going to be earning more or

Alberts: I don't think so. If I remember right, Chrysler Corporation was the only one that allowed supervision to join a union.

IA: Oh really?

Alberts: I might be wrong, but it seems to me that I remember that they did. Ah, Ford Motor Company was the only other holdout and they had a battle royal down there. They busted a lot of heads.

IA: And the big Flint strikes where people got

Alberts: Oh that Flint is worse, they always hype that Flint strike, the Flint Fisher won but they weren't the first ones. Reo Motor Car Company and Hudson Detroit were the first two to go down on a sitdown strike.

IA: Oh they were?

Alberts: Because we were inside that plant when Flint Fisher One went on strike.

IA: Oh you were already on strike.

Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 37

Alberts: We already put our time in.

IA: Nobody really got hurt in your sitdown strike, did they?

Alberts: No.

IA: You didn't have any violence.

Alberts: No we didn't have no violence, well we had one guy there was carrying a gun. But ah, they got wind of that and they threw him out.

IA: So, his co-workers did you mean?

Alberts: Yeah.

IA: Ah huh, they didn't want it to disintegrate into a

Alberts: There was no clubs, no guns, no nothing.

IA: Peaceful. How long did

Alberts: Yeah, you go by that plant on Sunday, you wouldn't know there was anybody in there.

IA: Is that right. I talked to somebody awhile back whose husband was in there on the strike. He's dead now, so I couldn't talk to him obviously, but she remembered that he could go out of a window at the back part of the plant over, I think in the Cedar Baker area and he went home, because he was worried about his family and then he'd go back the next day.

Alberts: A lot of them did. We got one day a week off. A lot of them did that, went out the window, but a lot of them went out the window the day of the strike was pulled, I think, but the guys caught them with their britches and pulled them back in again.

IA: So, but you stayed.

Alberts: You are darn right I stayed.

IA: Were you worried about your family?

Alberts: I worried about them, yes I did, but ah, there wasn't much we could do about it.

IA: Ah huh, ah huh.

Alberts: Go home one day a week see how everything was going, but

Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 38

IA: What did you do, you weren't getting paid, how did the family survive without any money.

Alberts: Donations.

IA: Donations. That was kind of, you'd take them in and divide them out among the families?

Alberts: Yeah.

IA: Oh that's interesting.

Alberts: Went into debt.

IA: Went into debt. Yeah.

Alberts: Yeah, I'll tell you. The day that labor holiday was pulled they shut us down at 11:30 at noon, and we went downtown and watched them for a while and then I finally got on a bus and went home. Ah, all the neighbors around there was all under washtubs of foaming water and milk cans and pails and basins and what's all this for, well they are going to shut our water off. I says you are crazy.

IA: Why did they think that?

Alberts: Because you don't get your water from the city of Lansing, what's the matter with you.

IA: Oh you were living in Holt then.

Alberts: Your mother had everything she could think of full of water. I said well we could water the garden, I guess. We didn't have no, we had our own water wells.

IA: This was outside of Lansing in Holt or

Alberts: This was out to Holt.

IA: Well, okay, what about the people in Lansing, were they under threat of having

Alberts: They didn't shut no water off.

IA: But they thought they were going to? They'd been threatened.

Alberts: They ah, shut the city down as far as that went, but ah, they didn't ah, interfere with water departments or anything like that. But mainly when they shut it down, mainly it was there on the four corners, Michigan and Washington. They went out, they sent a flying

Russell Alberts  
4-16-92  
Page 39

squad out to East Lansing, they never should have done it in the first place.

IA: This was the Lansing Police Department did you mean?

Alberts: No, the union did.

IA: The union did.

Alberts: Ah, they wanted to shut East Lansing down. Well East Lansing had no part of that quarrel. They weren't involved. They sent a flying squad out there to shut the city down, but students threw them in the river.

IA: Oh okay. Yeah.

Alberts: They did, they bounced them into the Red Cedar River. And I didn't believe him, they had no part of that quarrel.

IA: Big excitement. That must have been headlines in the paper for two weeks.

Alberts: No, there wasn't nothing in this article about them but

IA: No, no, I'm talking about the Lansing State Journal.

Alberts: That's what happened, they sent that squad of men out there to shut the East Lansing down and ah, students there at Michigan State met them at the city limits and they got into a bruhaw(?) with them, they threw them into the river. Now well I ..... East Lansing wanted no part of that quarrel.

IA: The labor holiday only lasted one day, did it?

Alberts: Just one day.

IA: Just one day and then everybody went back to

Alberts: As soon as they let them people out of jail it was disbanded.

IA: That is so interesting.

Alberts: A guy by the name of Murphy was governor at the time and they had a big gathering up on the capitol lawn and he got out and made a speech.

IA: Oh he did.

Alberts: Yeah. But they ah,

Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 40

IA: He wanted everybody to kind of go back

Alberts: They brought it on themselves when they just used old tactics like that ... they just went out and grabbed the pickets and put them down and throw em in jail. She was in jail with her nightclothes.

IA: Oh.

Alberts: I didn't blame Les Walker for what he did, I mean, it was illegal to begin with, they broke into the home, they had no word or nothing.

IA: I wonder if he ever thought of suing them or people didn't probably sue each other as easily then as they do now. But I just wondered what kind of action he took.

Alberts: Well, ..... sued .. or anything like that, but they should have sued the city of Lansing.

IA: That's what I'm thinking.

Alberts: They should have sued the pants right off of them, but they didn't.

IA: Hum.

Alberts: But they did do was shut the city right down, movie theaters, stores, police, run the police right off the streets. The state police didn't get into it for ..... Ah, they had everything shut down, I guess they couldn't get shut down, shut Oldsmobile, Fisher Body and Ryon Bown and ... went down. It lasted just the one day, but also they turned them loose .....

IA: This is kind of off the records, this has nothing to do with Reo, but I, just for my own information I was thinking about Uncle Alex.

Alberts: ... she didn't work in my department.... where she worked, and she had long hair, that was all the rage back then, her hair went down her shoulders, she was suppose to wear a hat.

Wife: Suppose to wear a hair net, hair net.

Alberts: Well a hair net, but she didn't do it. She got that hair caught in a drill and that scalped her, before she started screaming and before they could get that thing, machine shut off, it had just about scalped her.

IA: My gosh.

Alberts: And the orders went out to let her on out. Nobody wore wedding rings, jewelry of any kind and they usually had a net on or you didn't work.

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Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 41

IA: That's if you were working on a piece of machinery?

Alberts: No, I had one old girl working for me, she was a Jew and she had a great big wedding ring. I had to go out and tell her to take that ring off, no, no, I ain't taking that ring off. Shut I forget how old she said she was, but she said that ring has been on that finger since I got married. Well I said you can't work here if you don't take that ring off. That's the order and I can't tell you anything different, you either take the ring off or I'll take you off the job. So she finally agreed to take the ring off and she put it on a string and hung it around her neck and that wasn't going to work very good, because when she bent over that ring could have hit that drill.

IA: Oh yeah.

Alberts: And I don't remember how they did work that out with her, but she stayed there.

IA: Maybe just by wearing it inside.

Alberts: Oh she had a battle with them, she wasn't going to take that ring off.

IA: Even though it meant her safety.

Alberts: Yeah, she, they explained to her what had happened to some little girls that had gotten their ring fingers caught in the drill, it would strip their finger right off their fingers.

IA: Is that how you caught your finger? Did you have a ring on your finger?

Wife: No I caught the end of my finger.

IA: And what did it do to it?

Alberts: ...finger out there in machine. We had what they called ear chuck(?) ah, it pulled the handle and the jaws would open up, you'd stick your material, your work piece in there and then you pushed the handle back and she'd come down on that piece of material, then they went ahead and machined it. But if you didn't want your finger when you put that in there to hit that darn lever, she'd shut down on your fingers and one of the kids forgot what she was doing and she lost about that much of her finger.

IA: Yeah. When I worked in Elsie in the factory one of the ..... Did you ever go down to the clubhouse, or was the clubhouse gone by then, emptied out?

Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 42

Alberts: No it was still there.

IA: Oh.

Alberts: They hadn't ah, ... anything or ah, they didn't start tearing that place down until very recently.

IA: Ah, come to think of it, that's right.

Alberts: .. you know when that thing caught fire, that was set.

IA: You think so?

Alberts: I know it was.

IA: Tell me what you know about that?

Alberts: For the simple reason that the city of Lansing had taken it over and they didn't want to spend the money to hire a bunch of demolition teams to come in there and tear it down. And so unbeknown to anybody I guess they set it on fire ..... The only thing that was left standing was the powerhouse.

IA: The powerhouse?

Alberts: Ah that was the one down on Grand Trunk tracks, the big steam plants

IA: Oh really?

Alberts: They tore that one down, but

IA: It wouldn't burn?

Alberts: No it didn't burn.

IA: I would imagine that that, I remember that fire, but I imagine with all those oil soaked floors and all that stuff, but the bricks themselves wouldn't burn, would they for the outside of the building?

Alberts: Oh I don't know, I guess they hauled them out of there, but some wrecking company from Chicago bought all the material that was in that plant.

IA: Oh bought what was left in, you mean the plant was emptied out before it caught

Alberts: Yeah, they hauled all the machinery and things of that, there was an outfit in Chicago, it was a Jewish outfit and they bid on it and

Russell Alberts

4-16-92

Page 43

they bought all the machinery and all the, everything that could be sold. They stripped the plant.

IA: So it was totally empty when it was set on fire.

Alberts: Yeah, it was empty when it burned.

IA: Ah.

Alberts: But I've always said that place was set on fire intentionally because the city of Lansing had bought it. I forget what they paid for it, but I guess they didn't want to spend the money to hire a wrecking crew to go in there and tear it down. It would have cost considerable amount of money and I think they just hired some flunky to get down there and set her on fire.