

1 **Larry Otis talks about his career**
2 **at REO Motor Car Company and Diamond REO Trucks, Inc. 5/11/2004**
3
4

5 Shirley Bradley: Well, it's May 11 and this is Shirley Bradley and Larry Otis and we're at
6 the R.E. Olds Museum and we're just going to talk about REO memories.
7 [0:13] And I usually start out by just getting a little background, a little
8 personal history, where you grew up, where you went to school...
9
10 Larry Otis: Hm.
11
12 Shirley Bradley: ...and how you happened to go to REO.
13
14 Larry Otis: Well, I, I grew up in, well, since I was 10 on, in Lansing. And so I went
15 through, I finished Oak Park, then to Pattengill, then to Eastern. And then,
16 uh, after graduating from Eastern, I worked at [inaudible 0:42] Oldsmobile
17 briefly before I got drafted, got out in 2 years and I had a series of jobs
18 over the next 3 years. Then, I went to a diesel mechanics training school
19 in Chicago and when I got out of that I went to work at REO in 1959.
20
21 Shirley Bradley: Hm.
22
23 Larry Otis: And, uh...
24
25 Shirley Bradley: [1:04] What did they put you on?
26
27 Larry Otis: Well, I was a truck mechanic on the repair floor.
28
29 Shirley Bradley: Oh.
30
31 Larry Otis: And similar to, well, Tom originally was on the repair floor, then he went
32 to quality control. And Dick Trierweiler worked on the repair floor and
33 then he went on to, I think he went to college, went back to college or
34 something, and then he went on to tech service. And then I ended up
35 working on diesel engines. I think I was there about 10 years on the repair
36 floor and I worked about 4 years on diesel engines and then I ended up in
37 engineering the last 2 years that REO was in business.
38
39 Shirley Bradley: Oh, you did?
40
41 Larry Otis: And then it went into, went into bankruptcy in '75.
42
43 Shirley Bradley: Yeah.
44
45 Larry Otis: And that was the end of it.
46

1 Shirley Bradley: Yeah.
2

3 Larry Otis: That covers it, I guess, what you wanted.
4

5 Shirley Bradley: [chuckle] [1:47] Um, so did you have any other relatives working there at
6 REO?
7

8 Larry Otis: No.
9

10 Shirley Bradley: No?
11

12 Larry Otis: No.
13

14 Shirley Bradley: So many folks did, you know, their mom and dad...
15

16 Larry Otis: Right, yes.
17

18 Shirley Bradley: ...or grandpa and grandma.
19

20 Larry Otis: Yeah.
21

22 Shirley Bradley: [1:58] Uh, and so you started out in truck repair?
23

24 Larry Otis: Yes.
25

26 Shirley Bradley: [2:02] Do you remember, and you just mentioned some of the folks you
27 worked with, um, and the training?
28

29 Larry Otis: Ray Kimball.
30

31 Shirley Bradley: [2:07] Ray Kimball?
32

33 Larry Otis: Yes, I met Ray. He's about the same age I am. He got out of Remus High
34 the same time I got out of Eastern in '51 and he came down here, of
35 course, occupation-wise. He was there when I went there and, uh, then he
36 went through a series of, oh, I think he went from the repair floor to
37 military engineering or something. And then he was with a separate unit
38 which when Francis Cappaert bought it he sold that unit off and so Ray
39 went elsewhere, I don't know, about 3, 4 years before REO went bankrupt,
40 ...
41

42 Shirley Bradley: I see.
43

44 Larry Otis: ...with American General and that in turn it went out of business here, that
45 division it – but yes, I knew Ray and a host of other people that I've

1 already mentioned. And, oh, then I got, I was on the credit union board
2 for a little while, for about 5 years.
3
4 Shirley Bradley: [3:02] REO had a credit union?
5
6 Larry Otis: Yes.
7
8 Shirley Bradley: I didn't know that.
9
10 Larry Otis: Oh yeah. Yeah, they, I think it started in '58 and, of course, I think it went
11 all the way until '75 and then it merged with, well, I can't think of the
12 name of the credit union...
13
14 Shirley Bradley: Mm-hm.
15
16 Larry Otis: ...but it's another one here in town...
17
18 Shirley Bradley: Mm-hm.
19
20 Larry Otis: ...which also has absorbed a lot of smaller credit unions and I don't know
21 if it completely merged with another credit union now or not. But yeah,
22 that was their – that – most of the companies that had, oh, 500 people or
23 more had a credit union...
24
25 Shirley Bradley: Mm-hm.
26
27 Larry Otis: ...of some nature and...
28
29 Shirley Bradley: [3:40] Was it in the building on the grounds or?
30
31 Larry Otis: Uh, it started in there, yes, it was the office was in there, uh, I'm going to
32 say maybe 11 or 12 years. And then about 1970, I think it went over on
33 Holmes Street...
34
35 Shirley Bradley: Oh.
36
37 Larry Otis: ...just south of Main, just across, it, it's just off the intersection almost.
38 The building is, um, right next to the railroad tracks.
39
40 Shirley Bradley: Okay.
41
42 Larry Otis: Where the, now the eastbound exit from 496 curves around there.
43
44 Shirley Bradley: I know where you're talking about, yes.
45

1 Larry Otis: Okay. Well it was on the, it was on the east side of Holmes right next to
2 the railroad tracks there.
3
4 Shirley Bradley: Oh, okay.
5
6 Larry Otis: Right next to the expressway.
7
8 Shirley Bradley: Next to the expressway. [4:35] Um, during the years that you worked
9 there, what would you say the working conditions were? I'm thinking of
10 safety and...
11
12 Larry Otis: It was probably about average for the industry in Lansing at that time. It
13 was a very old building and it often surprised me it didn't burn down.
14
15 Shirley Bradley: Is that right?
16
17 Larry Otis: Yeah. It had a – a lot of the building has, oh, they were sawed off blocks
18 that were soaked in creosote or tar. A lot of the building was that way on
19 the floor.
20
21 Shirley Bradley: The floor.
22
23 Larry Otis: Yeah. And when it had rained it would seep in and, uh, the blocks would
24 expand and pop up but it wasn't all cement like you'd think it would be...
25
26 Shirley Bradley: [Inaudible 5:13].
27
28 Larry Otis: ...an industrial setting nowadays and, uh...
29
30 Shirley Bradley: [5:15] Was that pretty much true all over in the various buildings?
31
32 Larry Otis: I would say maybe, I would think 60, 70% of it was that way.
33
34 Shirley Bradley: Huh. And so the roof...
35
36 Larry Otis: Yeah, and the roof leaked. [chuckle] But, uh, a lot of the buildings, of
37 course, came out of the anywhere from what the, the buildings up on
38 Washington Avenue 2 or 3 of'm I think were like 1905 or 1909 and then it
39 went on back to probably the 20s that some of the later buildings were
40 built.
41
42 Shirley Bradley: [5:45] So the later ones were still pretty old, huh?
43
44 Larry Otis: Yes.
45
46 Shirley Bradley: Out of the 20s.

1
2Larry Otis: To the best of my knowledge. Now if you research some of this, the, the
3 old John Bean plant used to be the body deal for REO, the car bodies, and
4 there used to be a tramway went over Cedar Street there for years, uh,
5 where the body was similar to Fisher Body Trucking to Oldsmobile. Do
6 you remember that?
7
8Shirley Bradley: Mm-hm.
9
10Larry Otis: Well, this was a similar deal. I think this was probably in the 20s and then
11 the old Duo-Therm plant down on Washington and Mount Hope, that was
12 the REO truck plant but then, of course, in the Depression everything, you
13 know...
14
15Shirley Bradley: Yeah. Went down.
16
17Larry Otis: ...went down and so, uh, henceforth, the main plant became the total
18 assembly plant for both cars and trucks. Then, of course, after the '36
19 model, there were no cars.
20
21Shirley Bradley: That's right. That was the last one.
22
23Larry Otis: And so that was a...
24
25Shirley Bradley: Um...
26
27Larry Otis: ...general summary, you know, their business.
28
29Shirley Bradley: It was a boom and bust business [inaudible 6:46].
30
31Larry Otis: Oh yeah. Well, they weren't alone, the majority of industries.
32
33Shirley Bradley: As long as they got contracts.
34
35Larry Otis: Yeah.
36
37Shirley Bradley: Well, of course, during the Depression everybody was...
38
39Leslie Mitchel: Yes.
40
41Shirley Bradley: ...hurting.
42
43Larry Otis: Was hurting, right, yup.
44
45Shirley Bradley: And so, but you weren't there then.
46

1Larry Otis: No.
2
3Shirley Bradley: You were too young for that.
4
5Larry Otis: I went there in '59 and I was there until April of '75 when it completely,
6 well, it, it, they stopped all production and all the employees were laid off
7 other than the people on the repair floor finishing the units that were built.
8 And, uh, roughly from April until about September I think they had
9 finished up the majority of the actual built units and then and I can't tell
10 you the exact date but then they had the referee, they got the bankruptcy
11 referee or judge ordered liquidation and then so they had an auction and,
12 and bid on the remaining parts or equipment or whatever and then they,
13 one of the...
14
15Shirley Bradley: [7:45] This was after they closed the doors?
16
17Larry Otis: Yes, after they closed the doors. One of the vice presidents of parts I think
18 it was at that time and the vice president in charge of production, they
19 ended up as the, they were backed by another outfit out of Chicago and
20 they bought a majority of the parts which became The Nuts and Bolts
21 Store as they called it and that succeeded there for a while. It then ended
22 up in the John Bean building I think.
23
24Shirley Bradley: Mm-hm.
25
26Larry Otis: And some of the, a few of the employees worked for them for about 1 ½
27 years or so, or 2 years.
28
29Shirley Bradley: To help finish up.
30
31Larry Otis: Well, they'd just sell, you know, equipment, parts, uh.
32
33Shirley Bradley: Oh, in The Nuts and Bolts Store.
34
35Larry Otis: Yeah.
36
37Shirley Bradley: Uh-huh, okay.
38
39Larry Otis: You may have heard this from some of the other people too.
40
41Shirley Bradley: Um, I knew about The Nuts and Bolts Store being there.
42
43Larry Otis: Yeah.
44
45Shirley Bradley: But I didn't know that was in the factory for a while and then moved.
46

1Larry Otis: Briefly, yeah. I, I don't remember what the, you know, the contract permit
2 circumstances.
3
4Shirley Bradley: Yeah.
5
6Larry Otis: It's too bad you couldn't get Gary Hicks to interview 'cause he actually
7 worked there for...
8
9Shirley Bradley: Well, I'm hoping to.
10
11Larry Otis: Yeah.
12
13Shirley Bradley: Yeah.
14
15Larry Otis: Uh, he actually worked for The Nuts and Bolts end of it for a while.
16
17Shirley Bradley: Oh, okay, I'll remember that.
18
19Larry Otis: And, uh, so he'd give you more insight on that part and so forth.
20
21Shirley Bradley: Each of these cassettes kind of stands alone. If somebody comes in to do
22 research, you know...
23
24Larry Otis: Right.
25
26Shirley Bradley: ...and wants to know a certain thing, so.
27
28Larry Otis: Yes.
29
30Shirley Bradley: So I just pretty much ask everybody basically the same questions, um.
31
32Larry Otis: Yeah.
33
34Shirley Bradley: [9:03] What kind of pay scale do you remember that you had?
35
36Larry Otis: Uh, it wasn't bad as the general industrial pay scale. Uh, in fact, I talked
37 to this fellow who's about 6, 7 years younger than I was and he retired as a
38 skilled tradesman at Oldsmobile and he had been a committee man over
39 there and I spoke to him in relation to general bargaining wage factor and
40 conditions, you know. And we were usually I would say about 1 contract
41 behind General Motors, and so pay, pay-wise we would be a little less
42 than what GM was paying on a similar job titling.
43
44Shirley Bradley: Oh.
45

1 Larry Otis: And, uh, but usually the next contract we'd pick up about everything they
2 negotiated. It was kind of a universal UAW type.
3

4 Shirley Bradley: Oh, I see.
5

6 Larry Otis: And, uh, I think in relation to, uh, John Bean and Duplex Truck and
7 [inaudible 9:56] Manufacturing and, uh, some of the other industrial jobs
8 close by they paid less than REO did, so REO was probably just a bit
9 under General Motors.
10

11 Shirley Bradley: Kind of in the middle.
12

13 Larry Otis: Yeah. And, uh, as far as healthcare seemed to be very good, about as
14 good as General Motors' healthcare program with Blue Cross Blue Shield.
15 They had a, oh, I can't remember the title. I think it was similar to
16 workmen's comp that would if you were injured or if you were off on sick
17 leave, they'd pay you I don't remember...
18

19 Shirley Bradley: A percentage.
20

21 Larry Otis: ...60% of your wage or the...
22

23 Shirley Bradley: Oh, 60%.
24

25 Larry Otis: Something in that vicinity, you know...
26

27 Shirley Bradley: Mm-hm.
28

29 Larry Otis: ...for the first few weeks. I never collected much but it was there.
30

31 Shirley Bradley: [10:44] You never got hurt on the job [inaudible 10:45]?
32

33 Larry Otis: Well, not, not to speak of, no.
34

35 Shirley Bradley: Oh.
36

37 Larry Otis: And, in fact, I, I believe, thinking back and this was a few years, I think I
38 was off, I think I had a hernia surgery and I think I was off one other time
39 for almost a week and but that was the only time. I think I was off a week
40 for a hernia and I think I collected that week but that was about it or
41 maybe it was, maybe it was 2 weeks. I don't remember.
42

43 Shirley Bradley: Mm-hm.
44

45 Larry Otis: But it, it had a reasonable, uh, you know, benefit package for industrial
46 type employment I think.

1
2Shirley Bradley: Sounds like it.
3
4Larry Otis: Yeah.
5
6Shirley Bradley: [11:24] And you were able to, um, go up in your job? What I'm saying is
7 obtain other levels.
8
9Larry Otis: Pay scale-wise you mean?
10
11Shirley Bradley: Mm-hm. If they moved you from different jobs.
12
13Larry Otis: Yeah, it had a, I'm thinking it was like, something like a 90-day deal and
14 then you, I think 30 days you were supposed to join UAW, you know, the
15 union. It was sort of a closed shop, which wasn't all bad. Uh, 90 days
16 you had pay scale raises. I don't remember specifically. I think after I'm
17 going to say 1 ½ years or 2 years you hit maximum on whatever job title
18 you were at. And then I think it was the 1-week vacation the first year,
19 and then after that it was 2 weeks to 5 years, then it was 3 weeks between
20 5 and 10, and then it was 4 weeks.
21
22Shirley Bradley: If you'd been there quite a while.
23
24Larry Otis: Yeah. Over 15, I think. Oh, I got in to a different, they had later on they
25 unionized the office and they called it the Tech TOP, it was Technical
26 Operational and Professional. And when I went to engineering I ended up
27 in Engine Test and Research in the basement of Engineering and for some
28 reason, long before I went there, 4 or 5 years, that was in this TOP's deal.
29 Well, then I went on salary and rather than hourly. And also one of their,
30 at that time this would have been around '73 through '75, and they had a
31 sick leave policy under that particular negotiated deal 'cause I remember if
32 you weren't sick all year, you collected 10 days' pay under that but not,
33 that wasn't true under the hourly out in the plant so to speak.
34
35Shirley Bradley: I see. It was more...
36
37Larry Otis: So it was a reasonable fringe package they had, an inducement to stay on
38 the job, you know.
39
40Shirley Bradley: It sounds like it was a pretty good place to work.
41
42Larry Otis: It wasn't too bad, yeah, all in all. It, it, as far as the general industrial
43 setting, I think it was probably as good as I could expect. Uh, looking
44 back, of course, hindsight works well and in a sense in my case, I, it's
45 good that it went bankrupt in '75 because it would, uh, White Motor
46 Company owned it and they got into a cash flow problem and then Francis

1 Cappaert bought it and in 1970 he made a bid which they accepted and
2 then between 1970 until '71, uh, they rescinded and didn't want to sell it.
3 Then, he I guess filed a court action and it looked like they would have to
4 pay for a dead horse so to speak, you know, if they kept it so they ended
5 up selling it to him and it was about '71 through when they went bankrupt
6 in '75 then under that operation and, uh, uh, and, and, of course, in '73, the
7 economic conditions were terrible. They had the Arab oil thing and the
8 economy in 1973 went down and it was, it was tough on the automobile
9 industry too but also the heavy truck industry too.
10
11 Shirley Bradley: I see, yes.
12
13 Larry Otis: Quite tough and, uh...
14
15 Shirley Bradley: So that didn't help.
16
17 Larry Otis: No. It, it was several other things, uh, that became involved at that time.
18 Money was, you know, the cash flow problem developed again for them
19 as it was a smaller independent company and, and then eventually they
20 were forced to file bankruptcy and liquidate, so.
21
22 Shirley Bradley: [15:09] Cappaert was a businessman out of Mississippi?
23
24 Larry Otis: Uh, yes.
25
26 Shirley Bradley: [15:13] It was more of an investment for him than a...?
27
28 Larry Otis: Uh, you sure you want to go there? If some of the other people [inaudible
29 15:21].
30
31 Shirley Bradley: No, we haven't gotten into it yet 'cause basically I know but people that
32 are doing research might not know. [chuckle]
33
34 Larry Otis: Well, uh...
35
36 Shirley Bradley: Just whatever you're comfortable with.
37
38 Larry Otis: Yeah. Uh, there were a lot of adverse things that happened along that
39 period, yes, with his direction. I'll put it that way, the way I viewed it.
40 And, uh, I understand he came from Clare originally. He came down to
41 the St. Louis Alma area which made New Moon and Century Trailers way
42 back, horse trailers. He learned the business there and went on down to
43 Mississippi, opened a plant, did very well.
44
45 Shirley Bradley: Oh.
46

1Larry Otis: And he ended up I think with 5 plants, [inaudible 16:01] Guardian
2 Corporation and then he followed a trend I believe of buying up older
3 companies and, uh, quite often either selling off a portion of it or, or
4 liquidating them from what I understand so, uh, I guess that's about the
5 biggest viewpoint I can tell you.
6

7Shirley Bradley: Okay. That's fine. [16:28] Um, the building was old. The floors were
8 old.
9

10Larry Otis: Yeah, quite old.

11

12Shirley Bradley: [16:31] How about the machinery?
13

14Larry Otis: Uh, yeah, a lot of it, a lot of it was. Uh, and then they were getting
15 reinvestment because say for all purposes, White Motor Company went
16 bankrupt in 1980 so if they hadn't gotten rid of REO they'd probably, it
17 would have went under in 1980 too.
18

19Shirley Bradley: Oh, okay.
20

21Larry Otis: And, uh, [throat clearing] they, uh, although the name is still around, uh,
22 Volvo makes the Volvo White GMC truck out in a plant that was I think
23 in Virginia. That was a relatively new plant that White had built.
24

25Shirley Bradley: Oh, it was?
26

27Larry Otis: And, yeah, and, but actually the Volvo Corporation manufactures all 3
28 brands there since around 1980. They bought I think all the rights and
29 some of the parts but not the liabilities to White so. And they – and, of
30 course, if you have a dealer network, it's beneficial to pick that up and
31 continue producing units to keep the dealers and keep the sales
32 organization, you know.
33

34Shirley Bradley: Sure.
35

36Larry Otis: So, yeah.
37

38Shirley Bradley: Um...
39

40Larry Otis: Yeah, the building was old but 2 or 3 times it was proposed White was
41 thinking of building a new plant here out north of town but for one reason
42 or another it didn't materialize.
43

44Shirley Bradley: [17:56] Hm, oh, he was? Would continue to start all over again with a
45 new plant making trucks?
46

1 Larry Otis: Well, with a newer plant you could obviously get newer machinery and a
2 better facility.
3
4 Shirley Bradley: Mm-hm.
5
6 Larry Otis: But it didn't happen, so.
7
8 Shirley Bradley: He couldn't maybe attract enough money to help him get started.
9
10 Larry Otis: Could be. I, I don't really remember exactly all the conditions, whether it
11 was, what it was, or some question about the utilities being extended into
12 DeWitt Township to...
13
14 Shirley Bradley: Oh.
15
16 Larry Otis: ...service the facility and I don't remember [inaudible 18:26].
17
18 Shirley Bradley: So there were a lot of problems.
19
20 Larry Otis: Yeah. Of that nature, you know.
21
22 Shirley Bradley: Mm-hm.
23
24 Larry Otis: What the tax base would be there, would it be annexed to the city of
25 Lansing, would it not? You know, would the [inaudible 18:35] might
26 have water and electricity facility to it, things of that nature. But I, I really
27 don't remember directly all the reasons why but it didn't materialize.
28
29 Shirley Bradley: Probably a lot of things, but that's interesting.
30
31 Larry Otis: Yeah. It was proposed in the paper and well thought of but it just didn't
32 happen.
33
34 Shirley Bradley: Oh. So those of you that were working there probably could see the end
35 coming.
36
37 Larry Otis: Uh.
38
39 Shirley Bradley: [18:59] Or not?
40
41 Larry Otis: Well, yeah. Uh, yeah, I believe, I think it was something like 8 million
42 that, that, at that time that...
43
44 Shirley Bradley: Oh my!
45

1Larry Otis: ...Cappaert borrowed from FMC which had a division called John Bean
2 across the street and that was because of a cash flow problem. And there
3 was some controversy on exactly how, how, when and the methods that
4 got paid back to FMC, Food Machinery Corporation.
5
6Shirley Bradley: [19:38] What does it stand for?
7
8Larry Otis: Food Machinery Corporation.
9
10Shirley Bradley: Oh, okay, thank you.
11
12Larry Otis: FMC and John Bean happened to be one of their divisions...
13
14Shirley Bradley: Oh, okay.
15
16Larry Otis: ...across, you know, Cedar Street.
17
18Shirley Bradley: Mm-hm.
19
20Larry Otis: And, uh...
21
22Shirley Bradley: So he was able to borrow [inaudible 19:52] for a while.
23
24Larry Otis: Yeah, right, for a while, a short period. And, uh...
25
26Shirley Bradley: To keep going. [chuckle]
27
28Larry Otis: Anyway, then there was the, [throat clearing] the agreement with UAW
29 and if I remember right, it was in March you had to pay or the corporation
30 was supposed to put something like a nickel or 6 cents per hour that each
31 employee worked over the last calendar year and they had from the 1st
32 until March, 1st of the year until March to bookkeeping-wise amortize how
33 many hours each person worked to put that much into the pension fund to
34 fund it so that if and when the person retired that, you know, there would
35 be an annuity retirement that they would get. And I think in '73, the cash
36 was bad and if I remember right, Mr. Cappaert signed a note for 1.2
37 million I think it was with the Bank of Lansing at that time. I can't
38 remember if it had changed names at that time. And to the best of my
39 knowledge, nothing was paid on that throughout the next calendar year
40 and then a similar situation in '74.
41
42Shirley Bradley: Oh.
43
44Larry Otis: And then it would have been, it would, it wouldn't have been, it would
45 have been prior to that because they filed for bankruptcy in 1974 in
46 December.

1
2Shirley Bradley: Oh, in December.
3
4Larry Otis: And I think that was around March the 2nd the note would have been
5 applied at that time. Um, uh, the Bank of Lansing, of course, became very
6 nervous and went out to court in Mason and filed for a possession of assets
7 that they had put in to the pension fund as they hadn't received no
8 payments and the judge awarded it back to the Bank of Lansing, so.
9
10Shirley Bradley: Oh, the pension fund went [inaudible 21:52].
11
12Larry Otis: Well the, the...
13
14Shirley Bradley: The amount it had.
15
16Larry Otis: Those 2 years that they had put in.
17
18Shirley Bradley: Uh-huh.
19
20Larry Otis: Which amounted to I think about 2 million but, uh, and, uh, everybody
21 had, over 10 years, had a vested right and should be or has been receiving
22 pension from it's the PBGC, Pension Board Guarantee Corporation...
23
24Shirley Bradley: Okay.
25
26Larry Otis: ...from the federal deal. This was just a relatively recent deal, excuse me,
27 the federal people had created over the 1973 'cause so many of these
28 pension funds were going, going down.
29
30Shirley Bradley: Mm-hm.
31
32Larry Otis: Yeah. I get my pittance every month of \$81, which isn't too great but
33 that's...
34
35Shirley Bradley: That's better than not getting it.
36
37Larry Otis: Yes. Better than a sharp stick.
38
39Shirley Bradley: Mm-hm.
40
41Larry Otis: And most all the people I mentioned before are, are getting something.
42
43Shirley Bradley: Are getting something from their pension.
44
45Larry Otis: Yeah. Depending, the different legislation changed it. I think Ray
46 Kimball got about 7 or 8,000 back in, oh, I can't tell you exactly,

1Larry Otis: And I'm into my, finishing my seventh year of retirement now so...
2
3Shirley Bradley: Are you?
4
5Larry Otis: ...things haven't been too bad.
6
7Shirley Bradley: Good.
8
9Larry Otis: Although my wife has been gone for 9 years, but.
10
11Shirley Bradley: Oh, that's not good, no.
12
13Larry Otis: Well, but that happens, you know, health reasons.
14
15Shirley Bradley: I know. That's the way life is, yeah.
16
17Larry Otis: Health reasons, yeah.
18
19Shirley Bradley: [25:09] Do you, can you remember any humorous things that
20 happened...?
21
22Larry Otis: Oh yes.
23
24Shirley Bradley: [25:14] ...or maybe things that weren't humorous?
25
26Larry Otis: Yes. There was numerous humor items but I suppose the statute of
27 limitations is long past on any of the fellow employees, you know, but, oh
28 yeah.
29
30Shirley Bradley: Yeah. [chuckle]
31
32Larry Otis: I remember, yes, we, and I recall these to the people you've interviewed
33 too but we had a, uh, way back, this was probably back in about 1960, I
34 remember when business was good and when business was good, we
35 worked overtime. One Saturday I came in and we were working 10 hours
36 a day and 8 hours on Saturday and a few of the people were inclined to
37 cash the paycheck on Friday and get a little too much beverage, you know.
38 And I remember at that time, this was previous to when [inaudible 26:13]
39 came up with the Diamond T organization and John Tucker was the
40 president of it then and we had one of the mechanics we, we were building
41 pusher buses with a gasoline engine, which means the engine was in the
42 rear of it.
43
44Shirley Bradley: Pusher buses.
45

1 Larry Otis: Yeah. It's the same way like pusher motorhomes are with diesels now.
2 They all have the engine in the back.
3
4 Shirley Bradley: Oh, that's what you mean.
5
6 Larry Otis: Yeah.
7
8 Shirley Bradley: Okay. It's pushing [inaudible 26:35].
9
10 Larry Otis: It's behind the rear axle actually. Anyway, I remember this one person he
11 was still somewhat under the beverage that he had previously. He was out
12 in the lot making laps around there on this, there was no sheet metal, it's
13 just a frame and the controls and the seat and the engine was at the back.
14 And I remember John Tucker came out and stopped him and asked him
15 where the other cars in the race were. And unfortunately that same day we
16 had one of the bodies repairman and painter, he came in and, and he was
17 too far into the beverage too and so he wanted to call his wife and let her
18 know that he hadn't been home all night, that he was okay, he was just
19 going to go back to work. And the superintendent saw him and said, well,
20 why don't we just call a cab and have you go home and tell your wife. He
21 said I'm steady as a rock, steady as a rock, so henceforth they called him
22 Rocky after that.
23
24 Shirley Bradley: Oh, that's funny.
25
26 Larry Otis: But, uh, and, and a few other things of that nature but, yeah, there were
27 different things through a period of time, you know, but those, those
28 things come up continually and, uh...
29
30 Shirley Bradley: That makes it fun to work when there's some...
31
32 Larry Otis: Well, as long as somebody don't get hurt.
33
34 Shirley Bradley: Well...
35
36 Larry Otis: That was the dangerous part, you know.
37
38 Shirley Bradley: [Inaudible 27:55].
39
40 Larry Otis: I used to worry about that some and, uh...
41
42 Shirley Bradley: [27:57] Did you?
43
44 Larry Otis: Yeah. I know different times we had different military contracts where
45 we, you know, and they, they constantly road tested all the military units

1 and this one acquaintance of mine had always seemed like when they had
2 a breakdown it was close to a bar, you know, and we...
3
4 Shirley Bradley: Wasn't that odd how that works.
5
6 Larry Otis: Yeah. It's all right. I'm in here warm. I'm just having a cup of coffee.
7 But anyway, we would go out and repair the truck and get it back, you
8 know, and things of that nature. But, uh, yeah, I – there were numerous
9 smaller incidents like that. I remember different frivolous pranks and
10 different things the guys would, would use, you know, but like you said,
11 it's kind of in a jest, you know. It wasn't anything that was really
12 unhealthy or harmful, you know, but...
13
14 Shirley Bradley: It was kind of fellowship.
15
16 Larry Otis: Yeah.
17
18 Shirley Bradley: [28:53] What about the clubhouse? Did you have...?
19
20 Larry Otis: That was, I always had a lot of respect, a lot of regard for it. Uh, they had
21 what they called, long before I went there they had what they called a
22 charity ball and this was a Christmastime party, usually it was about the
23 first weekend in December and I always enjoyed it. In fact, my wife
24 always said it was, it was nice to see all the people and dance but usually I
25 got too far into the celebration of the evening but, uh, I went there most all
26 the time they had it at the clubhouse and they had a big, big facility there.
27 I don't know, you probably never saw it, but it was...
28
29 Shirley Bradley: When I was 5 years old...
30
31 Larry Otis: Yeah. Okay.
32
33 Shirley Bradley: ...the neighbor took us down and we saw...
34
35 Larry Otis: Yeah.
36
37 Shirley Bradley: ...Major Bowes. You don't know who he is, but...
38
39 Larry Otis: Yeah. I remembered vaguely on radio he had a...
40
41 Shirley Bradley: Amateur hour.
42
43 Larry Otis: Yes, yes.
44
45 Shirley Bradley: Yeah.
46

1Larry Otis: In fact, he got caught up in this communistic thing, uh, later on, you know.
2
3Shirley Bradley: That's what I heard later...
4
5Larry Otis: Yeah. Just toward...
6
7Shirley Bradley: ...when I was older.
8
9Larry Otis: ...toward the radio-TV switchover period that, that he got accused of
10 being affiliated but I don't know, you know. But yes, it had a big
11 ballroom. It had a mezzanine upstairs and it had a, actually, it had I guess
12 a pretty good organ up there, uh, you know...
13
14Shirley Bradley: Oh.
15
16Larry Otis: ...a pipe organ upstairs and, but yeah, various facilities in the, in the
17 clubhouse. It was, it was a nice building. Of course, it was used by a lot
18 of organizations. I remember even when I was getting out of high school,
19 there were teenage dances there, uh.
20
21Shirley Bradley: [30:31] Oh, there were?
22
23Larry Otis: Yeah. They used to be downtown, the Prudden family.
24
25Shirley Bradley: Prudden Auditorium.
26
27Larry Otis: Prudden they had Motor Wheel Company, they started that.
28
29Shirley Bradley: Mm-hm.
30
31Larry Otis: It was Prudden Wheel Company and like some of the other [inaudible
32 30:45] and whatever. Well, they had built that auditorium down there,
33 which at the time I was getting out of high school it wasn't very much but
34 they used to have teenage dances down there at the Prudden Auditorium.
35 Well, then as that got decrepit and got demolished, then the REO
36 Clubhouse for a short time they had teenage dances down there around the
37 early 50s I think.
38
39Shirley Bradley: I didn't know that.
40
41Larry Otis: So it was a point of social environmental contact, you know.
42
43Shirley Bradley: Sure, like the civic center of its day.
44
45Larry Otis: Right.
46

1 Shirley Bradley: Mm-hm.
2
3 Larry Otis: And then after I got out of the service in the mid-50s, the civic center was
4 under construction by '55 so, of course, that and that was a...
5
6 Shirley Bradley: Oh, we had a lot of people come in on tours on one thing and another and
7 several years ago we had a REO day here and we invited everybody that...
8
9 Larry Otis: Yeah.
10
11 Shirley Bradley: And I don't know if you were part of that or not but a lot of'm talked
12 about the clubhouse being torn down and they said it was such sadness as
13 if their home had been...
14
15 Larry Otis: Hm.
16
17 Shirley Bradley: ...their childhood home had been taken away.
18
19 Larry Otis: Yeah, well...
20
21 Shirley Bradley: Because they were attached to the, you know...
22
23 Larry Otis: Well, they had the bowling alley and then, of course, far be it from me to
24 know the radio station was there except reading about it.
25
26 Shirley Bradley: Right.
27
28 Larry Otis: But they had, it was a lot of social function for the people that worked
29 there.
30
31 Shirley Bradley: Mm-hm.
32
33 Larry Otis: And then even, well, I don't, do you remember the red stocking dance that
34 was a charitable deal?
35
36 Shirley Bradley: I do.
37
38 Larry Otis: Well, okay, they used to hold that on 2 nights there...
39
40 Shirley Bradley: Oh.
41
42 Larry Otis: ...because of the capacity.
43
44 Shirley Bradley: Oh.
45

1 Larry Otis: And I don't remember what the capacity was but at the time of it, it was
2 prime through the 50s and through the mid-60s and then it moved to the
3 civic center, of course, and that drew quite a few people.
4

5 Shirley Bradley: That was a charity for Christmas for the children.
6

7 Larry Otis: Yeah. The State employees would put that on and...
8

9 Shirley Bradley: Oh, they did? Oh they [inaudible 32:33].
10

11 Larry Otis: Yeah. That was State employees-oriented but you, the public could get
12 tickets. I mean it wasn't a closed deal. And this REO charity ball was
13 supposed to be for families or whatever of people that worked at REO
14 that, you know, were, illness, health, bad situations.
15

16 Shirley Bradley: This was just for the REO employees.
17

18 Larry Otis: REO employees, yeah. I, I think the red stocking deal was more of an
19 overall community area type thing, but...
20

21 Shirley Bradley: I think so.
22

23 Larry Otis: But yeah, they used to hold it on 2 nights, oh, in the late 40s down there.
24 And, henceforth, all of these things, you know, would represent a, a social
25 aspect of the REO clubhouse, you know, that people would remember,
26 memories and things there, so.
27

28 Shirley Bradley: When I talked with some of the gals in '92 that had worked in the office...
29

30 Larry Otis: Mm-hm.
31

32 Shirley Bradley: ...sadly, some of them are gone, but they would talk about the, the
33 dances...
34

35 Larry Otis: Right.
36

37 Shirley Bradley: ...and putting food baskets together...
38

39 Larry Otis: Yeah.
40

41 Shirley Bradley: ...and all of that sort of thing.
42

43 Larry Otis: Mm-hm.
44

45 Shirley Bradley: Well, um, I think I'm out of questions [chuckle] unless there are some
46 things you'd like to add.

1
2Larry Otis: Uh, in fact, that reminds me, my wife was in private employment and then
3 she went to the, well, it was the commerce, no, she worked for Liquor
4 Control Commission for a while.
5
6Shirley Bradley: Oh.
7
8Larry Otis: And, um, at that time, now this is I'm talking in the 70s where liability
9 hadn't caught up with some of these things and it used to be the vendors
10 would come in, some of the liquor vendors and they would put on a party
11 at the REO clubhouse.
12
13Shirley Bradley: Oh.
14
15Larry Otis: And this, and they would have this dispensing bar like, you know, it was
16 all set up there and, of course, naturally their own products. And I had
17 gone there a couple times after my wife, you know, had left private
18 employment and gone to the State. She went about 3 years before I did.
19 And then they would leave that up, this, this, it, of course, the liquor and
20 beer disappeared but they had 7UP and Coca-Cola and other things, you
21 know, and they would have a kids' Christmas party at the clubhouse the
22 next morning.
23
24Shirley Bradley: Oh.
25
26Larry Otis: You know, afterwards.
27
28Shirley Bradley: Sure.
29
30Larry Otis: And it was, I look back, back on the clubhouse as a very social center
31 aspect, you know, a lot of times.
32
33Shirley Bradley: There aren't too many places that have that sort of thing for employees.
34
35Larry Otis: No. There isn't. And, well, at that time, the capacity I can't tell you
36 number-wise but there wasn't...
37
38Shirley Bradley: Two or three hundred or something.
39
40Larry Otis: Oh, I would think it would even be upwards to 800 I would think.
41
42Shirley Bradley: Oh.
43
44Larry Otis: But it was about, that was about the limit, see. And, of course, the civic
45 center I don't know, it would accommodate what about 6000, 8000 I
46 think, something like that, I don't know.

1
2Shirley Bradley: Probably.
3
4Larry Otis: But at that time, there was no other banquet or facility too much over 100
5 people, you know, so naturally it was, it was a focal point there and so
6 forth but...
7
8Shirley Bradley: And the, well, the athletic teams and that sort of thing weren't there by the
9 time you were...
10
11Larry Otis: To a degree.
12
13Shirley Bradley: [35:47] Oh, were they?
14
15Larry Otis: Yeah. I knew several people and the Diamond REO ball team, softball
16 team was very competitive. They had some very good players on that in
17 the, as late as even the early 70s and, um, [Howdy Hilliard 36:02], Doug
18 Sleep, uh, Jerry Mitchell, uh, they're well respected in the city league.
19 And then there were several people who weren't REO employees who
20 also played on that team but I think they got Diamond REO to sponsor it,
21 you know, and, uh...
22
23Shirley Bradley: Okay.
24
25Larry Otis: But, in fact, has anybody mentioned the, the pistol team?
26
27Shirley Bradley: The what?
28
29Larry Otis: Pistol team.
30
31Shirley Bradley: No, no.
32
33Larry Otis: Well, I had heard of it and I saw a couple pictures. Well, then up on the
34 third floor just over from Engineering they had this pistol range.
35
36Shirley Bradley: Oh, they did?
37
38Larry Otis: Yes. And, uh, there were 2 or 3 guys I knew, it wasn't real common, and
39 they'd go up and practice at a cement wall, you know, and then they had
40 these targets hanging there and, and I guess they had a competition league
41 with a couple other, you know, organized pistol teams and...
42
43Shirley Bradley: And they would compete.
44
45Larry Otis: Yeah. And that was the REO Pistol League Team.
46

1 Shirley Bradley: I never heard of that.
2
3 Larry Otis: Yeah. It was upstairs on the third floor. Uh, it wasn't, I don't recall that it
4 was well known in there but I knew of it and a couple times I went up and
5 glanced at the, you know, the facility up there.
6
7 Shirley Bradley: Hm.
8
9 Larry Otis: But it's kind of a different offshoot to...
10
11 Shirley Bradley: Absolutely.
12
13 Larry Otis: ...to...
14
15 Shirley Bradley: Yeah.
16
17 Larry Otis: ...put a play on words.
18
19 Shirley Bradley: Yes. [chuckle]
20
21 Larry Otis: I'm guilty of that continually, but, uh,...
22
23 Shirley Bradley: I'm afraid I am too. [chuckle]
24
25 Larry Otis: Yes, so.
26
27 Shirley Bradley: Well...
28
29 Larry Otis: There, there were in a sense it might be a fraternal employee factor, you
30 know, to that but...
31
32 Shirley Bradley: Mm-hm.
33
34 Larry Otis: Uh, and they had, they had and I think in the mid-60s they, they had a
35 somewhat of an RV or outdoor club too. Some of them, you know, they,
36 they...
37
38 Shirley Bradley: Oh.
39
40 Larry Otis: The pickup truck campers came on real big toward the mid or late 60s and
41 I remember they had I would dare say a dozen or 15 people that had them
42 there, you know, and they would plan a few events I remember together.
43 But, uh, and there were probably numerous other deals too but I can't
44 immediately think of them.
45

1 Shirley Bradley: Well, that, that would give anybody listening, you know, a feel for not
2 only the work side but the social side, so.
3

4 Leslie Mitchel: That's right. A little bit of a fraternal feeling among the people that...
5

6 Shirley Bradley: Mm-hm.
7

8 Larry Otis: ...you know a group feel, yeah. I would think so, so, uh.
9

10 Shirley Bradley: [38:44] Well, can you think of anything else that you'd like to add,
11 something, something I haven't brought up? If not...
12

13 Larry Otis: No. I asked Tom and I asked Ray, well, you hadn't done Tom. You did
14 him earlier today didn't you?
15

16 Shirley Bradley: Mm-hm.
17

18 Larry Otis: But I asked Ray and I asked Tom and they said, well, they were just under
19 the impression that, you know, that you would ask a few questions and
20 they could bring up things...
21

22 Shirley Bradley: And that's pretty much...
23

24 Larry Otis: Right.
25

26 Shirley Bradley: ...the way it's gone and that's, and that's been great.
27

28 Larry Otis: Yeah.
29

30 Shirley Bradley: I thought the questions would just be to get things rolling and bring out
31 sometimes...
32

33 Larry Otis: Yeah.
34

35 Shirley Bradley: ...and give people something to talk about.
36

37 Larry Otis: They, then again, I don't, uh, I don't know what the initial deal of the
38 army truck deal but they had a [inaudible 39:26] on that and this was one
39 of their better avenues of manufacturing and income for the company, you
40 know...
41

42 Shirley Bradley: Mm-hm.
43

44 Larry Otis: ...for years because they seemed to be quite well respected in that. And
45 during the end of WWII and the Korean War, and even on continuing into

1 the 60s we had numerous military contracts for trucks and they seemed to
2 be pretty good. The government seemed to like'm all right.
3
4 Shirley Bradley: I imagine if the company was still producing trucks...
5
6 Larry Otis: Right.
7
8 Shirley Bradley: ...and hadn't gone out of business, they would be doing military contracts
9 through Vietnam and...
10
11 Larry Otis: Yeah. Probably, I imagine.
12
13 Shirley Bradley: ...wherever else.
14
15 Larry Otis: Yeah.
16
17 Shirley Bradley: Yeah.
18
19 Larry Otis: But, in fact, I know when I was in the military, the GMC and then the
20 REO was, were about the 2, 2 ½ ton trucks or about that, that was the only
21 2 there were, basically, in the army.
22
23 Shirley Bradley: Oh really?
24
25 Larry Otis: Yeah.
26
27 Shirley Bradley: Oh.
28
29 Larry Otis: But I don't know too much else of – did, did you go back and pick up
30 Henney Hearse and Body Company and Bohn Aluminum and they came
31 along in the 50s. The economic tides, you know, they had this I think it
32 was Henney or Heeney in Ohio that built and I think they're still in
33 business maybe, they build ambulance bodies and so forth. And you could
34 look this up in some of the books and, uh, I don't know, they, they bought
35 enough stock to control the company, I think that was it, and then they
36 sold it to Bohn Aluminum.
37
38 Shirley Bradley: That one I've heard.
39
40 Larry Otis: And at that time they had quite a facility I think in the St. Joe-Benton
41 Harbor area, Bohn Aluminum did. And then they, I think it's B-o-h-n I
42 believe and...
43
44 Shirley Bradley: I think it is.
45

1Larry Otis: And there again, I'm, I'm guessing, maybe '55, something in that
2 neighborhood, I don't know, maybe, maybe earlier. But anyway, they
3 held it for a while and decided, you know, it wasn't a good diversification
4 and they in turn sold it to White in 1957.
5

6Shirley Bradley: [41:36] Now these 2 companies, were they making engines?
7

8Larry Otis: No.
9

10Shirley Bradley: They were making materials.
11

12Larry Otis: Yeah. They were separate from the truck business entirely. Uh, Henney
13 Body Company, they, they made, they made ambulances and hearses
14 down in Ohio I think, I believe. Bohn Aluminum was in the aluminum
15 business down in I think St. Joe-Benton Harbor area at that time.
16 Reputedly, if I remember right and I'm straining my memory, was they
17 were going to use REO trucks for semi-tractors to haul their product to
18 various spots. Now, you know, whatever happened, I don't think they
19 held it too long because they sold it to White Motor Company in '57.
20

21Shirley Bradley: Uh-huh.
22

23Larry Otis: And then White Motor Company bought Diamond T Truck Company
24 down in Chicago in '58 and then, uh, brought the whole Diamond T
25 operation up here I think in 1960 and then they built both brand trucks
26 until they, until 1967 and it all became Diamond T then. Well, it was
27 Diamond REO is what it was and they merged them together so it was
28 only 1 truck.
29

30Shirley Bradley: Diamond T, yeah.
31

32Larry Otis: Yeah. It was the REO and the Diamond T. We built I remember there
33 were both models, you know. You could get'm with a little different trim
34 on them, you know. And it was a Diamond T or it was a REO and then
35 they finally in '67 merged it as Diamond REO.
36

37Shirley Bradley: The Gold Comet engine and the Cummins engine.
38

39Larry Otis: That was a very good product. Uh, uh, and I can't tell you specifically
40 what year they introduced it but I had occasion to, to do some testing and
41 whatever development in Engineering. And it was a very, it was a good,
42 durable truck engine so, of course, [inaudible 43:24] mean anything to you
43 but, you know, it was a, it was a, it had its own uniqueness and it was a
44 good, heavy-duty gas engine, very good quality and that was one of their
45 premium, the Gold Comet tradename and well respected, you know. It
46 was a good producing engine in the heavy-duty truck business.

1
2Shirley Bradley: [43:48] That was the engine that they were still producing right...?
3
4Larry Otis: Yes.
5
6Shirley Bradley: ...close to the end?
7
8Larry Otis: Oh, yeah, right up to the end.
9
10Shirley Bradley: To the end, okay.
11
12Larry Otis: They were still using it but, uh, uh, Diamond T had a heavier truck style
13 model, more over the road freight hauling and when they came into REO,
14 uh, they introduced a lot more bigger diesel-powered units and it wasn't
15 very long before, of course, Diamond REO had its comparable models,
16 you know, of, of semi-tractors with heavier hauling capacity with large
17 diesel engines. But yes, the Gold Comet was still going when it went
18 bankrupt, yes.
19
20Shirley Bradley: [44:28] And what was the Cummins engine that I heard about?
21
22Larry Otis: That's, that's a separate, that's in Columbus, Indiana, still going, still
23 terrific.
24
25Shirley Bradley: Hm.
26
27Larry Otis: A big, big producer of diesel engines and, uh, um, uh, they, um...
28
29Shirley Bradley: [44:48] Were they ever put into the REO trucks?
30
31Larry Otis: Oh yes!
32
33Shirley Bradley: Oh.
34
35Larry Otis: They're a good, they were a thorough product that was well known and
36 well respected.
37
38Shirley Bradley: So that was like outsourcing.
39
40Larry Otis: Yeah.
41
42Shirley Bradley: Yeah.
43
44Larry Otis: They were, they'd buy, well, that's what I did for about 4 years. At that
45 time, they had Detroit Diesel and Cummins were the 2 prevalent engines
46 that were diesel engines that were put into the Diamond REO product.

1 Uh, they would order, because there was delivery lead time on them, in
2 other words, if you want 50 engines, you put in the order and it might not,
3 you know, it might be a little bit, a month or so before you got'm. So they
4 ordered spec engines and what they called a basic engine and then they
5 sent this other fellow and I to school down at Detroit Diesel and down at
6 Columbus, Indiana to Cummins Engine Company and we went through
7 school so that we were authorized to do certain things to change the
8 engine to fit the model.
9

10 Shirley Bradley: Oh.

11

12 Larry Otis: And, uh, and that way the engine company felt comfortable, yeah, these
13 guys are trained, they can do it so we don't start losing engines out here on
14 warranty. And, uh, yeah, at that, toward the end of the 60s, uh, it was a
15 very good, heavy-duty truck market with, with the Diamond REO truck.
16 In fact, we even did a few mid-range engines and, uh, Detroit Diesel was
17 part of GM but there again, the management GM didn't do as good a job
18 with the Detroit Diesel Division and it went [pfft] down, you know. And
19 then Roger Penske, I don't know if you've heard of Roger Penske but he
20 bought off about, about 80% of Detroit Diesel.
21

22 Shirley Bradley: Oh.

23

24 Larry Otis: And he now owns, his organization owns about [inaudible 46:33]. And,
25 and for all fact, he brought back a good product. They have changed
26 dramatically in the last 15 years, but. Uh, and the same way with Allison,
27 the Allison Transmission is well respected. It's an automatic and heavy-
28 duty truck transmission and that used to be a division that was, it was
29 Detroit Diesel Allison and, uh, there again I don't think GM did enough of
30 research and development but that's a separate division down in Indiana
31 now that somebody else bought and, uh, uh, but, uh, everything changes.
32

33 Shirley Bradley: Oh yes.

34

35 Larry Otis: You'd think that, that GM is the ultimate decision-maker but it's, it's not
36 true. They've made a few circumstances, error in decisions, you know,
37 but that's life.
38

39 Shirley Bradley: Yeah. It is. Well. I thank you very much for coming in.
40

41 Larry Otis: Oh, fine, good.
42
43
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