Robert H. Doehler Oral History

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Note to Readers

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DESIGN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

DOEHLER, ROBERT H.

1987

EDSEL B. FORD DESIGN HISTORY CENTER

Henry Ford Museum &
Greenfield Village

This is Dave Crippen of the Edsel B. Ford Design History Center at the Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan. Today, which is October 26, 1987, we're talking with Mr. Robert H. Doehler. Mr. Doehler has had a long career in design over a span of thirty-five years, and we'll ask him to give us his career reminiscences at his own pace. Start at the beginning.

A I was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in December of 1922. At the age of eight months I moved with my parents and brothers to Iron Mountain, Michigan, where my father was to take charge of power at the plant Ford was building up there. A plant that was built for the purpose of making primarily wooden parts for the Model T body frame, which was made of hard wood. Perhaps because my father was an engineer -- it was in my genes -- I was always interested in automobiles.

Q He had initially been with a railway?

A That's right. Milwaukee Electric Railway and Light Company. It's now called Wisconsin Electric. It's the Milwaukee utility.

The stress of the big city -- I remember Dad saying that if they lost power at the rush hour, the trolleys were stopped in their tracks. There was hell to pay! It was just at that time that pulverized coal was coming into use, and he could tell some pretty hair-raising stories about problems in the power plants. At any rate, he got a nervous breakdown and wanted to get away from it all. When he heard about Ford building this plant up in the U.P.... I guess he'd admired Henry Ford from a distance.

Q He was a power engineer?

A Yes, as was, also, Henry Ford in his original career [at Detroit Edison]. Our talk around the dinner table frequently centered around cars. I absorbed it all. By the time I was ten years old, I knew what I wanted to be and that was an auto designer.

Q You lived in Iron Mountain?

A Yes.

Q How long?

A Until eighteen when I graduated from high school. When I was an art and Ford booster, the Ford products of the 'Thirties gave me a lot of incentive to be a Ford booster. I thought they were exciting, although the auto industry, in general, was very exciting in the 'Thirties. It was a period of amazing development. The difference between a '30 Model

A, or even a '30 K Model Lincoln, and a 1940 Lincoln Zephyr, were worlds apart, not only the way they looked, but the way they rode on a trip.

Q The Iron Mountain plant made the Model A parts?

A I was eight years old when 1930 came along, and my only recollection is they made wooden parts. They may have made more truck parts beginning in the early 'Thirties.

Q At the introduction of the Model A station wagon, Iron Mountain seemed to take on a new role?

A Yes.

Q The lessening of wood parts as the decade wore on?

A That's right.

Q And the use of the wood body station wagon was in?

A Right. So trucks and station wagons were, really, the only remaining thing left for wood.

Q And Ford was the only company in the Big Three that was making their own station wagon bodies?

A But the Ford station wagon bodies of that period -- 1939/1940/1941 and the early postwar years -- if you saw them next to a competitive station wagon, there was no comparison.

Q In what way?

A The workmanship -- the quality of material. They used the finest quality birch and maple. But, I really didn't even believe in station wagons, myself. I once made the remark to Mr. Nelson that didn't endear me to him at all, that they would look much better if they took them out of the crate!

Q This is Walter Nelson who was the general manager of the Iron Mountain plant?

A Yes. But I did have to admire the workmanship that went into it, and much of this was due to his efforts. They were a thing of beauty, just for the workmanship.

Anyway, I graduated from high school in 1941.

Q Iron Mountain?

A Actually, we moved to Kingsford in 1930. Kingsford is an adjoining company town. It was named after Edward G. Kingsford, who was a distant cousin of Henry Ford's.

Q His name lives today in the Union Carbide charcoal briquettes.

A Yes. Kingsford owned a lot of the timberland up there in the Upper

Peninsula. As I heard it, he persuaded Henry Ford to put his plant there. Also around 1920, Ford and his company of famous camping partners -- Edison, Firestone and Burroughs -- camped up there on Cowboy Lake, which is very near Iron Mountain and Kingsford and where Ford later built a hydro plant. It was on the Menominee River which separated Wisconsin and Michigan, and Cowboy Lake was right off the river. This hydro plant was also under my father who was in the power department. I always used to be extremely impressed by -- Henry Ford Senior was one of my personal heroes. When I read some of the later things about Ford. or when I read later in life about some of Ford's ruthlessness in dealing with some people, I had to work a little bit to maintain this hero worship, and, at other times, I didn't have to work at all, I was in agreement with him on many things.

One of the things I admired about Ford was the way he kept his factories. And the Iron Mountain plant was even more in the area of outstanding housekeeping than, perhaps, the Rouge. For one thing, they didn't have such dirty operations as foundries and steel mills. I know the powerhouse was absolutely -- well, I've been in hospitals that were much messier than the Iron Mountain powerhouse.

I remember some amusing things. I think it was 1938, Henry Ford would come up there on an average about every other year. Maybe more frequent in the earlier years.

Q He would come up on an ore boat?

A Yes. Dad told me when he came up in his private car -- railroad car. One time they chartered an Ann Arbor car ferry. This was all before I was old enough. But I do remember when he came up in '38. The reason I remember it was '38 is because I was in the driveway washing Dad's car, which was a '38 Ford DeLuxe with the widow's peak. He called home and told Mother he wanted a clean white shirt delivered at the factory gate immediately. This was because Henry Ford was expected, and, I guess, he was afraid the shirt he was wearing might have had a bit of stain around the collar. But such was the excitement when Henry Ford was expected. And Dad would tell how when he came to a plant, usually the first thing he'd seek out would be the powerhouse.

Q His old stamping grounds?

A Yes. He said he bounded up the stairs there, two and three steps at a time. This was when he was in his late sixties or early seventies.

Q He was seventy-five in 1938.

A So I was raised very much in the legend and the stake of the old Ford Motor Company. So I was quite excited, when in 1941, I was given a letter to present to the personnel office on Miller Road [Rouge Plant, Dearborn, Michigan] that would put me in the company. Here, at last, I'd be working right in the heart of it all. They couldn't put me -- or they didn't, at least -- right in the styling department. I was put in the Ford Training School. It was an apprentice program.

Q Where was it located?

A Just inside Gate 4 on Miller Road. In this school, you were put on various medalworking tools, the basic tools: shaper, lathe, milling machine, and grinder, just to see what feel you had for this, and there was related school work. It was a three-month program, and those who were in the top part of the class went to the tool room to go on a tool making apprenticeship. Others went -- they tried to find room for them on the line in the factory.

This was quite a shock to me. I had led a sheltered life up to then.

Q Had you taken any technical curriculum in high school?

A Mechanical drawing, geometry and algebra, which I absolutely hated. But I did beautifully in mechanical drawing. My instructor was very effusive in his praise of my mechanical drawing. It was largely a repeat of the mechanical drawing classes that I took at the Ford Trade School, which were in connection with this apprentice course. I had an instructor named Slade there, a man whom I greatly respected and whom I felt respected me. We got along fine. I look back with fondness on those years, and also by association to Henry I, because he was the one that set up these things, and he wanted to be sure that succeeding generations had a good background of training in the mechanical arts. It wasn't too long after Henry's death that these things started to be neglected. The only thing that counted is what contributed to the bottom line of profit for the company.

Q They lost Henry Ford's vision of preparing generations of students for practical work?

A That's right. So, I went to the tool room. I had only gone to Detroit. My object was not specifically to work for the Ford Motor Company, it was to get into automobile designing, which later became known as styling. In the Ford organization, it was called the Design Department, not the Styling Department.

Q Even as far back as Bob Gregorie?

A Yes. Especially in Gregorie's day, because he had Edsel's backing. Later on, a man named MacPherson became very powerful in Ford engineering, and he wanted this design department strictly under his thumb, so it became known as the Styling Department, which was really an intentional put down, but many stylists don't really do much to deserve any more than that title, because they are little more than window dressers for automobiles. Their attitude is very superficial.

I was working in the tool room in the Fall of '41 on the afternoon shift on the shaper. That was the first machine they put you on. I had a very tough foreman, and all of this was just a bit much for me to take. I looked at these long rows of lights forty feet up there in the tool room, and they seemed, with the perspective, to go off into infinity. It was just utterly overwhelming. I'd come from this small town.

Q Where individuals counted for something?

A Yes. Everybody here was so tough and impersonal. I was yearning to get out. Apart from my basic desire to get into design, I intensified my efforts. I worked on a little portfolio. I had no formal training in art. This was just my own self-taught talent. So I made these half dozen pencil sketches. I was a little disillusioned, and, even given the perspective of an eighteen year old, a little bitter at the Ford Company. Here their most ardent booster was being treated so cavalierly.

So, I went to try to get a job at General Motors. I got an interview up there with a man named Jules Andrade, who was pretty high up in the [Design Department]. He was very congenial and talked to me in an avuncular way. But he had to inform me that they were in the process of disbanding their styling department.

Q What year was this?

A October of 1941. Pearl Harbor was two months later. I don't know how I managed to get an interview at Ford.

Q At the Engineering Lab [in Dearborn]?

A Yes. I got in the lobby there, and I was put on hold. I waited out there for two hours. My new found old resentment was starting to seethe again but not out of control. There was a tendency in those days everywhere to humble you a bit.

Q Did you use the expression "cooling your heels?"

A That would have been appropriate to that situation. That's the way I tended to interpret it. Nevertheless, I was thrilled to be in the lobby of the Ford Engineering Laboratory. I had seen reproductions of the old mail carrier delivering mail in his Model T touring car. It was on the wall in the lobby. This was legend coming alive for me.

Q The Norman Rockwell?

A Was that a Norman Rockwell? This was a huge....

Q We've got the original.

A That's where it was.

Q A favorite of Henry's.

A I believe it. Maybe they had just forgotten me. If I were in their shoes, things might not have been any different. Anyway, a man finally came out. It was Johnny Walters, who had done the instrument panels for the Ford products, which I greatly admired. I thought he was absolutely a genius. The instrument panels on the '40 Zephyr, the '39 Mercury and the '40 Mercury. They were really superb.

Johnny looked at my stuff, and he seemed quite impressed. So, I got a job in the Design Department. However, they, too, were beginning to trim back, but not as much as G.M., mainly because of Henry's opposition to the war. He wasn't going to acknowledge there was a war going on over there, which, at the time, was another thing I admired him for.

So here I was in the Ford Design Department. I had reached Valhalla at last! What a contrast with working in the tool room. In the tool room we had to rush to that lunch wagon, bolt down our food in twenty minutes. If I can backtrack just a moment to give the atmosphere, when the bell rang, you had to be at your machine with your apron on, and the machine had to be running.

This poor kid on the machine next to me had gotten me an ice cream bar off of the lunch wagon, and he was at his machine all right, but he was finishing the last of his ice cream bar. So this foreman named Yates -- he always wore bow ties so they wouldn't get caught in the machines, and they were leatherette black bow ties -- very stern man. He wouldn't brook any nonsense at all. I don't hold it against him; he had to be that way. That was his job on the line. But, he came up and pulled it right out of this kid's mouth. And this poor kid was shaking. He gave him a brief tongue-lashing. But, that was the atmosphere. This was why

I felt that I was in heaven in the Design Department.

I was given something to do so they wouldn't have to think of something. They just gave me some clay [work] tools and said, "Here, go ahead." I was working on the rear quarter of one of these first flush-sided proposals, which eventually wound up being the one which was put in production. One is the '48 Mercury and Cosmopolitan, also the little car, which, eventually, became the French Ford Kadette. The overall supervisor, at that time, was an old German fellow named Dick Beneike, and he was quite a character.

Q In what way?

A We made fun of him because of his accent and the way he murdered the language. He would say, for instance, "Close der vindow half vey open. Rub der clay good in mit der hands." He was short stoop-shouldered. He looked sort of Neanderthal, but I liked him from the beginning.

Q Basically, he was a good guy?

A I feel he was. There wasn't anybody out there then who I didn't feel was a good guy. The whole atmosphere throughout was very low key.

Q Was that tone set by the chief designer?

A I always admired Mr. Gregorie. I liked the way he dressed, and he had very good taste. He had an air of refinement about him. I suppose that was part of his appeal to Edsel Ford.

Q It would be helpful here, without impeding the flow of your narrative, to give us a thumbnail sketch of your various colleagues in the Design Department -- who they were and what they did.

A As I mentioned, Dick Beneike was the head clay modeler. He had time for me, even though I was just a kid then. Another fellow named Al Sartor, who was a clay modeler. I have fond memories of him because he gave me helpful hints about how to drag the scraper over the clay so it wouldn't chatter. You appreciate those things when you're a neophyte. Somebody who knows what they're doing, takes time out and imparts his knowledge to you.

It was at this time, also, that I met Fred Hoadley. I didn't really get to know him very well before the war, but I do remember him. As for some of the others that I recall, there was Bob Gregorie. I knew from what I had read and heard that Gregorie was the creator of the Lincoln Zephyr. This is, he took Tjaarda's work on the '36 Zephyr and made it into a produceable front-engine automobile, and I think he did a beautiful job of it.*

That body remained through the '39 model year. Then they did that masterful facelift in '38. In its time frame, I think the '38 Zephyr was probably the most exciting car of all time for me. Perhaps most enthusiasts would say the Cord, but the Cord was not a high-volume car; it was almost a custom-built car. It might have been compared more with the Lincoln Continental. But the Zephyr was a mass-produced car, and it really had much more relevance to the scene than the Cord did. All those Zephyrs through '41, to me, were very exciting. I had read about Gregorie being head designer for Ford. It wasn't only the Lincoln Zephyr, the '39 Mercury was a beautiful car. Ford was a style leader in those days because they went their own way. They didn't appear to be so concerned about what General Motors was doing.

Q Ford's efforts in the late 'Thirties with the first Zephyr and later Zephyrs and the Continental were a matter of grave concern to G.M.

A The '38 Zephyr strongly influenced -- all the '39 cars had their version of catwalk cooling, and some of them were done in extremely poor taste. The Zephyr was exquisitely done, but the worst ones, I think, were the Chrysler products. They were terrible.

So in my estimation, Gregorie had a running head start. He was the creator of those cars. I looked up to him as the disciples of Frank Lloyd Wright look up to him today as a legend.

Q How was Gregorie to work for?

A Remember, I was just a young, eighteen year old kid.

Q You're slogging clay at the moment?

A Yes. I don't think I ever exchanged any words with him during that three-month period I was there.

Q Do you remember John Najjar?

A Yes, I do. I remember John Najjar very well. He was nice. I have nothing but good memories about him.

Q Very helpful?

A I don't remember Johnny so well from that pre-war period. I remember him more clearly from when I came back after the war.

Q Ed Martin?

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*Editor's Note: See Bob Koto's interview for his authoritative version of this model's design.

A I remember seeing Ed Martin around there, and he was up in the inner circle.

Q He was a confidant of Gregorie's.

A I had that impression, yes. It was never quite clear to me what his job was there. There was Walter Kruke. He was involved with interiors or fabrics and colors. He was a very dapper, suave gentleman. That's about the only comment I could make about him. I didn't have any contact with him.

Q Do you remember a Frank Francis?

A Yes, very well. Frank Francis was the personnel man. I don't know if that's the right title for him, but he was Gregorie's gofer, if that's the right term. It was Frank that went around checking fellows if he needed to know something about personnel and scheduling. Frank was a very good man for the job. He was tactful and polished and thoroughly likable.

Q What about Bennie Barbera?

A I remember Bennie primarily from postwar days. This was totally strange to me when I came there. I was worried about my own performance. I do remember Martin Rigitko clearly.

Q He was the layout man?

A Yes, he was. I would say the most influential men there were Gregorie at the top, Dick Beneike as the head clay modeler, and Martin Rigitko as the man who took these clay models, translated them to paper so that the body engineers over at the Air Frame Building got it right. Martin had a lot to do in the original layout of the package drawing to see if the seating was right and the placement of pedals in relationship to doors and windows. They call it ergonomics now.

My impression of Martin at that time was that he was rather aloof, which I didn't take offense at. I expected important people to be aloof. Because he was part of this organization, I also looked up to him as a part of the legend.

Q Ed Martin became an early historian of the Continental. John Najjar asked him to put his reminiscences on paper about how the Continental first came about.

A He was in a position to do it. Ross Cousins was a great idea man, aided by his expertise as an illustrator. He was very good at these loose pastel renderings.

Q Apparently, he could translate fairly basic drawings into something that became advertising art?

A Yes. He was very good in his field. There's no doubt about it. Everybody there were top-notch men.

Q Did you run across the engineering people like Joe Galamb?

A No.

Q V.Y. Talberg?

A After the war, yes. I always wanted to see Joe Galamb, because I'd heard about him when I was still in Iron Mountain.

Q He had been Henry Ford's chief engineer for many years, and, by virtue of his ability, he had Mr. Ford's ear. Shortly after the war, he retired.

A Did he get deeply involved in the aesthetics, or was he primarily a body engineer?

Q He was primarily a body engineer, but, as you know, from that period, the body engineers felt that they were -- you mentioned Mr. MacPherson -- the designers; these styling people were simply decorators. Galamb would insist, sometimes Mr. Gregorie's annoyance, on having the final say on certain shapes and construction. He was something of a dictator aided by his longevity and presumed clout with Mr. Ford.

A Take the '32 Ford -- the first V-8 -- did Gregorie have any input in that?

Q No. That was done at Briggs.

A The shape of the radiator and the fenders and the body lines?

Q Those were a collaboration between Edsel, Briggs and the body engineers. That was when Ralph Roberts was in charge of design over at Briggs.

A Even that was a superb job, although I thought the '33 and '34 were, in the context of the times, the most beautiful Fords ever.

Q Mr. Gregorie's first real influence came with the '36 Ford.

A Yes. And Gregorie did a fine facelift on the '36 Ford with the convex fenders on a front end, which supposedly [Bob] Koto originated.

Q As you can imagine, Edsel depended on Briggs. Bob Koto, John Tjaarda, and Ralph Roberts ran a very skilled body design operation. But as Gregorie came along, first doing some personal cars with Edsel Ford and then gradually getting his confidence, Edsel Ford decided to shift the design operation into an in-house group headed by Mr. Gregorie. But the transition was slow. The design for the '36 Zephyr was pretty much Tjaarda's, except for the front end.

A From the cowl back, yes.

I'm trying to confine myself to comments on what I am reasonably certain and know what I'm talking about. This is something I don't know, and that's who really did the styling on the '33 Ford, the one that I admired so much? Gregorie is supposed to have done an English job -- the Y Job they called it. This car sort of had the basic theme of the '33 Ford in it -- '33 American Ford. The '33 American Ford was larger, and it had more room to develop this theme, and it was much more graceful. But, to my knowledge, there was no Ford styling department in '32 when this was designed. So, did Gregorie design it, or did Briggs design it, or was it a collaboration?

Q We'll have to check with Gregorie.

A Whoever designed it, my hat is off to them. I can look at a '33 Ford -- any body model -- and still get excited today. As my friend, Ted Pietsch, says, "A thing of beauty is a joyfor." With his sense of humor he says, "It's a joyfer."

I want to mention when I worked at the Ford Design Department before the war, I remember lunch hour, because then we took a long walk down the hallway. Styling was on the South end of the building, and we walked the full length of the Engineering Laboratory, and then through another hallway to the cafeteria. The heavenly smells of these soybean muffins were coming through the hall. Henry Ford had a German cook in the cafeteria. To eat that food was like going home again. It was clean and wholesome food. It was all just too good to be true. It was a different ballgame after the war.

My only recollections of Henry and Edsel was during this period: one noon, another young man and myself, Gene Requa was his name. I don't know what happened to him. He went to California, and that's the last I've heard of him.

Q He was in the Design Department?

A Yes, at that time. He also was an apprentice. There was quite a lineup at the cafeteria there, and he told me if we could get there five minutes early, we could largely avoid the line. So we sneaked out about ten to twelve to go to the cafeteria, and I'm feeling a little uneasy about it. You'd never do anything like that at the Rouge Plant. Holy smokes! So we're walking down the main aisle, and way down at the other end of the aisle we see this gaunt figure coming toward us. Oh my God, right away I knew who it was. He was strolling around and headed for his office, apparently. We didn't know, at that time, where that was. So we cut over to the side aisle, and darned if he didn't also, so we ran smack into him. He had a big grin on his face, and he just said, "Hi, boys." Of course, we stuttered a response. So this was Henry Ford. It was the only time in my life I ever exchanged words with him, although my dad had talked with him.

Q But he had a big grin on his face because he knew what you were doing?

A We thought he did. Maybe he did, maybe he didn't.

Q He didn't ask you how you liked your job?

A No.

Q That was one of his favorite questions.

A Really? I wish he would have. I would have loved to have talked to him. Brief as it was, it's a happy remembrance. And my meeting Edsel was very much the same. I was a bit late quitting one night, and almost everybody had left. I was walking down the hall, and here was Edsel walking in the other direction. I looked at him, and I was afraid to say hello. I was brought up in this old German ethic where everything was quite formal, and children didn't speak unless they were spoken to. You had respect for your elders.

But he gave me a friendly hello, and I answered him. We also saw Edsel in the Styling Department frequently, but, of course, I didn't have occasion to talk to him.

Q Known then as the Design Department?

A The Design Department, yes. One time I recall Henry coming through there with a raincoat on all alone. He wasn't followed by any retinue. It was that same day that he and Edsel sat down on a bench in there and had a long talk, which somewhat gives the lie to these stories that Henry couldn't be bothered with Edsel.

Q Quite the contrary. They conferred endlessly, but they often disagreed.

A I'm sure of that. But, I had the impression that Edsel was largely ignored by Henry.

Q On the important things, perhaps, but on questions of design, he deferred to Edsel.

A I didn't know that Henry was even interested in design at all.

Q He would say, "Well, that's Edsel's department," but he would occasionally drop in to see what was going on in the Design Department with Edsel and occasionally on his own, but it was not frequent.

A That sounds more plausible than what I have been led to believe.

Q But there is a historical precedence for thinking that, on some main social/industrial issues, they disagreed.

A I'm well aware of those.

So, the dream was about to end, and it ended on Pearl Harbor Day. I knew what came to pass was about to happen. I had the choice of going back to the tool room from whence I'd come, or going out in the drafting room department at Willow Run. I would have liked to have gone to the drafting department, but I conferred with my father, and he advised me to go to the tool room, if I didn't want to get my head blown off when they had no further need for me as a draftsman. I went to the tool room, and that's where I spent the war years.

Q Tell us about your experiences there.

A This was a toolmaking apprenticeship, and it was an extension of the apprentice school work I had in the Training School, which was part of the Apprentice School, which was all under the Henry Ford Trade School that was in B Bulding [at the Rouge plant]. That's where we went for our classroom-related studies. This was really an extension of that. I did very well, if I say so, in the tool room. I liked working with my hands.

Q Doing war work?

A Yes. Making tooling for various things that Ford made during the war. One incident might bear repeating here. In hindsight, it's a matter of nostalgia for the old Ford Motor Company. I went through all shifts, but I was working on the day shift at this time. I got in there at seven o'clock. I was running what they call the bullard -- huge machine, a vertical lathe with a revolving horizontal table. We were on almost what you might call a semi-production job. We were turning big, huge barrels that were used for casting the aircraft cylinders. The midnight shift man had left the machine all set up with taking a heavy cut on the inside and a heavy cut on the outside. When you're taking these heavy cuts, the workpiece gets very hot, and it expands. I started up the machine, as I was supposed to, but while it was running, I was also supposed to keep my eye on it. Since these are long cuts that take fifteen minutes for the tool to reach the full cut, I went to return or borrow a tool from a neighboring worker on the same machine, and he pointed back at my machine. I looked back, and here this barrel had come loose from the jaws, and it was starting to rock. I panicked. I ran back to my machine and tried to turn it off with this big foot lever. I kicked at it frantically, but I just didn't push it hard enough. Meanwhile, the thing was continuing to rotate, and finally it comes out of the jaws and gets jammed between the side head. To make it short, it did about ten to twelve thousand dollars worth of damage on the machine, which translated into today's money, would be much more than that, at least fifty thousand, I'd say.

I thought my goose was cooked, but my record was good up to that point. So, my boss looked at it, and I could see he wasn't happy, but he didn't come unglued. But we had to go see the boss of the entire tool room. There was a man named Durling and also a man named Snyder, and this was Snyder who we went to see. His office was up in the middle of the building. Snyder came, and he listened to the story, and we walked back and looked at the machine. Mr. Snyder didn't say much, and I was expecting him to give me a real tongue-lashing. Something like that didn't make him look too good, either.

He finally said, "Be more careful in the future." That's all he said. I think he actually felt sorry for me. I wasn't making a big scene, I was just anxiously awaiting the verdict. So Snyder was known as very glum. If you remember the cartoon, "Bull of the Woods," I think Snyder was the prototype for that. Always glum. You never saw him smiling, and you thought he was a real crab. I loved the man after that.

All in all, my My experience in the tool room was good, and I'm grateful to Ford for having given me that experience.

Q Invaluable, I suspect?

A It really wasn't invaluable. It wasn't appreciated by stylists.

Q But, appreciated by you?

A Yes, by me, it was.

Q A unique background?

A Yes. The schoolwork that went with it was rigorous.

I completed my toolmaking apprenticeship in the Spring of '45. Then my overriding object was to get back into the Design Department, which I did.

Q How?

A I was working from within the company now. I requested an interview with somebody out there.

Q Mr. Gregorie was still head of the department?

A He was at that time, yes. I don't know whether he remembered me. To be real honest about it, I don't think he did.

Q He had gone and come back by this time.

A Yes. What happened in between there is not really clear to me.

Q He went back to naval architecture at that time.

A In that period?

Q Yes. One of the problems was a run-in with Joe Galamb.

A In April of '45, I had an interview with Tom Hibbard.

Q He was a well-known designer of the classic era and had come over from General Motors. He was in the twilight of his career at this point.

A He was in and out of General Motors several times. Hibbard's history in the late 'Thirties after he left LeBaron and went to G.M. is fuzzy to me. But he certainly was a real gentleman. Anyway, he gave me the interview, and he liked what I had to show him. It was like starting all over again.

He put me in Martin Rigitko's department. The body surface development.

Q Colloquially known as the layout department?

A Layout, yes. Among Martin's duties were, besides committing the shape of the clay models to paper and translating them into engineering drawings -- surface development drawings -- he also made the initial package drawings. These were usually made in tenth scale.

Q They are the dimensions of...?

A The dimensions of the package that the styling was to be done on.

Q And the package is known generally as?

A The dimensions of the chassis and the interior and the body. It's what the Design Department is given to work around. The package comes from the engineering department. Later on, it did, period. For instance, Harold Youngren gave Styling a package for the '49 Ford and said, "This is it. This is what you work to." In Gregorie's time, it was my impression, that the Design Department had more input in it. I made these tenth scale drawings for Rigitko, and I was quite happy about it because I was finally getting a chance to show my stuff. I was good at lines. I knew what a good line was, and I made very clean and neat drawings. Martin appreciated these, and although I was never told so, I think, perhaps, even Gregorie must have appreciated them, because I know he did the same thing back in the days of the K Model Lincoln. I have one of his drawings. And I have to say it was very well done. It was not as well done as another one I have that Rolland Taylor had done, but it was very good.

Q He had been where?

A He was from General Motors. On the big K Model, they made them twelfth scale because the cars were so huge. I made it my business to get these drawings. I was very much interested in line drawings because there you're looking at the real car; you're not looking at a stylist's or an illustrator's distortion of what that car was.

So I ran across these drawings of Gregorie's and Taylor's. I still have these drawings. They would take these tenth-size drawings, and that's what they would do their sketching on because they were convenient. That's what Edsel or Gregorie sketched on for him to do the Continental.

Q Actually, it was a dimensional drawing from the salesmen's book.

A Those are derived. They're made much smaller. That's what I did for Rigitko, primarily. We would also make line drawings of competitive cars with the seating so as to have a guide for the competitiveness of our own products. It was fun, but after several years of it, I couldn't really see much future in Rigitko's department because, in the meantime, the General Motor's crowd came over.

Q To the design studio?

A Yes. I could see Martin Rigitko's influence waning. I always liked him and respected him. He was a good boss, and I think I had his high regard also. However, I'm afraid I lost much of it when I quit him, because he regarded me as an ingrate or unappreciative. I left his department and went more into pure styling.

Q How did that come about?

A I was pushing for it.

Q You felt that for your career, layout was a dead end?

A It was sort of a dead end, unless I wanted to be a layout draftsman. I didn't really want to be a layout draftsman, because the layout draftsmen didn't have much input into the basic appearance of the car. They were executors. They were very skilled men, and certainly to be respected, but it really wasn't what I wanted to do.

So, I found myself working for Bill Schmidt. He was the head of what became the Lincoln studio.

Q What period was this?

A About '47 or '48.

Q Gregorie had left by this point?

A Oh, yes. Gregorie made this -- I would only be rehashing what you've heard many times.

Q Give us your perspective.

A My view of it?

Q You were there.

A I remember making the tenth scale drawing of the house proposal -- the house proposal I will call Gregorie's and Rigitko's version of the interpretation of this package drawing that Youngren sent over.

Q Which was to be the postwar Ford?"

A The 1949 Ford, when Breech decided nothing we had was suitable. We couldn't fault him for that, because the job that eventually did come out as a '49 Mercury was too big for a Ford at that time.

Q Is it your definite impression that the Gregorie proposal for the '49 Ford, while rejected, was then somehow transmogrified into the '49 Mercury?

A The Gregorie department had four basic new cars designed for the postwar period. All new cars with essentially flush sides, although they had a vestigial front fender shape in them, in the case of the Mercury and Ford, not on the Lincoln Cosmo, that was strictly flush all the way through. But these cars were -- the smallest one was a 106 inch wheelbase, or was it a 100 inch wheelbase?

Q The smallest of the four?

A Yes. The one that became the French Vedette.

Q I want to ask you a few things to indicate how it happened.

A I remember it quite clearly. But there were steel prototypes of this model running around the Ford grounds.

Q The one with the 100 inch wheelbase?

A Yes.

Q Which is known as the small Ford?

A Yes. One of them had a five cylinder engine in it. Others had the Ford 60 engine in. I don't know what the rest had.

Q Sixty was the...?

A Sixty was the small, flathead V-8. Henry developed that for the -- well, the first came out in the European Fords, and then he put it on the '37 Ford. It never took hold in this country very well. Just as aside, I have one of those in my garage right now -- just the engine -- sitting there. So we had this small Ford. They were very serious about coming out with it, and they found out -- and you mentioned Mr. Tallberg. Mr. Tallberg was very much seen in the Styling Department in these days.

Q Postwar?

A Yes. Planning for the postwar line. An amusing aside: Tallberg had a phobia of people chewing gum. He just couldn't stand it. I sympathize with him to some extent.

They found that material costs were the cheapest thing in the car. It was tooling costs and the handling of all the parts. The small car was really nothing but a miniature edition of the big ones. So it would have cost nearly as much to produce the small car as a full-size car of the period. They had second thoughts about it, and, eventually, it was put on the side burner. By this time, an awful lot of money had been spent developing it, so the French Ford people came over, and expressed a desire for it, and they got it. The car went into production as the French Vedette; pretty much as it was designed here for the small American Ford. Later on, they botched it trying to make a notchback out of the fastback. But, originally, it was designed at the Ford Design Department.

Q You're talking about three other models?

A The next one up the line was to be the standard-sized Ford. Sharing this body of the standard-sized Ford was the smaller Mercury, which had a different front end, different instrument panel, and a little longer hood. The wheelbase was extended forward of the cowl.

Then you went up to the next size body. At G.M. you would have called it the C body. This was to be used on the Lincoln Cosmopolitan and the larger Mercury. There was some that never got beyond paper. I think they were going to put a Continental on this Cosmopolitan platform chassis. But there are only three bodies: The small, the intermediate, and the large. The large one came in different wheelbase lengths, but it was, essentially, the same body.

Q These came out of the Gregorie shop, and these were to be his proposals for the postwar models?

A Right. When Breech came over, he thought this full-sized Ford was too big for a Ford. There was already a small Mercury on that body, so that body became one Mercury.

Q Is this the B body?

A If the little one was the A body, we'll call that the B body. And then that body was also utilized for a small Lincoln. It was abandoned for Ford. So this left a gap in the Ford line. There was no Ford. That's when the crash program came for the '49 Ford.

Q So, basically, what I'm trying to understand here, is that the B body -- the Ford -- the Gregorie proposal for the postwar Ford -- was deemed too large by Ernest Breech, and it was shifted to the Mercury and the small Lincoln?

A Yes. It might be misleading to say it was shifted to the Mercury because there was already a Mercury being developed with that body.

Q What happened to that?

A Well, you could say, it came out, if you wanted to.

Q It was deleted, and the Ford...?

A It doesn't much matter. You see, this was the Mercury that utilized that body which was originally....

Q Oh, I'm sorry. You're right. The B body was simply deleted?

A For the Ford, yes.

Q For the Ford, but did it become the C body?

A No, it was still the B body, and it was used on the Mercury and the small Lincoln. Is there a picture here?

Q In audio terms, the design was not scrapped, it was utilized?

A Except for the front end, in the case of the Mercury.

Q How was the B body utilized, if at all?

A The A body was sent to the French Vedette, the B body, which was essentially the same theme, a recognizable family resemblance.

Q But a larger wheelbase?

A Yes, a much larger car. The B body was originally slated for the full-size Ford, but the Mercury was also to share that body -- the B body. Just since '41, Mercury had always shared the Ford body. By this time, there was only one Mercury. They had abandoned the larger Mercury. Mercury was to be just one line, and it utilized the B body.

Q So, in effect, the B body, which was Gregorie's postwar Ford proposal, in effect, became the Mercury in '49?

A Yes. But don't forget, he intended to use that body on a Mercury, I'm sure, from the beginning, which might explain why it was fairly large.

Q He also had a C body proposal?

A Yes. This was the body that went on the Cosmopolitan, but, at an earlier stage, that body was also to be available in a Mercury. They were going to broaden the Mercury line. Mercury was to be more like Buick. Buick at one time shared bodies with Chevrolet, and they shared bodies with Cadillac when those bodies were completely different.

Q But they dropped the larger Mercury?

A They dropped that, yes, and the C body became unique to the Cosmopolitan.

Q Then what happened?

A Since the B body went to the Mercury, this left nothing for Ford. The little Ford went to France. There was no Ford, so there was a crash program to design a '49 Ford.

Q How did that come about? I'm thinking of from the Ford perspective, not the design of the '49 Ford. Breech, obviously, made the decision, but now he's stuck. He's got a big hole for the '49 Ford. What is his plan of attack?

A I wasn't privy to the inner councils of the company, so I'll have to give you my version of it or what I saw or heard.

Q That's what we want.

A There is always a tendency when a new crowd comes in to think that the house group is in need of a housecleaning.

Q Especially if you're G.M. oriented, as Breech was?

A Yes. But I'd also have to say, and there's nothing personal here, but something happened at Ford design. That was touched upon the other night at the Raymond Loewy party. If somebody else hadn't asked it, I would have been tempted to ask it myself, except I didn't want to make any waves.

As I have tried to impart to you before, I was just crazy about the Ford products through '41. These Zephyrs had such organically-smooth, flowing, aerodynamic lines. Maybe it wasn't true aerodynamics, but it wasn't really phony either. Edsel did have an interest in aerodynamics. I just wish Edsel would have lived a full life and remained active. I think I would have stayed with Ford Motor Company.

Ford styling, in my opinion, just went to hell in '42. I think they went from the best to the worst in one model year.

Q You were there?

A I went back to the tool room in '40, but the '42 models had been styled before I left.

Q From you vantage point, could you see any reason why?

A I'd have to speculate on that, because they were already done -- the '42 models, which were basically the '46, '47 and '48 models also. They were busy on what they hoped would be '43 and '44 models. They were heavily influenced by the '41 and '42 G.M. cars.

Q That's where the influence came?

A Yes. But, putting it bluntly, they really fumbled the ball on that '42 Lincoln.

Q That had to be Gregorie?

A Yes. Edsel was alive, too. What happened, if I can give my interpretation of it, was that up until the '41 model -- really the '40 model, because the '41 was merely a carryover of the '40 -- Ford styling had been going their own way. They weren't worried about what anyone else was doing. They were confident of what they were doing. They were trying to build beautiful cars, and they were succeeding dramatically. The cars were honest. They weren't building what later came to be known as commercial packages. And Edsel was an aesthete. The results were terrific.

Q How were they commercially?

A They sold well, yes. The Zephyr sold 20,000 cars, and Zephyr was outselling LaSalle through '41.

Q Had something happened at G.M.?

A The '41 G.M. line was very salable -- they were pretty hot cars. They were well styled. They were overdecorated.

Q The whole line or just segments of it?

A I didn't think the Chevrolet was all that great. If you want to stick to front ends, the '41 Ford was nicer than the '41 Chevy. But the '41 Ford had a balloony look to it. He was trying to put the head room and big windows that he'd put in the Zephyr, and they didn't go on that 114 inch wheelbase like they did on a 125. Also, I think Charlie Sorensen was in there trying to make the cars easier to fabricate. This became evident on the '41 Ford and Mercury, and it became evident on the '42 Lincoln.

Q By that, what do you mean?

A Take the hood, for instance. I spoke of these flowing, organic lines that the '40 Zephyr had. The '40 Mercury had it, too, and even the '39 Ford. The front fender came down, and between the fender and the hood shape, there was a big fillet. Do you know what a fillet is?

Q No.

A It's a big rounded area where one shape is married to the other shape by means of a big rounded fillet. It's filled in. Where an airplane wing meets the fuselage, instead of a sharp juncture of the two shapes, there's a rounded surface to join them. This is organic styling. It's like a thing alive where one shape doesn't just butt into another, but there's an easy transition. The fundamental shape between fenders and hood has this fillet, and it made the hood probably a little harder to fit, because it had to fit between the two fenders and make an even joint. On the '41 Ford and Mercury, and then the '42 Lincoln, the hood just sat on top of the fenders, and if only the fenders were to be accounted for, the hood could be a half an inch on one side or the other, and nobody would know the difference, because it just sat it on it -- just plunk, there it was. It didn't have to align.

Q In the Ford Design Center glossary, a fillet, as you described it, is "a curved surface used to blend two intersecting planes."

A So they didn't have that tailored look, they had a fabricated look. It's the tailored look that makes the car look expensive. They think people don't know that or notice that. It may be that people don't really consciously know it, but they do consciously know when a car looks rich and tailored and when it looks cheap and fabricated. The '42's were overdecorated. They had themes on the front end for several cars, not one car. We used to describe the '46 Lincoln as a mouth organ on a manhole cover! It didn't have flow. It was vulgar -- really bad.

Ford design was going to hell. Because of his past inspired service, I don't like to blame Gregorie for it, but somebody should be blamed.

I just wanted to say that this '41 G.M. line -- in particular, the Cadillac, was a very hot car, very well styled, somewhat overdecorated, but very salable. Add to this the fact that it had a hydramatic transmission, which made it a tremendous selling car. I'm sure that Edsel was just worried stiff. He gave the directive to styling, and it had to be a crash program, to come out with something competitive with this Cadillac. When you do something in panic, you never do it well. Just like I didn't turn that machine off. I panicked, and I screwed up. That's the kindest interpretation I can give it.

Q It would lend credence to the atmosphere at the time.

A Yes. And that's basically what Tucker Madawick told his questioner Wednesday night that it was Ford's response to Cadillac at G.M. It was a hurried, panicky response, and Ford had lost their deft sure hand, and it showed.

So back to the '49 Ford. We had the package drawing, and Rigitko was instructed to draw something.

Q Which you mentioned that Youngren had dictated?

A Harold Youngren was brought over by Breech as the chief engineer, and he made his first package sketch on a napkin. This has been well publicized.

Q You were describing Mr. Youngren's delineation of the postwar Ford package.

A This was made into a cleaned-up line drawing with more dimensions at the Airframe Building by the engineering department. Then one copy of this final package drawing was given to Rigitko, and the other one to George Walker's group.

Q Where did you first hear of them? How did they come into your purview in the Design Center?

A I can't tell you specifically. I just knew that we were faced with some competition. Walker had probably been hounding Henry Ford II for an interview for a long time to get the Ford account.

Q Do you think that might have been a Breech-originated thing?

A I had no insight on that.

Q But from your perspective on the design staff, you realized that there was external competition?

A At some point, it became apparent, yes. I had no doubt that Walker was probably working on both Breech and Henry. These fellows are hungry.

Q Had you known who Walker was at this point?

A Oh, yes. As an auto enthusiast, I was aware that Walker had the Nash account back -- the first car it was apparent on was the '39 Nash. Walker, like Loewy, was the front man. He didn't really do much designing himself.

Q Did this competition manifest itself internally in any way that you can recall, like personnel or location?

A My first inclination of anything happening was that they cleared out a space. We were still on the South end of the building in the original Design Department location at that time. We had not moved yet. We were still on the South end where we had been from when I was there in the '41 stint. And they cleared out a large room on the South end of the building for Walker, and he was given some of our modelers. He may have gotten some modelers from the outside. Then he put in his, what we called, the "Gold Dust Twins" -- Elwood Engel and Joe Oros.

Q Did you see them?

A Not at this period. I managed to get in the studio down there a couple of times. I wasn't supposed to, but I did.

Q Did they come to your studio?

A I wasn't aware of it. They may have, but I really can't answer that truthfully.

Q You sensed there was a competition shaping up?

A Oh, yes. There was a competition shaping up. And while my superiors wouldn't admit it, we were running scared. They had reason to run scared.

Q Why?

A There was a competition, and if the house loses the competition, and some outsider wins it, then they start wondering why are we keeping the house crew. Of course, the lower down you got, the safer you were. Mr. Gregorie, I'm sure, had every reason to be concerned if he wanted to stay there, and so did some of the others.

Q This is probably the first time that a major corporation brought in an outside consultant to possibly outdo the internal -- the incumbent -- group?[*]

A It's the earliest one I know of that was done in that way. Of course, you always had outside groups such as Briggs making contributions.

Q But they were in-house, in a sense?

A Almost. I don't know how to define the difference. Briggs was only trying to sell their services -- their bodies. It was a little operation, really. Walker, in turn, getting the Ford account meant at the expense of the existing Ford group.

Q Awkward situation?

A Maybe Mr. Gregorie was proud, and he quit.

Q Let's tell how that happened.

A My only recollection was we were aware we were in competition with somebody.

Q You saw these strangers at the other end of the building?

A Yes, they were working feverishly, and so were we, to come up with our answer to the package. Some people will tell you that the answers looked very similar, but I don't buy that. At the risk of being considered a heretic, I have to say that their job was a better job, even though I was working on the one we were doing, because it was better balanced. It was just a matter of subtlety of tumblehome, and the slope of the windshield, and the taper of the C-pillar, and a more level belt line. Ours had too much of a dropping belt line. It looked like the last Studebaker Larks looked. The buffalo look I called it -- beefy up front and then tapered down to a puny tail.

They had this bright yellow model in there. I don't even remember what color our model was. Ours had some fussy trim in the C-pillar, which did nothing for the car.

In short, the management picked Walker's job. Now, when I say Walker's job, I could put quotations around that. Walker was credited with it, but by now we all know how that car was designed.

Q The die was cast. The Gregorie model had lost out?

A Yes. So, I suppose, Mr. Gregorie felt honor-bound to resign.

Q How did you find out about it?

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[*] Editor's Note: Harley Earl was brought in by G.M. from the West Coast in the 1920's to create the LaSalle. He eventually became Chief of Design.

A Word gets around quick which job is picked. For one thing, all work on ours stopped.

Q Did Mr. Gregorie say anything to the assembled group?

A No, not the assembled group. He maybe did to the higher ups.

Q You obviously knew that work was stopped, and that particular model didn't make it?

A Yes.

Q What happened then?

A It's a little hazy.

Q What happened then to you?

A I was still working for Rigitko at that time. I can't recall just exactly when the G.M. group came over, but Walker didn't just go on to ever greater strengths there. Walker was almost forgotten about again quite soon. A group came over from G.M. led by John Oswald. A man by the name of George Snyder was Oswald's man in styling. Before that happened, I went to work with Bill Schmidt in his Lincoln studio.

Q Mr. Gregorie had resigned?

A Gregorie resigned immediately.

Q Shortly after the competition winner was known officially?

A Very shortly after that, yes. I think just a day after.

Q Tom Hibbard was temporarily in charge. That would be about 1946?

A Yes, that's right. I went with Bill Schmidt.

Q Who had brought Bill Schmidt in? Was it Hibbard?

A I don't know how he got in there. He started as an illustrator at Willow Run during the war. I guess it was felt that if you were an illustrator, you naturally fit in styling, so I found him in styling when I came back.

Q In what capacity?

A A stylist, or designer, or illustrator. He might have been a group leader.

Q So you were assigned to Schmidt's...?

A Yes. After working for Rigitko for several years.

Q You made the break?

A Yes.

Q Mr. Rigitko, you said, was unhappy with your defection?

A Noticeably, yes, because he'd taken me under his wing. But he remains very high in my esteem. I respected him highly. I know he made a substantial contribution to these prewar Zephyrs and Mercurys that I admired so much.

Q And made a substantial contribution to your perception of surface development?

A That's true. He knew what a good line was. That's what it really boiled down to.

I don't want to badmouth Bill Schmidt too much because, basically, he wanted to be well liked, and he was for the most part. I didn't feel, though, Bill had gasoline in his blood. He was not an automobile man, from my judgment. He didn't know much history about automobiles: the background, the great cars of the past, and the designers. Sometimes I made somewhat less than tactful remarks.

Q In his hearing?

A Yes, to him, even. I wasn't the most tactful person. I was very young, and I didn't have the edges knocked off. So soon we grow old and so late smart. If I had played my politics, I would have done a lot better at Ford. Bill Schmidt was a very good illustrator. He would make very slick renderings.

Q Technically or aesthetically?

A It was hard to separate the two. I didn't think they always had great design merit, but most people can't separate a slick rendering from a slick design. They don't know whether they're looking at a good design or a beautiful rendering. William B. Stout made the observation many years ago that many of Detroit management has been sold an ugly design with a beautiful rendering. That tendency was accelerating at Ford.

Q Was that Mr. Schmidt's aesthetic approach in those days?

A I felt so, in any event. We didn't get along as good as either of us might have desired. The first thing I knew I was back working for Rigitko for awhile. Then the G.M. crowd came in, and Rigitko didn't want to take me right away, because I was the prodigal son. He didn't greet me with the fatted calf. I had to come back hat in hand. And I understood it, and I didn't blame him.

Q Schmidt reassigned you to Rigitko's staff?

A No, he wasn't able to assign me. He may have said that I wasn't working out for him. I don't know who he said it to.

Q Tom Hibbard, perhaps?

A Possibly. In any event, I do remember being a little uneasy for a few days. It didn't occur to me that I couldn't go right back to Rigitko. But there I was.

Then the G.M. crowd came.

Q Quite a change?

A Yes. And what happened to Walker during that period, I can't say, but there was a gap there. Then there was a period where the G.M. crowd is riding high in the saddle.

Q Is this John Osward and George Snyder?

A There was John Oswald and George Snyder in styling, and Henry Griebe in body engineering.

Q Who had survived the influx for awhile?

A Yes. But these men, even though it was the G.M. crowd, I had quite a bit of respect for. I had respect for Snyder and Oswald because Oswald was a body engineer from the old school. He was the Joe Galamb of Oldsmobile Division. George Snyder might have been more parallel to Gregorie. My understanding was that Snyder and his group did the body development for the new postwar G.M. cars as represented by the '48 C-body Oldsmobile and Cadillac, and then the next year the whole rest of the G.M. line.

Q What happened at G.M.?

A I don't know. Breech probably got Oswald, and Oswald got Snyder. You know how it is, you bring your own group with you.

Q Gene Bordinat was one of that group?

A Yes. Gene Bordinat and my nemesis, Don DeLaRossa.

Q A strange group, in retrospect?

A They were a group of slick rendering men, and in the group I would put Bordinat and DeLaRossa.

Q This was the airbrush era?

A Yes, right. They were airbrush whizzes. But it was Snyder that I had the rapport with. He was the line man. He really designed the body. These other guys fooled with the front ends, trim, and chrome.

Q And that was your basic orientation?

A Toward body design, yes. As months went on, I think Snyder was made aware of my talents.

Q He was sympathetic?

A Yes. Somehow, though, I got placed in an instrument panel studio. I remember we did panels for the Lincoln and Mercury, which Snyder over-saw, and I remember laying out a panel for the '51 Ford, one which Bill Schmidt had a rendering for. He designed the theme of it. It was my job to take these very much out-of-proportioned renderings and reproportion them to the actual dimensions available in the car, and with the necessary space available for the radio, and controls, and heater, instruments and defrosters. Now they have air conditioning to put up with. It was a very demanding job to do it and yet keep the theme, maybe even refine it a bit. Was probably the toughest job in styling. The area around the corner of the cowl and the A post is the most complex area of the whole car from body design standpoint. If I say so, I did a good job. I did all of the instrument panels from the 'Fifties Lincolns and Mercurys through the '54 Lincoln and '55 Mercury. The '55 Mercury was my undoing, in a sense.

I did a very good job on these instrument panels, and....

Q These are for the early 'Fifties?

A Yes.

Q But executed in '48 and '49?

A Right. I was doing instrument panels yet in early '53, which is one reason I left. You do a good job in some area, and you stay in that area, especially if no one else seems to be able to do a good job in that area. Mercury had some rather outstanding, unusual instrument panels in that period -- the '52 panel. I don't mean to say I set the theme for those panels, but I worked them out. I executed them.

Q Which is no mean feat?

A Yes. So I came to the attention of Snyder, and he being a good line man appreciates a good line man, and he put me in a body development studio. This is where I really wanted to be, but, unfortunately, it only lasted several months.

Q What happened?

A One Friday afternoon we were busy developing the lines for what was to be the new '52 body on the blackboard, full-size. And Snyder looks back there in his wooden armchair, and I think he was mimicking Harley Earl, because I've read where Harley Earl did the same thing, which is okay. What else could he do? He had to sit back in the armchair and look at it, and he could see the slightest variation if a line was out of -- do you know what a fair line is versus a bad line? A fair line is one that makes a smooth transition. It may accelerate, it may decelerate, but it doesn't have any bumps in it -- huckles. It's one word they use meaning bumps -- irregularities. Even when you get inside it -- variously shorten it -- then any irregularity shows up quickly. It comes from naval architecture. It's the way they fair out the lines of ship hulls and yacht hulls. So he'd sit back and evaluate these lines and tell me to lower that line a sixteenth of any inch or make an overlay of the whole top and lower the whole thing bodily or rock it. It was very demanding, specialized work. I know that I gained his respect, and I respected him because he knew what he was doing.

One Friday there we were getting ready for a show. Henry II was supposed to come in. Snyder's right-hand man was Leonard Trewin. He was the working assistant. Leonard was his blackboard man, too. I was really Leonard's assistant, but I got along great with both of them. There was mutual respect between us. Leonard was a ruddy-faced little fellow who just loved chocolate. I should have remembered it in view of what happened to me.

Ford came in, and Leonard was looking -- Snyder told him to fetch some particular drawing to show Ford, and Leonard just went frantically looking for it. He was very high-strung. I don't even know if he found it or not, but I do know that the next Monday I came to work and asked where Leonard was, and Leonard had had a stroke. Leonard was dead! The studio broke up right after that.

Q Why?

A I don't know what happened, but Snyder's star was falling, too. Here I was finally getting in with men at the top and whom I had a mutual respect with, and here he gets sidetracked. Eventually, they sent Snyder to England. But Snyder was not very well liked in styling. He was arrogant and high-handed. Again, I think he was aping Harley Earl. And there was no need for him to be. He was very capable. It's hard for me to relate this, because, if he was, I accepted it. The important thing to me was the product. He was capable and confident, and he knew his business, and I respected him for that. I don't care if a guy is the nicest fellow in the world, if he isn't competent, and he turns out a lousy product, I have no use for him.

I was stuck back on instrument panels, and I found myself, by this time, working on Lincoln panels. It was probably a '52 Lincoln, later on the '52 Mercury panel. I worked with Dave Ash and Damon Woods on the

Lincoln panel.

Q An interesting duo?

A Yes. They were very good friends.

So I did a succession of Mercury panels: the '52, '53, '54, but the '55 was different. On the '55 panel -- I'm going to tell you the story of that, and I'll be through with my days at Ford. In '55, the exterior body was well along, and very late in the program they realized they didn't have an instrument panel for the '55 Mercury. So they put every stylist -- figuratively speaking, even the janitors are making thumbnail sketches with heavy felt pens, trying to establish a theme. We just papered the walls with them of this other Lincoln studio. Lincoln and Mercury studios were under the same roof at the time.

Q Standard technique of the time when you were developing a theme?

A Pretty much, except these drawings were just single-color, felt-tip pen on white paper. But we just plastered the walls with them. And, believe me, there was a lot of mediocre crap on the walls. That's all it was was wallpaper. So everybody looked at them.

Q A blizzard of thumbnail sketches?

A Yes. Everyone had input. I was asked if there were any that I thought I'd like to work on since I was going to be given the job of working one of these sketches out.

Q By whom?

A That I cannot remember.

Q What level would it have been?

A It would have been someone above me. I can't imagine [Don] DeLaRossa asking me what I thought.

Q In terms of his relationship to you, was DeLaRossa a studio chief?

A Yes. I think he was, but I can't remember how he fit in there. I think he was Mercury exteriors, and Mercury interiors probably came under him. Mercury interiors was headed by a fellow named Reg Bennett.

Q Mr. DeLaRossa had had an alleged reputation for not only conviviality, but for capriciousness, did he not?

A What was the first word you used?

Q Conviviality.

A I believe that's why he finally had to leave Ford. He failed to show up for a meeting where Henry II was at, and Bordinat finally had to fire him.

Q But did this manifest itself in your relationship with him? Was it a problem?

A It wasn't apparent to me, his fondness for drink. But the other one was -- the deviousness.

I was asked for my opinion on [the new proposal], as were many other people, because I would be given the job of working out, perhaps, several of these panels, so I was a natural. I picked out one that I thought had a recognizable and coherent theme, which most of them didn't. They were just an assemblage of cliches. If this one had a cliche, at least it was a coherent one.

So I picked out this one that I wanted to work on, and they gave me the go-ahead on it. The attitude was, "It's as good as anything else." And they wanted to have three alternatives to present to management, so they gave me this one that I chose, and they picked another one that was a takeoff of the '54 Mercury. I had to keep that one going, also. Then they picked a third one which was given to a man named George Spiroff.

Q Who was?

A He was the layout man for Mercury interiors, that's as close as I can describe him. So George had this, we'll call it panel number two. The third one I was doing, I didn't really believe in it, although there might have been a little deviousness in my method, too, because I wanted this number one to win. I put my major effort into it.

Q This is the original design, not the copy of the '54?

A No, this was the original, number one for me -- the one I picked up on the wall. Number three, which I was also given to work out, was kind of a takeoff of the '54 Mercury. It was mediocre. Number two was -- the only reason I'm calling it number two -- certainly management didn't regard it that way -- it was the other panel or one of the two contenders. In DeLaRossa's eyes, it was number one.

Q Had he done it, or he was just the proponent?

A I think he had picked it because he worked directly with Spiroff on that panel. Spent a lot of time on it, and he completely ignored me.

So, we went along on this instrument panel program for as long as two months. It wasn't any less than one month. [DeLaRossa] was coming in there and working with Spiroff much of the time. They were experimenting with little different shapes on it, putting doodads on it and foiling it to make it look like chrome. Lots of fooling around in decoration. I didn't think they were really working on getting the job done. It wasn't any of my business, though, and I just let them go ahead.

Q But ignoring you in the process?

A Ignoring me totally. I didn't like being ignored, but, on the other hand, my job was not being tampered with either. When I saw how things were going, I practiced my own brand of -- this was the way to do it, but it also fit in neatly with the way I wanted things to go at the time, at least. It was not politically the smart thing to do, but I'm not a political animal. DeLaRossa is the very epitome of that.

These panels were taking shape, and here was DeLaRossa's and Spiroff's with real knobs in it and real chrome trim. A lot of effort was going into it. It was a full-size clay model. We went direct from those real roughs on the wall to the full-size clay.

Q Was that the first time that you'd done any designing by clay, or is this a natural outgrowth of what you'd been doing?

A I'd been working with clay modelers for some time on these instrument panels. I made the layout, but then we put it in clay. Even now, I wasn't working in clay, I would make sections on the drawing, and give them to a clay modeler, he'd make a template, and he'd transfer it to the clay.

Q But you would oversee it?

A Yes, unless it was some fine detail that I wanted to show him just exactly the way I wanted it. I was a little reluctant to get on this program. I said, "I'm trying to get off instrument panels." And here we go again on another big instrument panel program. I was a little petulant about it. Reg Bennett says, "Look, Bob, stay with me on this program here. I ask of you to do that. If there's any glory to be had at the end of the program, you can have it." I didn't forget that. I was going for the glory! I told you how the program was progressing, and as it got toward the end, I had everything on the layout on paper, because I thought in terms of layouts as well as three-dimension. To me, the layout was merely the paper manifestation of the three-dimension.

So, I could give layouts of the instruments to the designers in the studio, and then they in turn simultaneously started making instrument dial faces. We gave layouts of the knobs to the fabricating shop. Heater control panels and all these things, they were being fabricated throughout the shop, or were created, in the case of the dial faces. But none of them were being tried out in the model.

Q Why was that?

A We weren't ready to put it together yet. But they were doing all that stuff next door. By next door, I mean right next to me in the same room as close to me as you are. So this panel was getting all the attention. All mine was was clay. Clay, by itself, is not very attractive. Well, the day of the show was drawing closer. I remember the last week before the show. A man by the name of Richard Krafve, who was pretty high up in the Mercury Division and he later headed Edsel Division, had an absolute fetish about clocks and Pontiacs. If Pontiac had it, we had to have it, whatever it was. If Pontiac had a lot of chrome, we had to have more. If Pontiac had a big round clock in the center, we had to have a bigger round clock in the center.

This panel was all put together. It had been researched and checked out with engineering for the heaters and nicely balanced -- the heater controls under the speedometer. The instrument cluster had a gullwing theme, then we had these big arcs. The top one was the four instruments, and then the speedometer, and then the little one down below the shifting quadrant. There was a strong theme, and it was all worked out. I was very happy with the way it was coming out. There was very little interference. Then in the last week this guy Krafve comes in, and he wants to rearrange things.

Q On your design?

A Yes.

Q Not on DeLaRossa's or Spiroff's?

A I don't know. I didn't even pay any attention to what was happening there. It was their business, and I was minding my business. I dare say, he did, and they readily accommodated him, if DeLaRossa was running true to form. Probably stroked him on the back while he was doing it.

I resisted. I even had the temerity to protest to Mr. Krafve that....

Q He was interfering?

A I was tactful about it. I wasn't acting like a spoiled brat, but I did point out that we had done considerable research, and the clock was at least as big as anyone else's. He wanted to do something with heater controls, which would have just screwed us all up. And you don't just come up with a solution to this like that, you've got to work on it to get the nomenclature and everything. Well, he relented. He didn't pursue it. But I embarrassed DeLaRossa by talking to the big man myself.

Q How had you embarrassed Mr. DeLaRossa?

A Because, at my level, you're not supposed to talk to the visiting brass. That's supposed to be the studio head's prerogative.

Q He advocated a specific action?

A He did, yes. Also, I was certainly very much involved here. He didn't say anything to me, but I could tell that my stock with DeLaRossa with sinking by the day. When he met me in the hall, he didn't even raise his head to say hello. So now we had Mr. Krafve out of the way.

Q How so?

A He didn't pursue the heater controls and the clock.

Q You had fended him off?

A I don't know if it was that. I really don't know whether Mr. Krafve saw the logic of my arguments and, therefore, decided to let things go, or whether they thought that we were too close to the show time to throw a wrench in the machine, which was one of my arguments. So they backed off, much to my relief. I was never told, really, they backed off, though. They just didn't press forward. I wasn't told anything. In this atmosphere I'm describing, you can understand why.

We get down to two days before the show. The things are wheeled to the paint shop -- all of them.

Q Including yours?

A Including mine. They come back out of the paint shop, and I suddenly noticed a great deal of interest in it for the first time.

Q From whom?

A Bordinat and DeLaRossa.

Q DeLaRossa hadn't seen it?

A He wasn't admiring it, he was just -- I don't know what, but I remember Bordinat seeing it come out of the paint shop. Anyway, we brought it back to the studio, and then we started putting the chrome pieces on, and it was painted. It was painted a two-tone green -- darker green on the top and lighter green on the bottom. It looked pretty sharp. It really was a knockout.

Q Who had worked with you on this?

A Nobody.

Q You'd done it all yourself?

A I had a clay modeler.

Q Do you remember who that was?

A I can't remember his name. He was a real nice guy, too, and I got along especially well with him, because he had originally come from Escanaba [Michigan], which was my country up there. But, anyway. that's all, which was good and, in a way, was bad, but it was mostly good if we wanted to sell a panel.

It came the day of the show. You know, there's a caste system over there. We can't be present when the show is on, but I heard the results of the show soon enough. This panel won hands down. They didn't even look at the others. They zeroed in on it, they looked at it, that was it. But they had to pick at least one backup panel, so they picked this other one, the one I was working on. The one that DeLaRossa had done wasn't even in the running.

Q Both of yours were picked?

A Yes. But we only kept the other one going for a couple of days, and then we just dropped it, because it didn't have anything, and we knew it, and there was no sense in carrying on. Put our efforts on what we know to be the superior panel.

Q The DeLaRossa/Spiroff one was completely ignored?

A Yes. I don't know what happened at the show, whether they looked at it or not, but it certainly wasn't continued for further work. As I say, both of those that I was working on were picked, including the one that I had no interest in whatever.

Q What level of decision-making was this? Was this Iacocca, HF II level?

A This was before Iacocca's time, at least before he got into....

Q This is early 'Fifties?

A We're now talking about late '52 or very early '53.

Q Was it a high-level decision-making session?

A Oh, yes. Breech was in on that show.

Q Standing in for HF II?

A I don't really know of HF II was there or not, but it was the decision on the instrument panel for the '55 Mercury.

Naturally, I was pleased, and I shortly went to Reg Bennett. I told him I was ready to collect some of the glory that he had promised me if the program was a success. He looked a little flustered. He was a nice guy. I liked him. He stuttered a bit, and he said, "Well, you'll have to talk to Don DeLaRossa." So I braced myself. I went to see DeLaRossa. This was like a performance review. As I recall, if he didn't do it then, he did it at some previous performance review, but the whole thing was very negative. He says, "We don't have any room for you as a studio head because studio heads we advance strictly from designers." I wasn't classed as a designer, I was classed as a layout man, something which always irked me. Because on this particular panel, if I didn't design that, then I don't know what designing is. "As for raises, you're making pretty good money now." If he didn't say it in these words, he alluded to, "You don't interact too well with people." Actually, I interacted very well, because all the people I worked with in the studio to help me get this to go together smoothly worked enthusiastically with me.

But, no, I didn't get along too well with Don DeLaRossa or Bill Schmidt, especially DeLaRossa. I don't want to say Bill Schmidt -- he's not an evil man, but we just didn't have much in common. DeLaRossa, I felt, was an evil man.

So I was more or less anticipating what he was going to say, so I said, "Is that it?" He said, "I don't have any more to say." I said, "Well, I'd like to take a month off." He said, "Be my guest." He practically sneered it.

So I took a month off and made some renderings, and I went down to Studebaker with them, and I got myself a job for three hundred bucks more a month.

Q What year was this?

A This was in February of '53, and I hired in at Studebaker in early March.

When I got back, I was feeling a little devious myself at this time, and I was going to have my kicks a little bit. I was walking downtown in West Dearborn near where I lived, and I met Art Miller, one of the fellows in the studio. He said, "Hi, Bob, how are things going? What are you doing?" I said, "Fine, fine." I purposely didn't tell him that I'd gone to Studebaker or that I had another job lined up; I just strung him along a little bit, "Yeah, I'll be in Monday." Then I learned from another fellow that he had come back to the studio, and he said, "I met Bob Doehler downtown, and I think he's a lot humbler now. He'll be more cooperative. Probably everything will be all right."

So Monday came, and Reg greeted me with a glad hand, and I did feel kind of bad for Reg. I didn't want to leave him hanging, but I had myself to consider, too, at this time. He said, "Well, I trust you're ready to get down to work. We've got a lot of stuff pending here." I said, "Reg, I really came in to get my tools." And he threw his head back, and he was completely surprised, especially in view of this wrong signal I'd sent downtown. I'd really sent it for DeLaRossa's benefit, not for Reg.

So I took my sweet time that day picking up my tools and saying goodbye to everybody.

Q You'd already cleared it with the personnel office?

A I didn't talk to anybody in the personnel office. I just talked with my superiors. I did have a short interview with a man named [Charles] Waterhouse, who was the nominal head of the....

Q Administrative head of the Design Center.

A Was that it, administrative head? That's why I said nominal head, because he wasn't that involved in design.

Then I said goodbye to everybody. I had made a lot of acquaintances over the years there and good friends, too. That was the end of my Ford period.

Q You didn't run into DeLaRossa?

A I may have had some words with him, but they were very curt and perfunctory. I mean, both ways.

One other little thing I wanted to mention about DeLaRossa was he was an auto enthusiast of sorts, and I was, too. I had loaned him my portable Sears Roebuck air compressor for some spraying he was doing at home. He didn't return it after several months. I went to him and said I wanted to use the thing. I asked him if he would bring it in because I needed it. He looked at me kind of strangely. I might have had to ask him again. He did bring it in, but he seemed to resent it very much that I'd asked him for it back.

Q Before he was ready to bring it back?

A I guess you're not supposed to ask for things that you've loaned to your superiors; you're supposed to wait until they're ready to return them.

Another time they had a show for Henry Ford II, and they wanted to show him what a sports car looked like. There were two shows, and one was in the summertime. They asked several of us who had sports cars to bring our cars in, and they were spread out on a field for the brass to look at, including Henry II, so they could see representative cars of the period that passed for sports cars -- Jaguar XK-120, MG. Jack Aldrich had a Fiat 1100, and I had this Simca Sport. It's a very beautiful car. A takeoff from the Cisatalia. Henry had one of those, by the way.

So I brought in my car, but I put a card in the windshield to please keep hands, knees and knuckles off the soft aluminum panels, because it bends easily. When I got back to the car, that sign was laid on the floor face down. I guess you don't tell Mr. Ford to keep his knuckles off a car.

Then there was another show in the wintertime where I actually told DeLaRossa, "I don't want to bring my car in." And he as much as told me you bring it in if your want a job. There was salt on the ground by then, and I just didn't want to drive my car on the salt. I know what salt did to cars, and I intended to keep this car. I still have it, and it still looks like it did then. He didn't like that at all, that I challenged him. I don't think anybody else did. I didn't challenge him, I just told him I didn't want to do it and why I didn't want to do it. But he said, "You do it if you want a job." So it's a number of things like that, plus especially this last competition. So, that's the Ford era. I'll have leave it to you if you want to go into the Studebaker era.

Q Definitely.

A We went down to South Bend.

Q Who was your contact down there?

A Ted Pietsch. I had met him at Ford. A very good friend of mine and a very good designer. He's had a lot of experience. He worked at Briggs. He first worked at Chrysler. From Chrysler he went to Briggs where he met Bob Koto, and they became fast friends, and they both worked at Hudson. Then Koto went to Studebaker, and Pietsch, later on, went to Studebaker, as did I, later on. I knew Bob Koto very well, too.

The Studebaker years started out in March of '53. The very first thing I was put on was a rear deck lid nameplate that was to be combined with the deck lid release handle.

Q On what model?

A That was to be the '54 Studebaker. A very minor facelift of the '53, which, by now, you remember as the designer's design -- Bob Bourke's crowning glory. Some people called it a funny car when I left Ford. I remember Damon Woods referring to it as a funny car, but I didn't think of it as funny, and a lot of other people didn't think it was funny. We thought it was the best looking American car yet -- certainly in the postwar era.

In some ways, I liked the Studebaker approach. They didn't plaster the walls with sketches. They were more interested in getting a design out than in putting on a show for management. One aspect of the Studebaker approach that I did not care for was they didn't go much for line drawings. This was, primarily, because Loewy didn't really understand a line drawing.

Q Give us a brief precis of the design administrative setup that you found when you got to South Bend.

A Raymond Loewy Associates had the Studebaker design account, and all Studebaker styling was done by Raymond Loewy Associates who were assigned space in the Chippewa Truck Plant. Spacious quarters there.

Q This is Chippewa Street?

A Yes. Chippewa Street in South Bend. It was where Studebaker made its aircraft engines and army trucks during the war. It was built for the war.

My paycheck and that of everybody else's in the styling department came from Raymond Loewy Associates, not from Studebaker.

Q A unique arrangement.

A Of course, Studebaker paid for it. As you'll read in Bourke's book, everything Loewy paid was marked up a hundred percent, and that's how Loewy got his commission.

Q Unprecedented in the industry at that time?

A I guess so. The closest parallel I can think of prior to that time was George Walker with Nash. What [actual] arrangement he had, I don't know.

Raymond Loewy spent most of his time in New York or Paris, and his resident manager in South Bend was Bob Bourke, who was a very capable designer. Loewy was really not a designer himself. Although he was very good on graphics, he was certainly no designer. But he did have a flair. He recognized good design, and he had a talent for surrounding himself with good designers.

Bob Bourke was the resident manager, and he was the boss there in the South Bend office of Raymond Loewy Associates, which, in effect, was the Studebaker styling department.

Q Bourke was rather benign -- a firm, but understanding, boss?

A I would say so, yes. He was a good man. If there were any problems between he and myself, I'm afraid I would have to take the major blame. Those edges I alluded to weren't really polished off yet. I remember Bob with fondness and affection. But I didn't really care for their approach. They didn't really understand the value of line elevation drawings. The final sweetening of the line has to be done on paper, not in three-dimension, because you don't really see it in three-dimension as readily.

Q You mentioned earlier that you thought that was due to the peculiar orientation of Loewy.

A Perhaps Bourke, too, because Bourke hadn't had any experience at any other automotive company, and he came in fresh from Sears Roebuck. If he'd had his training at G.M., or even at pre-war Ford, he would have probably drawn these things on a blackboard full size before going to the full-size clay. Even Studebaker, in the pre-Loewy days, did it this way. I'm not saying that way is sufficient. You have to have the three-dimensional clay to prove it out. But if it looks good in a side elevation line drawing, I say it'll look good in clay -- it'll look even better in clay. But if you go directly to clay [from] the sketch or a scale model.... The Loewy days were rather short lived, because by [the time] I started in March of '53....

Q You adapted to the situation, at least temporarily?

A Not fully. I never became a good sketch artist, so I became more oriented toward clay, and I tried to present my ideas in clay when possible.

Q In self-defense?

A Yes.

Q This had been the route of Bob Koto?

A Yes.

Q And Ted Pietsch?

A No. Ted was pretty much a rendering man and lines, too.

Q You said the Loewy days were numbered at this point? What year was this?

A I started in March '53, and his contract was terminated or failed to be renewed sometime in early '55.

Q Any scuttlebutt around the shop as to why this happened?

A Sure. Jim Nance, who headed up Packard....

Q James A. Nance?

A That's right. Was not an automobile man; he was an appliance man and a salesman.

Q Sort of like George Walker?

A Yes. As such, he didn't really appreciate the good stuff that Loewy had done and was capable of doing, and also this stuff didn't sell as well as it should, but not because of the styling. In my opinion, it was because Studebaker was doing such a bum job of building these cars. They had what we called the "rubber band frame." Styling is important, but it's not going to overcome poor workmanship or poor engineering, and Studebaker had both. But styling was the scapegoat. Nance was more oriented to Detroit styling, which was the razzmatazz extruded school by that time -- filling out the cube, which it reached its nadir with the '57 Mercury, in my opinion. This was the all-time low point in design on anybody's car that anybody ever made. The '58 Buick was close, but I give the dubious honor to the '57 Mercury. It was the ultimate expression of the emerging Detroit school.

On the other hand, the '53 Studebaker really represented Italian styling in a way at its best. It wasn't Italian styling, it was good styling. I hate these names applied to styling, because Detroit styling can and, at one time, was the best, but by the mid-'Fifties, I don't feel it was any more. The Italians were by far the leaders, and Detroit was getting more vulgar by the model. For somebody who knows nothing about cars, the '57 Mercury might have been pretty attractive. But now you'll find pretty universal agreement that it was pretty bad. But some of us so-called purists at that time were increasingly becoming a voice in the wilderness. That's one reason Nance thought that the boys he could find in Detroit were better. Maybe Bill Schmidt had already done a job on him, I don't know. At any rate, Schmidt was his man. He went with

Packard when Nance took over.

When I heard Schmidt was coming down to South Bend, I was a mighty dejected individual. He came in with all his sketches of extruded stovepipe designs, which now, thank goodness, are out of fashion again. Of course, Bill -- his type, as he puts it, bend with the wind. They bend with the breeze, and they would adapt themselves very readily to whichever way the breeze is blowing. In fact, they'll present themselves as the foremost proponent of whatever happens to be the current trend. If I sound a little bitter there, I apologize.

Shortly put, Nance felt that he and his Detroit crew could do a better job, maybe for less money. So they brought Bill Schmidt in with Duncan McCrea -- Bill the overall head, and Duncan the head over the Studebaker operation -- the branch manager, as it were.

So here I'm proving myself over and over again to a new crowd, and it really was getting pretty tiresome. I was trying to be more diplomatic, maybe by force of circumstance, than I had been in the past. I didn't have any problems with Bill.

Q You're learning to play the game by this time?

A Yes, learning to play the game. I guess that's a good way of putting it. I was given a goodly amount of freedom by Duncan McCrea, also. I think I was fairly highly regarded. Maybe they didn't like me, but they tolerated me.

Studebaker went through a lot of convulsions shortly after that period. I remember Bill [Schmidt] coming around shaking hands with everybody, me included, telling me he was quitting Studebaker/Packard, going back to Detroit. He saw the handwriting on the wall. One thing I will not accuse Bill of being, he's not a dummy. He's really okay. I don't feel bad about Bill that way, but, anyway....

Q A nice guy, personally?

A Yes. Very smooth, though.

Q As you say, a salesman?

A Yes. He and Gene Bordinat I've always kind of thought of as birds of a feather. But, at least, as I said before, I didn't consider them evil men.

Schmidt quit, and McCrea was then in charge of everything.

Q At this point, all the galaxy had left: Bourke, Loewy, or did Bourke stay on for awhile?

A No. Bourke left when the Loewy contract was over.

Q How about Ted Pietsch?

A He stayed.

Q How about Bob Koto?

A No, he left. Koto left with Loewy, Bob Andrews left with Loewy, and Kuchel left with Loewy, but within two months they were all dispersed on their own, because Loewy had nothing to keep them going. You'll read that in Bourke's book.

So McCrea took over the Studebaker....

Q Was Duncan a likable guy with talent?

A Yes, I would have to say so. I hesitated because I know I was not one of his favorites. Duncan was also fond of the grape, and, in his case, it was quite obvious. And he was also very much, call it a ladies' man, if you want. You could call it other things, too. He had his little crew of close associates -- drinking buddies.

Q Who would they be at that point?

A Bill Bonner was one, and I liked Bill. I had nothing against him. I'm just telling I wasn't in on Duncan's inner circle. Bill Bonner, and a fellow named Byron Brown, and Burt Holmes, I believe his name was. To a lesser extent, maybe Ray Everts.

But, to his credit, Duncan did let me go my own way. He let me make two quarter-size clay models, which I really enjoyed making and strictly to my own designs. They had very little to do with production, but it didn't matter at that time because Studebaker didn't have any money to put into some new models, anyway. We were all kind of floundering -- killing time.

Q A chaotic period?

A It was; it was very chaotic. Nance and Packard dropped out of the picture, and Curtiss-Wright came in. Duncan developed the '59 Lark.

Q His conception?

A I would say so. I'd say so, because I saw him design something very much like that when he was at Ford -- the sketch of his -- and I admired it then. The radiator type grille. A real, honest grille in front of the radiator core. I always thought that was very nice. I read where he attributed the front end to Bill Bonner. It was my impression that it was Duncan's design.

Anyway, he needed an alternative design so management would feel that they had a choice. You never like to present management with a design and say, "Here, this is it." They like to have at least two to choose from so they feel that they've made a good choice. Duncan let me work out the other full-size one, which, in this case, was -- he denied this later, and I think he resented my saying so. But, in this case, the other car was "the other one" -- the one that was slated to be the fall guy, because I put a front end on this that was based on one of these clay models he had let me make, and it was quite a nice front end. I had Larry Brown, my woodworker, make up a wooden grille for it. At the last minute when these two models were to be shown, he had this grille taken out of it, or he wouldn't allow me to put it in, and he put in instead a plain wire mesh gravel screen -- regular perforated metal. A real cheap-looking thing. It looked like hell. I brought this up to one of these writers for these [autmotive history] magazines. I explained that -- I didn't really say it bitterly -- he needed another design, and I'm sure that he didn't want this thing that I was working on to be chosen, so he made it unattractive. He should have been honest with me, though, and just told me, "Look, we're trying to sell this one." I guess it isn't done that way.

Anyway, they picked the other one, and I feel, in this case, it was the better one. They picked the right Lark, and it was a damned good job, given that they had to work around this old '53 body. So, you have an inkling of how I feel about Duncan. I think he was a capable designer, his designs had flair, and he had respect for me, but I don't think he liked me. That pretty well sums it up. I didn't have any respect for his personal life, either, but it's none of my business. So that's they way it was.

Then after the '59 Lark came out, and Churchill thought that was Studebaker's Volkswagen. In other words, something they'd never change as people thought they'd never change the Beetle. It just went on and on and on.

Q This is Harold Churchill, who has come to the presidency of Studebaker?

A He was president at that time. So Duncan said he quit because, in effect, Churchill wouldn't have much need for his services for the foreseeable future. And he went to work with Curtiss-Wright. I don't think this says much for his intelligence, but he went to work for Curtiss-

Wright back to the Chippewa Plant, which Curtiss-Wright had took over.

Q They had taken over the Chippewa Plant?

A I don't know if they had the whole plant or not, but I know that Duncan had, maybe, the old Studebaker styling department out there, and he took his buddies with him. They went out there with the thought that they were going to design ground effects aero cars; these cars with the fans that shoot a fan toward -- they've got the same principle going over the English Channel now with these hovercraft. Curtiss-Wright was going to replace the automobile with these things. They really thought seriously it might replace the automobile at the time. That was the impression I got, anyway. At least, it was an exciting new venture, and these fellows were going to design these vehicles that had fans directed at the ground and a big curtain around the bottom, and this directed air down so the car could go over any terrain without benefit of roads. Well, it all came to a screeching halt, and McCrea went back to Ford.

Q Why did it come to a screeching halt?

A It was a crazy idea to begin with. They always have these guys that think they're going to revolutionize things. I don't mean to say every new idea is not without merit, but it stands to reason that if a vehicle has to waste that much energy just to stay above the ground, it doesn't have much left to propel itself forward. I guess it had another propeller to propel itself forward. It just didn't work. Maybe it was okay for special purposes going over swamps or something.

Q Do you think McCrea saw this as a way out of his dilemma with Churchill?

A Possibly, but I don't know.

Q A face-saving device?

A But a lot of stylists really don't have their feet on the ground. Sometimes it's even considered an asset. They don't want stylists [to be normal]. They think it makes them too stodgy. I don't feel that way.

When Duncan quit and Curtiss-Wright left the picture, Churchill and Hardig got Randy Faurot back to head this.

Q Hardig?

A Gene Hardig was chief engineer. So Randy Faurot, whom I'd known from the Loewy days, was in the saddle.

Q And he was?

A He was one of Bob Bourke's two assistants when Bourke was heading it up under Loewy; Koto being the other assistant.

Q He'd stayed on through the vicissitudes?

A Randy?

Q Yes.

A No. He left when Bourke left. But I don't think he went with the Loewy group. I think he went to American Motors. I might have my timeframe a little mixed up there.

Q He's back?

A He's back by 1959. That's when I came back. He got Ted Pietsch back. Pietsch had gone to American Motors. I was without physical means of support from March of '58 to about July of '59.

Q Who brought you back? Who made the overture?

A Randy Faurot. I think partly at Ted's behest. I was a very good friend of Ted's. I think Randy had respect for me, too. So it was back to Studebaker. I was fishing around at the time trying to get out of the field all together because I didn't want to go back to Detroit. So Randy gave Ted and myself a pretty free hand. That was my most enjoyable period in the whole automotive career. We designed all new sheet metal for a new '62 Lark. It got so far there were mahogany die models made for the hood and front fenders. Whether they had any more than that, I don't know. But I had heard on good authority they had already spent about five million dollars for engineering and tooling for the new model.

Then the board of directors got off their fat duffs in New York and came to South Bend.

Q By the new model, do you mean the '60 Lark.

A The new car we were working on would have been the all-new '62. Meanwhile, we were working on facelifts for '60 and '61. The '61 had some fairly extensive sheet metal changes on it.

Q The Lark was a minor success at this point?

A Oh, it was a great success in '59, but that was before Corvair and Falcon came out. When Corvair, Falcon, and Valiant came out, there was an awful lot of competition, besides Rambler who were the first in that field. And Churchill made the mistake of thinking this '59 Lark was his long-term solution. It wasn't, it was just a stopgap solution, and they should have been working feverishly for a new model, but they weren't. Finally, we got the go-ahead to work on new sheet metal for the '62.

Q Had Studebaker's fortunes improved, or was it still hand to mouth?

A They improved with the '59 model. They made twenty-nine million dollars profit, which was a lot of money for a small company at that time. But to tool up for this all-new '62, it would have cost them twenty-five million just for tooling up. That's one reason why they were loath to go ahead. They were going ahead, though, but the board of directors weren't on their toes, and they came in after the program was this far along. Five million dollars and a year squandered. Remember, we had done this job to a strict package drawing. And this strict package drawing was set up by Gene Hardig and Harold Churchill who were engineers. Their attitude, if I can paraphrase it, was "We're going to show these stylists how it's supposed to be done."

Q Hardig and Churchill?

A Yes. "We're going to keep the reins on them." They were going to keep those stylists guys from running wild, so they gave us this very stringent package with minimal front overhang. A stylist likes to see a decent amount of overhang in front of the front wheels to develop his lines and get some character into all that front sheet metal. They finally allowed us an inch and a half more than the '59 Lark, which was, in itself, really ridiculous. It looked like it was cropped off in the front.

Q Why did they do that?

A To keep the package to a minimum. Engineers don't like surplus sheet metal. I'm not contemptuous of that, but everything can be carried to extremes, and they were on an extreme in this case. Another case in point was tumblehome.

Q Which is?

A Tumblehome is the inward slope of the glass toward the roof.

Q On both front and rear?

A Of the overall super-structure, or even the whole car, for that matter. Tumblehome is the inward slant. It comes from naval architecture. They limited the tumblehome to ten degrees. The reason for this, so I was told, was because General Motors has been making it ten degrees for 'lo all these years, and if it's good enough for General Motors, it's good enough for us. Of course, engineers tend to be against a lot of tumblehome because there's more room inside if you have vertical windows, and they just tend to think square. I don't mean square, but square --

ninety degree corners.

I had to go out, and I was relieved to see the Corvair come out, because General Motors finally increased the tumblehome to fourteen degrees, but I had to do all this work just to stand still, so to speak. The '40 Lincoln Zephyr had fourteen degrees tumblehome way back in 1940, which is one of the things I liked about it. It gives it a very stable look.

They restricted us on all these dimensions that stylists like to have free hands on. The result was the car, while it would have been very salable, it actually would have been quite timely in the last ten to fifteen years since the energy crunch. In other words, when common sense automobiles came back into vogue. The car was not too well received by the board of directors. When you're used to driving a Cadillac with two or three feet of overhang on the front and maybe eight or ten feet on the rear, this car tended to look a little abbreviated.

Q Truncated?

A Truncated, yes. Stunted. In any event, they didn't have the money, so the thing was stopped right there. From then on, the whole Studebaker story -- in the words I use to describe it -- was just a series of dismal facelifts and even more dismal facelifts on the facelifts. And the public senses this, too. It was all downhill after that.

I had a strong part in the Avanti program.

Q Can you tell us about the Avanti?

A The basic concept was created by Raymond Loewy.

Q So Sherwood Egbert ousted Churchill and brought Loewy back, in a sense?

A I wouldn't say Egbert ousted Churchill. Churchill remained on the board of directors.

Q But he was no longer president?

A He was no longer president. He was kicked upstairs.

Q Egbert was a rather dynamic personality?

A Egbert was a very dynamic personality. But here the point I wanted to bring out was that we had had our hands tied with this very rigid package we were given to work with.

Q By the engineers?

A Yes. And Churchill was an engineer. We were in the dog house; like Mr. Gregorie was in '47.

Q With Talberg and others?

A Not with Talberg, but with Breech.

Q Breech and Youngren?

A Yes. When Walker's car won the [1949 Ford design] contest. And, as an outsider, Egbert, dynamic as he was, was nevertheless not an automobile man.

Q Where had he come from?

A He came from McCullough Supercharger. McCullough was in California. They made, among other things, superchargers.

Q Was he was one of McCullough's fair-haired boys?

A I don't think there was a McCullough in the picture at this time. McCullough originated in Milwaukee, and that's where Egbert met [product designer] Brooks Stevens. Stevens was a consultant on a steam-powered car that McCullough had something to do with. I'm not too familiar with the details of that. But that's one reason why Stevens was called in to assist on the passenger cars, and, shortly thereafter, Loewy was called in to work on this Avanti program.

Q Which was to be a new, top-of-the-line beacon?

A Right. A salesroom draw. Certainly, it couldn't be sold in enough volume to save the company. But my point here is that Stevens was allowed to make some prototypes in Italy. They were made by Sibona-Bassano. That's an independent outfit. And they're in his museum now -- the sedan, the station wagon, and a hardtop coupe.

Q Stevens' museum in Mequon?

A Yes. He has them in his museum now. If the Henry Ford Museums wants to acquire those, you'd better make arrangements because....

Q What's happening?

A If anything happens to Brooks Stevens, and his health is poor now, the museum will be dismantled faster than you can say Jack Robinson.

Q How?

A His sons are not interested.

Q His younger son who is working with him now in Mequon?

A His two sons run this industrial design office right next to his museum.

Q They're the sons that are involved in production of the Excalibur?*

A Yes.

Q There's a younger son. There are three of them.

A Are there?

Q Yes. The youngest one, when I was there, was working with his father in Mequon; the other two were in West Allis with the Excalibur. Have they since come to Mequon to assist their father?

A The father is inactive.

Q What I'm trying to say is that the younger son seemed more in sync with his father's design business than the other two.

A I didn't realize there were three.

Q Do you think they would dismantle that museum?

A What I'm doing mainly is quoting a good friend of mine, Al Bonk.** He used to be an employee of mine. He is now the curator of the museum, and he tells me that when Brooks goes, the museum goes, and Al goes. So he does have a vested interest in it, and he's not too concerned about it because his plans are all made. But he said the sons have no interest in continuing it.

Q It's a nice little museum.

A They've already got rid of some of their better cars.

Q So Stevens was brought in for the Avanti program?

A And he was given a clean sheet of paper. He could make these prototypes any way he wanted to. He could put ten foot of overhang in the front if he wanted to, so to speak. Finally, Loewy comes in to work on the Avanti, and he was given a clean sheet of paper. He could make it any shape he wanted. He gave it 26 degrees tumblehome; we were limited to twelve, I think, finally. What the Avanti had was 26, exactly the same as the '61 Lincoln.

Q There's some folklore that Egbert gave him a rough sketch of what he wanted?

A I can't say that's true or not true. Bob Andrews says that's baloney. If it's rough, it's so rough you wouldn't even recognize it as an automobile.

So the Avanti has extreme front overhang. Most of us thought it was too much at the time, but now most cars have that type of front

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Editor's Notes:

* The Excalibur operation is in Chapter XI.

** Mr. Bonk left the Stevens' Museum in the late 1980's.

overhang. We were under the thumb of engineering there, and it was quite an oppressive thumb. In the person of Gene Hardig, mainly.

Q He stayed on as the resident...?

A As the Studebaker chief engineer. I don't say this with any bitterness toward him; he was probably doing what he thought was his job, but he was really misled on some of these styling matters.

We were kept on, but we had competition now. When the Avanti came along, I was happy to join the Avanti team.

Q It seemed like a good group?

A Yes.

Q Bob Andrews and who else?

A What happened was that Loewy got the commission from Egbert, and he assembled around him the men that he wanted. One of them was Bob Andrews.

Q Who had been earlier associated with Loewy?

A Loewy, yes. Andy's job was primarily to model.

Q Is that his nickname, Andy?

A Nickname, yes. We called him Andy. His name is Robert F. Andrews.

Q With the omnipresent pipe?

A With the omnipresent pipe. I don't think Andy would feel fully dressed if he didn't have a pipe.*

The other fellows on the team were Tom Kellogg, and I think Tom Kellogg was the principal idea man. Tom worked, I think, almost exclusively on sketching. They no doubt consulted a lot between them. Andy made the eighth size scale model of it.

Q The original one?

A The very original one. There was a rough model and not much detail on it.

Q Bob Koto wasn't available at this point?

A No. He was working for Ford at the time.

Q What do you know about John Ebstein?

A He was Loewy's man Friday.

Q In design administration, but not necessarily at Studebaker?

A No. This was the first time I'd seen him on the body project.

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*Editor's Note: Mr. Andrews died in 1991.

He was primarily a New York office man. I don't know that he was that much into design. I had the impression he was sort of a gofer for Raymond Loewy. He could be trusted by Loewy; a very loyal, trusted servant. By this time, he'd picked up a lot of design know-how, or tastes, at least.

Q Hanging out with the Maestro?

A Yes. He was with this group in the desert in Palm Springs.

Q The legendary group that were sent there?

A Yes, the legendary group.

Q Sequestered near Loewy's home in Palm Springs?

A Right. Randy Faurot, meanwhile, had let me go over to the old Studebaker styling department. He was the head of the resident Studebaker styling department. My title, by the way, was chief designer. It didn't mean a damned thing! I was a chief with no Indians. When this '62 program was axed by the board of directors, we were left hanging.

Q Hadn't it been something that would have revitalized the line?

A I think it would have been.

We were floundering like a ship without a rudder. I knew it was coming. A lot of makework projects and boring as heck, and you knew it wasn't going to probably amount to anything. On the basis of some clay modeling I had done in the past and these clay models I'd made under McCrea, which turned out, I thought, very well. And some others did, too; mostly foreigners.

Q What do you mean mostly foreigners?

A Visiting Germans from European -- we were connected with Mercedes, by this time.

But, anyway, I approached my boss, Randy. I said, "Let's be honest, Randy. You've got a staff here now -- admittedly, a small staff, but still a staff -- and you don't know what to do with them. I'd like to remove me from your problem list. I'd like to go over to the 69 building where the equipment is."

Q Which one?

A This is a building where we had a bigger styling department. We were shunted all over the place.

Q Was this within the Studebaker complex?

A Yes. It was an old factory building right in the midst of the factory. "I'd like to build a 100 inch wheelbase small car there, quarter scale model to this design," which I showed him a line elevation of. "You know from past experience I'll make a nice -- you'll, at least, have a good model out of it."

I saw it as an opportunity. If I didn't, I might get put on designing garden tractors or floor cleaning equipment for Clark. They acquired all these subsidiaries. Eventually, I did, anyhow, but this postponed it.

So he bought it. He said, "Go ahead." So I spent the next two months making this model. And I was in the finishing stages of this model when I was warned. They came and said, "When are you going to have this done?" I said, "I could probably finish it in a week." Randy said, "You'd better do it, because we're supposed to have a model of this Avanti, and then we've got to blow it up into a working, full-size car." So that's what happened, I finished the model hurriedly, and it was cast in plaster, and, ultimately, in fiberglass. A real nice model was made out of it, which I still have.

So we got these sketches of Tom Kellogg's which gave the basic Avanti theme, especially the side of the car and the superstructure or greenhouse as they call it. And this was the rough eighth scale model that Bob Andrews had made. My job was to take that information, blow it up on a full-size draft on a blackboard and make sure it's to the right package dimensions. So the seating is taken care of, and we've got the full head room, front and rear, and full leg room, steering wheel clearance and the toe board to the front wheel, so everything is to the right dimensions.

Building up an eighth scale model is quite a blowup. It's really impossible to make an accurate eighth scale model. You get a scale effect. Things that look right on eighth scale, if they were literally blown up, they become clumsy as hell on full scale. You get out of scale. That's one factor at work, and they didn't have full information about the dimensions we had to work with. It's almost like starting from scratch, but I did have a theme. I was doing what I had done so successfully with instrument panels back at Ford. I had to make something that would work, though.

We got the basic lines laid out; the profile of the fender lines, and the roof, and cross section through the front wheels through the middle of the body and through the rear wheels. Since they were very much in a hurry, we turned that over to the clay modelers who began the full-size scale model, then we started on the interior. The interior I actually modeled in clay myself; the instrument panel and the tunnel. For the seats, the management didn't know what a sports car seat was supposed to look like, so before they got any wrong ideas, I ran home and got an old Alfa-Romeo Gulietta seat out of my loft in the garage. I was saving it for a car that I had. I brought it into work, and we actually installed that Alfa-Romeo seat in the front of the seating buck. And darned if Egbert didn't come in that afternoon right after we installed it. Well, that's why we got it in a hurry. He sat in it and liked it. "That's the seat." And if you saw the two seats together, they are identical. They took templates off of this Alfa seat, and that became the Studebaker Avanti seat. The Japanese couldn't have copied it any better! Which was all right for the period. I thought it was a nice seat. What the heck, better to have something good than to have something original but not good.

Another interesting episode: Egbert, when he got into the seating buck, he bumped his head against the windshield pillar because it was sloping so much. He was about 6 foot 4, at least.

Q What was his reaction?

A I can't repeat his reaction here. It's not recordable. But it's too bad, because Mr. Egbert, to get into most any of the contemporary of the cars, would have to duck his head more, and the Avanti, that's one of the things that dates it now is that stiff windshield on it, and it was too stiff even for that period.

So Randy tried to console me and say, "Well, you're going to get a longer hood out of this anyhow." Fine, but I'd sooner have a slope in the windshield. But we, of course, had to please him. From his point of view, it was a reasonable request. So we lengthened up the hood about an inch and a half and brought the roof forward a little so it ended up with a stiffer windshield.

Anyway, the Avanti shaped up. I won't get into some of the finer points of it. It was a program that I had a lot to do with. Probably the crown of my Studebaker period.

Q Some details?

A I did most of the instrument panels for Studebakers, not only the execution, but the idea concept as well.

Q In the case of the Avanti, Loewy did the original concept drawing?

A Yes. I have some of the Loewy sketches.

Q And it was taken from there to what? Who took it over?

A He went out in the [California] desert, and Tom Kellogg made more polished, refined sketches. Kellogg made the model, and then we took over.

Q But you were doing the fine detailing and were actually involved in parts of the interior long before anyone else?

A Yes, without benefit of any sketches.

Q So, in effect, you had an awfully lot to do with the design of the original Avanti interior?

A Virtually the whole interior.

Q This has not been recorded anywhere that I know of.

A Yes.

Q You hear about Andrews, Kellogg and almost nobody else.

A Well, you know, they're....

Q Self-promoters?

A No, I don't want to [say that]. The basic concept of the car did come -- the exterior, especially -- from that group that worked on it in the desert.

Q But you were not part of that group?

A No. I don't want to put down their efforts.

Q Not at all, but this was the exterior.

A They don't put down mine. It was a team project. We each did what we were best at.

Q I suspect that, in the excitement over the exterior, there was very little credit being given to the interior designer.

A Fred Fox wrote an article for Special Interest Autos back in '75 on the development of the Avanti.

Q And he gave you credit for the interior?

A Oh, yes. He tells the whole thing quite accurately. It has a red Avanti on the cover. There was a Stout Scarab on the back cover.

The Avanti didn't do that great in the marketplace either. They had all kinds of production problems with it. And, for those times, I have to say the car did look a little freaky.

Q It was different.

A It was a bit too different, and some things of it -- I could mention aspects of the surface development that didn't work out the way they should have. We didn't have time enough. In a way, that resulted in the car being as good as it is because when a car has too long of a gestation period, there's too much time for committees to screw it up! But if it's too short, you don't have time to work out some of the bugs in it, either. And the Avanti was fast. Believe me, it was just a matter of a few months.

After Avanti, there was really -- I didn't do much more on Studebaker automotive projects. I worked on floor cleaners and garden tractors -- Gravely Tractors.

Q Was that an established line that you had a contract for?

A Ted Pietsch called them Graveley. He had a dry sense of humor. Grav-e-ly Tractors. I thought it was kind of a clever perversion of the word.

Q You have do that occasionally to keep your sanity?

A That's right, sometimes you did. Ted finally broke one day. Brooks Stevens had brought in a quarter scale model of this car he was going to build in Italy. They gave him a completely free hand: no limits on tumblehome, no limits on overhang, put all the curved glass in it you want, do whatever you want to do, see what you can do. We never got such a similar assignment. They'd breathe down our neck, and they held our pencil for us.

Q Stevens had this reputation.

A That's right. Nothing like good P.R. But you can't do that when you work for the company. It's a manifestation of the old proverb that a prophet is without honor in his own country.

This was all in one big room in the styling showroom. We had our desks back there. This was quite a small department. We were forbidden in the most stern manner to go over and look at that model. We were to stay back at our desks in our territory, which became our own limited territory. Over the side under tarps were two metal full-size models that Loewy had had made in France, and we weren't to see those, either. We weren't supposed to lift the tarps off them, although we actually did. We hung a piece of paper over a window with the picture of Kilroy on it to show them that we were there -- we had looked at it! We had to strike back in some way.

This was getting to Ted Pietsch, and his sense of humor had vanished. And I, like a fool, was goading him. I could see he was really getting angry, and I'd make smart remarks, not directed at him, but at the situation. Wry remarks. It came quitting time, and Gene Hardig, chief engineer; Randy Faurot, director of styling, were seated in chairs, and they were discussing a full-size clay model of a coming face-lift. The quitting bell rang, and Ted slammed on his coat and jammed his hat down over his head, stomped out, and he walked out where Gene Hardig and Randy were seated. Next to them was one of these aluminum type ashtrays on an aluminum pedestal with a glass removable ashtray in it. As he went past, he gave the ashtray a resounding kick, and it went rolling across this polished hardwood floor with the glass coming loose and, with a lot of inertia behind the heavy glass, it hit several things and made a lot of noise. It's the sort of thing you don't usually see or hear in the august halls of engineering or styling department. It startled everybody. Ted had just gone beyond the breaking point, and that was his way of showing it. He kept on going. Randy went after him and implored him to stop and come back. Why should Ted? He knew he'd get chewed out. So that was when Ted left Studebaker.

Q Of his own volition or by request?

A By request. It would work both ways.

Q He'd had it?

A He'd had it. So that left only myself and Randy, and Randy was afraid I was going to leave, because I was a good friend of Ted's. He came over to my house the next day and said if I have any ideas of leaving, he wanted to know about it because, in a way, he was in a bad situation now.

Q Was he adamant about letting Ted go?

A I guess he felt that he couldn't trust Ted at that point. Ted had embarrassed him in front of Hardig, just as I had embarrassed DeLaRossa in front of Dick Krafve, although not in such drastic terms. When people are kicked enough, they reach their breaking point.

Things went on pretty much like that right till the bitter end. On that day in early December of '63 when the flags at the plant were all flying at half staff -- officially, they were flying at half staff for Kennedy, but, to us, it looked like they were flying at half staff for Studebaker.

Q What had happened to Egbert at this point?

A Egbert's health was failing. He had some serious ulcer problems.

Q Which developed into cancer?

A Yes. He was out of the picture for as much as half a year.

Q There was no direction at the company?

A A man named Byers Burlingame, who was strictly an accounting type....

Q Who brought him in, the board?

A I think so.

Q They turned to a financial man?

A Right. At this point, I think their mind was made up. We didn't know it, but...Burlingame was called the undertaker in some quarters, after the fact, maybe. He was not an automobile man. He made no pretense of being one, and he was just doing his job. That was the way, from our vantage point, Studebaker ended.

Q Sad.

A It was very sad.

Q Could it have been avoided?

A Yes. If someone had done away with Henry Ford II, maybe Studebaker and Nash might have survived [along with] Packard and Hudson. The reason I say that is because Henry said sometime in 1953 or '54 that he was going to beat Chevrolet. No matter what, he was going to be number one again.

Q And, as it turned out, at the expense of the independents?

A I'm not being original here. You'll see this quote in Bourke's book. But someone said, "When the elephants fight, the grass gets trampled." Studebaker dealers couldn't sell Studebakers for fifty dollars above invoice like Ford and Chevy dealers were being forced to do because the factory was dumping cars on them. Each one was fighting for sales supremacy. So the independents were a casualty of this, what was essentially an ego trip on Ford's part. I have said I'm a great admirer of Henry Ford and Edsel Ford, but I really don't feel that way about Henry Ford II.

Admittedly, Studebaker management was inept at many times. We can say that with hindsight, although I felt so even at the time. I don't think they were any more so than the management of Ford or G.M., but they couldn't afford to be. They didn't have the money for new models. Sometimes that was a blessing.

Q The engine was a...?

A The engine was a virtual copy of the Cadillac. The V-8 Studebaker was a Chinese copy of the original '49 Cadillac overhead valve scaled down to 230 some cubic inches.

Q The six dated back to when?

A The six dated back to the Champion, which came out in '39. It was a good engine. But once they were going downhill, and they didn't have the money for model development, the handwriting was on the wall.

Q How was the Avanti mechanically?

A It was basically good. It had some glitches in it. I have one, and the transmission linkage leaves a lot to be desired. But as far as engine reliability and frame rigidity -- something they sadly lacked on the previous coupes -- the Avanti had a good, heavy, rigid frame under it, finally, when it was too late. The suspension, perhaps, wasn't as sophisticated as some of the competition. Certainly not as some of the European cars. It was mechanically a good car.

Q As an American exotic, it seems to remain high with the collecting public.

A It has its following, yes.

Q What's your estimation of Brooks Stevens' design ability?

A Off and on during his career, Stevens has had some competent designers working for him. Stevens' brand of design, especially at that time, was not mine. He liked very crisp architectural, angular stuff. I like flowing organic stuff. In that regard, I was much more in tune with Loewy.

Q Who did have taste.

A Yes. And that harks back even to Gregorie's days when the early Zephyrs were flowing and organic. That's why I liked them, and he did an extremely good job of executing those cars. That's why I hated to dwell on this period after '42 when I couldn't figure out what had happened. They were capable of doing much, much better.

Q What would be your epitaph for Studebaker?

A They made some of the most interesting, exciting cars produced in this country. It's too bad they had to go the way they did, but, to a large degree, they brought it on themselves. Those coupes were a pretty poor excuse for a car, mechanically and structurally, mainly structurally.

Q The Starlite and Starliner, particularly?

A Yes. I have some of those, too. We used to call it "the rubber band frame" without any exaggeration.

Q Loewy wasn't able to exercise any oversight on the mechanicals?

A No. I don't think he was really that perceptive, mechanically. But there were other designers who could have told the company what was wrong.

Q Bourke would have been one of them?

A Yes. And he tells in his book where he tried to sell them. And I was harping on it a lot, but you can't harp too much because you become a thorn in their side, and they want to get rid of you.

Q Vance and, maybe, Hardig and others were oblivious to the fact that they were turning out ramshackle products with a pretty face?

A I don't know about Hardig. That certainly describes Vance.

Q Hardig apparently tried?

A I don't know what limitations he might have had, therefore you hate to == it's easy to sit here and condemn somebody, but I did feel when the subject was brought up that you could feel their spine stiffen a bit and their hackles raise. If you wanted to keep your job, you couldn't say too much to a lot of them. What his reasons were -- maybe he couldn't do anything, and maybe he could. But don't underestimate the taste or the sense of the public.

Mercedes is overpriced as it is. They have gotten where they were on merit. Now, maybe, they're staying where they are on reputation, but they certainly aren't worth the money they ask for them. But they built a good, solid car. People sense the solidity when they ride in a car.

Q Did you stay on to the bitter end?

A I was there to the bitter end. They kept a couple of engineers to make necessary changes for the Canadian operation, and that's when they switched to a Chevrolet engine. But there was no more styling done after that. That's not quite true. If you interviewed Bob Marks, he'll tell you where he....

Q Who was that?

A Bob Marks. He designed the program for the facelift for the Canadian operation, but it never got off the ground.

Q What happened to the corporation? Did it just disintegrate? Did someone take over the assets?

A It was taken over by Worthington Pump Company.

Q What happened to Bob Doehler, post-Studebaker?

A He wanted to be his own boss, so he went to Milwaukee and bought an auto body shop. He thought he was going to become a Pininfarina. He soon learned the facts of life.

Q Let's hear about it.

A I chose the wrong business in the wrong town at the wrong era. It's a service industry, and the period of '65 through '82 was a period when the working man was king. He could dictate his terms, and if you didn't like his terms, if you looked at him cross-eyed, he'd pick up his tools and go across the street and work for a dealer and make more money and do poorer work, and there you're left hanging without a staff. It was a nightmare, all eighteen years of it.

Q Did you make a living?

A Barely.

Q Was there any satisfaction?

A Sometimes. I had the facilities to work on my own cars. During that period, I along with another tenant of the building we were in, bought the building. The building is now our principal source of income. It's a pretty nice building -- 35,000 square feet. I actually live in the building.

Q It houses your collection as well?

A Houses my collection. I like to tell visiting friends that I always wanted a house with an attached garage! So I've got a 6,000 square foot garage and 1,000 square foot apartment.

Q What sort of work did you do during those eighteen years?

A I managed this body shop I owned.

Q Can you tell us some of the projects that you worked on?

A We tried to do high-quality work.

Q For what kind of a market?

A Mostly the import market. We did all the work for what was then the only Porsche/Audi dealer, and we did a lot of work on Mercedes.

Q Were you able to get the parts?

A Yes, they were good on parts.

Q So you established a local reputation?

A Yes. We had a good reputation. It was a nightmare keeping it, though, trying to keep good help. The dealers did quick and dirty work, and they made big money doing it. So to try to compete against them for the same price and do good work and expect your men to make a living. The end of it was that they got paid pretty well, and what was left was mine, and there wasn't a heck of a lot left.

But we did acquire this building during that period.

Q What street is it on?

A Fourth and Cherry.

Q In downtown Milwaukee? Is it a desirable location?

A It's just north of downtown, but it's before you get into the blighted area. It's a solid building.

Q Who are your tenants now?

A Our 14,000 square foot first floor is empty, I'm sad to say. We had a vocational school -- a county-supported vocational school in there when we bought the building. We thought they were there for life, but they weren't. On the second floor, we've got a printing operation that shares a second floor with myself. We now have another body shop on the third floor where I had operated mine.

Q A successful body shop?

A Very successful. He's doing a much better job than I did.

Q What kind of market?

A The same market, but he's in a better climate now. Around '82 we had a severe recession brought on by the [national] administration's efforts to tighten up on the dollar. It was the only way to cure the inflation problem, so I'm not criticizing Reagan at all. Men tend to value their jobs more now, and especially in Milwaukee because we've lost so much industry. We're in a depressed area. It's really a nice town. I like it.

Q You've got a good supply of experienced mechanics?

A There's a better supply than there was. It's one of those cases of timing.

Q Looking back at your career, how would you sum it up? How would like to be remembered?

A I'd like to be remembered as a good designer.

Q And one who didn't always compromise?

A I wouldn't want to make that hard of a statement. You have to compromise.

Q But you didn't like to make bad compromises?

A Things should be approached from an objective, rational viewpoint. Above all, I'm interested in the product.

Q The integrity of the product?

A The integrity of the product. That's gets back to Henry Ford again. The original Henry Ford had integrity. He put good materials in the car. Some people thought he was slow to abandon so-called buggy suspension and mechanical brakes.

Q He thought the latter hadn't been improved on.

A Basically, yes. There were some things to be said for his suspension, too. But he put out a car with, above all, integrity. And Edsel saw to it that the car had design styling integrity. They will always be personal heroes to me.

Q They were basically a good team. They got out of sync emotionally and philosophically.

A I know that was true. I admired Edsel for his good taste in design. Some of Henry's social ideas I was more in agreement with. He might have gotten a bit carried away with paternalism toward his men in the real early days, but he was so embittered by the failure of that to work that he became a very hard-nosed employer.

Q He did became embittered. He felt that benevolent paternalism was the way to go and that employees should be loyal and should be grateful. He felt betrayed.

A I attribute a lot of his skinflint reputation of the 'Thirties back to this disenchantment.

Q Basically, are you happy with the way things turned out? Do you think you would have done anything differently?

A I haven't given that too much thought, because you can't turn back. I don't think I could have stayed with Ford through the 'Fifties.

Q Because DeLaRossa stayed there for another ten years?

A Yes. And when I saw what was coming up for the rest of the 'Fifties, I don't think I would have stayed.

Q Did you have much interplay with Bordinat?

A A bit.

Q What was your estimate of him?

A He was always friendly and civil.

Q But a consummate politician?

A A consummate politician, yes. I regard him about the same as Bill

Schmidt. But he was civil, friendly, and not two-faced as I would describe DeLaRossa. I don't remember Bordinat with any feeling of bitterness. But I didn't have the respect for him that I have for Gregorie.

Q It would seem that your career, as I think a case study in artistic frustration?

A Yes.

Q Here you are trying to make the best product you know how, and you're being frustrated by the sales mentality?

A Yes. And I didn't want to make rocket ships; I wanted to make good-looking, practical automobiles, which we are getting to now again. It's evolving toward that again. We've been forced to by aerodynamics.

Q That's the trend of the future?

A It certainly is the trend of the present. If energy is going to be a consideration, it'll be the trend of the future. So I hope we always do have a little energy shortage cloud hanging over us that'll force us to design sensible automobiles instead of those monstrosities that were produced in the 'Fifties and 'Sixties.

Q Any final word?

A Thank you very much.

Q Thank you, Mr. Doehler.

#

Addendum: Bob Doehler died in Milwaukee at St. Luke Hospital May 17, 1993.

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