



Transcript for

AUTOMOTIVE DESIGN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW WITH AUDREY MOORE HODGES, 1985

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NOTE TO READERS

This PDF-format version of the Audrey Moore Hodges interview transcript was created from a Word document, created in turn from the transcript available on the *Automobile in American Life and Society* Web site (<http://www.autolife.umd.umich.edu>).

The Automotive Design Oral History Project, Accession 91.1.1673, consists of over 120 interviews with designers and engineers conducted by David Crippen of The Henry Ford during the 1980s. For more information, please contact staff at the Benson Ford Research Center (research.center@thehenryford.org).

Staff of the Benson Ford Research Center
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AUTOMOTIVE DESIGN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of Audrey Moore Hodges

Reminiscence from the 1985 Interview with Audrey Moore Hodges. Automotive Design Oral History, Accession 1673. Benson Ford Research Center. The Henry Ford.

This is Dave Crippen of the Edsel Ford Design History Center at Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village, and this is May 10, 1985. We are conducting a career interview with Audrey Moore Hodges at Whitmore Lake, Michigan. We're going to ask Mrs. Hodges to tell her career story. Mrs. Hodges is unique in the sense that she was one of the very first female, full-time designers at a major automobile company. We'll ask Mrs. Hodges to tell her story in her own chronological narrative.

A: I grew up in Plymouth, Michigan. I graduated from Plymouth High School. From there I went to the Detroit Art Academy in Detroit and met some very wonderful people there.

Q: Was that well known?

A: Quite well known, yes. Emil Weddidge was one of the instructors, Carlos Lopez, Don Gooch, who later went to the University of Michigan.

It was a most enjoyable experience. I wanted to major in fashion design, but I needed general design work, so I took life studies and design studies until the school was finally sold. They sold it to Meinzinger, who also had a competitive art school.

Q: When was that?

A: That was in 1936. They transferred all our credits then to the Meinzinger School of Art, and we went there. They made every one of us who came from the Detroit Art Academy start over again just like it was kindergarten. The way they treated us was almost like stepchildren. We weren't in the same category as the Meinzinger students were, and so -- money or no money -- I just quit.

Then I decided I was going to get a job. I'd learned quite a bit in fashion design, so I went to the J.L. Hudson Company.

Q: How old were you?

A: Eighteen. I went to J.L. Hudson, and they said, yes, I had all the qualifications for fashion illustration. So when we got to talking about money, they didn't pay much, so I thought there wasn't any point of spending my money to and from Plymouth to earn practically nothing. So I just decided I wasn't going to do that.

Q: You're still living at home?

A: I'm still living at home. Then I decided that I had to earn a living, so the most important thing was to get a steady job. My mother said, "What you'd better do is go to business school, and no matter whether you have a college education, business school education will always come in handy." So I went to Detroit Business Institute and studied shorthand and typing and so forth, and I got a job after that working for an attorney in Detroit. When I went in the office to work for the attorney, he showed me this beautiful office. It was just as neat and clean as could be, and the first day that I arrived, I could hardly find the desk, because they had briefs piled up all around the desk, on top of the desk. It was absolutely smothered with stacks of work that hadn't been done for months, and the girls in the outer office said, "Well, you're sucker number three this month." And I went in and looked at that work, and I thought, well, I needed the job, I'd better get busy.

So I started working, and the phone kept ringing, and this attorney kept saying, "Have you done brief number so and so?" And I'd say, "No, I'm still working on brief such and such." He'd say, "Well, you'd better get busy. We have a lot of work to do." I think this lasted for about three days, and when I was supposed to have lunch, he gave me a list of errands he wanted me to do for himself and his wife, so I didn't even get time to eat. So after about three or four days of this, I said to my mother, "This isn't what I went to school for." She said, "I don't think it is, either."

Q: Why did you go to art school? Was there something in your early life that...?

A: My mother was quite an artist, and I believe she had a favorite aunt who was quite an artist. My mother had quite an artistic background. Music and art were her favorite subjects. She really wanted me to go to school and become a music and art school teacher, and I said, "I don't think I'd have patience with children, so I don't think that's my thing."

I was fooling around trying to get myself located somewhere in a different job, and I came home one day, and she said, "I have you all enrolled at the University of Michigan ." I said, "You do?" And she said, "Yes, and we have an appointment, and you're going over, and you're going to talk to whoever was the registrar at the time. I think you're going to find it's going to work out fine." So we went over, and I found that I was arriving there with seven extra credits. I'd never been at the University of Michigan, and I couldn't understand where I was getting all these credits because I hadn't been that long in art school. Apparently, they liked the work I had done, so I got extra credits for drawing and painting. I got credits from Plymouth High School, which, apparently, was very highly regarded by the university, and I got credit for a subject we called civics in those days. It had to do with government.

And English poetry. We had a very fine English teacher, so I got credit for those two classes from high school. So instead of having to take SAT's and arrive as I did, I just went in! That was it! I just came in as a transfer student.

Lo and behold in the art school was Emil Weddige, Don Gooch, Carlos Lopez. It was like old home week. We just had a wonderful time. It was marvelous.

Q: From the Detroit Art Academy ?

A: They had been the instructors at the Detroit Art Academy. They had been my instructors, and I came, and here they were my instructors again. So we just got along famously and had a wonderful time. I just had a marvelous time in college. I loved every minute of it.

Q: What did you specialize in?

A: Industrial design.

Q: Unusual to have women in those classes?

A: It was. It was mostly men that were in industrial design; women went into interiors. One of my instructors who was quite impressed with my technique said, "Your approach to the subject has a masculine touch, so we'd like you to try out for a bachelor of science in industrial design." When one went into industrial design, one designed items, whatever the assignment was, and then you went into the shop to make it. You had to actually make this thing yourself to make sure it could be handled by mass production. So I learned how to run lathes -- wood and metal lathes - - and how to do all kinds of things.

It was a curious thing. In all the years that I was in art school, I had an eight o'clock class every day of the week except Sunday. I had a four hour eight o'clock. In other words, from eight to twelve that went on, and I had so much work to do that every night after supper I would go back to art school and work. My sorority sisters would say to me, "Come on and play bridge with us. Take a night off." And I'd say, "I can't, I have to work in the shop."

I didn't find out until years after I graduated, they thought I was working in a dress shop. They never realized that I was down making things with my hands in the shop and running the lathes. So it was curious that the dedication that I had to my work was all misinterpreted by my classmates.

Q: What type of projects did you work on during those years?

A: One of the toughest things I worked on was a copper tea kettle. It was quite a nice design, and it was in a couple of the shows. I don't know what has happened to it since then. It was a combination....

Q: Did you aspire to the Paul Revereware?

A: I wasn't even aware of Revereware for some reason or another. I went to Grand Rapids a few times to look at furniture to make some furniture designs, and I got into tableware and that sort of thing. But this particular thing was so difficult to make because I had to hammer, and weld, and cut, and mold. And then it was a combination of walnut and copper, so I had to cut, and sand, and finish the wood that went with it. That was one of the most difficult things I had done.

Q: It must have been fascinating?

A: It was. Oh, I loved it, I just loved it. I never had any feelings of what was going on around me except what I was doing in school, and every night I was in that art school.

Q: Were you aware at the time that there were great things happening the late 'Thirties in industrial design?

A: No.

Q: Like Teague and Bel Geddes?

A: We heard about some of those people, yes. I had to take some courses in architecture, so we had to study the history of architecture, so we were very much aware of the Bauhaus and things that they were doing there. And Frank Lloyd Wright was everybody's god and mentor and that sort of thing. So we were very well apprised of a great many things, but we had so much pressure on us. The pressures were tremendous.

Probably one of the finest people that I met in the art school was Aarre Lahti. He had two sons; one was Alexis. He was a very fine person. We used to have many discussions about how the school could better help the students in their approach to design.

Q: Was he on the staff?

A: He was on the staff. It might have been he that convinced me to go into industrial design, because we had to take architecture courses, and fine arts painting -- oil, watercolor. I took from Earnest Barnes, the watercolor instructor. Alexandro Maestro/Valerio was the cutest man. I took life drawings and oil painting from him. He was just darling. He was as temperamental as his name sounds. He was so cute, and he would get with us, and if we didn't respond to his desires that day, he would say, "You godda damma kids, you're no good. You godda damma kids." Then he'd start throwing everything he could lay his hands on, and he'd go out of the room. And once in awhile he would go down to one of the local bistros and have a beer, and one beer was enough to make him drunk.

Occasionally, a friend of mine -- Tristan Meinecke that I went to school with -- he made quite a name for himself in architecture in Chicago. His father was Bruno Meinecke, head of the Latin department -- Latin or German. He was a professor. And Tris and I were great pals, and we were quite friendly with Mr. Valerio, and his wife would call, and we'd get this page that we were wanted on the phone -- it's his wife. So we'd go and find him and take him home.

And then, of course, after we'd find him, he would cry. Oh, he was so cute. He was so temperamental, and it was just a riot.

Q: He was a good teacher?

A: Oh, yes, a wonderful teacher.

Q: What was his discipline?

A: His discipline was, "You gotta damma kids," that was it.

Q: What was his specialty?

A: His specialty was life painting. I think he's quite famous for -- it's like an aquatint. They're like a watercolor. They're like an etching. Mezzotints/aquatints. Beautiful, beautiful. All these were typical old master type paintings. The actual word escapes me that his fame was really all wrapped up in, but he was wonderful. He was good. We had a wonderful time.

And then the war came along.

Q: Certainly a good background for your later experiences?

A: Oh, yes. I had some of the best instructors that there were, and the experiences were varied. We really did have some wonderful experiences. But then the war came along in my senior year, and that just blew everything. Classmates went off to war. I, being the only girl in industrial design, the fellows were all at war. And I had one instructor....

Q: Were you the only female in industrial design?

A: Yes. So I was alone, and it was very interesting. They talk about sexual harassment; I had one instructor I could never stand. He would come up behind me after all my years of training on how to use drawing instruments, and he would come up and throw both arms around me to show me how to use drafting instruments. Then he started asking me to go out with him, and I wouldn't go out. He said, "You remember you're the only one in this class, and I can give you any grade I want, and you can fail," and this sort thing. Where I had always gotten A's in that particular design number, I began to get C's.

Q: In those days, you didn't take those [incidents] to the dean?

A: No, no. Today, nobody would tolerate that. But, anyway, I had already gotten into an honor society, so it didn't bother me too much. I certainly wasn't going to go out with him.

Then we got a call one day from Willow Run. I don't know who was in charge out there. They were making the B-24 Bombers, and they needed draftsmen to come out and do some crucial rush work. In those days, the B-24 Bomber was similar to the English Liberator Bomber, but the English version had a revolving gun turret, where our B-24 did not. In order to shoot it -- it was all fixed -- you had to turn the plane. They were working madly to get a revolving gun turret in that plane, so they needed somebody to come out.

Uolevi Lahti, who was the brother of Aarre Lahti, was one of my classmates, and I went out, and they took a girl -- her name was Mary Frances Greshke. She was an interior design student at the

university. She was younger than I. I think she was a grade or two behind me, but a very fine draftsman, and they wanted precise work, so Uolevi, Mary Frances, and I went out there.

Q: Tell us about Willow Run in those days. What kind of atmosphere was there?

A: The drafting department was quite apart from the rest of the factory, but it was very, very busy. Scores of tables and a lot of draftsmen all over, but what we went out there to do was lofting. Are you familiar with the term?

Q: No.

A: Well, you work from blueprints, and the information that is on a blueprint is transferred to a large -- I'm talking forty years ago -- sheet of metal....

Q: 1941?

A: '42, I believe it was. Large sheets of metal that had a white coating, probably of some sort of enamel, and once the ink went onto that white enamel, there was no removing it, so the precision was ner- veracking. It had to be so precise because the actual manufacturing was done from the dimensions that was on this loft.

Q: How did you get the impression on the...?

A: You took your shoes and your stockings off, and you went around on pads on your knees. We had little ink pots and very fine drafting instruments, but everything had to be so precise. We had these blueprints. We were transferring the information from the blueprint to the loft.

Q: And what would a loft have been once you transferred it?

A: That was removed. They were big sheets. They would be as big as this kitchen area. They were taken out and taken to the manufacturing area. I never saw them after they left the department. And we rarely went out of that department. We had our own private entrance into it, and only once or twice did somebody send a truck for me to go over someplace and pick up some blueprints, and we zigzagged all through it. But I never walked through the plant. It was totally separate.

Q: You never saw the assembly line?

A: No, I never saw the assembly line. It was quite an experience, because I was living in the sorority house, and my classmates thought it was great that I was doing something for the war effort and getting paid for it and paid handsomely.

Q: What sorority was it?

A: Alpha Gamma Delta on Hill Street. But the housemother approached me one day, and she said, "I don't think you can continue to live in this house." And I said, "Why is that?" She said,

"After all, we do have an image to maintain, and we do not like to have factory workers in our house." I said, "Well, you'll have to take it up with the national, because I have no intention of moving." And the national was contacted, and they said no way was I to be evicted from the house because I was doing this type of thing.

But it was hard. I would go to work and work all night, and come home, and shower and change, and go to eight o'clock class.

Q: You were still taking classes?

A: Still taking classes. I didn't drop. It was very difficult. Then I would try to catch up sometime during the afternoon.

Q: Did you have your own car in those days?

A: No, I didn't have a car. I rode with either Mary Greshke or Uolevi had a car because they were residents. In those days, students were not allowed automobiles. If you were an Ann Arbor resident, you had to go to the dean and get special permission to have an automobile and also to have a license if you were to do work for your parents, or shopping or whatever. So going back and forth, it was not a problem. I had no transportation problem at all.

Until the work was finished, then I just came back into school.

Q: How many months were you there?

A: I was there all winter and all spring. I would say probably four months.

Q: '42/'43?

A: Something like that, yes. I was to graduate in '42, because I was on a three-year program, and I was all set to graduate in the Spring of '42. But the fact that I was doing all that work, I had to drop a couple of courses, so that meant that I went on into '43 and graduated then.

Q: That came to an end, and you greatly enjoyed the experience?

A: Oh, I certainly did. It was very rewarding, and I felt I had done something. After all, my brothers were in service, and my sister was in Europe, and I had wanted to do something, and this was just a wonderful way to help.

So then when school was through, I decided I wanted to go into the Red Cross....

Q: You came back from Willow Run, and you finished your curriculum in June of 1943?

A: Yes. However, I did have one little discrepancy in my program. I had worked on a senior thesis, and to wrap it up, I needed information that was in the rare book room, and when I went to the library in the rare book room, the book had been stolen. Here I was all ready to graduate,

had more credits than I needed, because I was all scheduled to graduate in '42, so all the courses that I took from '42 to '43 were just plus. But I did get this incomplete in this one course, and I was devastated by that, but I didn't see any point in staying on and starting the thesis over, and my instructor said, "Oh, finish it sometime, and we'll remove that, but go through all the graduation," and I did. But I never finished the thesis.

Q: Still got it?

A: No. Everything is done. All the loose ends have been tied up, so I'm fully graduated, got the diploma. In fact, I got two. I got one in '42, and I got one in 1969 or '70 when I went back to do it. But it was one of those things, it always bothered me, and I thought one of these days I'm going to do it. But I didn't want to go back when the war was on. Things were so different, and I thought what I'll do is I'll go out and do something for the war effort, so I volunteered to go into the Red Cross. I passed all the written exams -- everything.

Q: To button up the episode, in '69, what did you do? You contacted the School of Architecture ?

A: Yes. I contacted the School of Architecture. I think it was 1969. I've got the diploma.

Q: The instructor had long since retired?

A: Oh, yes. They were long gone. And I went in, and it was a curious thing at that time, the dean, Bill Lewis, had been a classmate of mine. He was in the war when.... [five years in the U.S. Navy]. The well-known Ann Arbor artist?

A: Yes. And here he turned out to be the dean. Oh, it was cute. So we had a wonderful conversation, and he said, "Audrey, that is ridicu-lous. Why didn't they give you your degree? Look at all these extra credits you had." And for an incomplete and a thesis that was three--fourths done, I had to make a lot of illustrations. I did all the illustrations for the thesis.

Q: What was the subject?

A: I've even forgotten. It was something to do with how architecture affected some country. I think it was Mexico. And I had done all these plates of -- it seems to me it had something to do with Mexico .

Q: You still had them by then in '69?

A: Yes. So then when I went in, Lewis said, "Don't bother with that. We don't require a thesis any more." I said, "You don't require it for graduating?" "No," he said, "That's passe." I said, "I have all these extra credits." He said, "Why don't we have a little meeting, and, maybe, we'll give it to you anyway." So I said, "Do what you like, but I have time. I'd like to come back to school anyway. When I was in school before, I didn't have a chance or time to take a lot of subjects I wanted, simply because I had switched to industrial design, and that took me out of all the fine arts." He said, "What do you want to do?" I said, "I'd like to come back and do some more

painting, and I would like to study from some of the current artists, and I'd like to take lithography. After all, Emil Weddidge does some wonderful work with lithography, and he studied out in that school out in California, and I know the gal who ran it."

Q: Where was that?

A: I can't think of the name of the city in California, but I think it was in Los Angeles, and her name was June Wayne. She was in charge of this famous school for lithography, and Emil Weddidge went there and studied under her. [Tamerind]

So, anyway, Bill said, "Well, if you want to, but I wouldn't bother take credit." And I said, "Why not?" He said, "You don't need them. Why don't you just take cafeteria courses or pass/fail." I said, "No. I'll go in there just like I'm one of the kids." So then I had to go on and talk to several other people before they would readmit me, and I did. One of the men said, "I don't think you can hack it. These kids are so fantastic today, and to come in on a competitive basis, you can't do it." I said, "Let me find out." So I enrolled, and, at the same time, I was taking some drawing and painting classes out at Washtenaw Community College. I just loved that school. That was a real fun thing. So I went to the university, and I was taking one four hour course and one three hour course, and then I was taking a three hour course at Washtenaw.

Q: What courses were they?

A: Painting -- drawing and painting. I had seen this ad for black art, and I wondered what is black art? I'd like to know what that is, so I enrolled in a black art course out at Washtenaw Community College.

The black art course was taught by a black artist, Jon Lockhart, who I have a great deal of admiration for. Jon's had to do everything the hard way, and I just admire him. He has marvelous talent, and if he'd had a better education when he was younger, he wouldn't have had such a struggle. But he had to work so hard for everything he got. And he gave so freely of himself. He's just a love of a man, he really is.

So here I was busy at the School of Architecture. They called it Fine Arts, and they changed the name of everything. I was in the fine arts department then, and that was a totally different connotation than it was when I was at school before. Fine arts meant that you studied over in the museum, and you studied famous paintings. Now the fine arts meant that you actually learned to draw and paint in the fine arts style.

So, anyway, I was into that, and the kids were really great. They were right, the kids were great. They were so great I'll never forget them. I had this one instructor -- Emil Weddidge -- that had always been so nice to me when I was in Detroit and when I was in the university the first time. But I think that when I came back, I reminded him of how old he was, and I think that he resented that, because from the first day that he set eyes on me, he was as hateful as hateful could be. He did everything he could to get me to leave school. He insulted me in front of the class every chance he got. He ridiculed the work I did. He said that the best thing I had in my portfolio was the paper I hadn't touched, and he was absolutely hateful. And it got to the point that the kids

resented his treatment of me to the point that whenever they would see him come toward me, they would get between us and interrupt him, "Mr. Weddidge, could you please help me with this," or "Would you give me your opinion on that," just to keep him away from me, that's how great the kids were. But when it came to grades, I got a B from his course. They still had departmental judgment, and I got a B from his course, but he walked right down the aisle when they were grading all the work, and he did everything he could to destroy the credibility of whatever I had done, which was really quite heartbreaking.

At the same time, I was taking painting from Richard Wilt, who made quite an impact on the Ann Arbor community with his wonderful paintings, and he gave me A's. He told me to stay away from Weddidge. He said, "The man absolutely can't stand anybody over twenty-three." So I realized then I was right! I reminded him of how old he was, and when he was with kids at eighteen and nineteen, they made him feel like eighteen or nineteen. But he was giving me such a hard time that Bill Lewis called me up to his office, and he said, "Audrey, how are you getting along with Emil?" I said, "By staying as far away from him as I can." He said, "I know. If he weren't retiring this year, we were going to let him go."

Q: When did you get your official degree from the University of Michigan ?

A: I think it was about 1969 I finally got my official degree.

Q: And that was very satisfying for you?

A: Yes. It was tying up loose ends.

Q: But, more importantly to chronology, we have you back in 1942 or early '43. Your work at Willow Run has come to an end, and you've graduated since. You want to do something patriotic -- at least to help the war?

A: I did. I tried out for the American Red Cross, and I passed all the written tests, but when it came to the health test, they found that I had a heart condition, and I was rejected. I had a heart murmur. And I was rejected, so I was quite devastated by that. I wanted to do something, so I went to work for University Hospital in Ann Arbor as a secretary. I had studied typing and shorthand, and I immediately was taught how to take medical dictation, and I became a roving medical secretary throughout the hospital. In the meantime, a friend of mine who was a chemist down in Middletown, Ohio, invited me to visit with her, and I rode the train down and back. I had no car. Coming back, I met a man on the train named Joe Thompson, and he worked for Studebaker Corporation in South Bend, and he was quite impressed with the fact that I had studied industrial design in college and had not any idea where to go to look for a job. And there was no assistance at the university in helping people find jobs in those days.

Q: The industrial design department couldn't help?

A: No, nothing at all. You have to realize they were in an ivory tower, and outside their ivory tower, that was a big, wide world out there, and they didn't know anything about it.

So this Mr. Thompson was very nice, and he told me that he would like his boss, who was Virgil Exner, to see some of my drawings. And I said I had never done any automobile drawings. He said, "That doesn't matter. Just bring some drawings, and I'm sure that he'll see them." I said, "I'd rather not go down there unless he's expecting me." So he said, "Okay, I'll talk to him about you." So he did.

Q: Exner was...?

A: Head of the styling section at Studebaker in South Bend working for Raymond Loewy who held the design contract. So he did, and Virgil Exner....

Q: He was, by then, a world...?

A: A world famous industrial designer, yes. They did buildings, and airplanes, and just every phase of design.

Q: At this point, he was interested in automotive styling?

A: Automotive styling, yes, and he held the Studebaker contract, and Virgil Exner was his chief stylist. So Virgil called me and told me -bout what Joe had told him. So he invited me to come down and bring some drawings. I did, and I was hired, and that was fine. I was hired in the fall, and I went to work in February of 1944.

Q: Tell us about your going to South Bend and some detail about meeting Mr. Exner and what your interview was like.

A: He was just a very charming man.

Q: This was a first for them?

A: Oh, yes, this was a first for them

Q: The only female in the industry?

A: That's right. It was a first. They'd never hired a woman, but he liked my work, and he thought I would work out very well.

Q: What type of sketches did you take him?

A: I can't remember, but they were probably my industrial design sketches. The things that I had made, and he was impressed with the workmanship and the type of style that I had. He said he thought it would work out fine in styling.

Q: Had there been any women working in styling at Studebaker?

A: No. There were just two women down there that were clay modelers, but they did not do any styling. Then they had a woman secretary, so I was the first stylist.

Q: This was in late '43, and, by this time, women working in several stages of industry was not unique any more?

A: It probably wasn't unique. A lot of women got into factory work that had never worked in a factory before. In fact, when I was out at

Willow Run -- when Mary Greshke and I went out -- we were the only women in that drafting department. It was all men.

Q: It's a tribute to Mr. Thompson and Mr. Exner that they forgot your ex, in a sense, and looked at your work?

A: They didn't consider it at all, and I never felt the least bit unique, or uncomfortable, or anything. It was a job. I had assignments along with the men. Our assignments were carried out, and I did the work the same as they did. In fact, how the designs would evolve would usually be when there was a meeting of the sales people, and engineers would all meet and say what we need to do is to revamp like a front end, or a back end, or a door section, or an instrument panel, or what-ever, and we'll need some sketches by such and such a time. Each one of us was given a number for our designs. They didn't go by name; we were given a number, so no one ever knew whose work they were judging.

Q: Obviously, you're working on postwar [design]?

A: Yes, postwar. We worked anywhere from five to ten years in advance.

Q: This was wartime?

A: Oh, yes, the war was very much on.

Q: So you were working on the postwar Studebaker?

A: Yes.

Q: Was Studebaker, into war work?

A: Studebaker did war work, yes, but this was totally separate. We were in a separate building.

Q: You were in the design department working on the postwar design?

A: Yes. Everything was separate. No, I never felt the least bit uncomfortable, or unique, or anything. I was just one of the boys, as far as that goes. But I did have the female companionship of the two clay modelers. We became very close friends.

Q: Do you remember their names?

A: Yes. Virginia Spence was the mother, and Nancy was the daughter. Nancy was a graduate of Melbrook Academy in New York. She went to a very

fine girls' school and had quite a flair for clay modeling. I never saw her make any drawings. I don't think either one of them ever made any drawings. They just liked working with clay, so they were permanent clay modelers.

Q: This is interesting. Can you describe this unit? Obviously someone at Studebaker -- Vance or...

A: Cole was the head of engineering.

Q: Has decided to get a jump on the postwar -- they obviously knew that they were going to need automobiles right after the war?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: And so they decided to do some woodshedding during the war and hire a world-famous designer to head it up?

A: Yes, you're right. One of the things that made them go to Raymond Loewy was he had a very ingenious way of approaching a product. In fact, it was he who had the opportunity to redesign the Lucky Strike cigarette package. And he did it by not changing the package at all, except removal of the green color. He said, "[Lucky Strike] Green has gone to war!" He was great on mottoes. In fact, he was always going around the studio -- in fact, our whole building -- tacking up signs that said, "Weight is the Enemy," because materials had gone to war, and so we had all these signs to remind us that we must think small. "Think Small." They wanted a shorter car, a smaller car, everything had to be smaller than previously because of the shortage of materials. The wheelbase that we worked with for the Studebaker Champion was 109 inches, and the President was 114.

As I say, everyone of us were just brainwashed with "Weight is the Enemy." He was so far ahead of his time. Today, if he were designing cars -- that little Studebaker Champion, if it were being made today -- would really give all these other cars good competition.

Q: So Loewy was the nominal head, but he did not stay in South Bend ?

A: No, no. He would come in with Mr. Snaith, who was in business with him. They would come into town.

Q: He was a Loewy associate?

A: Yes, Loewy associate, out of New York. Mr. Snaith didn't come with him routinely; Mr. Loewy came alone, mostly. He was a very fine person to work with, and he was so chic that you just felt everything had to be super chic in doing things in styling, and you knew that he expected the cleanest and the crispest, because that's the kind of presentation he made. Very clean, very stylish, but a very nice man to work with. I enjoyed the work there very much, and I was very sad when Virgil Exner resigned and went to work for someone else. I forget who he went to work for, but he didn't get along with Mr. Loewy at all.

Q: Before we get into that interesting episode, which you may shed some light on, tell us about the department -- who did what and some of the names.

A: Exner was the head of the department when I went there. Gordon Buehrig was directly under Exner.

Q: Gordon had come from a rather interesting background?

A: Yes, Cord-Duesenberg.

Q: He had been their chief body designer?

A: Yes. He had a very good background. When Exner left, Gordon took over. And then Gordon didn't get along too well with Mr. Loewy.

Q: All of a sudden, Mr. Loewy seems rather temperamental?

A: He was. He was very temperamental, and these other people were temperamental, too. Probably, it was a clash of temperaments. I never saw anything. I just noticed that one day they weren't there and that sort of thing, but they never displayed any temperament in front of the other people. We had a very good styling section. We had some temperaments in our own styling section. Probably Vince Gardner was the most temperamental one of all. John Reinhart was probably the most laid back, easygoing, nice fellow.

Then they brought in a fellow named Bob Bourke.

Q: Where did he come from?

A: I don't recall where he came from. All I know is, all of sudden, there he was. He was pretty difficult to deal with. He was not the easiest person to work for.

Q: Was he working under Gordon Buehrig, or had he left by this time?

A: He worked under Gordon for a very short while, and I don't think he and Gordon got along too well. Then, the next thing I knew, Gordon was gone, and Bourke was head of it.

Q: Still under Loewy?

A: Yes, still under Loewy. It continued that way until such time as the contract terminated.

Q: What year was that?

A: That was late '45 or '46.

Q: What had the unit accomplished by this time?

A: They said that we had made enough finished designs and models for a good ten years.

Q: Full size?

A: No, these were scale.

Q: Three-eighths?

A: No, one-eighth. What they used to do was -- oh, for years, and in some respects until just a few years ago, they would take one design and, in a way, cannibalize it. They would take one item, or one detail, or one feature and put it in a new -- the new model would have a new front end or a new back end. They never would come out with an all-together new car, so there was never a total concept, and that was very discouraging to designers, because designers wanted to see a whole new concept at one time. And between engineering and management, it didn't work out that way.

Q: Engineering was still fairly powerful?

A: Oh, very powerful. In fact, we used to be so distressed. We would be invited to a showing of one of our designs. We'd hardly recognize it. Every engineer featured himself as a designer, and they would take some of the most well-intentioned designs -- I can just see Exner rubbing his head so many times over what engineering would do to a perfectly beautiful design. But that's the way it was.

And when the contract ended, Studebaker said they had enough resigns ahead to hold them for ten years, and they released the Loewy people. Loewy was just taking certain individuals to New York. I was asked to go. I was very fortunate. I was the only one in the whole Styling section that was asked to go to New York .

Q: By Loewy himself?

A: Yes. We had a male secretary, and they took him. He went. I didn't go. You've got to remember, I was a small-town girl from Plymouth and had never been to New York. I was such a hick that going to South Bend was a big move!

Q: Did you commute, or did you live there?

A: In South Bend, I lived there. I had an apartment in one of those Studebaker mansions; a perfectly gorgeous apartment. I just couldn't picture going to New York. When I did finally take a job in New York, I called Mr. Loewy, and I went in to see him.

Q: This is years later?

A: Yes, years later. And he showed me through the whole place, and he said, "See what you missed. You should have come. You would have had a wonderful life." I said, "Mr. Loewy, I'd never been anywhere, and I was afraid of New York. I didn't even know how to come to New York and find a place to live." He said, "You wouldn't have had a thing to worry about; we'd have taken care of all that for you." Just as nice as nice could be.

The Loewy offices were like something out of a movie production. It would have been like fairyland for me.

Q: We all have our missed opportunities.

A: I know it. And it was a case of where you went through at least three secretaries before you could get to the inner sanctum.

Q: Back to South Bend, I'm interested in knowing what you did there, specifically, as a designer.

A: Anything that was asked. In fact, when the whole project ended, I was working on a reclining seat, which finally came out in cars, but I was working on a reclining seat so that the driver and passenger could switch off on trips. I did front ends, light sizes and shapes, door handles, and hood ornaments. I can remember when we had the hood ornament contest, mine was selected over everyone else's.

Q: What was it like?

A: It was like a torpedo. I had worked at Willow Run, and I had seen a lot of wild designs around, and so I had some ideas of what streamlining should really look like. So it was a streamlined thing. And, of course, it was a war-type feature -- torpedo. So it was just one of those things. It probably wasn't very original in those days, but, at least, it was selected by the sales staff that made all the selections.

And Jake Aldrich was on our staff. He worked on the Cord-Duesenberg. He was a fabulous stylist. Wonderful water colorist.

Q: He and Gordon Buehrig came together?

A: I think Jake was there at the same time.

Q: You had submitted the hood ornament design?

A: Yes, along with the rest of the stylists, and mine was selected. Jake came up to me afterwards, and he said, "I guess it's about time for me to get out of styling when a mere slip of a girl can design something that's better than what I design. I guess I'd better get out of the design field." Of course, he didn't.

Q: Reinhart?

A: John Reinhart and Bob Koto. They stayed in styling for years. Vince Gardner was there. Vince had been to a number of other companies I before, as everyone did, because it was mostly project work in those days. Everyone had worked everywhere else it seemed. Vince was one who liked to make his own drawings, which were terrible. Oh, he was a terrible artist, but he could get an idea across, and then he'd like to go out and make it. He did wonderful things with clay, but his sketches were atrocious. Koto did very meticulous work.

Q: What was Koto's specialty?

A: He did nice designs. He would design a car. in toto.

Q: A clay modeler, also?

A: And then he did his own clay modeling. I don't think anyone ever worked on Koto's clay models but himself. He did his own, and Vince did his own.

Q: He stayed on with Studebaker?

A: Yes.

Q: John Reinhart did, too?

A: I don't know what happened there. There was a short while that the whole thing was closed up.

Q: Closed completely?

A: Closed completely, and then they reactivated it, yes. By that time, everybody had gone their own separate ways except one or two.

Q: Who else was there? You mentioned a couple of others.

A: John

Q: Did you do any [tasks] that seemed to be in the early days, traditional for female design people. Did you work on color and fabrics as well, or weren't they thinking about those in those days?

A: No, they weren't thinking about those.

Q: It was too far in advance?

A: Right. I was just working on ideas and making mostly my own airbrush drawings.

Q: Do you know whether there were any other females that you can think of who were in design work in the auto industry full time?

A: No. After my stint with Studebaker ended, I came back to Detroit .

I went to Nash and Hudson Motor Car, and they had no women there, it was Only men, and they thought it was weird. They thought my work was nice, and they said, "We'd like to think about it, but it's strange for a woman to...." They really weren't interested in taking women, and I wasn't interested in that place, either. I came home and said, "If they didn't like me...."

Q: Which company was that?

A: Hudson Motor Car. I said, "I don't like their location. Their grimy studios are awful. I don't think they're ready for a woman." And I C I can remember telling my mother that they're not ready for a woman.

Q: How about Nash?

A: I didn't even follow through too much. I contacted most of these people, and some of them I didn't go to. I did get an appointment with General Motors.

Q: With Harley Earl?

A: No, it wasn't Harley Earl. I'm trying to think who it was at the time. It was a very Spanish sounding name. [Julio Andrade] Q: Was he an Earl assistant or personnel manager?

A: Yes. He was a designer. He was the head of personnel, too. I met him years later. I met him out at Alex Tremulis' house. And he said, "We always wondered what happened to you." I'll tell you what happened. I had the appointment, and I took my portfolio in, and I was waiting for him, and I announced to the receptionist that I was there, and she said, "I'll give him your information." So she went inside, and this little man came out, and he looked like he was about my age, and he said, "Yes, I'm ho take your drawings and look at them." And he took the drawings and I W ent in back through the door. A little while later he came out, and he said, "No, we're not interested in you at all." And that wasn't who I had the appointment with at all! So years later, this fellow said, "We always wondered why you never kept your appointment." I said, "I did Deep my appointment, but I got the brushoff by somebody." He said, "Who could have done it?" I said, "He was small." He kept coming up with names. He said, "Who would have done that?" I said, "Someone who didn't Want me in your department, that's who."

Q: You never knew who he was?

A: No, never knew who he was.

Q: So you were crushed, and you left?

A So I was crushed and left, and I said to my mother, "That's it. I'm not going try to get into this man's world. I am going to look for something that is meant for women." And she said, "Well, I think it's this thing of always having to look for a job," because I got the impression that everyone of these people had worked for Ford, then they'd go from Ford to G.M., G.M. to Hudson, Hudson to Chrysler. This just was a circus, so I didn't even bother to go back to -- trying to get into any Of these places.

Then I was contacted by someone from Ford, and, at this time, I was forking in New York .

Q: What were you doing in New York ?

A: I went to work for a fashion house in Chicago, and I didn't like that at all, so I quit.

A: I could see that there was a lot of talent around. I wasn't getting anywhere, and I was impatient. So then I got a job -- I had applied for a job at International Harvester. I was applying for everything. I had applied for a job at International Harvester and was accepted. And I got to thinking that wouldn't be much fun doing all those big machines, so I never bothered to go through on that one. So I applied for a job doing pipeline drawings for a Saudi Arabia American company, and I was accepted for that.

Q: That doesn't sound very glamorous?

A: Well, it was exciting in that you'd go to Saudi Arabia .

Q: What year was this? You'd left Studebaker in early

A: Yes. I was through with Studebaker. It was between Studebaker and Tucker.

Q: So it was the immediate postwar era?

A: Yes. So I went then to pick up my final instructions, and that very day they had received word they were not taking any more women into Saudi Arabia, so that ended that.

Q: What was the problem?

A: So then I got this job with -- I worked with Tristan Meinecke on his -- he had a publishing company in Chicago.

Q: The same Meinecke?

A: Yes. Tristan Miencke now was in Chicago -- my old buddy -- and he had established a publishing company, and he was publishing directories for professional people. He was a first. There was no such thing in those days as professional directories. In fact, doctors and attorneys at first looked down their nose on that, but the more he talked about it, the more they were interested in dealing with getting their name out in front of the public.

So, we had a directory going, and I had probably the hardest kind of job one can ever think of: selling this idea over the phone to doctors and lawyers to be included for a fee. We got enough to get a good directory going, and Tris had a financial backer -- an angel who turned out to be a bad angel. And the directory had gone to press, and before it came off the presses, the financial backer demanded that he be paid in full for the money that he had loaned him to get this thing printed in the first place. He couldn't come up with the money, because we hadn't taken in any yet. So, this fellow took over the company and kicked Miencke out. So, then Miencke got into designing buildings. He's since done quite a lot of public projects, and public housing, and apartments, so he's done very well for himself in that field.

My mother, in the meantime, had moved to Ann Arbor, and I came back to Ann Arbor and briefly went back to the University Hospital to work for Dr. Alexander and Dr. Cameron Haight, who were head of thoracic surgery.

So then while I had got this work with them, I had heard about Alex [Tremulis], and I heard about the Tucker Corporation.

Q: Tell us about Alex's background.

A: Alex, also, was a Cord-Duesenberg graduate, so to speak. He was also an aircraft stylist.

Q: He had worked for the Air Force?

A: Worked for the Air Force down at Wright Field, and Alex's ideas, way back in those days, were so far in advance that they're just beginning to catch up -- talking about space stations. They were his ideas -- space stations. When he was telling me about them, way back then, I thought this fellow is really far out. And here we are creating space stations today!

Q: Also swept forward airplane wings?

A: Yes. Alex was just so far ahead. He was an absolute genius, and he could keep you spellbound for hours with his ideas.

Anyway, my brother had gone from working for the Pontiac division General Motors to the Tucker Corporation, and it was in Cicero, Illinois.

Q: Tell us about the Tucker. Why don't we develop the Tucker experience in some detail, especially your perspective on it. Who was r. Tucker, and what was he trying to do?

A: Preston Tucker was an Ypsilanti native, and it was his idea to have very automobile stylist's dream -- a totally new concept automobile right from scratch, everything new.

Q: Everybody else was face-lifting at that time?

A: Right. Everybody was just doing minor face-lifting and making new models out of them year after year, but he wanted to make a totally new car and put it on the market so people could have something really new and something different -- very forward thinking.

So he created this car, and he and an engineer over in a little barn over in Ypsilanti

Q: Do you remember who the engineer was?

A: It was Dan Lebou, who still lives in Ypsilanti.

Q: Mrs. Tucker was involved, too - his mother?

A: His mother financed the original model.

Q: She owned a...?

A: Machine shop. Mr. Tucker had been interested in -- well, he'd done some work on racing cars for Ford way back in the 1930's. He'd been interested in cars and airplanes and....

Q: He'd worked on the mid-'Thirties racing cars, I think?

A: Yes. We were in a conversation with Mary Lee Tucker, who was Preston 's daughter. I understand the car was born in Ypsilanti. Her grandmother had a garage back of her grandmother's home. Tucker was interested in a new and innovative car, and that this was his idea of getting something started. And he had Dan Lebou as an engineer and....

Q: Tucker, himself, was he an engineer?

A: I don't really know what he was.

Q: He was an inspired tinkerer?

A: He was an inspired tinkerer, and I think he had a great idea for style.

Q: Like the early Henry Ford?

A: Yes. I don't recall, at the moment, who he worked with originally, as far as the styling of the car, but he had the ideas of things he wanted. He needed somebody else to put it down. This is as I understand it. I didn't know this at the time. These are things that have been told to me that someone else actually put his ideas down. Eventually, Alex Tremulis came into the picture.

Q: You didn't know him when he was at Studebaker?

A: No. And this is very curious. I was talking with this reporter from the Ann Arbor News, and she said, "It seems like everybody, at one time or another, has worked for Studebaker?"

Q: That was an astute point.

A: Yes. I don't know if people realize that in the old days design jobs were done on projects, and they didn't maintain their staffs like they do today -- these huge staffs with several floors of design departments. There were just a certain nucleus of people who are brought in to design a car, and then when the design was completed to the satisfaction of the powers that be, then they were released. So one met in one design department those that had worked for everyone else. There was Chrysler, Ford, General Motors, Hudson, and they just kept making the rounds.

And, I suppose, that Tucker investigated a number of places before he found someone that could do what he wanted done. Alex Tremulis filled the bill because of his work with Cord-Duesenberg. He felt that Alex could do the job, so he was told to do certain things, and these were the things that came about. There wasn't much time to do it, to get the car design put together.

Q: The Tucker story is so fascinating that we might ask you to speculate about Preston Tucker -- about the vision of this remarkable automobile and how he brought it to fruition.

A: I don't know this for a fact, but, possibly, he was a frustrated person, like anyone who ever worked in automobile design is frustrated.

Earlier I mentioned that a car could be designed in toto, and when it came back from engineering, there were so many changes made that one would hardly recognize one's own design. And it's entirely possible that Tucker was a bit tired of having one new idea come in this year and another new idea but never anything totally new. And he probably -- I'm speculating -- from time to time would like to have seen a car that could do certain things -- would have certain features. So, he wanted to put 'hem all together in one car to see how it would be that one could have a whole new concept of automobile.

When he came up with all these ideas, they were new, such as the Cyclops' eye. The front end moved separately from the back of the car. When the wheels were turned, the front wheels would do certain things. Independent suspension, too. He wanted everything independent of each other. A certain type of brake system. He wanted the disc brake to come in. He was a great man, not only for speed and aerodynamic designs, he wanted safety. They wanted to put safety belts in cars right from the start, but they didn't dare do it because people would think if they're putting in safety belts, is it safe? So, they had to do it differently, so that's why he cleaned out the interior of the car. The crash pad concept came so that in case of a roll, there was something to catch the force of the roll. Also, the protrusion of knobs and toggle switches, that was important to him. Everything was recessed.

In fact, it reminds me of one year my mother had a new car, and she was taking it out for a drive, and she had my little brother in the back seat, and she hit a patch of ice, and the car went into a spin and hit the curb. My brother hit the instrument panel and smashed the whole front of his face. So, this sort of thing was not to happen with the Tucker. That crash pad was to prevent all that.

Also, the floor was recessed because of the type of engine that it had, and it got rid of that long drive shaft that went from the front to the back.

Q: Was it rear engine or was it transverse?

A: It was transverse. Anyway, that drive shaft just disappeared, and it was supposed to be sort of like an escape basement or something that line could get into if a crash were imminent and that type of thing.

Q: It was a startling innovation?

A: The whole thing was different. It was low, it was sleek, it was beautiful. In fact, when we had our convention this past year, I rode in one from the Sheraton Hotel over to the S ? garage, and people were staring -- today!

Q: One of the original torpedos?

A: Yes. Oh, it was a beautiful. It was in blue. A beautiful car. You could see all the features there and how clean it was. An entirely, different concept.

Q: He is a remarkable pioneer in that he was able to take all of the innovations that had just come out that people weren't using, like disc brakes and independent suspension. He could get these from Europe and other places and roll them into a remarkable new package. What was your first contact with him?

A: After the company got started in Cicero, Illinois, I had a brother who had been a salvage engineer for General Motors.

Q: Had he picked up the old Dodge plant by this time? A: Yes, he had that. It was a Dodge airplane engine plant, and Tucker was starting out by leasing it from the government, and then they found that they could buy it.

I had a brother who was working there, and I had come back home from my different kinds of job seeking and gotten a job at the University Hospital. My brother called me, and he said, "You ought to go over to Illinois and take a look at that Tucker car. I think that's something that you'd like to get into." So I asked him if he knew who was in charge, and he didn't know Alex [Tremulis], but he knew the man in charge in personnel, and he gave me his name. It seems to me his name was Wilson. And he said, "If you'll call him, he could probably tell you who's in charge of the styling." So I called, and he told me it was Alex Tremulis who was in charge in that department. So I called him and talked with him, and he asked me to come to Chicago and

bring some samples of my work. He'd heard that Loewy had had a woman working for him. So he said, "That would be kind of interesting."

Q: What had been Alex's background in the prewar years? Had he been on the fringes of automobile design in those days?

A: Oh, yes. He was doing race cars [and concept cars at Chrysler]. He said, "We need somebody to do some interiors for us." And although interiors hadn't been my forte, it was something that I had done.

Q: You'd worked on them in design school?

A: Yes. So I went down, and I took some drawings, and Alex hired me on the spot, and helped me find a place to live. I came home, packed up, and went back down.

Q: Where did you live?

A: I lived on South Shore Drive. One of Tucker's secretaries had an apartment, and she was willing to take me in as a roommate. It was a beautiful address and a beautiful location overlooking the lake. It was really quite delightful. We got blasted in the winter with a lot of heavy snow, but it still was a good place to be.

Q: You had to commute to Cicero ?

A: Yes. She had a car, and she said I could live with her if I would guarantee that I would drive part of the time rather than have her do all the driving.

Q: Even though you didn't have an automobile, you had learned to drive?

A: Oh, I knew how to drive. I learned to drive when I was twelve years old. You talk about going for rides on Sunday afternoons, when we went for rides, they were working rides. My mother made us all learn to drive.

But it was an experience in itself driving in Chicago. We had to drive through the black belt, which was quite an interesting experience.

Q: The South Side?

A: Yes. Because we had to go clear to Cicero .

Q: The old Capone hangout?

A: Oh, yeah, right. But it all worked out very well, as long as it lasted. It was very enjoyable.

Q: What did you actually do in terms of interior design?

A: I made drawings for interiors. Now there I did work with colors -- fabric samples and also color chips, coordinating the interior colors with exterior colors, which was something else again. It was quite new because, up to that point, there hadn't been too much concern about color of interiors. They didn't worry about colors; they didn't worry about fabrics. There was just like one fabric, and it was....

Q: Quite drab?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: Those old grey mohairs?

A: And they just clung to your clothes terribly. So we were interested in trying to use some different kinds of fabrics.

Q: What kind of new fabrics did you come up with?

A: I can't recall the names of them, but I can still see them, and I can still feel them. They looked like suede, but they were woolen. Beautiful, beautiful fabrics -- just beautiful. And it was nice working with vendors and seeing what they have and working with the boys from the trim shop to see what they could do for us.

Q: So you were in charge of interior styling?

A: Yes. I did designs for door panels, and seat covers, and coordinating the lines of the seat covers to the door panels and that sort of thing. It was different.

Q: How about the dashboard?

A: I didn't do any of the work on the dashboard. That was a separate thing. It was already pretty well established that this is what they wanted, and the instruments were pretty well established in a cluster group in front of the steering wheel. There wasn't an instrument of any kind or any hardware in front of the passenger. In fact, the glove compartment was in the door instead of having the glove compartment in the instrument panel. They took the glove compartment out of there and put it in the door. So there wasn't anything that could hurt anyone if there was an accident. Everything was recessed.

Q: Remarkable that he was such an advocate of safety in those days. When it wasn't, as you say, even whispered that cars weren't safe, even though racing drivers and airplane pilots have been using them for years.

A: Yes. I read an article a couple of years ago written by a young fellow from Canada who was making some pretty interesting guesses on the number of lives that could have been saved had this car [Tucker] gone into production. Because of the way people die in an automobile accident, the things within a car that kill people.

Q: The incredible ricocheting -- especially the children?

A: Yes, especially children.

Q: You were very much in favor of this?

A: Oh, yes, definitely.

Q: You felt it was visionary, but it was something that must be done?

A: It was a wonderful idea.

Q: Did they have padded dashes, too?

A: Yes. It was padded.

Q: Padded, protected?

A: It was like a roll. It went all the way around. I don't recall how the rearview mirror looked. And even though I had many sketches, and I'd saved my sketches, they all went to the Coppola studio, so I don't have anything anymore.

Q: Did you come up with some pretty bold colors?

A: We were working with colors, but, however, we didn't come up with anything wild for this reason: previous experience didn't give us a background for a lot of boldness for one thing. For another thing, Mrs. Tucker dictated the colors.

Q: Preston 's wife?

A: Preston 's wife dictated the colors that were to be used, and we worked with her ideas. Although we didn't work with Mrs. Tucker, the ideas got through to us. As long as it was blue, or pink, or peach, that as okay -- and black, of course.

Q: Looking back, the colors are rather basic?

A: That's right. Since this was their car, their ideas, and we were only to carry out their ideas, this is what we did.

Q: How about fabrics? Did she have any expertise in that line?

A: I don't know too much about what her expertise was in fabrics,

but it was made pretty clear that everything had to be compatible and coordinate right. But, as I say, if it were blue -- anything that went with blue. And we did have some beautiful blue fabrics that went well with her favorite color which was Waltz Blue.

Q: Was it light?

A: Yes. A lovely blue. In fact, if you saw the car that Norman Knight brought down from Hickory Corners [at the Tucker reunion], that is Waltz Blue. He made everything as authentic as possible. Whether or not he repainted the car, I don't know. The car was old, but it had no more than three miles on it when we saw it. But what happened to the paint job in all these intervening years, I wouldn't know. But that was the authentic Waltz Blue.

Q: So you did have a chance to strike out in some new directions with fabrics?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: And color fabrics?

A: And color fabrics, right.

Q: How about any of the interior structural designs? You said you made wall panels and door panels.

A: Door panels, yes.

Q: Which would probably be diamond shape, or what would it...?

A: Whatever. If I just had some of my drawings, I could show you the variety of ideas that I had. How many of those ideas were carried out, I have no way of knowing. But I did submit drawings to the trim department. And we would see the doors and seats after they finished them. It was very nice. They did lovely work.

Q: So, in effect, the trim department was executing your designs for the interiors?

A: Yes. In fact, it was very gratifying to see how well they followed our ideas.

Q: What sort of fabrics did you use?

A: They were woolen fabrics, mostly.

Q: Did you use leather?

A: No. We didn't have leather. I think we might have had some vinyl, but it was mostly....

Q: Early vinyl?

A: The early vinyl. And beautiful woolen fabrics, but they were very smooth surfaced, and they looked almost suede-like. It was nice. One could just slip from one side of the seat to the other without tearing your clothes off.

Q: Did you use any bolsters or biscuits?

A: No.

Q: It was just a straight bench seat?

A: Straight bench seat, yes. There were be some sort of indention one way or another, either vertically or horizontally, and maybe a color contrast -- mild, though. It wouldn't have been wild.

Q: What did they use for stuffing?

A: I really don't know.

Q: That was in the trim department?

A: That was all in the trim department, and I never saw any of that.

One of the interesting features of the automobile, and this was a lso one of Mr. Tucker's ideas, he wanted the front and back seat cushions interchangeable so that the wear would be distributed evenly. hen we're turning in a car or selling it, the seats would be worn so e venly that there wouldn't be any distinction of wear. It was a pretty good idea.

Q: This is in '47?

A: It must have been about '47, right.

Q: And the car was causing a lot of talk -- a lot of publicity about it. Are you about ready to go into production at this point?

A: Yes. At the time I arrived there, however, they hadn't produced a car. In fact, when I came from the airport to the Tucker Corporation the first day that I was to report to work, the cab driver pulled up at a light, and when he found out that I was going out to Tucker to work, he said, "Oh, that's a fabulous car." He told me of an incident; how he had been out driving and had stopped at a light, and this car came up, and he said, "Never seen anything like it. When that light changed, it was like a rocket; it just took off. I was still there. It was just a rocket!"

Q: This was a driveable prototype?

A: This was the cab driver talking. So when I got out to the building, I was telling Alex about this wild car and what it could it do, and he said, "Let me show you the Tucker." So we went out to the showroom, and he showed me this beautiful car sitting there, and he said, "There it is." I said, "Is that the one that the fellow was talking bout?" He said, "Must b" So we looked at it, and it was a mockup, a nd it was made of wood, metal, clay, whatever they could get. There wasn't much clay because they couldn't get the venders to sell them any clay. I suppose the Big Three refused to allow the venders to sell clay to Tucker. They needed it so badly to make their models.

So it mostly was anything. It was really a junk pile, but it was beautifully painted, beautifully shaped and styled. And he said, "That's the one that left him like a rocket." So it was a wild imagination of people that Tuckers were around and what they could do, and here there wasn't one out there yet.

Q: You didn't have a driveable model?

A: There really wasn't, no. It was just his wild imagination. But then after the cars did get into production, Alex and, sometimes, Phil Eagen, who is the other fellow in the styling section, and mostly Noble....

Q: What was his name?

A: Noble Tucker.

Q: A brother?

A: He was the second son of Preston. There was Preston, Jr., then Noble, and John. Noble was the one that always liked to hang around the styling section. He was very affable. He was just a delightful young fellow. We'd go out in the parking lot, and we'd take the cars and do some wild things with them. I know that it could perform, but we didn't take it out on the highway.

Q: You're there, and you're working in interior styling. How long did it take before the first production model -- bearing your design?

A: This I can't even tell you. I can't tell you because the first production models did not have my design. Everything was in the works when I arrived, and even though I didn't see anything, at that time, assembled, we were in the works. And, as I say, even today, I don't know that cars had my designs on. I can't remember, and I have no way now even of finding out.

Q: Can you look at a Tucker today and say, "That's something I did?"

A: No, I can't. No, I couldn't tell you, because I made so many....

Q: If you see a door panel or...?

A: I did so many designs, I couldn't tell you. As I say, if I had my drawings, I could, probably.

Q: So it was really departmentalized? You worked, in effect, in a pleasant creative vacuum, but you sent your sketches on to the color and trim department?

A: They did the work, right. As I say, when I saw the work that they did, I thought it was very nice. But what went into production, I don't recall. And the drawings that I had -- that I was able to bring out -- from Tucker when they closed, those are the things that I sent to the Coppola

studios. And, as someone said -- they brought a car to the, convention -- "Did you do this interior?" I couldn't tell. I couldn't remember.

It was very delightful, though. It was a nice place to work.

Q: Can you tell us some anecdotes about working there?

A: Yes, I could tell you some things, or, at least, I can tell you one d elightful thing....

Q: Tremulis and Mr...?

A: Yes, Alex and Phil Egan and I would go out to the airport, and we would lie down on the ground next to the fence. Did I ever tell you about that?

Q: No.

A: We'd lie down. Alex wanted to tell us about aerodynamics. He -aid, "The best thing you can do -- we can't take you to a wind tunnel, out you kind of get an idea of aerodynamics by watching the planes take off." So we would go out to Midway Airport, and we would lie on the grass right next to the fence at the end of the runway. We'd lie there and watch the planes go overhead. You could see the airfoils.

Q: You were at the old Chicago City Airport?

A: Yes. He was explaining exactly how it worked.

Q: He was a very early advocate of this principle?

A: Oh, yes. This fellow was so far ahead of his time, it's just a tragedy that he's his age and can't put those wonderful ideas to work, because he was far ahead of his time.

Q: You said he's still busy?

A: He's very busy. He's retired, but he's just doing freelance, and he's busier than ever. He did quite a bit of work for Subaru. They were so terribly demanding of his time. They expected him to do something almost like a Rumpelstiltskin overnight, and he said it just got to the 'point, "I can't work with you people. You're impossible!" I suppose 'hat he did such fantastic things and got such wonderful results on such short notice that they just kept pulling ideas from him, and he just got 'o the point he couldn't take it anymore, so he just quit.

Q: But in '47, he's at the height of his power?

A: Oh, yes. Now Alex dealt mostly with -- in fact, neither Phil nor I had any meetings with Mr. Tucker, other than maybe social occasions when they were showing someone through the building or the department, or we went out into the showroom. Also, Alex dealt with engineering, and we were adjacent to research. But Alex did all of that, because he was the boss,

and he was carrying out Tucker's orders, and he could work with research. And we did meet engineers like Mr. Fred Rockelman.

Q: The old Ford hand?

A: Yes, Fred Rockelman. I think he had a big farm out in Pennsylvania .

Q: He had been semi-retired when...?

A: When he came along, and then I'm trying to think of the other fellow that was -- Mr. White -- somebody who did -- was it the water-cooled engine?

Q: They were considering a water-cooled engine early on?

A: Yes, and he came through and talked to us. Then there was some fellow from Italy who was a real speed demon, and he came through and talked to Alex, and Phil and myself. We did get some information from outside, although design departments are usually under lock and key. Not anybody can walk in there. And we, of course, were not allowed to go anywhere, either.

Q: You weren't allowed to go into the trim department and watch them work on your ideas?

A: No. The trim department brought their things to me of what they had done to get our approval and to see how we liked what they were doing. And it was nice.

Q: Unusual, even in those days?

A: Right. It's just like when I worked for Loewy, we never went into any other part of the plant. And we were under lock and key. In a lot of ways it's good, and in a lot of ways it's very frustrating because you get so tired of not having anyone else to talk to.

Q: No inter-connection?

A: No. It just isn't possible.

Q: It would have been great if you and the trim department were able to work together?

A: Yes.

Q: I suppose the old practices and prejudices were still...?

A: People were always stealing one another's ideas, and that had a lot to do with it, and they didn't want somebody to come through and take a job for awhile, and steal the ideas, and move on, and carry the ideas along with them, or techniques, or whatever, and the techniques were very important.

Q: Probably fifty odd Tuckers that were actually made?

A: Yes.

Q: Were they all handmade, or were they mass-produced?

A: No, they were establishing their mass-production. The only real handmade one was the prototype.

Q: And that still exists, doesn't it?

A: Yes.

Q: Mr. Tucker's having some problems from all sides. Did they filter into the design department -- the troubles he was having?

A: Yes, they did. In fact, it was so troublesome to us to get drift of what was going on. All one had to do was read the newspaper and read Drew Pearson's column. He was the number one enemy.

Q: The Chicago papers splashed it all over the front pages?

A: Yes. They were having a heyday with it, and it was all a figment of this fellow's imagination. And, of course, we know he was ultimately proven innocent, that he wasn't....

Q: Too late, unfortunately?

A: Yes, it was too late. But the troublesome things kept coming to us, and we were very disturbed by it, to the point that we made signs and put them outside our office that said, "We ain't mad at nobody!" We had to do something to break the tension, because tensions were really strong there for awhile.

Q: What generated this hatred? Was it largely inspired by the Big Three?

A: I would imagine that was something that had come through from time to time. I'm sure they had gotten to the vendors. We were overcharged, as I understood at the time, four or five or six times for something from what it should be, like, maybe, a mold for a bumper. Somebody else could have done it for \$50,000, but for Tucker they'd charge him \$200,000 -- an exorbitant amount. I don't have total recall. These are not exact figures, but I'm just using this as an example.

Q: What about fabrics -- did you have any problems there with vendors?

A: I don't recall having any trouble with fabrics, but I know that engineering was having major problems. And, of course, they couldn't get these assemblies done. This would hold up production, and it just filtered on down like dominos through the whole place. It slowed everybody down and brought us to a halt.

Q: It seems like it was a calculated attempt to drive him out of the business?

A: I'm sure it was.

Q: A concerted effort?

A: Yes, I'm sure it was. We felt it all along the way that this was

being done. If one were there to read the articles, it was clearly a conjured-up accusation.

Q: In living through that, and reading about it, and then reading -bout it after years, it's incredible to me that the government pursued him like he was a criminal?

A: When you understand the small amount of money that it would have taken to put the car in full production was miniscule compared to what production costs are today for any one thing, and he was going to have a hole new car. The industry had so much at stake, they had to make certain this car never, never came off the line.

Q: It seemed almost like a conspiracy?

A: Oh, yes. We were all convinced that it was. It could well be that, maybe, even Drew Pearson was paid to do these things.

Q: He was one of your nemesis?

A: Yes. It was a sad thing, because so much had gone into it. It was shame that it couldn't have come off, and, of course, ultimately, Tucker was cleared, and it was just, "I'm sorry. I guess I was wrong." They accomplished their purpose, whoever they are.

Q: He was, effectively, out of the business?

A: He was effectively out of the business.

Q: And became disheartened and defeated?

A: Right. When we looked at this corollary John DeLorean's thing, the millions that he has spent were mega-times from what Tucker was spending, and a lot of the ideas on his car were Tucker ideas, only exaggerated -- the gull wing. What we had in our door sections was a gull-wing type thing, so that one could walk into the car without knocking his head off.

But, in looking at these things, when you think that how here's a man who did put money that was from stockholders into, apparently, homes and apartments. Tucker never did anything. I went to their apartment. I went there to work with Mrs. Tucker. Mrs. Tucker wanted me to design a heraldic crest using the logo from the car. I took the working drawing of the logo, and I made a heraldic crest out of the colors that she decided that she wanted the crest to be, and I took

it up to their apartment. It was a lovely apartment, but they didn't live lavishly. It just wasn't their style. They were just nice people.

Q: Nice, small-town people?

A: Yes, nice, small-town people.

Q: Did you design the logo?

A: No, I didn't design the logo.

Q: Who did that?

A: No, I don't know. I was given the logo and told to work with it and change it any way I wanted and to do some different color ideas of combinations and that sort of thing.

Q: You should have resurrected your torpedo hood ornament?

A: Listen, there was a number of other companies that did that – took my torpedo and put on their cars. I did see that floating around on many cars, yes. Not many makes of cars. I don't know whether it was G.M. or who, but one of the companies had it, and, I think it was General Motors that had my torpedo. It sounds so ridiculous to make such a big deal about a hood ornament, but if one considers that out of the entire styling sections, how many people in that styling section ever get anything on a car. They work for years and never get anything on a car. They do just work. They make drawings, they make paintings, but they never get anything on a car. I, at least, in my first attempt, got something on a car.

Q: Did you salvage one of those hood ornaments?

A: Yes. Well, not the hood ornament, but I had the original drawing, and that is another thing that I know that went out to Francis Ford Coppola's studio. I remember I had that original drawing that came back with the mark on it from his Studebaker meeting when they decided that was what they wanted.

Q: You've got about ten cars completed. How are things going about '47 at this point?

A: We were going along fine. Everything was go. As I say, we took one of the cars out and drove it around the parking lot and that sort of thing. Everything was go at that point. And, as I recall, that was late spring or early summer, and everything was fine until suddenly the cracks began to appear in the wall, and no one had any enthusiasm. Everything was too depressing. People began to disappear and move on.

Q: Leave the company?

A: Leave the company.

Q: Feeling that it was...?

A: They knew they had to do something. As I recall, they were accused of not intending to bring out a car. They accused him of just bilking the public.

Q: With a phony concept?

A: Yes. That he really didn't have any intention of putting out a car, which was totally untrue.

Q: Was he selling stock in the company?

A: Yes. They had many [stockholders]. People really believed in what

they were going to turn out. And there were a lot of little people that believed in him, as we all did. We believed in him, and we still believe in him. That was just a tragic accusation, and it could have been anything.

Q: It was Drew Pearson and Homer Ferguson?

A: Yes. As I recall, they're the ones.

Q: They seemed to be pursuing him for some sort of personal vendetta. They thought he was a charlatan, obviously?

A: Obviously. Somebody had gotten to them, and I still think they were paid to do it. I think they were paid to do a job on Tucker. That is what I think. Because, after all, they had their reputations, too, and if they had succeeded in really convicting him, that would have been fantastic feather in their cap, so they took a total defeat when the jury couldn't find anything, and the judges couldn't find any truth to his accusation.

Q: By this time, he had exhausted his finances and his energies?

A: The company had gone bankrupt.

Q: The models had been impounded by the government?

A: Everything was impounded.

Q: It was just impossible to get it re-started?

A: Couldn't, no.

Q: He did try, though?

A: I think he did half-heartedly. But the will wasn't there, the backing wasn't there, and he needed the confidence of the people, and, of course, their confidence was probably blackened by all the accusations, and it did take its effect. It destroyed the man; it destroyed the company.

And when we were trying to get our [Tucker] convention out here -- and I wanted it -- I thought it would be like coming back to Mecca -- the place of the birth of the Tucker. The family didn't want it. The family was very reluctant. I worked a whole year convincing these people we meant them no harm. We wanted to create a wonderful reunion, and we wanted to pay tribute to Preston Tucker. Then when I told them what we planned to do, that we were going to have a ceremony over at the grave-site. We had the gravestone refinished, and re-reset, and I think it was that that made them realize that we were sincere in wanting to do something.

Q: The old home is still there?

A: And the old home. We had the tour that went past the big machine shop and the old home, went out to the cemetery, and we had a little service. One of the members, who is a very fine, religious man, one of the members of the club, said a little prayer. It was very nice. We had forty-eight red carnations. We couldn't afford roses, so we took red carnations, and each club member that was there, put some flowers on the grave to commemorate the car of '48.

Q: He was a dynamic, visionary person. It seems a shame that his career was so abruptly and so deliberately [smashed]?

A: I'm sure it was deliberate. I think that is a very good word.

Q: The car was well-engineered?

A: Yes.

Q: Who was...?

A: They had a fine engineer. They had Carl Doman, who was also from his area. A very fine engineer.

Q: Another Michiganian?

A: Yes. Another good one was Warren Rice, who lived over in Dexter. He died about three years ago.

Q: These were all associates of Tucker from the Michigan days?

A: Yes, from way back. But they all had some wonderful talent.

Q: And there was Alex Tremulis, who was turning out the design, and you were doing the interiors?

A: Yes.

Q: Who else was involved in design?

A: Phil Egan, and Phil was from Illinois.

Q: What was his background?

A: He was from either Winnetka or Glencoe -m one of those suburbs of Chicago m- and he was a very fine designer. I think he used to work for

George Walker, but I'm not sure. The Walker name keeps ringing bells.

Q: Walker was a well-known industrial designer in those days?

A: Yes. Phil was a very quiet, very studious, very capable fellow. A nd he has his own business now in California .

Q: Oh, he's still alive?

A: Yes. And Joe Thompson, the fellow who got me started in the industry, he's passed away now, because he would be around one hundred if e were still alive. He had a fine job out in California. I think it as the Art Students' League, and he taught the clay modeling and car d esign for years, and his students adored him.*(See Editors notes)

Q: What did he do at Tucker?

A: He was head of modelmaking. He was a marvelous clay modeler. I guess there were none better.

Q: Did you go through the classic routine in those days making three- eighths or quarter models clays or plaster?

A: Oh, yes. It was clay put on a wood buck, and then we piled the clay on. The clay would be extruded from this machine that heated it. Sometimes it was so hot it would burn your hands, so you threw it quickly, so that's why we called it throwing clay.

Q: You had a heater and an extruder in those days?

A: Yes.

*Editor's Note: Thompson, a pioneer and legendary modeler, taught at Art Center School of Design in Pasadena in his later years.

Q: It was pretty good equipment for those days?

A: Oh, yes. So you moved it fast when it came out of there.

Q: Did you get to do any of the clay modeling?

A: Oh, yes. I had never done any clay modeling before, so it was interesting. I made all kinds of things. In fact, I have a plaster cast of a little gentleman that I modeled out of clay, and I had the boys make plaster model of it for me.

Q: You haven't got a plaster model of the Studebaker [pointing to photograph]?

A: No. I don't have anything.

Q: Did any of those survive?

A: I don't really know where they would be. Have you ever talked to Bob Koto? He would know more about those things?

Q: Yes.

A: He could probably clarify some of that, because I don't know whatever happened to those. There's one picture I have here shows how they - these are clay -- most of these are clay with paint-over. Those are one-eighths.

Those are Studebaker, but that's the way it's done. In fact, I had one picture of our model that we had in the design department that was made of clay and painted, but I don't have those pictures either.

Q: So you're getting intimations that things are not going well. What as your reaction of that?

A: Heartbreak, because I loved Chicago. I absolutely adored it. I never met so many nice people. Everybody was nice in Chicago. Whatever they say about Chicagoans being nice, you believe it, because it's true.

They're just good people. In fact, years later, I was in Tennessee, and my car was parked in front of a store. At this time, I was selling merchandise, and I had parked my car in front of a store, and I had a Studebaker at that time, and it had Illinois tags on it. When I came out, there was a man leaning on the car, and he said, "I see you've got lioness tags on this car." I said, "Yes, I have an apartment in Chicago, and I work out of Chicago." And he said, "I want to tell you something. During the war I was stationed in Chicago, and I never met so any wonderful people in my life. No matter when I went to have a drink, when I went to eat, or at a hotel, I never paid a penny. The people of Chicago paid for my stay there, and I want to do something nice for somebody from Chicago. I own this record store, and I want you to come in

and select any album of your choice." I said, "You're very generous, but I do not have a record player, and I'm not home long enough to even invest in one, so why don't you keep that offer for somebody else who comes along with Illinois tags on their car." But they were wonderful people.

So when this happened, to get back to your question, I was devastated because it then meant moving on.

Q: What about the rest of the staff, Tremulis and other colleagues?

A: Tremulis, of course, was a native of Chicago. He and Chrissy were natives, and although they didn't live with their parents, their parents were there, so it was a matter of their just staying at home or staying in Chicago .

Q: How about the rest of your colleagues?

A: I don't know where Phil went, and I didn't know anybody else too well. But, as I say, the place became quieter and quieter, and finally we got the word that our department...

Q: Did the end come fairly soon after that?

A: As I recall, it came kind of gradually.

Q: You kept turning out cars?

A: We kept trying to do something, and then it just got to the point we got the word that it was over.

Q: Were you all being paid?

A: As long as we were there, we were paid, oh, yes.

Q: The payroll was met?

A: Oh, yes. We were never wanting.

Q: You turned out fifty odd cars?

A: It was either fifty or fifty-one. There seems to be some dispute on whether that one was a complete car or not.

Q: Someone's got the first prototype?

A: John Limo, who is now the president of this Tucker club, has what they call the Tin Goose, and it's now up for sale. And he has another car that he's working on.

Q: Is it a driveable prototype?

A: Yes.

Q: He has two?

A: He doesn't want to go too far, but you don't expect too much of it, but he's done a wonderful job. He and a fellow named Ulotowski have worked on it just night and day, and they've got in really great shape, it looked good. And it was interesting because the design of the prototype was lightly different from the other cars. Maybe you noticed the opening in the back, it was a different shape.

Q: It was Alex Tremulis' basic design?

A: I would think so, yes.

Q: With input from the Tuckers?

A: Tucker first got his ideas across to another person. I can't recall who the other person was. And he did some work, and he wasn't doing things the way Tucker wanted, so he got rid of him, and he got Alex. And they got the car totally designed and ready for production in one hundred days! And Alex said, "How did we ever get all of this done in it?" I said, "I don't know."

Q: Were you involved in that in those days?

A: In part of that. I said, "Alex, do you recall, we never took a coffee break."

Q: Probably not a lunch break either?

A: So I'm sure when Alex was working, which was longer hours than what either Phil or I were working, that he went without many meals.

Q: There was a sad conclusion to a glorious experiment?

A: Yes, it certainly was.

Q: The cars were impounded by the government, initially?

A: I believe they were and then later released to the people who purchased them.

Q: While Mr. Tucker did not survive that experiment, he did live for a number of years afterward?

A: Not too long after that. He died at age fifty-three.

Q: It would have been in the early 1950's?

A: It would be, yes.

Q: He was completely vindicated?

A: Yes.

Q: Did the government offer any retribution?

A: No. Mr. Tucker never got anything; neither he nor the family.

Q: Did they ever think of suing them?

A: I don't know. Actually, it was hard to get information out of the family. I asked them a lot of questions.

Q: His resources were probably limited by this time because of the legal fees?

A: I understood that his wife had to take a job in a motel, finally, because everything they tried to do was so costly. He had lost everything in trying to clear his name, and the whole family was united in trying to help him. It was heartbreaking for the entire family.

Q: So, again, you're looking for job?

A: Looking for a job, right.

Q: Sometime in late '47?

A: Yes. I accepted a job, at that time, with a veterans group that wanted an industrial designer to lecture to veterans. They were having these veteran colleges all over. I said I would do that, and I asked them how I was to get paid, and they said, "You'll be well paid if we decide to keep you. We have a number of people that we're trying to do this, and if the students like them, and they get along well, then we'll keep you on, and you'll get paid like, maybe, once a month." I said, "I have to have better than that. I can't live on a once-a-month salary. I've got to be paid at least every two weeks. But I'll come down, and I'll lecture to the students." And I did. They loved it. I took drawings down, and we had a big blackboard, and I was telling them different things that they could do and how to approach a subject. They loved it.

So they asked me to come back again. So, I thought I'm doing fairly well. And I had to take the IC from where I lived on the Southside to the Loop, and these were night schools, and I didn't get out of these night classes until sometimes midnight. And traveling alone, it was pretty scary business. I did it for three nights, and I got the word that what they were doing was they were using people. I'm sure this school was collecting from the government for instructors, and they put people on this so-called "trial basis" and then say, "Sorry, you didn't measure up," and they'd take somebody from this way. They could string the thing along and get money from the government but never pass it on to anyone.

I was getting desperate at that point, and I didn't want to go

home, and I didn't want to ask my mother for money. I went to an employment service and asked them to help me find a job, and it was through them that I got a job interview with a corset company who was looking for a designer. I was hired.

Q: Women still wore corsets in those days?

A: Oh, very much so. So I was hired, and I went to work in the design department, and that was a bust. That was terrible. I could see I was never going to do anything but pick up pins off the floor, so I decided that this is not for me. I'll go back and, maybe, I can get that job at International Harvester I had talked to before. So I went to them, and I said, "I quit." And they said they didn't want me to quit. They wanted me to try something else. They said, "We sort of like your background. You've got an interesting background. We'd like you to stay with the firm. How about going out and doing promotional work for us?" I said, "I've never done anything like that."

Q: Was it a fairly well-known line of...?

A: Oh, yes. It was the Formfit Company. It was a big outfit. So I went out, and I did some promotional work for them. One of the places I worked that I liked real well was a corset house on State Street. They had three floors.

Q: This is in Chicago ?

A: In Chicago on State Street. And I would go there, and I would talk to women and analyze their figures, and tell them what they needed to now. I knew very little about corsetry, because I never wore anything like that in my life.

Q: But you had a sense of structure and design?

A: Yes, I knew about design, and they gave me a quick course in how to fit -- take measurements to fit and different figure types. When you break it down, it's kind of complicated. And then it was just a matter of getting the confidence of the customer, and getting them in the fitting room, putting them into the hands of the corsetier. So I did that, and I loved it. That was great. I just loved it.

They sent me all over. I went to Kansas City, and St. Louis, and I did other places in Chicago. They sent me to Atlanta. I came back from one of the trips, and they said, "You sort of fit in with selling. How would you like to take a line out and see if you can sell it?"

Q: A line of their foundation garments?

A: Of their merchandise, yes. So I did that, and I called on the customers and sold to merchants.

Q: You were successful?

A: Yes, very much so. They called me The Star, because I got the biggest increase -- and it was in that next year -- of anybody on the sales force.

Q: Were there an army of saleswomen?

A: Oh, yes. They had a tremendous sales force, and they were mostly women -- some men, but mostly women. But they were unique. Most companies don't have saleswomen, they have salesmen. I worked for this company for three years, and then I went to work for another company -- a New York firm. That was when I went over to see Mr. Loewy was when I was sent to New York. And I got that job through this first man that I worked with on State Street that had the three-story corset house. This man knew all these different companies, and he knew this one in New York was called Bienjolie. It was a very expensive line of foundations. Mr. Vaffe, who was the owner of the company, had talked with the man on State Street, and he said he would like to have me come in to possibly work in the design department.

Q: The whole foundation business was exploding at this point?

A: Oh, yes, tremendous. So then I went to New York, and they had one other saleswoman, and the rest were all men. But I didn't want to work in their styling section. It was too confining, and....

Q: Sweat-shop atmosphere?

A: Yes. The machines are going all the time because you had this special area. You didn't work in the factory. The factory was over in New Jersey, but their styling department was in conjunction with a work room, and you would just hear these motors going zoom, zoom, zoom.

Q: So you instantly transferred your design into garments?

A: Yes, right there. That's not for me. I enjoyed this freedom. I enjoyed getting out and going places. So I stayed on the sales force for Bienjolie the next fifteen years. And I spent a month in New York in the summer and a month in the middle of the winter. I worked with people from Europe and the United Kingdom. It was nice.

Q: Do you remember designing? Were you largely in sales?

A: I didn't design anything.

Q: If you'd had the freedom, would you have liked to have stayed in design?

A: Yes, I would have, but the freedom wasn't there. Both Formfit and Bienjolie had a top designer. Both of them had a core of designers. Wonderful talent that wasn't going anywhere, and you were going to have to wait until that person died off. As it turned out, the one woman in Chicago lived to be eighty-nine and stayed there until she died. The one in New York, she must have been in her seventies. I was in my forties!

Q: There was no room to move up?

A: Nobody ever did. As long as I was with that firm in New York, nobody ever moved anywhere.

Q: You were obviously very successful as a salesperson?

A: I enjoyed it. Yes, I did very well.

Q: In design, the design director would sketch out the new line, and the seamstress would take over?

A: Would take over and make it up, and then they had models. They would come in and talk to us and how did we like this and what did we think about that. They had their big shows twice a year when the whole new line would come out, and we'd have a chance to use it. Then they got so that they gave us garments to wear so we could see how we liked them.

We women, finally now about three of us, and the rest were men, so their wives wore them.

Q: Did you get into outer underwear, like chemises and teddies?

A: No, that was more the lingerie.

Q: Strictly foundations?

A: Yes. This is strictly control garments.

Q: Did you have anything to do with the emergence of the panty girdle?

A: Oh, yes. Very definitely. In fact, we were given panty girdles to wear to see how we liked them, so we came up with the idea of having them so that you could remove them, or adjust them.

Q: Zippers?

A: Yes, right.

Q: That was really a breakthrough on foundation garments?

A: Yes, for sanitary wear. Now some of the things that they were just 'trying in those days, are just everyday occurrences.

Q: So, in some instances, you were out selling a line of fairly innovative garments?

A: We always had a new line, but we maintained certain numbers from year to year, because if a customer got used to wearing a certain garment, they weren't about to give it up. And if you dropped that out of the line, there were plenty of complaints. So they kept some numbers in.

I did an awfully lot of traveling then.

Q: Did you get into hospital type...?

A: No. The company that I worked for finally came in with a light maternity garment, but they didn't stick with it. It was mostly high fashion. And they began working with Anne Klein? Talk about being top of the charts, she was top of chart of women's wear, and certain Bar-ents. What you did was you went in and talked to a woman, "If you will only control your figure, you could wear certain outer garments," that were impossible to wear otherwise. And when they would see how they would look -- one of the famous strapless things was Warners. That was a 'competitive line, but it was the Merry Widow and that type of thing. It wasn't Anne Klein, but it was Anne somebody or other. I've forgotten how. But we worked with outer fashion.

Q: So this was the era of getting away from the heavy girdle?

A: Yes. Heavy garments. It was lightweight, but the structure of the garment did the controlling.

Q: Spandex?

P Yes, Spandex came in. That was wonderful.

Q: A rubberized nylon?

A: Yes. Sheer, light weight, but, by construction, could be as controlling as something with bones.

Q: And the bra was also in a revolution at this point, too. They were no longer the bulky things that you wore?

A: No. And they began to come in with their cup size. Woman before wore whatever there was -- anything that flattened them down.

Q: Quite an innovation, giving women a chance to own up to various cup sizes?

A: Yes. In fact, a lot of women didn't know, and that was part of the job that one did as a demonstrator/promoter was to go into a store, and that particular store would advertise the fact that you were going to be there. "Bring your figure problems and let our expert help you."

Q: So really you were a figure consultant?

A: Yes. One instance I never will forget. I was doing a promotion in

Georgia, and this woman came in. I asked her what size bra she wore, and she said, "I never wear a bra." And I said, "Wouldn't you be more comfortable with a bra?" She was a pretty good size woman, and she looked awfully big around the middle, and I measured her, and she was big. So I said, "Let's go in the fitting room and let me see what your situation is. I can measure you better if I can put the tape measure next to your skin." And I went in, and here is this woman with these tremendous, pendulous bazooms stuck in her corset. That's why she was so big around the middle. But imagine the pain. She didn't know anything. Somebody saw the ad and had her come in, like a daughter. When she got there, I never will forget that woman. I put her in a 36C bra, and, I think the girdle as something like a 28. Here's this woman who's big like this, but she didn't know any better.

Q: You must have heard the story of Howard Hughes designing this special bra for Jane Russell in *The Outlaw*?

A: No.

Q: He sat at the drawing board and engineered her a special bra because of her full-breasted figure so that it would be shown off to its best advantage.

A: To his best advantage?

Q: Or his best advantage. He thought to her best advantage.

A: When I worked for Formfit, they did special designs for Liz Taylor. She was just a young girl, and she had very large -- they decided were either D or E size bosoms, so they designed bras for her.

Q: Then, of course, Jane Russell is now a spokesman for...?

A: Cross Your Heart, or Exquisite Form full-figured bras.

Q: Still a big industry?

A: It was all business, I can tell you that. It was a lot of hard work. It was interesting because I would deal with either the store owner or the store manager together with the buyer or buyers and then with the staff. So it was interesting.

Q: Seventeen years is a long time?

A: Yes.

Q: Were you married in this period?

A: Through part of it. The reason I got out of the industry was the firm that I worked for in New York was hiring a salesperson to represent them permanently in London. Even though I

was married, I traveled all during the week and came home on weekends. I applied for the job, and I said, "I know the work well, and I know the buyers. I've been working with them here in New York. Let me have the job." And the man said, "No, you're married." I said, "So? I can fly back home. If I can fly over there, I can fly home. No difference than driving all day from Indianapolis to Ann Arbor, so what difference does it make?" And he said they thought they wanted somebody else. So they asked me the name of a friend of mine. I said, "You don't even know whether or not she is as qualified as I am. I feel I'm more qualified. I've had more experience, I know your line better. She doesn't know your line at all. I know the customers. She doesn't know these customers," because they were some pretty high-powered customers. I worked with Saks Fifth Avenue buyers, and there's nobody any sharper than Saks Fifth Avenue buyers to work with.

So when they didn't give me the job, I quit. And they weren't in business too much after that. The owner was old, and he was riding the company out.

Q: In the few minutes we have left, do you think you could sort of sum p your feelings about having been in on the ground floor of females d oing industrial design?

A: Now that I know about ERA, I would have thought "yea for me!" But, n those days, it was a matter of I just needed a job, I knew how to dr aw, I was a good draftsman, and I did what I knew how to do. I felt here wasn't anything out there they couldn't teach me that I wasn't, capable of learning. I've never felt inferior in any way, so, I suppose, 'hat one has to have self-confidence. My mother was always saying, "You can do it, you can do it." And so I did what I could. I guess I didn't do too badly, because people have come along since, and women are still being given a chance, and women are still being discriminated against, to some degree. But, nevertheless....

Q: Your career was a breakthrough?

A: It was a breakthrough, and I worked with such wonderful people. Exner couldn't have been nicer. He was a wonderful man to work with, and he certainly was a talented man. Alex was a love to work with. He was just a joy. I just felt privileged to be around anyone with such fan-tastic ideas and ability. I just feel I've been very, very lucky. And when people tell me that I was probably the first -- I'm not sure -- but they tell me I probably was the first [in the industry]. I think okay, but it never occurred to me at any time.

Q: I was hoping you would have said that sometime you would have wanted to work for someone like George Walker or Norman Bel Geddes?

A: I had thought of going into the packaging business designing packages, but I didn't. My husband started a travel agency, and I plunged into that full time.

END

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