Eugene Bordinat Oral History v.1

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Note to Readers

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This copy was produced from a bound, hard copy final version of the interview.

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AUTOMOTIVE DESIGN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

BORDINAT, EUGENE

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VOL. I

EDSEL B. FORD DESIGN HISTORY CENTER

Henry Ford Museum &
Greenfield Village

This is David Crippen at the [Edsel B. Ford] Center for the Study of Industrial Design at the Henry Ford Museum, and this is June 27, 1984. Today we're interviewing Eugene [Gene] Bordinat, Jr.--long-time head stylist/designer at the Ford Motor Company and, for [almost] twenty years, Vice-President of Design. We've asked Mr. Bordinat to tell his story in his own way and in his own sequence.

A In 1936, I went to the University of Michigan, and after being there for two years--a little over two years--I was informed of a school that was starting at General Motors. They were having difficulty in getting fellows--then known as stylists--because there were very few schools that were teaching any of that kind of work--even industrial design--which bears on auto design, and as a result, they decided to start this school which was the brain child of Harley Earl who was then the Vice-President of the Styling Section at General Motors and was working directly for [Chairman] Alfred P. Sloan at the time. The school was unusual in a sense. They selected thirty-three people from throughout the country. They had to submit samples and references and the normal things, and I was fortunate to be one of the thirty-three people. The group was unusual in that nobody had any experience in automobile design, but they had demonstrated a love for cars, were able to put together their concepts of cars for their samples and brought, of course, their other samples which were in the fields that they'd been in, such as shoe design, industrial design, dress design. Some were illustrators for various advertising agencies and so forth. This came as kind of a surprise to me because my own urge was to be in advertising. I could draw well, and I could write rather well, and I thought that that gave me two legs [up] in the advertising world, but this looked like an interesting opportunity, and I'd always had a love for cars, and so I decided to give it a shot. The school itself was interesting and rather pressure-packed because you were paid for going to school in the first place--the sum of $75 a month for the first three months, and at the end of the three-month period they would either fire you or they would graduate you to the next three-month segment and give you a $10 raise. Inflation notwithstanding, that was not a great deal of money in those days. At the end of a year, I think that I was making $105 a month and was graduated into the sanctum sanctorum of the Research Building B where their then styling section resided and was a given a raise to $150 a month. That was the beginning of my career as a professional automobile stylist-designer. I worked in an advanced studio for the first portion of that time and was happy to be recognized by Harley Earl because I had designed a front end for a car that had to be listed as his favorite, known as the LaSalle. It was his favorite because it was his entree into the General Motors design business in those days, and he paid special attention to it. Naturally, I was pleased to have done this for a man for which I got an immediate $25 raise. Their policies were a little different on giving raises in those days, and then was, of course, crushed to find out that they were going to discontinue the manufacture of the LaSalle. I then went into the Chevrolet studio and played a part in the development of the 1942 Chevrolets. The war was approaching, the government was causing the automobile companies to cease and desist in the manufacture of cars, and so General Motors thought that there would be little use for their styling section. They dissolved it but kept a few of us in various places within the corporation where, I think, they thought that they could get us back again when the war was over. I went to Fisher Body and spent quite a bit of time working on the M4A2 military tank and had the privilege of designing many of the tools and fixtures that were used in its manufacture. When it came time to actually get into the manufacture of the tank itself, the pilot line was to be placed in the Fisher Body number one plant which was in the South side of Flint, and, at that time, they had no one that could help them lay out the plant so they asked if I had ever--if I thought I could do that kind of work, and I said, "No problem." Obviously, the optimism of youth, and I did. I was helped no little bit in this by the fact that my father, in the course of his career, had been the plant engineer for the Willys Overland Corporation, at that time defunct. He gave me the principles of how one lays out an assembly line, which, I might add, I had never seen in my life up to that time, and so I did it, and it worked, and then followed by doing the same thing for the permanent assembly lines in the Fisher Body Grand Blanc Tank Arsenal just South of Flint. As as result of that, I had the opportunity to work with Mr. [James E.] Goodman, and Bud Goodman ultimately ended up as the Executive Vice President in Charge of Manufacturing for General Motors and was in charge, at that time, of eight of the factories in Flint that were devoted to the manufacture of this particular tank. He was under the guidance and supervision of Del[mar] Harder who had the complete responsibility for the development of the tank at Fisher Body. Mr. Harder was interested in having an inspection manual that would fit into his hip pocket that dealt with all the assembly operations and product illustrations of all of the pieces, etc., that he could carry with him when he would go out to see how things were going along the plant line.

I was given the responsibility for supervising that particular operation. I believe I was 23 at that time. It was a successful operation. At least, it pleased Harder, and I only bring up this name because I was to run into him later when I came over to Ford Motor Company. However, I was hearing the drums beat and [watching] the flags fly, and so I decided to get into the service. This was difficult to do because of the various deferments that the corporation was giving me, and the only way you could get in was getting into officer's training, but they considered aviation cadets a part of officer's training and so I was given my release and entered the service where I became a cadet.

Q Was that the Air Force?

A Well, it was the Army Air Corps at that time, Dave, and then it changed to the Air Force while I was in it. But, at any rate, it was a rather uneventful military career, and, on my return, I went back to General Motors. In the meantime, Ford Motor Company was beginning to become active in non-military kinds of activity--car manufacture and so forth--and, in 1946, began to put together a group of executives. Henry Ford [II] had been called from the Navy. He, and as I understand it, under the guidance of his mother as well as using--what's his name--as his advisor--the fellow that had the financial....

Q Ernie Kanzler?

A Ernie Kanzler.* And between those two they gave him good counsel and put together a team of rather hard-hitting executives under Ernest R. Breech. The newspapers were beginning to talk about what was happening at Ford. They obviously had told of their fantastic financial losses, but it looked a little exciting to me. I was still fairly young, and it looked like it would be a very slow climb through the various steps at General Motors; and even though I was very bullish about myself, I was also very much in a hurry. So two people that I had known at General Motors had already left and gone to Ford Motor Company--two people in the styling end of the business. One was John Oswald, and John was a former chief body engineer for Oldsmobile and had been brought over by Harold Youngren who was formerly with Oldsmobile and had become the Vice President in Charge of Engineering for Ford Motor Company. John Oswald was in charge of body engineering and styling for Ford. In order to handle the styling affairs, he hired a fellow by the name of George Snyder. George Snyder had previously been with General Motors under Harley Earl in charge of Chevrolet, Pontiac and Oldsmobile, as I recall. He was sharing the duties of the total car line with Bill Mitchell who had Buick and Cadillac and, ultimately, became my counterpart at General Motors.

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*Editor's Note: Ernest C. Kanzler, brother-in-law to Edsel B. Ford, was a longtime advisor to the Ford family.

Q Who did you say brought over Oswald and Snyder? Was it Youngren?

A Youngren--Harold Youngren. After the usual negotiations I came to Ford Motor Company in charge of advanced styling.

Q Were you recruited directly by Harold Youngren?

A No. No, as a matter of fact, I had run into George Snyder, and George Snyder said, "Hey, you're missing out on a great opportunity," and so he said, "Get your samples together and come on over," and I did, and, of course, for me that was a quantum leap. I had had a taste of supervision, not on styling matters, but in the manufacturing end, and to go back on the board seemed to test my patience a little bit, and so I was more than pleased to come over in a supervisory capacity of some consequence at Ford Motor Company, and, of course, the money was pretty good too. So, that was my beginning with Ford Motor Company. In 1947--August, as I recall.

There was a fellow that was titular head of styling at that time whose name was Tom Hibbard. Did Johnny [Najjar] mention Tom?

Q Yes, he did.

A He did. Because John would have worked for Tom. Tom Hibbard succeeded Gene--what was his name?

Q Gregorie?

A Gregorie [Eugene T.], yeah--known as Bob Gregorie. Bob was very close, of course, to Edsel Ford--had worked with him on the development of the Mark I Continental, and, of course, was also responsible for the--about '33 through '39, maybe [19]42, kinds of cars, but Gregorie--I believe it was in there, sometime, [1943] that Edsel Ford had died, and Gregorie was not that solid and, besides, his interests were more nautical than automotive, and so he peeled out and, I believe, went to Florida. Tom Hibbard took his place. I had ran into Tom Hibbard at General Motors where he was in charge of an advanced studio. His reason for being at General Motors was because a fellow by the name of [Howard] "Dutch" Darrin was a partner of Hibbard's in the custom car world. They had an office in France. Mrs. [Alfred] Sloan happened to see this office and saw the cars, was quite taken by it and told her husband about this, and he thought it would be a good idea to get this fellow that had all this imagination, and so they brought Tom Hibbard over. The interesting thing was that Tom was the salesman and Darrin was the designer, but

Tom got into the design business that way. He rapidly demonstrated his inability to either administer or design when he was at General Motors. In fact, in all candor--he happened to have the studio which was juxtapositioned to the one that I was in--and, as a result, I could look in and see him either (a) sleeping or (b) reading Yachting magazine, and not much was coming out of the studio. So, he left, but, on the reputation that he had--obviously, not too thoroughly investigated--was given the job in charge of design at Ford Motor Company. He lay doggo there. I happened to have an office that was next to his, and I continued to see more of the same, and so, nobody paid much attention to poor old Tom, and, ultimately, he left our bed and board, and I don't know what happened to him. I hope he went back to selling. But those were quite adventuresome days. I remember how shocked I was when I first walked into the place. The styling operation--occupied a corner of the now Triple E Building which I guess was the old Ford Administration or Ford Engineering Building, at any rate. It was really the Ford Administration Building before the one on--[3000 Schaefer Road]--yeah, because I know the corner office that Youngren had was Henry Ford's I former office.* I know it was a place of great interest with its high-vaulted ceilings and its floor which they had more people polishing than they had designing cars, and little mementos of Henry Ford I's days of the square dancing during the noon hours and various things of that nature. This was fascinating but hardly my idea of what the business was all about. In one corner of that building was the then styling organization. George Snyder had managed to get some partitions put up dividing it into a few studios, and there were only about 50 people

*Editor's Note: The building at 3000 Schaefer Road was the main Ford Administration Building. The Engineering Laboratory on Oakwood Boulevard was the engineering administration building.

when I first came over, and that included sweepers, shop personnel, designers, modelers, administrators, and the whole schmier. That compared--what?

Q Excuse me. Was this in the North end or the South end?

A Oh golly, don't give me ends. As you face the door it was to your left.

Q That would be the North end.

A North end, yes. And I would say that it took up about, maybe, a quarter of the length of the building. Let's see, there was a Lincoln-Mercury studio, and a Ford studio, and an advanced studio, and an interior-trim-color combined studio, and the offices that we were using were the ones that were for the former executive corps of the whole corporation, which were not modern, but they sure were impressive.

Q The old Mahogany Row?

A Oh, it really was, and, of course, I had a desk that I could have built a bed on. It was a massive thing. Anyhow, to give it perspective, at that time, General Motors had about 450 in their styling section.

Q For all divisions?

A For all divisions, yeah. So even if you prorated it X [number of] people per division, 50 people were still not very many. So we were commissioned not only to go forth and do great and wondrous things but also to build up a cadre of people.

To talk a little about people [at Ford styling]. There was very little sophisticated technology, compared to what General Motors had, in this relatively small organization, and one of the jobs was to sort out the people that were not just there as a result of just having been there, but that really had talent and could go forth and do a good job. There were a number of very good people. They were, obviously, misdirected and were taking an awful lot of time to do things because they had no way of measuring how long it took to do things--at least at General Motors. And I don't think that General Motors was the epitome, it's just that they were there first and had developed a lot of techniques that didn't exist at Ford. Out of that group, that you could say was inherited by a cadre from General Motors, there were some outstanding people--and Bill Wagner, who was a former graduate architect, a fellow with great taste, [an] unlikely interest in trucks, who, because he was an aesthete, really, but was a great truck man and ran that part of the operation for many years.

Q Is this Willys P.?

A Willys P. Willys P. was, and his wife were, very active with the [design] cadre at Cranbrook, where, by the way, I had also spent some time but not as an enrolled, full-time student, but I'd taken evening courses at the Academy.

Q What were the subjects?

A Oh, life drawing and other things that are so useful in the commercial world, but great training, really, of the hands. But Bill was awfully good. Ted Hobbs had already gone over. He had formerly been with General Motors; in fact, he ran the Pontiac studio at General

Motors. Do you have his name there, by any chance?

Q No, I don't.

A He was quite an important fellow.

Q Could you give it to me again, please?

A Ted, as in Theodore, Hobbs.

Q I'm glad to hear that.

A Ted was in charge of all the trim and color work at Ford and was until his retirement and a fine designer. He had run into a little difficulty at General Motors with Harley Earl--which wasn't difficult to do--and so he chose to leave and go to Ford, and really got into a field--the color and trim field--which he really wasn't all that familiar with but he did a masterful job of it for a number of years. He had Herman Brunn working for him at that time, and Herman was awfully good. Herman came from the old Brunn Body Works [Buffalo, NY]. His father had been in charge of that, so he was intimately familiar with custom automobiles and so forth and stayed with the [Ford Motor] Company until his retirement. Ted, unfortunately, as an aside, a few days before he was to retire took his last physical examination under the auspices of Ford for their executives down at Ford Hospital, discovered he had leukemia, and so he, rather than retiring to the golf course as he had planned, of course, a year later expired, but it was a tragic thing. Bill Schmidt happened to be there, and he was working on Lincoln matters at the time, as I recall, and Bill was very gifted. Unfortunately, he felt that his opportunities at Ford might be somewhat stifled because of the influx of people from General Motors. This was a fallacious assumption, by the way. He was very well thought of, and Bill was a fine designer and good politician--now, I use politician in the sense of it being a necessary piece of the business--and had great taste. But he had a lot of entrepreneurial drive, and when Jim Nance took over Packard, he was given an opportunity to become their vice president in charge of styling, and with certain conditions that made it very inviting for Bill, the conditions being that he could carry on an independent, industrial design business on the outside, which was fine, I guess, in those days, but would be considered a massive conflict of interest in these. And [he] went out, stayed with Packard until their demise and then became, already had the groundwork and a going, independent, industrial design business, and has been a very successful industrial designer in the interim.

John Najjar, who as I recall was on Mercury at the time, but I don't remember for sure.

Q That's what he says.

A And John always reminded me of "Shadow" in [the] "Harold Teen" [comic strip]. I don't know whether you remember that or not, but John just reminds me of that. Highly intelligent, beautifully-organized mind, not the finest designer in the world, but a good recognizer of design--an atrocious renderer and an absolutely brilliant sketch man, and it's an interesting example. One doesn't have to be a renderer, but when a lot of your competition is showing off by rendering, it's something of a disability, but John had other talents that showed through that. He gave it a whirl, but he wouldn't stick with it because he was too embarrassed to go against fellows who'd really been top pros of the business for some time. But, that boy can draw! He can really draw, and he has a good, analytical mind. A lot of design--you know, people think that you sit down and make sketches that, by some God-given fashion, are ultimately transformed into some sort of an automobile. But, back in those days--and even today--most of the creative product planning comes out of the design center. Product planners are great at taking a known and making a determination as to whether or not it's financially viable, if you can separate their own biases from it, and determining what the absolute costs of the car would be and the cost of manufacture, etc., etc. But, I have never seen a product planner come up with an idea--not a car--just an idea for a car. Those were all generated in the design center.

So, there were others--Bruno Kolt was one that happened to be there, but Bruno didn't like the pressure of the building of things, and -- did Bruno Kolt's name ever get down there? [on Najjar's outline of Ford Design staff]

Q Yes.

A Charming fellow. I think he was Austrian, and he had some talents to offer, but a funny thing happens when there's a massive onslaught of people from the outside into what has been a rather carefully-cocoonized kind of an operation. Some say, "Well, okay, that's the way it is," and work to become a part of that organization, others are not that sure of themselves. They feel that they've lost their security blankee, and they feel that going someplace else might be more desirable. He went someplace else of his own volition, nobody said, "Hey, go," and and he could have been a contributor; unfortunately, he wasn't of a personality that wanted to work with that change.

Jimmy Lynch was there. Jimmy Lynch was an excellent shop supervisor in spite of the fact that he had two fantastic disabilities--one, was the size and equipment in his shop which was very small, and the second was that he was caught up in what was then considered a perfectly normal kind of thing to do--taking care of all the electrical and other fabricating needs of the executives of the corporation that had boats or summer homes or whatever, and so the--it, apparently, had been a way that, to Henry Ford I, couldn't have been unknown, but it must have been a way that he helped reward them in addition to taxable salaries--witness [Harry] Bennett and all his houses, and he never had a salary, you know, that sort of thing. So, this was common practice. I found it fascinating. As a matter of fact, I found it sort of nifty, but it was, obviously, illegal as hell, and it [yet] really wasn't, not if you have an independent company that way.

Q Unethical?

A Unethical, certainly, and a double standard, certainly, and, of course, the minute we went public, then it became a shareholder interest, and it was downright illegal, but so Jimmy's time was being chewed up. I had mixed emotions about it at the time. I wasn't running the place, but, obviously, a lot of my things were in his shop, and my own performance was going to be measured on how those things came out of that shop. On the other hand, I suppose, Jimmy was doing one of the great political services of the world. There wasn't an executive in the place that didn't smile on that little function, you see. But, Jim was there until he retired, too.

George Martin, who had been with--is he there?

Q I'm not sure.

A Well, at any rate, George Martin was there under Jimmy Lynch, and they had never done a cast of a car at that time--a plaster cast or anything. Jim had been in charge of all the plexiglass work for the bombers out in Willow Run--all the bubbles, the gunnery bubbles and things of that nature. I only bring it up because when Jimmy Lynch retired, George took over his responsibility and was very active in developing techniques which certainly began to exceed what General Motors had in the business of full-size casts of automobiles and so forth. Before going out to Willow Run, he had been one of the premier modelers at General Motors, and so he knew everything from the modeling all the way up to through making these casts. Many of the techniques he developed himself.

So that was the matrix of what we had. I went over a few months, I believe, or a month before Bob McGuire, also from General Motors, came over, and when he arrived, my duties were changed to be in charge of all exterior, and Bob was in charge of all interior for all cars. We began to pick up people from other corporations, and here's where I get a little out of order on sequencing. Gordon Buehrig joined us, as I recall, and Gordon, of course, has had a reputation for many years for being the developer of Duesenbergs and Cords and was less of--in his capacity with Ford--I won't say this about the Duesenbergs and Cords--but he was more an innovator of different kinds of cars. Example: up until his arrival we had a wood station wagon, and so did the world at large, but, of course, Ford was avant-garde with their [1929] wood station wagon, and, you know, Iron Mountain forests and the usual vertical integration that Henry Ford I believed in, and so we were pretty good at that, but it was getting more and more difficult to handle wood. As a result, Gordon had the idea of building a station wagon off of a 1949 Ford, that was all steel, and to which we could attach plastic wood pieces and various grains and so forth which sounds terribly hokey and artificial, and it was, but it was terribly successful. And he developed an interchangability, at that time, for using many, many of the sedan components, so that the cost of putting this station wagon out was far less than any cost of putting out a wood wagon we'd ever done before. And so he made very good contributions there. Ultimately, [he] went on to be the body engineer for William Clay Ford in the development of the Mark II Continental when they set that up as a separate division.

There were many other fellows that came on board. What does John have there in his list of folks at the time?

Q He mentioned Beneike and clay modeling.

A Beneike was very good. He pronounced it Ben-i-kee, by the way. His son pronounces it Ben-a-kee. I happen to know both of them, and, yes, Beneike was the old--he was no young man at that time, and he was an old, pipe-smoking guy that really had a fine feel for surface. He was very slow, but very thorough, and I took to using him on smaller pieces, primarily, because bull work on full-size clay models is pretty heavy duty--I mean you're throwing around--you know, you put up a couple tons of mud and then you are working on large surfaces, and Dick was much better at smaller things. I mean, it was more within his then physical capacity, frankly, and we could take advantage of his great modeling ability and work it on stuff where he wasn't breaking his pick. Yeah, he was there, and Martin Regitko.

Q Regitko was another, yes--the layout man.

A Yes. Martin was not too sure about "us stylists," but I learned to love him. He was a fellow that was accustomed to having the designers pretty much under his thumb. You could develop a surface of the side of a car, for example, and if it did not fit Martin's "side-of-panel schweep" well, then he changed it to his sweep, see? But we, after a lot of trauma, actually reached an understanding, and those of us that were trying to execute things there, and, of course, he was our first point of contact. He had to get it off the model onto the paper from which the tools were made, and if he didn't reflect the model, obviously we had no idea what was going to come out. But it turned into a really--quite a lovefest. It was one of the most delightful associations I can remember, all the time I was there, and, frankly, not too many guys in the design business can say that about too many engineers. But we got along famously, and he was probably the most sophisticated fellow in the art and technique of body development of any man I ever knew. It was tender and thoughtful and lovely that he had composed a book about four inches thick on how to key a drawing and how to really do sophisticated body engineering. Such techniques as foreshortening all the drawings, nesting sections and things of that nature that could tell you if you had a bump in a highlight or a lot of things very quickly. And it was also unfortunate because that was his legacy, and shortly after he retired, and I was privileged to be the master of ceremonies at his retirement, and I must tell you it was a tearful thing.

Q What year did he retire?

A I can't remember. It's in the archives! He was a such a delightful man. We all loved and respected him and thought that this tone that he had produced was absolutely wonderful, and it was for about a year, and then came computers, you see, and numerical control, and we began to take surfaces off with massive machines that would go onto a Gerber machine which would draft it out automatically, and the day of the draftsman was practically extinct which, in a way, is a tragedy. It's a great training ground for people, but that isn't to say that the body engineer's extinct, you understand. But he was a fantastically valuable contributor to our organization. Remind me of some other names, and maybe I can give you a little fill on them.

Q I have it here as J.[ohn] Walter or....

A Oh, Walter, yeah. I didn't know him very well, frankly, because he was there when Johnny [Najjar] was.

Q Right. This is the group.

A And as I recall, he had left before we came over, and I think he got into independent, industrial design, but I'm not sure. All of us were doing a little moonlighting in those days, and I think that Johnny had some work that he was doing for them, and I helped Johnny out on a couple of occasions. I remember--I think it was John that actually developed the logo for Whirlpool that is still used--you know, the one that looks like the Whirlpool.

Q That's John Walter.

A Yeah, well, John Najjar for John Walter. But, you know, regardless who develops it, the guy that's the leader is the....

Q I think John did mention that. He mentioned also W. Kruke.

A Walter Kruke, yeah. Walter was working with Ted Hobbs. He was part of the trim and color operation, and Walter was a tall, heavy-set chap. The most gentle of gentlemen that I'd ever met and was married to a very attractive gal, and to see them together, they were the epitome of sophistication. He was very, very good at what he did. You see, we didn't inherit a bunch of bums, Ford had done their homework before. They had some good people there. They did not know up-to-date technique, but they had a hell of lot of talent. And Kruke fell into that category. He was a very--he and Herman Brunn were sort of the right and left hand bowers to Ted Hobbs, and the unfortunate thing about Walter was, and nobody could tell, that he was a dipsomaniac, and like so many fellows who develop a fantastic tolerance for whiskey, you never know that they are drinking even. I suppose people that chew cloves are kind of a dead giveaway, and it was a tragedy because he expired from cirrhosis of the liver, and it came as a shock to all but his most intimate friends because he was full of alcohol, but he was never drunk. He was a perfect gentleman. I was very, very fond of him, and it was really just a tragedy that he had this problem, and that it ruined his body.

Q What was his forte.

A Trim and color.

Q Trim and color with Ted Hobbs?

A Yeah.

Q John mentions as trainees, in this period, some of whom later came on--G. E. "Bud" Adams whom you knew well, I think.

A Yup.

Q He mentions Barbera.

A I hired George, as a matter of fact, and, in those days, because the schools weren't really pumping out the kind of thing that they were supposed to, you know. Well, there wasn't enough need, really. As a matter of fact, you add up all the people that could remotely call themselves car designers now, and you'd probably undercut a thousand nationwide, and so schools did get so that they were cranking them out, but for a long time there really wasn't enough reason for the people to get into it--into transportation courses, I guess they called them. But, I remember George coming to--oh, no, he's not talking about George, he's talking about Placid Barbera, isn't he?

Q B is the first initial.

A Well, I think that he means Placid. Is he talking about a modeler, do you know?

Q He is just mentioned as a trainee.

A Trainee. Well, we didn't really have trainees for modelers, and Placid Barbera and George Barbas--is it Barbas, by any chance?

Q I think it's Barbera.

A Well, then it has to be Placid because there was only one Barbera--what did we call him? I never called him Placid--Benny!

Q That's what....

A Yeah, okay. Benny was an interesting story. The Barberas were, perhaps still are, a big name in Detroit Mafia, and Benny was always surrounded by a lot of people who drove big cars and had expensive clothes, and Benny's mother had a little chat with him when he was a young man and said, "Hey, Benny, don't go that way," he said, "Okay, Mother, I do solemnly swear," and he never did, and I always admired the fact that he didn't because he was plagued with this fantastic urge to play like the big boys. He bought very expensive clothing, he never went to a shabby nightclub, he suffered from satyriasis, I believe, and always was on the make for girls, and this costs money, but he was an A-1 modeler, absolutely superb, had the filthiest vocabulary of any man I ever knew, and was a glutton for overtime. But every time--he would spend the money, of course--and he would work the overtime to satisfy his other urges--the clothes, the clubs, the girls and so forth. Well, it came to Benny, as it does to so many, that he would take unto himself a wife, and he did, and overnight there was a changed Benny--no more chasing, still wore the nice clothes, began to save his money, bought a lovely home, changed his vocabulary. I never heard him utter one profanity or anything, from that day forward. I have never in my life seen such a 180° transformation in one man, but he was crackerjack modeler, and he was one of the leaders of the sects of modelers--there were two sects--the Catholics and Protestants, and Al Kellum was the leader of the Protestants-Masons. This was one of the biggest problems I have ever faced because--I'll come back to George Walker--but George Walker was a Mason, George Walker was a consultant and was credited with the development of the '49 Ford, and, I suppose, much of this is a litany that's been put down by many other people.

Q No. We'd like to have that story.

A Okay. Well, George was a political animal. He was a very successful, independent industrial designer, and I have no aversion to political animals, but he would--he had a couple of fellows who were working for him--Elwood Engle and Joe Oros--and it was, obviously, important to him to toot their horn, and many of the things that we developed for Ford Motor Company were shot down by George in his capacity as a consultant so that his own boys could come in and "fix this," you see, which is how one keeps on top of the heap in that business, and Ernie Breech, who was a genius at so many things, did enjoy having famous people working for him, and George was internationally famous, and so this was rather nice. They both belonged to the same clubs, you know, and so this was a great arrangement. And George was not without talent, by the way, but he was absolutely merciless with things that didn't go quite his way, and, frankly, not the most ethical man in the world. He also had a third interest in an outfit called Trim Trends, and, as an independent, that was fine. They did about all of Ford's grilles and chrome trim and things of that nature. Well, after a fallow period, when they decided to create a bigger, more substantial design center and spin it off from--before they spun it off from engineering, Youngren had already left, and MacPherson had taken his place. MacPherson could not abide George Walker at all, nor could Bill Ford, and, of course, this ultimately augured to my benefit, but it was kind of tacky for a long time, because, you know, you were serving a couple of masters. But George was a Mason, and there was a lot of "you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours," which I tend to think should not be in business, but it creeps in.

[Al] Kellum was a Mason, and, of course, he became a favorite head modeler, supervisory modeler of George's. Well, obviously, the Catholics could see the favors that were being pushed in that direction. They could see people that were working for Al Kellum moving--sometimes only imagined, by the way--faster than they were and so forth. Both Al and George, knowing that I was a Protestant, were very anxious to get me to become a member of the Masons, and I have no--I'm not a congenital joiner, but I have no objection to Masonry, I mean, it's a fine organization, but I didn't like the way they were using it, and I could--almost could smell entrapment in this damned thing, and so I refused to join. I just said that I wasn't interested, and I'm glad I did it that way, because had I, and what happened subsequently, as far as my own career was concerned, I never would have been able to solve this problem. But, eventually, we got on top of it, and everybody was treated equally and so forth, but that was a toughie. You talk about palace revolts. It was on the edge. That can breed unionism. It can breed all kinds of things, you know. Well, just the morale stank. So, George was, ultimately, made the vice president of the place when it was spun off from engineering and was there for five years.

Q Excuse me. Were you there when the competition for the '49 Ford was going on?

A No. As you know, cars are developed, or, in those days, particularly at Ford, about three years before they ever hit the road, and I went over there in '47, so it was a happening, really, before....

Q Before you got there?

A Yeah. Harold Youngren should be given credit for making it happen--not necessarily how it happened--but for making it happen, because the Mercury had already been developed, and the Mercury was too much car to be a Ford, and he noticed that immediately and said, "Hey, we have to get something that'll undercut this for size. We'll use this for the Mercury," that sort of thing, and I'm sure that Breech responded to that, and I'm sure George Walker got the commission because of Breech. The competition was interesting because George really never did the '49 Ford. A fellow by the name of Dick--Arabic name--went to Chrysler later--it'll come to me--not Arbib, but, at any rate, he had been at Studebaker as a draftsman, and he had come upon--don't tell me how--a model that was developed at Studebaker. The model developed at Studebaker was done by--oh, God, he worked for me--remind me, we'll come back to it, it'll come to me--by this chap that was also at Studebaker and who ultimately came and worked for us at Ford [Holden "Bob" Koto]. Calleal was the fellow's name--Dick Calleal--and Dick, in search of a job having left Studebaker, with model in little hot hand--talk about coincidental timing--took the model and his other samples to George W. Walker. George was right in the throes of this competition that you're talking about, and the essence of this car turned him on. Here was some way to go. This was a chance, and he took it, and developed it further, had a bunch of illustrations made, and things of that nature, of it and so forth, and it became the winner of the contest. He became the fellow that won the contract and the whole schmier. Now that car--how people come by things in subtle ways--he rewarded Dick. He bought a design from Calleal. He didn't know where it came from--Calleal had it, that's all he knew. His reward for him--because George was very clever--he didn't want to hire him on. He didn't think (a) he had that much talent, and (b) he didn't think that he should sort of have to pay that kind of money. The way he rewarded him was [to] encourage Ford to hire him, you see, so he was part of the permanent party personnel at Ford. A nice fellow, by the way. When he left, he went over to Chrysler in charge of their truck program, and was there for--I didn't follow his career very closely, but he was there for a number of years, and they did some pretty good work on trucks. The guy had some ability, but not on a par with the fellows we've been talking about right now. But that car was already in existence when I got over there. A fresh eye is always useful, and there were a few things about the front end that had to be adjusted, and I played a part in that, or I, and my people did, but the credit for getting it to Ford Motor Company, regardless of the circuitous ways, was George Walker, and then, of course, this terrible conflict between consultant and permanent party personnel began to develop, and they didn't think that they needed George anymore, so they let him go. So when they separated styling from engineering, they needed a head, and George served a useful purpose. He, obviously, wasn't going to come on at less than a vice-presidential level--after all, there was Harley Earl over at General Motors and so forth, and so he made that happen. He established the climate for successors to be vice presidents, for which I am eternally grateful. He and I--George Walker and I--did not get along too well because when George came he brought Elwood Engle and Joe Oros with him, and so we began to divide up the responsibilities between the people at Ford, and those two fellows who were obviously going to get a couple of the key spots. And, not only that, I had known George since I was in high school.

Q Oh, really?

A Yeah. In fact, I must confess he's one of the guys that titillated me to going to General Motors because he had a Nash account back in those days, and he had an old Marmon that he drove--I mean it was a beautiful car, and his son and daughters went to high school with me, and he would drive down my street, pick me up, and I would see this work in the back seat and so forth, and it was fine. But Pleasant Ridge, which was where we lived, was a very, very small neighborhood, and people get to know too much about people, and he knew that I knew an awful lot about him that was not probably as nice as it might have been and so forth. So, at any rate--and, besides, politically, it didn't serve him any purpose. He obviously wanted his successor to be one of his own boys, and that would protect his entree back into the place, and he wasn't too sure whether mine would or not. But, at any rate, his real mistake was in--a not, too well-kept secret--resenting Bill Ford who was our titular head. He was in charge of all design, and we had the design center under that, and he had other responsibilities, including central product planning, you see.

Q Did he resent him because he was young and inexperienced?

A Yes, and maybe because he was a member of the Ford Family, and George, who was the greatest user of nepotism in the world, probably didn't like nepotism, but that often happens, you know. Yeah, as a matter of fact, he used to refer to Bill as "the fuckin' kid," see, and there aren't any secrets. Those things get back to Bill. Well, Bill has always been known as the Kid Brother. In fact, when [Philip]

Caldwell was made the Chairman of the Board, it's because the Kid really didn't have enough years on him, see, and the fact -- what would he be, he's almost 60 now? When do you quit being a kid? [That's the way it works when you're] the youngest. How are we doing here?

Q Oh, we're doing fine.

A I know we're doing fine, but how long have I been talking? I'm running out of spit.

This might be redundant, but, when I first went over to Ford, I was appalled at how little they had to offer. I think I might have spoken of that [earlier]. They had about fifty people and that included the shop people, the sweepers, and the whole shot. And I'd come from a place that had had 400 people doing the same thing, and their methods were rather primitive--not that they didn't have the talent, but that they'd never had the exposure to how other people had done things, and when you have the complement of people like they had at General Motors at that time and a fellow like Harley Earl who was a great experimenter. In fact, he went through all kinds of devices to try to figure out the best way to run a design operation. In fact, one of his problems was setting up some sort of a system. Nobody had ever done it before, and I recall once when he had a desk that he'd moved into an auditorium that we had there, and then had all of us move our drawing boards and taborets into this area sort of surrounding him. It was kind of like a city editor with people bringing copy up to him all the time. We'd been given a project, and he just sat there [while] we cranked out sketches and designs, and we'd keep putting them on his desk, and he would keep throwing them away. But that was merely an example of one of the kinds of things he tried.

We eventually worked out a format that, actually, we introduced over in Ford, those of us that went from General Motors and has been the format ever since, in a basic way, for how you go about designing a car. So, they really didn't have much of a way of going about it at Ford, and, at least, we had that in our hip pocket that we could bring on as kind of new boys on the block, and it worked pretty well. And everybody was working awfully hard, but we really didn't know what we were working on. That might sound sort of strange, but the Ford Motor Company was in such a state of flux at that time that they--and had had no experience--at least the group that had come on board--the high executive group most of which came on in 1946. They really didn't--with one or two exceptions, they'd had no exposure to the design systems at all. For example, the car that was to be the 1949 Ford had been pretty much developed by the time that I got there, and when it was--before it was introduced--you can't wait until you introduce a car and then say, "Hey, what are going to do the next year?" Nobody really was giving us any orders as to what to do. So I was in charge of advanced design, at that time, and decided that, well, if I'm going to be in charge of advanced design, I'd better try and do something, not necessarily advanced, but at least the next phase of what the cars that were to be introduced were going to look like. We reached a little far on some of this stuff, but Val Tallberg--I'm not sure I mentioned his name before--but Val Tallberg was administrative fellow for Harold Youngren who was in charge of engineering, and we fell under his aegis with John Oswald being our immediate boss and George Snyder, who had come from General Motors and was the reason for my being at Ford....

Q Had these moves been orchestrated by Breech, pretty much?

A I don't know how far down he went in the orchestration. He orchestrated the business of Youngren coming over there, I know that. And Youngren--his greatest contribution was, of course, to bring in and begin to build up the engineering cadre. His other contribution, and this is probably not too well known, and to a lot of people wouldn't mean much, but was very important as the history unfolded at Ford, was to decide that the car that was to be the Ford, which was the Mercury--well, it was too big, and he decided it was too big, and so he also decided that that would probably make an appropriate Mercury and that they had to start from scratch on the Ford. Breech got ahold of George W. Walker, who was an independent industrial designer, and who had had some automotive experience in that he had worked on the Nash account and had developed the Nash that had been introduced just before the war, and he was given the job of coming up with was what to be the 1949 Ford.

Q That had been his only automotive design? [the Nash]

A Yeah. Well, I take that back. He had worked for a very brief period for General Motors styling section and had left to become an independent designer. He didn't particularly care for either the potential pay or the constraints that are imposed in the car business, and George was a good designer but an excellent salesman, and those talents served him better as an independent industrial designer. He'd gotten to know Breech because he--George--found that it was expeditious to be a member of Bloomfield [Hills] Country Club, and, of course, that was headquarters for a lot of the hierarchy of the automobile business--still is--and so he and Breech had gotten to know one another quite well through that, and George's reputation was pretty good. He had a lot of accounts, and he'd made a lot of money. And, at any rate--and he was known worldwide. He had a hell of a press man, by the way, and so that was pretty useful. And Breech is an interesting sort of fellow. He really didn't shop too far for who might be the best in the business--pretty tough to determine anyhow, but he really didn't shop on it. He just listened pretty much to George, and he knew George, and he knew his history and decided that he would be a pretty good fellow to bring in on that. For a number of reasons, which I'll touch on, it turned out to be a good idea.

George was having difficulty in coming up with something that would serve as the next Ford. A fellow by the name of Dick Calleal--I think his name was given to you by Johnny Najjar--had been at Studebaker, and Dick, when he left Studebaker, for whatever reasons, took a quarter-scale model with him that had been developed at Studebaker. And it wasn't developed by Dick, by the way.

Q That's interesting.

A But he took it, regardless, and George saw it and felt that that might have the makings of the kind of a car that would satisfy Breech and Company. And he developed a lot of illustrations to go along with it and some alternate front and rear ends, but the thematic idea was what became known as pontoon fenders, where the front fender, rather than being independent of the rear fender, flowed all the way through the side of the car, and the '49 Ford was the first car to have that, you might recall. So, that was introduced and had already been developed and approved by the time I came on board. There were a few adjustments that were made in the front end and so forth that I had my folks do, but, essentially, the car was put to bed.

Q Your folks would have been?

A Well, the folks that I inherited--the Ford folks.

Q Yeah, right. Anyone in particular that [you can recall working on the '49 Ford]?

A Bob Thomas was one of the fellows that was working on it.

Q Bob was here [Dearborn] today, by the way.

A I know, I'm going to be seeing him on Sunday. [He's] probably on a fast track, but I think you'll find he's been, you know, studying up on his numbers. He just finished a book on Mark II. It's very interesting, and Bob writes rather humorously. It's hardly a book, but it's [hack work?]. It's better than that, it's hard cover, but it's still, nonetheless, a modest effort. So, Bob worked on it ['49 Ford], and I think, perhaps, John Najjar, but I don't recall exactly. But, at any rate, we made some adjustments to the front end, and they were approved by my bosses, and I don't think anybody above that approved it at all. The thing was just in the machinery, at that time.

Q Was Joe Oros involved at all?

A Joe was working for George Walker at that time, both Joe Oros and Elwood Engle--but after they had made their contribution of the '49 Ford, they beat a retreat.

Q Your people made the adjustments?

A Yeah, and worked with the engineering cadre to put the car to bed. I'm trying to recall--oh, at any rate, I was telling you about not really knowing what to do because there wasn't a product planning committee.

There was no one who was really thinking about what the next move should be on any of the automobiles. We knew that General Motors was into annual changes, and the way they usually went was a minor facelift, after you had an all-new car, followed by a major facelift, followed by an all-new car. That particular format went on for a good number of years, so we at least knew that's what General Motors' plan was, and that incited us to go ahead and try to prepare for it. George Snyder, who was the fellow that got me over there and for whom I worked for directly, had us also working on an X-100 which was a radical, very advanced car which actually was made and toured the country, at one time. But, that wasn't really--you know, it was a lot of fun and it was great exposure as far as we were concerned and served our purposes very beautifully, and in Ford at Fifty,* which you might recall, it was sort of the centerpiece of the whole thing. But other than being a hell of an interesting exercise, it really wasn't going to help us get any cars in the marketplace in the near term. So, anyhow, I was mentioning Val Tallberg, and I applaud him for this, found no way of getting ahold of any decision-making personalities because they hadn't solidified in any kind of committee structure at this time.

Q No product planning?

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*Editor's Note: Ford Motor Company celebrated its 50th Anniversary in 1953. One of the public relations products was a sumptuous picture book celebrating its contemporary achievements.

A No product planning. No anything, really. So, actually, for the 1950 Ford--well, Ford, Mercury and Lincoln--Val just came around and said, "I think you bastards are going too far with this stuff." He said, "We can't afford this kind of money. We don't even know if the '49's going to sell," you know. So he backed us off, prudently, to a modest change, but, at least, it was a change. I said, "Well, okay, we've done it. What the hell do we do now?" And he said, "Hell, Mr. Ford's busy; Mr. Breech, you can't get in touch with him; I'll approve it." Well, I give him "A" for brass balls. Somebody had to do something, and he did it. And so that's how the 1950 Ford was accomplished and how really the first cars, that were somewhat under my aegis, began to get out. In the meantime, it was decided, and you can tell when they decide to have--when things are really important (a minor facelift, that was nothing) but the next round of engineering budgets was something else! And so we--I'd never prepared a budget in my life. In the meantime, I'd been put in charge of all exterior design, and Bob McGuire had all interior design. Bob and I were both commissioned to put together a budget. I can't remember exactly what year it was, but it was fairly early on.

Q Are you reporting directly to Walker at this time?

A No. He's still a consultant, and....

Q So it is Snyder and Oswald?

A Yeah. As a matter of fact, less than a consultant because his commission was to bring out the '49 Ford. The Company was beginning to spend money to build up their own staff, and they didn't think it was a requirement to have George, frankly. So, at any rate, we prepared a budget--figured out how much--how many pencils and how many people, I guess, is about the way we did it, and then we began to thrash it out in these rather mass meetings with the engineering folks, and then....

Q Who were still in the ascendancy?

A Oh yes, yeah. As a matter of fact, I don't even think that Earle MacPherson had joined the group yet. Now he may have, because I don't know exactly when he came in. Well, he must have, because he was a Dearborn Motors....

Q Late Forties?

A Yeah, yeah. He had some Dearborn Motors stock, I know, and was an early on optionee. So, he must have been on board, but his bag was chassis and engine, and so we rarely saw him. The body engineering and the styling was under John Oswald. And, of course, body engineering was very important to us.

So, let's see, I remember the budget meeting, and I remember we got an approval, and, I think, some sort of commendation that we seemed to know what we were doing, which, of course, was bull because we really didn't. But, there were no finance people in attendance other than George Altmansberger. Why that name pops into my mind, I'll never know, but George was the controller for engineering, and I don't think that George knew a hell of a lot more about numbers than a lot of us, but, nonetheless, that was his job, and so he wouldn't--one thing he didn't know anything about was our business, and so he sort of had to nod yes. As a matter of fact, over time, that became a very useful ploy. The Corporation never, ever shorted me on money--never, ever. I mean when there were purges and things of that nature because we'd go into a recession, why, then we'd all have to carry our fair load, but [never] in any budget meetings. As a matter of fact, at one time, Henry Ford [II] was in a state of shock, and I can't remember the exact year--I know I'd been an officer for some time, because I getting kind of easy in making these pitches--and had gone through this whole thing, and when it was all over, Ed Lundy said, "Now, Gene, are you absolutely certain that you have all the money you need?" And I said, "Yes, Ed, I think we do." In the meantime, Henry Ford was just about knocked out. It was the first time in his life that he--he was just laughing uproariously. It was the first time in his life he'd ever heard Ed trying to give away more money, you know. But that was sort of an attitude that they had, and, I guess we didn't spend it too badly or they wouldn't've had it. And, in addition to that, it developed that we had fantastic flexibility. About 40% of our budget--which got up around 32/38 million at various times--was on "advanced design". Well, you had to give them a list of projects on which you were going to work in order to establish a budget, it just wasn't carte blanche; but I'd had the flexibility of changing those projects to "suit the need," which was another way of saying to suit myself, and I think that this has been somewhat unheard of in the business. In fact, it's probably all stopped under Poling. But at any rate, that was really the first trial by fire that any of us had in "almost" working with each other, and there was still an awful lot of sparring and suspicion and concern on the part of the Brunns, and the Najjars and the Schmidts and the Walt Krukes and others that were seeing this onslaught of hotdogs from General Motors. And, I know, I, for one, and Bob McGuire, too, both worked diligently to try to put their minds at rest. There was no way that we could do it without their help, and, over time, you have an opportunity to sort out the good guys from the bad guys but, going in, one of most disruptive things you can do is to try and just clean broom a place--a clean sweep, I should say. There was too much talent there, you could see it. But trying to get them to look upon us as anything other than the Nazis that had just taken over Poland, was something else, you know, and it took awhile for that to sort itself out. But being a charming, lovable, gracious man that I am, I prevailed.

Q Obviously, you did very well.

A But, they all got off it, and we were able, fortunately, to set up this structure where the people that were there had important parts of the operation, and I've always tried to work on the basis of giving a fellow his show time. I think it's vitally important that they get the kind of exposure. This can be very good or very bad. The engineering fraternity resented the styling organization just, fundamentally, because we did have exposure. We were doing our talking to, not only their bosses, but to Henry Ford and Breech and so forth, and they called us by name and so forth, and they called people by name two and three echelons down in our operation. A fellow that far down in engineering just never saw the light of day, as far as that kind of exposure is concerned. Well, it's one thing to resent it; on the other hand, when you have that kind of exposure, you have a lot at risk all the time. You don't have the usual organizational protections that guard some people that don't have that kind of exposure. So it's a two-edged sword. There are a lot of benefits, but you can make an ass of yourself in front of these people, too, and they don't forget that, either. As a matter of fact, they're more inclined to remember that. But, nonetheless, there was no structure at that time. I remember a visit that we had where we had about a half-hour's notice that Mr. [Henry] Ford [II] was coming over. It was the first time that I'd met him, and this had to be sometime in '47, and I expected him just to come over. Well, he came over with entourage. Every officer in the damned Company was with him, and they, you know, [were] walking around and oohing and aahing, and they didn't know what the hell they were doing--they really didn't. But that became the decision-making body--all officers--and it was interesting because it's very difficult. You can never get two people to agree on anything in our particular business--and in hardly any business--but certainly in ours, which is so subjective. Ford also discovered--both he and Breech--although Breech enjoyed his audience. He liked to bring his audience along, you see, and there was no question, at that time, who was running the place, and he had--I thought that he must have one of the keenest senses of humor I'd ever heard in my life. Not because of what he said, but because of the laughter it generated. I never heard so much laughter in my life whenever he would come up with something that was just sort of funny, you know. I then learned that's one of the techniques, of course, for getting ahead in business without even trying. He was a remarkable man. I'm not demeaning him in any sense, but he had a ego as big as all outdoors. Of course, everybody that he was with had an equally as large ego, but they knew who the hell they were working for. Breech could be mean. He didn't hesitate to put people down in front of people, if they invited it, I'd guess you'd say. It's considered a bad management technique, I think, but, nonetheless, it generated a lot of ill feeling toward him on the part of some, but, nonetheless, it was pretty damned effective. I remember once, for example, I used to pitch our cars, and you used to do it like the sales people used to pitch 'em for the dealers. It was asinine because you can't sell this cynical bunch of bastards anything. You can explain things to them--explain why you did what you did and why you reached that conclusion and try to apply as much logic to it as you can, that they understand. But, if they don't like it, they're not going to like it because you get up there and tell them about these great impact bars and these swoopings--you know, lines--and longer, lower, wider and all that sort of baloney. They just--you make an ass of yourself! But another thing that Breech would do--and he did it to me in this case--was begin to query--he would ask you a question. And, in this case, he asked me the wheelbase of this car, and I gave him the answer, and then he said, "and the wheelbase of the Mercury, and the wheelbase..." and began to go through all of our cars. Then he began to go through all the dimensions of the cars--overall height, overall width, front overhang, rear overhang, interior dimensions, knee clearance, the whole schmier, and, of course, when you're getting this, your adrenalin is going pretty good. On me, it sharpens me up--on some people, it panics the hell out of them. He went through everything he could think of, and I was making comparative, dimensional evaluations between the Lincoln and the Cadillac, and he asked me what the rear knee room on the Cadillac Sixty Special was, and I said, "Mr. Breech, I don't know, but I'll find out." He said, "Never mind." I'd been up there for what seemed like a half hour--it was probably five minutes. That was a wet armpit situation, and the audience can tell when Breech is on one of these wickets.

Q They get awfully quiet?

A They get dead silent, and they all look at each other like this, and they're saying--they're pulling for you, really. They think that there but for the grace of God, go I. Well, I always have made it a habit to bone up on dimensions before going into those meeting, anyhow. I think it's our business, we ought to know it, and if you don't....

Q Known as the package?

A Yeah. Well, the package, really--yes--inside package, outside package together, right. So I remember what happens when a fellow fails in this, and Neal Blume is the guy that comes to mind. I don't know whether you remember Neal or not. He was [an] initial optionee and was--I've forgotten his exact capacity in engineering--but he had been working directly for Youngren at Oldsmobile, and it was a responsibile position--more on the administrative side than on out and out engineering, but over time he was--when we'd gotten to the place where air conditioning was becoming quite a thing, he was given the responsibility for heating and air conditioning for the cars. And they frequently would join meetings dealing with those kinds of things along with meetings that had to with aesthetic stuff that was coming out of my shop so I could be privy--they could be privy to my downfall, but I could also be privy to their's. And Breech got going on compressors with Neal. Well, Neal hadn't done his homework. He knew that, I guess, we were using the Tecumseh or something of that nature, but there are ten other compressors out there in the field, and, of course, one of Breech's jobs before coming to Ford included Frigidare, and they had the rotary compressor of some note, and Breech started off, and, Christ, I knew it was coming when he asked the first question--you could just tell. He asked him what compressor we were using, why are you using it and all the usual stuff that goes along with that, and Blume had that in hand, but when he asked him about other compressors, the guy was like a kid that doesn't know his answers in school, and Breech wouldn't get off him. He'd just go on and on and on, and he could think of more questions to ask knowing that Neal didn't know any of them but just exposing the poor bastard and ends up with saying something to the effect: "Well, if you're responsible for this particular element of the car, don't you think you really ought to know a little about it? I suggest you go back and find out," and then he got off it, but he had--it was terribly embarrassing for all of us.

Q Had he, in effect, destroyed Blume's professional reputation?

A Oh, yes. He destroyed him. First of all, what usually happens under those things if a guy really blows one, if his boss is charitable, he tries to put him in someplace where he can lick his wounds and recover without further damage to himself or to his boss. You know, it's a hell of a reflection on a boss that have a guy out there that hasn't done his job. So, Blume went down, echelon by echelon, until he was about four echelons down from where he had been, and here he was a millionaire--made a millionaire, as an initial optionee, you see.

Q Youngren couldn't save him?

A Well, Youngren had difficulty saving Youngren. You see, Youngren left not too long after--it must have been '48/'49--maybe '49/'50, perhaps.

Q He did disappear rather quickly.

A Yeah, yeah. And MacPherson, who had been--took over for him. Now this was a rather unsteady period for those of us in the design end of the business because Mac, first of all, didn't like John Oswald at all. Mac was not a guy of very large stature, and Oswald was a giant, and John had a lot of experience and was a cunning bastard, but he is not what I would call a bright guy. Mac was rather quiet and laid back--very intelligent fellow, however, but his intelligence was more toward engines and transmissions and suspensions and things of that nature--hence, the MacPherson suspension [strut] which was on every damn car you hear about now.

Q It's plaguing the hell out of my car.

A Well, as a matter of fact, if they're good, they're good, but that damn ball joint and stuff on top could go kind of wacky every once in awhile. But Mac was not terribly appreciative of the fact that there was a need, really, for those of us in our business. But McGuire and I, if nothing else, were hard workers, and Mac would come down, oh, 6:30/7:00 every evening, and, of course, Oswald had taken off for the golf course, and so we intercepted Mac, and in the course of a few months of "getting to know you" kinds of conversations--small talk, all kinds of things. I remember Mac's wife was pregnant with their youngster, and Mac was in his--approaching 50, I guess, at the time, and McGuire, who was in his--well, he was 42, I believe, before his wife conceived--I mean she conceived on several other occasions and had some misfires--miscarriages and stillbirths and that sort of thing--but both of them were sharing this, you see--older men having children and that kind of thing. In addition, he was curious about what made us tick, and it turned out to be very useful. He developed an appreciation for what we were doing, and would backstop us once he'd joined on to our wavelength. Those of us in the design business resented working for engineering. Those of us that came from General Motors were spoiled by working for Harley Earl, and Harley Earl worked directly for Alfred P. Sloan. Sloan was bright because he knew that this--in spite of the giant size of Earl--that the people in his organization would eat him up, if he didn't have some protection; because there's great resentment. You see, initially, in the business, the chassis/engine fellow was the whole schmier, and if there is anything done to make the car look like anything, why, that was done by him, too. When the body engineer came in, he was an enigma and resented by the chassis engineer, and it took a body engineer a hell of a long time to establish himself as sort of a separate entity. And, of course, when styling began to happen, you know, these fruitcakes, for Christ's sake, coming in and trying to tell them what to do. That was really resented; so there was an awful lot of bobbing and weaving just trying to keep alive, and, of course, when you work for engineering, and I say we resented it, it was for a very simple reason. Why would an engineer ever approve anything that would cause him any hardship? And, the answer is, he wouldn't. This, over time, began to be recognized. It was recognized when they decided that George Walker better come back in. Apparently, Breech was on another "I think I need my consultant," and then, ultimately, led to George Walker's joining the Company at the age of 60, as I recall, as a vice-president. Well, George wouldn't come as anything but a vice president, and he obviously wouldn't work for any engineer. So, and, of course, he had a pipeline to Breech, and that made everything sort of hunkydory. That was George's major contribution in my judgment, because I succeeded him, and, of course, the groundwork was already laid for having an officer in that position. But, back in those days, just '48, '49 and '50, there were some staggering growing pains on the part of the Company. The fortunate thing was that the '49 Ford was a smash, and, all of sudden, with the leverage that you have in that kind of a business, the money began to roll in.

Q Let me stop you for moment, please, Gene, and let me ask you a simple-minded question. In your estimation, respective of your many years in the business, why did the '49 Ford become a smash [hit]?

A Well, first, it was unique. Perhaps, I shouldn't say first. First, you could sell anything.

Q Still a buyer's market?

A Yeah. It was--well, '49 was the first, with the exception of the Studebaker that came out, I think, in '46 or '47, because they had cheated and had the car developed down in Mexico, you know.

Q Really?

A Oh, yes, during the war. So they were in the position directly after the war to bring out a new car. But everybody else was effecting the transition from war materiel to domestic production again, and, everybody, in order to get off the grid in '46, which I think was the first year that they began to make cars after the war.

Q Early '45.

A Yeah. Was it '45?

Q Early '45--I mean mid-'45.

A Mid-'45--okay. At that time, all we did was dust off the stuff that we had, called '42's, and so everybody was waiting with bated breath for this great, revolutionary automobile that, obviously, had to be developed, and there was some sort of smell of it by what Studebaker had done. And Studebaker was an interesting approach, by the way. That was an advanced car, and for Ford to do it with a Ford car would have been a mistake, in my judgment. They could have gotten away with it, I think, because of the times, but it still would have been a mistake. But for Studebaker that had limited production facilities, anyway--as we think of them at Ford or General Motors--they could afford to divide the country into those that loved it, and those that wouldn't have it, and out of the those that loved it, satisfy their production needs. For Ford to do something like that or General Motors, you have to be a little more prudent. You hope a lot of people love it, and some always do. You hope that you have a massive middle ground of people that find it damned acceptable and very few people that hate it. That's your objective, but if--and, in fact, I think that on a normal basis, even the '49 might have been a step too far, but because of the circumstances, because of the anticipatory nation, the buying public at the time, and because, boy, if you could get 'em out there, people were hungry to buy, and it was a six-year, whatever it was, fallow period, and people had been making money, by the way--those that stayed home, certainly--so they were ready for a new car. So they gravitated toward it, and it was great leg up, not only because it gave Ford money, but because it established a pattern of a design that we could work with for some period. You might recall, it was quite awhile before General Motors with Chevrolet moved in that direction, and we were beating on them pretty hard during that period. In fact, we knocked them over a couple of years, as I recall. But, that was the--really, the saving grace of the Company.

Q There was, of course, you know, a design award [for the 1949 Ford] that has always seemed to me to be some sort of PR cobbled-together kind of design fashion institute award. Was that a legitimate award?

A I don't know whether it was or not. I remember we got it. I know the one that most of us felt was a more important award was the IDS--Industrial Designers Society award. Those began to go by the wayside because it was really an association of industrial designers voting for themselves, so which is hardly the fashion award, if it were really a true award--and, I can't answer your question, specifically because I don't know whether it was contrived or not--but it was damned useful.

Q They used its stamp in advertisements.

A Oh, sure. But the IDS award was laid on such cars as the '56 Lincoln, the '61 Lincoln, the Mustang and cars like that, and the Industrial Designers Society were having great difficulty in finding anything nice to say about automotive people, anyhow, and so those were kind of cherished, you know. In the meantime, the Whiz Kids had come on board, and we began to feel their presence. They had reorganized the company to the extent of putting Lew Crusoe in charge of Ford [Division].

I don't remember that year, but it had to be pretty close to '50. I became quite an admirer of his. It was really--I mean, here was this fellow that looked like a mouse--a finance background. Turned out to have the damnedest product savvy of any guy that--well, there are very few that I have met in the course of the business, particularly out of the financial community--the only one to come out of the financial community that had that kind of really good product savvy. He began to set up product planning. Now whether he invented it or not, I don't know, but I wouldn't be surprised. I think, at least, he appreciated it, because one of his favorites of the Whiz Kids was Jack Reith, and Jack had hired Chase Morsey, and they had a plethora of book carriers, and, man, they had the answer to everything, and they would come over and stand in sort of an echelon with Chase here, Bill Grimes, you know, and so on and so forth. Each just sort of a half step back--a little castoff from the military. It was the beginning of something pretty good, really. They exercised far too much power, but, on balance, it was a pretty neat thing. Neat enough so that General Motors figured that they had to get there, too. And, over time, it achieved an appropriate balance, but for a period there, you would swear that you were working for the product planners. We were not working for them. They were information gatherers and analysts and presenters thereof, and I think it's right and proper to have somebody that determines how much can be spent, should be spent, etc., work out cycle plans and things of that nature. But much of the product planning, per se, ended up being done in our place because it's very difficult for a fellow to conceive something out of whole cloth, and they would respond to what we developed and then began to put their presentations together. But I don't recall them ever, as product planners, saying, "Hey, don't you think we need this kind of a product?" But they would take what they saw, or what people were responding to, particularly, their bosses and begin to work out the arithmetic on it. I remember--this is a bad example because Crusoe was so good on major things, but this is a very minor one that stuck in my mind, but major in that it gives you the measure of the guy. We had developed, unrequested, the [1950] Crestliner, and that was kind of a weird car with the big swooping line on the side, you might remember.

Q A black [scallop effect]?

A Yeah, yeah, black with maroon, and chartreuse and black, and what the hell was the other one?--a two-toned brown, I believe, but I've forgotten the exact....

Q You developed that unbidden?

A Yes. And, that's exactly what I mean. You see, but we had the right to do that. Obviously, if we'd gone off and begun to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars, we would have been unbraided, and, probably, the right would have been taken away from us, but this was a relatively simple kind of thing to develop, and it was one of the first cars, other than the limousine cars of yesteryear, that had a vinyl roof on it. Actually, the cues were right off the cars of yesteryear--the vinyl roof being one, off the old town cars, and the sweep on the side was off of such cars that you can see right out here [in the Henry Ford Museum]--Bugattis and Duesenbergs and cars of that ilk. But we had....

Q Unusual for a mass-produced car?

A Oh, yeah. As a matter of fact, it was a real crap shoot, and the question was, would it be a mass-produced car. And the risk of putting that kind of a roof on when we didn't know a hell of a lot about how to handle that material was also -- I remember the most persuasive argument that I advanced was, well, vinyl surface is the same as a paint surface, and if paint is okay on a car, paint should be all right on vinyl, and that's hardly persuasive, but, at least, there was an element of logic there. How to secure it was the thing that really got to be tricky after awhile, but we worked that out, sort of. But at any rate, on that car we had chrome-plated the little lock devices for locking the car on the inside. They had been rubber before that or some sort of a plastic. When Crusoe came over--oh, to further set the stage, General Motors with Chevrolet had just brought out its first metal hardtop with windows that looked like convertible windows, but it was a hardtop convertible, is what they called it, and it was taking the country by storm. Seems sort of silly, now, but, by God, it was. It had to be, what, '50, I guess, and the car was successful, and we had no way of getting into competition with them on the short run. Crusoe saw this car, and, of course, being an older fellow, had memories of what these cues stood for, and he turned to Chase who was right with him and said, "Chase, I want to bring this car out. I think it'll take a little of the attention away from the hardtop at General Motors, and maybe we can make a little money on it if the pricing is right," but the throwaway line was, "I don't want you to change one thing on this car." Well, Chase had come back a couple of days later, and he'd gone over all the pieces that were to go on the car, and he had to make some sort of a token gesture, I guess, to demonstrate to Crusoe that he was really on the stick, and he was going to go back--eliminate the little chrome buttons and go back to plastic or rubber or whatever the hell they were, and I said, "Chase, Mr. Crusoe said 'Don't change anything on this car.'" He said, "Yeah, but we can save a nickel," or something on that order. I said, "Well, okay, but I'm obliged to tell him." He said, "Okay, okay. Go ahead and tell him." So, Crusoe came over, and I tattled.

Q Not really a tattle.

A No, not really a tattle. I told the guy I was going to do it, and our orders were quite clear, and Chase was right there. I did it right in front of him. But, I said, "Chase wants to change this, and I remember you saying not to change anything," whereupon Crusoe turned to Chase and said, "We're not going to change it, Chase," but that was important to him. He had bought an entity, and he was very good at knowing that the total is the sum of its parts, and you begin to whittle away, you can whittle away on any car, and you end up with nothing but a standard automobile. But he was awfully good. He had good prescience.

Q He could deliver a complete package?

A Yes. Well, that was very useful to us because he was new to us, we were new to him, and, as a matter of fact, it probably did more than anything else to allow us the right to develop things outside the influence of product planning.

Q Very powerful, was he not?

A Yes, he was.

Q He had everybody's confidence, I think.

A Yup, he did. He lost it just before his retirement. It was kind of a tragedy, and there was no reason, really, for doing this. When a guy gets to be 64, he's only got another year to ride, anyhow, and I thought that it was rather cruel of Breech to wave adieu, because--but it was brought about, as you probably know, by the great dream of making Ford like General Motors and having separate, independent divisions, and Jack Reith, when he got back as boy hero--the great, white hope--sort of Time magazine articles and the whole schmier on the Ford of France issue, that, I think, Jack probably was taking advantage of Crusoe's desire to want to do this. He just needed a little pushing, and, of course, Jack was good at putting together all of the right reasons and burying all the wrong ones, and so they began that, and, of course, as a handmaiden to the division, of the divisions, or the establishment of the divisions, was the establishment of a special projects division which turned out to be the Edsel.

Q It was Jack's baby, initially?

A Well, the whole concept was, but Jack was pretty clever. He wasn't going to get stuck with such an unknown. He wanted Mercury, and got it, so, in a way, what he was doing was creating an organizational atmosphere where he had opened up the dike for more division heads, of which he would get to be one, and it was relatively short lived because Jack was a wild man as far as Breech was concerned, and, I'll say this, Jack was one hell of a fighter. I enjoyed working with him. I didn't get much sleep, but I sure enjoyed it because things were happening, and he wanted things to be different, and he wanted to beat Buick, goddamn it, and he was going to do it. The Turnpike Cruiser was the thing that came along that led to his demise. He was working on the old business of all we have to do is to sell 10,000 pieces, and we get our bait back, and we have enough dealers out there, so that's in the bag, you know. Well, it wasn't in the bag, and Breech, in effect, accused Jack of lying to him or misrepresenting, which Jack didn't do, but what Jack did do was persuade him against his better judgment, and that was a heinous crime, you see. To say nothing of the Edsel and a few other things which Jack really had nothing to do with other than establishing the need for another car in order to make it a full--let's go head to head with General Motors on every front kind of a corporation. I find it interesting that General Motors has picked up on so many of the things that Ford really established like the centralization of various things and stuff like that. Product planning, which they began to establish only to discover that they hated to use product planning. It -- pride, you know, is a terrible thing, and because Ford had used it, and they began to write articles about Ford for having used it and so forth. It was a big blow to General Motors to have to come along and create such a thing which they were perfectly willing to do, but to call it product planning was really boggling their mind. I think they now call it product planning.

Q But Crusoe was, in the early Fifties, quite powerful and a real mover and shaker in the upper echelon.

A Yeah. He not only was a hell of a numbers man, but with his product savvy and with the responsibility for the Ford car which was the backbone of the Company, he began to work hard on the truck part of the business, and I remember developing a crest for the thing, and that pleased him.

Q The truck business needed help, didn't it?

A It needed a hell of a lot of help. Well, it was neglected. Nobody had done anything, you know. So we began to get on that. In the meantime, Jack had gone over--Jack Reith had gone over to Europe, and they had absolutely no design facilities over there, and so we did all of the Versailles and Cometes and other cars that they had over there.

Q Oh, you did them here in Dearborn?

A Did them in Dearborn.

Q Did you?

A Yes. As a matter of fact, we did them in Bill [Willys] Wagner's truck studio, and Wes Dahlberg played a big hand in a lot of those. I found it fascinating because I went to France for the auto show where they were introduced. The other thing that we had thought was a pretty good idea was to introduce two-tones. They had never had two-tones in Europe, and there was a full product line there, and Jack deserves a hell of a lot of credit for what he did over there [Ford of France]. In the first place, I remember the union was Communistic, and they were going to shut him down, so he had a meeting with them, and, of course, he had to use Jacques Maronet as the interpreter--also his finance man--and he said, "Fellows, I don't have to be here. I can go back to the States, I have a job waiting for me. You, on the other hand, don't. You're stuck with this place. Here's what I propose. Let's declare a moratorium on all this crap because this part of the Ford Motor Company's losing it's butt, and if we make some money, we'll reconvene and talk about this"--sort of a promissory note. And they bought it. So that was the first thing he had to do, I mean, they were just testing--the first thing that happened when he got over there was this test of strengths. Well, he won that battle, and then he brought out the cars, and they were shown at the Glace Palais in Paris, and their auto shows are unlike our auto shows in that they take orders right at the show with hard money down which you lose if you welsh on the deal, you see.

Q They used to do that with the Model A.

A Yeah. Well, that's--your memory goes back farther than mine on that, but then you've been studying! But, it was the most phenomenal introduction that has ever taken place. They sold out two year's worth of production at that auto show, and Jack had fulfilled his commission. It turned out to be a terrible mistake, but his commission was--Breech said, "Get this thing in some sort of shape so that we can sell it. We've got to dump it. Let's get the money out of it and put it into other important things." Well, they did, and Fiat worked a lot on the arrangements. They were really a blind for Chrysler, and Chrysler [of France], known as Simca, bought the operation, and it always amused the hell out of me to go over to France and see Simcas running around that came out of our truck studio in the United States of America. And they did quite well with them, by the way!

How are we doing on the tapes, there?

A I think it would be a good time to stop. We're getting close to the end of your hour.

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Q This Dave is Crippen with another of our design history series of interviews [at the Edsel B. Ford Design History Center], and today [September 13, 1984] we're interviewing Eugene (Gene) Bordinat--long-time Ford designer, and Vice President of Design for many years, and we are continuing his discussion of the influence of product planning on Ford design history in the 1950's.

A Well, Jack Reith was a very bright guy. He was one of the "Quiz Kids" to become "Whiz Kids," and I think that was part of statistical control [section] for the U.S. Air Force under Tex Thornton. Tex, as you recall, brought a cadre of his officers, sold them as a package--offered them as a package, I should say--to the industry, and Ford, who was--Ford, the man, [Henry II] was short of people, and so it looked like an opportunity for him and also for Tex Thornton, and sold the whole package to Ford Motor Company. It was kind of interesting--they got the name "Quiz Kids," because for the first year or so, they went around to all kinds of departments and just asked questions--sort of getting a quick education in the car business. One of his stars was Jack Reith, and Jack Reith was very well thought of by Lew Crusoe who had taken over the head of [Ford] North American Automotive. I'm not sure that that's how they defined it at the time, but, at any rate, it included all the automotive parts that were made in US of A. Jack, obviously, was a very intelligent fellow, terribly enthusiastic and an extremely hard worker and had dreams--in fact, even mentioned that he would like to be sort of the second coming of the president and chairman of the board of General Motors--Harlow Curtice, known as "Red" Curtice--who had, in one year, pumped Buick sales from about 250,000 units a year to over 800,000 units a year, and, of course, made a mark that went down in history, even though it scared General Motors, by the way, because they put him in a position of power where he had more than six years to exercise it. I don't know whether you've noticed, Dave, but General Motors has been pretty careful, except for their recent appointments, to insure that no one stays in a position of power for more than six years. It became known as the "Rule of Six," and Curtice probably prompted it more than anyone else because with the phenomenal success that he had with Buick and other successes that he had, subsequently, as he went up the ladder, he began to feel his oats a little bit and began to do things that were not quite in accordance with the tried and true, long-standing policies of General Motors. Apparently, they began to feel that that would happen to anyone who was in a position of power at General Motors for a protracted period of time. It's a pretty heady position, and they began to feel that they're sort of--they've been deified before they'd even died. So that was Jack Reith's hero, and he felt that he could do that, certainly, with Mercury. But that gets ahead of it a little bit because Jack started off before he could have a division of his own. He had to persuade Crusoe that Ford Motor Company was in a position to be divisionalized the way General Motors was. We'd been very centralized, and they had been very divisionalized, and each of their divisions was more autonomous than you would find in any other corporation at that time. Almost independent, but under an umbrella of policy making that was handled by the board and other officers above the division general manager level. So Jack's first move had to be--you see, I can say this like I could read his mind because he's dead. There won't be any recourse on this. There is the possibility that it could have been Crusoe's dream, too. I tend to doubt it. Much as he was a General Motors aficionado, I don't think--I think he needed--if he had the urge to go in that direction, he needed a lot of encouragement and pushing, and the pusher, if not the inventor, was Jack Reith. He, obviously, persuaded Crusoe to do this, and that led to separate divisions for Ford, Mercury, Lincoln and then "Special Projects" which, ultimately, became the Edsel. An aside on the Edsel, they keep talking about the $250,000,000 losses, those were only of record after it became the Edsel Division. All of the special projects part of it, which was the total development of the line of cars and all promotional work, etc., leading up to the introduction of the car, was "absorbed" by the various other divisions, and so the real cost was astronomical because that's the heavy-hitting part of any kind of a program. Well, Jack was aiming for a car division that was entrenched and yet was--had not begun to ascend any kind of a ladder of success, really, and Mercury was cut to measure. He didn't--wasn't interested in Lincoln. Lincoln hadn't generated a profit any year since it was bought from [Henry] Leland [in 1922] and came awfully close in 1956 when it had a winner--Ben Mills, another Whiz Kid who at that time was in charge of Lincoln, didn't have quite the nerve to ask for 1,000 more units, and, if he'd taken that 1,000 units, which obviously would have sold, they could have made money that year. It wasn't actually until the Mark III came along [April 5, 1968] that they began to generate some money. So the stage was set for Jack to come in and take over the--you can't call it a run-down division because it had never been up far enough to run down, but, at least, an established division that had an identity, had dealers, and so they began with that kind of a base which was far more successful than starting from scratch, or taking Lincoln, and he didn't feel that he had a chance, frankly, for the Ford Division because there were others among the Whiz Kids who were in higher station. He did a pretty convincing job, obviously, of selling some pretty hard-nosed people. The hardest nose of all being Ernie Breech, but Ernie was mesmerized by his own General Motors background and thought that this might be a pretty great thing to do. Product planning, as far as that goes, was an obvious way, and, here again, it's kind of hard to say who developed it, but statistical analysis in the Air Force is probably as analogous to product planning as you could get. It's the gathering of data and then applying it to logistics and supply and what planes you need and all that sort of thing which, I guess, is about as close as you could get to product planning in civilian life, and so it seemed kind of a logical thing to have happen. Further, Ford Motor Company was really dealing with a lot of neophytes. They really didn't have anybody, particularly among the Whiz Kids, who had any experience at all in the car business, and those that came from General Motors and other corporations to head the various divisions--manufacturing, etc.--had been in high station at General Motors but had never been in charge of a product line. They had never been a car division head, and, as a result, they were pretty green in how go about the business of "controlling" a car. They all knew that given a car, they knew how to make it and make it in huge numbers and how to distribute it and everything, except how to design it and control the design. Now a lot of this might have been influenced, too, by the fact that when Harold Youngren, Vice-President for Engineering who came from Oldsmobile, spotted, when he arrived, that the Mercury, which was originally planned to be the Ford, was too much car to go head-to-head with Chevrolet. I mean it could, but you couldn't make any money out of it, it was just the design cost was out of line. So it's possible that that might have suggested, too, that if you can make that kind of a mistake by just fooling around and developing a car and getting it approved, naturally, ready for production, only to discover that it was out of control, as far as design costs was concerned, that, maybe, there should be some sort of a system that would protect the ignorant from making that mistake again. So that's a possibility that that triggered it. The very nature of the statistical control people that had come in and were anxious to get on product. Their background, and the financial background of Lew Crusoe himself, would suggest that these kinds of controls were required. And the fact that he was in finance at General Motors and probably had seen certain sins being made over there in the design cost and developmental costs of cars. Dave, you know, I think that I must have a very hypnotic voice. I tend to put you to sleep, you know.

Q No, no.

A No, really?

Q It's just a post-prandial [condition].

A I see, okay.

Q No, I'm fascinated with it. Along that line, with Crusoe, did he promote people like McNamara and Arjay Miller along that line?

A Oh, yeah. Arjay was a totally finance-oriented man, but was very high on Crusoe's pecking list, but probably the guy that was most admired was [Robert] McNamara. He was a very concise speaker, he was a logician and prided himself that he was. He knew how to handle those for whom he worked and impressed them, and, in coming out of the service, was, as I recall, second in command to Tex Thornton who was the colonel. I believe that Bob was a major, but, if not by rank, certainly by responsibility. He was his second in command. So he had those things going for him, going in. Frankly, Bob was not one of my favorite types and demonstrated it pretty much when given the responsibility for the Ford Division. He tried to apply logic to everything, and, frankly, in product, you're not trying to tell the person that the car he must have, you're trying to find out the car he wants, and, in that, there is an awful lot of emotionalism. In fact, the design business is probably 40% logic and 60% emotion whereas Bob was 100% logic and zero emotion. And this not only applied to product but it also applied to people, and you can't--people that worked for him--and you really can't handle people that way. I remember Sevrain [Sev] Vass, who was the controller, first for Lincoln-Mercury, then, as I recall, for Ford. [He was] a very dear friend of mine. We made strange bedfellows considering the practically diametrically opposite position that we had on things, but, regardless, we were dear friends. And I remember having a quarrel with him once and Sev said, "Well, Bob, is so smart that I feel perfectly comfortable having him take--me being a book in his library, he can take me down, open me up, take out what he wants, put me back and that makes me happy." And I said, "Well, you're obviously a whore," whereupon we had a big argument, but people were that way. Now had Bob stayed--he became President, as you know, and was for a month before he was drafted by Kennedy for Secretary of Defense--but, had he stayed at Ford, it is my judgment that at the end of eight or so years that the people--and then had he left--the people that he would have left in charge would have been rudderless because they were all order takers and saluters and going out and doing [a] beautiful job of what they were told to do, but all the orders would be coming from Bob McNamara, and there wouldn't have been any input at all from other people. Now that's, obviously, a very subjective view, but I think that Ford's savior was not necessarily the country's good luck.

Q As it turned out.

A As it turned out, because he was applying that same crap to the United States, and we ended up in Viet Nam and a lot of other things. The domino theory is very logical, you understand, but, at any rate....

Q But Crusoe, at this point, was fascinated by these mentalities?

A Oh, no question about it. Crusoe's a genius in his own right, and it takes one to know one, and he was fascinated--it's a good word. He saw not only brilliance but he saw youth and brilliance and energy. Crusoe was not exactly a youngster, you know, he'd been retired once and come out of retirement to go to Ford and....

Q His energy is waning, obviously?

A Well, he had a lot, but it had to be waning because he left the Company when he was 64, and I am now 64, so I know a little about the difference of energy I had back then and the energy I have now. You just run out of spit. So, anyhow, he admired Bob for the kinds of responsibility he laid on Bob for general planning and, perhaps, because Bob was busy doing other things. He relied on Jack Reith, and, of course, Jack had won his spurs in product by having been sent to France to straighten out Ford of France, and his commission--at least as he told me--was to get Ford of France to a place where it could be sold because Breech didn't think that it was really a worthwhile enterprise. We all lived to rue the day, but, nonetheless, Jack went over and did this. He used--he had no talent over there in the design sense, so he used our people to develop the line of cars. A very successful line of cars--he used a lot of techniques--product techniques like two-toned color combinations and things of that nature.

Q New to them?

A Yeah, over there was the first time they'd ever seen a two-toned car since the days of Bugatti, and it was extremely successful, as you know--perhaps you don't--but, at any rate, at the auto shows in Europe they sell cars at the auto show just like you would at a dealership, and they take hard money down, and that's a commitment on your part, and you lose the money if you don't come through and buy the car a little later. When Ford introduced its line of cars over there, the Reith cars, they had taken two years' worth of orders--their capacity for two years--and that's the first time that that had ever happened any place in Europe. So that was money in the bank. He had further demonstrated his means of dealing with the highly Communistic auto union that was in the plant by working out an agreement with them that, "Hey boys, I can go home. I've got a job back there. You fellows are going to be out of work if we close this place down, so hang in tough with me, and I'll see that you get your reward in heaven or at least when we begin to make money," but at any rate, he made it stick. They understood the logic of this, and so he got the place going. He did a remarkable job. They wrote articles about him in Time magazine, you might recall, he was the white-haired boy of business, and so he had that in his hip pocket, and that was obviously more in the product end, anyhow, and Jack really wanted to be a product man. That was his long-term goal. So he ended up with the Lincoln-Mercury Division.

Q The whole division--not just Mercury?

A I mean, excuse me, Mercury.

Q Can you explain how that split came about. I believe about 1949 or '50....

A Well, I've forgotten the exact time. I think it was a little later than that, actually.

Q Maybe early Fifties? [1955]

A Yeah. They divided it up because Jack had presented a paper--a series of papers to Lew Crusoe making the case. Now whether Crusoe said, "Hey, Jack, go out and noodle this out and come back with the evidence," or whether Jack said, "Hey, this is a hell of a deal. I think I'll put it together and show it to Crusoe," I don't know. But, at any rate, I do know that Jack made the presentation, and, interestingly enough, he--at Crusoe's suggestion--in fact, in Crusoe's presence, rehearsed this several times. I know one of the groups to which he rehearsed it was the design center, then the styling organization. Well, by the time he was through blowing smoke up our ass, why, we thought that this was the greatest thing since sliced bread, and we were all enthusiastic, and, frankly, he was very good at these kinds of things. He had all the pie charts and the graphs and evidence--hardbaked evidence--of how successful this was all going to be. And, in fact, if we'd let it ride for awhile, perhaps it could have been. But it was fascinating that, as we got over the decentralization business and began to consolidate again, that General Motors began, very slowly, to centralize, and, as of now, they've gone through major centralization because it's a hell of a lot cheaper, and what price the independence of divisions? In fact, the only reason, I'm sure, that Sloan allowed the autonomy that he did of the divisions when he picked them up was a ploy to keep peace [among] the heads of the corporations that he was absorbing. General Motors was buying up whole corporations and buying their executive cadre with them, and you couldn't take these entrepreneurial personalities, that obviously had been successful, and shackle them under a dictator that was going to tell them what to do. And so I'm rather convinced that Sloan, even though he doesn't talk about it in his Adventures of a White Collar Man, but I am rather convinced that he thought that he would have a real bear by the tail if he didn't give these fellows their head, and he provided the umbrella of policy, etc. under which they operated. They could all see the benefits of having their bodies, for example, made by Fisher Body and things of that nature, but these were pretty hard-headed, individualistic kind of guys and used to having their own way, used to running their own thing, and I think that that probably was--rather than crush them, have them quit or have the morale go to hell, that he felt that it would be better if they all worked together and had a great deal of independence. And I think it worked, but over time, as new people come up and so forth, you can begin to mold them to your own image, and it was just the opposite at Ford.

It was a great, centralized thing, and the romance of being decentralized and looking at General Motors which, obviously, had a hell of a track record out there, all sort of augured for this being the thing for us to do. We weren't prepared for it, and so we, after a period, began to--after a period of failure, we began to consolidate again.

Q At this period, you are chief designer at Mercury?

A I was head of Mercury [design] under Jack.

Q Jack Reith.

A Yeah. He selected me, I'm happy to say, and I was very anxious to become a part of his dream. I mean Ford was nose-to-nose with Chevrolet. Heroes are not made just being nose to nose with Chevrolet, and, at those volumes, very difficult to break out more than a point or half a point or something of that nature. You're lucky to hang in tough. With the second, or Mercury Division, you stood a chance at becoming quite heroic, and, as a matter of fact, we did some good things and did get the sales up a lot on that car. Jack, however, made a tactical error. There was a Turnpike Cruiser that was developed which was a piece of exotica which is probably the epitome of poor taste.

Q You know that his prototype still survives?

A I understand it does. Yeah, as a matter of fact, there's a guy that bought one after they were in production that was in touch with me not too long ago. Maybe he called you. Did he? I've forgotten his name. But he was in the process of restoring this thing. Oh, yeah, anything that's that unique--and let me tell you, it was pretty unique because Jack had sold it on the basis of with this kind of dealer organization that's running pretty good right about now, we can get rid of 10,000 of anything, and if we get rid of 10,000, we'll think we've died and gone to heaven because of the profit, or the accounted profit on the car.

Q At this point do you have separate dealer organizations? Has Jack come up with that kind of a...?

A They had some that were unique, but they were still marketing them through combined dealers, yeah. They almost had to. Those franchises were sort of locked in concrete. In fact, the wordage was such--apparently, they were so desperate to get Lincoln dealers at one time, that they made all kinds of concessions in the contract with the dealers --in the franchise contract. You could have an exclusive area, and, of course, these guys kept their areas at times when there was room for a couple of other points right close by, and that led to all kinds of legal battles and bad will and things like that. But, anyhow, this Turnpike Cruiser thing was really the undoing of Jack because it was an exciting enough car. The market began to falter a little bit, as it frequently does. You know, you're on a high, and then all of a sudden you hit a little, modest dip, and we were eating a lot of Turnpike Cruisers. This provoked Breech, and you really had to know Breech to understand why it really provoked him: I mean, here was a fellow that not only was bright but, in his own mind, there was no one brighter, and he was pretty close to right, by the way, he was a bright guy. But as all fellows who get into positions of power, not only have egos to start with but their egos get reinforced as the power base builds, and he just hated anybody that would ever put him in a position where he had made a decision where the decision didn't work out to be 100% right. The same thing happened with the Edsel. The Edsel was enthusiastically endorsed by Breech.

Q The concept?

A The concept of the Edsel, and, you know, he was the chief approver along with Henry Ford of all the stuff that came out of our place and the whole product line and all that sort of thing. One of the fellows who was violently against it--almost everybody that was in on the Mercury side of things--was obviously against it because it was going to crowd their market. One of these fellows was Dick Krafve who was second in command of Lincoln-Mercury at the time.

Q Under?

A Under Ben[son] Ford, I believe, and, then Ostrander, and I think it was under Ostrander that Krafve was sort of second in command. And Dick was another military guy--not through the--yeah, as I recall, he was a colonel, too. But Dick was a pretty smart dude, and he stood up and made speeches against it, and the irony of ironies is that he ends up by inheriting the damned division [Edsel] for which he was ultimately canned. So it was really crazy. But at any rate, Reith was doing battle with Breech, and I think you almost had to call it doing battle. We would go in and have our ears soundly boxed on some sort of a program or the look of something that we'd taken in, and Jack would come out and say, "Okay, we're going to regroup and come up with another battle plan." That's a quote. Of course, Jack was in the military. I don't think he ever conceived of a battle plan in his life, but, nonetheless, he was still filled with these militaristic things, and we would, and we'd go back and hammer on the committee until, by God, they just--I guess we just wore them down.

Q The design approval [committee]?

A Yeah. Which in those days was every officer in the damned place--[Henry] Ford, eventually--well, I had suggested to him that these mass meetings are awful, and he had agreed but for quite different reasons. I knew that you couldn't get unanimity in a group like that if you wanted to. If there's a powerful leader that says, "Okay," everybody else will say okay, but in their heart of hearts, you know, you just can't get them together. That was my reason for wanting it reduced. Ford's reason was that he was beginning to discover that his own quotes were being aired around the Company, and he wanted to be able to speak with a little more candor on product matters, and so--sometime subsequent to this time, of course, he reduced it down to about--well, actually, he went down to about three people one time, but then it grew to about five and then the various hangers-on that had to make the presentations and so forth--the walking file cabinets. But, back to product planning, Jack was a--you can use it any way you want. It was a fact-gathering operation. The problem was that if a product planner didn't like something, he could kite the numbers to make it a more than unattractive program, if he, personally, didn't like it. That was the shortfall. If his boss liked it, he could frequently send him back and say, "Well, let's restudy the numbers. We want this to sail." Then, all of a sudden, numbers that made it impossible, one day, came out to make it look pretty good the next, so you know that was some skulduggery afoot. That gave them an awful lot of power. It did not give them the innovative feel for things. They were a control. They weren't inventors. Now, Crusoe had ideas and good ones, and....

Q He used to hang around the design shop a lot.

A Oh yeah, and Reith, ditto. In fact, you could tell the guys that wanted to be a part of it and had constructive criticisms and good ideas and would listen to ideas, good or bad, but had a good filter system for being able to select the good from the bad. They're good product fellows. DeLorean was a good product man, for all his other faults. But I remember asking John--I was a pretty good friend of his--it is not true that people that work at Ford never speak to people that work at General Motors.

Q After you'd come from General Motors, you still maintained your contacts.

A Well, yes, but that wasn't a contact at that time. I'd met him socially, subsequently, and we just became friends. A couple of subsequent marriages kind of pried it apart because you find yourself having to take sides whether you want to or not. But I asked him once, I said, "John, how do you control a design cost on a Pontiac?" He was in charge of Pontiac Division at that time. He said, "Well, I have an accountant that comes with me, see." Well, "accountant" was a euphemism for his product planner, but they hadn't quite gotten to the place where they were using the word. And he said, "He really keeps close tab on design costs." Well, he had a cadre of people that were keeping--he was the spokesman for his people, I'm sure, but, actually, too much money is spent on that sort of thing because they get it down to fractions of a penny for every part. When I was working in the Chevrolet studio, they had a chief body engineer and--no, a chief engineer and a chief body engineer--Waterbury and Luxmore were the two names, and they were the only two fellows from the engineering fraternity that ever got into the then styling section at General Motors, so they had to do their job. They also would cost a job, and it was very simple. They would walk around a car--now, remember, we're talking, perhaps, fifty years experience, anyhow, between the two fellows. They would walk around a car, and it was up a nickel, down a dime, up fifteen, down ten, and by the time they got around, if it worked out to zero, you had a program. I am convinced that they were every bit as accurate, if not more accurate, than the plethora of product planners who were inexperienced and taking each of these things to purchasing and having them put a cost on, with all its protection and then they'e taking it to manufacturing, and, you know, the tooling guys and so forth. Everybody building in their safety factor. It's a wonder we ever built a car, frankly. But it was a way to do it, anyhow. The other difficult thing that came up, and this was a policy matter that the product planners had to work with, and that is a system that really never allowed you to ever introduce a unique automobile because they had a constant volume concept and would never make any allowance--so if you wanted to bring out a unique body style or something of that nature, you had to justify it within the constant volume. Well, if you do that, that means something else has to back off. So if you're bringing out a car, it better be one that generates a lot of economic profit or you can't make any sense out of it at all, and frequently you can't make any sense out of them, anyhow, and that's when emotionalism got into it, and every once in awhile our management would say, "Well, fuck the concept. Let's go anyhow." But, I suppose it was a control, but a very bad one because it was stultifying as far as bringing new stuff to the marketplace was concerned. I think their great concern was something that actually happened, anyhow, and that is that they--that we had this fantastic diversification of product, and we really glutted the marketplace with added models and so forth, and, I suppose, we could have been a lot more selective on that sort of stuff. But, actually, it was a hell of an inhibitor, and in the business of product, you want to be--any self-respecting designer knows that you cannot go to press with a car that is out of wack too much, design cost-wise or you're going to fail, and if you fail, you're blamed for the failure. They never blame the guy that did the engine unless the damn thing blows up or other parts of the car. They always blame the guy that cost them the money to change the look. That's why I'm so amazed that I wasn't--if it hadn't been for this great diversification of models and so forth, I think I would have been canned after the first year or two. There was always something that was hot, and that took the onus off of the failures that I was doing, too, but that's a dicey business as far as staying alive. But Jack, anyhow, was very good at what he did, but he did tend to--for want of a--and it's not a very charitable word, but for want of another one, he would rig numbers to get his own way, and if it blew back in his face, as it did with the Turnpike Cruiser, then that was the thing that Breech would hang on to: "I, Breech, did not make a mistake in judgment. I, Breech, was given a royal shafting by this son of a bitch that gave me the bad information." He said, "I can't trust him, obviously, so we won't exactly can him, but we will send him up to take charge of Ford of Canada, if he wants it." Well, Jack didn't want Ford of Canada. You might recall it was essentially a sales arm in those days--still is, I guess--and the manufacturing was all under manufacturing here, so Jack didn't want that at all.

Q By rigging, do you mean sales figures?

A No, by rigging numbers to make things look like they will generate more profit than they might. Really, not ethical. I mean there are ways of even rigging ethically, but there are ways to just lie, too, and Jack was so sure that anything that he did would be right that he didn't hesitate to warp the truth a little bit in order to make it happen because he knew he'd be vindicated in the final analysis. It's sort of like a guy in the service that disobeys an order and then captures a hill or something like that, he received a hero's badge. On the other hand, the guy that disobeys an order and doesn't capture the hill is shot, frequently. Well, Jack got shot, and he decided that it wasn't a good time to be going over to Canada. That was a blow to his pride, and he didn't want that, and so he ended up, as I recall, as president of Crosley [AVCO] which isn't the little car company; it was an electronic outfit of some consequence, and things did not go well there, and, for whatever reasons, Jack disposed of himself. A lot of people thought it was an accident. Bill Grimes, who was very close to him and was talking to Maxine* about it, is of another mind. I think that they allowed him to have an accidental death because of the extreme Catholicism of the family, and that was a gracious way to do it. It didn't make a damn as far as his insurance or anything like that was concerned; I mean, it wasn't a swindle, but it was very important to the family that he not have disposed of himself. But Maxine swears he did.

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*Editor's Note: Mrs. Reith

Q It was a classic case, then, of sort of going too far, too fast, too soon with a fatal flaw in terms of ethical concern?

A Yeah. Excepting, regardless of that, frankly, Breech made a mistake, in my judgment. You cannot take fellows who have had absolutely no experience at all and put them in a--well, no experience, you know, minimal experience. Everybody makes mistakes, and the higher up you are, the more costly the mistakes when you make them. Most of us get our training by making mistakes that don't cost too much or, at least, you have the protection of a couple of layers of supervision that either get blamed or protect you or something, but you're awfully vulnerable when you're a division general manager, and it is your responsibility, and, by God, whether you've been accepting bad information from your own people--regardless of all that, it is your responsibility, and when you make a mistake, it's usually a blinger. The reason I say that I think that Breech was wrong is, here was a guy in his middle thirties, perhaps, and limited experience, given this fantastic responsibility, and it was--he makes a mistake. He's a smart guy, you think he would have made the same mistake again? I think not, and I think that if you, as the top manager of an organization, give these responsibilities to fellows who are bright enough to learn and do their job and the whole schmier, and they make a mistake, you should be prepared for them to make a mistake and count on their intelligence not to make another one, but don't wipe out a man who had what, fantastic potential, even if it is such a thing as being of questionable honesty where it comes to numbers. He wouldn't do that again, so it's a--it wasn't really an amoral issue with--I should say it wasn't an immoral issue, it was more an amoral issue with Jack. He just knew he was right. Well, he wasn't--so he learned--but he was never given the chance, you see, to relearn. Ford's history, by the way, is surfeit with fellows that made "the one mistake," and that is ridiculous because fellows that get to that position--particularly, after they've had about 20/25 years experience, you can't send them down again, so you give them another chance. You have to or you fire them. And it was only until recently that--well, recently, within the last 5/7 years or something like that--that they began to give fellows another chance. I think--why, I'm sure that you don't have these kinds of things recorded on General Motors, but if you were to look at their lines of ascension, as far as officers were concerned and so forth, versus Ford and the number of people that they had to "remove" compared to Ford, you'd think we were living in different countries--Ford Motor Company in Russia and General Motors in the United States, and I've heard they have it behind them now, as best I can determine. For example, it's really Ed Blanch's own decision to leave Ford Motor Company after the European fiasco. He was brought back to be given another responsibility. [James] Capolongo just didn't like the way the things were going, so he bailed out; but Lutz, who could be held accountable for it all, is still an executive vice-president*, and it is no secret about Lutz' part in the whole act. So, I think that this shows a great deal more forbearance than it did. Of course, there was another thing that was happening at Ford that was unique and that is that the

*Editor's Note: Robert Lutz was given a position in Ford Truck. He soon opted for a Chrysler offer to create an international organization. As of early 1988, he has assumed the responsibility for Chrysler Motors.

chairman of the board was the chairman of the board for a hell of a long time, and he had a tendency to get chapped off at people, and it's sort of like John Dykstra, you know. John Dykstra once told me, "Hey, Gene, I never fired a guy in my whole life. Of course, there are a hell of a lot of guys that aren't working here that I didn't like, but I never fired one, see?" Well, Henry Ford never fired a guy until it came to Lee, I guess--Iacocca. But all he had to do was let it be known that a guy was a bad guy, in his mind, and he had all kinds of lieutenants out there that would see that that guy was, in effect, set up to become a non-functioning eunuch.

Q It happened many times.

A Yeah, many times. I think that a lot of times if Henry Ford had known his damning with faint praise to some guy was going to lead to the fellow's industrial execution, that he probably would have said, "Oh, hell, I really didn't mean that." I really believe that.

Q But no one ever told him?

A But nobody ever told him. It's kind of interesting traveling with him because, after a couple of bottles of Pommard or a few Scotches or something, he was given to giving your performance review, you know. I remember once when Will Scott--God, he took off on Will because he didn't like his haircut. Will had a butch haircut. He was emulating [Ed] Lundy at the time who's never changed his.

Q Henry Ford didn't mind that?

A Well, Ford thought it was okay on Lundy, but he thought--he could see what Will was doing. "Why don't you let your hair grow, Will, god-damn it?" And, Harley Copp--the infamous Harley Copp--was in the group at the time. He said, "Harley, there isn't a soul in Ford Motor Company that likes you." He said, "I, on the other hand [think] you're all right, you're all right, but nobody else likes you, it's really terrible." What the hell does Harley do, you know.

Q Right, jump out of the airplane?

A Yeah, and Charlie Baldwin was in the group at the time, and he took his turn. He said, "Oh, Charlie Chipmunk, aack!," 'cause Charlie had this full jowl look, you know, and he leaned on him. I hesitate to say this for history, but I will. He looked at me and said, "Gene, you're the biggest brownnose I've ever met in my life." I said, "Well, I'm glad to hear that, Mr. Ford, because anything I do, I want to do well," and he laughed. Now, if he hadn't laughed, I would have been in deep shit, but he laughed. But he was filled with that kind of thing. It was one of the reasons that we got rid of the 727 aircraft because people didn't want to travel with him, and it looked embarrassing for him, to end up someplace with two people getting off that big mother, you know. That, and the fact that his wife thought that it belonged to Henry, and didn't have any regard for the fact that it was costing a modest $80 an hour in the air, on the ground and everything else which....

Q Out of the corporate coffers?

A Out of Henry's pocket.

Q Oh, Henry's pocket.

A Yeah, yeah. I mean, that's the way we booked it. Obviously, it cost thousands of dollars an hour, but the government stood still for that. You didn't have to earn back the plane. All you had to do was cover the cost of the fuel and the wear and tear and that sort of stuff.

Eighty bucks an hour--you couldn't do it now for five times that. But, it was sort of interesting.

Q So, you had this marvelous troika of yourself and Crusoe and Reith.

A Well, I wouldn't say it was a marvelous troika. I'm not sure....

Q In retrospect, at least.

A Yeah.

Q It must have been.

A I spent an awful lot of time with both of them.

Q Trying to lift Mercury out of the doldrums?

A Yeah, and Jack was very good at it. In fact, he was so absorbed in what he was doing that we would--he would meet at 7:00 in the morning in my shop, and wouldn't call a break for lunch. He would send a couple of the younger product planners over to the Dearborn Inn to pick up some club sandwiches or something like that. We would set up a massive round table and carry on a business meeting while eating. Now, it takes most of us about a half hour to get rid of a full club sandwich. It takes Jack about ten minutes. I never saw a guy get stuffed down so fast in my life, and that's the way he did everything, and he was hyperactive, frankly, but he channeled it all on the product, with one exception, he also tried to channel it on the wives of some of his subalterns, etc. Now, as long as the guy's a winner, his sins are forgiven.

Q They are overlooked.

A Yeah. Overlooked is a better word. If it were going to mean a lot of money to Ford Motor Company, they'd buy him a girl, if that's what he wants, you know. But, it was a game with Jack, and he wasn't at all above intimidating the hell out of his lesser people in order to see if this would work out. Not unlike George Walker--my predecessor, who sort of had a go/no-go gauge for girls when they would come into the place. He hired all the girls, or they all had to pass his--excuse the expression--muster. As a matter of fact, Ed Roberts, who was the furrier in town, was the guy that put the mouton carpet in George's office, you see, and called upon with great frequency to come and repair little patches in the carpet because that was a great romping ground for George, and it did really kind of mess up after awhile, you know--a terrible thing to say, but George was very candid about this. In fact, when they did the Time magazine cover....

Q "The Cellini of...?"

A "Cellini of Chrome," yeah. Great editorial joke. Because they thought that was great. They really couldn't come out and say exactly--they--you know, they researched the hell out of these things. They went back and chatted with his old English teacher, whom he had presumably bedded, and, yeah, you know, she thought that was sort of interesting--he was sort of a gay romantic--and George was just a horny, old goat, you know. But, that "Cellini of Chrome" is one of the great lines of all time, particularly, if you know anything about Cellini! I mean, that's what makes it, and the editors thought it was great. That's as close as they could come to really saying the way it was--great double-entendre. But, anyhow, Jack ran out the string. He wanted the cars to be the most advanced, and, of course, it's fun to work with a guy that does. In those days, we'd come up with such things as integral bumper/grilles and that sort of thing which were new to the industry, and a number of innovations that were unique. Not that they hadn't been conceived by other people--competitors and the like--but they never got off the ground. Jack was a great guy for approving all that stuff.

Q The impact of his kinetic personality on your design decisions then was....?

A Well, as a matter of fact, it was delightful working with him. It was not delightful trying to sell the stuff to a more prosaic management, but Jack could be pretty persuasive. See, I'd get up and have to pitch it, and, in those days, I learned as a result of this that you never really try to sell a car. We used to stand up and sell them like when they would make these annual presentations to the dealers. They would get a pro up there, you know, to really hoot and holler about the car. Well, that was my commission, see, to do that. Well, all that does is provoke people. You can tell that the ship is sinking just by looking at their faces while you're standing up there like a song and dance man making an ass out of yourself, but you go through with it.

Q Excuse me. Is this the process called "The Dog and Pony Show?"

A Exactly, and it was. It was just a miniature version of the same kind of thing that you would take out to the dealers, and the dealers, of course, unlike--I mean, they want to be hyper. They, you know, they put on funny straw hats. They looked like the Republican or Democratic convention; I mean, they're real asses, but we have these dour personalities sitting there with Breech drilling holes in you wondering when the hell you were going to wet your pants, you know. It was awful. Well, we got over that. I said, "Look, just explain the car, establish a rationale for why it's there, but if they don't want--they're looking at the car too, you know, and they're looking at it with more jaundiced eye than a customer, even, because they can see the dollar signs as well." But at any rate, it was a very exciting period, and Jack, I think, made a contribution. He probably also was a warning to other fellows in high station on how not to play Breech or anybody else--any of his successors or anything. You begin to fool around with numbers--even if you're not lying about them--but by misdirection. That kind of legerdemain is dicey, yeah.

Q At the least. As someone mentioned to me one of his techniques was instead of ten-day reports from the dealers, he, eventually, wanted to have a [sales] report every day.

A I wouldn't be surprised. That's stupid. He might have wanted it, but it's stupid because the vacillations of ten-day reports--if they were consistent with, say, everything your competitors were doing, they don't take into account contests that one company is having and another company isn't. Ten days isn't a broad enough margin. As a matter of fact, you might recall that American Motors no longer makes them. I think that they're on a monthly basis or something like that, and it's a lot more sensible. In fact, you could even do it on a quarterly basis, but then the newsies wouldn't have anything to talk about every ten days. Ben Bidwell frequently said that his whole life is measured by ten-day reports because he was always in sales, and, you know, if the ten-day report is high just before bonus time, you make out like a bandit, but if you got two bum ones in a row just before bonus time, why, you don't make so much money, and ditto every other decision that's made during the year. Ben is very good, by the way; unfortunately, he's at Chrysler.*

*Editor's Note: Bennett E. Bidwell, formerly Vice-President of Sales for Ford Motor Company, after a sojourn with Hertz, rejoined Iacocca at Chrysler where he is (1987) Vice-Chairman in charge of sales strategy.

Q I have this picture of--far too simplistic and far too ignorant--of your association with Reith, as you described it, and with Crusoe looking [on], benignly, from his elevated position as group vice president, and then suddenly both of them began to run out of steam, gradually. Crusoe is losing his health and energy....

A Well, losing health is one thing. Yeah, he had a modest attack. He could pump like hell for a long time, thereafter. That wasn't the reason he left. The reason he left is because he sponsored the divisional situation, and it turned out to be floundering or foundering, and so he was held accountable for it, and so they let him go. Now, that's typical of the way they used to do things. They let him go at the age of 64. Now, that's patently ridiculous. They could have allowed him to coast for one more year and walked away with face, but they didn't give a damn about that in those days. He obviously didn't need the money, but he was so damned provoked that the minute he left he got rid of all of his Ford products and bought two Rolls Royces and a Mercedes. I don't know whether you knew that or not. That's being mad! So, it wasn't affecting any ten-day reports around our place, but it was sort of an indication of how offended he was. Well, the same thing happened to Breech. You might recall, I happened to be the guy that was on the catching end of both sides of this thing, and I've forgotten exactly what the specific was, but Breech had come over and had said--Henry Ford had been over by himself and said, "Hey, I want this to go this way," and Breech had come over and said, "Well, it isn't going to go that way. It's going to go this way," and Henry Ford was out of town at the time. That's why he'd come over early because he wasn't going to be in town, and when he came back, Breech had gone out of town, and Henry came over and said, "Why are you doing it this way?" and I told him why, and he just went like this [facial expression] and left. And it was directly after that that I was told by Bill Ford that he called Breech up, and he said, "I think I've matured enough so that I can handle the affairs of Ford Motor Company by myself," and Breech, you might recall, was 64 years old. So, he could have, you know, been a nice guy and let him stay for another year, but Ford--that triggered it. He'd been thinking about it, I'm sure, for a long time because he was--you know, Breech had--and Henry had always been very careful never to have any quarrels with him or anything like that, always deferred to him, but knowing Henry's personality as he began to have different views than Breech, this was beginning to stifle him, and so he decided to remove this inhibition. After all, he'd--Breech had made a hell of a lot of money at Ford Motor Company--14 or 15 million dollars, and he'd outlived his usefulness. I mean, a lot of people thought that he ran the company; you see, what he was doing was tutoring Henry. That was his prime responsibility, as Henry saw it, at any rate.

Q And the vernacular at that time was that Henry was reported to have said to Breech, "Ernie, I've graduated."

A Yeah, yeah, exactly. He'd had the tutor long enough. But another kind of personality could very easily have had a little chat with Breech in his office and gradually allowed Breech to divorce himself from top responsibilities and, you know, all kind of devices can be made that are great face-savers, and that, obviously, hurt Breech. It would hurt anybody, and it was--and without Breech and Breech's ability to gather executives and make decisions--some good, some bad. I remember his coming over after the--I had Mercury, then they began to centralize again, so I ended up with Mercury, Edsel and Lincoln [design responsibilities], and we had reconstituted the Edsel. It seemed ridiculous for us to have it off of a Mercury. We were taking it off of a Ford, and we could have worked it like BOP--like Chevrolet/Pontiac/small Olds, so forth, and so I had just eliminated those, arbitrarily, because nobody was really telling us what to do. All I knew was that we had to have a face-lift, and so I concentrated on the Ford one which, because of the anatomy of the body at the time, was--and it was not an interchangeable body, they were unique bodies at that time--the Mercury body didn't lend itself to certain things as well as the Ford body did, and so [we] concentrated on that, and we came up with--believe it or not--an execution of the original concept of the Edsel, which was a handsome machine. We took a lot of the gewgaws and gingerbread, and so forth, off, and Breech came over and looked at it, and he said, "Gene, it's a good-looking car, but I've already made the decision that we're going to eliminate the Edsel." Well, it was no skin off my tail, but 600 dealers went down the tube, and some guys jumped out of windows, you know, and, in my judgment, once you make a commitment to get into it, once you have a dealer organization in place, and the biggest thing that you need are stalls in the marketplace. These guys were hanging in tough, and all they needed was a product, and they could have made it, and we could have used 600 dealers, importantly, as time went on. Much as we could have used Ford of France, as time went on, but we sold it, as you recall, through a big mishmosh to Simca which was owned by Chrysler. It was kind of interesting to go to France and see cars that you designed at Ford running around with the Simca nameplate on. Well, Dave, why don't we call it quits [for today]. I've run out of spit.

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