John W. Ebstein Oral History

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Note to Readers

The Automotive Design Oral History Project, Accession 91.1.1673, consists of over 120 interviews with designers and engineers conducted during the 1980s by David Crippen of The Henry Ford.

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

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DESIGN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

EBSTEIN, JOHN W

1986

EDSEL B. FORD DESIGN HISTORY CENTER

Henry Ford Mueum &
Greenfield Village

This is David R. Crippen of the Edsel Ford Design History Center of the Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan. Today we are speaking with Mr. John W. Ebstein in Roslyn, Long Island. Mr. Ebstein has had a long career in automotive design, a part of which was an exeutive position with the Loewy Group which produced many of the fine Studebakers of the 'Fifties, including the Avanti. But this is just one chapter in Mr. Ebstein's career. We would like him to begin at the beginning and, with as much detail as possible, give us the story of how a young man from Germany came to America and became an automotive designer.

A I'm John W. Ebstein, born May 14, 1912, which makes me 74 years old. I was born in Stettin, Germany. Stettin is on the Baltic Sea, north of Berlin. I graduated high school in Stettin, went on to Stuttgart to study architecture. Before going to architectural school in Germany, you have to work one year as a bricklayer, a carpenter, a plumber and demolition worker which I did. That's why I'm very handy around the house.

Q A very practical education.

A Very pratical education. In 1933, Adolph Hitler was made Chancellor, and, overnight, my school closed its doors to me, and I could not enter. I took my motorcycle, and, after quite a hassle with the police, I escaped into France. I have never been back to Germany. In France I enrolled in the Ecole des Beaux Arts where I stayed from '33 to '36. In 1936, I had to leave France because the police again had caught up with me, and I got caught for working. I had no permit. I

had developed a hobby in Paris which made me quite successful. I have to explain this because it's a very important part of my life. One night in the hotel in Paris the lights went out. I stepped out of my room and with me was another fellow from Stettin who had escaped. [As] we talked German to each other, we heard from above us on the staircase somebody asking, "Are you from Germany?" in German, and we said, "Yes." Before long, this fellow came down, and we became very close friends. He was a photo retoucher who worked out of this hotel in this room setup, and I was intrigued with his work. Just around this time, my mother could not send any more money to France to pay for my studies and my amusements, so I was frightened. I didn't know what was to [happen]. So this new friend offered to teach me how to use the airbrush, and, being quite handy, I practiced and practiced and became quite good. Before long, we had built up a tremendous clientele. We worked day and night. He worked during the day while I was in school, and I worked at night. We made a very handsome living using the airbrush. We became so famous that the police finally caught me, and I had to stop working. I packed up and went to Czechoslovakia where my brother went to school after he had [left] Germany at the same time I did. He was a doctor, and he told me on the phone when I called him of my predicament, "Come here. You'll continue studying." In Prague was a German college Deutche Technische Hochschule, and I enlisted there immediately.

I graduated as architect in Prague. Shortly after my graduation, my brother and I and his boss, who was the chief orthropedic surgeon in the German hospital in Prague, went on a skiing trip. In a terrible accident, I broke my back. I was transported to Prague and stayed in a

hospital for close to a year--completely encased in plaster--in agony. During that time, which was '36/'37, the Germans made tremendous progress in invading, very slowly, Sudetenland, and things became very tricky and very dangerous to everybody, and I wanted to get out.

After I was released from the hospital in a metal corset to keep me straight, I went to the American Embassy in Prague and asked how long does it take to get a visa to come to the United States. They looked at my passport which was stamped, "Not Valid for Germany." In other words, only for other countries was it usable. In Germany it was useless. So they looked at the passport and said, "When do you want to go?" And I almost fainted. I said, "I'm in a brace. I had this terrible accident." They said, "Doesn't make any difference. We need fellows like you in the United States." I was immediately examined, got my stamp in the passport, my visa, and I was ready to go within a day or two. I called my mother in Germany [to set up] a last visit, and we met in Venice for a week. She had to go back to Germany. I went back to Prague, packed up and was ready to go to the United States. On my way to the United States, I stopped in Paris again to visit relatives who still lived there, and they asked me, "Well, what do you plan to do in the United States?" I said, "What does an architect do? He gets into architecture or he gets to be a poster artist who does this or that. I won't starve." My uncle said, "I have a stockbroker who has a very successful brother in the United States. I don't know what he's doing, but why don't you come with me, and I'll introduce you."

So I went with my uncle to meet this man, who happened to be Raymond Loewy's brother Max Loewy--who was a stockbroker in Paris--and

he wrote me a lovely note of introduction to his brother. I put it in my pocket, and I said, "Thank you very much." Shortly thereafter I took a ship to the United States. There, upon my arrival, was a heartbreak. The ship arrived in New York harbor at night, and they can't dock at night, so they anchored right next to the Statue of Liberty. I'll never, never forget the impression. I heard the traffic noise from a distance, [saw] the lights, and it was very exciting. It was unbelieveable. We docked in the morning. I had some money in pocket, not cash, but checks, which were to be honored in New York. But the officials wouldn't let me leave the boat unless somebody picked me up, because I had no idea where to go, what to do. I had a cousin who had come over here a few years earlier, and she had promised to pick me up. But she sent a telegram to the ship that she had to work and couldn't get off. I was stuck, and I almost wound up at Ellis Island. At the last minute--I was the last one off the ship--the customs offical who spoke German, said if I would go with this man, he would let me go. This man turned out to be an angel. He was a representative of the Hotel Bristol on 47th Street between 6th Avenue and Broadway, and he took me under his wing. He took me to the hotel, gave me one of the nicest rooms, made me take out my first papers the first day in New York, and worried about me every minute of the day. He would call and ask, "What are you doing, where are you going, what's...?"

I had a letter of introduction to another relative in New York, and I walked from the Hotel Bristol to 98th Street and Broadway where I rang a doorbell at the address given, and a young lady opened the door. That young lady was to become my wife six years later. I wrote to my

mother, "I think I have met my future wife," and she didn't quite believe it because I had said that many times before. But this time was true. This young lady was still in high school. I had to wait until she finished and went to college. We were happily married for many years and had three lovely sons. But my wife passed away in 1976 of cancer, and I've remarried since.

I mentioned the introduction to Max Loewy's brother. I didn't even know his first name. I had this letter in my pocket, and the man from Hotel Bristol, Mr. Gerber, told me, "Why don't you go to this man's office and see what it's all about." I said, "Fine." My English wasn't too good then, and I had the letter in an envelope. I never opened it, and it was addressed to Mr. R. Loewy, One West 49th Street. I went to One West 49th Street, which is the Rockefeller Center, and I went into the building, which happened to be the French building. Everything seemed to make sense. I went to the little board where the names of the tenants are, and there was an R. Loewy Bookstore. I went into the bookstore, and I gave the letter to a lady at the cash register. She opened the letter, read it, and laughed, and said, "This is the funniest coincidence." Her husband's name is Rene Loewy, but this letter was for Raymond Loewy, not at One West 49th but at One West 47th Street -- later we became very good friends -- and I said, "Thank you."

I went down two blocks into Raymond Loewy's office at One West 47th Street and took the elevator to a penthouse. A gorgeous lady answered my request to see Mr. Raymond Loewy, and she said, "That's too bad, he had just left for Europe." But I left my address and a telephone number, and I asked her would he please get in touch with me

when he comes back. I came back to the hotel, and Mr. Gerber asked me, "Did you meet Loewy?" I said, "No, he had just left for Europe, and they didn't know how long he was going to stay." Raymond Loewy is French born and headquartered in Paris. Gerber said, "You don't want to sit here doing nothing while Loewy is away." I said, "No, I would love to do something." So he got the Sunday Times, and there were many ads for artists. Architects weren't looked for because this was 1938. There was nothing [being] built, nobody looked for architects.

He found an ad which sounded intriguing. I arrived here on February 3, 1938. That's an important date. I applied for the job which we saw in the ad, and many other people applied for the job. This was for an artist at a big agency, but it's not an advertising agency. It was an agency by the name of Ross Federal. They do not exist any more. Mr. Ross set up an organization that counted attendance of movies. At that time, movie producers were paid by the amount of attendance. He had an organization all over the United States--4,000 [people] who stood with clickers in front of movie houses to count the attendance of various movies, and payments to the producers were thus counted.

But Mr. Ross had another hobby which is where I came in. He owned advertising spaces. He had the 24 sheet poster frames, and the smaller ones attached to buildings. On highways, he owned all those and leased and rented them out. With those rentals, he sold my services as a poster artist. I created posters for breweries where half-naked girls went over Niagara Falls. They were ghastly, but they liked them.

Q You gave them what they wanted?

A I gave them what they wanted. One day--and this is a heart-warming story, and I love to tell it--Mr. Ross comes through the offices and stops at my desk to see how I was doing. He told me I was looking so sad and said, "What's the matter with you?" I thought this is strictly personal and none of his business, but he insisted on finding out. I told him, "My mother is still stuck in Germany, things were getting terrible, and I'm worried. I didn't know how to get her out." And when I told him, he screamed at me, "Why don't you tell me these things?" I didn't think I should bother him with that, so he asked me to follow him into his office. Looking around in this tremendous office, I see photographs all over the wall with Mr. Ross standing, and next to him, with his arms around him, was the President of the United States--Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Before I knew it, Mr. Ross pushed a button on his telephone and told his operator, "Get me Washington." A minute later he said, "Frank, this is Harry." Frank, needless to say, was the President of the United States. I died right then and there. I found out later that they talked to each other frequently. At the end of his conversation, he said, "I've a friend of mine here whose mother is stuck in Germany. I want you to help her get out." And with this, he hands me the telephone, and I was switched over to the Counsel General. I had to give him my mother's name and address. The following day, I got a telegram from my mother from Berlin: "I was received like a queen! What happened?" This is how my mother got out of Germany.

But now my description is going to be a little complicated. A few days after this, Raymond Loewy returned from Europe, called me and asked me to come over on a Friday. I [brought along] a book which I had used

in Paris to sell my retouching art to prospective clients. I showed it to Loewy, and when he saw it, his eyes got big. He called for his assistant, A. Baker Barnhart, and said, "Look at this." Barney looked at it, and they looked at me, "When can you start here?" I said, "I am not looking for a job. I got a job, and I'm very happy." He said, "No, no, no, no. Today is Friday. You go back to your office, you quit, and you start here Monday morning." I said, "No, I can't do that. The people have been so nice to me, and I couldn't possibly." "Yes, you [can]." He closed the book, handed it to me, and they ushered me out. So I went diagonally across the street to 45th Street and 5th Avenue where the Ross office was, and I went in there and I quit. They were terribly shocked after what they had done for me. They had invited me to their homes, and they'd been so nice. So I resigned, and the following Monday, I started to [work for] Raymond Loewy.

Q You'd had a talk with Mr. Ross?

A No, I resigned to one of this three sons there. I didn't see Mr. Ross, but this goes on. I started at Lowey, and a week after I was there, I got a telephone call from Harry Ross and to tell me that he had thought it over. I did the right thing. My future with a design office was much, much greater than what they could offer me, and, even though they were terribly annoyed at my quitting, but I did the right thing. He said, "By the way, where's your mother?" I could report that by this time my mother had packed up and left Germany and spent a few weeks with a dear friend in Brussels.

The next telephone call from Mr. Ross came on May 14, 1938. It happened to be my birthday. Little did I know that he knew. He knew it

from my application for a social security. He asked how was I doing, was I happy, and what am I doing at night? I said, "Nothing." He said, "Why don't you come over for a drink?" So after work, I went over to the old office at 45th Street and 5th Avenue. He had asked the entire staff to stay for a big cocktail party and a celebration of my birthday. After the cocktail party, we walked towards Lexington Avenue to the Hotel Shelton. [I did not know it, but] Mr. Ross had retained the swimming pool for the entire group for me to go swimming. I have to explain why. When I took the job with Ross, I was still in a big metal brace. The therapy for me was to swim, swim, swim to strengthen my back and the fractured vertebra. So he figured that if we have a swimming party it would not only be nice but good for me. So he had retained the Shelton pool. The hotel had set up tables around the pool, and they served dinner after everybody had swum. This gives you an idea of what a wonderful guy this Harry Ross was. I thanked him. He kept on calling, "Where's your mother?" I could finally tell him she had booked her passage on the Ile de France to arrive in New York on a certain day, and he said, "Great."

A day before my mother arrived, Harry Ross called again, "Where's Mother?" I said, "She should be here tomorrow." Have you gotten a hotel room?" I said, "Yes." "Where?" I told him. I picked my mother up, and we took a cab to the hotel. We entered the room. We could not sit down. There were flowers all over the room--roses, tulips, carnations. [I couldn't] believe it. In the middle of one bouquet was one little card. It said, "Welcome to the U.S.--Harry Ross." He had gone to Goldfarb--the biggest florist in New York City--and bought every

cut flower that was in the store. After Mother was here a few weeks, I took her to meet Mr. Ross who was most gracious, and Mother couldn't thank him enough. They turned out to be the most wonderful people I've ever met in my life. Now back to my job with Raymond Loewy.

Q Could you give us your impression of Mr. Loewy the first time you met him? Could you give us a visual, thumbnail description of your first external impression of him? Then, throughout the interview, would you give us a description of the man and his methods at various points in your career?

A My first impression of Loewy, when he called me to meet him, was that he spoke French to me. I speak French fluently, and he knew I'd gone to school in Paris. I could talk to him fluently, and he was amazed at my not having any accent at all. My impression of Loewy was that he dressed extremely well. He had a little moustache--I think they refer to it as a French moustache--and he had a very French accent when he spoke English. He surrounded himself with people who he insisted be extremely well dressed and well mannered, and the office gave the impression of a design office--everything done in good taste.

I was surrounded by pictures of locomotives, and ships and airplanes, and, at this point, I still did not know what he was doing and what I could possibly help him accomplish. It didn't take long to find out. Loewy was very nice to me. He brought his wife in--his first wife Jean--with whom I had an immediate rapport. We got along famously. Loewy had an apartment next to the penthouse of One West 47th or Five 85th Avenue--that's the same address--and he would change his outfits three/four times a day. Everytime you looked, he had a different suit

on, and he paid tremendous attention to what he looked like and was always perfumed--an impressive man. He was tall, had beautiful automobiles always, and was quite a showman. He was the best salesman I have ever met, and a better salesman than designer. I shouldn't say this, but it's true. His forte was that he could tell you whether a design was going to be successful or not. He looked at sketches, and he knew "that's no good" and "that's good," with assurance which was unbelieveable. He was always right. And, to boot, he was a good salesman. He would take good ideas from his employees and present them to future clients and be able to sell them.

Now, I'll describe how an architect was hired by Loewy. My presentation book, which I showed to Loewy when he called me in, was all retouched photographs--which I still own. He was so impressed that he called in his assistant, A. Baker Barnhart, when I was hired. It took me many years to realize why I was hired. You must realize that my being hired by Raymond Loewy is almost the beginning of industrial design as a profession. To show what an industrial designer can do, the first approach to this problem was to take a photograph of any object--a duplicating machine or a locomotive--then you make a duplicate photograph and retouch it to show the client what it should look like. Here I was the expert photo retoucher, and I have never worked so hard in my life. He had never had anybody on the staff like this, and he didn't know where to go. I stepped into the Loewy office not knowing what was going to happen to me. I designed locomotives, and airplanes, and ships as fast as I could work. This helped him build up his office and his clientele, and this went on and on and on.

The first job I was given was a trolley car redesign owned by the Pennsylvania Railroad that ran from Atlantic City to Ventnor and was an ugly conveyance. Pennsylvania Railroad had just become a client of the Loewy organization, and he handed me the photograph of this monster and asked me if I could I do it. I said, "Sure." I was told never say no, so it was successful. I redesigned the trolley car, and it was sold. As far as I know, it still runs today. The next job was locomotives. The K4S is an example. They sent us photographs of the ugly locomotive that went from Washington to New York, and we redesigned. I retouched it, and it was shown to the management of Pennsylvania Railroad, and it was accepted. And this is the secret of my becoming an industrial designer. I was involved right from the beginning, and, before retouching, they finally asked my advice on how to design. Before I knew it, I was a designer. Before I knew it, I was a vice-president, and I played quite a major role in the Loewy organization's life span. I stayed with him 'till 1963--right after the death of Studebaker account--and left him to join a major toy company.

At this point, I'd like to explain how Raymond Loewy got most of his very large accounts. He befriended a lady who still is very active in the [national] Democratic Party in the United States and here in New York. Her name is Mary Reinhardt. Mary Reinhardt later on married a Mr. Lasker who was head of a large advertising agency. When Mr. Lasker passed away, Mary Reinhardt inherited a large fortune which she now distributes for very good causes. Mary Reinhardt, before she married Mr. Lasker, [was very] active in the Democratic Party. Being a society lady, she knew every president of every major company. She would meet

them at cocktail parties, receptions, and she told everybody about the up-and-coming designer, Raymond Loewy. She actually brought to the Loewy office the Pennsylvania Railroad account, the Greyhound account, the Coca Cola account to name a few big ones. There were many others, and every time she showed her face [in the office, we wondered] now what? We knew something else was brewing. She was a lovely, lovely lady and a dear friend of Loewy's and of the organization. She threw a lot of parties where she entertained lavishly. In the beginning of the industrial design office of the Loewy era, the staff at Loewy's, when I joined them in '38, were about 18. Among the 18, were the first employees he had hired: A. Baker Barnhardt, Carl Otto, Bill Snaith, and Jack Breen. Jack Breen was the financial man--an accountant. The others were designers Loewy hired away from General Motors. His contention was, and I freely agree with him, that once you design an automobile, you can design anything, because an automobile design is the most complicated thing there is. So he hired these gentlemen, and it was a pleasure to work with them. A. Baker Barnhardt was hired by Loewy as a public relations man and was between Loewy and the design staff. Carl Otto concentrated on promoting and overlooking the design for Pennsylvania Railroad. That was his area of influence. Bill Snaith, with whom I went to school at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, was in full charge of the growing architectural division. The architectural department at the Loewy office started out with designs for Lord & Taylor. They became so good that the fast expanding Lord & Taylor group retained Loewy to do all their stores. They were the first ones to have the shopping malls, and Raymond Loewy's office did all of the Lord & Taylor

stores all over the place. The first Lord & Taylor here in Manhasset on Long Island was so successful that W. T. Grant called. "Would we design them a big store in Detroit?" I was involved with Snaith, and the two of us designed the store overnight. We had 24 hours to do it, and we worked 24 hours. I made a tremendous rendering, which I still have a photograph of. It was presented to them, and W. T. Grant became a happy customer of ours.

Q At this point in the late 'Thirties, was there any other design firm that had the variety and strength of accounts that the Loewy organization had?

A Yes, there were other design firms. Henry Dreyfuss was there. [Norman] Bel Geddes was there, but he was more a stage designer. Bel Geddes made his name by designing the 1939-40 New York World's Fair--the General Motors building. The [Walter Dorwin] Teague office was in existence, and there was another--Norman Deskey. But the Loewy organization was, by far, the largest, and it had its own style. I understand now that, at the time, it was the best known. Over the years the designers have come and gone and left one job to go to another job at somebody else's [shop] which thinned out the trademark of a Loewy design. Up to the 'Forties, you look at the design, and you know if it comes from the Loewy office. Now you look at a good design, you have no idea where it comes from. In the 'Eighties and 'Nineties, German design frims are outstanding--the F.R.O.G. Group. They do a lot of design for the American market, and they are absolutely outstanding. They seem to have taken away the glamour of the American design offices.

Q In terms of building a Loewy image in industrial design, you've indicated that you had a master salesman and a very talented and

dedicated staff who were building his image through yours and their work?

A Right. Everything that was done and designed at the office was always a Loewy design. Very few people got credit for their contributions, which did not set well with a lot of people. I never minded it over the 25 years I spent with him. As a matter of fact, I became an expert in signing the renderings and presentations, and I never minded when I had to sign his name to one of my artworks. It didn't matter to me. I knew I did it, and as long as I knew I did it and it was sold, it was good enough for me.

Q You weren't allowed to initial it discreetly in the corner?

A No, no. We weren't allowed to do any of that.

Q [Tell us about] his personal technique. Was he autocratic in manner, or was he able to relax and be informal with his staff?

A Yes. He was very informal with his staff. [He was] a fabulous boss. Every time we got a new account, a big champagne party would take place. He would take us out for fancy dinners. If there was a good show on Broadway, he'd buy tickets for everybody. He was a wonderful guy and a wonderful man to work for.

Q Was generous in terms of salary?

A No. He was a typical Frenchman. He was very tight with a dollar. When I got my first paycheck in 1938, I got $60 a week, which was a lot of money. When Loewy asked me to resign my job at Ross and join him, we never talked about salary. I was too embarrassed to talk about it. My first Loewy paycheck was $25 a week, and I was very upset, and my English wasn't very good. I stormed into his office with my check in my

hand. I said, "I took for granted that I would at least get the same amount of money at his office than the job I had just left." They talked me out of it, and I had to settle for $40 a week which was more than some other guys at the office were making at the time. No, he was very tight with a dollar.

One day, shortly after I started work at Loewy, I sat at my desk working, and he came to see what I was doing. He was to contribute something to my design, and I got up, he sat down at the desk, and he asked me for a piece of tracing paper. In my haste, I pulled two pieces of paper out of a pad. He looked at it and said, "John, I asked you for one piece of tracing paper." This is typical Loewy. He also would go around the offices at night and turn the lights out. He was right. At that time, he had millions, and I didn't. I cannot question the wisdom of his actions.

Q Were his fees large?

A His fees were very large. One thing sticks out in my mind which I thought was very typical and very funny. We had just gotten the General Motors account designing refrigerators, humidifiers, et cetera, and were celebrating with the typical champagne toast. As we were sitting in Loewy's office having a good time, Helen Peters (Loewy's beautiful secretary) came into the office and announced, "Mr. Loewy, there is a man to see you. He says his name is George Washington Hill." Loewy said, "George Washington Hill. Who is he?" She whispered to him, "He's from the American Tobacco Company." So Loewy said, "Bring him in." There were about four or five people with Loewy--me included--and in walked a man without a jacket but with red suspenders. On his hat

were fish hooks with feathers. He walked right up to Loewy, shook his hand, and said, "I guess you know who I am. I want you to do a little job for me." Loewy was quite amazed and not really expecting the visit said, "What can we do for you?" Mr. Hill threw a pack of Lucky Strike cigarettes onto Loewy's desk. I remember vividly that it was a dark green package with a red dot on it, and it said "Lucky Strike." Mr. Hill said, "The cigarette sells well, but the package is lousy. What can you do for us?" Lowey looked at the package and said, "Well, yes, I guess we can help you." Hill asked, "Do you have a pad?" and Loewy handed him a pad and a pen. Hill wrote "If accepted, $50,000. If not accepted, $25,000." He threw it back on Loewy's desk and said, "Goodbye. Call me when you're ready," and walked out. The whole thing took less than five minutes. After he left, we had more champagne and celebrated.

Loewy told us--the head of our packaging department, Howard True, A. Baker Barnhart, and myself--"Don't you think about it. I will do this by myself." The next day Loewy started to play around with the package, and, after a very short time, called Mr. Hill and said, "I'm ready." We were there at the presentation, and Loewy came up with something very clever, and I give him full credit for it. When Mr. Hill was there he said, "Mr. Hill, the reason for what I'm doing here is very simple." He said, "When you're through smoking cigarettes, you throw the package away. Fifty percent of the time the package will fall on one side, fifty percent on the other side. You're trademark, which is the red target, will be shown only fifty percent of the time. It should be shown a hundred percent of the time. That's the reason I put the

target front and back. The unimportant message that's on the back side, we put on the side of the package." In addition, he cleaned up the word cigarettes and the word "Lucky Strike" and added another color at the target: an olive green ring. Hill absolutely flipped. He loved it. From that day on, Loewy kept the American Tobacco account for years, and it was very successful.

Q And very lucative?

A And very lucative, yes. [When] the new [American Tobacco] brands came out, the packages were designed at the Loewy office. I'm about a describe a photograph which was widely publicized, and anybody who knew Loewy remembered that photograph. It was taken at the New York World's Fair. A locomotive designed by the Loewy organization stood in front of the Railroad Building which also was designed by the Loewy organization. Loewy stood in front of the engine, and I had my trusty Leica with me, as always, and he posed for me. I took that photograph which I have many copies of.

Q I have the impression that this particular striking photograph of Loewy did as much for his image as anything. He's standing there looking regally into the distance.

A Yes. At that time, the public was very train conscious. The Loewy train--which was the Broadway Limited--competed head-to-head with the Twentieth Century which was designed by Henry Dreyfuss. Our locomotive was the S-1 which was shown at the New York's World's Fair and was designed and financed by the American railroads. They all got together to put in some money. It looked very beautiful but was the most horrible disaster technically.

Q What happened?

A This was pre-computer design. Weight distribution could not easily be figured on paper, and when this monster was built, it got longer and longer. We styled it and added to it. They couldn't coordinate the cylinder function with the drive mechanism. It was also too long to go through the horseshoe curve at Altoona, Pennsylvania. So it was transported back to Altoona and used only to move freight cars back and forth. That was the end of the S-1 locomotive.

Q A sad fate for a gorgeous design.

A Right. It could not happen today--absolutely impossible. For the New York World's Fair, the [commissions] of the Loewy office were the Railroad Building and the House of Jewels.

Q What did that represent--the jewelry industry?

A Yes. At the very end, a telephone call came, "Could you handle one more?" It was the Chrysler organization asking Loewy to take on a half-finished building to convert it into the Chrysler building. Loewy was delighted and said, "Yes." We rapidly--and I mean rapidly--designed a spaceport as their main attraction and, hopefully, to compete with what Bel Geddes did for General Motors with their City of the Future.

Q The Futurama?

A Yes. We designed a spaceport with rockets shooting up. It wasn't bad at all.

Q Very visionary at that time.

A The theme of the Chrysler building, which we submitted, was to have famous paintings over the cars in three-dimensions: the Blue Boy would stand over a blue car, and another painting where the red dominated over a red car and so on. During the building of the exhibit, a

funny thing happened which I will not forget for a long time. We had the Blue Boy being assembled in a big frame about twelve feet above the floor level, and the puppet was being put together. At that time, there was a big struggle of various unions. The union that controlled the wigs of the puppets was not the same union that controlled the costume. [Another] union controlled the body, and they were fighting each other. They assembled the Blue Boy, and it looked like a monkey. The arms were too long, and everything didn't fit. Loewy and I stood there looking at it, and Loewy screamed, "Take it down." So one man got hold of the hand that sticks out--I think it was holding a spool of yarn--and took the arm down. From the empty building about 100 yards back somebody saw this and yelled, "He broke his arm." Two minutes later, the sirens screamed and an ambulance came. "Where is the accident?" It was a very funny occurrence. That same day, after work, we went into the amusement section which was being built, and there was big tank which wasn't finished yet. The tremendous front piece of glass wasn't installed yet, and inside the tank set a man who looked awfully familiar. Looking [closely] at him [I realized] it was Salvadore Dali sitting on a chair [doing] one of his surrealistic paintings with watches dripping over branches. That was to be the background for the water-filled tank, and naked women were to swim in it. A little while after that, as we stood there watching Dali paint, people came to install the big sheet of plate glass. As they tried to fit it into the frame, one guy dropped his end and broke the glass. In braking the glass, one of the pieces cut the artery in his arm, and blood squirted onto Dali's painting. Dali, instead of helping the guy who was almost bleeding to death, was totally

worried about his stupid painting. It was unbelieveable. This has very little to do with industrial design.

Loewy signed the Studebaker account in late '37, and his reputation as a designer and automotive designer was firmly established having earlier designed the Hupmobile. Hupmobile was approached by Loewy with an offer that the Hupmobile people could not refuse. He had established his reputation having designed the Gestettner duplicating machine. An English firm came over, and he did a magnificent job for them. He then approached the Hupmobile people and said, "I don't want to get paid. I can design an automobile which looked not assembled by engineers but be a designed, good-looking car." So they agreed. Loewy got to work, and I think he did it all on his own. His partners were not involved. This was before the partners joining the firm. He went to the Hupmobile plant, and with clay and drawings, a car was put together which was then produced and shown in various automobile shows. Wherever it was shown, he got first prize, and the car was a tremendous success. They sold so many--about 10,000--that it was beginning of Loewy's wealth. So with this background, Loewy was hired by Studebaker to style Studebaker cars. Studebaker was the great independent. The moment he signed the Studebaker account, Loewy hired the chief designer away from General Motors--Virgil Exner--who had just made his reputation by creating the first Pontiac with very thin A and B pillars. In other words, the greenhouse was really a greenhouse, not a few pieces of glass surrounded by metal. Exner got to work and created the first President and the Champion models for Studebaker.

Q What sort of a design reputation had Studebaker before this? Had they been rather stodgy?

A Very stodgy and very conservation and had no design staff. They stayed that way even with the good Loewy designs. They never modernized the plant, they never modernized their whole outlook on production. Studebaker, almost to the last, was the only plant that used enamel instead of lacquers. Enamel had to be rubbed down and repainted, and rubbed down and repainted. Of course, it was a beautiful finish, but it took three times as long as the quick, shiny lacquer finishes that everybody else used. Studebaker spent a lot of money on an engine plant where they did their own die-casting, and it happened to be one of the most modern die-casting machines in history. But they never located all the assembly into one building. The bodies were stamped in one building, the frames were done in another building, the engine in another building, so before it was all assembled, a lot of time and money was wasted. That seems to be the bugaboo throughout the Studebaker history.

Q Who hired Mr. Loewy initially at Studebaker?

A I don't remember, offhand. I was immediately involved in automotive design for Studebaker when the first operation was here in New York. This was before the establishment of the studio in South Bend. We clay modeled here, we photographed, we retouched, and the engineering staff of Studebaker would have to come here to measure [in order] to do their final, full-size drawings. This didn't last too long. We did that a little over a year before the studio was established.

Q They insisted you establish an outpost in South Bend?

A It had to be. It just didn't work any other way, because the design of an automobile from full-size clay to engineering drawings is

so closely related that too many questions went unanswered if one operation was in New York, the other one in South Bend.

Q Did you have a fabrication shop in New York that did your models?

A Yes. It was our shop which was right near Broadway, and we worked out of there which was not too convenient, and, as I said, did not last too long. Loewy went out and hired a whole design staff to set up the operation in South Bend.

Q For which model were you pointing?

A This went on continuously. 1939 was the first year of the President and the Champion, and then it went into '40 and to '41 with the facelift. The war broke out, and all Studebaker fabrication stopped. We designed some trucks for them which were badly needed for the war effort. It resumed in '46, when the famous wraparound, coming-or-going Studebaker, was designed with a rear window--the famous rear window that Bob Hope made a lot of fun of.

Q I remember the jokes.

A Yup. All comedians referred to the Studebaker as not knowing whether it's coming or going, and Bob Hope was one of them. Of course, the '47 was a trendsetter, and the next trendsetter was the 1953 Sports Coupe. The '53 Sports Coupe was done under Bob Bourke, as far as I remember. There was one facelift in '54. Then the Packard company was acquired, or Packard acquired Studebaker. To this day, it's not clear who acquired whom, and it was really the end of all good design. The Loewy account was cancelled, and Duncan MacCrea and Bill Schmidt took over, and they bastardized the Packard design and combined it with the Studebaker design, and the result was awful.

Q Let's take you back to 1942. The government edict comes down that there will be no more production after February of '42.

A Right.

Q What was the Loewy/Studebaker reaction to that edict? Obviously, you could not do any manufacturing, but was there not a definite concerted effort to keep the design unit intact?

A They tried to, yes. A few people left and a few were kept on to design the trucks. A new plant was built in South Bend--the truck assembly plant which later became the car assembly plant. But the other contribution came to an end, really, at that point.

Q But was there not an attempt to keep a skeleton staff that Loewy felt should be working on post-war design?

A Yes, yes.

Q Could you tell us about that? How that worked out?

A I have to think about it, because I haven't thought about this for forty years or more. I, myself, was loaned out to the government to do super-secret stuff. I designed assembly booklets for armaments. There were machine guns, cannons, and I developed a new technique to print parts' breakdowns on cellophane, so as you put one sheet of cellophane over the next, you had them all together. It looked like the complete piece, and you could take it apart again by moving the pages. I did that for the longest time. The reason for it was that quite a few soldiers could neither read nor write, but they could identify pictures, and they could easily clean their rifles and machine guns and take them apart and reassemble them again. Toward the end of the war, I was asked to bid, for the Loewy organization, on some contracts for the Special

Devices Center of the Navy which was located here in Sands Point on Long Island. I was successful in obtaining a few contacts which I was asked to handle by myself because nobody else wanted to. We designed assault trainers which were built here and then trucked to Little Creek, Virginia, where a special building was being erected, and these units were installed. They were so successful that official visitors from other countries were flown down to Little Creek to be impressed by the almost theatrical performances of these assault trainers. During the war, the Loewy organization was asked to do some of the insignias for various units. They also did a study on how to load gliders to transport war equipment. As they tried to save on expenses for airplanes, they had a whole fleet of gliders, and we designed equipment to go onto the gliders to be towed into the air and then glided into the war zone.

Q Really?

A Yes.

Q These would have been Ford gliders?

A I don't know who built them. We did various projects duringetherwar, and so we were not idle at all. And towards the end of the war, everybody was anxious to get going again to create the world of tomorrow which was described as everybody having their own plane, car or whatever, and nothing materialized. During this time with the end of the war in sight, Studebaker restarted, and the '47 trendsetter was finished in clay long before the production started in '47.

Q [Studebaker was] among the first of the companies to really get a jump on a new postwar automobile.

A Yes, yes. Because Loewy had kept some of the staff.

Q Toward the end of the war you'd been working on new designs.

A Right.

Q This is unusual. Most of the other companies didn't have that foresight [or capability].

A They didn't. The only other car that was ready was a Nash, which was not a very good car. However, the Studebaker was pretty good, and it made quite a name for themselves.

Q Before the war, when the new series of Presidents and Commanders came out, what was the public reception of those early Loewy designs.

A Extremely well. The cars were very well received.

Q Studebaker which, heretofore, had a [somewhat] stodgy image, has now become very dashing and almost racy.

A And coming out with the first compact car--the Champion line.

Q What year was that?

A 1939. The compact car--I owned one and loved it. And they were extremely well fabricated, assembled and finished. The whole Studebaker history is very complicated with the various presidents, with their coming and going, and when Packard finally joined the Studebaker organization, the Packard president became president of the Studebaker, and, to me, it was like the end of the line. The Loewy contract was at an end.

Q This is what year?

A That was 1956/1957, and we didn't do any Studebaker design for quite awhile. When Sherwood Egbert was retained, he asked Loewy to come out to South Bend at night, and I was asked to come with Mr. Loewy. We

were shown, at night, what Studebaker's own design group--by this time under Randy Faurot--had accomplished. They had designed a facelift to the Lark and had a fiberglass model ready which was shown to us at night. It was ghastly. It was an ugly automobile, and Loewy told Egbert not to invest millions in this--it'll never sell. Shortly thereafter, we were called in to help Randy Faurot with a facelift on the existing Lark which was not an easy undertaking because Lowey wanted to do one thing, and Faurot, who was on the payroll of Studebaker wanted to do something else. Little me, was in the middle. Loewy would not tell Randy Faurot what to do because he wouldn't talk to him. So I was given a message to tell Randy, and this went on and on. I had to take photographs and retouch them. "This is what he wants, and this is what he wants," and it was just awful. The Lark facelift finally came out. I read somewhere that somebody took full credit for the imitation of the Mercedes Benz grille. Studebaker had taken on the distribution of Mercedes cars in 1958 or '59, and, at which time, I suggested--and I say it here--to copy the Mercedes grille, not as finely detailed as theirs, but as a metal stamping, and it was accepted. I've since read, in some reports, that somebody else took full responsibility. But, here again, I can say it--I did it!

Q What was the genesis of the Lark? Who was responsible for that? It was quite an interesting car.

A Harold Churchill, I think.

Q Did Loewy have anything to do with the Lark?

A Yes, Loewy had something to do with the Lark. The Lark was actually a put-together out of spare parts. The whole greenhouse section was old. Only the trunk lid and the hood and the front end was

new, and the Lark turned into a tremendous moneymaker. It was very successful, but the company failed to modernize their factory, so the transporting of the parts from one place to the next for assembly took forever. The finish, again, was still enamel instead of lacquers, and it was the dark beginning of the end. They had decided to close the facilities and move the car production to Canada to try it there for awhile. In the meantime, Mr. Egbert had given Loewy an assignment to create an eye-catcher. He wanted a car that would attract people into showrooms in order to sell the other models. He saw the new XKE from Jaguar, which he felt was the living end. Egbert, who took partial credit for the design of the Avanti, said, "I make you a sketch, and that's what I want." Well, I happen to have the sketch right here, and I will show it to Mr. Crippen. He took a catalog sheet from the Jaguar, and, with some squiggly lines, drew something meaningless on it and sent it to Loewy. Loewy accepted the assignment to create an eye-catcher, called me and says, "This is what we're supposed to do." He flew out to California, called me and said, "Come right out." He appointed me the chief executive for the Avanti project.

Q You had that [famous] time in California?

A At that time, he had rented a small house in the desert in Palm Springs, not too far from his own gorgeous home. He made a sketch of what he wanted the car to be, and he emphasized the Coca Cola bottle shape which is pinched in from all sides, and the top and the sides.

Q Was he the first one to use that particular configuration of the Coca Cola [or Coke] bottle?

A I think so, yes. It happened to be very good, aerodynamically. He was the first one to do it, and he insisted on not having a straight

line on the automobile, and which was easy to do. He hired a young man from the Art Institute in Los Angeles, who had graduated with honors, named Tom Kellogg, who has since become one of my closest friends and whom I consider the outstanding designer in the United States today. Loewy asked Tom Kellogg to join us, and he asked me who else can we take, and I suggested that Bob Andrews be retained. Bob Andrews had many personal problems. While at Studebaker, he drank a little too much. He married one of our secretaries, and they didn't get along and got a divorce. Eventually, he was no longer allowed in the plant. But I thought that Bob Andrews was a good designer, and I wanted to give him another chance, so I called him, and he came out to Palm Springs to help us. So the three of us were given the assignment to finish the car in absolute record time. We worked twenty hours a day. Tom Kellogg was making beautiful sketches. I made sketches, and Bob Andrews worked on the 1/8th scale clay model. In order to save time, we made a half a clay model mounted on a piece of mirror, so when you looked at it, it looked like a full size.

Q What was the reason for the haste?

A The board meeting was set. At the board meeting, it was to be decided whether Studebaker goes out of the automobile business at all or stays in it. So, on March 9, Raymond Loewy was given the assignment to design the hot automobile by Egbert. On March 19, 1961, works starts in Palm Springs. By this time, I had Bob Andrews and Tom Kellogg there. On March 27, Loewy took the clay model--the half clay model with the mirror--to South Bend with the various drawings for approval. What was seen, they liked. On April 2. Egbert flew his company plane into Palm

Springs, looked at what we did and gave us the go-ahead signal. On April 4, 1961, I flew to South Bend after I had air-mailed the dimensions of the car, and they built a wooden buck. By the time I arrived, on the 4th of April, clay was already on the wooden buck to start the full-size clay. On April 27, 1961, the presentation of the full-size, finished clay to the Board of Directors which was received with an ovation.

Q I can imagine. What was the inspiration in terms of styling?

A The inspiration was a combination of being impressed by the Jaguar and by a late Lincoln model. The Lincoln had just come out with two fins on their fenders with a very simple grille which Loewy loved. So a combination of the two and a very full study of the C pillar led to the design of the Avanti. There's one unsung hero in the Avanti story, and I never see his name. His name is Otis Romine--a body engineer on the engineering staff of Studebaker. He was given the assignment to take the dimensions and the plaster casts of our full-size clay to the Ashtabula, Ohio, fiberglass company to supervise the production of the first prototype. He had to make decisions which were unbelieveable, because the whole body was put together out of thirty-two parts/pieces that have to match and fit, and he did it all. He worked twenty-four hours a day. I never saw his name--never heard that he was given any credit. I'll give him his credit right here. I loved him dearly. I still love him. He's now active in Notre Dame or the University of Indiana and a very learned man and a wonderful guy. One thing that ruled the hopes to have the Avanti out in record time was an unforeseen event. In a production of a metal car, when the doors don't fit, you

take a 2 x 4 while the doors open and bend the doors until they fit. You can not do this in fiberglass, so when the bodies arrived, painted and ready, the doors were not installed. It took dozens and dozens of doors to find one that fits the cars. Each car was a little bit different. There was a little twist here, a little twist there, so all the doors had to be custom fitted.

Q Who's idea was it to have fiberglass bodies?

A The fiberglass use was for strictly economic reasons: the dies are so much less expensive. And the Ashtabula plant had had much experience with the fiberglass Corvette which were then in production for General Motors.

Q About the fiberglass?

A The fiberglass--the finish on it was beautiful, and the bodies were beautiful. The reception of the car seemed to be very good, but people who had ordered the car with the advanced notices, lost patience and went to other cars. They bought Jaguars and cars that were readily available. By the time that the Avanti was ready, they really had to go after sales. The production rate was very low, and it didn't take that long. The cars produced were readily sold, but the management lost patience. They decided to stop it all, and by 1963, all production ended. It was heartbreaking.

Q I don't want to leave the Avanti yet, but I do want go back, chronologically, and have you tell us, in some detail, about the Hawks of the early 'Fifities--how they were conceived and their design.

A The Hawk series actually started with the 1953 Sports Coupe. The Sports Coupe II has always, with the Studebaker plan, had many problems.

It leaked when it was first issued, and it was written up immediately in the technical journals as the leaking Studebaker. At that time, I don't know who was president. The Hawk series at Studebaker was an outgrowth of the '53 Sports Coupe. The Sports Coupe was extremely successful, and the first facelift in '54 was very successful. Then came the end of Loewy's contract and the possible merger of Packard with Studebaker. Loewy was no longer in charge. A a designer, Brooks Stevens from Milwaukee, was retained, and he was given the assignment to create the Hawk series. At that time Ford came out with the Thunderbird, and which was quite good looking. Brooks Stevens copied the Thunderbird design almost to the last detail, and the Hawk series was created. He straightened out our curved fenders--Brooks Stevens seems to work only with straight edges. Everything is straight line with him, and the Hawk and the Golden Hawk were the outgrowth of Brooks Stevens' contribution to the Studebaker design based on the '53 Sports Coupe.

Q A number of designers have passed by your desk over the years. Which among them stands out as solid, creative people?

A Many designers came out of the studio in South Bend and in New York connected with automotive design. I must say Virgil Exner was the greatest. Bob Bourke is a very fine designer. Bob Koto is a very fine designer. Bob Doehler is a fine designer. But if you ask me today who was the outstanding designer, I must say without hesitation that Tom Kellogg is the greatest. He has a design feel that is unequaled by anybody, and it was amazing to see him right out of school to be an accomplished designer. His sketches are collectors items. He is unbelieveable. It's very funny that I should mention his name. He called

me last week. We became very close friends. After he left Loewy, he worked for himself for quite awhile, and then he was hired by Gould Associates in California where he became Vice-President. He was responsible for all the great designs for their packaging department. They were also retained by one of the most famous automobile manufacturers in the world to give an American input. I'm not at liberty to say which one Tom Kellogg handled. As of two months ago, he has left Gould and has opened his own design office. I wish him the greatest luck. To come back to the Studebaker period, I will outline the dates of the various presidents. In 1938, when Loewy was retained, Mr. Vance and Mr. Hoffman were presidents of Studebaker. Their presidency ran to 1955. In 1955-1956, Mr. Nance was president. He came to Studebaker from Packard. From '56 to '61, Harold Churchill was president, and from '61 to '64, Sherwood Egbert was made president. Parallel to this, let me quickly outline the Loewy period at Studebaker. Loewy's styling effort went from 1938 to 1955. From '55 to '56, Bill Schmidt, who came to Studebaker from Packard, ran the studio. And from '56 to '59, Duncan McCrae, also from the Packard organization, ran the styling division. In '61, one of the employees, Randy Faurot, became the chief designer, and he lasted almost to the end in '64. In '61, Raymond Loewy and Brooks Stevens were asked by Sherwood Egbert to come up with new designs and create whatever models needed to be done in record time. Loewy's assignment, was first to look at a facelift of a Lark while Stevens got the assignment to create a new, small station wagon. Loewy's assignment wound up with the Avanti first and then a bread and butter Avanti which never came to life. It wound up as a running prototype which I will describe later.

Q What was your input into those great days of the early Fifties?

A I was the go-between man again between the powerful head of our studio, Bob Bourke, and Loewy who not always agreed with Bob even though Bob was an outstanding designer. Loewy never had the guts to tell him outright, "I don't like it. What else have you?" I always had to go take photographs, enlarge them, and retouch them, and Loewy would go back and say, "This is what I want," so I was no competition for the big studio that had a dozen designers out there, and I kept away from it. I had plenty of other jobs to handle at the Loewy office. My real contribution started with the Avanti.

Q Tell us about that in some detail.

A The Avanti story is a chapter all its own. I gave you the dates when in '61 we got the assignment, to the day when the finished clay model was shown to the Board of Directors. I mentioned that from that day on, Otis Romine deserves a hand from everybody for his accomplishment. The full-size clay model was done so accurately that it was good enough to make plaster casts from it which, in turn, were used for the first fiberglass prototypes. While we were working on the full-size clay, I gave the assignment to Bob Doehler to work on the establishment and the workout of the interior. Various sketches were made with that approach, and, finally, Loewy agreed to one design, and Doehler took that and translated that into correct dimensions which is not easy. As the buck--as we call it--was created....

Q This is sort of a skeleton of the body?

A Right. The roofline was there, and the dashboard was there, the steering wheel is there, and the seat was there. You have to be able to

sit down in it, you have to describe whether you want your elbows sticking up as you sit or whether you want it to parallel to the ground or which way it goes. Egbert, who was an ex-Marine at 6'6", was very interested in the whole Avanti project and came every night to sit with us and talk to us and bring us hamburgers as we were working twenty hours a day. He wanted to sit in the buck and not touch the roof with his head. So our seat, which was a copy that Bob Doehler brought in from an Alfa-Romeo seat. He sat in it, and he touched the roof. "I want it lower, I want it lower," he would say. We could not and didn't want to change the contour of the Avanti--the roof height. So you almost sit on the floor with the seat that Egbert wanted. But, that's the way it wound up. Finally, the buck was approved, and the seats were detailed. The one thing that Lowey wanted very much as a new approach to automotive design, was to have controls for headlights and heater above the windshield very much like airplane [cockpit] design. It looked very handsome, but it created untold problems. The first cars that were assembled--and the inside mouldings were attached--all shorted the wiring that went into the head panels. Until that was solved, we lost more and more time. Finally, the first car was delivered to South Bend. It was painted in metallic blue.

Q Where was it being assembled?

A The body was assembled and painted in Ashtabula and trucked in to South Bend in the old plant where they are still making the Avanti today. The car was put in our studio showroom, and Loewy and Egbert came to view the first Avanti. Loewy beamed, and Egbert partially beamed. He loved the automobile, and he sat in it beautifully. Gene

Hardig was there--the chief engineer and a dear friend. Egbert, don't forget, came from California where they are all car nuts, and the front end has to be low and the rear end has to be high. He looked at the car from the side and said, "It should be more rakish." Loewy asked, "What do you mean? What's rakish?" Egbert explained he wants the front end lower and the rear higher. This was shortly before lunch on that day. Loewy came to me and said, "John, fix it up," and they went to lunch. The moment they walked out, we jacked the car up, we took the U bolts off the rear leaf springs, we took steel blocks an inch and a half high and put them between the rear axle and the leaves and got longer U bolts from engineering and put it back together. They come back from lunch, and Egbert looked at it and said, "What did you do?" I said, "I fixed it." The first production run of the Avanti was with a steel block between the springs and the rear axle, and which was terrible because the amount of play in the springs was reduced to almost nothing. It bottomed out every time you hit a bump, so engineering fixed it. It took quite awhile, but this was the story of the first Avanti. Then came the big discussion of the name. At this time, we felt that the name of the car would be Pierce-Arrow.

Q Really?

A Yes. Pierce-Arrow was bought by Studebaker.

Q They bought the name?

A They bought the name, and in a meeting where I was not present, it was decided to not use the name. There was a competition of names, and everybody had to write down various names, and somehow the word Avanti came up. It was suggested by Egbert. His very close friend--a school

teacher whom he had brought into the plant named Lombardi--must have suggested the name. So "Avanti," meaning "forward," was accepted. Loewy said, "I will do the trademark myself." He designed the word Avanti all by himself. It was refined a bit by our packaging and corporate identity experts, but the logo, the way it's spelled and the way it's written with a little L through it, is Raymond Loewy, and nobody else gets the credit. While we're on Avanti, I must mention that a lot of people took some responsibilty and credit for the Avanti design. I really shouldn't name names, but here are two: a very nice young man, whom I recently met at a design conference in Washington after many years, Doug Kelly, who was running the Loewy office in Paris for a short time before he came here to the United States. He right now runs his own design firm in London. He came to New York first and then went on to Washington to attend the design conference. While he was here in New York, he addressed the IDSA--the Industrial Design Society of America. I saw in the program he was going to talk about his contribution to the Avanti design. I never saw any contribution of Doug Kelly's for the Avanti design. The closest he would come would be as follows: while Doug Kelly was head of the Loewy office in Paris, there was an American designer whom Loewy had sent over to the Paris office with his wife and kids by the name of Ed Levy. Ed Levy used to work for General Motors, and he was--and still is--a very fine designer. Ed Levy was asked to make some blue sky sketches which we found on the windows in our Palm Springs house when we got there which had nothing to do with the Avanti design. They were very nice sketches, but nothing we or Loewy wanted. That seemed to be Doug Kelly's contribution to the Avanti design.

Q There are other claimants?

A Another claimant is another dear friend of mine who is currently the dean of the industrial design group at Pratt Institute--Joseph Parriott. Joseph talked to me the other day and asked me, didn't I remember what he did on the Avanti? And, even though I'm 74 years old, my memory is still quite good. I do not recall a thing that Joseph Parriott did for the Avanti. Another sample for taking credit for the Avanti design was somebody who was the model maker for AMT--that's the outfit that does the small, plastic car models. They made a beautiful model of the Avanti, which came out with square headlights, and the model maker takes credit for having added the square headlights to the Avanti. In response, I must say I owned one of the first Avantis off the line, which I drove proudly to New York with missing oil rings, using five gallons of oil on the way. The car was parked in front of my house here in Roslyn, and I invited Tom Kellogg and Ed Levy to come out and spend the day with me. We were then given the assignment by Loewy to come up with a facelift for the following year. Since we were not allowed to touch the body in any way, the only thing left to do was to alter the headlights, and, possibly, play around with the grille. The car first came with a big, gaping hole on the bottom. We added a stainless steel wire grille to it to protect the radiator from flying rocks, and we re-designed the headlights. By the way, we did it--we covered the existing headlights with paper, colored them the same color of the body, and with charcoal and crayons we designed new headlights--square headlights--and photographed it. You could not see that it was a fake. These photographs were shown to Loewy and Egbert and were

promptly accepted. So, that was the birth of the square headlights. Mr. Loewy had personally played around with rectangular headlights with some of the private cars he designed--or we designed for him--and which were built in Europe where the rectangular headlights were approved and permitted long before in the United States. We had them on one of Mr. Loewy's private BMW, which had a specially-designed body, and they were shown all around, even to Mr. Hardig--the Studebaker engineer--who took it up with Washington to see whether we could get permission to use rectangular headlights. It was refused. We used them and never had any trouble. My knowledge of all these questions--who did what on the Avanti--comes up all the time to this day, because I am active in all the Avanti owners' associations. There's one in California, in Maine, and there's one here in New York. They all have publications which I get. I read about myself, what I did and I didn't do, and it's really very funny. Sometimes it gets to a point where I feel obliged to answer and set things straight. I've been asked to make a tape for the Maine section of the Avanti Owners' Association. They wanted my version of the Avanti story, and I gladly gave it to them for publication. I, undoubtedly, will receive many letters.

Studebaker's success story slowly, but surely, fell asleep. People seem to realize that every new car that came out was a facelift upon a facelift, upon a facelift. In the meantime, General Motors, Ford and Chrysler seemed to run circles around Studebaker. price-wise and manufacturing-wise. The Hawk series was perceived to be a copy of the Thunderbird, and people didn't want to be laughed at. People who bought the car loved it. It was all based on an existing chassis, existing

engines, existing this, existing that. Just by replacing a few body panels, these cars were created, and you can live that way only so long before the whole card house collapses. That's what happened.

Q So, your impression is that that the company was slowly collapsing from within?

A They absolutely died of old age. Their facilities were so old-fashioned in South Bend between their five or six plants, between trucking this to there, and with labor problems, they just couldn't make it. It was impossible.

Q Someone decided that they needed a master stroke to try to rescue them from oblivion...?

A Right. They hired this young, energetic engineer from Marine Outboard and brought him to South Bend and hoped that he would rescue the company--Sherwood Egbert. But we heard later on that even before he got there, Studebaker's fate had been settled, and they had decided to go out of the automobile business.

Q The Board had decided this?

A Yes.

Q Even before Egbert came?

A Even before he got there.

Q He did not know this?

A He didn't know this, no, and he really put a tremendous effort into it. He rehired Raymond Loewy to evaluate what Randy Faurot had done on the facelift for the Lark, and started on the creation of the eye-catching automobile. Again, they made limitations--an old engine and old frame, but I got the assignment from Loewy, as one of the oldest

and probably most reliable and loyal employees, to head the whole project. I was very unhappy with the very narrow and very long chassis. At this time, everybody else came out with cars that were close to ten inches wider than ours. We were stuck with a very narrow, long chassis. As I describe my contribution, I will wander from left to right and from top to bottom. As we finished the full-size clay, about eleven inches of the old chassis stuck out in the back, and I was supposed to work very closely with engineering, and they all were my very close friends--Gene Hardig and Metz--one of the engineers. So, we worked very closely together, and I said, "I cannot stand this chassis sticking out, because I will not run my bumper all the way back. That makes the car twelve inches longer. Let's cut it off." "You can't do it." So, I didn't ask anybody. We cut it off. We welded on a tubular frame member to stiffen the chassis, and, to this day, nobody said a word about it. I got a big writeup in one of the magazines about my guts to have shortened it, because I just didn't ask anybody. I just did it. The chassis was reduced in length, and it worked beautifully. My special contribution? I must state one thing here. The scale model that Loewy took first to South Bend was brought back, and we finished it in Palm Springs. That was supposed to be the guiding design for the full-size clay. The two of them have absolutely nothing in common. If you can see one line on the small model that reappears on the full-size clay, I'll eat my hat. This was just really to appease Egbert--make everybody happy--and when we worked on the full-size clay, that's when the car was designed. My relationship with Mr. Egbert was unbelieveably good. This very busy executive told me, "John, anytime you need anything, I am

always ready for you to stop any conference, any meeting--you come first," and thank God I didn't have to do that very often. In addition to Mr. Egbert, he had a delightful secretary with whom I still correspond. Her name is Martha Rich Fleener who lives in California. Martha was a godsend. Whenever I needed something--all calls went through her--everything was accomplished. At one time, Loewy mentioned to me, "John, we get too little money for this work." I said, "All right, I'll ask for a little more." I would talk to Mr. Egbert, and I said, "We're really putting in too much time for the amount you're paying the company." Without qualm, a substantial raise was granted.

Q What was the annual retainer?

A Their retainer was $75,000 plus bonuses. It was a lot of money. Mr. Loewy's relationship to all the presidents and to the engineering staff with whom we worked very closely, couldn't have been better. He [was] a very charming Frenchman with a very charming French accent and very observant when he finds out somebody likes something. He would send a present, write a note, congratulate somebody for this, and he got along with everybody beautifully. I cannot recall that we ever had any friction in South Bend with management or with the engineering staff. With the design staff, yes. When we came back in 1961, and we found Randy Faurot in charge of the design department and Brooks Stevens who--Loewy did not like Brooks at all. I was, again, the man in the middle. I was the peacemaker. I had to get along with everybody. I had to work with Randy because I could not avoid Randy. He was there. I used two of Randy's men--Bob Doehler and Ted Pietsch, who are good designers and nice guys, so I had absolutely nothing against them. I

even got along with Brooks Stevens. If Loewy knew now that I flew to Indianapolis from South Bend in Brooks Stevens' private plane.... He invited me to come for the introduction of the Avanti. We drove 115 miles an hour around the racetrack after Andy Granatelli drove around 150 miles an hour and apologized later that he wouldn't want to drive any faster. By the way, Andy Granatelli and his company--STP--was bought by Studebaker, the the time the Avanti was being finished. One of the reasons was it seemed to be a very good investment. Number two, they wanted very badly to get Granatelli to promote the Avanti, which he did very capably. The record which, to this day, is unbroken. With a production car, he drove 199.9 miles an hour in Salt Lake City with a car prepared by him with a standard engine. It was a super-charged R2 engine, and the standing mile is still unbroken. So the Granatelli's contribution to the Avanti was remarkable.

Q Was your position during this period an overall, senior design coordinator?

A Yes. I was the super-chief. Everything had to go through me. Loewy would tell me, and I told them whatever had to be done. I had to work with everybody. I was available, and I got very sick over it. But it was an unbelieveable performance by everybody involved to get this job finished in time. The record will never be broken. It's impossible. Bob Doehler did a magnificent job finishing the interior. I should mention that one of the things that Loewy and Egbert insisted on was to create a very safe automobile. He wanted every surface padded in the car. He wanted--he was not sure of the durability of fiberglass--to build in a roll bar in the automobile which had never been done, so

in every Avanti from then till today, a roll bar is included in the roof--padded and not visible--but it makes you feel pretty good that it's there. A stunt man was hired from Hollywood trying to roll the car to see what happens. He tried it a half a dozen times to roll the car and couldn't. Why, I don't know, but he drove like a mad man and yanked the steering wheel to try to roll the car.

Q It wouldn't roll?

A It wouldn't, and it couldn't. The center of gravity was very low, and the engine was very heavy and would not move. The engine used in the cars an old Studebaker V-8, and it really should not be called a Studebaker V-8. It's a Cadillac engine which was copied to the last detail, and over-designed, and so it lent itself easily for additional power. In other words, the super-charger and blowing out the cylinders was easily done to up the horsepower and the performance.

Q Was this Mr. Hardig's contribution?

A Yeah. Gene Hardig has been the Studebaker engineer. A lovely man, and a pleasure to work with. Very, very competent, yes, very competent, and suffering as much as anybody else seeing what was happening with the company. He couldn't do a thing about it.

Q Was it a situation where you had something here that would have bettered the firm's profit margin, but you could tell from the internal situation that it wasn't going to work?

A We didn't know that. We found out later that the decision had been made to go out of the automobile business. Egbert didn't know, because right after the introduction of the Avanti and the glowing reports in all the magazines and the performance of the car by

Granatelli, he gave us the assignment to come up with the bread and butter version of the Avanti. At that time, which was in '62, Tom Kellogg came to New York with Bob Andrews, and the three of us again set down to design new versions of the regular automobile based on the Avanti design. We made two plaster models, beautifully finished, and I photographed it. We invited Egbert to come to New York, and we got a room with a white wall large enough to project the slides full size so Egbert could see what the car looked like. He said, "Go!" So the moment he said go, I got the jitters because I knew damned well I had to do it.

Q Why was that?

A The moment he told us to go ahead, we investigated some body builders in Europe. Loewy didn't want to do it here in the United States. He called one or two, and they were all busy. They couldn't handle us, so he called an Italian builder--the one had built one of his cars. They couldn't handle us, and then he went to Pichon Parat near Paris--80 miles south of Paris in Sens. He called them. Yes, they could do it. So we shipped two chassis to Sens with V-8's. I got the assignment, "Take the plaster model and go build it." So I got on the plane and went to the Paris office first, and then on to Sens to meet Mr. Pichon, and I had the model. He said, "Where are we to build this car?" and the chassis were on the way. He said, "I can't build a car from this." I said, "What do you want me to do?" He said, "I need more detail in this." I spoke French very well from my school days, and I had go back to Paris with my plaster model. I had to go to the Loewy office and develop sections every two inches of the automobile. I developed them in small scale and blew it up photostatically to full size.

Then I came back with a roll of photostats to Sens. We went into a lumber yard and bought sheets and sheets of plywood and pasted the contours to the plywood then cut out the plywood to the contours, mounted the contour panels onto 2 x 4's. As you mounted them every 2 inches, you could see the contour of the car. So after that was done--which took quite a few days--I found I had a deadline. The car had to be in South Bend by April '63. Egbert was very sick. He had developed cancer of the liver. He had turned yellow. I really wanted to do everything to get the car there before it was too late. And when I saw Pichon Parat working in an old 14th century courtyard without a cement platform, I thought it was impossible. He had helpers who hammered out little pieces of steel on a wood stump. He had two wood stumps--one convex and one concave--and he would hammer 12 x 12 pieces of steel until they fitted onto the wood panels. This is the way we built the car--piece by piece was hammered out and spot welded. Once I said, "Fine," they would weld the whole thing and grind it down. One side of the car was a two-door, the other side was a four-door. That's the way it's done, because it's the same roof contour.

So the car was built with many, many interruptions and difficulties. One day the car was half finished. A supplier of undercoating showed up in Sens, and he said he had heard that some futuristic cars were being built there. He wanted to supply the undercoating for free, and I agreed, "Okay, if you want to, but we have no jacks to jack the car up," and there was no well to get underneath. "If you want to crawl under there to do it, be my guest." So he came, and he sprayed the black stuff under the car which was fine. Two days after he was

gone, we had to make an addition to the body, and we needed the blowtorch. We used the blowtorch, and the whole car was on fire. No fire extinguishers, nothing, and I thought the whole damned place was going to burn down. He had two little helpers that were school kids. They had to run to a brook with pails to get water, and they put it out. We didn't lose it. So that was one hardship.

Another one was I did all the wiring of the car from the engine to the stoplights, directional lights and the headlights. I did everything. One of the last things we did to the car was put the sill underneath the door panel. One of the guys comes with a chrome-plated panel to put it down with two screws--right through my wiring. The wiring was all done in gray wiring--they're not color-coded. So he burned out my wiring, and it took hours and hours to relocate and reattach the wiring. Finally, the car was finished. I had stolen many engineering details from French automobiles. I admire the French automobiles. Citroen with their panels would take two big bolts, it'd take a whole fender off. The doors you could put in and out in ten seconds flat. The seats--I stole whatever I could steal in order to get finished sooner and improve what we had. Finally, the car was finished. I had to cut the fan blades, because I lowered the hood to a point where it looked good, and the V-8's needed a lot of cooling which we didn't get, so you couldn't drive the car very far without overheating. We had no well to get underneath, so the first time I could drive the car was from where we built it out into the courtyard. Which I did. We got the engine started, but I heard the driveshaft rub against the tunnel something fierce, so we had to do something. So I said, "Where is

someplace where we could drive the car onto a well so we could go in and hammer the tunnel out?" He finally found one. This is a whole story in itself. I drove this car through the sleepy little town of Sens. This looked like a spaceship, and everybody came running asking, "What is this?" We finally drove it over the well, and Pichon went down, hammered the tunnel out, and then we had to try that to see if it wouldn't rub. We could drive it back to his yard without overheating, and it drove quite well.

Next day, the big truck would come to pick it up to put it on the France to take it over. Everything was on schedule. The truck came, and if you ever saw a modern French truck, the truck bed is above the wheels. Now he would have to cut it out to have the truck bed this low. There it's above the wheels. My car sits there, and the truck is this high. I said, "How are you going to get the car up there? Do you have ramps?" No, he doesn't have ramps. So the problem is to get the car onto this high truck bed. I said, "Now what do we do?" Oh, he had a brilliant idea--the railroad station. They have a platform. We'll back up the truck against it, and we drive the car up there. So nobody wanted to drive the car but me. So we wound up at the railroad station with very little gas in the car--just enough. The truck backed up, and they had to build a little platform. It was about a foot difference which we did with planks and bricks. I'm half way up into the truck, and the motor stalls. I'm out of gas, and it was too heavy to have to push it up--impossible. So my friend Pichon had a moped like I do--the Solex. He had to get gas to put in the car. I started the engine and put it back on the truck. Finally we got the car to Le Harve, and it was hoisted onto the "France."

The car came over here, and it had to be covered because it was super-secret. Loewy was expecting me, and Ed Levy, who I brought back from our Paris Loewy office. The car was there covered to be trucked to South Bend. I flew out to South Bend, and the truck came as I arrived. They drove all night long to get there, and the car was delivered to the proving grounds and unveiled. The Studebaker mansion is at the proving ground, and Egbert lived there. Egbert appeared in a bathrobe looking very ill at the window. He saw it and cried like a baby. Loewy was there, and Egbert came down, barely able to walk, and sat in my car. I drove him once around the test track keeping my fingers crossed that it wouldn't overheat because of the cut-down fan blades. But we made it. Egbert kissed me, and, shortly thereafter, died. It's a very sad story, but I made it. The car was there, and that was the end of my work with Studebaker. I stayed with Loewy another half year. I was involved in something that I have to describe at length, and which I didn't enjoy too much. I resigned on July 9, 1963, to join a big toy company which was owned by my personal best friend and stayed there until my retirement.

Q Why did you leave?

A The reason I left Loewy is a story in itself. After Studebaker died, Loewy wanted to keep me and a lot of other people busy. He had an idea. He wanted to become the designer to the government, and he approached Mary Reinhardt Lasker, whom I mentioned earlier.

Q I wanted to ask you about Mrs. Lasker. What was the attraction? What was the relationship between Mary Reinhardt Lasker and Raymond Loewy?

A It's strictly social. They were friends, and she admired him as a designer. Loewy was very ambitious to make "Who's Who," and she was in "Who's Who." He was a very ambitious man, and he wined and dined her, and she was responsible for our big accounts. She was very active in Democratic circles, and she was in and out in Washington and knew Kennedy very well, so she approached John F. Kennedy's sidekick Mr. Billings.

Q Very close to John Kennedy.

A Right. Billings. She approached him to get his opinion about what he thinks of her approach, and he liked it. She came back and said, "He likes it, and we should try it." So I got the assignment. How do you sell your services as the designer to the government? I was sent around the United States with my Leica and clearance was up to top secret to photograph every government installation--Air Force, Navy, National Guard, Social Security, weather stations, postal department--you name it. I photographed everything I did not like, and from every angle. That took me a few weeks. I came back with a thousand photographs which I developed and printed and showed it to Loewy. We went over this, and had him select the ones he agreed were lousy. Amongst them were the Navy ship where the lettering was cockeyed and bad: airplanes where the markings are very bad, postal stamps which were terrible; postal forms which were terrible, and so on. Our approach was a presentation book with one side of the before and the next side of the after--what it could look like. Again, I had the assignment to create this big book which took forever. I had to do a lot of retouching.

We called Mary Reinhardt Lasker to look at the book. She loved

it, and she called Billings at the White House and a date was set. The date finally came, and we were to see the President--John F. Kennedy--for two minutes and 47 seconds. I have to add that the President was very well informed and prepared for this meeting. His friend had told him about who Loewy was and what he could do. We were ushered into the oval office, received like an old friend. He was that friendly. He went through the book page by page, closed it, looked us full in the face and said, "I love it, but all I can do for you is to open some doors. So anytime you need me, call me. Nice meeting you," and out we went.

So we flew back on the shuttle and called Mary Lasker and invited her for a champagne party, and it was unbelieveable. Then we had to decide who's going to make the presentations and to whom. We had another fellow involved--Joseph Lovelace--who was very helpful and a very good writer. We drew lots out of a hat as to who is going to make a presentation to whom. We have this big book, and we have the President's okay to proceed. Loewy made presentations, Lovelace made some, and I made some. I drew one which I must describe in detail. I drew the Postal Department--one of the most important--and I got a date set for a presentation in Washington. I wore my dark suit, white shirt and dark tie--this is the official uniform--and arrived in Washington and was announced in to the Postmaster General. The standard procedure is that the government man who receives you is surrounded by his assistants. As you enter the office, they get up and walk in front of their desk and welcome you and ask you to sit down, then they go back to their desks, sit down and make you feel at ease. I had done this a few

times, so I knew what to expect. The door opened, and I was announced. I see a man in the background with his feet on his desk reading a newspaper, and I was so shocked I did not know quite what to do. I approached the desk, and when I was about five feet away from the desk, the newspaper came down, and an old friend said, "Hello, John, how are you?" It was the public relations officer of Studebaker who had gotten a political assignment as Assistant Postmaster General. He received me, and we had a very successful meeting, needless to say. I asked, "Where's the Postmaster General." He was out of town, and his name was O'Day. As we talked, I saw on the desk a button like a political campaign button and on it was a little blue man with a red face running, and it said, "ZIP." I stared at it, and I said, "Isn't that ugly?" He said, "Do you know what that stands for?" I said, "No." He told me it was Zone Improvement Project or Program. At this time the postal department was in the red by millions, and they had applied for help from the government. "Do you want to see the rest of the ZIP campaign?" I said, "Sure." So he opened the drawer and out came 8x10 photographs with various posters and stuff for the ZIP campaign, and it was the ugliest thing you ever saw. By the time I left--and I bade him farewell--he had given me the button and the photographs. I came back to New York and reported to Loewy what had happened, and he was delighted, you know, that we made out so well. I said, "By the way, here is a button." He looked at it and said, "Isn't that ugly," exactly what I had said.

A few weeks later, when we had to go back to Washington for a meeting at the Pentagon, we stopped at the White House first, and we were ushered into the President's office for a few minutes. We had

interrupted a very important meeting, and Loewy asked to be announced by the President to the people in the Pentagon so we would have an easy entry. On our way out, Loewy turned around and said, "Oh, by the way, Mr. President, have you seen this?" and he pulls out my button and puts it on the presidential desk in the Oval Office. The President looks at it and said, "Isn't this ugly." This made three of us, and Loewy explained in his charming French accent that the Postal Department was in the red, and they're wasting their money with this ugly campaign. The campaign could be very handsome and much better. The President interrupted everything, got on the telephone and said, "Get me O'Day." The secretary must have answered, "Mr. O'Day is out of town." He said--the only time I heard the President use this language--"I don't give a shit. I want O'Day." So O'Day must have called him back after we left.

Q He may well have been a political appointee of Mr. Kennedy.

A He was, and the following day Mr. O'Day left government employment. So I am really partically responsible for his departure, and little does he know that I didn't mean to get him fired. But the work for the government, which turned out to be quite successful for Loewy, was not quite what I had figured my design future should be. I hated to wear dark suits and white shirts and click heels. It just didn't sit right. My friend, Loewy--I adored him, and we got along beautifully. But promised more than I could fulfill for the Postal Department. After my meeting, he said he could save them millions of dollars by painting the postal boxes and putting a decal on them. All the postal boxes are diecast with knobs. You cannot put a decal on it. It's impossible. He made promises that I couldn't keep because I always got stuck with doing the job.

In July my personal best friend called and asked what I do for lunch. I said, "Nothing." I knew what the call was about. He is the owner of one of the large toy companies for whom I had worked freelance over the years. He asked if I was ready to make a change, and I accepted immediately. I resigned from Loewy. Loewy flew back from Europe to try to talk me out of it. I said, "No, I think it's better that I leave," and we parted very good friends. He admired me for my honesty and for my 25 years with him. He thanked me. It later turned out that I did the right thing.

To finish the automotive side of my story, I will try to describe Raymond Loewy's forte in automotive styling. He had the advantage over large styling departments like General Motors--with 150 or 200 designers--or the Ford Styling Division or Chyrsler's, that he could go out as a wealthy man and build his dream car. He would design it partially himself, partially with our help, and have it built in Europe and finished to the last degree. Then he would have a perfect public relations person publish the description of this automobile at length in the automotive magazines and all other newspapers. Sometimes his own creations were really sensational. I'm mentioning one car especially. There was an automobile show in New York. It must have been '52/'53. BMW came out with a Model 507 which never went into production. They built just a dozen of them in aluminum bodies. It was shown here in New York in pure white and demonstrated by the most beautiful Indian girl I have ever seen in my life. This car was so gorgeous that a Dallas millionaire paid cash for the car. I think it was three or four times what it was worth. But he had to have the car. This car got rave

reviews. Loewy, being an ambitious and jealous man, said, "I can do better." This car--the 507--was designed by Al [Alfred] Goertz. Al Goertz is of German nobility. His real name is Karl Albrect von Goertz, and he comes from the royal German family. He came over before Hitler because they had to get out. He was a designer. He looked for employment, and he came to the Loewy office, and Loewy hired him. Since Al did not speak any English and I spoke German, I was asked to take him under my wing. I befriended him. We became very close friends. Al worked in New York for awhile and then asked to be transferred to South Bend since he was interested in cars and had done automotive design in Germany. He stayed in South Bend for awhile, contributed a lot to our design staff, and then quit to open his own office. Being well known all over the world and being a count, he got a lot of beautiful accounts immediately, among which was the design of the BMW. He went to Germany and designed the 507 BMW which, to my mind, is still one of the most beautiful cars ever done--gorgeous. Our friend Loewy got so jealous over this car designed by Al Goertz that he had to prove himself to do him one better.

But as he was mad at Al Goertz for being so successful and didn't want to talk to him, Loewy asked me if I could call Al Goertz to get a chassis of the 507. So I called Al, and he said, "I really shouldn't do it, but for you John, I will," and a chassis was sent to Pichon Parat--the same people who later on were to build our bread and butter Avanti. The chassis of the 507 sent there while the design work had started in New York. By this time, Bob Andrews, who had left Studebaker and come to New York and the Loewy office, worked on a small clay model for the

507 BMW. Before it was completed, he had one of his attacks and took one of the two shaping tools for clay, stuck it into the clay model and wrote on a piece of paper underneath, "I quit," and was out. We finished the clay, and it was sent to Pichon Parat, and from the clay--I was never then in Paris to supervise this--they built the car for Raymond Loewy, and it turned out to be the most beautiful car ever. It was even outshining Al Goertz' approach, and it was beautiful. The only thing that was wrong with it--I drove it more than Lowey did--was that I had to rewire the entire car. I had it home with me more than Loewy ever had it. Finally, after I fixed it all up, Loewy went to his beautiful home in Palm Springs and wanted the car in California. Of course, my approach was put it on the railroad or on a truck and send it. He said, being a Frenchman, "You drive it out." We had an engineer at the Loewy office--I forget his name--who said, "I'll drive it out." The car never made it to California. It burned up somewhere en route and was never seen again.

Q It was accidental?

A The wiring or something overheated, or here we didn't put oil in here or something. The car was in perfect shape when it left here--it checked by BMW. The car never made it to California, and that was the end of that one.

There was another car which was to come back on Loewy's taste in automobiles. He had what in German translates as "It's the feeling on the tip of your fingers." The man had the feel what is going to be good and successful. He could look at a drawing and say what's wrong with it, and he was absolutely sensational. In addition to this, he was a

very fine salesman. He always went to each presentation beautifully prepared, and his taste was great for things he sold. For his personal stuff, I don't admire his taste so much the way he dressed, the way he decorated his apartments. They were overdone. He was a real showman.

I want to talk about the motorcycle. When the war broke out, and you couldn't buy new cars, we bought the old Lincoln in '41 and had it rebuilt by Durham in Philadephia, and it turned out beautifully. Loewy didn't want to drive that car too much because he knew he couldn't buy a new one soon. As a youngster he said he used to ride motorcyles like I do, and one day on a weekend--we were working 20 hours a day at the office--he came into the office with a cap on, with a scarf around his neck, with knickers and announced that he just had bought a motorcycle--a big Harley Davidson. I got up from my desk and started walking out, and he said, "John, where are you going?" I said, "Mr. Loewy, I'm quitting." "Why?" I said, "You're not going to live long. Since you're not going to live long, I will look for another job." He said, "No, don't worry. I've been riding motorcycles all my life." A week later or so we were invited to his beautiful estate in Sands Pointe on Long Island, and there stood the motorcycle. Since I'm an old motorcycle fan and rider, and I raced motorcycles in France as a youngster, I took the motorcycle without asking any questions, started it and rode around, and he looked at me, "John, I didn't know you could ride a motorcycle." I said, "Mr. Loewy, I've been riding them for a long time." I said, "I just hope that you're good and careful with this motorcycle." And shortly thereafter the party was over--went home--and Loewy and A. Baker Barnhart, his assistant....

Q Was this the legendary Barney?

A Yes. We were there, and he said, "Barney, you want to go for a ride? Let's go." Well, they went for a ride, and they wound up in a ditch, and both were quite hurt. They rushed Loewy and Barney to the hospital and gave them each a tetanus shot. He forgot to tell them that he had had a tetanus shot, and he swelled up like an elephant. This man was in such agony for so long. I made fun of him which I shouldn't have, and I said, "You shouldn't do these things." I don't think he rode a motorcycle after that. So that's the famous motorcycle story.

Q Where would you place Raymond Loewy in the pantheon of design history? How would you rate him?

A Number one.

Q Number one. Because of the breadth of his accomplishments?

A Yes. Absolutely number one. Henry Dreyfuss I liked very much, personally. I never had too much respect for any other great designers. I liked them all, but, mostly, the people who accomplished something. Henry Dreyfuss had the telephone company, and he had bulldozer company, and he had steady accounts, and he did it year, after year, after year, after year. He updated his designs, which were very sound and very beautiful, but we had accounts from lipstick to locomotives. Name it, and we did it. We did Lord & Taylor, which was really the first suburban department store in the United States.

Q Where was it located?

A In Manhasset, on Long Island. From then on the Loewy architectural department under Bill Snaith grew and grew. They did all the department stores for Foley's in Houston and Bullocks in California.

Name them, and Loewy or the Loewy office did them. His packaging department was tremendously successful in creating trademarks. The most beautiful one and most famous one is International Harvester, which was done in our office. The Exxon trademark with a double X. It's endless. The marketing division, which was created much later, was under the leadership of Joe Lovelace and the various departments. We had such sincerity in our design approach that we created, and we were the biggest and the best. We were the innovators.

Q The innovators and the longest lasting designs?

A Yes. Absolutely. The spread of the design assignments from rigidized metal to lipstick containers to the cafeteria in the Lever House on Park Avenue. There's a cute story connected with the Lever House. Mr. Charles Luckman was president of Lever Brothers, and he gave us the assignment to decorate his beautiful building which he mostly designed himself, and it came to the cafeteria, and we decorated the cafeteria. He went over the plans and the specifications. He said he wants all walls and the ceiling painted in high-gloss paint. We said, "But why, Mr. Luckman? Don't the people come there to relax?" He said, "I don't want them to relax. I want them to get in and out fast as possible. Make it damned unpleasant." Which was a funny, funny, funny story.

After I left the Loewy office, I kept in close touch with Raymond because we became very close, personal friends. They moved from their headquarters on Park Avenue to 58th Street into a smaller office, and, as I hear this story, all of a sudden they found themselves very short of funds and could not meet the payroll.

Q What had happened?

A One member of the firm absconded with a lot of money.

Q A trusted associated?

A A trusted associate, and he had an accomplice in the accounting department. One day, they went over the books and found themselves deeply indebted and not able to meet the payroll which was very large having so many high-paid staff designers. In order to save it, Mr. Loewy had go out and find himself a factor--someone who would invest a lot of money and who had confidence in the operation--so he found one. I forget his name, but this man insisted on moving into Mr. Loewy's private office to listen in on every telephone conversation coming in or going out. Mr. Loewy could not stand it--absolutely could not stand it. One day he called the designers together and said, "Gentlemen, I'm leaving. Mr. so and so is in full charge. I leave you my name. If you need me, you know where I am, but I want out," and he was out. And as he left, the whole operation collapsed very rapidly. One day the designers came in the morning and found the office padlocked and a sticker in front of the door declaring non-payment of taxes. The firm is closed. Nobody had any inkling of it. Neither did they have a pension or a penny of money--nothing--closed-out--finished.

Q Could they get their personal belongings?

A The doors were later opened to get them, yes. Some of the groups opened their own offices. The architectural group made a go of it. The packaging department did not. The product design department did not. The marketing division did not. So, before you knew it, it was all finished here in New York. I am still in touch with some of the

designers and my old associates. None of them has a very kind word for Loewy. Little do they know what caused it all.

Q Did Loewy maintain his Paris office?

A Loewy maintained his Paris office, which was owned by him alone. His only partner died on the operating table with open heart surgery. One day he said--I was gone by then-- "Goodbye. I need a bypass operation which is nothing." He didn't make it. So there was nobody else left but Loewy and his wife. He maintained his Paris office for quite awhile, and had many good accounts.

Q He recouped his personal fortune?

A His personal fortune was never touched. He sold his house in Palm Springs, and he retired to France.

Q Sands Pointe, was that part of it?

A No. He sold that when he divorced his first wife, Jean, and married Viola. Viola didn't want anything to do with what Jean had created. But they had maintained the beautiful home in Palm Springs which was sold when he went to France. In France, he eventually sold even his beautiful, little chateau in Rambouillet, which was magnificent. I was there many times. It was a hunting castle of Henry IV which Loewy bought for a song. He left the outside intact and modernized the inside. It was an absolutely charming place with an indoor tennis court--just magnificent. He retired to France, and he grew older--slowly but surely. He went to Russia, offered them his services, and he did some work for the Russian government. After many years, he came back to New York to have this show in So Ho at one of the galleries down there. When the show was announced, some of his old designers came

there, and they saw their own drawings with his signature. It disenchanted most of them.

Q He was selling them?

A He was selling them, and they were very, very angry at him. At that time, they had commissioned a company to make a movie on Loewy's life and accomplishments, which was abruptly cancelled because of the thing he had done.

Q Which was essentially what he had done all his life--hire people to do drawings and put his name on them.

A Yes. That was the understanding. Once you worked for Loewy, it was the Loewy design, and either you took it or you didn't take it. If you didn't take it, you quit after awhile and looked for other employment. I stuck it out. I didn't care whether he put my name or his name on there. As a matter of fact, I signed all the drawings with his name, and everybody came to me saying, "Please sign it." I didn't mind at all. I admired the man from beginning to end. He was a good friend and an outstanding designer, and I had the most exciting life with him. I love him dearly.

Q But putting the best on face it, this show in So Ho was the last straw for many of his old employees?

A Absolutely, absolutely.

Q They weren't to share in the proceeds either?

A No, no, no. As a matter of fact, we were invited last year to attend the international designer show in Washington, D.C. where I was honored for my long contribution to industrial design. A medal was given to the outstanding designer which was voted on, and Loewy's name

did not come up once. Charles Eames' widow got the award for his contribution. Eames was a great designer, but, not the volume and the scope of the Loewy organization. To me, Loewy deserved it hands down. There was no question, but they wouldn't have any part of it.

Q The membership wasn't asked to vote on this motion?

A Yes, the membership voted. They wouldn't vote for Loewy. I probably was alone.

Q It's too bad that someone's personal ego got in the way of his professional accomplishments.

A Yes. It's very sad. But, in his old age, he deserved much better than he got. He was, undoubtedly, quite confused. His second wife did give him a very hard time. Loewy is still around and lives in Monte Carlo. His daughter lives in California, and I, occasionally, hear from her when she needs something. It's sad that a life-long association is coming to an end because he can't write any more, his wife won't write to me, and his daughter is too lazy to write--only calls when she needs something.

But my later years as a designer for a major toy company were happy ones.

Q Can we hear about that?

A I can tell you I joined a company owned by my best personal friend, and the company's name at the time when I joined them was Levy and Friar. They had a yearly sales of 3 to 4 million dollars in the toys they manufactured. At the time I left, the company was up to $150,000,000 in sales yearly, so it was unbelieveable growth, I'm happy to report that the name was changed to Gabriel shortly after I joined

them. Gabriel was the name of a toy company in Chicago famous for the trademark of the Angel Gabriel with a trumpet. They made building blocks and books, and they were very well known. They were having problems, and Levy and Friar bought all their assets and the name. Gabriel grew rapidly. They bought a sporting goods manufacturer by the name of Roberts. They bought a manufacturer of little girls' appliances like ironing boards, irons, little refrigerators and what have you, and I was to design every new item they had.

Their design department consisted of one man who was me and another man who did all the packaging. In the toy industry, you can readily see the success of your design. Prototypes are shown at each toy fair which always happens in the end of February, and the success of your design you know immediately before you go into production. You show prototypes and you see the reaction. I found this very encouraging and enlightening after the Loewy years where you have to wait years and years to see whether anything you did was successful or not. By the time you found out, it was not--it was too late.

But in the toy industry, you come up with prototypes, and you show it to the main buyers of Sears, of J.C. Penney, or the large buyers, and they are bright enough and smart enough and have enough experience to tell, "We know that's going to be hot," so this was completely novel to me, and I enjoyed it very much.

In the design approach for the sporting goods division, for instance, I found out that the backboards for basketball have never really been designed. The hoops for basketball have never been designed. I came up with new features which I hold patents for. The

weight lifting equipment had never been designed, so I came up with the cement filled pastic weights which were blow molded and then shipped empty to the other side of the country and filled there with cement so you didn't have to pay for the dead weight when you shipped them out. So all these things had never been thought about, and I found all these loopholes where we could add and take advantage of.

A little later the company bought Gym Dandy--the best and best known manufacturer of play gyms and outdoor play yard equipment. Again, I found that very little really had been designed that was novel, so I came up with many new additions, and my association with Gym Dandy went to about a half a year ago, which is really 22 years, and they upped production from 8 million yearly to well over 20, which is unheard of in a play yard equipment manufacturing outfit.

When Gilbert went into bankruptcy, we bought the remaining parts which were the chemistry sets and erector sets which we kept to the very last, and I was happy to add to erector many new items and features. The chemistry sets I hated from the first to the last day because they are not for little hands. We had so many law suits and fires that the burners would make.

Q The caustic chemicals?

A Terrible, but they kept it because it was a good seller. Then our company was bought by CBS. CBS doesn't need to be described, but they had a toy division--creative play things and some building blocks. CBS bought our entire outfit, and shortly after they bought Gabriel, they bought Ideal Toy. Ideal is a major manufacturer in dolls and novelty items. They became famous when Evel Knievel lent his name to one of

their performing dolls. But CBS somehow mismanaged the toy division to a point that they were to go under, and a half a year ago they stopped all production. They sold their assets--part of them the pre-school division--to Hasbro while the division I handled in later years--the Gym Dandy--they just let die, let everybody go, and that was the end of it. I personally have continued to work on some of my accounts to keep busy and keep my hands in design. I'm currently designing some fireproof safes--a novel approach to safeguarding computer tapes from robbery and from fire, which is a good assignment. I'm having a lot of fun doing it.

Q Looking back on your career as a designer of children's toys and appliances, what was it about the industry that attracted you? What was the most satisfying aspect of it?

A What attracted me first of all is my close relationship to my friend Morton Levy. He asked me to help them when they first got started--Levy and Friar. They were national sales reps. They took the output of various plants and sold them. They were convinced if the items they sold were better designed, they could sell more of them. They came to me and said would I design a new baby car seat? Would I design a new little iron for little girls that is more handsome? Would I design their showrooms, which I did, all while I was at Lowey--all freelance work. I was fascinated with toy design and found it very challenging. We have many competitors of much larger companies, and it was fun to outsell them by better design. When I finally joined them permanently, the challenge became even larger. As I mentioned before, from the three to four million yearly sales to over 150 million in 15

years ain't hay--that was unbelieveable growth. For the second time around I would never go back into the toy industry. It's a cutthroat business. You come out with a good design, and you may rest assured that the following year somebody will undersell you and copy your design.

Q Copy it completely?

A Yes. To patent a design is almost useless. Design patents aren't worth the paper they're written on. Mechanical patents are good.

Q Why is that? The way the laws are written?

A No. A design patent is for a specific design. The moment you change two lines on it, it's not the design. One of my freelance jobs was to design a blender like the Waring blender for Puerto Rico where they have very little electric power but plenty of water power, so this was to be water operated. I designed the item, and it worked beautifully. But, but all of a sudden, I was stuck because the little bushing that connects the outside attachment to the inside blade was patented by Mr. Waring. It took me ten minutes to change the design and got our own patents on it. So, patents are there to be bypassed or improved on. I have many, many patents, but with a design patent for an automobile, you take out a design patent the moment you come out with a new design. Nobody can copy you with the Avanti as is, but a design patent is to discourage somebody possibly copying your design.

Q The toy industry is fascinating, in terms of the impact that you have and the incredible sales that it engenders in indulgent parents. When my children were growing up, we bought them all sorts of new toys as they came out. The business must have been limitless for really creative output.

A It is really limitless. It's a multi-billion dollar industry which was much handicapped in later years by the safety programs of the government. What we went through at the Gym Dandy plant to abide by all the safety regulations. We had to change tooling, and angles were triangular shapes were such that a kid could put a head through but couldn't get out fast enough, and if you look at a gym set, it's nothing but triangles, so they had to be all opened up, all the designs had to be changed to abide by the laws. There was never a law. It was a regulation. While there was never a law, the moment a big buyer would buy your merchandise and you did not include all these safety measurements in it, the whole line would be obsolete--it could be thrown out. But, it is not a law, but you have to abide by it.

Q Could you explain what the Gym Dandy line was?

A Gym Dandy was the best known quality line of outdoor gym sets for little people to swing on, climb on, and slide on. We had--compared to what I saw in the competition--by far the best made sets of the heaviest steel, the best finish of welded rather than screwed on top brackets that held the swings and lawn glides. We had a whole research department to keep ahead of the paint finishers to see how the paint would stand up in different weather conditions all over the the United States. We kept ahead of everybody. Our biggest client was J.P. Penney. They took the entire line in their catalog. It's all Gym Dandy stuff. Now it's dead. I don't know whose they're using. We were always a few steps ahead of everybody else. In the toy industry, we come out with a new item, the next year everybody else would have it. The last few years were very thrilling for me because, all of a sudden, CBS decided

to go into the wooden gyms which cost a lot of money--from $600 to well over a $1000 apiece. I had to design the wooden gyms, which were made in one of their plants in Herndon, Pennsylvania--the outfit that made famous creative playthings--little wooden train sets and building blocks. I had great fun designing the various successful wooden gyms. But, one day they're open and the next, they closed the plant, and it's all finished! Incredible!

Q Why would CBS have done that?

A The reason for CBS doing that was the take-over bid by Ted Turner. CBS didn't want to be taken over, and they bought back a lot of their own stock at tremendous expense. All of a sudden, they found themselves short of funds, and, in order to not lose any more money, got rid of all non-productive divisions, including the toy division.

Q That's fascinating. From architecture to all sorts of product designs, you found that your last assignment was one of the most satisfying?

A Yes. I did a lot of architectures in this country. It's my first dicipline. I never took out my papers here to register as an architect, but I was allowed to do a lot of alterations to homes in the area where I lived, and I'm especially proud of the temple I designed here in Roslyn--Temple Sinai. I designed it, and the first addition, second addition, third addition. So that was a major job, but since then I have not touched any architecture work.

Q Can you describe the Temple Sinai design?

A It was a very small congregation when I first joined. I was one of the founding fathers, and our services took place here in a

Presbyterian church. They had a very lovely reverend whom we all adored, and he gave us his church to have our services. Eventually, we had enough families to put up enough money to buy property here in Roslyn, and I was the first chairman of the building committee. I got the assignment to design us a temple, and here's a check for $60,000. I built a temple for $58,000 and gave them back $2,000.

Q What was that design like? Was it modern?

A It's very modern, and I had the help of Levitt, the famous builder. Levitt had built Strathmoor, he had built the country club, and he had built out in Levittown the village greens. We took the basic design of the village green building, which he gave me, and I translated that into our main building. I added to it, which made it very simple and very successful. The building turned out very well. The Levitt plumbing engineer donated the entire heating and cooling system for the temple and helped tremendously in the layout of all the basics. The temple was added to and is still up and looks very good. So this is my top architectural accomplishment. I changed my house extensively before I sold it, and it turned out very well.

Q Did you do any work with the Loewy organization that involved architectural design?

A Yes, I did. In the beginning, when we had an account for the Panama Line, we designed three ships: the Panama, the Cristobal, and a third. I was to detail quite a few of the interior areas, and I had terrible difficulties doing it because my background was in centimeters and not in inches. I made many mistakes until I learned. I did quite a few architectural drawings and helped Snaith a great deal. I mentioned

before the W. T. Grant competition we entered and had 24 hours to do it. We got it, and I helped Snaith quite a bit whenever needed. I was the all-around man and always available.

Q A jack of all trades?

A Yes. I helped every department in the packaging and, from my experiences, I'm really a self-made industrial designer. I never went to a school to learn it, but I learned it thoroughly through the employment by Raymond Loewy, and I taught for six or seven years at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn.

Q The premier design school.

A Yes. I'm invited every year to address the graduating class of the industrial design section, and I've gone every year.

It's a funny story how I stopped teaching at Pratt. One night I came out after a class and went to my parked car in the worst area of Brooklyn. I drove to the corner of Ryerson Street and went straight through a street fight--two gangs, one on either side, shooting at each other. I was so petrified with the bullets flying left and right and above me that I stepped on the gas, got safely out of there and never returned to Pratt. I resigned the next morning and said, "This I don't need for my health," and that was it. But since then, many years later, Joe Parriott, whom I mentioned before as a non-contributor to the Avanti project and with whom I designed a taxi cab for the handicapped, asked me to address the graduating class every year. I enjoy doing it.

I'll mention briefly the project of the taxi for handicapped people, which was very interesting. Joe Parriott and Pratt Institute had gotten a grant from Washington to design a taxi for the handcapped. The

specs were such that a man or woman in a wheelchair could get themselves into a taxi without getting out of the wheelchair, which is quite an assignment. They worked on this assignment for over half a year, and then Joe Parriott called me to ask would I give my time to supervise this thing, and I said, "I'd be delighted to." I went to Rikers Island, which is an island in the Hudson River which houses a tremendous hospital for the handicapped, the retarded and the criminally insane. We were given a big room to do our design work, which was without cost to Pratt or to us. I couldn't believe what I saw there. They had started to build a mockup of this taxi with all wrong dimensions. It was based on the General Motors Citation front-wheel chassis. I took a few measurements, and I said, "Take it apart. This is not right. It cannot work." I went home and built a cardboard model of what it should look like with correct dimensions, where the door should be and how the ramps should work, and they said, "All right, go build it." I spent days and weeks with a few helpers from Pratt Institute building a working mockup. We had help from the handicapped people at the hospital--especially one lovely Black lady who had been run over by train and lost her legs, and she needed counseling. She spent a lot of time in the hospital, and she helped us. She volunteered to get in and out of our taxi prototype to see that the dimensions were right and the door opening high enough.

A very important part is that people in wheelchairs can barely move their necks or head forward in order to make more room to get into a lower door, so the door opening had to be 58 inches, which is tremendous. It's enough room for a person sitting erect in a wheelchair to go through without being forced to bend their necks. The dimensions of the

small model were correct, and we built this mockup based on the Citation, and it turned out I designed a ramp that folds out of the door, hooks onto the sill and extends. The driver, of course, has to come out of the car and do that, but, once it's installed, the slope of the ramp is flat enough that a wheelchair person can get into the cab by him or herself. Once in the cab, they can turn around, face the front or stay sideways. There were little anchors--little hooks--that, by themselves, they can hook onto the wheels of the car, and the wheelchair would not move. When the wheelchair transporation was not needed, the same taxi was usable for four passengers--three on the backseat and one jump seat.

The car was shown to many people, there was great interest, and we had volunteers to build a working prototype. Then we were caught in the middle of a political thing in the city of New York. It was either our taxi or the Veterans Administration which insisted that wheelchair persons can use the transportation system of the city. In other words, they insisted on having elevators put at main subway stations. They won, and we lost. So the grant, which had been renewed two or three times, was not renewed, and they are in the process of building elevators at 15 main stations. They will not have operators. They will be self-operating units. In New York, you can imagine how long they will last, and the first person who lives here will get mugged, and one week later the elevator will be out of service. The installation of each elevator is estimated to cost $1,500,000 to $2,000,000. So they're wasting these millions of dollars with our taxicab, which was based on an existing chassis with very little engineering needed, and fiberglass

bodies, we could have created a fleet, available with special telephones for the handicapped, for much less money. So it died a horrible death.

Q In the short time we have remaining, would you describe your design philosophy as it evolved over the years? Your aesthetic sensitivity, your credo, in a sense? Could you sum it up?

A I'll try to. That's not going to be easy. I had always maintained, and I taught my sons to not put anything on paper that you can't do. We had an outstanding designer at the Loewy office who did fast and beautiful renderings and made beautiful presentations, but you could never build what he designed. I will never present to a customer a drawing--God forbid he should say, "Do it," and you can't. This is my basic philosophy. I'm not the hottest designer nor the greatest designer, but I'm a sound designer. My interests are more in the technical end of things than in the aesthetic. I try to combine the two, but I will not present to anybody anything that cannot be done--be it in plastic or metal or in any medium. This is what I've lived by and will continue to live by as long as I live. It's not the most exciting design, but it's sound design. I take great pride in my color sense, and I established all the colors in the toy industry of what we needed. I was very much involved in the selection of colors for the Avanti. I mentioned during the Avanti period, that Egbert had invited his friend Lombardi to join him in South Bend. He was a school teacher--a very nice man--but he had no background in automobiles. One day I came back from lunch, and he said, "John, look at the new color we just introduced." I went into the showroom. There was a gray Avanti, and it looked like it was a prime coat. I hate battleship gray--you could see

every ripple in the fiberglass. I said, "It is ghastly," which didn't make me very popular with Lombardi, but, thank God, they never did it. Color studies are most important, and I take great pride in having good taste in colors. I had a slow education in industrial design, and, over the years, I've done good. The profession was good to me, and I was good to the profession. I did good design. I've been cited in many magazine articles. I'm proud of what I've accomplished through honesty in design. I will not present a design I don't like.

Q Thank you very much Mr. John W. Ebstein of Roslyn, Long Island. We are in your debt.

A I enjoyed it tremendously.

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