

EDWARD WAYNE BROG  
Transcript 1<sup>st</sup> Editing by Shirley Peters

World War I

- I: Please give me your full name.  
EB: Edward Wayne Brog.  
I: I understand that you were not born in Union County.  
EB: No. I was born in Michigan, on a farm outside of a little town called Wayland.  
I: What year were you born?  
EB: 1912.  
I: Before the First World War.  
EB: Yes. I remember the First World War.  
I: You would have been about the right age to remember.  
EB: I was about five or six. Most families had uncles, cousins, and so on in the war.  
I: Did you go to elementary or secondary school in Wayland?  
EB: Yes.  
I: Did you graduate high school in Wayland also?  
EB: I graduate high school in Kalamazoo, Michigan.  
I: You must have left the farm then.  
EB: My dad was killed when I was two, and my mother never remarried. We stayed on the farm for several years. But the way farming was in those days—they didn't have all these laborsaving machinery. It was hard work. My mother worked. She harnessed the horses and worked the fields, plowed, harrowed, sowed, and harvested.  
I: Were you the only child?  
EB: No. I had a sister twelve years older than I.

The Depression

- I: What year did you graduate high school?  
EB: 1930.  
I: The Depression was getting more severe at that time. Job prospects around there must have looked a little bleak.  
EB: Michigan was right in the center of the Depression, so to speak. I found out after I got out here that people talked about the Depression, but they really didn't know what it was. People froze to death. People starved to death. Employment lines a mile long were the norm rather than the unusual.  
I: Did you and your mother suffer?  
EB: No. That is as far as no food and heat, no. We might not have had what we wanted, but, no, we never suffered.  
I: Did your mother ever tell you what she would like to see you do with your life?  
EB: During that time most people were born, raised, and when you got old enough—depending on how many children were in the family—some continued on with the farm. People didn't get very far away from where they were born and raised.

I: By 1930, you had left the farm.

EB: My father having been killed changed my life in that way. We moved off the farm.

#### Coming to La Grande and M.J. Goss Motors

I: How did you learn about La Grande, Oregon?

EB: There was an ad in the newspaper wanting a driver to take a truck from South Bend, Indiana to La Grande, Oregon.

I: How old were you at the time?

EB: I was about twenty, twenty-one.

I: How did she respond when you told your mother you were leaving?

EB: I packed a suitcase, and my mother put up a box lunch that lasted four or five days.

I: What kind of a truck was it?

EB: It was a Studebaker truck. South Bend, Indiana was only about eighty miles from Kalamazoo. That was home to Studebaker automobiles and trucks.

I: This was a brand new truck just off the line?

EB: Yes.

I: Was it your initial understanding that you would pick up the truck, and then you and another person would return it to Kalamazoo?

EB: No. We hitchhiked to South Bend, picked up the truck and also a car, then went to Edwards Machinery Company, and they had a hoist to load the car onto the back of the truck. We knew we were going out west. Of course in those days you were hopeful you could find employment somewhere.

I: But there was no guarantee that you would become employed once you were in La Grande.

EB: No.

I: Did you find out who, in La Grande, had placed the ad?

EB: M.J. Goss.

I: Did you realize he was a car dealer?

EB: His brother had a furniture store and so the name wasn't entirely unfamiliar. Yes, I learned from his brother that M.J. Goss was a car dealer in La Grande.

I: How long did it take you to drive from South Bend to La Grande?

EB: About six days.

I: Did you sleep in the truck?

EB: We slept in the truck or any other place we could find. It was early spring, and commencing to warm up.

I: Tell me about when you first saw La Grande.

EB: I can remember quite a little bit about that trip. The old highway came down Pyles Canyon through Union. It went right past Hot Lake, of course. Michigan had been a flat country, no mountains. It had some hills, but no mountains. I think I was impressed by the mountains [here] more than anything else.

I: What year was this?

EB: 1934. We stayed around La Grande. Goss Motor Company had moved into that building where they are now, not too long before. I don't remember for sure, but

- I think they had probably moved into that building within a year or so. Among other things, they used some big window sash and frames that they got from the railroad roundhouse. They built partitions out of those to make offices and divide the showroom from the parts department, and so on. The glass in those window sashes had cinders just burned into them when they had been used in the roundhouse. So we got a job with a razor blade and lacquer thinner scraping those windows, and cleaning them up. We worked probably four or five days.
- I: Where did you find a place to live while you were working?
- EB: Mind you, businesses were just as hard pressed for money as individuals were. There was an old wicker two-seater and another old davenport that had loose springs in the cushions. We slept in the showroom.
- I: Did they provide you blankets?
- EB: No. They didn't give us a blanket or anything. The lube service part of the shop was open all night because people didn't leave their cars out on the streets at night in those days.
- I: Why is that?
- EB: Just wanted to take better care of them, I guess. The Sacagawea Hotel stood where the U.S. Bank now is. In those days business wholesale houses had salesmen on the road calling on people, and almost any kind of business. These traveling salesmen would fill that hotel pretty much every night. They wanted a place to put their car, and storage for a car overnight was thirty-five cents. You could have your car serviced. It could be washed, lubed or have an oil change. So the sales room and parts room wasn't open. This fellow and I each slept on one of the old pieces of furniture. You had to curl up on the settee because it wasn't very long and it wasn't very comfortable. It was still cold. I remember we had been here a few days and wanted to wash out some clothes. We found a few pieces of rope, tied them together and then tied them between the handles of the cars in the showroom and hung our clothes to dry. But the janitor came in about three o'clock in the morning to sweep and clean up, so that put an end to our sleep. Our rest period was pretty short from the time the showroom closed at eleven and the janitor came in about three.

### Hitchhiking and Hopping Freight Trains

- I: Where did you eat?
- EB: I'll digress a bit here. We bummed around and hitchhiked and rode the freight train, most of that year, around the Northwest. We would eat maybe one meal a day at a restaurant. In those days you could get a roast beef or roast pork dinner with meat, potatoes and gravy, bread, drink, and some dessert for fifteen cents. We used to go to the bakeries and they would have what they called day-old bread, but it was more like six or seven or eight days old. But you could get a big grocery sack of that for ten cents. You could live on that sack of day-old bread to supplement that one meal for ten days. I've slept in just about any place you can name--in culverts and hotel lobbies.
- I: Did it make you feel like a bum?
- EB: Yes. A bum, that's right.

I: It sounds as though after you had done these odd jobs for M.J. Goss they didn't want to give you a full time job. Is that why you struck out and started traveling on freight trains?

EB: We never planned on a job when we got to La Grande with the truck. After we had been around and worked several days, as I recall, we earned seventy-five cents or a dollar for a day's work.

I: Probably not enough for a hotel room?

EB: Oh, no. When I said hotel, we slept in the lobby. We didn't spend any money on hotel rooms. They had what you called flophouses in those days. There was just a big bare room maybe upstairs in some place of business or something where they had some cots. For five or ten cents you could get one of those cots. No blankets, no pillows. We never spent any money on sleeping.

I: Were there flophouses in La Grande?

EB: I think there might have been, I don't know.

I: Were there a lot of other men around La Grande in your position?

EB: Not that I know of. Of course there were always some bums on the freight trains. In the West they didn't bother you too much if you rode the freight trains. I went south that winter and the other fellow didn't go with me. Down south when you rode the freight train and were caught, you would probably wind up in the chain gang. But out here the railroad didn't object too much as long as you stayed out of the yard while they were making up the train because that's where people get in the way and get killed.

I: Did you look for an empty boxcar as it was leaving and then try to hop on?

EB: Yes. I remember the first train I hopped was in Harleton, Montana. The freight train didn't stop in such a small town, and we caught it on the fly. You learned by doing. We caught a gondola right behind the engine and tender. In those days they fired with coal by hand. Going up those grades red-hot cinders came right over the top of that boxcar in front of us. After that we learned to get a little farther back where those cinders would cool a little before they landed on your shirt collar.

I: You said you hopped the train the first time in Montana. Why didn't you hop the freight from La Grande?

EB: We knew that we were all through working and so we were going to hitchhike to Portland and then to Alaska. We heard there were a lot of opportunities in Alaska. They told us that they had a repossessed car that belonged to a finance company in Portland and that we could drive the car to Portland; they wanted it brought out.

I: From La Grande?

EB: Yes. It was an old 1929 or '30 Buick coupe. I remember on the other side of Pendleton it kept missing so we decided to turn the switch off and one. We thought maybe it would backfire and blow carbon out that was making it miss. We did that, but it was only a very short time, a matter of a mile or two, and we felt heat around our feet. We found out the holes that the clutch pedal and brake pedal went through were quite big around. The rod went through there, and we saw flames. We pulled over and stopped. There was a lot of sand alongside the road—that's sagebrush and desert down there—and we put the fire out. It melted

part of the carburetor. We got towed into Hermiston and went to the junkyard to find a carburetor that fit, and replaced it. We went on to Portland with that old Buick, and delivered it to the finance company.

You asked me how we got up to Harleton, Montana. We intended to get on a ship and go to Alaska. So we went down around the docks in Portland and they had a longshoremen strike. This was 1934. It was a pretty nasty thing. I think the rumor was that they had killed a couple of longshoremen in the violence of the outcome. We were a couple of young punks. We didn't know much, but we knew enough not to hang around there. So we said, instead of going to Alaska let's go up into Montana. I had kind of been fascinated with the hills of Montana. So we headed up the Columbia River, and then headed for Montana.

I: Did you hitchhike?

EB: Yes. We got up around Rufus. It was windy, cold and damp. It was getting dusk so we walked out to the edge of town. Of course there was no town in 1934. Anyway, we crawled into a culvert, but the animals—squirrels and snakes—had the same idea. We crawled out of there about as fast as we went in. We walked back toward the little old town and there was, what was in those days, the forerunner of the motel. They called them tourist cabins. These were pretty dilapidated and old, but we went up and saw that they had sheet metal stoves in them, and offered to split wood if they would let us sleep in one room. There was a bedspring, but no mattress or covers. I remember we took two of the window shades down to cover up.

We proceeded on through Walla Walla, Dayton, Colfax, Lewiston, and Spokane. Then we went east through Coeur d'Alene, Butte, Livingston, Bozeman, and Billings. We hitchhiked all the way to Roundup, Montana where we hopped that freight on the fly.

I: Was hitchhiking fairly easy, or did you have to wait long?

EB: Sometimes we had to wait. We got a ride from Billings to Roundup, Montana; it was about fifty miles as I recall. We tried for; I think, two or three days to get out of that town. You must remember that there wasn't traffic like there is now. Now, you could go out on a highway and stand for fifteen minutes without a car coming by.

I: Were the people who picked you up friendly or did you have some scary experiences?

EB: It was a different age. Number one, we carried suitcases. We kept ourselves fairly clean. The ordinary hobo is probably pretty full of fleas and dirt. That's why, when we could, we preferred to hitchhike because it was a lot cleaner. You worried a little bit on the freight trains about somebody knocking you over unless you were careful, kept your eyes open and took the normal precautions.

#### Returning to La Grande and A Job At Goss Motors

I: After wandering around the country on freight trains and hitchhiking, what brought you back to La Grande?

EB: We were headed for Florida. Our ride took us as far as we wanted as long as it was in the general direction the driver was going. When we got close to Michigan

the fellow that I was with said, "Let's go home for Thanksgiving." We did. I wanted to leave right after that for the south because I had been told that the tourist business in Florida in wintertime had a lot of jobs. I wasn't true, but I had to try. The other fellow decided not to go.

About March or April, after I had been gone about a year on the road, I was going to go back. I had worked some in Glacier Park. The Great Northern Railway owned hotel concessions, and hired all their people out of St. Paul, but they deducted your transportation from your pay. I was hitchhiking, and the freight trains were a good option, so I thought I would get a job at Glacier Park when they opened to save that transportation money. Then I thought that if Goss Motor Company got another car or truck to go to La Grande it would be a lot better than hitchhiking or riding the freight. I wrote and asked them if they had anything they wanted driven out. I didn't hear anything for a couple of months. One day I got a letter that said they had a car they wanted brought out, and that they would give me a job when I got here. That's what brought me back.

I: Did they say what kind of a job it would be?

EB: No. I didn't care what. In those days you didn't ask what it was or how much it paid.

I: When was this?

EB: March, 1935. I drove out here and stood around for a few days. Finally, I had to eat and have a place to stay. I had to have some money. I reminded them that they told me they would have a job. He says, "What do you want to do?" I thought, I am going to shoot for the top and I answered, "I'd like to work in the office. I had never written a check in my life. I stood around for a few more days and a fellow that was keeping the books said to me, "You've stood around here long enough. Come on." He showed me how they were keeping the books and I went from there.

I: Did you think at the time you might become a salesman?

EB: No. You were living from day to day. You didn't think too much about the future.

I: You had learned a fair amount about cars. You knew where the carburetor was located, for example.

EB: I think most people had that general knowledge. Cars were so simple then.

I: Can you recall images or feelings you had about La Grande from the first time you came and then when you returned?

EB: You were thrilled to have a job. It was a little bit romantic. The West had a romantic feel to it. As I said, the mountains fascinated me. The people were friendly and open. I just liked it, and stayed.

I: Were you outgoing or rather quiet by nature.

EB: I was quiet.

I: So you weren't aggressive; you just hoped something good would happen.

EB: Survival was enough of a motivator to keep me going.

I: So the first job you had at Goss Motor Company was a bookkeeper in the office. Did you find it difficult at first?

EB: Yes. There was a fellow keeping the books and also selling cars. He spent most of his time in Wallowa County selling cars. He showed me how to do things for

two or three days, and then he would take off for a week. When he came back I had plenty of errors. He straightened me out and then took off again for another week. He'd be gone all week and come back on weekends.

I: Which Mr. Goss hired you?

EB: The father. There were three boys, Bill, which is Milo or M.J. Jr., Bob and Ken. They were just kids when I first started there. The father was Milo Sr.

I: Did Milo Sr. begin the car agency?

EB: Yes.

I: Did he sell strictly Studebakers?

EB: No. Studebaker, Desoto, and Plymouth.

I: What sort of a man was Mr. Goss?

EB: He came out west from Michigan as a young man. I think he came from rural Plainwell, Michigan.

I: Did you have much day-to-day contact with him?

EB: Sure. He ran the place.

I: Was he an easy man to work for?

EB: Yes.

I: Was he cheerful, optimistic.

EB: He had to be in those days.

I: At that time, during the Depression, was the business fairly successful?

EB: The economy was starting to strengthen a little bit here in 1934. They sold maybe two, three, four cars a year during the Depression. They were probably selling twenty, twenty-five per year, new. The business establishment just grew with the increased economy.

#### Entertainment, Barbershops, and Laundry

I: Where did you live once you got a job?

EB: I roomed with a family, a man and wife with children. They had an extra bedroom.

I: Did they serve food?

EB: No, just a room.

I: Were you having any relationships with women up until this time?

EB: No. I'd been through hard times; I didn't want to take on any obligation like that.

I: Did you ever visit any places of entertainment in town such as taverns.

EB: That was part of life in those days. Yes, when you're young.

I: What else did you do for entertainment?

EB: The usual things, hunting and fishing.

I: Did you have buddies to go with you?

EB: We went together.

I: Would this take place on a weekend?

EB: We worked Saturdays. We worked six days a week. I usually went to work before eight. In the early days, as I mentioned, the showroom was open in the evening until ten or eleven o'clock, seven days a week. After World War II things changed a lot. I worked six days a week instead of seven and closed at six o'clock in the evening.

I: What was it like to go to a barbershop back then?  
EB: There were a lot of barbershops then. I used to go to one once a week. I'd get a haircut. I didn't often get a shave.  
I: Why did you think you needed to go once a week?  
EB: My hair grew fast.  
I: I wouldn't think it grew that fast. Was it because you felt you should have a neat appearance at your place of employ?  
EB: Yes. I always wore a suit and tie.  
I: Were you making enough money then to buy a suit of clothes?  
EB: Yes. It was hard to earn money, but it also went a long way.  
I: Who did your laundry?  
EB: There was a lady down on Spring Street that did washing and ironing and starched shirts. She washed everything including socks and underwear. She charged ten cents a shirt and everything else was thrown in, socks, underwear, handkerchiefs, everything.  
I: Do you think she used a washboard?  
EB: I don't know whether she did or not. I think people were kind of primitive, but I think they had washing machines.

#### Car Sales Manager

I: When did you become a car salesman?  
EB: I started working there in 1935 selling cars as well as keeping the books. After a year or two I became sales manager.  
I: Give some idea of a conversation you would have with someone looking for a car.  
EB: If you weren't acquainted, and didn't know anything about your client, the first thing to do is get to know him. Get to know something about him and establish whether he could buy a car or not. Number one, did he want one, and if he did, could he buy one.  
I: You didn't come right out and ask, "Can you pay for this?"  
EB: We had a used car salesman who used that opening. He'd get a fellow and head for the used car lot. He'd say, "All right now buddy, how much you want to pay?" He would qualify him in short order.  
I: How did you handle the conversation?  
EB: Just visited with him. As I said, get to know your customer. You didn't ask him these things right out in the raw. You tried to find out about him through normal conversation.  
I: Did you teach yourself this or were you following someone else's model?  
EB: I think that we all watch the people around us. If they are successful maybe we try to imitate them.  
I: Is that what you did?  
EB: I wasn't aware of it.  
I: At that time could you buy a car on time or did you have to have cash?  
EB: A lot of cars were bought on time. I mentioned that farmers and ranchers in this valley were successful. There were a lot of grain storage elevators in the valley at Elgin, Imbler, Alicel, La Grande, and Union. The Kiddles pretty much owned



and operated the grain storage and merchandizing. As a rule, after harvesting your crop, which was generally wheat, it was put in an elevator. The market would be watched, and when the price was favorable it was sold. That's when the farmers would come to town to buy a car or truck. They would pay their account, which probably hadn't been paid since the year before.

When they had repairs and tires to buy they charged it. It was a good example of honesty. You couldn't do business like that today. Number one, the interest would run you out of business.

I: Were these no-interest loans?

EB: Their open accounts as we called them were interest free. Sometimes a farmer would buy a car and give you a note due in a year's time, which would bear interest.

I: Did you travel to any other towns in the county in connection with your job?

EB: Yes. We circulated around the valley in search of people that were interested in buying a car or truck.

I: Was this by appointment or were you just scouting around?

EB: We would just go out and see what we could find. Sometimes people would come in to the place of business, and look around. They may not buy anything, but you knew they were interested. We called on these people at their homes.

I: Did this work?

EB: Sure.

I: Were people more likely to buy when you visited them?

EB: Oh, I don't know about that. But the fact is, if you're thinking about buying a car you're probably going to go downtown and stop at the showroom and see what they have. If somebody had that much interest, you should go call on them.

I: Did you receive a commission on the sale of a car?

EB: Most everything was on commission, yes.

I: So the commission was in addition to your salary for keeping the books?

EB: Yes.

## Changes Before and After World War II

I: During the mid 1930s were the streets in La Grande paved? Were the boardwalks gone?

EB: Yes. When I drove the truck out the first time from South Bend there were paved roads pretty much through Illinois and Iowa. When you got to Nebraska you started hitting gravel roads, and it was gravel much of the way to Boise.

I: Were there gravel roads through Pyles Canyon and from Union to La Grande?

EB: Yes. I think the majority of the streets of La Grande were paved.

I: Can you recall any of your reactions to the small towns in the county prior to World War II?

EB: Elgin was a lumber town. Cove was cherries. Union had a sawmill. There wasn't much. La Grande was railroad and sawmill.

I: La Grande was a big city in comparison.

EB: Yes. La Grande was about eight thousand. La Grande, Pendleton, and Baker were pretty much all the same size at one time.

I: I heard Elgin was noted for its roughnecks. Did you ever get into arguments with any of the men in Elgin?

EB: No. It was a logging and sawmill town.

I: You probably didn't pick fights.

EB: Too small to fight.

I: You mentioned that there were several changes after the Second World War. Besides changes in the business hours, what other changes do you recall?

EB: The population shifted a lot. People that you knew before the war didn't come back. I don't think anything was the same after the war. It would be different if we have another one. It never gets back to the same things.