

R. J. HUTCHINSON

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Interviewed by Ron Brand

Transcribed by unknown

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[T1, S1]

RB: R. J. "Shorty" Hutchinson at his home in La Grande. The first question I have is how did you get to Union County? What did you first do when you got here? How did you get your start here in La Grande?

RH: Um Ron, I came here as a sophomore in high school. It was right after the war, and my folks had left their home in Illinois and moved out here during the war years. I had lived in a small town, about 8,000 people, in southern Illinois, Mt. Carmel, Illinois. I had started-- I finished my freshman year of high school back there. Came to La Grande in 1946 in January of 1946 and actually finished my sophomore year of high school here and stayed here until I graduated. I was-- while I was goin' to high school here I worked part time in service stations, two different service stations. I was associated with a small automobile dealership at that time because I offered to service their new cars.

RB: That was which dealership?

RH: That was Herlocker Motors. At that time cars were in great demand and short supply. A fellow by the name of Fred Herlocker was an older fellow, and he'd been in and out of the car business many times over in Idaho and down in the Portland area. He-- his son come out of the Navy at the age of twenty-six. Darel Herlocker was his name, and he wanted to buy a new car. They went over and tried to get a new car. Well, they couldn't get a car, but they could get-- if they'd buy two new Hudsons they could get the dealership.

RB: That's all it took?

RH: And the dealership was open in La Grande, Oregon. So that's how the Herlockers, Fred and his wife and his son Darel, fresh out of the Navy, had moved to La Grande and started up a very small automobile dealership down on Adams and Hemlock behind the big 76 service station there. The service station had an open building in the back where years ago they used to do a

lot of mechanical work and washing and polishing and things like that. So they had this building open in the back of their lot and Herlockers leased this building and they had a small showroom and a three-bay garage.

RB: This was in 1946?

RH: This was in 1946. They weren't dealers in La Grande very long because they just couldn't get enough cars. When cars were sent to dealers they were distributed through a car distributor. Peterson Motors in Boise was the car distributor, and they could only get sometimes one or two cars a month. And they found it pretty hard to get along. 'Course they were promised more cars all the time. And one point of interest that you might want me to touch on here is cars were in such demand and such short supply that they were often came short some of the parts. And they-- Hudson Manufacturing asked their dealers would you rather have us hold the cars until they're complete, or would you rather get 'em sometimes without spare tires. Or, if you can imagine, even rear seats. They'd have up here you'd open the back door on a new car that had just come in, and there wouldn't be any cushion in the back. They would also be short-- most often they'd be short chrome bumpers and bumper guards. So we would make makeshift bumpers out of two-by-fours and we'd take and paint 'em. Of course we didn't have shaker cans of chrome paint then. We'd take a can of chrome paint and a small two-inch brush and we'd paint these bumpers and apply them to these cars with stove bolts and carriage bolts. People were so anxious to get 'em they didn't really care that they didn't have chrome bumpers. They wanted the cars. And so they were-- I don't know if there were many other manufacturers putting cars out that way. I think there were some shortages, but I'm not sure if it was-- I know they definitely were that way on Hudson Motor cars because I was-- they had come over to the service station where I worked. And they couldn't afford to hire a full-time service person to just service new cars so they brought 'em over and had me service them a lot of times in the evenings.

RB: Do you have any idea what the cause of the shortage was? Was it materials nationwide?

RH: Yeah, it was materials due to the fact that so many of these automobile manufacturing companies had switched over to making munitions and war vehicles, you know, army vehicles, military vehicles. A lot of the companies weren't back into full production making chrome-- chrome, uh,

chromium bumpers and chrome parts. And so there was just a lot of things that the automobile manufacturers had not gotten back in full swing, and they weren't able to secure these necessary parts in great supplies, you know, in great numbers. And so rather than bottleneck-- if you can imagine if they were trying to build several thousand new cars, and they didn't have upholstered rear seats. Why, rather than have those cars have to go out in a holding yard, I suppose that they just contacted their dealer body and said, "Hey, do you want 'em without rear seats and bumpers and spare tires?" Because if they left the spare tire out of the new car then every time they left the spare out of four cars that put another set of tires on one more new car for 'em. So they shipped 'em without spares.

RB: Okay. You mentioned a family in Elgin that bought a car.

RH: Yeah, there was a family in Elgin that I remember by the name of Keefer that ran a grocery store there. They bought a new 1946 Hudson. I remember delivering that car and remember the equipment that was on it and the color of the car because I, you know, to me, why, that was a brand new car. It, at that time, sold for between \$1600 and \$1700 dollars. And that was with a-- they didn't have power steering and power brakes. They had a real-- instead of just an add-on heater like some of your products had like Ford and Chevrolet just had a heater that you installed on 'em after they were built. But Hudson like also Nash had about the same thing. They had a real-- it was an excellent heating system called a Weather Eye. So it had a Weather Eye heater in it, fresh air heater, and it also had a spot light. It had fog lights, and it had a standard transmission. And sometimes they had standard transmission and overdrive.

RB: Okay, the \$1600 to \$1700 dollar figure you mentioned, was that an average kind of figure for the price of a new car? And then who in this Union County was able to purchase cars? Who were the people who were looking to buy?

RH: Well, a lot of people that were trying to buy cars, I know, were-- you had of course business people were buying cars. And you had the younger people that were fresh out of the armed forces. They come home, and the first thing they did of course-- they had their severance pay in many cases. And they had money that they had sent home for their families to-- for their folks to put in savings accounts. So the first thing they wanted to do when they got out of the service and come home was buy a new car. But they were often

placed on waiting lists, and they would have to wait. I know I'd heard stories of even later years they never ever forgot the fact that after comin' home from the service they had to wait two and three and four months to get a new car.

RB: You mentioned when we were talking before ways that some people tried to manipulate the waiting lists.

RH: Oh, we--

RB: Recollections of that?

RH: Yeah, we often heard stories of some dealers, not necessarily any here in La Grande, but naturally when someone had to wait up to four or five months they always had the idea that maybe someone else had gone in and maybe slipped the dealer a little extra cash and got his name moved up to the front of the line. Because whenever they'd see-- say if a guy'd come home from the service, and he was waiting on a new Ford or Chevrolet, and he was put on a waiting list. Naturally, he'd check with 'em very often to see if his name was being-- was being brought up the ladder, you know, closer to delivery time. And all of a sudden he sees some fellow that got home after he did, and he's driving a new car down the street. He wonders how that happened. Sometimes maybe the fellow that had the new car that was driving it down the street, maybe his uncle or his folks went in and put their name on the list. And maybe they've been waiting on that car for six months. And when the guy come home from the service, bang, they got their new car maybe a week or two after he got home. And said, "Here son, here's your new car." But there were some hard feelings, I think, over the fact that-- it was-- people-- I know they were-- used cars were in such demand because new cars were not plentiful. When we were young fellas in high school, juniors and seniors in high school, we used to go make trips on weekends. We'd go to Spokane, or we'd go to Walla Walla. Or we'd go to Portland, or we might go to Boise looking for a particular type of a Ford or Chevrolet or used car. Generally a Ford or a Chev or maybe a Carley Hacker Buick, but we would shop the used car lots. That was one of our famous pastimes.

RB: Was this part of the business here was to send people off to shop for used cars,--

RH: No, it was just--

RB: or was this done individually?

RH: It was just an individual hobby that you found young fellas that were interested in cars. When they'd work out here in, say, like they'd go over to work in the pea canneries over in Milton-Freewater, they'd go out and work in the farmers' fields and harvest hay and crops. They'd get a stash of money built up, why, the first thing we'd want to do is three or four of us would jump in some fella's car, a friend of ours, and we'd go off on a trip lookin' for a used car to buy. They were often very, very expensive. They weren't always in the greatest shape. But these dealerships around the country, used car dealerships, made a ton of money on these used cars because new cars weren't plentiful. You'd go off and you'd pay anywhere from \$250 to \$1000 dollars for a good used car depending on what--

RB: Okay, where were the used cars sold here in Union County? Who--

RH: Used cars--

RB: did the dealerships--

RH: Yeah, used, yeah, used-- normally, the dealerships had a used car lot--

RB: Okay.

RH: adjacent to their dealership. They were actually-- they were happier when you had a trade-in on a new car. If you had a trade-in on a new car they would put that out on the used car lot and make good money on it often. I know, well, I had a close friend that bought a beautiful little '41 Chevrolet in 1946. It was a little, beautiful little '41 Chevrolet Club Coupe they called 'em then. Gee, it was just, just never had a mark on it. He was able to get it from a new car dealer because that car dealer had delivered a new car to these people and they had traded this beautiful little buckskin tan '41 Chevrolet in on that new car. He had a-- he had a '37 Desoto Coupe that was a great lookin' car, and he traded it in on that '41 Chevrolet. So that what happened was sometimes the dealers ended up takin' a used car in on the new one. Then they would take another used car in on that used car, somebody wanting to trade up, you see. And they would eventually-- maybe

they'd have to trade three or four times before they got all their money washed out of that deal that started with that new car deal.

RB: Okay. What were-- when you came in 1946, how many, and what were the different dealerships in La Grande and the nearby area, Island City?

RH: There were-- here, there weren't any dealerships in Island City. There weren't any dealerships in Union, even though at that time we didn't have the freeway. Highway 30 came from Pendleton over the Blue Mountains over Cabbage Hill, came through La Grande and through Union and on to Baker. There were nine total dealerships in La Grande at that time. Some of them were bigger than others. You had, you know, you had the Chevrolet dealer, the Ford dealer, the Pontiac dealer and the Buick dealer were bigger dealers. You had a slightly smaller dealer that was the Chrysler - Plymouth - Oldsmobile dealer. And then you had four other small dealers that were in the business mostly because of the war years. And the fact that, like they said, you know, if a dealership couldn't make it during the war years or just after the war he'd better not ever-- better not try it any other time because those were good years to automobile dealers, you know. But there were a total of nine dealerships when I came to La Grande.

RB: Do you know-- have any idea why there were no dealerships in Union?

RH: Well, Union was a small-- had a small business district. It-- Union was generally-- the business district was made up of service stations, grocery stores. There was one or two-- I think there was at that time, one drugstore, and there were a couple of pretty nice grocery stores. There was of course, a liquor store and a small bank, a branch of U.S. National Bank, or First National Bank, I should say _____.

RB: But La Grande was quite a bit bigger?

RH: La Grande was, at that time, about eight thousand people, and it was quite a bit bigger. You had La Grande-- the main street of La Grande was really, at that time, a very thriving business district because you didn't have any shopping centers. You had nothing out in the outlying areas. Everything was situated right downtown La Grande. And if you look at any of the old historical pictures you find that there were many, many days of the week when you could hardly find a place to park a car on the main street. There was service stations, sometimes four service stations on several corners at

each end of La Grande. Those service stations stayed open from like seven o'clock in the morning 'til nine, ten, or even midnight at night. You can imagine I worked in a service station when there were other service stations, other brands, on two more corners across the street from where I was workin'. You know, because we'd even form a friendly relationship with the guys that worked across the street. And when you were-- often, I can remember opening the service station when I was out of high school and worked through the summer. One year there, why, it was nothing not out of the ordinary for me to work ten, twelve hour days. I'd-- maybe I'd open in the morning at seven o'clock and work a five or six-hour shift, and then I'd come back at six o'clock or seven o'clock in the evening and close the place up again.

RB: Was this a fairly common kind of activity for young men at that time, high school--

RH: Yeah.

RB: in high school or just graduated?

RH: Yeah, you'd find a lot of-- I had a lot of associates that-- fellas that I had met that were just back from the service. And they were attending-- of course, La Grande being a college town they were attending Eastern Oregon College up here at that time. They would be attending college a lot of times on the GI Bill, and they would supplement their income on their GI Bill by working part-time in a service station. And the normal wage at that time was around a \$1.25 to \$1.50 an hour. So I know I've made several acquaintances that I still remember back-- fellas that went on to become veterinarians. Uh, they came uh-- they-- they got their degrees in college and worked as geologists for the State Highway Department, different things like that. I can remember when those fellas worked in the service station at the same time I did. But I worked more hours than they did because they were going to college during the day. They'd come and work evenings, and sometimes they'd close up the service station at night. But yeah, in answer to your question, it was a good way-- it was one way for a young fella to find work that he could do while he was going to high school. I often worked, as long as it didn't interfere with my studies, why, I was able to work sometimes four or five nights a week. I would close the station. Go to work after I got home from school, I'd often take my homework and go over and work at the service station, and when it got kind of slow and after I got the things done,

why, duties done, why, it was okay with my boss if I did a little studying, you know. That was-- that was the type of work that I chose as opposed to going out and working for a farmer in the hay fields or driving truck during harvest or something like that. Those were good jobs at that time, too.

RB: Okay. Could-- did you get any education in auto mechanics in-- while you were in high school? Did they carry that?

RH: No. They carried it. They offered it. But I didn't really plan at that time to go into the automobile business or auto mechanics. I picked up so much auto mechanics in the service station through the years that I worked in the station that it gave me a real good background. Even after I went into the service in the early '50s, I got bored. One place where I was stationed back in Granite City, Illinois, the engineer base depot back there. And I went down, and where I had a little good-sized Shell service station in town where I bought my gas and had my car serviced, why, I'd pitch in and help 'em every now and then. Well, they wanted me to come and work nights. I had enough free time where I could get off the base I actually did that.

RB: Do you know any other kinds of work for young men in-- I imagine-- I don't know what was going on with women at the time, but let's get back to that. Any other things like carpentry, things like that, that people were learning in high school here at that time that ended up being career possibilities?

RH: Well, no. I knew-- I know that they had shop classes. They had a class while I was in high school called Vocational Education. Actually, their shop classes-- some fellas took shop classes, and I don't know. I'm trying to think. I can't really-- I don't think any of them worked into jobs as much as maybe the contractors. Professional contractors that I knew that later went into the contracting business generally picked it up and followed an uncle or a father in that line of work. But they did-- they did offer classes like that, and several of the fellas took shop classes. But they even had auto mechanics classes.

RB: And you didn't take those?

RH: I didn't take any of those.

RB: Okay. Do you know anything about the job situation for young women coming out of high school because during the war years, women had started

working in industry a lot more? I don't know if you know anything about that situation in La Grande, tell me. And then afterwards in '46 on, the years we're talking about, what were young women doing?

RH: The women that I knew that were going to college were taking business courses to become secretaries, at that time. Of course we didn't have the computer, and they were taking shorthand and typing and classes like that. I took typing classes with some of them that later became secretaries. They-- some of them that were really motivated went on to Eastern Oregon College and became teachers. They could get a BS degree in general Business, a lot of them. A lot of the fellas that I knew, several fellas that actually just took general Business because they didn't really know what they wanted to take. They-- one of 'em went on to be a-- well, a couple of the guys that I knew real well became fantastic CPA's. One of 'em just passed away a couple of years ago. He was a corporate CPA in Portland. His-- you know, he was written up in some who's who in the business world. He was very, very successful. Donated \$150,000 to the basketball scholarship, or not scholarship, but basketball athletic fund up here because of the fact that he said had he not had business people donate to the basketball athletic department while he was going to high school he probably wouldn't have become so successful as he was.

RB: Do you remember his name?

RH: Yes, I do, yeah. His name was Fred Gerard. His father was deceased. His mother and one sister lived here in La Grande. He-- I worked with Fred while he was going to college. He worked with me in a service station. He was one of the guys that I recall that I worked with for-- he worked part-time nights, and I worked full-time days. He became a very, very successful CPA.

RB: Okay. Of the, I think it was nine car dealerships, were any of those-- did any of those organizations employ women? Particularly, did any of them have women as their-- in their leadership positions?

RH: No. Generally women at that time were often, very often, in bookkeeping positions only.

RB: And secretarial?

RH: Yeah.

RB: Okay.

RH: That's the only positions that generally the main-- I'm thinking, five, six of those dealerships out of the nine employed women in the secretarial positions.

RB: Okay. Did this-- How about in sales positions because you became a salesman finally for a number of different companies? Did any of them get into sales positions? And if they didn't then, when did that start to happen?

RH: There weren't any women at all in sales positions for many, many years. Never that I can recall has there been any successful, well I shouldn't say successful, but any women sales personnel in La Grande in any of the dealerships that stuck with it and enjoyed it. I can only think of one or two that tried it in La Grande. Now if you go to the cities now you find women as sales people working for the big dealerships in the cities like Portland and Boise and places like that, uh, Spokane, Seattle.

RB: But that's very low-level in Union County.

RH: Yeah, yeah. There isn't right now-- there isn't any--
[recording interruption - 13 second delay]

[T1, S2]

RH: There aren't to my knowledge any women engaged in selling automobiles at this time.

RB: Okay. What do you know about minorities involved in the automobile industry here?

RH: Never has been, that I know of, any in La Grande since 1946.

RB: Have there been any people who work, like mechanics, who worked in the industry at all? 'Cause there is a black pop-- a small black population here.

RH: Yeah, they-- they never have. I'm thinking back. I cannot think of anything where other than poss-- than janitorial work there hasn't been any minorities involved in dealerships here in La Grande since 1946.

RB: Okay. That's an interesting fact. It's still true, I think.

RH: I think it is.

RB: Okay, let's go back to some of the main dealerships you worked for. Why don't you give a rundown of, particularly Goss and Lynch and offshoots of them?

RH: Well, the-- to start with in 1946 there was-- M.J. Goss was-- he is probably the oldest dealer-- one of the oldest automobile dealers probably in Oregon. He-- it was originally started back in 1922 and it's still in operation today in the same family. He presently is the Chevrolet dealer. Geddings-Lynch Motor Company was another firm that was a...it was compiled of a fellow by the name of Ed Geddings back years and years ago during the war years. Ed Geddings had a son-in-law, Mike Lynch, and Mike Lynch came into the dealership working with and for Ed Geddings and became a full partner. And Ed Geddings backed out of the dealership and retired.

RB: When was that?

RH: That was back-- I can't tell you accurately. It was back, I'm gonna say, in the very early '40s. I know Mike Lynch was a very, very shrewd and good businessman. He was good to his customers. He was good to his help. He was very successful because he had good years. He believed in motivating his help. And at least once a month he would call everyone together and we would set down in the meeting room, and he would show his entire workforce exactly how much money that had been made or lost that month. He motivated his workforce by showing them these things. If it was a prosperous month, why, he'd take the workforce out and give 'em a big feed. Feed 'em a nice meal and they'd get together like that, and it formed a sort of a family company there where everybody felt like they sort of belonged rather than you just had a place where you went to work and they gave you a paycheck. He made you feel like you were doing your part to help in that firm. I went to work for him, Mike Lynch, for Geddings-Lynch Motor Company, when I come out of the service in 1953. I had not had any background in selling automobiles, but I knew a lot about automobiles. And I had a desire to-- I liked people, and I'd worked with a lot of people. And I knew a lot of people in La Grande even though-- because I'd been working around in the service stations. So I went to work for Mike Lynch at Geddings-Lynch Motor Company in 1953, and I sold cars for him: Pontiac,

Buick and Cadillac. At the time I went to work for him he was the International truck dealership. He didn't like some of the things about the way-- he'd been an International dealer for a long, long time, but he gave up International and took on GMC. Where he was a GMC, corporate GMC dealer for Pontiac, Buick and Cadillac, why, they urged him to become a GMC pickup and truck dealer. So he took on GMC while I was workin' for him. Very promptly, I remember, we sold two new school buses to the school district here in La Grande. We-- I took another salesman with me and in 1960 and went back to Lima, Ohio, to pick up these new school buses and drove 'em home. Those were the first GMC buses that we'd sold any of the school districts around, the outlying school districts as well as the school district here in La Grande.

RB: About how many-- when you were working for him-- you started in 1953. About how many salesmen did he have and anybody really notable that you remember from that time?

RH: He had a sales manager that became a very close friend of mine by the name of Vern Pridgen. Vern Pridgen had been with Mike for several years. He was with him back in the late '40s. He was sales manager. He had a parts manager, Kurt Roper, who was with him. A very, very loyal and very fine parts manager was with Mike from back in the '40s until after Mike sold the business.

RB: You mentioned before that Mike Lynch really took care of his employees. Do you remember what kinds of things were involved in that? I know my father comes from an old style company like that. He works for one. What happened if people got sick, had to go someplace? What happened? What-- what did he do specifically?

RH: I know the fellas-- I never did have occasion to borrow from him. But I know of some of the fellas that were in the shop, Mike financed their homes, loaned them money for down payments to buy homes. I know he was right there in case any of the fellas had any kind of an emergency or anything. Mike was always right there ready to lend a hand, normally assure them that their jobs were safe. I know he-- at the time I went to work for him he had an older mechanic by the name of Toad Howell who was a-- who had been with Mike back when Toad was the only mechanic he had. And he said we would have these meetings that I talked about and go out and have dinner and reminisce about the old days. Mike would say, "You know, I was

always able some way or another to--" back in the old days when times were tough during the Depression he would-- he said, "I always managed to give you money to buy groceries or give you a paycheck." He said, "Sometimes I didn't know if those paychecks were good or not." And Toad would laugh and say, "Well, they always-- they never did ever bounce back when I'd cash 'em." But they talked about the old days, and there were-- he had Toad Howell and Clarence Evensen was a fantastic tune-up and automatic transmission specialist. Then he had a fella by the name of Gilbert Weisman, was a fantastic older mechanic that was a great engine mechanic. Leonard Riggle was another just all-around good mechanic. Then he had Ray Cornwell was a front-end specialist. Then he had two lubrication technicians, a fella by the name of Jack Nickel and another fella that's still alive today by the name of Harry Payne.

RB: Now this sounds like a company that people would work for a long time. Like what kind of period would these gentlemen work for--

RH: Oh, some of 'em had been there--

RB: a company like that?

RH: Some of 'em had been there-- he had a detail man that did light mechanical work on used cars, but his main job was detailing new and used cars. And he was a fantastic detail man. Whenever you'd take a used car, and Mike would walk out and walk around it with him. His name was Art Kelley. He'd say, "Art, I think we ought to do this and this and this and this." Art would go through that used car from one end to the other detailing it and making it look beautiful. If he might have to remove the seats and shampoo the upholstery and shampoo the carpets and clean it all up, you know. I mean when those cars came out of that detail department onto your used car lot they were ready for you to show to anybody.

RB: How long did he work for Lynch Motors?

RH: He worked for Lynch Motors-- I know-- I'm trying to think. He must've worked for Lynch up close to thirty years. And toward the latter years when Mike would get short on sales personnel for some reason-- maybe he had a used car salesman that quit, went to work for another dealership or something. You had your bigger turnover in the sales department than you did in the shop. You rarely had turnover in the shop, but you did in the sales

department because not everybody found sales work to be to their liking. Because, you know, it was like chicken one day and feathers the next. You didn't look at what you did this week as opposed to what you did for the full month. And some months you didn't always do as good selling because you had weather was a big thing that played into it. And you know, your prospects during harvest time were harder to see and harder to get a hold of because they spent a lot of time out in the fields. They'd go out in the field at sun-up, and they'd still be there after dark. And that meant that a lot of your farm clientele was just absolutely impossible to put together a deal because they were interested in harvesting that crop. They could buy a car or a pickup or a truck anytime.

RB: Yeah.

RH: So, you had those things that entered into it. But just to-- I-- Art Kelley would-- he detailed these cars. And to show you the kind of a person he was, I always remembered I had a good customer that I used to sell new cars to, new Cadillacs. And Art one time-- we had a-- we had a rule that if he found pennies, nickels and dimes and quarters under the seats of these cars he didn't have to give that to us so we could return it, if it was just chicken feed. If he found gold chains, earrings, watches or anything of that nature, a billfold or something, of course we wanted it back. So one day Art come out on my sales lot and he said, "Hey Shorty," he said, "How much does it have to be before you want it back, this money that I find in these cars?" I had just traded Cadillacs with this fella. And I said, "Oh," I said, "You keep the nickels and dimes. Now if it gets into paper, why, you probably better talk with me about it." And so he reached his hand out, and I reached my hand out. And he dropped and old, dirty, wadded up, dollar bill, really dirty, dusty, and I unrolled it. It was a \$100 bill. And so I said, "Where'd you find that, in so-and-so's '58 Cadillac he'd traded in on a new '60?" He said, "Yeah, it was behind the seat." And I said, "Well, thank you, Art. I'll be sure that he gets this, and I'll be double sure that he knows that you're the one that found it." So I went back out that night after work and walked into that fellow's place of business. He run a supper club here in La Grande. He set me up a drink, a cold drink of some kind, and I said, "You know that last \$150 that we were hagglin' over for three or four days?" And he said, "Yeah." He said, "I probably shouldn't have give in so easy." He said, "But my wife wanted that car." Well I said, "I got to feelin' bad about it, and I brought this back to you." And he looked at this, and of course I'd wadded it back up. And he said, "You found that under the back seat." I said,

“Well, I didn’t.” I said, “Ken, Art Kelley found it when he was cleanin’, vacuumin’ the car out. He found it behind the back seat.” He said, “Yeah, I remember just when I put that back there.” He said, “We went out with some friends that had come from up where we used to live, and we went out to dinner one night. And I’d had a few drinks, and I was spendin’ too much money. And Helen put me in the back seat and told me not to spend any more money. And I wadded up some-- several hundred dollar bills and stuffed them down behind the back seat so I wouldn’t spend ‘em.” [phone rings]. And he said-- [phone rings].

[recording clicks - no delay]

RB: Okay, um-- asking whether the same kind of relationship that Mike Lynch had with his employees was common in other dealerships in La Grande at that time, particularly in the-- in the-- from ’46 on and early ’50s?

RH: I think it really was. I think in small dealerships, the size of the dealerships in a town like La Grande, you had more personal relationships, close relationships with, you know, than like you did in the big cities. I think it was very common in several of the dealerships in La Grande to form that close relationship with the dealer principle.

RB: Did you see that kind of relationship change as young people get more mobile? Particularly you differentiated between the sales personnel and the mechanics, people like that who did the work inside. Did those kind of relationships start to change at any time, or do they still continue?

RH: I think that they continue. I know they continue with a couple of the dealerships. I know that there are some newer dealerships here in La Grande that they have an awful large turnover of-- in their sales force. And I don’t think they-- I think they use a different type of selling. I think they use a big city type selling in some of these larger dealerships. We used to refer to it as system selling. They would run a customer back and forth from one salesperson to another salesperson to a closer. They use what they call system selling which originated in big cities. We didn’t ever use system selling in La Grande area. Your small communities generally didn’t because you had to form a clientele. You had to gather a clientele that you worked with. And you know, you’d go out and you’d sell a fellow a car and you might be out helping him. I know I’ve had times when I’d be out helping a guy maybe work on his spring out behind his house or something, and he’d say, you know, “Well, you’d better stay for supper, Shorty.” And so I’d set

there and eat supper, and we wouldn't even discuss a car deal. And then I'd say, "Well, I guess I better be going back to town." He'd say, "Well, you better put my name on that new car." Because you formed--

RB: So, you still--

RH: a good relationship you didn't always go and ask a person to buy a car. It's like when I later became a sales manager for Gateway Auto Company for many years. I had new salesmen that worked for me, and they'd say, "When you say get in a car and go out and make calls exactly what do you mean, Shorty, go out and make calls?" And I'd say, "Well, you go out and you take and jot down some names or maybe an area that you want to go out and find out where people-- who lives where." And, "Well, do you just stop and knock on a guy's door and ask him to buy a car?" And I'd say, "No, you see a fellow out here working in his garden, and you might walk up and tell him how nice his garden looks and visit with him a little bit and comment about this good-lookin' pickup that he's got settin' in his driveway. And ask him if he'd be interested in selling it." And he'd say, "Well, you know, I've thought about maybe doin' some tradin', but if I got rid of it I'd have to buy a new one to replace it." Well, you've found out what you really wanted to know, but you didn't ask him to buy anything. You asked him if he'd be interested in selling his vehicle."

RB: Is there any way-- is there any-- as opposed to system sales, what kind of sales do you call that? Was there a term?

RH: System selling was a name that was given a type of selling in the cities mainly. And what it was is you'd go in and look at a car, and a salesman would come out. And he'd say, "Are you interested in this car?" You know, and he'd show you something about it, and you might say, "Well, I would only be interested in it if I could get what I want out of my trade-in." And he'd say, "Well, where is your trade-in?" He might walk out there, and you'd tell him what you wanted for your trade-in. And he'd say, "Oh, I don't think there's any problem with that." And you'd say, "Well, then we could make a deal." So he'd have-- he'd make out an order and put down the amount of money you wanted for your trade-in and have you sign the order. And he'd say, "Well, I'll just take this in to my boss." And he'd take that order, and go into the sales manager, or the closer they might call him. And he'd say, "Oh, we can't do anything like that." But he had your name on that you are a buyer now. You've been qualified not as a shopper or a

prospect. You're a buyer. All you got to do is close that gap. So he would maybe walk back himself or send another salesman in, and he'd bring this paper and say, "Hey, that guy's crazy. We can't trade this way, but we could trade this way." And maybe he would put down another figure for your trade-in that was maybe \$2000 dollars less than what you wanted. Maybe it'd only be \$700 or \$800 dollars less. But they-- you'd say, "No, no, no, I couldn't do that." And the customer would get up and start to run, and he'd say, "Wait a minute. Wait a minute. What if we did this and this and this?"

RB: Do you think--

RH: And they'd wear the guy out by running so many people to him to talk to him. They called it system selling. They a lot of times would let the fella, "Well, while I run this by my sales manager, why don't you take and drive this car home and show it to your family and come back? It'll take me probably an hour to get this." Well, the guy'd go home, and he'd pull in the driveway. And his neighbors'd come out, and he'd say, "Here's my new car." Then he has to go back, and they say, "Oh, we can't trade that way." Well, the fella-- "Gee, what am I gonna do? I've already told everybody I bought this new car?" It was called system selling.

RB: Do you think you could use a system like that in La Grande and be-- and make it as a car dealership?

RH: It's been tried, and it's-- it's-- you oftentimes alienate yourself from your clientele. I have had friends through the years that would go down to Portland or Boise and buy a car from a system outfit, a system dealership. And they'd come home, and he'd say, "The only reason I bought this car was because my wife wanted it. I got a bad taste in my mouth. I don't like the car. I don't like the guy that I bought it from. I won't ever go back there again." And you can't do that in a small town because you don't have that big of clientele.

RB: Okay. Let's go back to Lynch Motors. How long did you keep on working for Lynch?

RH: I worked for Lynch-- Geddings-Lynch Motor Company. At that time it was Geddings-Lynch Motor. It was later renamed Lynch Motor Company. But I

worked for Geddings-Lynch Motor Company, Mike Lynch in particular, as a salesman from 1953 until the end of January 1961.

RB: Okay. At that time did you always work for Lynch, or did you work for any of the other companies that he formed? I don't know the--

RH: No.

RB: history of it.

RH: No. He only had the one company, Geddings-Lynch Motor Company. And at that time when I was working for him I had a friend, Bob Goss, who had purchased Gateway Auto Company from M.J. Goss Motors.

RB: Okay. So you went to work for Gateway?

RH: I went to work for Bob Goss who owned Gateway Auto Company in 1961.

RB: Okay, and what did they sell?

RH: They sold at that time-- they sold a real popular small car, economy car, which was called the Rambler. It was-- the parent company was American Motors. We had Rambler. We had Jeep which was the little CJ5, the pickup, and the Jeep station wagon. We had-- he had just dropped two foreign cars which was the French Renault and the French Peugeot. And so he just had Jeep and American Motors.

RB: Did anybody pick up the Renault and Peugeot?

RH: No.

RB: They didn't?

RH: No.

RB: So those cars didn't sell well in this area?

RH: They-- they-- once again, they were-- they were sold while cars were hard to get. Peugeot never did go over real big. It was an excellent automobile, but it never did go over real big in Union County. They sold quite a few little

Renault Dauphines. They were a little four-door economy car, and people bought 'em to commute back and forth to Union, to Cove, to Elgin. To you know, back and forth to work, and they sold quite a few of those.

RB: Okay. How-- how long did you stay with Gateway?

RH: I worked with Gateway until April of 1978.

RB: Okay, and what do you know about the Goss family who started the Goss Motor Company? And then who didn't-- who did you know and were involved with?

RH: The Goss Motor Company-- M.J. Goss Motor Company was started by Milo Jasper Goss, Sr.-- M.J. Goss. He was a fine car man, and I worked with a fellow by the name of Roe Buchanan that had worked for Mr. Goss for years and years. And he was-- he started that dealership in La Grande right down on the main street of town in 1922.

RB: Okay, and you started with him in '61. Do you know anything about the--

RH: Goss--

RB: Gifford--

RH: Goss--

RB: Goss family, or it's--?

RH: I started with Bob Goss who--

RB: and-- and--?

RH: See, Goss Motor had a little satellite dealership. I call it a satellite dealership-- called Low Cost Auto up at the west end of Adams Avenue, the west end of town. And they had Jeep and Renault and Peugeot. Well, they wanted to take on Rambler from American Motors. And in order for them to get American Motors to let 'em have that dealership in 1959, late '59, American Motors said, "We won't let you have a dealership as long as you carry the name Low Cost Auto. We don't like that name connected with our automobiles." And so they renamed Low Cost Auto, and renamed it

Gateway Auto Company because it was the gateway to La Grande being at the west end of town.

RB: What was the location?

RH: The location was on Adams Avenue at Third Street. And it-- we-- we-- it was an excellent location because at that time the big building that now houses Blockbuster Video was, in fact, Albertson's Food Store. So we were right across the street from Albertson's, and when people came to shop for groceries-- while mother was in shopping for groceries the dad comes over and starts looking at your used and new cars. It was a very, very good situation. It was a small building, but we did our service work-- we also had the Texaco service station. We acquired it-- that was just across the alley from us, and that's where we did all of our service work.

RB: The Texaco that's still there?

RH: Yes.

RB: That building that's still there?

RH: Yes, that building is still there today and is run by Wes Kalmbach. That was-- we used that as a service facility. And we had a small shop within the building where our dealership was and a small showroom. It's the same building--

[end tape]

September 14, 2004

Transcribed by Paula Helten (12/14/2011)

[audio begins - 10 second delay]

RB: This is Shorty Hutchinson on September 14th, 2004. Uh, the first question I have for Shorty is uh, the locations of the dealerships, auto dealerships in downtown La Grande, uh, which was pretty extensive and has a long history. Go ahead.

RH: Um Ron, in 1946 the very first-- in January 1946, as my memory calls, there were nine established auto dealerships in business in La Grande. And all nine of them were within the confines of, uh, the downtown area. And uh, there was, uh-- to point out sort of where they are and give you an idea of

where they were-- why uh, M.J. Motor Company was at 1415 Adams, the present location where they've been since 1932. Prior to that Goss Motor Company had been down on the corner of Adams and Fir where the Wells Fargo Bank is presently located. And they were there from-- for ten years, from 1922 until 1932. There was Walker Motor Company which was the Ford - Mercury - Lincoln dealer, and he was located where Max Square is pres-- pres-- is presently located. It was at the corner of 4th Street and Adams Avenue, and he was the Ford - Mercury - Lincoln dealer. Um, across the street from him, from Walker Motor Company was Perkins Motor Company, uh, at the corner of 4th and Adams Avenue. They um-- they were located in the building that is presently housed by Blockbuster Video, and they were the Buick - Dodge - Plymouth dealer. Then, Geddings-Lynch Motor Company was located at that time down on the corner of Fir and Jefferson, and I think there's a small eatery of some kind in there, a little restaurant. Um, they were located in there, and they had their uh-- their auto dealership, their part's department, their garage was in that building, and then there was a ramp along the side of the garage that went upstairs. And their body shop and car storage was upstairs in that same building. And they had an elevator-- no, they didn't have--

RB: How did they get the--?

RH: an elevator. The ramp. They drove the cars up that ramp. And when I was working for Geddings-Lynch Motor Company, uh, back in the '50's we still were takin' large Buick sedans and Cadillacs up that ramp, driving up that wooden ramp, uh, to get up into the storage area. It wasn't any longer used for a body shop. After Geddings-Lynch Motor Company built their new building in 1951 and moved down to the present location of Lynch Motors at uh, uh, Adams and uh, Hemlock, um, then they used the old location of-- of Geddings-Lynch Motor for just their body shop and storage up above for their cars. Now that's what they were using that facility for storage up above, um, until oh, after I left in-- after I left the-- the Geddings-Lynch Motor Company. They were still using that up there. And if it was raining or anything, you-- or snow on the ground, you couldn't get a car up that ramp because there had been so many cars up that ramp that it was slick. And uh, you-- you just couldn't take one of those big automobiles up through there. It was too narrow. Anyway, to go on there was uh, Geddings-Lynch Motor Company was as I said was located at Fir and Jefferson. Hamilton Motor Company was the Chrysler - Plymouth - Oldsmobile dealer at that time. He was located at 3rd and Adams where

EONI TV or internet service is-- not TV, but internet service is presently located. And that was Hamilton Motor Company. It was run by a gentleman by the name of Bert Hamilton and his son, Earl Hamilton.

RB: What cars did they sell?

RH: They sold Chrysler, Plymouth, and Oldsmobile. Um, there was um, some smaller dealerships. There was Ferguson Motor Company at 1517 Adams next to the Chevron Service Station across from Globe Furniture. And they were Willys Jeep. Willys-- Willys had a-- made a small, four-cylinder sedan. And they also made uh, a jeep after the war which was the small, uh, CJ model Jeeps, and also the Jeep station wagon which was uh, pretty popular with farm people. Herlocker Motor Company was the Hudson Motor Car dealer, and he was located behind the 76 Service Station catty-corner from Globe Furniture. Um--

RB: What did they sell again?

RH: They sold Hudson-- Hudson's--

RB: Hudson's--

RH: Hudson's Motor Cars. And uh, then there was Oregon Tractor which was located at 3rd Street, uh-- and it wasn't 3rd Street. It was 5th Street and Depot. And I made a mistake there, I'm sorry. 5th Street and Depot, and they sold Packard Motor Cars. And then later after Ferguson went-- went out of business they also took on the Jeep dealership.

RB: I thought uh, 5th and Depot ran the same way.

RH: 5th-- well, 5th Street-- no, 5th Street is-- runs parallel to 4th Street and comes down and intersects Depot right across--

RB: On the angle.

RH: from number Ten Depot,--

RB: Okay.

RH: the-- the-- the--

RB: Restaurant.

RH: restaurant.

RB: Okay.

RH: And right there where the Post Office is located now, the back of the Post Office was where Oregon Tractor was located.

RB: Okay.

RH: And they had-- they had Packard Motor Cars, and they later uh, after-- oh, in along about 1949-- '40-- well no, not '49. I'm gonna say '47 they acquired Jeep because Ferguson Motors went out of business. Then Paul Bunyan Motor Company, uh, was run by John Larison, Sr. and John Larison, Jr. And it was located, uh, as you come out of the underpass and circle around to the right, Paul Bunyan uh, uh, had a big shop back over by the uh, California Pacific Substation. And uh, they-- they manufactured the custom logging trailer that was patented by Larison, but they also sold-- they were um, the dealer for GMC trucks and Land Rover four-wheel drive vehicles.

RB: The British car.

RH: Yes, the British-- it was an all aluminum Land Rover at that time. It wasn't-- wasn't it-- near as expensive or near as successful a vehicle as the Rover is now. And-- but it was the same basic uh, automobile company.

RB: Uh, did it have a good reputation then because later they had a reputation as an indestructible vehicle?

RH: Yeah, I don't think they-- they didn't have near the following. I'd-- I can't even recollect. My memory's pretty good on what was sold and of course that was what I had an interest in. I can't relect-- recollect them selling any new Land Rovers.

RB: Okay.

RH: The-- Mr. Larison, young Larison, drove one himself, and that was about the only one that I had seen around town. And I don't-- but he did sell a few GMC trucks, and they were the GMC dealer. Now later on in uh, long about

19, uh, um, I'm gonna say '59 to '60 Geddings-Lynch Motor Company got the GMC truck line. And Larison had gone out of business. Uh, Oregon Tractor was just about out of business. Ferguson Motors had gone out of business, and Herlocker Motors had gone out of business. And that left La Grande with um-- with M.J. Goss Motor Company, Walker Motor Company. Walker soon sold out to um, Claude Hand and became Hand Ford Sales. Geddings-Lynch Motor Company remained uh, in business. Perkin's Motor Company sold out to a gentleman by the name of Shaw. And Shaw ran that uh, dealership for uh, oh, a short time, a couple of years, and then he went broke. And so there wasn't uh, uh-- it-- it left the town with-- with M.J. Goss, Geddings-Lynch Motor Company. And uh, uh, Gateway Auto was formed in 1959 as a satellite dealership by uh, one of the uh, partners and owners in M.J. Goss Motor Company opened up Low Cost Auto. After about a year they renamed it Gateway Auto Company. And they became the American Motors Jeep dealer at the same location what 3rd and Adams where Hamilton Motors had been.

RB: Okay, these were what you could referred to before as the war years.

RH: Yes.

RB: Immediately after World War II and people had money coming home from the service. So this was a good economic time for, I'm guessing La Grande, but for the auto industry.

RH: It was a very good time for the auto industry in some respects um, but you know, it takes uh-- it takes several-- several portions of the picture to make it a successful business. And right after the war years you had people coming back from the service with money, and most businesses were making good money on their products. But in the case of the automobile business, for uh, two or three years there was a very great shortage of automobiles because automobile manufacturers were still trying to re-- re-gear up to building automobiles instead of war machines--

RB: Mm-hm.

RH: and war supplies. And so, you'd take um, uh, they-- they had a problem. You know a lot of automobile dealers that were-- that were in demand uh, such as Pontiac and Ford and Chevrolet and Oldsmobile, and uh, they-- they

had waiting lists for cars. Because they-- people put money down and waited on their automobiles.

RB: How long did that period go on where there was a shortage of automobiles?

RH: It pretty much caught up by the time that I um-- I'm going to say that they caught up by about uh, '50-- '49 to '50. It took 'em a couple of years to get caught up.

RB: What happened to the industry in the number of dealerships then? Did that change at that time?

RH: Well, dealerships-- I think they found that in order to-- when-- whenever the supply became plentiful for automobiles the manufacturers got to making greater demands on their dealers. And they want 'em to stock more vehicles. And the dealers that hadn't bankrolled their profits if they made any weren't capable of putting, say five to ten new cars on their lot for people to come in and choose from. And I think they got to where uh, the manufacturers were-- were giving their-- they were distributing their cars to the dealers in the big cities that were buying in larger denominations, and it virtually starved some of these small dealers out.

RB: Mm. Did you see that happening in La Grande where some of the dealerships that you've mentioned didn't stay in business very long?

RH: Well, it-- it became uh-- it became-- when cars became more plentiful automobile manufacturers put people out in the field as-- as district managers. And they would come and call on the dealers, and they would pretty much try to see that the dealer uh, operated in a way the manu-- the way the company wanted them to. The manufacturer, I should say, wanted them to. And they wanted them to stock the product, merchandise it properly, display it in showrooms. And if these dealers didn't have a proper showroom and didn't have the money behind them to stock these cars, for one reason or another, they either got frozen out by the manufacturers or they just plain went out of business. And also you had to have a good relationship with your banker. Uh, you had to have flooring for those automobiles. Because uh, when they pulled up out in front, or when the train pulled in-- back in those days we used to get our-- our new cars on the train. And they would run a boxcar up by the siding down here at Union Pacific, and we'd go down and unload six new cars. And those cars are

always paid for before they leave the factory, either in cash or the bank-- they'd call the bank and draft your account. And those cars are floored by the bank, and after thirty days you pay flooring on them each month. And so uh, some dealers weren't capable of carrying on that type of business.

RB: Okay. Um, right after it-- the war years-- this is the time when you were first in this business. There were a lot of returning soldiers?

RH: Yes.

RB: Um, they were involved in that. Who else was buying? In particular, one question uh, were any of the black members of La Grande uh, involved in that? Would they buy cars--

RH: Yes, I--

RB: as well as--?

RH: I know of-- of uh, a few that bought new cars, and uh, um, a very few. Uh, they were mostly used car customers, but I know of uh, a one in particular that was a good customer of Geddings-Lynch Motor Company. And I know of one or two that were good customers of Goss Motor Company. Uh, they uh-- they had the-- they had uh, the Railroad to work for. And I know back I'd heard stories of when they were uh, some blacks working up in the Railroad-- uh, in the logging communities up in Wallowa County. Uh, they would-- whenever they got paid a lot of times, why, they would often order new cars back in the old days.

RB: Were those the two areas where the black community did well economically? In-- I think you've mentioned logging and the railroads.

RH: Yeah, I think the Railroad and logging and then uh, we-- you know we had uh, uh, some uh-- I think we had uh, one-- one family here that I knew of in particular that was in business for himself. And he had the local shoeshine shop, and-- and he-- they bought pets. They--

RB: Hm.

RH: they had a shoeshine shop. They uh, uh, later branched into furnace cleaning and things like that. And so uh, uh you know-- but you didn't

really-- you didn't have a lot of black families uh, in La Grande when I first come to La Grande. And uh, you know the community-- the black community for one reason or another only was comprised of about, I'm gonna say uh, oh, four or five blocks down on Monroe Avenue at the very most.

RB: It came up.

RH: I didn't-- for instance, I didn't recall there being over uh, four or five uh, students in La Grande High when I was a sophomore in La Grande High School.

RB: Okay. Was that because they would stay home, or--

RH: No, I just-- that was because--

RB: they didn't--?

RH: of the population.

RB: The population was down then.

RH: Yeah.

RB: Okay.

RH: The population was low.

RB: How 'bout the Chinese community? Was that very active at that time?

RH: Absolutely inactive. I'd heard stories of the Chinese being a very active community in La Grande located-- they had a Chinese area, a business district, located down uh, on uh, 4th Street and Jefferson. And it ran on down 4th Street toward uh, uh-- oh, I'm not sure what that street is down there, Grandey or the street below Jefferson. But anyway, I had seen pictures of it in-- Richard Hermens and John Turner's put together a very nice historical uh, book of pictures. And it came out in-- it was comprised of 1985 to 1990--1985 back to 1885! And there were pictures in there of the Chinese community, but I had no knowledge of-- there was no-- there wasn't

anything left of the Chinese community down where-- where Commercial Tires present-- presently located. And that's where it had been.

RB: Was Commercial Tires there when you came in 1946?

RH: There was a large building there that had been uh, uh, a truck shop and uh, different things. And later was-- was Ford's Tire Service, and then was bought out by Commercial Tire. But there's always been a sort of a truck shop or tire service located in that building--

RB: Okay.

RH: since I came.

RB: Do you know if that was Chinese owned before it became part of the larger community?

RH: It was-- that corner-- I uh-- I believe I showed you one picture of that corner.

RB: Mm-hm.

RH: And one down that looked like it was probably at least a block long there of Chinese buildings. And they had pool halls and billiards parlors, I guess you'd call them, grocery stores, smoke shops and things. Probably some uh, uh, Chinese food stores and one thing or another there, but I knew of nothing personally. I'd heard stories that they were in business at that time back in-- back prior to the time that I came here.

RB: Okay. Uh, when you came here who else was buying cars? This is in these war years immediately, but what other groups of people were in the car market? And we can probably go into trucks and farm implements too.

RH: The interesting thing about trucks-- you mentioned trucks-- uh, when I first started selling cars I came back from the service in 1953, and I went to work for uh, Geddings-Lynch Motor Company and was hired by Mike Lynch. And uh, I sold new and used cars, basically used cars when I started out because they were um-- it was a little easier I thought to uh, learn the used car business. And uh, uh, at that time uh, they were a Pontiac, Buick, and Cadillac dealership and also had uh, International Trucks. They had previously had Nash Motor Cars and dropped that line. Uh, I was uh, at that

time you sold farm trucks to some of your successful farmers, new ones, um, not a lot of them. You might sell uh, three farm trucks. I'm talking about a two, two and a half ton farm truck that you'd haul grain to the grain elevator out of your field. Or you might haul cattle uh, to the-- to the stock yard where they-- to the livestock sale. But you didn't sell many trucks in a year's time. You might sell two or three. And you might sell six pickups in a whole year. And that was a big plenty. But as opposed to sales now where you'll sell sometimes um, six to ten or twelve new pickups, Chevrolet pickups, in a month!

RB: When did that-- when did that start changing? 'Cause I know pickups-- your rig is what it's called around here-- uh, is a big business.

RH: Well, the-- it-- it is something that in this country has uh, evolved because you take-- you live in this Grande Ronde Valley, and if you leave here or work around in this valley in the winter time when the weather gets bad, you-- people feel a security when they're driving in a four-wheel drive vehicle. And four-wheel drives have more or less um, really come into their um-- into their realm back in the-- in the uh, '70's. Uh, and it's just steadily increased since then. Uh, I know when I worked for Gateway Auto Company for seventeen years, and we were the Jeep and International dealer, and we sold many, many, many Jeep four-wheel drive Wagoneers. We sold uh, Toyota pickups, and we-- we-- people started developing a love affair, you might call it, with the sport utility vehicle. And it's been comin' on stronger and stronger. And you know it's nothing at all in the last years that I was selling where uh, you-- when you had a young woman walk in the showroom and want to talk to you about a pickup. Or she would just liable-- just as likely want a-- want to look at new pickups as she would a new car. And where we always used to sell a greater number of new vehicles, automobiles, cars, coupes, a lot of coupes, hard-top coupes, and coupes, as opposed to about fifty-fifty on coupes and sedans, now you rarely sell a coupe. Um, the-- the big uh-- the big turnover in new vehicles is in-- is in what they call trucks. They're pickups. They're four-wheel drive, long wheel base, short wheel base. Now the big thing is extended cabs with four doors. And you'll-- you see as many if not more women driving them than you do men.

RB: Was that true when you first came in because you were selling coupes and sedans, but did women-- were women the primary buyer of those, or was it generally the men?

RH: They weren't the primary buyer. You-- you, uh-- you sold to families. You sold to men and women, and you certainly didn't want to discount the woman because she carried as much weight in the family as the man. And many times they would-- the woman would pick the color, the man would choose the equipment. Sometimes they took turns picking the color. I had several customers-- one in particular I can remember where the woman and the man would always have a confrontation over the color of the car. And finally she'd say, "Well, you picked last year. This is my turn to pick this-- this time." And she would get to pick the color of the car. But I've actually had them get in a discussion over the color to where I would uh, say, "Folks, uh, excuse me for a few minutes." And I'd get up and leave them alone in my office, and I'd go make a phone call. Or go out and maybe uh, get a cup of coffee or something and come back in a few minutes after the smoke cleared. And usually the woman got to pick the color. [laughs].

RB: So, you've mentioned a couple cars, vehicles that strike me as having a similar function as the SUV, the Land Rover and the Jeep. Uh, the Jeep is sort of a quasi mini truck, at least the old Jeeps were. Uh, was that true, and did that-- is that market really expanded--

RH: Back in the--

RB: or what?

RH: Back in the '60's when I left Geddings-Lynch Motor Company in 1961 and went to work for um, Gateway Auto Company, a friend of mine had-- had acquired Gateway Auto Company. And uh, he happened to be Bob Goss, a brother to Bill Goss that ran Goss Motor Company at that time. And I had been uh, friends with the representative from International Harvester uh, Motor Trucks. And I run on to him and introduced him to my boss, Bob Goss. And we went out to dinner, and when we ended up that night we had the International Motor Truck dealership. We all ready had Jeep-- the little Jeep-- the Jeep wagon at that time--

RB: Mm-hm.

RH: and the Jeep pickup. Now we had the International Scout and the light duty International line which gave us a half-ton and three-quarter ton pickup, and also the farm truck line. So this gave us-- we had the four-wheel drive lines sewed up at that time because Chevrolet hadn't come out with a-- any kind

of an SUV or any kind of a four-wheel drive that was popular at that time. So we had a corner on the market. We sold to sportsmen, mill workers, farmers. We sold Scouts because they were actually more popular through those first years that International Scout come out because they had uh, a body with a roof over it and doors that opened and closed and fit proper.

[audio interruption - 10 second delay]

A type Jeep, it didn't have uh, a top, a roof, or anything. You just bought the Jeep with two front seats in it, and you bought a rear seat was extra. And they sold for about \$2395 dollars that way, but then you had to buy a \$600 or \$700 dollar met-- metal cabin to put on them. Or you could put a \$300 dollar canvas cab, uh, but it was-- you know, it wasn't much good in the winter. And you'd freeze because those Jeep heaters would-- you could hear 'em runnin', but as far as getting any heat out of 'em is pretty sparse. So, International Scout really took that market for awhile and-- and just overwhelmed Jeep with it. And we sold those International Scouts to all kinds of people. I sold 'em to teachers, and-- and farmers, and mill workers, and people. And uh, you know I even-- we even sold International Scouts to-- to uh, business people that were engaged-- that were working for other automobile dealers for a sport's vehicle so that they could go huntin' and fishin' then in their off-duty hours. So it was a-- that-- people in this area really developed a love affair for the sports type vehicle. And the-- the-- that they could go out in and uh, uh, go hunting, go fishing, go up in the hills and truck through the hills, take their family with them. And so, pretty soon, why, you could see people were buying more and more and more four-wheel drives.

RB: These are still people with families,--

RH: Yeah, all--

RB: generally.

RH: Yeah, a lot of families. And uh, a lot of family people were interested in that because around here you know, why, uh people have these mountains. And that's why they live here and put up with the snow in the winter time is because they love this country and the scenery and the places that it affords them to get out, you know into the hills. But later on we could see that there was a trend towards people buying pickups. And now uh, for the last uh, oh, I'm gonna say probably uh, since the late '80's, why, you've had a lot of people that have moved into uh, Suburbans too. Because you've got the

soccer moms and the-- the family, the women that are taking their kids and carpoolin' and takin' other kids to these functions that these kids get into now, such as soccer and baseball and little league and-- and volleyball and all these sports type activities. And these women haul these kids in these uh, Chevrolet Suburbans, these GMC Suburban type vehicles, the Ford Explorer and the big Expedition. And uh, you're-- you just-- when-- when somebody gets out of a vehicle and walks into your dealership right now, um, if you're-- if you're representing uh, Ford, GMC, Chevrolet, um, or whatever, Jeep, you can figure there is a-- is a large percentage of 'em, they're gonna want to see some kind of a SUV, Sport Utility Vehicle.

RB: Mm-hm. And how about the farm implement business?

RH: The farm trade, it's a very interesting thing. And it breaks down into-- it's just very simple. Uh, farm equipment for the farmer, um, has become so expensive that well, by the time a farmer buys self-propelled combines and hay balers and drills to plant his crop and other farm equipment, uh he-- if you'll stop and think-- if he used to take and buy a two and a half, three-ton truck and put what we call a combination bed on it which had uh, what we call rain racks that went up about four feet from the sides for hauling grain to market. And then they had stock racks that were attached to the top of these grain racks and folded up, and he could haul horses, cows to market. He could haul these horses around if he was gonna ride up in the hills for his cattle, why, they were called combination racks. And you also put a twin telescopic hoist underneath it, and by the time you got one of these rigged you had a lot of money wrapped up in that truck. He actually only used that truck from the farm just a couple or three months of the year, and then it sat around. And usually when you found those trucks you didn't get to sell very many of them because farmers didn't put but maybe two to four thousand miles on 'em in a whole year. So, all of a sudden then in the last ten to fifteen years trailers, stock trailers, gooseneck stock trailers have come into the picture. And they can put a lot of calves, cows, horses into these horse and stock trailers. And they can pull them with a heavy-duty pickup which they drive that pickup all year round. And they back under that gooseneck trailer and drop it on the hitch mounted in the bed of that pickup and take off and go out here and load just almost as many cows or horses as they were loading on those trucks. And take off down the road with them. Uh, this has been a very popular transition for farmers, but it killed the stock truck sales to farmers because farmers all of a sudden say, "Well hey, why do I buy a big old truck and let it set out here and gather dust? Let it-- in the rain and

snow or pull it in the barn or whatever, but I only drive that thing two to four thousand miles a year. Why not get me one of these fancy stock trailers?" And you'll see 'em everywhere for sale. And they-- you just can't hardly run up and down the roads in these rural areas, and just look at how many stock trailers you see settin' out in by farmer's, uh, houses and out by their sheds and their barns. And that's what's-- that's what the-- the whole industry has gone from farm trucks to these stock trailers bein' pulled by heavy-duty four-wheel pickups.

RB: Okay. How about tractors, other kinds of implements, specialized equipment for the fields?

RH: They still sell that kind of stuff, uh Ron, but it's terribly expensive. And they-- they're usin' it longer. They're runnin' it longer. They're spendin' about as much money to overhaul and maintain their farm equipments, such as tractors and combines and hay balers, and as they use-- they're spendin' as much money on that stuff to keep it goin'. From my-- from the-- my observation, they're spendin' as much money as they used to spend to buy new stuff. But that-- that's specialized farm equipment is so expensive that you find a lot of your farmers buying used uh-- used equipment and only your biggest farmers buying new combines, new tractors. And these tractors now, where you used to have a-- a, you know a three-wheel tractor, two little wheels in the front and two big wheels in the back, and now they're big. They have two large wheels on each corner, and they're four-wheel drive, and some of them their even puttin' tracks on. So, they've gotten into where, you know it's nothin' for them to spend \$100,000, \$150,000 for a piece of equipment like that. Where they used to go out and be able to buy one for 15-- \$10,000, \$15,000.

RB: Who sales those?

RH: Well, your big implement companies. John Deere's still in business. They're still a big company. Massey Ferguson's a big company. And uh, Caterpillar has gotten into it.

RB: Okay, here in Union County. Here in Union County, okay.

RH: Uh, you have S & G Machinery out on the Island City strip, sells John Deere. And uh, I-- I don't know who represents Massey Ferguson, but uh, uh, you've got Caterpillar down on Adams Avenue, merchandise the

Caterpillar line. And I see by some of the new equipment sitting out in front of them that they do have uh, tractors and-- and uh, four-wheel drive tractors and stuff. Where they used to at one time all they were interested in was the big commercial uh, uh, construction outfits, road building and bridge building and--

RB: Mm-hm.

RH: things like that. Anyway the-- the-- there's been a tremendous transition in the automobile business to go to what we used to call commercial stuff or-- or farm stuff. But it's spokesman-- they've found that your doctors and lawyers and accountants and business people they can go down and take the wife and buy a new Sport Utility Vehicle. And she's happy as a lark because she knows she can go downtown, and if it lays down six inches of wet snow and she's shoppin' downtown she can get in that and put it in four-wheel drive. Push a button on the dash and back away and drive down the street and never worry about if she's gonna get back home even if her home's up on the side of the mountain. And that's what-- that's where it's been. Uh, the American family, at least out in this country, has a definite love affair with the Sport Utility Vehicle. They cost more to operate. They cost more, maybe to maintain. But they've got 'em now to where the maintenance part is not a problem. And uh-- but they, you know you take an SUV as compo-- as compared to a small V-6 uh, front-wheel drive sedan, and the SUV uh, will get, you know uh, oh, fourteen to twenty-two miles to the gallon. And a-- and a six-cylinder sedan will get uh, twenty to thirty miles to the gallon. But they still have a love affair with that SUV.

RB: Okay. Next time we start I'd like to go-- I'm gonna have to go because I have to call uh, Mr. Rollin. Um, but I'd like to start with how you-- what plans do you have to sell a vehicle? How is that done? You've contrasted how they might sell in Portland compared to how you sell here. So why don't we pick up with that uh, next time? Okay? Okay thanks, Shorty.

[audio interruption - 7 second delay]

September 21, 2004

Transcribed by Paula Helten (12/15/2011)

RB: Hi, this is Ron Brand. I'm speaking with Shorty Hutchinson. The date is September 21st. We're at Shorty's house, and we were gonna pick up with

the kind of selling that they did in car dealerships here in La Grande and Union County.

RH: Yeah Ron, they uh-- as I told you the uh-- the cities had adopted several different techniques that were uh, designed to divide and separate the customer from uh, his helpers in the family and anybody that might come along to sit in and help him buy a car. And they-- they used a lot of different ways of doing that. But in La Grande, as in many small communities, you-- if you were successful at selling and you took it to heart, you-- you developed a good close relationship with your customers and you never pressured them, you never lied to them. Uh, my first-- the first boss that I worked for, Mike Lynch, told-- always told new salesman, you know if I ever catch you lying or-- or knocking another uh, salesman's product, I'll write your check and you're all finished with Geddings-Lynch Motor. He didn't-- he didn't believe in it. Uh, he was a shrewd businessman and very good automobile uh, dealer, but he was a respected automobile dealer, one of the most respected Pontiac dealers in the whole Northwest. Uh, Pontiac division of General Motors had a very-- held Mike Lynch in very high esteem. And uh, so I felt privileged to have been trained and to start the car business. My-- my-- uh, I started my uh, car selling career working for, I felt, one of the best I could have ever had. Uh, because I learned uh, how to treat my customers and how they should be treated after the sale, and uh, that got to be very, very important to me. Because I soon found out that your customers came back to you because of the way-- because they liked the way you had treated them before. They-- they told their-- their relatives, they told their kids, and they told their neighbors, and so this all played a big important part in building up your clientele.

RB: Now this would be different than a city situation. Is there-- would you attribute this difference between being oriented towards the customer in high pressure?

RH: Yes, you see, where in the city they-- their intention was to always uh, run you past several different sales people in-- within the same business. Because in that-- by doing that, their-- their intention was uh, they could wear you down. If you had a personality conflict with one salesman, he would introduce you to another salesman, and that salesman would ask you, "Well, how're you getting along with ole Jim there, you guys about to make a deal?" And you'd say, "No." And he'd say, "What seems to be the trouble?" "Well, we can't get together on a price." Or, "He doesn't seem to

have the right product that I-- he doesn't have a car with the kind of equipment on it that I want," or for whatever reasons. So, this fellow would-- would start asking you questions all over again, and you would reveal things to him that maybe you didn't reveal to the first fella. And-- but then he would turn you over to uh, maybe a sales manager or a closer, and they would-- the idea was once they got your name on the-- on the order, they always-- if you made 'em an offer on a car, they always put it on paper. They would not go to their uh, supervisor without it being on paper because as they put it, until you're on paper it's just conversation. If you sign that you will pay X number of dollars difference between your trade-in and the car you want to buy, or you make 'em an offer on the car that you want to buy, then, they'll take that, put it on paper and have you sign it. Then they would take this offer on paper to their supervisor, and their supervisor would say, "We can't do this, but we have qualified this man as a buyer. He's no longer a shopper or a suspect or a prospect. He is a buyer. He signed his name."

RB: How would you do that same paperwork in La Grande?

RH: Well, in La Grande you'd talk with your-- with your customer and uh, you know you said uh, uh-- and a lot of times you'd been working with him. Maybe you'd been trying to find a particular used car for him or a used pickup. Uh, or maybe it was a new car, and you'd say, "You want it in this particular color with this and this and this equipment on it, and I have found one. And here's what it's got on it, and this is the uh-- this is the sticker price." Now, one thing we have never discussed is you used to just put a price on a car that you got from the factory, and you marked it up a certain percentage and you put a price on the window of a car. Then you came out with a truth-in-lending law which said that when you financed a car you could not charge the customer for any more time on the contract than what he actually used. And it also said that the factory would put a Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price, what we call a MSRP sticker on the wind-- on the window of each new car. That sticker is by law to remain on that window until that car is sold ultimately to the purchaser. And that tells what the retail price is on that automobile for that particular list of equipment. And it had a lot of information such as all the standard equipment and what the options were that were on that particular vehicle. So, in La Grande in answer to your question uh-- and I felt it was important at this time to tell you about that, Monroney. What they call-- the guy's name that was, I think, that the guy's name was Monroney that came out

and-- and came out with that-- that proposed law that passed. And that Monroney sticker has to be on that new car, and has to be on 'em today. Uh, you don't necessarily have to sell that car for that amount of money, but anything that you do in respect to price has to be on that Monroney sticker from the factory, MSRP, Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price. And if you do anything additional to that new car such as you put after-market paint treatment on it or you might add some-- some uh, uh, paint stripes, some striping or enhance the side of it with some-- some kind of um, detail. Or you might put some gravel shields on it, some what we call, mud flaps or gravel shields. Anything that you put on that that's done after the factory that's done at the dealership has to be on the, what we call an Additional Dealer Sticker on it for dealer installed items.

RB: Okay, what-- okay, back to my question about when do you get down to actually working with signing contracts with customers here?

RH: Okay, what you would do: You would talk with your customer and uh, he would say, "Well uh, Shorty, uh,--" you'd ask him, you know. You would say, "Are you uh-- are you satisfied with this vehicle?" And he'd say, "Yep! Yeah, this is what I want right here. This is what I'm gonna buy." "Okay uh, why don't we take-- let me take and uh-- and have our appraiser appraise your car, and let's find out what it's worth, your trade-in. That's the next thing we're gonna have to do." So, he'd give me the keys to his car. I'd get the sales manager uh, or appraiser for that dealership to come. And he'd get in his car, and I'd get in with him. We'd drive it around the block. He'd come in, and he'd get out the NADA or Kelley Blue Book. NADA was National Automobile Dealers Association which for many years was the standard by which they dealt in all used cars, both pricing 'em and buying 'em as used cars, trade-in. And he would take the-- the Blue Book-- Kelley Blue Book or the NADA book and book out that car and all the equipment on that trade-in, arrive at a trade-in price, and he'd give you a figure on that. And you would go out and approach your customer with the trade amount difference that you would accept between his trade-in and the other vehicle. And if he said uh, uh, "Gee, that's not as much as I had hoped to get," and you told him what you were gonna have to do to recondition the trade-in-- um, everybody of course thinks that their car is in top condition. But of course, why are they getting' rid of it if they're-- if it's in top condition in most cases? In at least 60% of the cases, there are things-- maybe it needs tires, maybe it needs some dings touched up, or it might need a little painting, or the upholstery might need cleaning. But it needs a general

reconditioning, and that costs money. And so you would-- you-- when you'd agree on a price then you'd write up an order on it, a sales order. And you'd sign it, and the customer would sign it. And you would take it to the-- to the uh, sales manager, and he'd put his OK on it. And you would either arrange then at that time-- you would discuss financing, and we would uh, go to the finance personnel. Uh, there's usually a person in every dealership. Some big-- big dealerships call 'em the F & I Manager, Finance and Insurance Manager. And that person seeks financing for your customer. Uh, their business is getting on the phone and phoning in or faxing in a credit application if they wish to finance. And generally, the business that I worked for at Goss Motor Company would-- we made it a point to shop for financing just like you'd shop for a car or anything else. We would put that information, that credit application out to three different financing institutions. It might be GMAC, Wells Fargo and-- and uh, one other name.

RB: How is that uh, financing cars-- how has that changed during the time you first started getting involved in sales here and the present day _____?

RH: You mean as far as the in-- interest rate, or what gets done?

RB: Well, the way it's done because uh,--

RH: Well, as I said they passed a law which was truth-in-lending law. And a lot of times uh, back when I first started selling cars I have seen dealerships, none of which I worked for, but I have known and heard stories from my client-- my clientele. That they would have a car financed with a dealership that they had bought a car from previously, and if they went in and paid that car off early they didn't give them any of their unused interest off. And they passed a law back in about the-- I've gotta stop and think. It must have been in the uh, late-- in the early to middle '70's, and it was a truth-in-lending law. And you had to-- you had to disclose to the customer several different things, but above all, you were only allowed to charge the customer for the amount of the time that he used on that contract. So, if he paid that contract off within twelve months, and it was a thirty-six or forty-eight month contract, then he got credit for the unused portion of that contract. That interest was refunded back off of his payoff. What you'd do-- if somebody come in and said, "Uh Shorty, how do I go about paying off that car that I bought from you? Uh, we sold a piece of property, and I've got-- got the money from it. And so, I kinda wanted to pay that car off and stop that interest." So we would phone the in-- the financing institution,

whether it be the bank or GMAC, and they would reach an immediate, what we called an immediate net payoff. And that was back-figured from day one using what they called-- a term-- was called the Rule of 78's. And it is a way-- it is a way of computing the actual time used by days. And they figure the first thirty days, and they would take that interest off of the total amount of interest. Then also eh-- toward the first year contract you pay more interest than you do toward the latter part of the contract. And by-- by the-- say on a forty-eight month contract, if you've paid forty months into it, you've paid all of the interest per se.

RB: Okay, now as far as a person make a deal-- making a deal with a dealer-- dealership then, the actual value of his vehicle, if they're still paying on it, is with the actual amount that has to be paid off is less than the payments would be if they continued paying it off through the life of the loan?

RH: That's true. And if you say-- if you're a customer, and you come to me and you say, "Shorty, I'd like to trade cars with you, but I still owe money on this car." And I say, "That's no problem." And you say, "Well, what do I have to do? Do I have to pay that off before I can trade?" "No, you don't." What we do is we arrive at a trade-in figure for your car, and we call for immediate net payoff figure on your vehicle from the lending institution that you were doing business with. We find out how much you owe on your trade. We take that amount off of the value of your vehicle, and the difference is the net trade-in that you will have to apply to the vehicle that you want to buy. So in other words, we're dealing with a net figure. As far as you're concerned we're gonna pay off your car. We're gonna take the amount of money it took us-- say you owed-- say you owed \$4,000 dollars on your car. Say that we allowed you \$6,000 dollars for your car. We're gonna pay off that \$4,000. We're gonna take the \$4,000 from the \$6,000 trade-in figure, and you have a \$2,000 dollar net equity to apply to your new car.

RB: Okay. Do dealerships ever fiddle with this new amount because if they don't apply-- if they take just what you think you owe on a vehicle if you paid it off uh, that's a higher figure than the net payoff figure if it were paid off all at once?

RH: Okay.

RB: Do dealerships ever try to get around and do that?

RH: They can't.

RB: They can't.

RH: No.

RB: The--the-- the laws are setup--?

RH: Yes, and they wouldn't dare. If they ever got caught at it,--

RB: If they got--

RH: they'd hang 'em out to dry!

RB: That should be a very serious--

RH: They'd fine 'em! Very-- that's a very serious thing! And every now and then in-- there is a-- a monthly automotive newspaper that comes out to dealers. They subscribe to--

[audio ends]

[audio begins]

RB: Shorty Hutchinson on September 21st. This is the third tape, and we were talking about financing cars uh, for purchase here in Union County. Um, I had a question. How many dealerships actually finance the cars themselves, and how many went through banks? And how-- how has that changed during the time you've been working in the field?

RH: Very few dealerships if any were uh-- used the practice of financing cars themselves for the simple reason that it takes a lot of operating capital to run a car business because of the uh, amount of-- of uh, inventory that you have on hand, both in parts in equipment, and in new cars and used cars. And at the time that I was working for Geddings-Lynch Motor Company I remember we used to carry about \$75,000 dollars worth of used car inventory. And that meant you had \$75,000 dollars of your operating capital tied up on that used car lot. Well the-- the thing that you wanted to avoid was to have-- get down so low in operating capital that you had to finance your used car inventory through the bank. Now a lot of dealers weren't well enough off that they-- they had to do that. They had to finance some of their used cars and all of their new cars. Well, what happens if you have an

inventory of new cars setting there, and you have two or three slow months through the winter time we'll say, you're paying the bank interest payments, flooring payments on those automobiles. And when you start out with about-- back in those days you'd only have \$500, \$600, \$700 dollars gross profit in those cars to start with. You don't have to pay the bank too many monthly installments on flooring charges and pretty soon you're profit is going to look down to where you don't have anything. Um, but you had asked me about uh-- about financing. We-- we did our best to-- to finance. Uh, we would shop the financing with two or three, always more than one, financing institutions. And we would advise our customer to take the least interest rate that we could get. And by shopping with two or three financing institutions we were able to play one of 'em against the other and come up with as good a rate as possible for our customer. One thing that we didn't touch on, Ron was when we were into the conversation about how the trade-in process worked. Uh, in some instances in this scenario that you and I were talking about where you're gonna trade cars with me, you're gonna buy a new car. Your car is worth-- your trade-in is worth \$6,000 dollars. You owe \$4,000 dollars on it, so you have \$2,000 dollars net equity that we're gonna apply to your new car.

RB: Mm-hm.

RH: You don't have to make any more payments on the old one. Well say, look at this scenario. Say that you owed \$7,000 dollars on your car, and it was worth \$6,000. Now you have a minus equity. In other words, you owe more on the car than it's worth. So, as a salesman I have to say, "Ron, we checked with your financing institution." We'll say it's Wells Fargo Bank, and they say you owe \$7,000 dollars on your car. Uh, my-- it would probably be \$7,243 dollars and .68 cents, see. And we would have that figure exactly. And they would tell us this payoff figure is good for ten days. So within ten days we would pay them off that much if we make a deal with you. Uh, but when I tell you that you owe more on your vehicle than it's worth, now in order for you to make a trade, you have to come up with some cash because first of all you have to pay off that vehicle. We have to pay it off so we've got to get you to give us at least \$7,000-- whatever the trade-in, or whatever the payoff is so we can pay it off. But then you still have to come up with money to put down on the new one, see what I mean? We referred to that as being upside down. The customer is upside down on his trade-in. He doesn't-- he owes more on it than it's worth.

RB: So, because you're dealing with two things, you're dealing with the price of the new vehicle and what you can allow on the trade.

RH: That's true.

RB: Do you balance those two figures so you come out with what you feel is an appropriate profit margin?

RH: Well, that's always what we always try to do, but you'd be surprised. Uh, there like the grocery business, they say they operate on 26% profit. And they say uh, some of the uh, uh, cut-rate grocery outfits such as Wal-Mart will operate on 16% profit. We never ever-- for instance like the clothing stores operate on a certain percentage profit. They know what they have to have percentagewise in order to make a black figure at the end of the year. In the car business, I never did work for a car dealer that worked on a percentage basis. He-- he works on strictly on uh, uh-- on the scenario of uh, let's try to make a profit. But as far as a percentage profit, percentage never ends into it. Now most dealers pay their sales group people uh, a certain percentage of um, what they take in on the deal. But you'd be surprised. Very, very many dealers operate on the same or less profit, and now with cars selling for \$20,000, \$30,000, \$40,000 and \$50,000 as they did back when they were selling for \$2,000 to \$6,000 dollars.

RB: So, a-- a car salesman, if they working on the same percentage, the boost that they would have would be-- it's-- it's a higher percentage of \$20,000 dollars as opposed to the same percentage as 10-- on \$10,000 dollars.

RH: But they don't get paid on-- see, like years ago I used to get paid on money difference between the trade-in and the new vehicle. They don't do that anymore. They pay you on a percentage of the gross profit.

RB: Percentage of the gross profit.

RH: Yeah. So, you might sell a \$40,000 dollar vehicle, but if there's only-- say if they only made uh, uh, \$800 dollars profit, gross profit, on the deal. That means gross profit is \$800 dollars before they paid the salesman, before they paid the detail shop, before they uh, uh, paid um, for any uh, uh, additional charges. Which might be-- maybe they had a charge-- maybe this car-- in order to find the car that you were interested in, we had to send a man up to-- up to Spokane to pick up this car. He'd take one of our cars out of

inventory, and we'd made a deal with the dealer up there to accept our car and give us the one you wanted. It was a different color, and it had different equipment on it. We had to pay that man to take and drive up there, make that exchange and drive back. And so, you know we did that a lot, an awful lot. Because we-- now that computers have entered into the picture, why, you have uh, right there in front of you, you run a search and you can find out where a certain vehicle is. You-- you put in the-- the equipment and the type of vehicle that you're looking for, and it'll come up with a list of dealers around the Northwest, what the MSRP is on 'em and the color and the equipment, all the equipment. You've already told the computer what equipment you have to have. If you want an automatic transmission or a five-speed standard, what gear ratio you want in the rear end. If it's uh-- if it-- if it's got leather in it, or if it's got cloth. If it's got uh, tilt-cruise tape, air conditioning and all these things. And uh-- but when you get that car back you have certain overhead that you have to pay off. And each car is charged-- that overhead's charged against that new car number. So, the salesman is paid on the gross profit after those things are paid.

RB: Okay. Now is that-- that uh-- the change in being able to find vehicles that you want and travel to get them has that really increased the-- that part of the business?

RH: It's increased the-- fact, it's been good in this respect. You can offer your customer a great deal of-- of uh, uh-- he has a-- he has a great choice of-- of uh, equipment and colors. And he doesn't just have to look at your inventory and say, "Well, I kinda wanted a white one, but you got that light tan there and my wife says maybe that'll be okay." Or he might say, "You haven't got what I want in stock, and I'll just wait 'til you get it." Of course a lot of people, you know they want to look at it, feel it, touch it and look at it. Well, what you do is you'd sit down and you'd say, "Folks, if the car isn't exactly what you want, I don't expect you to take it. But I know that this car has been in this dealer stock for three months. It has a hundred and twenty miles on it, or it has fourteen miles on it. It is absolutely in new condition, he guarantees me. If my representative that goes after these cars, he will inspect that vehicle when he gets up there, and if it isn't exactly what the dealer has represented he won't bring it home. And so, I will guarantee you that if you-- if you like this color, and you like this equipment that I have shown you--" I've actually printed him out a picture of the manufacturer's sticker. "Here's what it's gonna have on it. And you rest

assured that's what you've got me for. I will guarantee you that this car will meet with your approval when I get it here, or you don't have to buy it."

RB: Okay. Who were the people who'd do the transporting?

RH: They--

RB: Did they work for the dealer?

RH: Yeah. We have special people. They're trained. They uh-- they're trained on how to drive new cars. They're bonded. Uh, they go up and uh, uh, look these cars over and inspect 'em, and even in the winter time sometimes. Uh, if a dealer said, "Well, you can have this car, but you haven't got anything in your inventory that I need." So, we take a gooseneck lowboy trailer, and we may drive up there and load that new car and bring it back.

RB: Okay. You mentioned once before um-- I think we were talking about people who did mechanical work on cars, that in some of the dealerships you work with these people tended to stay for quite a long while in-- in a position like that. And I think uh, the relationship of them with car salesman I think you said were not as likely to stay as long. What are the issues involved in that?

RH: Well, dealerships right now-- um, through the years that-- back-- back in the uh, I'm gonna say '50's, '60's, '70's, the American manufacturing, automobile manufacturers got to puttin' out shoddy workmanship. And the Japanese manufacturing, auto manufacturers brought in cheaper cars, and they were economical cars, but they were well-made and for the most part. And because of the fact that competition forced the American manu-- car manufacturers, General Motors and Ford and Chrysler, into back it up and say, "Hey, we've gotta build a better product! These Japanese and German cars are comin' in are fantastic in workmanship!" And uh, so they-- they took a look at things, and right now they're putting out a product that is as good as, if not superior in a lot of cases, to the Japanese and German manufacturers.

RB: Now the people who fix these vehicles uh, need training. Did that change at the same time?

RH: Yes, they-- by the-- by the uh-- the manufacturers require that you-- they aren't called mechanics anymore. They're called Service Technicians. And they have to be schooled in their particular uh, category or their particular uh, segment of the-- of the vehicle-- of the technology. They-- they go to school. They take uh-- they're sent down to special schools. There's a special General Motors Training School in Tigard. With the fact that all of these-- all of these mid-size cars and a lot of even the smaller ones nowadays have a certain amount of electronic uh, computers on board that control the timing, and the air mixture, and the fuel mixture, and the different things. And uh, they have to-- these technicians have to go to school and learn how to deal with these problems and how to-- how to recognize this uh-- these different things that can crop up. They-- they have what they call an electronic scanner that they plug in underneath the dash of your automobile, and they-- and they-- it runs the-- they plug it into your automobile and it will record over to the master computer. And they set right there and that computer diagnoses the problem. If you have a problem with-- say, if you have a vehicle that's-- that's uh, not getting the proper amount of-- of air into the air fuel mixture, it'll tell ya if it's not. If it has a bad catalytic converter, and it's not getting rid of the amount of exhaust that it should, it'll tell you that. Uh, there is a very, very simple thing right now that-- that uh, has come into the picture. If you have your car filled with fuel, and if the service station attendant does not twist that cap on tight enough, it will trip a code. And then a little light comes on on your dash that says Service Engine Soon, eh, which means that you're to take it to your selling dealer as soon as possible. You take it to the dealer, and he plugs a scanner into it and types in some numbers. And it tells him that fuel cap was left loose therefore emitting fuel vapor into the outside air which is against the law. And it-- it thought there was no fuel cap on that vehicle.

RB: So how much will it cost you to have someone tighten your fuel cap?

RH: Well, what he has to do is, he says, "Hey." He goes back there, and he says, "The scanner and the computer tell me there's no fuel cap on this car." He goes back there and gives it a twist, and it's loose. Well, it can cost you \$50, \$60 bucks to get that done. Because every year when the company representative-- uh, the computer representative which comes from a computer company comes in there and puts the new software for that year and all the updates in that software into your computer system, and tests it, and sets it all up, and adjusts it, and will hand the dealer a bill for \$5,000.

RB: Okay.

RH: So, that has to be paid for. And people sometimes really get all out of shape because they think that they should be able to drive in there, and you put that machine on there, and push those buttons, and it tells you the fuel cap's loose. But that man had to stop doing what he was doing. And right now shop wait in-- the shop rate of a Service Technician is \$65.00 dollars an hour.

RB: Okay, the people who start-- I remember you worked on cars as a young man yourself before you entered the auto industry working for dealerships. Uh, is this computer technology changing how people get into this business, particularly mechanics?

RH: You know, it's-- I don't care what you do, Ron. If you have anything at all to do with so many businesses, especially the car business, first of all you have to have knowledge of computers. Because when you set down now, and you figure payments for someone, or you figure uh-- you set down to a computer, and you don't even have price books anymore like we used to have. We used to have little price books, and they'd come out and update 'em uh, you know like every two or three weeks. They'd change some of the equipment, or they'd get a price increase, they'd have to send us new books. Now you just sit down at the computer. And you turn that computer on every morning, it automatically updates. From the satellite it updates your prices. And-- or they'll send you a disk by FedEx, and you'll slip that disk in there and update your prices. But the computer world is controlling everything we do. And it-- right now uh, all this is so computerized that if these cars-- people say, "Ah, they don't build 'em as good as they used to." But when you stop and think of back when we had carburetors, and distributors, and uh, uh, spark plugs that had to be changed every ten thousand miles. Now they go a hundred thousand because they're platinum tipped spark-- spark plugs. We don't have points and condensers anymore. It's electronic. Uh, the-- we don't have carburetors anymore. So, when you pull up to a-- like you go out and get in your car. It starts and it runs perfect whether it's ten below or a hundred and twenty-five in the shade. Because the computer controls the mixture, the timing advance, and the-- the air speed setting, and the fuel mixture. It sets all that as-- as it runs. So in the morning when your engine is cold and you start it, that computer is telling that air-flow mixture to richen up, that you need more fuel. As soon as the temperature comes up it sends a signal to the computer. The computer

readjusts that air mixture, and the timing on the engine, and everything. But it-- as far as the driver is concerned, the consumer, it always runs the same. So, as opposed to how it was back in the '60's-- '50's, '60's and '70's when we started getting cars with air conditioning, and power steering, and a lot of things that the engine had to propel. The engine put out a lot of power to run the power steering. It put out a lot of power to run the air conditioning compressor. You'd pull up to a stop sign on a hot day, you had one foot on the brake and one foot on the throttle, and you had to slip the car in neutral so you could keep it runnin'. Otherwise it would set there and shake and vibrate, and you'd have a heck of a time keepin' it goin'. And if it ran perfect here in La Grande, Oregon, you'd go down in a valley to Salem or Portland and it didn't run worth a fiddle. So you always-- you-- now the day of computers has-- has made these cars run perfectly all the time.

RB: Okay. So, a young man who wanted to work as a mechanic, auto mechanic, would have a very different route toward preparing himself for a job than he would in the past.

RH: That's true. If he walked into a dealership and said uh, uh, "I want to go to work as an auto mechanic." And they'd say, "Well, how much training have you had? Have you been to trade school?" Well, if that fella has been down to Oregon Technical Institute, and he studied computers, and he studied how to make these-- how to read these computers, and adapt them, and make them uh, follow what they tell him is wrong with this engine. Plus the fact that he has to know how to take them apart and put them together. If he's had that kind of training, chances are he'd get a job. If he hasn't, then they could start him on the lubrication rack. And maybe he would advance to uh, doing small jobs such as brake work, and uh, wheel bearing packing, and things like that. Uh, but he would never get into an Advanced Electrical Technician which is one of your key personnel, or Automatic Transmission Specialist, or a Heavy-duty Mechanic. See, there's several different segments. You've got an Electronic Specialist. He never touches automatic transmissions or heavy engine repair. In other words, he doesn't tear engines down and work on them like they used to. He will only deal with electronic problems and tune up electronic problems and air conditioning. And then you'll have a Heavy-duty Mechanic that deals with rear ends, gear replacement, engine replacement, transmission replacement. Generally a Transmission Specialist is a transmission specialist, and he works on transmissions and gear boxes. And as opposed-- one point I wanted to make, and I'm getting clear off of car selling, but in the automobile business

anymore because of the high rate of hourly wage involved anything that takes a lot of labor, they have to weigh the cost of the labor of tearing into something and rebuilding it against if they order a new, what we call a crate re-built engine, or a crate brand new engine. The engine comes in in a crate. You uncrate it. You take the-- the-- some of the accessories such as the air conditioning, and the alternator, and the things like that off of the old engine and put on the new one. Take a chain hoist and drop the new engine in there. You can't afford to pay a mechanic \$60-some dollars an hour to go in and take the pistons out, and take the pan off, and take the-- the intake manifolds off, and exhaust manifolds and go through this engine. You can't-- it's not in-- its, uh-- it can't-- theoretically, you'd have more money in it. You'd have almost twice as much money in it as if you bought a crate engine or a crate re-built or new automatic transmission.

RB: Okay. When did this start to change 'cause I think you're also talking about the change from a general mechanic, local mechanic that would fix almost anything on your vehicle, to high-- to specialties?

RH: Yeah, if you look-- if you just drive down the street, and you look at how many-- used to have two and three and four service stations on most corners in your outlying edges of town. Like your east and west end of town you'd have service stations, and many of 'em had a sign out front: Mechanic on Duty. Now, a mechanic um, he-- he's not sharp enough and doesn't have the tools to work on the larger percentage of cars that are runnin' up and down the street. You've got to take that car-- you almost have to take that car back to the dealership that represents that car in order for them to diagnose the problem, order the parts if need be, and have a man there that's savvy enough, educated enough in that specific car model to know what's wrong with it.

RB: How many uh-- I know there are still some uh, repair places in La Grande. Is that number decreased over the time where there's a small repair shop that will pretty much do general work on vehicles?

RH: Yeah, there's just a very few of them. One in which I know of in particular, used to be a technician for M.J. Goss Motor Company. He was trained by General Motors dealers so he buys the same equipment that Goss Motor has, and he sets up a shop and hires mechanics and he teaches theses mechanics to do work. There's still a few-- mix out there-- there's a few pickups and older cars out there that don't have computerized stuff, that still use

carburetors and aren't fuel injected. And uh, uh, they operate these little shops and do these little jobs. Such as, you know there's-- there's always wheel bearings or gear boxes that need openin' up and worked on and everything. They don't get as much money an hour as your main shops because they don't have to maintain the high technology-- the technological equipment that it takes to keep these new cars goin'. So they can-- [coughs] excuse me. They can operate on \$55 dollars an hour instead of \$65.

RB: Okay. Now a person working as a mechanic of whatever different type--
[recording clicks - no delay]

RB: make a good living wage?

RH: The technician you're talking about?

RB: Yes.

RH: Oh yes, yeah.

RB: They do.

RH: Depending on their experience and the amount of training they've had. And by that I mean, you go into these shops today, like you go into Goss Motor, uh, for instance, and on the wall displayed will be a technician's name. And there will be his certificates of accomplishment where he has been certified by General Motors that he does have special training in-- in-- by Chevrolet, and Oldsmobile, and Pontiac, Buick, Cadillac, or whatever. And he'll have those credits posted on the wall in the general service area where you come in and talk to your service writers and your service manager about what you want done. And just, you know uh, uh, there are-- they're all key men in their own field. Even the ser-- even a Lubrication Technician is not a grease monkey anymore. He-- he knows what that car-- what points that car has to have checked on it. And while he doesn't actually have as many, if any, grease zerks that he has to shoot with a grease gun, but he has duties he has to perform. He knows that-- the type of different uh, specialized lubrications-- lubricants that have to go into those vehicles. And-- and uh, he checks that stuff from one end to the other because these cars are uh-- they-- they can't just-- they can't be serviced in the same way they were forty years ago.

RB: Now, he would also have to keep up with-- in his education and training on that as the vehicles change.

RH: Yeah, and they-- there isn't as much now required of a-- of a Service Technician as there is Electronic Specialist, uh, or a Transmission Specialist, or a Heavy-duty Mechanic, Line Mechanic, but-- uh, Technician. But uh, uh, they-- they uh-- they have to be trained. The-- the-- these-- these are key men in your establishment. And believe me, they're uh-- you know when you go in and you've got a problem, and they say, "Well, what's your problem with your car?" And uh, okay, like I had a little service problem, just a little irritating thing on my new uh, Trailblazer-- Chevrolet Trailblazer. I went in last week, and they set me up an appointment with-- I had to wait three days to get in to one particular Service Technician because he was the one that was gonna deal with this problem. And the problem was uh, a little noise underneath this center steering airbag, behind the-- behind the steering wheel. Well, he has to get in and disarm that airbag so it doesn't blow up in his face. And he has to take and disassemble that-- that horn system there and-- and that airbag underneath it and get down to where this wire and this contact was making this funny clicking noise when I'd turn the steering wheel. And he's gotta have the technology and the know-how to do that, or you know, you blow one of those airbags up, it's about \$700 bucks. So, do you see--

RB: Mm-hm.

RH: why he's got to be trained? He has to be trained.

RB: Okay. Now, the salesman uh, do they have as much job security? And what does that depend on, and do they stay with dealerships?

RH: Salesman are-- are, as far as job security, uh yeah, they have job security. All they have to do to maintain job security is produce. And they have to have a clientele and a good rapport with customers. And when customers come in and say, "Is so-and-so here? Uh, you know I've been looking around for him, can't find him." If the phone rings and the girls are calling for your name, line one, line two, all day long and you get phone calls. You know uh, a dealer doesn't have to be a rocket scientist to see that you're active. You've got people wantin' to talk to you. You're out there talkin' to people about automobiles. Then you've got job security. But if you sit, you know some place and uh, watch TV, or read magazines, or somethin' like

that, or spend your time out on the golf course, then you're not-- you're not going to be very productive. You're not doing yourself any good or them either. We were always taught that in uh, sales you have one item that is the most important thing in the world to you and that's time. If you mess around, and you uh, goof off, and you lose eight hours, you've lost it. You can't ever get it back. And that's eight hours you could have been productive. You could have gone out and contacted four or five people and uh, talked to 'em you know. And uh, I used to prospect by walking up one side of the street and cross over and walk down the other side of the street uh, some days. And uh, you would do nothing more than just visit with people. And I'd always-- if I walked five blocks up Main Street and crossed over, and five blocks down the other side, I'd always pick up two or three prospects. Somebody would say, "Hey Shorty, watch for-- I'd like to get a good pickup." "How much money do you want to spend?" "Oh, so many thousand dollars you know, and something with not too many miles on it; something decent that I could use for a second or third vehicle." Or, "I want a-- were lookin' for a car for our son who is gonna be goin' away to college here, ya know right away, and blah, blah, blah." But you-- you know this is all the way you prospect. And now, I'm sorry to say, there are an awful lot of salesmen-- they-- you can ask 'em, and the biggest part 'em they don't know where their customers live or where people live. Or they don't know about how many kids they got in school, or they don't know anything about their business or anything. And I can remember, not that I was a perfect salesman, but I found that I knew most all of my clients through the years. I knew where they lived. I knew their wives. I knew their-- their husbands. I knew how many kids they had in school. And I would go out and talk to 'em out in their barnyards. Or I'd go out to the sale yard on Thursday and set up there while they were buyin' cattle, or sellin' cattle or hogs, or while they were loadin' 'em out in the chutes, and maybe I'd talk to somebody. And I've closed a lot of deals by verbally because they'd say, "I'll be in when I get this grain cut, Shorty. I'll be in and we'll talk about that new Scout, or that new Jeep, or that new pickup." And-- but I made the contact out in the field. And one of the best places I ever found to prospect this time of year was out in the line waiting to dump the grain at the grain elevator. And there'd be ten, twelve trucks waiting in a line right there. Well, when I was a kid I used to drive grain tuck-- truck in the summer times for uh-- for farmers. And I knew that you wasted a lot of time settin' in that line. And you'd move up, and you'd set there for twenty minutes. And you'd move up, and you'd set there for twenty minutes. Well, awful good place to prospect, just go out and park your rig and get out and talk to those people.

RB: Did other salesman back when you were doing this-- did other salesman do this same kind of prospecting?

RH: Some of 'em.

RB: But it was a good way to be successful.

RH: It was the only way.

RB: It was the only way.

RH: It was the only way. And before-- before us-- before we-- my segment of the-- of the sales people that I sold with and against and uh-- and people I sold for-- back in the old days they used to get in a car because they didn't have a lot of new cars in their inventory. They'd get in a car and put a dealer plate on it, and they'd go out and drive it around to these people's houses until they sold it. Then they'd come back and get another one, and they'd drive out through there 'til they sold it. Then I can-- I've worked with old-time sales people that used to sale-- I worked with a salesman for several years. And I-- I used to get uh-- just really liked his stories about the old days. He had a demonstrator with the first windshield wiper on it. And he also uh, used to go up into a little old loggin' community up at Maxville on payday. Because they'd have poker games in these-- in these-- guys that worked up there would get into these poker games. And he'd-- whoever was the big winner would usually buy a car. [chuckles]. And I know a fella that bought a car one time up there, ordered a new car from him. And uh, he was a young kid, and they had to put wooden blocks on the pedals so he could reach it. But it was also before you had to have a license to drive.

RB: When did that happen--

RH: Oh--

RB: that people had to have a license to drive?

RH: This older salesman that I worked with uh, had back in the old days had sold Studebakers. And uh, he sold Studebakers back when they-- they had a Studebaker that uh-- a certain model that was supposed to have the strongest roof in the business. And in order to prove a point, they-- they built uh, a square porch up on the roof of this Studebaker demonstrator, and they put a

piano and a six-piece band up there. And put it in the rodeos, and it went out and drove around the rodeo grounds with three gals up there singin' and a guy playin' a piano! This little-- and that's the way they demonstrated. But he-- he uh, uh-- he used to go up and work in this little logging community at Maxville-- Maxville up out of uh-- out of Wallowa. And uh, when you go up into Wallowa you see the sign now. It says: Maxville. And it goes off to the left there as you first come into Wallowa. And that was a thriving little community. It had a lot of-- a lot of fellows up there workin' in logging. And-- and uh, uh-- he often went up there and sold automobiles. And he was, at one time, a County Clerk for Harney County down in Burns. And he showed me the first year that you had to have a driver's license. And it was uh-- he carried it in his billfold. And if-- if he ever got stopped by the city or state police, and they asked him for his driver's license, he'd often times give 'em this old driver's license just to get a-- some kind of a-- of a raise out of 'em. They'd say, "Well Sir, you've certainly got a newer license than this." But he uh-- he-- I think that was around 1919 or 1920 that you had to have a driver's license in the state of Oregon.

RB: Mm. Okay, I noticed recently along the Island City strip there are these car lots that don't seem to have much overhead. They're basically just vehicles put out there. How does-- how recent is that type of business, and how do they do it?

RH: Well, they're-- they used to have, I know-- they used to have the-- the mayor of Island City would require anybody within his township to have a dealer's license. And in order to have a dealer's license, anybody that sales-- I forget. It's over three vehicles-- three vehicles a year has to have a dealer license. And there were-- used to be some shady characters around that-- that would sell-- they'd go and they'd uh, buy a car from somebody or they'd buy one from a dealership. And then they'd go out and put it on a lot, put it out in front of their house, hang a sign on it: For Sale; sell it at a profit. Maybe they'd make \$100 dollars. Maybe they'd make \$150. Maybe he'd make \$300, who knows? But they try to police that because they require them to have a dealer license. In order to have a dealer license, you have to be bonded because you have to be bonded that you-- and a bond will cost you anywhere from \$600 to \$1,500 dollars. I don't know. Uh, the last dealer license that I held was in 19-- uh, when I was in the recreation vehicle, travel trailers and used cars. And my bond at that time was uh-- for our dealer license was uh, I think around \$800 bucks a year.

RB: Okay, yeah. Now, are these all sold as a dealer's cars, or are some of them just sold by the actual owner of the car?

RH: They can be sold as an individual car. Like, you can-- you can sell your car and buy another one. Maybe you drive it two months, you don't like it. You can sell it and buy another one. And they won't bother you as long as you don't misrepresent and get into trouble. If you get into trouble with somebody that bought one of your cars, and they come back and say, "Hey, this car isn't what you represented." By law, you're supposed to have a sticker posted on the window of that car before you ever offer it for sale. And that window sticker-- if you'll go down here on any car lot and look at that sticker that's posted it states that this car is sold with warranty or this car is sold without warranty. And even if it's uh-- say it's only a one or two year old car that still is covered under the manufacturer's-- under the remaining portion of the manufacturer's warranty, then it states there that this car is not sold with warranty. And then down in the fine print here it says, "The reason this car is being sold without a warranty is because it's still covered by the remaining portion of the manufacturer's warranty: Three years or thirty-six thousand miles, whichever comes first."

RB: Okay. Now uh, I've noticed some vehicles that I had seen previously on Route 82 between, oh say-- near Alicel and appeared on one of the lots out here on the strip. Are people-- how is that business working? Are people looking for used cars that they can--

RH: I think you're--

RB: lend space, or--?

RH: I think you're probably referring to out on Highway 82 every now and then you'll run across a car that's settin' there with a For Sale sign in it.

RB: Mm-hm.

RH: Most all of them are tan in color.

RB: Mm-hm.

RH: And they're owned by uh, the estate of a fellow by the name of J. Dale Standley. He painted everything that he owned the same color.

RB: Mm-hm.

RH: That was his favorite color. Believe it or not, one time I sold him a brand new 1966 or '67 Jeep flat-bed pickup, and he took it home that night and repainted it tan. And--

RB: How did these vehicles end up out on one of the strips--

RH: I think his wife--

RB: out here in Island City?

RH: I think his wife is having different people that they knew-- and he was a very prominent farmer at one time. He passed away several years ago. I think she has gotten permission-- maybe uh, uh-- maybe his son or daughter of his has gotten permission to place 'em out there with a For Sale sign in 'em. Out in Island City, the particular lot that I've seen 'em on is a lot that I understand that if you want to sell a used car, you can come and place the car on that lot and put a For Sale sign in it and the particular's, how much you want for it and whatever. And I don't know if you pay them a little commission when you sell the car or how it works. That's the only kind of a lot I've ever seen that done on, that-- that particular process. I don't know if it works or not.

RB: And this is fairly-- a fairly new development--

RH: Brand new.

RB: here.

RH: Brand new within the last year.

RB: You used to see cars, two or three vehicles at gas stations--

RH: Yeah.

RB: sometimes for sale. Back in the days when mechanics at those stations worked on vehicles, was that the same kind of selling, reselling for a little bit of profit?

RH: Well, it depended. Sometimes if a service station owner had uh, a customer-- a good customer, and he said uh, "Hey Al, I-- I want to sell this pickup. Can I sit it on your lot with a For Sale sign in it?" And if the service station owner-- proprietor felt obligated, he might allow him to do that. But he might also get a visit from a state policeman who came in there and wanted to see his-- his dealer's license. And if he couldn't produce a dealer's license, than he'd better have a good reason for having that vehicle settin' there with a For Sale sign in it. And he might tell the-- the uh, state policeman, and I've seen this happen. He might tell the state policeman uh, "This is a customer of mine. He's you know-- he's got sickness in the family." Or, "It belonged to this-- to this guy's wife, and he wants to sell it. She passed away." Or whatever, but he'd better have a story because uh sometimes a dealer will call the state police and say, "Hey, I've got a service station up here on such-and-such Adams, and he's got two or three cars up there for sale. How come he can do that without a license, and you make me buy a license and-- and bonded and all this stuff that it costs me? I've got a lot of overhead here to protect, and yet, a guy can put two or three cars up there, and he doesn't have to have a dealer's license or be bonded or anything! What goes?" So this Lieutenant out there, or whoever they had-- guy is out there uh, in cases that I know of in the past, he'll say, "I'll have my patrolman check that out right away and get back to you." Because--

RB: If the gas station owner didn't make any money on it, can he still do that?

RH: Well, I don't know. There you're talking about a legality that I don't know just where the point of law is there, Ron. But I do know they weren't allowed to do it. You could do it once or twice and do it and get away with it. But if you've got-- if you make a practice of displaying cars with For Sale signs on 'em, those cars had better have the appropriate stickers attached to the window. And you'd better not make a practice of doing it unless you've got a dealer's license because you don't have to be a Philadelphia lawyer to know that somethin' is not right!

RB: Okay. What kinds of cars since you started working, selling cars particularly-- what kind of cars sell in Union County, and how has that changed over time?

RH: Well, we-- of course uh, the larger number of sales used to be in uh, Chevrolet, Ford, uh-- were your big sellers, your-- your big numbers. Uh, then you had-- because we-- I say Chevrolet and Ford because we didn't

have a substantial uh, Chrysler-Plymouth dealer in the area. We didn't have uh, Japanese car representatives in the area. So, your big numbers were Chevrolet and Ford because there were cheaper than Pontiac, Buick, Cadillac, and Oldsmobile. So, you sold lots-- a lot more Chevrolets and Fords. Then, when Japanese cars come into the picture, and they were cheaper, and the quality was pretty good on 'em, very good in fact, people had to go out of town and buy these cars. But they also had to go out of town to get 'em serviced. Now, you stop and think of this scenario, and I've seen it happen many times. If I sold a-- a new car to somebody and they took it home and they drove it for a couple, three months. And one morning they wake up and it won't start. They pick up the phone and they call me and say, "Shorty, my car won't start this morning." And I'll say, "Okay." And they say uh, "You know uh, uh, my wife had to catch a ride to work with one of her working uh, acquaintances." And I'd say, "We'll get right out there and find out what's goin' on." And, "Leave the keys in the car. You're gonna be there." And anyway, I get a service-- I go to the Service Manager. He would get-- a service truck would go out. Maybe it would just need a jumpstart. Maybe the battery was faulty and went bad. But in a lot of cases I was out there within thirty minutes. If they needed a car-- if she had to have a car, or he had to have a car, we'd take a car to them. Say, "Don't-- here, use this car. It's a loaner. Don't worry about-- I'll find out what's wrong with this, and I'll get back to you." And if it was just a thing like changing the battery, which it often was in a case like that, we'd put a new battery in it, take the car back to him, exchange with him, and everything's okay. Now, compare that to this picture. You bought this car from a Toyota dealer in-- in Milton-Freewater-- not, Milton-Freewater-- in Walla Walla or Hermiston, and you wake up some morning, it won't start. And you call the dealer and say, "My car won't start this morning." And he says, "Gee whiz." "Well, could you get somebody to come out and look at it?" And they try to see what it is, "Is it the battery?" "I don't know what it is. It won't start." "Well yeah. Do you suppose you could have it checked, and if it's the battery get somebody to jump you so you can get it over here to us?" Now you have two scenarios there. Which one would you rather be the victim of? See what I mean? So, it's uh-- that's why people did eventually start drifting out away from their hometown and buying Japanese cars, uh, because they were cheaper.

RB: Has the service changed because there's an All Foreign Autos place now in La Grande, uh, that do work on foreign--

RH: Yeah, they--

RB: manufactured--?

RH: Yeah, they work on foreign cars because as a general rule, uh, dealers have a commitment to their clientele and to their customers. And if they tell you, "I'm not really able to work on your new Chevrolet or your new Pontiac until about a week from Thursday." And you look over there and you see a Mercedes and a Toyota and a Honda, you're gonna be a little bent out of shape. "Why did I buy this car from you? And you say you're gonna service it for me, and you're taking care of foreign cars here? Why can't you put my car in there?" So they don't work on anything they don't sell unless they have nothing else to do. And somebody uh-- now say if a fellow's a good customer-- a good Chevrolet customer or a good Ford customer, and he also has a daughter that has a Toyota, so naturally, the-- the garage is gonna make an exception and work on it for him occa-- occasionally if it needs some little thing done. But they're not gonna have the special tools to do very, very intricate or sophisticated work and neither is All Foreign Auto.

RB: Okay. Uh, what did you learn during the period of time when you had your own RV business?

RH: In regards to what?

RB: Well, selling, the market. Um, how was it trying to run a business like that? What motivated you to start that?

RH: Well, it-- the RV business was people were buying something to enjoy. Uh, interest-- the rate of interest on people's investments was very good then. You know, it was-- it was up, you know in the 10-- 12% bracket or more. And they were buying travel trailers to take and enjoy and fun with. Go out camping, take a long extended trips, uh, go south for the winter, things like that. And you uh-- any kind of a used travel trailer or camper that you took in within reason, if it was a good piece of merchandise, you could resell. And it was a fun business. I did it for about ten years. I had a partner, and we did it for about ten years. He had been in it previously, and we had sold cars together back in the '50's. And so uh, it was just a-- just-- I was just-- got into it sorta by accident, but to get a little relief and try something a little different.

RB: Was it similar to an automobile? You wouldn't have to deal with repairs, but you would have to deal with a lot of different kinds of parts--

RH: Yeah, we--

RB: to get--

RH: we sold-- we sold a lot of parts, fast moving parts. Uh, uh, service items, items that people needed to uh-- for their uh, sanitation and uh, uh, LP gas, and things like that. We-- we sold a lot of small parts. We sold a lot of trailer awnings. We sold uh, a lot of new Fleetwood Terry Trailers because the factory was right out here, and we were the-- the franchise dealer. And uh, we also sold some use-- we dealt in used cars. We'd go buy-- if we had uh, an old customer-- both my partner and I had been in the car business. We had somebody come along wantin' a-- wanting us to watch out for a good used pickup or an automobile for 'em, why, we'd-- we'd try to find something and-- and fit it into that picture.

RB: So, as your car work-- lot of word of mouth, knowing customers--
[audio ends]