

**Oral History Interview of
Jim McGinnis**

**Interviewed by: Daniel Sanchez
July 13, 2017
Amarillo, Texas**

**Part of the:
*Sports Interviews***

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The Sports History interviews encompass interviews conducted by members of the Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library staff. They hope to document the evolution of sports and the role of sports in the social fabric of this region.

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Jim McGinnis, a former drag racer as he discusses his drag racing days. McGinnis describes his interest in the competitive sport and his cars that he built to compete with.

Length of Interview: 02:55:20

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Keywords

Drag Racing, Amarillo

Daniel Sanchez (DS):

My name is Daniel Urbina Sanchez. Today's date is July the 13th, 2017, and I'm in Jim McGinnis's home, and this is the second interview in a series with Jim. Right now, Jim was telling us a little bit about his mother. So let's go ahead and start with that, Jim. Tell us about your mom and a little recap of the story you were talking about.

Jim McGinnis (JM):

My mom was a little five-foot-two, black headed, very, very, pretty lady. My dad was a six-foot-three redheaded hulk. He was in the navy. Got out of the navy in 1934. Was on the USS Tennessee, and when he got out, my mama was a waitress. This was—now, you have to understand, as a job, during the Depression—they met and got married. I think they got married in about 1937. Yeah, '37. 1937. Maybe the year before, but she was absolutely in love with my dad and vice versa. He was a great guy. I wasn't aware that she was even going with my dad because I was living in Osenia [?] [0:01:42], Oklahoma, which is between Sayre and Macomb, and I was living with my Uncle Paul. Not my Uncle Paul. I do not have dementia, but that's a long time ago. I'd say it was eighty-one years ago. My Uncle Melvin and Aunt Carol. They were teachers at a small, unified school. I don't know the history of Osenia [?] [00:02:28], but it was off the road between Sayre and Mangum. It was off the road maybe a mile. It had to of been a stop for cotton or corn or something like that because they grew quite a bit of cotton around down there. Anyway, that's where I was when my mom and dad kind of started going together and got married. I lived there for about a year. I was there long enough to pull cotton. I was seven or eight years old. Seven. My Aunt Carol was my teacher and my Uncle Melvin taught the higher classes. There was another guy involved there. His name was Prior. He was one of the winningest coaches in Oklahoma District of basketball. You'd just think of a little old school like that. I bet there wasn't twenty-five males in the whole school. They'd go out in this clean plow. I don't know how they managed that, but they were an awful good little basketball team, but Prior had a son. His name was Sunny, and he went to Oklahoma State and made quite a name for himself up there playing basketball. In fact, as Prior—later on in my life, as I grew older, in high school, Prior was the coach at Capitol Hill High School in Oklahoma City and won three state championships. Pretty good. That's pretty good for any coach. So there I was down in Osenia [?] when my mom and dad got married and I finally got word that they wanted me to visit them in Oklahoma City. I think what the deal was—it wasn't so much a word that they wanted to visit me, it was the word that Carol's sister and dad and mama in Weatherford, Oklahoma, they just wanted to go visit. So anyway, I wound up in Oklahoma City and met my future dad. My mama had him well trained at that time. She was a trainer of men. Boy I tell you what. Anyway, mama was a great gal. She came to all of my races. She invented things to say about me, and some was true and some was not. Typical mother. She was a great gal. I loved her a great deal. We argued a lot, as probably men do argue with their mothers quite a bit, I think. They don't argue with their dad, they'd get slapped down. It got to where I was in the habit of arguing with mama for absolutely no reason. Absolutely no reason. Anyway, we lived at 1221 Southwest 41, there in

Oklahoma City. I went to Capitol Hill High School. She was a backer. I ran track, played football, as most kids do, or most athletic type guys. I suppose I was athletic. I could run a hundred and ten flat, and it was pretty good back then. It was good to have a mama like her. She wasn't one of these hands-on loving type mamas. She was sort of standoffish, but very gentle. Very, very gentle. Can't say too much more about my mother because you sort of take mamas for granted. While they're there, they're there. When they're not there, they're not there. It's sort of a yogi bear type saying.

DS:

A yogism.

JM:

Yeah, yogism. Anyway –

DS:

One thing you did mention about her was the connection she had with the governor's wife.

JM:

Yeah, I've got pictures of that over there in some papers that she sent me. I can't think of her name, but I had met her once or twice when I was living in—prior to going and living with my—

Regina McGinnis (RM):

Was it Del?

JM:

Huh?

RM:

Del?

JM:

Gale?

RM:

Del. Del?

JM:

Spell it.

RM:
D-e-l.

JM:
No, I don't think so.

RM:
You know, like Del City.

JM:
No, Del City was named after one of my neighbors, Regina, Mr. Epperly's daughter. Yeah, they were our neighbors. I played with—what in the world were those—Vernon, was one of the—

RM:
I didn't mean to get you off track. Sorry.

JM:
That's right. That's where I discovered that. It was a glorious night. That's when I discovered that sawdust burns, like that. You throw that sawdust in a fire and it just explodes. Vernon and I was pretty good friends. Vernon was a little guy. He was younger, little one. He was a kid and I can't think of the big one's name. He had a sister named Del.

RM:
Anyway, back to the governor's wife.

JM:
Well I'm getting back to there. You brought it up, so might as well get that over with. That was an episode in my life.

RM:
Sorry I'll keep my mouth shut.

JM:
Huh?

RM:
Sorry I'll keep my mouth shut from now on.

JM:
I'll get back to the governor's wife when I please.

DS:

[Laughs] I feel like a therapist.

JM:

But I met that lady. They were—I think they ran for governor and won, and then they weren't governor, and then they ran again and they won. I think. Politics wasn't my game, and I was awfully young. I could've cared less about what they did. Anyway, they were friends. Mama and her were friends.

DS:

You're talking about growing up there when you went to Oklahoma City. What was that neighborhood like that you grew up in? How many other kids did you hang around?

JM:

Oh, it was great. It was great. Had a guy named Gene Halsey [?] [00:10:39] that just lived two houses down from me. Ended up, you know, he was a good friend. I went to high school with him. Bobby was on the same street. Same hundred block, 1200 block. Binkley, B-i-n-k-l-e-y, when I first moved to the South side of town. We moved from the North to the South side. The reason being that we moved was because they had a lot of good houses over there by no other than Mr.—well I just lost my guy's name. Epperly. Mr. Epperly, that had a daughter named Del, who he started—he was a developer of Del City, and that's how Del City got the name. I failed to get onto that part of it while ago.

RM:

Was it Governor Turner?

JM:

Turner was the governor and Betty, was his daughter, and Bit [?] Clark, who I ran around with, played football with, married Betty Turner, and I was the best man at Betty Turner's wedding over in Oklahoma. Next—it was—I forget the name of the county that I lived in. I shouldn't. It was County Number 32. Back then, they numbered counties. What does it say?

RM:

These are the names of past governors.

JM:

Well I know all the governors.

RM:

Murray, Turner, Kerr, Philipps.

DS:

Well you mentioned Murray earlier.

JM:

Well I knew Kerr pretty well.

DS:

You mentioned Murray the first time around when we talked.

JM:

Yeah, I knew Kerr because during the period right after I got out of the army, in I guess 1949, early '49, I met a guy who I'd been in the army with, who was a Marine during the war. Bob Davis is his name. He was a terrible guy. I loved Bob to death, but he joined the army. He joined the airborne to be with me. We were lifeguards together and stuff like that. After he had got out of the marines, we were lifeguards together at Elmwood Swimming Pool in Oklahoma City, South side of Oklahoma City. I'd go to summer school so that I could get out of high school early. I was taking some classes that would get me through so I didn't have so much classes. I could play football and stuff in the afternoon. I was a terrible football player compared to some of them. I was fast, but that was it. They called me flash. Twinkle toes. Skinnis McGinnis. I had a lot of different nicknames.

DS:

So what position did you play?

JM:

Halfback. I was real—I weighed maybe a hundred and sixty, hundred and fifty-five, hundred and sixty, but I wasn't good. We had some ____ [00:14:22] this was on our team and Lindell Pearson, who later on made honorable mention All-American to OU [**University of Oklahoma**], was under Bud Wilkinson. We had some good players on our team. Our up and coming quarterback, name was Vanpool, saved the day for OU. He went to OU, and he was a quarterback and he was like a third string. All the other guys got hurt. All the quarterbacks got hurt, and he stepped in there and won the bowl for them. His brother Vanpool, went to, I think, Oklahoma State. A fellow I joined the army with and was in the airborne with, Bill Howrington [?], later on he was in the fracking business, I think here in Oklahoma City. He was a well-known guy, well-liked. Del and I ran around together quite a bit, as well as Dick [?]. We were all, kind of, the three musketeers, so to speak. I've kind of lost my train of thought there, where I was going. I go in so many directions a lot of times.

DS:

It's kind of good because you're kind of filling us in on where you started life, where all of y'all been together and come back and kind of let—

JM:

We can't think of everything.

DS:

No, no.

JM:

I can think of one thing at a time. I think maybe that's what's wrong with me. [DS laughs] My thoughts is don't go that far, but as I speak, a lot of times I am reminded of other things. I bring those up because that was an important part of my life, as well as I can see it.

DS:

You talked about how you were in high school and you were taking classes during the summer so you could graduate early. Did you have goals after high school that you were trying to get to?

JM:

No, I didn't know what I wanted to do. I was a typical kid. Who knows what you're going to do when you're seventeen, eighteen? I joined the army. Just as soon as I turned seventeen, I was gone. Talked to my principal, graduation was coming up, but the army wanted me since I had volunteered for three years. Dick went in with us and so did Bill Harrington. Dick Clark, who married the governor's daughter later on. We graduated, but posthumously, you know, so to speak.

DS:

So the army wanted you, where did they take you?

JM:

Took me to Fort Ord, took all three of us to Fort Ord in California. I'd never seen the ocean. I was land bound there in Oklahoma, boy. It was quite an experience. We learned how to—I shot on range and I think this was where it happened, but I broke the range record of Sergeant York, who was in the 82nd Airborne. It wasn't in 82nd Airborne, he was in the 82nd division, who'd won a CMH, Congressional Medal of Honor over in Europe in the First World War. He was from Tennessee, I think he was from. Great guy. Great shot. I don't know how I did—they said I did. They told me I did a lot of things, but they were wanting me to go to officer school and I didn't want to go to officer school. That I didn't want to do. I had just got out of school and to offer me another school was not what I wanted to do. If I wanted to go to school, I would have gone to

college. That was quite a time for me. I got to see Carmel and all the exotic places out there that we was going by. Caldwell had just written that book. What was the name of that book that Caldwell]—*Cannery Row* [John Steinbeck, I think was the name of it. I saw Cannery Row, where they canned the fish there in Monterrey. I got to see a lot of things. Learned how to drive a six-by, had never driven before. A six-by, is that—

DS:

I was going to ask you, what is a six-by?

JM:

One of those great big trucks, you know? I think that's what they called it, a six-by. I think it was six wheel drive, or something like that. Jeep, I drove a—so I learned a lot that was important to me as a boy. I was seventeen. I wasn't a man yet. That's for sure, but I got through. We enjoyed. I got along with my officers, and I got along with my sergeant in charge of my barracks that was there. I liked him. Sunny was his name. Don't remember his last name, but Sunny was his first name. Met the Mankowitz family, and I met the—Mankowitz, was who it was, in the films, you know? I met the guy. Boy he came up one weekend where we had the weekend off and he was in a great big old Buick convertible with all the portables on the side. That car was full of blondes. Man I mean, you talk about somebody that had an in with a girls, that guy did, and he was sort of ugly, I thought. He had all the girls. That was when I was in the service. Did quite a bit. Went to—I've left out so much of my life. I had a real productive life. Just a lot of things. I boxed on the South Side Boxing Club there in Oklahoma City. I was just—I didn't want to box for a living so I didn't, and I was in real good shape.

DS:

How old were you when you started there.

JM:

I was fifteen. Later on in life, the guys that I was on this club with, Butch Goss, later on he got a deal to go to OU later on, made quite a name for himself in college, boxing. Herschel Acton won the National Golden Glove in Chicago twice, I think. Maybe three times. He was one forty-five or one thirty-five. Somewhere in there. He's a tough little kid. He was a good boxer though, man. He was light on his feet. Hit hard. I boxed those guys, but they kind of powder puffed me, and they could've killed me if they'd wanted to.

DS:

So what got you started into boxing?

JM:

I didn't. Nothing. I didn't, I didn't. I wasn't a boxer.

DS:

No, but I mean, you joined the club. Why did you join?

JM:

A fellow named Roger Cloud, he was an Indian guy that lived out there close to us. We was living on North—this was right after the war and my dad was living in one of his mother's sister's house—one of them we were renting from her. It was on the Northwest—twelve hundred block Northwest—I think it was 41st. We were sort of blessed with a twelve hundred in forty-one, so anyway, I met Roger. I don't know. We had street cars back then. I may have met Roger—I think I met Roger on a street car. I saw him quite a bit because we—class in Oklahoma City was right down the middle. He lived over there, about a half a block off of Classen, I lived over here, about a block and a half off of Classen, so we had the same corner to wait on the street car going downtown. I may have met him there, but Roger was about—he was a pretty good boxer. He boxed in all the tournaments and stuff like that. It was an outlet. At fifteen, I didn't know anybody on that side of town because I grew up on the South side. I didn't grow up on the South side, but I knew a lot of kids on the South side because I was going to Capitol Hill High School. That was—I think that's probably—might've been during the war. No, my dad was out already, so it was in 1946. It was about a year before I joined the army. I was sixteen. Anyway, I didn't get into boxing. I just went down there and worked out.

DS:

Who was the coach? Do you remember his name?

JM:

Chief Jim. I don't know what Chief's name was, but it was Chief Jim. I do know what it is, but I can't—that's pulling something out that I don't remember. Chief Jim, something. I might think about it during our chit chat. Chief Jim. I remember him. He was a—a lot of Indians back then. A lot.

DS:

Especially in that area of Oklahoma.

JM:

Oh yeah. When I was growing up in Weatherford, Oklahoma, on Saturdays, all the Indians would come to town. There would be two or three hundred of them in town. Town was probably two or three thousand people, maybe a little bit more, but I didn't take an interest in population at all back then. I didn't care who was there, as long as it suited me. I remember that the Indians would come to town at high curves. It was about indicating they were here with my hand up [?] [00:26:38] about thirteen inch curves or fourteen inch curves, real high concrete curves. Brick streets, red brick streets. The main street. Indians would come into town along with the black

Dutch people in their little black buggies and their little porky-pie hats. Black hats. Mama had this little deal on that come around like this. Little black. The woman made them to wear a sun hat. All the kids was in black. Everything was black. Anyway, there was lots of them out there. I guess it was sort of a German—I don't know whether—I don't know what they were, but we called them black Dutch. People who I think—somebody told me one time that they weren't really black Dutch. They was some other religious organization, but not black Dutch, but I always called them black Dutch, not that it really mattered, but I did.

DS:

You said everybody was downtown. What would everybody do downtown during the weekends?

JM:

Well they'd buy, because that was the only place you could buy. They didn't have malls back then, they had downtown. So if you wanted to buy a candy bar or one of those little spiral red and white deals, or any kind of candy, you had to go downtown to the Five and Dime stores, is who had all that stuff. Woolworth—and there was three main stores you could buy candy at, but they only had one there in Weatherford. It was Woolworth. Three blocks long. The main street where they had stores was three blocks long. It was it. On the other side, you hit houses. On the other side, you hit the road going out of town. It was an interesting time. Black Dutch, that's who it was. It was the black Dutch, and they were there to buy groceries. So was the Indians. They come in and when I was living there—I was living there with Carol, my Aunt Carol, who I'd lived with—or who I was going to live with. I hadn't got to Osenia [?] yet. I was living with Uncle Sam. Everybody called him Uncle Sam. He was her daddy. The store is still there. Still looks the same today. It got modern color on it, but it still looks the same to me. The windows are the same. The big door that went inside—it was the seed house. People would bring their seed down there or buy seed or bring their eggs in. My job, at that time, when I was a little, six years old, seven, was to candle eggs. You know how to candle eggs, don't you?

DS:

No.

JM:

Well you get a little deal there. You set that egg in there and it's got a big light underneath it so you can see if it's got a baby in it. If it's got a yolk in it, that's okay, but you don't want the ones that they've already started developing—what do they call that? Baby. Anyway, that was my job. My favorite story about Sam's place there was—well there was a lot of stories. I didn't take a bath but about once every two or three weeks when I was a kid because nobody made me. I know my grandma made me wash my hands. I don't remember a whole lot about having to take baths and I don't remember a whole lot about anybody telling me not to or to. When I got down there with Sam, he said, "God, you're dirty." I guess I was. I didn't feel dirty, but he said I was

so I guess I was. Man he put me in a tub. It was a community tub. Sam washed first, his wife washed second, and I washed third. We didn't all get in the tub at the same time. My God, that man got me in the tub and took a big old bristle brush to me, and I thought he was going to scrape the skin off me. He washed me. Boy just like a potato. I never will forget that. Later on, as I lived with Sam, on the fourth of July, hot outside, typical, no air—didn't have air conditioning back then. They had evaporative air, but you had to be kind of rich to have evaporative air. To start with, you had to have electricity. A lot of houses didn't have electricity back then. Everybody used coil oil lamps. We had coil oil lamps in our house. I don't recall that we ever had electricity in our house, in the house that I was living with—prior to going and living with Sam. I went to Sam because they thought I was kind of getting wild because I liked to roam. Since I was three years old or two years old, I'd just take off and go where I wanted to go. Nobody there. Everybody's out looking for a job. All of my uncles were in the CCC [**Civilian Conservation Corps**], or what is it? Workman's, WPA [**Works progress Administration**]. My grandma was there. Everybody else was gone, all my aunts and stuff, they didn't care. They weren't worried about me. They was worried about getting married. I'd just take off. It just worried my grandmother. She put a dog collar on me one time, tied me to the tub. We had a tub. I don't know whether there was any water attached to it or not, but it was on a little deal. My granddad had built this little corner out there. Didn't have a john—yeah, we did. We had a john there. I'd just take off, so she chained me to the bathtub. Well I found a razor. Straight razor. I cut that. I had to have been a little imp. I cut that dog tag off me. I was lucky I didn't cut my throat. Took off. That was one of the main reasons that aunt—oh, my grandmother got breast cancer and died. So there was absolutely nobody to take care of me. That's when I went down to Uncle Sam's. One July down there—I started to say something about—I'd lay these eggs aside a candle. If it was no good, I'd lay them aside and I'd put them in another—they had those little box—those little old slat box. It was maybe fourteen inches wide and fourteen inches high. Maybe twenty-four inches long. It had a little wire lid that would come down on them like that. They had a little place you could drop your eggs down in there. It was sort of a corrugated paper type stuff. I had this thing, was plum full. I didn't have a place to put my eggs in. Didn't think about it at the time, but was outside and I was—now, I wasn't very old. I could've been what? Six. No, I wasn't six years. I was maybe five, but I mentioned to the kids that I had these—I didn't know what I was going to do with these eggs. "I don't know what the hell to do.", "Oh, why don't we throw them at the building?" So I went in and drug this crate of eggs out in the back and here, this great big beautiful concrete and brick wall there, sitting there in front us. I got all these eggs in my box right down here. We proceeded to empty the box on the wall. Boy I got whipped and I probably needed it. [Laughter] And they stunk. You hear me saying, "There's that rotten egg. Ew." My Uncle Sam made me get a ladder. He brought a ladder out there. Now, this is—and it didn't take very long for them to fry at that wall in a hundred and five, or six, or seven degrees. He brought that ladder out there and said, "Now, wash it. You wanted to mess it up." I washed that whole wall. Took me about a week or two to do it.

DS:

Last time you threw anything at it, right?

JM:

I've never done that since. Every time I go by there I think about that wall. It's still there. Yes, it's quite a deal. But my mama, we was talking about my mama, and they asked me to—I went from Sam's. I think that was just about the last straw with Sam, so they sent me to live with my uncle and my Aunt Carol. You know, father, daughter. They handed me around back then, which was typical. I think back then, everybody—families came together back then. It was hard times.

DS:

Yeah, I can think of several of the relatives in my family that were like that, it's whoever was available, that's who raised the kids.

JM:

Yeah, that's exactly right. I went from Sam's to Carol, to Osenia [?], back to Oklahoma City after my mom had married my dad. By the way, I think I told you the other day that my dad, later on in life—I was about forty years. My mom was real bossy to my dad. Very pleasant lady, but she was bossy to my dad and tried to be bossy to me. I suppose that's the reason we argued all the time. My dad was wise enough that he didn't try to argue with mama. He'd just go in the other room. He did not argue because he'd lost. I can see—it's like a Banty rooster fighting a big old rooster. You're going to lose. That Banty's going to beat you. He was a big guy and she was a little sweet thing. Dad wasn't meek. He was, I think at one time, was the heavyweight champion of the navy. He was iron man. I think that's probably what motivated me. I hadn't ever been motivated towards sports or anything like that up until I moved in with them. I didn't move in with them just right off, but they were living in an upstairs garage apartment which I don't remember very well, but it wasn't great big. It had a front room and a little kitchen and a bedroom. I was living with my aunt. I remember making a trip or two back and forth to Oklahoma City from Osenia. I moved in with my mom and dad after they had found a house to rent that had a second bedroom for me, which my dad insisted on. Bless his heart. I had never had a bedroom to myself. Not even when I was living down there, because the teachers didn't have kids. They had a duplex, a one bedroom duplex, one on one side and one on the other side. In Osenia, I didn't have it. I'd sleep in the front room on the floor on the palette, which was okay. I was so young and dumb, I didn't know, that's where I'd always sleep. I moved in on, I think it was 49th Street, right off of Classen. There was a park there and a creek ran through the park and Belle Isle Lake was North of us about three or four blocks. It was sort of a swamp at that time. All it had was a generator plant for the OGE, Oklahoma Gas and Electric. I could go out there and fish, which I learned not to do right off because the first day that I was there, I went off. I was used to taking off on my own. First day I was there, I went out to Belle Isle and caught seventeen perch, or maybe it was sixteen, but I caught a lot of perch, brought them home. Boy,

my dad, he said, "Don't do that," because it worried my mom. Here, I am a little kid. I was little. Walking around that—they didn't know where I was. I'd got out of school and I had got some string from one of the teachers and had found me a straight pin which I bent, and I got a little bacon rind in from the cafeteria, when I'd go through the cafeteria, I'd ask the lady for some bacon rind. That's all I needed to catch birds is string and I'd throw it out there and just jerk them in. Little old perch, about six inches long. That was my first day in Oklahoma City. My dad told me, "Don't do that no more," and I believed him. He had his belt in his hand so I was believing a lot, right there. I told him I liked to fish, I know where it is, I can swim, which I couldn't, at that time. He allowed me to do that. Over across the way, had this park that I mentioned, with a creek running through it and I used to go over there and catch crawdads and get those crawdads and bake them, and peel them and they are sort of like shrimp. It's pretty good because we weren't rich. I'm talking about, I got all these habits about finding food because I was hungry, but while I was there, they had a baseball deal. It had a backstop. Can you imagine that to keep the ball from going off over in the field someplace? Backstop. They used to play. There was a guy come by there and I was infatuated. His name was Billy Tiger. He was an Indian. Billy Tiger played softball, was a good softball player. Anytime Billy was playing there, and that was their home field, it was sort of like kids incorporated type thing. I don't remember how old Billy was, but he was a lot older than I was. He was probably twelve, thirteen. I was just a baby. Billy Tiger. Anyway, that's probably where I got interested in competition. Up to that point, I could've cared less who did what, but that's where I got interested in competition. That's probably what happened to me when all my drag cars was, you know, I can outrun your car. Or at least I thought I could, but it was a lot of fun competition. That's what drove me to where I am. I put my work—once I got to working—I went to work for Otis. I worked for Otis Elevator through a guy named Sharkey Vincent, and Sharkey was fifty-seven. Boy he was my size. He was maybe a little lighter, but boy he was in good shape. So was I.

DS:

What size were you at that time?

JM:

I was always five-foot-ten, five-foot-ten and a half, I think about that time. Hell, I'm not that tall today. My knees are short cupped. I was about a hundred and—I worked pretty hard. Sharkey and I worked awful hard. We cabled elevators, repaired elevators. Anything that was dirty and greasy, we did, but it beat nothing. I learned the competition to do it better than anybody else had done it. Better than it was. I always put that—the first thing I wanted to do was make sure that when I left, somebody would say, "Boy this is clean and it's pretty. It's nice. It's painted." Couldn't tell who was there except by the workmanship, so it was sort of a competitive thing. With Sharkey, it didn't make any difference, "Don't worry about wiping it off. Leave that grease there. It's fixed." Sometimes he'd let me wipe it off. I got fired from—after I got through with Otis, when I went to work for Southwest Elevator up there. Fred Ford and Buster Crookshank

and Bill Vaughn owned that-- they were three mechanics gormally with Otis, then they formed this company, southwest, to put in an elevator at the Veteran's Hospital there in Oklahoma City. I guess it was a competitive drive that I had. I worked for Otis, but I only worked for Sharkey. We weren't outcasts, we were just the people that got greasy. Everybody else kind of looked nice. They got that nice green uniform that said Otis here and it got the Otis wings here and crisp and nice and looked really good, but we didn't do that. We wore union overalls and Otis shirts. We had Otis shirts with the wings and all that stuff, but we wore overalls and we got greasy every day. We just did. So I kind of got competitive right there because of the other guys. We were repair guys. They were maintenance guys. If they wanted something done on their elevators that they did their maintenance on, they called the repair guys and we fixed them, so I thought that was good. I could fix something that that son of a bitch can't fix. Anyway, that's what I did with Otis.

DS:

Let's back up a little bit, more back on—you're talking about when you're getting competitive as a child by watching—

JM:

Billy Tiger.

DS:

Billy Tiger play softball. Did you ever go out there and venture and play softball with those kids that were out there?

JM:

Did I ever go play softball? Yeah, I played softball at school. Maybe a little kicking around soccer. It wasn't the same soccer we had—they threw a little rubber ball out there, we kicked it. That was it. We didn't have a goal. That way was one way, and this way was the other way. There wasn't no score. There was always somebody there that is better than you, so it was a—I learned that real quick. Don't play a game that somebody is in it is better than you. The only thing I played was football where everybody was better than me, or I thought anyway. [Laughter] We won quite a few games. We were undefeated one year.

DS:

This is football in high school?

JM:

Yeah.

DS:

Did y'all win the state title that year?

JM:

No, we didn't. We played semi-final. I don't remember who—we won our first game and then we played Lawton, and they just kicked our butt. Lawton did. Boy they had a little old short stubby half back down there that weighed maybe a hundred and eighty pounds, that was fast and mean. No, we didn't win. We should've. We were favored and I always will think to this day they doctored us because they said, "Be sure you don't eat. We've got stuff down here for you to eat. We're going to have a steak," and they just went on about that. Thinking back about it, why did they want to feed us?

DS:

That's an old story in sport, right?

JM:

Yeah, it's a hokey story. I'll tell you what. There's a lot of dope going on in there, but I remember that I just felt like I was just plotting. They put some drugs in whatever they fed us intentionally, and then they won too. They won like forty-seven to—we were generally the ones that scored forty or fifty points, and the other teams was the ones that didn't, but it was the other way around. We're talking a hundred point spread here. Something wrong. But no excuse. They kicked our ass. Yeah, it was terrible. It was really, really terrible because that was important to us. Football is important to kids who play it in school. It was a catastrophe, as a matter of fact, I mean, to get beat like that. We had never even been beat, but to get beat like—to turn the tails, you know? My old buddy that lives on the other side of that house over there in 1957, was captain of the OU football team. His brother was captain of the Texas team. Can you imagine that?

DS:

And who is that that lives over there?

JM:

Marshall York. His brother, York, was down at Texas, and Marshall had been—and he played for Bud Wilkinson up there. There's three or four guys living in town here that played on the same team. I've met most of them by living in that house right there. I lived in that house for quite a long time. I was in there ten years. Anyway, but what I was going to say was when you get beat, they had gone forty-seven games without losing. It's a national record today. Forty-seven college games. I'm talking about, they played eight or nine games back then, so it was four or five years that OU had never got beat, and he said, "We played Notre Dame on our forty-eighth game, boy they kicked our ass." Lost. He said, "You just can't imagine—my whole

college career, we never lost a football game and then all of the sudden, you lose,” and he said the helmets were painted gold. They had torn spots on their uniforms and jerseys that somebody had sewed up. He said they looked like shit. They was poor. Notre Dame wasn’t a rich school forever. They are now, because of TV. They get extra money just simply because they’re Notre Dame. He said, boy that’s just tough. So I remembered that one game that we played with Lawton as a terrible catastrophe. It was not as bad as losing your forty-eighth game, but it was pretty bad.

DS:

One thing that we talked about is your drag racing. Were you interested in racing back then as a kid? Was there people around you that were doing that already?

JM:

I didn’t get interested in drag racing until about 1952. Well they didn’t have it then.

DS:

It had to start somewhere.

JM:

Yeah, and everything you got, you got by word of mouth. How do you do this? How do you do that? How you set your timers up. We were fortunate that we had a kid there that was pretty smart with air, compress a start a clock, stop a clock. Set those things up at a hundred and forty feet apart and that was—was it a hundred and forty feet, yeah. Fourteen hundred—what is a quarter of a mile? Fourteen hundred yards? No, it’s not fourteen hundred yards. It is four hundred and forty yards, but you set them up one tenth, so they started and you timed. That’s how you got your speed. Back then, they didn’t have a lapse, ET lapse time. Speed was the main thing. If you won, that was the main thing, but speed was the main thing.

DS:

Can you walk us through that first car you had?

JM:

Yeah.

DS:

How you came upon it, and how you decided you wanted to race it.

JM:

My very first car was my ’51 Ford. I had seen guys double shift. There’s little teeth on your transmission. Those little teeth got to match and they’re made of brass so they’re lubricated good

and when you shift, you stop and your clutch stops so your transmission will stop and you shift and that thing goes like this. I got to where I could shift it really pretty good without hardly ever missing what they call a gear. These little sliders in there just slide your gears around. Was not hard missing gear without putting a clutch in, long, and just do that and shift at the same time. I got pretty good at that. I wasn't racing anybody. I was just doing it on the street. I was just doing it to see if I could do it, I guess. I don't remember why, but I wasn't racing anybody at that point. I went to work for Otis at the urging of a fellow named Bill Vaughn, who later on became a—he was an elevator guy. He worked for Otis and later on in his life, he got pretty high and mighty. Pretty good, got a pretty good job down there. He was a good elevator guy, but Bill was a step ahead of me. He'd gone to Capitol Hill High School. I knew him while he was in high school because he played football. This was during the war—I think, that Bill had joined the navy or something. I don't remember that part. I think that he'd got out of the navy and he got a little money when he got out of the navy, and he had brought this 1950 Ford Coop like I had, that could outrun mine. You know, short bursts. We never did go out and try to run a mile or anything, but it was fast. I don't like that. That wasn't no fun, getting outrun. So I got me some exhaust. He has dual exhaust. That helped, and I don't know if he had any tricks up his sleeve or not, but I still couldn't outrun him, so I got me some heads. Aluminum heads, higher compression, and put it on there. Now, I told you about dropping eggs, didn't I?

DS:

Um-hm.

JM:

Well I learned how to drop eggs about that time, so I learned how to improve on my timing and that there was a difference in non—they had high octane gas back then and low octane gas. They didn't have—what we're using today was scud gas back then. We call it white gas. You used white gas in lanterns and white gas was five cents a gallon and it wasn't good, but that's what we are using now, leaded gas. We're not using it, we're using the non-leaded gas, but back then it was a leaded gas. I got better. Then I put a different system—I put a hotshot to get my spark a little hotter. Different Mallory. It was a Mallory ignition and that helped. And I changed spark plugs. I was running way too cold of a plug. That was for road use. You get out there and go hunt sixty, seventy miles an hour for a hundred miles, gives you some cold plugs so your plugs won't burn up. So I finally got to where dropping my egg, where I was improving. I got to where I could outrun Bill and then I put two carbs on it. I think was too and that helped, really helped, and I put me a cam in it and that really let her up then. I could outrun anybody. I didn't care who it was. That's how I got started in drag racing, the fact that my car was better than their car. That's how I got started. And then I decided I could—you could buy a flathead back then for a hundred dollars. I thought, well I think I'll take this engine out and build a hotrod. Put this engine in my hotrod. Put a stock engine back in my other car. That never happened. I built the hotrod, but I didn't have an engine for it, so I met Bill Flincham, and he had these Arden heads.

He didn't know what to do with them. They was just sitting down in his basement. He had a hole in the floor where the boards were and that's where he put all his play toys was down in the basement. He had those Arden heads so I said something to him about them. Well, we raced his car. He had a little thirty-two—twenty-two roadster that he had raced on a circuit. You know, LA, Phoenix, Seattle, Chicago, and up East. He had that and it had a flathead in it. It had two or three carburetors on it. It had basically—it had a magneto on it. Mine didn't have a magneto. Had a magneto for his spark and so we run—he told me one day, he says, "If it looks—" because it was dented up. It was a race car. A round and round race car. He said, "If it just looked better. Don't look good." Of course, none of them looked good. Y'all have seen some of the cars back then. They was ugly. Did you ever see a Plymouth frame all stripped down? All of the body was gone. Everything was off of it and the guy put him a chair up there. I'm talking about like you're sitting in. A chair up there, bolted it down and that was his hot rod. He'd bring them to the races. They had to have a row bar so they went out and got a piece of iron, and bent it, and put it behind them, and they row it. The first hot rods were not too clever, but that was sort of the way I got started. Bill and I put the Arden in—we put the Arden in his T, and we won. I got pictures of it over someplace. We won. We won at Great Bend and a lot up in—it wasn't a whole lot of places. They had to be—they were all an airport, air force bases. Back then, they were nice, and pretty, and clean. Asphalt was clean and everything had been mowed because the war hadn't been over four or five years at that time. Six. But then deteriorate—weeds hadn't taken over. So I told Bill, I said, "I got this frame," and I had it all fixed up. I had slicks on it. They were implement slicks and they weighed a thousand pounds. They were so heavy. That implement like you run over asphalt with, the multi-wheel implements. God, anyone—I finally found some tires for my car that fit, looked good. I found some front end for it. I got it looking good, and we put the Arden in it and that's when I started drag racing. Started running a little nitro in it, and alcohol and shit like that. That's how I started. I wasn't one hundred percent drag racer at that time, but I was getting awful close.

DS:

What was it about it that was speaking to you?

JM:

Huh?

DS:

What was it about racing that was calling you?

JM:

Well it certainly wasn't the money. There was no money. I have got a—I kept it forever. I may have it hidden around here, but I got the first trophy I ever won drag racing. I threw three or four hundred trophies away. I think I told you about that. I carried them around. I was getting

divorced. Had T-Bar Chassie. I was building racecars for people, and you can't imagine what the hell am I going to do with this many trophies? It was literally—it was sort of like I built the house to put the damn trophies in. They sort of took over. They were important, one by one, as far as winning. Somebody hand you a trophy, but to take those trophies home and have them multiply, and have to dust them, and clean them, and keep them put up, and out of the way. They was always in the way. One day, I just—I guess you could say I snapped. I just started gathering them up and taking them to the dumpster. I filled two dumpsters up. I had some big old trophies in there. I had some trophies in there that's four or five feet high. They just weren't important to me. By that time, I was kind of getting burnt out by building all the racecars. This was in 1967. I'd been in the business now for fifteen years, you have to understand. I'd been drag racing, and it didn't seem like it was getting better. It was better because Wiley Parks and Barbara, his wife, the NHRA [**National Hot Rod Association**] founder and president, I guess. They worked their asses off, and they had people that was working with them as well. I worked real hard for them. Dale Hamden [?] [01:11:52], when I moved down here, Dale worked for them for free. When you start driving your car on your gas, and your food, and leaving your family for a whole weekend just to go watch somebody race or go race yourself, that's bullshit, but that's the way we did it back then. I wouldn't do that now, and I got to where I wouldn't put—if you wanted to put your name on my car, I'd need five hundred dollars for this or I need five hundred for putting the name on my car there. Nobody wanted to spend five hundred dollars just to put a name on a car back then. I got money from an oil company that, Don Garlits—I gave my sponsorship to—I didn't give anything, Don Garlits took it. They needed to sponsor somebody to stay in business, so they sponsored Don Garlits and by God, he did a pretty good job, but it was an oil company. Then I got into Pennzoil and when I got rid of Pennzoil, Pennzoil looked up Garlits and sponsored him, wasn't any of my doing. It was just the way it worked, but I put their name on my car, small print. I didn't put it drawn all on the side like they do today. I didn't do that, and I don't think today they would put a name on the car unless those people give them stuff. Schafer gave me all of my clutches that I need and my flywheel. I learned later on that I could buy my steel and take it out to a machinist out here and he could make me flywheels. In my last car I had, I made it right here in Amarillo, and I made my plates, and everything to go—it was sort of a motorcycle type. Had a lot of slippers and sliders. I had three sliders in mine. Nobody used but one back then because you could come off the line, you could kind of slip it out there, so it didn't get hot. You could start trying to slide a regular clutch and it'd blow up on you. What happened is you get springs hot, they just collapse and everything would come apart. Carlos blew his toes off doing that in his big car, but today, I don't know how many put in. Probably six or seven in there because they're real deep. They've got those sliders sticking back behind that clutch or between the clutch and the flywheel. I don't know how many they put in there. They need at least three. I know that. I thought about a timer for my clutch where I could—they had little timers. I worked in that kind of business where I could get me a condenser. I could make me a little—make my own boards, so to speak, and put my own resisters in there so that a clutch—I want to—a coil, when you energize a coil, where there's twelve volt or a hundred and twenty-

five VDC [**Volts of Direct Current**], or AC [**Alternating Current**], there's a residual, and when you [loud clack for emphasis] chop that thing off from its source, those electrons just go goofy. They don't know where to go. You've got them stirred up in there, but they don't know where to go, so you got to discharge them. Well about that time, they learned how to make little teeny—or we thought it was little teeny—diodes. Electricity just flows one way and you could put that diode around this thing to where you could pick up the coil and you could drop it out, and it would discharge to itself, then through resistance of its own self, it would discharge to itself. and it would—so coils got to where they lasted a lot longer because of the diode. You know anything about electricity?

DS:

I'm a novice.

JM:

Electricity doesn't flow through the wire, it flows around, if there's a wire there to flow it through and it goes this way. When you wind a coil—we'll say this cups a coil, and you go around and maybe thirty miles worth of wire and you apply voltage to that across a plus or minus line, and you chop it off, there's still all this wire in here that's just doing this. Electricity. It's the ampers, and I forget my—A, I, or E, equal—A or I equals E, I think that's what it is. I'd have to think about it, but it excites that thing, and the way that you can make this thing to where it dissipates slowly, that's long enough for your clutch to be slipping, and as it dies off, you take your forks on your clutch that are engaged, and as your RPM builds up, these want to fly out and you got fly weights on them. We got little weights on those things. They want to fly out there to center, which releases the clutch. So by putting a little—I thought about this—putting a coil in there and dissipating the electricity when it dies off. In other words, when you let your foot up off the clutch, that lets the clutch start dying. You could put a micro switch or something down there that breaks the circuit to the clutch. That lets it come out like that, so that's what they got today. So they got a little screw that you can screw in, a screw resister up and down, or whatever the hell they got. They probably don't know they got it, but they got it and they can adjust that thing's resistance. I over E equals R, I think, or R times—I being Amps, E being voltage, R being resistance. Anyway, I hadn't even thought about that in a while. That would let your clutch come out at the right time. That's what they're doing today. Sometimes when the wheels shake, the clutches let out too quick. Or when they start spinning right off the line or something like that, clutch is not set right. They've got a timer on that thing. Make a perfect run, never spin your wheel. That clutch is slipping all that time. They knew that they had something when they started wearing out those clutches, but they could look down and could see that dust coming off the clutches because it was slipping so bad, but they was going really fast. What?

RM:

Anybody want to go to lunch?

JM:

Yeah, it's about time isn't it?

DS:

What time is it? It's going to be noon already?

RM:

Twenty 'til.

DS:

Well if y'all insist, I'll go.

RM:

Okay. We do.

JM:

But anyway, that was something that I was thinking about and I may have mentioned it.

DS:

Yeah, you mentioned that before, so that's good.

JM:

There was a whole lot that I haven't mentioned.

DS:

I know that's why I am back. [Pause in Recording] Well we're going to go back to that too.

When we left, you were talking about, you know, the clutch, and the magnetos, and that stuff and we kind of left it there. Do you want to pick up there?

JM:

Which car?

DS:

Towards the end, you said had you known about how to do the clutch, you would have made it a little different.

JM:

Oh yeah, we were talking about clutches. I didn't start doing a whole lot. I did get my clutches from Schafer. I got my flywheel for my thirty-one roadster from Schafer. Kendall Oil is who sponsored me, and I got a champion plug sponsorship so I didn't have to worry about my plugs.

Bell sponsored me. Bell would send me a helmet about once a month. Of course, I'd sell the helmet because I didn't need but one helmet. I had two heads, but one was big and the other was bigger. Bell sponsored my hard hat. My tires—Mickey wasn't into tires yet. Mickey Thompson. I can't remember what kind of tires I had, but I had a sponsorship with a—they'd give me a set of tires every now and then. I didn't run a great big tire because I didn't have the power to pull the thing. I took off in second which was good, but a clutch would've helped. These guys today are coming off the line at about eight thousand. They rev that motor way up real high and they drop the clutch and they let clutch do the work, but they keep the RPM [**Revolutions Per Minute**] up there eight and above, even when they come off the line. If I'd come off the line at eight, two things would have happened. I'd either have spun the wheels or I'd have broke an axel. One or the other. No way of sans and but's, that's what I would have done. We just didn't have the give on—especially on the first car. When I wrecked my race car up at Oklahoma City, my little twenty-two flivver, it was because I broke an axel. I got drawings of that axel someplace. I don't remember where, but I draw everything. I don't leave anything to chance. I want to see what it is going to look like before I—sort of like I was telling you about, I don't mind putting it on there. When I drop that egg, I want it to be better. If it don't, I'll take it off. That's sort of the way I us. I've been that way all my life. If it's not worth fooling with, don't fool with it. Just wasting your time. Other than that, well if I'd of come off the way they come off the line now with those ____ [01:25:41] stock cars, it's an amazing thing. They don't spin the wheels. They've got, of course, they've got great big tires on those things and they probably got real low gears so that the tires will catch up with the gear ratio. Keeps them up higher. In other words, when they come off, they don't drop down to two something. They up in like in six or seven. I don't know how they gear them anymore, but it'd be simple to find out. All you got to do is ask. Everybody would be happy to tell you what gear ratio that they're running.

DS:

Well you know—but also technology's changed so much. You were talking earlier about how making your own circuit board for the clutch. Just think of the computer systems those cars use nowadays. It's just amazing.

JM:

Well certainly it is. They have things that weren't even invented, weren't even thought of. Diode was—on our elevators, we had diodes, but they were—some of them was like two or three feet long and they was that square and there was row after row after row. They'd take these pieces of tin, cut them square, and then put a deal down the middle of them so that they could direct their electricity from this thing down to here and they could re-route it through the diode and then bring it out down here and it'd be whatever voltage. Generally, it was an AC to DC, so you're coming off of your generator was a big thing back then. They don't even use generators anymore, hardly, except on large. They use the—on AC—AC does this in sixty cycles, so it does sixty cycles per second, I think is what it is. They'll do sixty of these and they'll—this is the top,

this is a plus and this is a minus. Down the middle is just zero. Goes from one twenty to zero to plus, to one twenty from plus to minus one twenty, and then back to zero again. That's the way AC worked. What the diode does is it skims off the top, takes that top right off it because there's a top there. You put sixty of them in that hump coming up right there, almost straight line. They call that straight line, is what they call it, Straight Line DC. You could—these large things that we use on our elevator were huge, then all of a sudden, they come out as little old one or two watt, or ten watt diode that's the size of a pea that'll do the same thing. It's just amazing. That was amazing, that was amazing because the first thing I did with all my—of course, I didn't change anything on the elevators, but there was a lot of things that I could put in there, like if I kept having trouble with my coil or something like that, I'd just put a diode around it, you know, and it stopped it. I could put a diode—I could preload with a diode. In other words, I could keep a load on things. Not with a diode, but with a resister, I could put a—say, instead of it being direct zero, I could put maybe a ten thousand Ohm resister around something, so where it was running through the—and it would save things because of the shock of the turning on, turning off, turning on, turning off, you know? That's a great shock, and the shock comes from the buildup of when you first turn it off. The buildup of the voltage. There's always a build up there. You turn a hundred and twenty-five volt DC off. A lot of those is seven hundred VDC. Volts, build it up, but it drops down real quick because it's off. That shock, after a while, it just wears things out. You wouldn't think a wire would wear out, but I don't know what happens. I'm not that smart.

DS:

I was telling you about the building that we're in right now at the Southwest Collection, last year, not this past December, but the previous one, we had a problem where an elevator went down. We have two main elevators, and one went down and it kept tripping all of the circuits.

JM:

They had a short.

DS:

It took them—I bet eight months before they were able to find the gremlin and had to have a new circuit board made. In the meantime, while that was going on, it caused the one in the back to also start doing the same thing so both elevators went down.

JM:

Was it Dover elevators?

DS:

I don't know what kind of Dover they have.

JM:

They had a problem. I had a friend when we was in El Paso, called me up. I'd called him up and told him I was moving down there and I had never met the guy in person, but I had talked to him a couple of times on the phone. I told him I was there if he needed anything. I kind of like put my hand in. If you have anything going on you want particularly fixed, I'll fix it for you. Well he called me up and said, "Jim, I got an elevator out here at UTEP that we've had on service for, I think, three or four years. Never has run, but I'm charging them for maintenance on this thing. We maintain what's not running, which is not good. Could you come over and look at it and see the thing? When it tries to run, sometimes it'll run in the wrong direction." I said, "Yeah, I know what's wrong with it. Picking a break up. It's got to pick the break up. Pick the brake up, it's got to be applying voltage to the generator, and if you got a generator in it, then the generator is turning—only turn one way, the way of the wire. Can't turn the other way, so they're applying the right voltage to the deal. Anyway, let me come over and look at it." So I walk in there. I had a pair of little old nail clippers like she uses. Had them in my pocket, and I walked in there and walked over to this control panel and I nipped this little deal and the elevator started running.

DS:

There was just a short there?

JM:

They had a resister. They preloaded the armature, where the brushes come down. They preloaded the armature so that when it did this, and come into the floor, and then backed up, it would be preloaded. It never went to zero. It always had a load on it. It'd come in nice and smooth, and then back up to level. They did it through that. If that happened, then the elevator just couldn't move, especially if they shorted out across there. Rather than the voltage going through the brushes, it went around the brushes because of the preload. The preload had shorted. I'd had that happen before.

DS:

So you already knew what you were looking for?

JM:

Sure. [Laughter] I wouldn't have gone out there if I didn't know what I was doing. They didn't even know what I'd done. I could have—and I told them I'd said, "I don't know just sometimes an elevator just starts running. I walked through the door and just all of a sudden it starts running."

DS:

[Laughs] Speaking of elevators, we were talking in the car about the Lubbock Tornado, and could you talk about your connection with the Lubbock Tornado?

JM:

We just drove down there that night, and at night, everything looks really bad, especially if there's no other lights. All the lights were off, so the only lights we had was the lights of our headlights, our car. I drove down there in my car and took my second mechanic with me, and we went down there and he was from Lubbock. He knew how to get around in Lubbock at night. I didn't know how to get around in Lubbock hardly, except during the day, I could see where I was, but I didn't know where I was. Anyway, we went by downtown. The first stop we did was for Westinghouse was. We worked for Westinghouse at that time, so let's go take care of the Westinghouse job, so we did. From time to time, I would have to go down there and help the fellow that was my former helper from Tulsa, Scotty McFadgen [?] [01:36:07], from Scotland, and I'd go down there, and Scotty would've a problem and I'd go down there and help him. Whether it was he had a problem and got behind on his service work or whatever it was, I'd go help him some way, but anyway, we drove around town and checked the elevators, and the police—it was either the county or police station had a little hydraulic elevator in there. It wasn't a great big elevator, but the county now had—the county, as well as I can remember, it was about a three or four story building down there. The courthouse. And I think they had a couple of prisoners in there with a guard, but they were trapped in between floors. You couldn't get out. Today, they've resolved a lot of problems where you can't open your elevator doors from inside the elevator. Period. You can't. They locked the little deal that's up in top that's supposed to be locked. It's not supposed to be open. It's supposed to be up there anyway, got a lot of people killed. You can't imagine how many elevators in this world there are, but especially in New York and Chicago and Detroit, in those big cities, my God. They've just got—a little building in New York City is a great big building here. We don't have—a little old building like we got downtown, that old white tower downtown, that's just a little old teeny building in New York City. It's maybe average, but here it's big. Same thing with the Great Plains building down in Lubbock, it's seventeen, eighteen floors. My friend that lived down here owned that building at the time. Well no, he didn't own it at the time. He just bought it. There was a twisted beam in that building. It was the Great Plains, I think. There was a twisted beam and the beam was about the size of—the top of the beam was about the size of this table. It was huge. It had to have been, the top of it had to be, oh, that thick, but you could see where it did this. It was one of those things. It was over on the far side of the building from the street. To where it was, it was on the far side of the building. We dropped Bob's down the hatch, and the rails were straight. Nothing had—

DS:

Bob's your friend? Like Plum Bob's?

JM:

Yeah. We dropped them down the rails. We didn't want to run into anything. We rode up and down on the elevators tops, later on, didn't do it right then. We just got people on, but we—they

have what they call hand controls. You can run it from the top of the elevator very slow. Twenty foot a minute. Sixty foot a minute. Something like that. We run it up and down, made sure there was nothing pulled away from the wall, and nothing was in the way, and then we proceeded to go through the controls and make sure everything was alright on the control panel upstairs, that we were getting the right voltages, and everything was level, so to speak. We did that later on, but the first night that Bernard, and fuel [?] [01:40:04] and I were down there, we just checked the elevators. Looking at some of those buildings, the National Bank of Tulsa—or National Bank of Lubbock or Little Hook National [?] [01:40:20] or whatever it was, they had an Otis elevators in there, but we checked those out. I don't know what the Otis guy was doing. Hell, he probably didn't even know it was snowing outside or anything, but we checked all those, but in front of that building, there was cars that had been crushed. The wall crumble off the front of that, some of that big white concrete that they use for around windows and stuff, that had fallen down on top of those cars. That was the first thing we saw. Said, "My God, there has to be hundreds of people dead here." I don't know how many—there wasn't very many people got killed in that thing.

DS:

It was twenty-six.

JM:

That's a few. That was a massive tornado. Where we normally stayed when we were down there—I started staying downtown. There was a head elevator downtown. I don't remember the name of it, but it was right down town, but there was one out on the road out towards country club back towards Amarillo that it had tore it all to hell. Across the street, it went down through some, I think a grain elevator, or cotton elevators. Some elevator, it tore it. Didn't tear the elevator. Tore everything around it up. It sort of veered it downtown coming through, and then veered out towards the country club that way. When we first got there, it was evident that something was wrong because it was torn all to hell out there. Had a bunch of crap on the street and the road, so all the way in, it just got worse and worse. That tornado almost took the path of our path that went into—that was before they had loops and all that stuff down there. It was on our way in, and it just kept getting worse, and worse, and worse. Of course, just being human, we thought this is a massive kill down here. It wasn't. It was as fortunate as hell that people got out of the way or whatever they did. That's the only thing I know about that. We got some people off and then we come back to Amarillo the next day. Once we saw daylight, and it didn't look near as bad during the day as it did, because we could see over here where it was okay and over here was okay. When it come down to what? Fourth Street, or whatever street it came down, it tore a couple of apartment houses down. I had my old roadster, my thirty-one, was in a deal there. I think was Fourth Street. Didn't it hit on Fourth Street?

DS:

I think so, yeah.

JM:

Anyway, going back towards town, that thing come across there like that, I had sold my roadster. That blue one, the dark colored one I've got. The one where the girl's standing there. I had sold that roadster to some guy from Lubbock, and he had just ruined it. He'd just taken everything off of it and changed it around. He was just a hillbilly, and he was trying to lighten it up. He was trying to go to another class, and just tore the car up going from—it was built for what it was built for, but it knocked the walls out from under that and the roof come down and smashed my roadster. Tore it all to hell, just smashed it flatter than a fritter, but that roadster sat out there behind Prentice Cunningham. You know Prentice?

DS:

I've heard the name from you, but I haven't —

JM:

Cunningham's Motor, they have the—they replaced motors.

DS:

Are they still there in Lubbock?

JM:

Yeah, out there right where it does this. One way goes on the loop, and the other way goes on a deal that goes through town. They're right there where it splits. They're sitting up there kind of on a hill.

DS:

I need to look for them.

JM:

Yeah, he was a good racer. He was really a good racer. Prentice, he was a piece of work. I don't know whether he's—I haven't heard of him dying. I know Lee died. Lee Christian, but I think Prentice is still alive.

DS:

There's a Christian Brothers Automotive. Are they descendants of Lee Christian?

JM:

I have no idea. Lee just had a, at the time—I never did know Lee all that well. I knew him when

he—I knew of him. I knew what he looked like, but every time I'd get around him, I had other things to do besides worry about ____ [01:45:39]. You know what I'm saying?

DS:

You were there to win.

JM:

Yeah, I attended to my business and he attended to his. I remember that he had a front end blower that he had bought from ____ [01:45:53]. I had never seen one, but I'd seen pictures of them. He had an Oldsmobile, a dragster, and it was a real nice one. I mean for that day, it was pretty nice. It was far nicer than mine. Lee was a good racer. Prentice come along, and Prentice, I dealt with Prentice. Prentice run into a bridge abutment just coming this way. On the other side of Sayre, there's a bridge there. Coming back this way, I think that Prentice ran into a bridge abutment there. It really screwed him up pretty bad. I think it put him in the hospital. I don't know. Something wrong with his head or something. It screwed him up. I didn't see much of Prentice. Now, every time I'd go to Lubbock, I'd stop by out there at Prentice's shop. His dad's shop, actually. They sold Oldsmobile's—Oldsmobile engines and Chrysler engines for the watering systems the farmers had, but I'd stop by and see Prentice from time to time. Prentice always first class equipment. They had a lot of money. Evidently, at that time, they had a lot. They had a lot more than I had, but Prentice was topnotch. Great guy. Good guy. I like Prentice. Not pretentious and just an out and out good guy. Can't say much more about—I didn't know a whole lot of guys from Lubbock. I didn't know a whole lot of guys from here that were—if they weren't in my class, I really didn't worry about them. I wasn't worried about glad handing anybody. I didn't feel like I was above anybody and I didn't feel like I was below anybody. I just wanted to race so that's all I did.

DS:

I guess you were talking earlier about how you only kept that very first trophy that you won, can you tell us about—

JM:

Well you know what it was? I won it from Roy Wheatley that had that—I previously mentioned on that other day that Roy on that airport down at Moore, Oklahoma. This was the first time we went down there, and it was the first time he was open. He didn't know what kind of trophies to buy, so he bought these trophies that we got. It was about this tall. It was about eight inches tall maybe. On top of mine was a soapbox derby, so he bought a bunch of soapbox derby replicas, and that's what he gave out, soapbox derby, trophies.

DS:

That's cool.

JM:

Do I have a soapbox derby trophy in here?

RM:

No, you have a swimming trophy in there.

JM:

That's it?

RM:

Yeah.

JM:

How about over there?

RM:

I don't think so. I think the only trophy I know of is out there in the garage in one of those shelves. I'll go get it if you want me to.

JM:

I think I broke that trophy.

RM:

I think it is broken.

JM:

The trophy is? Well go get it. I saved that one. It was my first one.

DS:

So it was a soapbox?

JM:

It was a soapbox.

RM:

I don't think this one is, but I'll bring it.

JM:

Of course, everybody griped. It's supposed to have a hotrod on it, not a soapbox derby. I didn't give a damn. I was proud of that trophy. That was the first trophy I won. I mean, it wasn't the

first trophy I won. It was the first one I'd won without Arden, that dragster.

DS:

After all the hard work you'd put into building that car.

JM:

Winning, of course, was the number one thing. Didn't give a damn about a trophy. Trophies, you couldn't eat, you couldn't spend them. You couldn't do anything with them. It's nice to be able to win a trophy, but you got to—the deal is, is it worth it? Is winning that little old two cent trophy worth that hundred dollars you spent to do it? The fact that you're an avid sportster, we'll say, that fact is—the trophy's great, but just the fact you won is worth a little bit. Same thing in life, there are important things in life that are much more important than that trophy, but you won it. It's pretty important too.

DS:

I think for you, you value more the competition than the—

JM:

Yeah, I didn't even think of it as competition so much as I can beat him or he can beat me, and if he can beat me, then I'm going to work my ass off to beat him. It's quite a deal. Let's see what kind of trophies—that's it. What does it say here?

RM:

It doesn't say anything.

JM:

Oh, I got the car at some place, but you can see it's been beat up. There was a little soapbox area on here.

DS:

I do have a camera with me. I might as well take a photo, right?

JM:

Let me wipe my trophy off here. I don't want you taking—that's my number one first trophy. Yeah, it's sitting out there collecting dust. It should be—I don't guess there's any writing. Cheap son of a bitch didn't even put anything on it, but he didn't know. That was top eliminator trophy, 1953 or—yeah, 1953, or four, at the Moore Dragstrip. What you don't go through for little things. I got that car someplace. I don't know where they are.

DS:

This ain't going to work for some reason. Batteries charged. It just doesn't want to work, but I got my cellphone. Camera on this is probably better anyway.

JM:

Probably. There's something. Put something in there that gave you the height of how small that is. [Camera clicks 01:53:42]

DS:

Now, would you smile for the camera? [Camera clicks 01:43:46] That way we can take a picture of you too, and add that to the record.

JM:

That was my pride and joy. Feel how heavy that little thing is. That's a real trophy. Some of the big trophies don't weigh that much.

RM:

Later on, the trophies got lighter and lighter.

DS:

Oh, did they?

JM:

That's all metal there, man. That's a trophy.

DS:

Oh yeah, this is a trophy. Back in '05, we were doing an event in Lubbock that I was in charge of getting the trophies for and this one lady said, "Oh, go to my friend. He'll get you some good trophies." So I just told them what I wanted. This is giant compared to the trophy we gave out for first place.

JM:

Really?

DS:

Yes.

JM:

It was littler than that?

DS:

It was. It's got like—next time I won't go to a friend of a friend for trophies because we got ripped off. They were like—the guy just made a killing on the money because he didn't charge a whole lot, but he didn't spend anything. But you're right. The trophies got to be four feet tall and weighed an ounce.

RM:

Yeah. I used to babysit for some of the—before I knew him, when I was a teenager—and this guy, they had trophies all over the living room from this tall on down and up and down, all over. They didn't have any furniture.

DS:

Jim was talking about that, how he basically was building a house for the trophies, to house the trophies.

JM:

I didn't have a house that we could—

RM:

This was Gene Taylor.

JM:

Yeah, I remember Gene. Gene was real proud of his trophies. Gene was a good guy. Gene was the one that bought my thirty-one roadster that got flattened out. Gene sold it to the guy in Lubbock that flattened out down there. But that thing sat up there behind Prentice Cunningham's house—not house, shop—at out there in the field. Just sat there. Sat there for two, or three, or four years, or five. Just sat there and one day I went by there and it was gone. Somebody from Dallas had picked it up and took it. The running gear was fine. Had a drop tube front axle. Everything was chrome underneath. Thirty-two roadster frame was all there. All you do was put wheels on it and a body and it would have been back like it was. Nothing bent. So I had screwed up. I should've gone down there and just picked it up and brought it back. They didn't give a damn about it. They was rich farmers. Whoever owned it was some farmer guy. Took it down there to this speed shop, let the guy at speed shop work on it which kind of shows you what kind of a drag racer he was to let somebody else make it go fast. That's—of course, they do that today. You got your driver, and you got your main guy that makes it go fast. What do they call him? The guy that makes it go fast—your top mechanic on your—when they rebuild all those engines. A crew chief. So I guess it's the same thing, letting somebody put it together.

DS:

So how many people did you take with you when you were racing?

JM:

Me.

DS:

You?

JM:

Yeah. Bill went, if Bill went. Bill went most of the time. Bill Flincham, my partner on that car. Bill went most of the time. He was a hell of a good mechanic, but I tinkered. I was a tinkerer. I was an egg dropper. We had clock. They had a high top speed clock, it was an ET clock [?] [01:57:54]. But I could—I think we had four carburetors on that or maybe six. I don't remember, on that Arden. I could jet it. You know, jet it, and mess around with it. I don't know what they call those main jets that had a little tid [?][01:58:20] in it. I fooled around with it to see if I could make it go faster. Sometimes it would. Never dropped off much because it wasn't—of course, mileage, it just doesn't take very long. Even back then, it took eleven seconds probably. I don't know how fast that car was. It was on dirt, so it probably wasn't the elevens, E.T. **[Elapsed Time]** wise, but it did go a hundred and forty-seven miles an hour, timed quarter. It was an exact quarter because I watched them do it and put it in—it was elated, my God. That was back when everybody else was going a hundred and fifteen, twenty. These guys in California wasn't going that fast, but it wasn't long before they were. Anyway, that's my number one. That was my love. Love of my life. I don't know where the little soapbox is. If I find that soapbox, I'll—

RM:

I think it is up in storage, Jim.

JM:

It might be.

DS:

But you're right. It does have some weight to it.

JM:

Yeah, but it is all metal. This is plastic on the new one. All of this is plastic, except maybe this little piece right here where they engrave it.

DS:

And what year was that that you won that?

JM:

It was '53. I was looking here to see if there was a number on it. I see it.

DS:

How often were you winning?

JM:

I won every week. Hell, I was the only one that had a dragster. I was the only one running fuel.

DS:

That must be a good feeling.

JM:

Certainly, it was great to go with the dragster.

DS:

Did people hate seeing you there?

JM:

Only thing I didn't like was I had to pay to get in. I had to pay to get in, and just like you come to watch me, you had to pay. I had to pay just like I was a spectator, then I had to pay to race. I didn't like that.

DS:

So it was a business from day one?

JM:

Yeah, they didn't give me no money though. I didn't get a dime out of it. Roy didn't pay anybody. He just gives these things away, but it was fun. I went down there for fun. I had to pay to have fun, but I had to pay to say that I won. I never did think that drag racing was fair in that you had to pay to race your car so that they could charge other people to come in and watch your race. I never did think that was fair. It just—and the excuse was, we've got to buy insurance. We've got to fill out an insurance card on you, which they did. When you entered a race, they give you a little—they give you some sort of little piece of paper that you sign for to not hold one. A non-labile type thing. You had to pay them, NHRA Insurance. So they had to pay NHRA, so in that case, they let you pay for getting in. They let you pay for your insurance, which really worked out pretty good because I got on my head and it screwed things up. It put me in the hospital for a couple of weeks.

DS:

Was that your first major wreck?

JM:
Huh?

DS:
Was that your first major wreck?

JM:
That was my only wreck. Broke an axel. Didn't know it. I wasn't smart enough. You break an axel on a big car, it twists it real quick because their wheels are way out here. My car, the wheels was in here. It took a while. I know that I just, all of a sudden, I just jumped. I was in the left hand lane and then all of a sudden, I know it just jumped over there about fifteen feet. Today, it would run into a cement barrier, but I just jumped over there and I was out on the dirt. It wasn't mowed. It was weedy. I got out on the dirt, and I started bouncing and my foot—that was the first week that they made you wear a strap to stick your foot in, your toes in, so that you—people were not putting stops in. I'm telling you, they had some dummies back then. People not putting stops on their carburetors so they would go on through. Their little deal would go through and it would straighten up like that and you couldn't get off the carburetor. Only thing you could do was hit your kill button, but that don't do anything. It just kind of takes a little power off your motor. Won't stop your motor if you got any RPM's at all, it won't stop your motor. Magneto will just keep firing, if you hit your kill button, you can hit that kill button all you want. I got across my magneto one time, I don't remember exactly what happened. Oh, I had a ninny that was helping me at the time that absolutely didn't know what he was doing, but he was helping me. I was letting him help. I had my car running. I don't know what I was checking, but I was checking something, had to have it running. And he got in it and he was—I don't know what happened, but it went to about ten-thousand RPM all of a sudden. And I told him—oh, he was out—I was in the car, and he was outside of the car and he was monkeying with the carburetors or whatever he was doing. All of a sudden, he went too far. I had a stop on it, but he had moved the stop for some reason, and it revved up to about ten thousand RPM, and I was in it so I could see my tack. I said—my kill button wouldn't even begin to hurt. It knocked it down maybe eighty-five hundred. I said, "Put your finger across this to short out the DC, so it just goes through your finger." So I told him to put his finger here and there, which would give me a better ground than what I had over here. Oh, he said, "It'll shock me. It'll shock me, it'll shock me." That thing sat there for a few seconds more and I jumped out of the car and ran around there and put my finger across that and it started to die and all of a sudden, my overflow, overflowed, went right down my foot. Right down my shoe with water. Now, I've got my finger across this magneto up here and water coming in on me down there, but I hung onto that dang thing. God almighty, it was hitting me. I sat in there, and I got it did. Boy it sure shocked me good. Came across that magneto vertex mag. I do it today too because I had a great engine and I just didn't want that engine to blow up. It had blown up—I didn't have time to even look to see what the hell was wrong with my carburetor. I didn't have enough hands to put over it to choke it down.

DS:

You were talking briefly about that first wreck, your only wreck. What was that like? You mentioned you went into the grass, but what was after that?

JM:

Well I had to unstrap, and I wasn't comfortable in that car at all ever. My seat needed to be a little higher, but I wanted it to be down. I wanted just my head showing, which it was, but the back of my calf on my right foot where I had my throttle was across the third member, the axel housing here. It was like that, and my foot was up here. It had a strap on it. I could push down on this part right here, and I could push down on this. Well, but in order to get my foot out, I had to turn my foot and pull it out this way. Couldn't do it this way because I had my—my quick change was sitting right here. I pull it out. I got out there in the deal and started jumping up in time. Every time I'd jump, it'd take the weight off of my throttle and it stopped me going—my engine didn't stop. It would just reduce in RPM, then it would come down and it would go faster and then I'd bounce. I would start bouncing. It was big balloon tires too, see, so I started going down through that popping. Bad axel. I found out that if I'd of had a regular—my axel had been—it was a big old axel. It wasn't a little teeny thing. If I'd of had an axel there, I could have controlled the car, but the axel was on the inside so the car tended to do this every time I—and I was trying to turn it this way, which I was. I was keeping it straight, but this axel was pulling and this axel wasn't, so I was doing this down through there. I got down so far and I got it back on the track, but I was headed across the track. At that point, just getting it back on was hard to do and I was down there about two hundred and fifty yards maybe. This all happened within a second or three or four. I was headed right for—there was a whole bunch of people standing at the finish line. Just standing there, about right that far from the track and I was headed right for them, and so I tried to pull my foot out. Got my foot back, got off the throttle, and I was going to run into somebody. I was going to kill somebody, so I just did this. Nothing else I could do but wreck the car rather than run into a whole bunch of people. I could've—if they hadn't of been there, I would have just gone on out in the dirt on the other side and that would have turned me back onto the track, see, but I didn't. Neither here nor that. I didn't even know at the time it had a broke axel. I didn't know it had a broke axel until I got back and out of the hospital, and got back and I had the car down here and I started pulling things apart and I found the axel was broke. Now, the car never had a tendency to not go straight. It always went straight. The only thing that I could figure out was that axel caused it—the trouble. Then bad planning on my part as to how to—I remember I got in a real big hurry because they said they wasn't going to let—unless you had that strap, you couldn't race. So I got in a real big hurry about that time and put a strap across there. Welded miss or I think I welded me a little aluminum strap to put my foot in. That's where I got in trouble.

DS:

Because your foot was pinned in.

JM:

Yeah, couldn't get my foot out.

DS:

So, you know, you mentioned going to the hospital. How long were you there?

JM:

Well I remember that I was awake part of the way because I remember telling the ambulance, "Don't wreck. Let's don't have two wrecks in one day." I remember telling the ambulance driver that. They got me there in good time. This was at a national event so they had an ambulance there on the job. I had set best E.T. and top speed that day. My record—my national record, was a hundred and fifty something, nine point four. Something like that, which was just my—that was my first run of that car so after that, I would make money if I broke the national record or I would make money if I set track record. I never did try to go fast. I'd rather—I'd go as fast as I needed to go. If you had a track and you were giving me fifty dollars or a hundred dollars for breaking the track record and the track record was a hundred and twenty-five, hell I'd go a hundred and thirty. No need going your national record. You could get fifty dollars. The only time I'd go for that is if they had qualify—if you had to qualify or something like that. I never did drive any of my cars as fast as they'd go, but that run, that particular run, was a hundred and eighty—they clocked my motor at a hundred and eighty two. I did all that. I wasn't even on a dragstrip. I was out in the weeds.

DS:

Hopping around.

JM:

I was going really fast.

RM:

Tell him about your face.

JM:

Well it tore my ear off, but you can't hardly see it in this. I had a big scar down through here like this. The guy that did this to my face was—I forget his name—I run track. He was a Classen guy. I was a Capitol Hill guy, but I lived over eight blocks from Classen. He run track at Classen and I run track at Capitol Hill, so we knew each other, and in the meantime, he had gone to OU. He was a big star down at OU. Football player. He was a doctor. He had—he did Namath's knees, and he did a lot. He was a bigtime facial doctor. I forget—he told me later on how many stiches in my face. He said, "Boy, I really put a lot of stitches in your face to get your face at where you wouldn't be scarred and stuff like that." He did it. I was lucky that I knew the guy and the guy

knew me.

RM:

Hundreds of stitches.

DS:

I can imagine because that's just a big area.

JM:

Went out there and picked my damn ear up off the dragstrip. Either that or I don't know.

DS:

When you are laying there in the hospital after all these injuries, do you start thinking about were you going to race again or not race again?

JM:

Oh, I still thinking about racing, but then it wasn't doing me any good. There I am, flat on my back. At that particular time, when I first got it, they didn't know what was wrong with me other than the contusion and bruises and stuff like that. They knew that I might have hurt my neck. That was back before you had to have a special wear, so I always wore a leather jacket. This leather jacket, evidently, I had my belts come over my shoulder and down and I had a deal in a quick change, what they call a quick release, I had one on my parachute. It was a parachute release thing that you snap everything in and if you wanted to get out of it, you had to turn and hit it. I had that. Well it was all wadded up. My jacket was up it over it and my arm was—it screwed up. They couldn't get me unstrapped so they just cut my seatbelt and got me out. The hospital cut my jacket off. They didn't try to take it off of me right there because they didn't know what was wrong with me. They took it off after I got to the hospital, I guess, because by that time, I didn't know what the hell was happening. I mean, I knew what had happened, but I didn't—I had passed out I guess. Come to a couple of days later. It was a good stay, had good people. Everybody treated me good. My insurance guys come up from here. One of them is still alive. What's his name? That goofy guy that sold me my insurance, you know?

RM:

You know so many goofy people, I'm sorry. Just kidding.

JM:

Anyway, they had come up to—no, it wasn't him. It was another guy. He was a trainee at that time that I was living out there on Adirondack. They had come up to visit me and I remember I could hear him coming down the hall. I knew his voice, so I closed my eyes. [Whispers] “God, he looks like shit. Doesn't he?” He said, “Yeah.” They were conversing. “Yeah, Goddamn. I

think he's dead." You know, just talking among themselves. I was listening to all the, "He looks like shit," and "I think he's dead," I thought—I hadn't looked in the mirror, so I knew evidently, I didn't look too keen. [Laughter] Anyway, said, "Goddamn, how much insurance does he have?", "I don't know.", "Hey!" and they jumped and all that. "Hey!"

DS:

You mentioned people you knew coming up there. How about family?

JM:

I had a wife. All of my family that I knew of was right there in Oklahoma City, so my mama and my dad and her mom and dad and grandpa and my wife and everybody was there.

DS:

Did you have kids at the time already?

JM:

I just had one six month old—six weeks old. Mitch, my son.

DS:

That's a sobering thought, right?

JM:

Well he's tried to emulate dad ever since.

DS:

Has he?

JM:

Yeah. Oh hell yeah, he's a champion. He's a champion. He won the world's championship for motorcycle racers over fifty.

DS:

Really?

JM:

Yeah, last year.

DS:

Where's he at?

JM:

He's in Oklahoma City.

DS:

Might have to get ahold of him and do an interview, at least over the phone.

JM:

Well you could, but he's quite a guy. He was quite a guy a year or two ago because he's doing drugs—he's like that guy.

DS:

Oh, is that the guy you were talking about?

JM:

He was quite the guy, he'd just get pissed off at the drop of a hat. He just wasn't right. It was drugs. He didn't realize it at the time, but it was drugs. One of his friends had given him some drugs. Told him, these will quiet you down. It didn't. They made him worse. So we got him off of that. He got himself off of it. We told him what we thought was wrong, and I guess he thought about it and got off of them. He's doing real good now. Very calm. He went to New York. They had this big race. Worldwide race up in New York and he took first. Number one tag. He got a number one. That's what they give you is a tag that says one.

DS:

So he grew up watching you race though, right?

JM:

No, I wrecked before. He was six weeks old.

DS:

No, I mean, but he grew up watching you race?

JM:

I didn't race after that.

DS:

Oh, you didn't race after that? That's what I was asking is like were you ever thinking about going back?

JM:

Well I built cars.

DS:

You just went back into building?

JM:

I just went back to building for a living. It wasn't a living, but I made money at it. Then I got tired of it about seven or eight years later. You can't believe how many people try to beat you out of money. On the books, I had maybe forty, forty-five thousand dollars people owed me. Friends. Rather than be mad at friends, I just said, "Well, Fuck, it's not worth it." I just quit. I gave the business to my guy that had welded with me from start. Duke Allen was his name. Duke had worked for me for like—by the time I'd given him—he'd been welding for me for, oh, six, seven years. I was paying him top wages. I was paying him—actually, I was paying him more than what I was making. My elevator business was completely separate from my race business. I never let the two meet. What I made in the elevator business was family money. What I made in my hot rod business was hot rod business. I never let the two get together. If I couldn't afford to race, then I couldn't afford to race. You lose a car, I lost my motor. I lost my injectors. Everything that was on that car, I lost. My magneto broke. Everything was broke. Blew out all my wheels. Bent my front mags, bent my rear mags—it tore it up. It was either if I wanted—and I could've started racing within—I could've built me another car probably within a month, month and half if it's what I wanted to do. And I just said it was just too much work. It got, over a period of fifteen, twenty years, it just got to where it's too much work. Got to think about having time to lay around and it's just not worth it. I was having trouble at home because I was getting home, I wasn't sleeping with my wife—I was sleeping in the goddang chair in the front room. I'd come home. I'd be so tired. I couldn't even get to the bed. I'd just pass out in the front room. Then I got to where I couldn't sleep. I just got so tired. I think they don't know what happened, but they kind of felt like I had a heart attack. They put me in a hospital for three or four days and I got rested. They gave me a lot of calm me down stuff, you know? I went in the hospital for that. Got out in about three or four days. I just never did. I went back over there and told Duke, my partner who the previous year, I'd give him forty-nine percent. Just said, here it's yours. I had sort of, in the back of my mind, I knew I wanted to quit so I needed somebody that wanted to take it over, and I just gave it to him. I said the only thing I want is thirty-five hundred dollars or whatever we had in the bank. I said, I want that. My tools, I had maybe five, six, seven thousand dollar worth of tubing on the wall. I had at least ten or fifteen third members. It was all cut down and trued up and welded and everything. I had twenty row bars that was already bent. Twenty axels was already bent. Everything. There was enough to build twenty cars. And I had, in today's market, I probably had seventy thousand dollar worth of tools, which is not very many. I had a lot of tools. All my tools, all my dyes, all my stuff that we—I had a deal about as big this table and the only thing it was—it was about from that end to that wall there, I'd put my cars on it and my jigs. I could put my tubing on that, and secure this one and secure this one from my bottom rail. I had a deal that you could heat it right here. I had a point here. You could just touch it right there and that rail would just come up like that. Come up like that. I could heat it

back here and it would kind of come up for your seat to be higher and your blower. That was when you had front engine—front machine—front engine cars. I could put my front end in it, and all my bracing. Then I could come back in, put my deal that I had built at it. Had a minute out at long beach bending and they bent it, and I could put my motor mount in here and also my mount for my steering wheels. My steering box. We could put the top rail in. If we had to bend it, we could bend it. Take it back here and then bend it. Everything just kind of come together like that. We weld it and they don't even use that anymore. They block everything. Everything on there's just solid. You have a whole frame that flexes. It's flexible, but there was a time that in the rules it said you will have a front suspension. You will have front shocks. Didn't say anything about the third member, but then they started having trouble with the damn third member tearing up. Had a bunch of beginners that didn't know what they was doing using exhaust pipe, which is just nothing but tin and they'd weld it. Their third member bolted in when they took off, the wheels wanted to go that way, but the third member wanted to come this way. They killed about ten people out there because the damn third member rotated on them and just gutted them, just dropped it down on the ground. After that, they started—you had to get welders to do it, but that—welders wasn't the deal.

DS:

The material.

JM:

I know guys in town that set national records with conduit, which is—conduit [02:30:06], you can break that over your knee.

DS:

Can you imagine applying that much torque to it?

JM:

Oh, it was just awful. I wasn't going to say anything. None of my business what the hell they built their car, other than if they asked me. If they ask me, "What do you think?", "I think it's a piece of shit. I think you're going to die in that thing." No, and then it got SEMA, Speed Equipment Manufacturers Association. At one time, I had the number one SEMA. It's a big deal now. Back then, it wasn't. Howard Esquiderian [?] [02:30:46]. All the guys that helped me were members of SEMA. Of course, Champion was, and Esquiderian [?] was and everybody that I knew was a member of SEMA. I don't remember what happened. I just quit. I just got out of the business. What happened after that, I don't know. I never was interested in it after that.

DS:

What year was that that you sold it? Or you gave it?

JM:

I think it was 1968, 1969, somewhere in there.

DS:

Okay, so that was like right before the big explosion in—because doesn't drag racing have a really big uptake in the early seventies?

JM:

It was really big up until then. The only thing that was big that happened was when NHRA jumped in there with a bunch of bean counters and said, well let's do money. Drag racing wasn't the number one thing. Money was. Let's collect money off the Coke's. You own the dragstrip, but NHRA comes in, you don't get the Coke money anymore. They get it. They get the popcorn money. They get the hotdog money. They get everything and a kick.

RM:

Piece of the gate.

JM:

Today, you can go out there and have a two million dollar dragstrip or a three, it doesn't make—if you want to race, they'll race, but they're going to get what they want. And that's what—

RM:

Of course, they do the advertising, so they did create—

JM:

No, they don't. They do in a lot of ways, but there's no promises from NHRA. They're not obligated any way. Today, I think they've got their safari, their safety safari. They put out fires and they have all these people that make sure that your fence is up ten so you don't run out of the dragstrip. They got that long place down there where they either put chat or sand that you drop off at the end in case your breaks fail. They got a lot of Indians, so to speak. Very few chiefs. All the chiefs are bean counter. It's money. Especially since—I saw the other day on TV, they only had two or three hours of drag racing on. That costs money. It's all for sale by NHRA. If you want our show with our announcers, our TV, our cameras and everything, we'll sell it to you for X amount of dollars. They sell quite a bit of it, but that's all bean counter. They're not interested in the guy. They've got the same people racing every week. You can pretty well tell who is going—out of thirty racers, on weekends, I can tell you three of them that's going to win. Every weekend.

RM:

Unless one of them gets sick.

JM:

You just know who's—then they all run about the same. They all know what this guy's got. Only thing that's different is getting the rubber on the ground and one chassis works better than the other chassis that day, on that particular track, on that particular heat, that particular water to air ratio. It's the same. Not interesting. It's not like it used to be. Everybody would build their cars and that's what happened is you had so many to start with, it let people that took junk out there, and got killed. Like my good friend Graydon Miller ran his damn fuel—had his gas tank in the car with him sitting over here on the floor, gas tank to his motor. Of course, it blew up, cut his gas tank. Blew up underneath, ruptured his tank. Gas squirted all over the inside. Car caught on fire. He tried to bail out and it drug him a hundred yards at a hundred miles an hour, and finally rolled him up and then he finally kicked his way out of the car. Died. I can name a hundred things that common sense would tell you, don't put that thing there. If you're going to put it there, get you a good piece of iron to go in between it and the clutch, but that was then. I thought that was drag racing. These guys today are going fast.

DS:

To you it was the old build your own, run your own.

JM:

I like that, and I don't like spots. I don't like—I had that thirty-one roadster. There was many times when they put me in the middle of the eliminator, and if I won, it was purely luck, and I won quite a bit, but the other guy didn't know how to come off the line or he was asleep or something and I beat him to the other end. My ET was better. I just think that it's—of course, it's been a long time since I've been out there so I don't know how excited I would be if I went out there. Eddy Hill come from Wichita Falls, come to town one time. He was a national boat champion. He run boat—drag boats. He was going to get his fuel license back, and then they called me and I went out there with him. The fact is, I guess that's about the last time I was out there. He made a couple of passes. Made a nice little pass, a hundred and fifty. Took it up a notch and then took it up another notch. Ran through the weeds down there at the end. It's not long enough for fast cars. It was okay for two hundred miles an hour out here. Three hundred—two hundred is really stretching it out here. If the shoot doesn't open, they got a problem. I don't know whether they got a sand pit out here. I don't know what they got. Don't really even give a shit. I like drag racing. It was fun. It was sort of a family type thing. Everybody in it was family. I always liked my family. I'm sure that the common ship is still the same because these guys all know each other.

DS:

So you got out fairly young. You were just thirty, right? You were just around thirty when you got out, right?

JM:

When I quit?

DS:

Yeah, when you sold the business and everything.

JM:

I quit in '68, so I was thirty-eight years old. Thirty nine. That was long enough. I was really glad. I found out that they had a thing they call golf. Boy, you talk about not winning. I play golf just every day. I play golf every day. Sometimes twice a day. Or at least, during the wintertime, I'd go out there enough to where I could put eighteen in, and if I could play another two or three, I'd play it. During the wintertime or summer, on weekends, I'd play thirty-six holes. I'd just go out there and play thirty-six holes and I walked. Couldn't afford a cart. Golf is such a shitty game. I call it that because I don't really like it because it's hard. Never was—I got to where I could shoot in the eighties constantly. It was always in eighty. Every now and then, I'd drop, seventy-nine. I shot a seventy-eight once. It was just fluke. Didn't lie. You can't be a liar and be a good golfer, unless you're a good liar, because you're going to get caught. If you get caught, nobody wants to play golf with you that can play golf. I don't go out today because my knees won't stand for it. I quit and played golf. I got into bowling. I got to where I would bowl. I was a lousy bowler. I was about as good of a bowler as I was football player. Terrible. I had a guy—there was a fellow from Canyon. God, he was a great guy and I can't think of his name. The guy I drink beer with on Wednesdays, knows him. He was a dirt worker. He could take me aside, he said, "Jimmy, I know exactly what's wrong with your game." Take me aside. I could roll a two hundred and seventy game with him telling me what to do. As soon as he left, it was a hundred and ninety-six, eighty-seven. It was the damnest thing I ever saw. I could really bowl when he was standing there.

DS:

He was your caddy.

JM:

Well-- what the hell is his name? Ned Carter. Ned Carter. Ned was probably the best athlete that I ever knew of. Ned could've won the world championship if he'd of wanted to. Boy he could bowl. He didn't bowl good all the time because he didn't—he couldn't get any games if he bowled his top all the time. But Ned was—

RM:

Couldn't get anybody to play.

JM:

Nobody wanted to play with him. He was too good. By God. I bought me a new ball, new shoes, and a new bag. I was in a league at the Grand Bowl over here on grand. Old Murray Finberg owned it. He owned that one and the Western Bowl. Went over to the Western Bowl to get this stuff because they had what I wanted, and Ned come by and I went out there and I rolled a seven-sixty something. That's pretty good. I never rolled lower than two-fifty. Went out that night, I told everybody, I said, "Goddamn, I should have had this ball to start with." I had them change my finger just a little bit and I told everybody that I was bowling. Shit, I mean, I bowled a two-seventy today. Went out there and I bowled a sixty-five, a ninety, and a ninety-three. I didn't have Ned with me. It was the damnest thing you've ever seen. People talked about it. That McGinnis is the worst goddamn bowler in the world, unless he's got Old Ned with him. If he's got Ned with him, he's going to bowl pretty—watch him. Keep your eye on him. Ned said he would bet any amount of money with me as long as he could tell me what to do. Kind of hurt my feelings. Everything through life with Ned Carter. Old Ned is a great guy. He was a good guy. He died here a couple of years ago. Anyway, he was a good guy. I took up bowling after I retired from my elevator business there, and golf. The one thing that I was really good at was chasing girls. I really was successful at chasing girls. You can see what I ended up with.

DS:

She's happy and content.

JM:

Yeah, she's happy and I was too. She wasn't the only flower in the block. I'll tell you that. Once I got my mind set that I couldn't bowl, and I couldn't play golf, and I wasn't good at football, and I wrecked my last racecar, everything had just gone kind of downhill.

DS:

While we're talking about your wife, let's introduce her just for the record because you spoke earlier. That way they'll know who to reference.

JM:

My wife's name is Regina.

DS:

Regina?

JM:

Yeah.

RM:

Yes.

JM:

Her middle name is Chloe, and she's a—what was your—

RM:

Maiden name?

JM:

Yeah.

RM:

Reeder. R-e-e-d-e-r. Reeder.

JM:

Reeder. Her dad owned a Surplus store out here on Pittsburgh. Nice guy, nice guy. Very smart guy too. I mean, he's smart. Had a great mama. I loved her mama. I had a good relationship with her whole family. Her sisters. Her sister just moved from here. They got a nice big house down there for sale. They moved in town. I think they were kind of worried about Buddy, I think more than anything. They moved to town. Got them a real nice beautiful home on a beautiful street here in town. Regina's been with me since—see, I met her in February of '73, and we lived together for—

RM:

'75, we lived together for five years and then we married in 1980.

JM:

Now, this is on the tape here.

RM:

So?

JM:

I don't guess anyone—somebody going to come by and shoot us in the toe or something?

RM:

I hope not. It's been thirty-seven years. Thirty-seven years.

JM:

Anyway, we met in '73. She wasn't the only one. I had a lot of other girlfriends. I'd date one, one night, date her. In '75, it started kind of getting serious with her so I had a house in Belmar that I had signed on when the person bought it. I spent twenty-thousand, twenty-three thousand on that house and they payed me. I'm trying to think. I sold it to them for about twenty-six. I really hit a homerun on that. Made five thousand dollars. Or three thousand. They didn't take care of the house. They didn't take care of payments either. They didn't take care of insurance. One day, the insurance company called me up and said, "When are you going to catch up with all the back taxes?" I said, "I wasn't planning on it. I don't own that house.", "Oh yeah, you do." She had walked on everything and left it to me. I was on the note. Luckily, I didn't even remember being on the note, but I was. That was in '75, so Regina and I went over and god, that house stunk. That lady was so dirty. They had moved in prior to that couple of years. Had baby—had a new baby, and two little ones. The baby was in diapers and all of the diapers between that time and when they had moved in were in the garage in a great big moving box. All the shitty diapers. Thousands of them. In one bedroom, they had a hamster sit. Those hamsters dukied and peed all over the place so much that just it was running down the walls. She had over watered her plants and so where she had overwatered, she didn't put a pot underneath them, so they just ran out on the floor, and the front is all cut carpet. It was just rotted out underneath. Every one of them. It was bad, so she had told me that I had screwed her, that the dishwasher never did work. She said the first day that I came in that house, that dishwasher never worked. Guess what I found in the dishwasher. A mop. A great big commercial mop.

RM:

Rag mop.

JM:

Rag mop, and it had got—hung down that far and had got into all the deal that goes around and everything. It had torn pieces off. It had gotten—stopped it up, so it ran over. All I had to do was pull the mop out. It worked fine. Just little things, you know, nasty. So we cleaned it up as much as we could. I hired some people from the—students. Hey, Reg, I wonder if we could hire some students.

RM:

I don't know, Jim.

JM:

Anyway, I hired students from West Texas. They come up and we took the carpet out. We sanded all the walls. We could redo the walls with plaster. Sanded all the walls. Bleached the floor. Bleached every place where everything was nasty. Got all that done and turned it around. I moved the john. Didn't like where I had—at first, when I'd designed the house, I didn't like

where I put the john to start with, so we moved the location of the john and I hired a decorator. Decorator come out there and told us what colors to put back and how to do it and one thing or another. Saved me a lot of money because I got everything it cost then. Payed the decorator his fee. I'd buy a piece of furniture. He'd sell it to me at cost and just payed it and payed his time. Dick Dye was his name. He was a great guy. Did a lot of work for me. Anyway, we got in that house in '75, and then we sold it in '78, wasn't it? '78 we moved over on—

RM:
'79.

JM:
'79? That's all? I thought we—what?

RM:
Four years.

JM:
What?

RM:
We lived there four years.

JM:
Well whatever. We moved to a different location. We moved into that duplex over there. I sold it for fifty something thousand dollars. Things had gone up that much in the time that I had originally built it for twenty-three. Sold it to that lady for twenty-six. I give her five thousand dollars, so I wasn't in it for—I was in it for twenty-six and I gave her a five thousand knock off of thirty one. I ended up selling it for—Regina and I, we thought, that's not bad money. So we started buying and selling houses and fixing them up. Flipping them. We were doing that way before most people were, and we flipped several.

RM:
Before it was the in thing to do.

DS:
You could be flipping Amarillo, right? On TV now.

JM:
Yeah. We flipped some houses there. That's where we originally got money that some of it we still have.

RM:

It was easy and it was a good hobby.

JM:

It was a hard hobby though.

RM:

It was difficult, but it was money making. You weren't squatting on a money on a hobby like bowling that you weren't any good at. It was a thing you could spend your—

JM:

She's gauging me now. I knew I shouldn't have said anything.

DS:

She is. She's grinning away over there.

JM:

That's okay. She means it. She don't say anything she don't mean.

RM:

Nevertheless, it was something we could do and make a little money off of.

DS:

When did y'all move out here to town?

RM:

Pardon?

DS:

When did y'all move out here?

RM:

Eighty-nine. Want to go see the backyard?

DS:

I guess we can. I'm getting close to the time that I've got to start heading back anyway. Jim, I thank you so much. Regina, I thank you too for getting Jim on his too.

JM:

You're welcome. We're going to have to do this again.

DS:

We are.

RM:

Who else did you interview?

DS:

So far, the same day, after Jim, I did Tuggie [Kenneth Tuckness]. Of course, I had done—

JM:

What a nice guy.

DS:

Isn't he?

RM:

He's a mess.

DS:

He's a great guy. Like you, he had a lot of experiences, but he wasn't that—here, let me turn this off.

[End of Recording]

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