

**Oral History Interview of
Jim McGinnis**

**Interviewed by: Daniel Sanchez
June 29, 2017
Amarillo, Texas**

**Part of the:
*Sports Interview Project***

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Preferred Citation for this Document:

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Recording Notes:

Original Format: Born Digital Audio

Digitization Details: N/A

Audio Metadata: 96khz/24bit WAV file

Further Access Restrictions: N/A

Related Interviews: The second part of this interview was conducted on July 13, 2017.

Transcription Notes:

Interviewer: Daniel Sanchez

Audio Editor: N/A

Transcription: Elizabeth Groening

Editor(s): Kayci Rush

Interview Series Background:

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 drag racer located in Amarillo, Texas. In this interview, McGinnis discusses his interest in drag racing, participating in the nationals, and how he made his way to Amarillo.

Length of Interview: 01:02:27

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Keywords

Sports, Drag Racing, Amarillo, Texas

Daniel Sanchez (DS):

My name is Daniel Urbina Sanchez. Today's date is June the 29th, 2017, and I'm interviewing Jim McGinnis at his home in Amarillo, Texas. This interview is part of our sport's initiative, and we will be discussing Jim's career in motor sports. Jim, first of all, thanks for letting me talk with you this morning.

Jim McGinnis (JM):

You're welcome.

DS:

Could you please state your complete legal name?

JM:

My name is James Robert McGinnis, M-c-G-i-n-n-i-s.

DS:

And where and when were you born?

JM:

Harland, Kentucky. Harland, Kentucky.

DS:

Harland, Kentucky.

JM:

Nineteen twenty-nine.

DS:

Nineteen twenty-nine.

JM:

In the—right in the middle of the coal country. My dad owned a coal mine up there.

DS:

What was your dad's name?

JM:

Smith. I'm adopted. McGinnis is an adopted name.

DS:

Okay, and how did you wind up in this part of the world?

JM:

My mama divorced my dad and brought me back to Weatherford, Oklahoma. That's how I got back down here.

DS:

You went through the school system there?

JM:

Well no, I went through the kindergarten and first grade in Weatherford, and moved to a little town out in Western Oklahoma, close to Sarah—between Sarah and Mangham, it was called—that's a long ways back, brother—Osen, Oklahoma. Osen, Oklahoma. It was just a—it had a little country school there, had four grades in it. We lived in a duplex. I lived in a duplex with my aunt and uncle, who later on, was a physicist with NASA, and I went through, I think, the second grade there. My mother met this Robert McGinnis, my dad, so to speak. We moved to Oklahoma City, and I went to third grade. I finished my school in Oklahoma City.

DS:

That's also where you started your interest in racing, right?

JM:

Yeah.

DS:

Can you tell us how that began? What was your earliest recollection?

JM:

My earliest recollection of anything that had to do with hot rods was—I went to a USO dance one night, and I was an eighty-second airborne, and we had our airborne band there, big band. Somebody had the first *Hot Rod Magazine* that was ever published, and I got to look in it, and I, “Boy that really looks neat.” That's when I first got interested and that was in 19—God, I want to say 1948.

DS:

Wow.

JM:

I think that's when it was, when I got out of the army. I was just about out of the army at that

time. I come back to Oklahoma City, and bought me a nice Ford Convertible. Wooed my first wife, Ima Jean. She was a lovely lady. We rode all over Oklahoma and parts of Texas with that car. There was no air conditioning back then. It was a pretty hot deal. We—then I run across a hot rod at some place. I don't remember. I think maybe it was Flincham, my partner, that big fellow that was in this picture here. I ran across Flincham, and he had this hot rod. He had raced at Soldier's Field, and L.A., and Phoenix. They used to have a circuit where they raced the 1922, '23, '24 T-models. He had this flathead Ford with two or three carburetors on it, and I was inspired by that, I guess. Anyway, that's sort of the way I got started on it. Then I decided—I sold that convertible and then bought me a 1951 Ford Coop. I put a—I decided that I wanted to race it. Actually, that was probably a year or two before the Tulsa Turnpike come along, and I got beat. I didn't like that. That wasn't what I wanted. Drag racing and getting beat is not good, so I decided that I would put me some mufflers on it, so I put mufflers on it. That helped. Did you ever do a egg drop?

DS:

No.

JM:

Well I was an egg dropper, and the way you drop eggs is, get you a dozen eggs, and you tune your car, and you go out and you got to mark deal here. When you take off as hard you can, shift it as good as you can, and when you get to be sixty, you drop the egg. As you improve, the egg's going to come back closer to the starting line. That's the way I learned how to get my ET down, was by dropping eggs.

DS:

Wow, dropping eggs. How did you come upon that? Was that something that somebody else was doing?

JM:

No, it just made sense. I didn't have any other way of measuring my time. At that time, didn't have a drag strip.

DS:

Yeah, you didn't have a stopwatch on you or anything that you could—

JM:

No, I couldn't afford a stopwatch.

DS:

As I was wondering, you started right away with racing, did you have a background in mechanics or did you pick that up along the way?

JM:

I was working for Otis Elevator and I was working with an old fellow who was about fifty-seven. I thought he was just older than dirt at the time. Of course, I was only twenty-one, twenty-two. He taught me a lot about tools, and I had a real good friend that also had a car, almost identical to mine. Different color, but was almost identical. His car could outrun mine. I didn't like that, so my goal was to outrun—his name was Bill. I can't remember his last name, but his name was Bill, and my goal in life at that particular time was to put enough stuff – if it didn't work, if my egg drop was worse, I didn't put it on the car. There's no need to spend the money on something that didn't help. So I put some heads on it. I put some Fenton heads on it, and then I put Edelbrock manifold on it, a three car manifold with—I can't remember the name of the carburetors, but anyway, that's what I had I had. I put in, what they called at the time, a three quarter race cam and that all helped. I had somebody go fifteen, thirty, forty five on my valves. That helped, expanded my valves. I had a friend that [phone rings 00:08:54] was a sports manager at Simpson Ford in Oklahoma City, and I told him what I wanted. He was a father of one of my good friends, and he acquired me the rear end that I wanted, the gears, and that's where I learned how to take a third member apart and put gears—get my gear ratio right or so. I want pretty low on that gear ratio. [Answering machine sounds 00:09:28] I could just spin the wheels off that car. I mean, I smoked those wheels, but once I thought about it, I thought, Well what I need to do is get me a little lower ratio so that my wheels will catch up with my engine. In other words, I started getting traction a little earlier because the wheels are not going as erratic. So that's what I did and most everything that I tried to attain back then was for a quarter of a mile. Everybody was doing quarter of mile so—now, there was some cars that I couldn't outrun for a mile, but most I could, you know. We'd go out, later on, when they got the Turner Turnpike finished there close to Oklahoma City, we'd go out there and race on it. I put a tank in my car, little moon tank, and I put alcohol in it. I had met a fellow that had a chemical place, you know, sold it to janitors and people like that, but he had a chemical place, and he got me some alcohol and I started running alcohol. It took me a while to get it right because your carburetors tend to freeze up when you run pure alcohol. I decided that we would try the big deal. I knew a guy from Kansas. I cannot think of the man's name. I'm sorry, but he was a real famous chessie builder in California, but he was from Kansas. He was from Wichita, Kansas. But he was the one that come out with a particular row bar that they're running today, the head of curve back and yucky, lucky, Stuckey. Rod Stuckey was his name and he was a good friend of mine, but Rod came down here one time to the races, and he was running nitrobenzene, which stinks, smells like shoe polish. I couldn't see the advantage of that, so I talked to my buddy down there at the chemical place and he said, "Well I got some nitromethane," and I said, "Let me try some of that," so he gave me a couple gallons of it, and it liked to tore my engine all up. It works pretty good. So that's kind of how I got – so now, I've gotten a three quarter race cam with aluminum heads, high

compression heads, the right gear ratio, the right exhaust system. I also put me some blueies, what I call blueies, out to racket open them up and just dump them out. Didn't even have to go through a muffler, so I could do that. I had a fellow that had a machine shop and I had him widen my rear wheels, because the wheels back then were only about that wide, about four, four and a half inches wide at the rim, inside the rim. So I had him widen that out to six inches, which give me more tread on the ground, and that helped. I had a lot working for my car, so I didn't lose many races. They was cheating if they beat me. [Laughter] So that's sort of how I got started, then Bill and I started – I found me a Model-T. I bought me a Model-T from somebody for five dollars or something like that, and I took the T off and threw it away. Took the frame and boxed it, set it about all up, and that's how I started on the Arden frame. I had gone to Dallas a couple of times, and I knew a guy down there named Gene Adams, and Gene had a car that looked a great deal like my little Arden, so I thought it was good, so I copied Gene's car from memory. I didn't see the car but one time. I don't remember where it was. It was Caddo or someplace like that, and so that's how I got the shape of the car and I had decided then I wanted an aluminum body, and I put a full pan on it and everything, so it was pretty neato little car. Went pretty good. Didn't always run fast, but we finally got it where—Stromberg—got my Stromberg's in it. I learned how to do the Stromberg's just through a lot of trial and error. I'd cut the power jet. They had a power jet in there for when you first took off, when you first had a little plunger in there and it's on a fulcrum, that kind of thing. The plunger would go down and it would push extra gas into the carburetor, and it had a little tip sticking up and so when it hit the bottom, it would open that up and what gas was in that deal at the bottom, I open that thing up and it would give you an extra squirt. Help you with your initial RPM's. So we had four—we either had four or six carburetors on that Arden, and I got to thinking, well what—I mean, Stromberg made a good carburetor. Why do I need six carburetors that's putting in the same amount of gas each time I go down, you know? I'll just take all of those little things loose and that helped, but I took the little arm that pushed the deal down. That helped. What I did, finally, was I just took that jet out that had the little spring and the little tip sticking out, and just ground the tip plum off in five of the carburetors and left one. That was all I needed. If I needed any more, say I go down to Dallas and race—are a toss up. I might have to put a good jet back in there that didn't have the tip off, just to richen it up just a little bit. You can't get too—because I was running a nitro on a three main crank. These cranks now they got five mains down there, and they got all kinds of screws holding them down. I didn't have but just two screws to the deal. Six bolts holding that crank in.

DS:

So you were creating a violent explosion there? You didn't blow anything?

JM:

Oh yeah. It was trial-and-error. That's how we got it and I learned to be patient. It helped me in my business. It also helped me in my racing. My elevator business was—I was working for Otis, it wasn't my business, but that was what I was doing. My business was number one. That's

where we made the family money. I didn't make any money doing this. We'd maybe—you was lucky if the guy you was racing had five dollars on him to bid, but that was a lot of money back then. You lose five dollars and you're not making—you're just barely—I was making a dollar and seven cents an hour. My wife was working on minimum wages, and the first year that we were married, we got five hundred and seventeen dollars for the whole year.

DS:

Combined.

JM:

That's starvation wages, but I still was racing.

DS:

Do you recall since—the first race that you ran? What that felt like the first time you went all out.

JM:

We had our races. The first races that I remember—they were pretty disorganized to start with, but then they got organized. We got our races organized through the fact that I was in NHRA (**National Hot Rod Association**). I joined NHRA pretty early and they help. They told us what we needed to do. We didn't have electronics back there like they got now. What we had was we could run a clock and start and stop a clock with air. You know, compression of a tube, and so when you run over your first tube, it'd start clocking. You ran over your second tube, it stopped the clock. Ran over the other one, it stopped the clock. And so, you had a little ET stuff there. We didn't have ET back then. It was top speed. That was the big thing. It was how fast you could go, not how quick you could get there, because generally, if you go real fast, you got there first anyway, so it wouldn't make any difference. So my first deal was down at Roy Wheatley's. He had a little dirt airport down in Moore, Oklahoma, which was south of Oklahoma City, about ten miles. We run down there, but it was dirt. It was packed down pretty hard, you know? It had been an airport a long time, but we finally talked Roy into putting a sixty foot wide by a hundred—I think it was about a hundred foot take off area, and it was pretty good. Anyway, that was the organization. We formed the Oklahoma City Timing Association primarily to try to figure out how to make the clocks, and how to do all that other stuff, and it went on and I was president of that thing. We went from four or five members to over four hundred, and the way we got the 1957—yeah, the 1957 Nationals, was by me taking four hundred memberships at – I don't remember how much they charged. Five dollars a copy. I don't know. I don't remember, but took them down to Caddo Mills to a meet down there and then show you, RA had their little trailer, their little safety safari, and there was an [Inaudible 00:21:47] or something like that, that took pictures. There was two guys and then there was the guy that was the cop that helped form NHRA. I can't think of his name. He quit the LA Police Department and he was there. But

anyway, all four hundred of us—I give them the money for four hundred, and all of the names, and all the information they needed, and that sort of got us into the NHRA. I met Wally Parks, he comes to see me, and Barbara, his lovely wife. That was what we did and we talked, and that's how we got the National. The way we got the dragstrip was completely different. Roy Wheatley, down at Moore, had decided to sell that land to a homebuilder. They was going to build homes on it. So we didn't have dragstrip for six months, so during that six months, I went around to all the asphalt people. There was a guy that managed the Oklahoma City fairgrounds, and he had been past president AMA, the American Motor Association, and at the deal, they ran their half mile tractor, and they'd run their sprint cars around that thing for the fair, or motorcycles. So I went out to see him, just by chance, and told him what I wanted to do, if they had some extra land out there at the fairground they wasn't using, "Can we use this land out here?" Well he says, "If you want to pave it and let me use your strip, so to speak, during the fair, sure." So what he got was a three quarter of a mile length of asphalt, it sixty feet wide, that he could use during the fair to park his things on, instead of in the mud, which was a lot out there at that time. In the meantime, there was a fellow out there that was named Bud Carson, and Bud was a draftsman, past president of the Oklahoma City Junior Chamber of Commerce. I met Bud and this fellow that, I don't remember his name, but the fellow that was manager of the fairground, told me that he wanted me to do this through Bud since Bud was an employer of his, and knew how to set up things like that dragstrip, and where to set it up and how to use it. So that was how Bud Carson and MARCAR—his wife's name was Mary—so that's how MARCAR came into existence. We built the dragstrip. We had our first—I've got pictures of our first drags that we had out there, and it worked out pretty good. We improved on our attendance, but it was going to cost us eleven thousand dollars to build this dragstrip. I finally found a guy that was generous, and said he would a dragstrip for us with real thick asphalt, so wide, so we could get it grade and level and everything, for eleven thousand dollars. So I told everybody in the association that I would really appreciate if we designed us a uniform so that we'd all look good. You know, white uniform with red leggings and all that stuff. Stripe down the pants and on my arm. NHRA patch. Home—Oklahoma City Time Association, OCTA, and we got—everybody got dressed up one day, took our ten cups, went down on the street, and raised twelve thousand five hundred dollars in one night. That's how we got the dragstrip.

DS:

That takes initiative.

JM:

Yeah, well I didn't have anything else to do, but that's how we did it and we—Bud and I, later on, went to Kansas City. They were having Nationals in Kansas City. That was in '55. They had a Nationals. The first one was in '54 at Great Ben, and then the next one was at Kansas City in '55. We went up there and I was ranching for Heath—I can't think of his name, Melvin Heath. I was helping Melvin, and we won top eliminator at Kansas City Nationals. That was a long time

ago. Anyway, we wooed Wiley, got Wiley down to Oklahoma City, showed him our dragstrip. Showed him the four hundred and fifty members that we had joined in NHRA. I don't the NHRA had four hundred and fifty members at that time. I'm kind of tear up.

DS:

That's what happens when you start remembering good times.

JM:

Yeah, so we went through that. I moved down here. We got to Nationals up there in '57. I don't know what happened to the '56 Nationals because—but they had the Nationals there in '57. I had a real good friend of mine got killed, Graydon Miller, that helped me with my engine. Graydon was a dear friend. Him and Melvin Heath, down there from Rush Springs, Oklahoma, were good friends. George Wallaver, George had that great big 1940 Lincoln Continental that had a great big blown Chrysler in it, back a long time ago. It just sounded like it was cutting itself to pieces. It just had its own—but boy it was fast. I mean, for back then it was fast. So all those guys come from Rush Springs, but they were in our Oklahoma City Time Association, and they were way ahead of the game back then, those guys were. They were really smart. They were all really pretty sharp. Nobody could beat them. Had my little Jimmy Nicks in there. Jimmy was sixteen at the time, just an asshole. A pain. He was just a pain. He was spoiled, and he'd gone to California, at sixteen, and his dad had a hose job, you know, where they'd cut hose for people and put the high pressure stuff on them for the oil field out there on the southeast side of Oklahoma City. That was all oil patch out there. Anyway, his dad, I guess, made quite a bit of money, but Jimmy brought back a 1941 Ford with a Carson top on it. God, it was gorgeous. It was all maroon, and white interior, and fast, and Jimmy was just such a little old jerk that he—and we were all aware of Jimmy. We were trying to get him to slow down because it was making everybody look bad, see? So Jimmy got caught several times and got fined and his dad was—I know his dad loved him, but he was enabling him to do things. Finally, we talked to the judge, and the judge sentenced him to one year riding an ambulance. Back then, you didn't have as much homework as they got now for these kids, so he could ride that ambulance about six hours every day, and they made him ride that ambulance and go out to those wrecks and things. That pretty well straightened him out. He was always Diamond Jim Nicks, was what we called him. Smiling Jimmy Nicks. He got killed testing his dragster. He was one of the better—he was up there with [Inaudible 00:31:53]. Eventually, he got up there, but he was fast. He was rapid. He got killed someplace up there in Oklahoma, was out testing his cars. No ambulance. Nothing. Just went out there unattended. That's about—you'd be pretty well taken up my early—

DS:

Well I was going to say, when I [picks up recorder 00:32:19] first got here, you started showing me some photos, and those early cars that you had, like the Arden and then the Triple Nickel. You want to go through those and through the dad's club, and just tell us about the cars and then

the people, you know?

JM:

Well I was real proud of the dad's club. It was a—they had a club here at the time, in Amarillo, that was—I thought, was pretty famous. I'd heard about it up in Oklahoma City. I can't think of the name of it now, but some of these guys were new. I know that Jack was a member of that particular club, and Tommy, and Bobby, and Morgan were—but we had so many new members back then. We had so many people coming into the race car, you know, that wanted to drag race, that didn't want to be a part of an old club that had sort of disbanded, so somebody asked me, said, "You want to do a new organization?" I said, "Well yeah." Anyway, everybody there was a dad practically, and so we just called it the dad's. Lots of national record holders. These guys held a national record. He had several national records. O'Tanger [?] [00:34:01] and Lindell, and me, and him, and him—we had national records. I mean we had about ten or fifteen national records in that one club. That's pretty good. You know what makes a club successful? You just got to have somebody to ramrod it. You can't be a pest. I used to go over to Border High School and other high schools around and talk to their mechanics class. Once every two months I'd go to Border, and I kind of enjoyed driving over and going over and talking to kids. They all wanted to know what I'd done and how I'd done it and everything, so you've got to do that in order to get the kids where they want to be in a club. Whether they've got a car or not, that doesn't matter. It's if you're a member of the club. Anyway, that's the secret. I don't know if they—they don't have anything like that in Amarillo today. They don't even have anything like that in Lubbock. I don't even think they got anything like that in Texas anymore, where one club can hold all those national records. We were pretty proud of that. [Blows nose] I hope this is not on your recording.

DS:

Well it can't be anywhere else.

JM:

Anyway, yeah, I can show you all this other stuff, but that was what the dad's was there for because—and we had—everybody wasn't there for that.

DS:

This is Amarillo, so we're talking about Oklahoma City. Can you transition us from Oklahoma City to Amarillo, how you wound up here?

JM:

At that time, I was working for Westinghouse Elevator Company, subsidiary of Westinghouse Corporation. [Phone rings 00:36:27] [pause in recording] Do some of these—and we had us a deal, a local. This was all local stuff here. We got to where everything was pretty popular, and I knew a guy named Red Vessels. Most everybody knew Red. He owned a printing shop [Phone

rings 00:36:56] [pause in recording] Let me just get this thing out of the way here. Anyway, so we formed our—we had our own little magazine and we had guys from the paper down here that took pictures. You may have met him once, but we'd come down to—he's living up east in Connecticut or someplace now, but he took pictures of the global news when he was a kid. We all was kids. I was a little older than most of them. Jack and I were the old guys. [Phone rings 00:37:39] Reach behind you. [pause in recording] This car right here belonged to Don Morgan and Bobby, these two guys here. I sold it to them for five hundred dollars. I bought it for five hundred dollars, and sold it for five hundred dollars. This was my little Ford. I've got pictures of the motor of this one someplace. [Phone rings 00:38:06] Oh, God almighty.

DS:

You're popular this morning.

JM:

I knew most all of the people in the country at the time. I knew everybody on the west coast, so if there's anything you want to ask me, well just ask me and I'll tell you. Come down here.

DS:

Okay, so this—Don Brown is the photographer you're talking about?

JM:

That's him, yeah.

DS:

Okay, because I flipped it over to see that copyright. Do you know if he's still around? Don Brown?

JM:

I don't know. No, I don't think so. The guy that came down here was – I don't remember his name. He worked down at the – but Don worked for the paper and Josephine is my mother, but Don probably did most of these pictures here.

DS:

And the reason I was asking is because that's who owns the copyright. He's the photographer so it's his copyright.

JM:

Oh, I've got other pictures. It's not the copyright. I don't care about copyright.

DS:

Unfortunately, I mean not unfortunately, but we have to.

JM:

You asked me about what brought me down here. I was in Oklahoma City. I had started in the elevator business in '50, and worked as a helper. I had worked as a temporary mechanic through NEN [?] [00:39:44] on several, several jobs. You know, construction sites. Ten, fifteen story buildings. Westinghouse hired me. They hired me the first time just to do a cable job that nobody else could do. Only I knew how to do it. I had learned that from my fifty-seven year old man in Otis, Sharkey. They asked me if I knew anything about installing elevators, which was stupid, that's what I've been doing for four or five years, and hired me as a helper. I told them—back then if you didn't work, you didn't get paid. I suppose it's that way today. I'm not sure, but there's a lot of guys getting paid that don't do much. I'll say that. Anyway, they hired me to come out and put in some escalators and a couple of elevators for Sears. They had a deal. It kind of got me started, and I did a couple cable jobs for them and did some repair work for them, so they hired me full-time. My deal was if you want to guarantee my hours, guarantee them, I'll work for you. I want forty hours a week. Well they said, "We can only give you thirty-two." So the first week, I worked on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, and took off on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, which is obvious that's what you should do. I got three days together. I didn't want to work one day and off a day. Well, on Friday, by God, one of our very important customers called because he—had him a mechanic was out of town. He was out in Wichita Falls. I said, "I'm sorry. I can't come over. I've already got my thirty-two hours." I did that to antagonize people. Oh my God, it just really pissed him off. I said, "Well I can't come over. They're not going to pay me over thirty-two." Well my big boss came up. The big boss, my regional president came up, "What the hell?" Oh boy, he gave me a what for, and I took him out back. I jerked him out back, so it wouldn't be in front of people. I slammed him up against the wall and I said, "Now, I don't mind working like a dog for you, but you're not going to treat me like one. You give me forty hours and we can solve this whole problem. Now, give it to me." So ever since that time, I've been drawing forty hours. So that got me in with Westinghouse, and after—up 1956, I wrote them a letter and told them that I had been offered by another elevator company and I had. A job as a mechanic, drawing 75 percent more – or twenty-five – 30 percent more wages and that I was thinking about taking that position if—I told them I really enjoyed working for Westinghouse, and that I just was trying to better myself. If you want to make me a full-pledged mechanic then—so I go to Tulsa. They want me to go to Tulsa. They had a new type of elevator that they was getting ready to put in down here at the Santa Fe building, and at one of the other buildings down here. So they sent me to Tulsa and I did a lot of maintenance up in Tulsa. I also met the guy that was ramrodding this National Bank of Tulsa and Mayo Hotel in Tulsa. Big building. Huge buildings. And they put me on those jobs to learn that particular unit, you know, how to put it together. After that was done, they sent me down here. They gave me this office. Two dollars and twenty-five cents an hour. [Laughter] That was in '57. That was in November, and I come into Amarillo, boy I mean the wind was blowing, coming down past the airport out here. You know, they had all air people out there at the time, had that big airbase out

there. I come down through there, it was dirty, and nasty, and a lot of café's out there and all, the napkins blowing across. It was a dismal day in November. I said, "God, what have I got into?" But the next day was beautiful. I walked downtown. You can kind of walk around, you know? Saw what I had to do, went by, talked to one of the customers that I was going to be working for, and I fell in love with it here. I've had a lot of chances. Westinghouse wanted to give me the Hawaiian Islands and Japan, the whole—be the head duck out there. We had lots of property and they had a good loan department at the time. If you used strictly Westinghouse product, they would loan you the money to build the building and so they wanted me to go around and I guess they thought I was salesman of sorts, but I didn't want to. The president, Gwendoline Price, was his name, he was the president of the whole corporation. Flew down here in a private airplane. Jimmy, he said, "We'll give you – I just got a new house down here. We'll buy you a house twice this big and don't worry about your cars. Don't worry about anything. Don't worry about your clothes even. Just come over to Hawaii and we'll get you what you want." All that beachfront down there. They owned all that beachfront. Same thing in Miami, all those hotels and stuff down in Miami, they owned all that. And Japan, that's when Japan was just coming back after the war, and they were building tourism stuff, and I didn't want to go. I liked it here, and then I was in awe .

DS:

I was going to ask, after you moved here, how long did it take before you got involved and found—

JM:

Immediately.

DS:

Did you know people already or did you find them once you got here?

JM:

I'd met Jack Mossett a couple of times down at Chickasha, Oklahoma. Chickasha, Chickasha, Chickasha, I think. I met him down there with his old rambling ram, blue goat. I knew Joe Williams. He was in this thing here. I'd met those guys before I'd gone down there. I didn't take my car, just went by there. So I knew people. I didn't know Dale, but I immediately ran across Dale. That's how come I got this picture of this car here in a magazine was because of Dale. Dale called out there and said, "You need to see this thing. It's pretty nice." They sent guys in from L.A. to here to take pictures of that car and that's how it got in that magazine. Rickman was that guy's name, and I can't think of the other one's name. I will eventually, but anyway, there's old Toogie. Jim Brown, some of my friends there. That's how I got here. I got burned out when I started—we worked so hard, I was working at my elevator trade, and I had hired Duke Allen to be my welder. He was a pipe liner. Boy he could lay that well down. Man he could put pretty

well on anything. He was just so talented. He could go from—any type of welding that he did, he was good at it. So I hired Duke. I gave him five dollars an hour, which was a hell of a lot more than I was making to get him to come down and help me, and eventually, I made him a forty-nine percent partner, which he didn't give me any money. I just made him a partner because he was just so valuable to T-Bar. I owned T-Bar Chassis Company. We made several hundred cars. A couple hundred, maybe. I was working eight hour days and sometimes, a little overtime, and then I'd go out there to T-Bar. We'd built us a building. It's still there today. I'd spent some time up above custom car supply, which one of these guys here owned. Bobby owned it in a pie shop. It was a bakery. Man I mean, it had crust on the floor that was an inch thick. We finally got all that scraped off, and cleaned off, and painted, and got it looking pretty good. Mainly, we was worried about cutting on that dough because that dough will burn so we had to get it pretty well fire proof before we could really start working there. Spent a couple of years. We'd make the car upstairs, dismantle the whole car, take the car down. I'd take the chassie by a seat upholster and let them upholster the seat, and get it painted because I didn't paint. I didn't want to paint. I didn't want to have to mess with paint. I'd take it by and get the chessie painted black and take parts off and send to the chrome plating place, if that's what they wanted, and then we put the car together and people would come get it. That's the way we started out and we did quite a few cars.

DS:

Why did you start that venture?

JM:

Huh?

DS:

Why did you start it?

JM:

Money. Hell yes. That's what it's all about. Isn't it? [Laughter]

DS:

That's as good as answer as any, right?

JM:

Yeah, and I may be wrong, but—I probably am wrong, because I was a lot younger then. I was in my thirties. I was vain to the point that I thought I was pretty good at what I did. I don't mean vain that I was an asshole or anything like that. I mean, I was vain to myself. It's nice to think good things about yourself. I thought that our chances were good and I thought that our help was good, but I also began to lose my home life because I wasn't getting home until about one

o'clock in the morning and I wasn't getting enough sleep. I got to where I couldn't sleep. I got to where I just got tired. One day, I just said, "I don't want to do this no more," and that's what I did. I went down and told Duke—we didn't have a whole lot of money. Back then, there wasn't a whole lot of money. This was in Johnson and JFK's day, see. I think I had about thirty-four hundred dollars in the bank. Maybe more. I don't remember, but I had all kinds of tools. I had a bender that I could draw him a balls through [?] [00:53:44] and get good bends. I had gone to Mickey Thompson and found out where he got his bending done at Long Beach Bending, so I would send them pieces of tubing along with instructions of how to bend them and stuff like that. They'd bend them and send them back to me, so I had plenty of front axels. I had plenty of row bars. Even with my own bending, it was cheaper to let them do it. We'd go find third members from time to time that we wanted to put in the cars and we had all our third members pretty well shortened down. We'd stick a big bar through there and then put everything on this bar. I'm talking about a big iron bar. It wouldn't bend. It was straight and we could put—it was a jig is what it was—we could weld the third members back up so that we could put them and narrow the members down. I had a jig that was about as long as from here to that wall in there. It was about twenty something feet long that we could build the cars on. Big square tubing. We built and then we clamped things down and weld things, and we had it pretty well set up. The only thing was that we could—if a guy come in there with a big car, and he wanted to—not a dragster, but a—if he come in there with say, a roadster, I'd want my roadsters to have a little better front axle, and they needed to weight up there anyway. So I would use different tubing. I used forty-one thirty. It was aircraft duty. And I had a deal with enterprise steel down in Dallas. 1154 was their number at that time, four numbers [laughs]. I would buying my tubing and I eventually got to where I was handling tubing for enterprise for Jorgensen. And I was selling little trailers—little trailers for motorcycling. I'd get that kind of came along in the late sixties and early seventies. I was selling trailers from the enterprise, and I was taking their winter stuff. I didn't know it at the time, but I found out that he had a bell [?] [00:56:42] helicopter down there—had several aircraft plants there in Fort Worth. The enterprise was selling all of the tubing to the aircraft plans. Who they didn't sell to, I didn't know, but they were selling a lot of tubing. Every now and then, they'd get caught short and they'd end up with tubing sitting on the bench or on the racks that they hadn't sold, and the federal government would come along and say, "You've got to send it back to the mail. They've got to melt it down and put it back in." So there was a shelf life on that shit. I didn't know that. So my deal was, "Well listen, here's what I want to do, you got tubing on the deal there that you've got twenty cents a foot in. I'm tell you what I'll do. I'll give you six cents a foot for it. You don't have to send it back. You don't have to get it reconditioned. You don't have to get it back to your deal, and you don't have to put it back on the rack. Just take a fifteen cent hickey, and I'll take care of it for you." So that's what we did, so I was making fifteen cents a foot off of them. They were getting rid of their tubing to me that they was going to have to turn back anyway because of the age. Now, I'm talking about just one year old, so I talked to the president down there. I said, "Listen, I'm going to return this. I had tubing this big. Thin wall, thick wall, all kinds of shit. I'm going to return this. I'll take a little

hickey on it.” He said, “Well what do you want for it?” I said, “Oh, I don’t know. You give twenty-one for it. I bought it for six. Why don’t I send it back for twelve?” So I’m making six cents a foot off of it, and they are getting it back, and they’ve got another year to work on that same tube. [laughter]

DS:

So you just got to help them out of a problem.

JM:

They call it timing, so that was one of my deals that I made a little extra on. I would buy any tubing that they had left over at Philip’s over here. They had a lot of stainless. They did a lot of stainless work. They had—all there screws were titanium or stainless. Everything was really good stuff. So I was buying all of their surplus. I could find a little Allen head. Allen head, is it the Allen head that has the hex deal that goes in it?

DS:

Um-hm.

JM:

I could find the little Allen head screws—I found them—several barrels of stainless Allen head screws that was just perfect for mounting headers. It was three quarter inch. All cars was three quarter inch. Not three quarter, three eights inch, standard thread. I bought all those things and sold them to Esquiderian [?] [01:00:22] and people like that. I found a place up in Oklahoma City that must have had a hundred blowers in it, and I bought those. So Esquiderian-- [?] [01:00:36] that’s when the blowers started getting. Connie Kalitta come through here with one of them that I had. He was going to put that on his bounty hunter, at the time. It was an ugly car, but it ran pretty good. Just pour a little bit more nitro in it, and it will run faster. I had a lot of experience.

DS:

You know, I’m coming up on, it’s going to be 12:20, and I’ve got to make my —

JM:

Oh, we forgot to go to my wife down there.

DS:

And then I’ve got to get Tookie, so—

JM:

Yeah, yeah. You go ahead.

DS:

So I was going to say, can we do this again next Thursday?

JM:

Sure.

DS:

I'm going to be in town. Do you want the one PM or the ten AM slot?

JM:

I don't care. Just call me. I'll be around, unless I die or something like that.

DS:

Well let's just plan on me actually being here at ten next week.

JM:

Yeah, there's just a whole bunch of bullshit on this thing here you'll probably want to erase.

DS:

No, this is the kind of stuff that you're not going to get any other way. That's why we do it this way because if you sit down and talk with someone and just let them talk, you'll come up with great stories.

JM:

Oh, I haven't even told you anything.

DS:

You will. Maybe this gets your mind in the right set. Next time, we'll just be –

JM:

There's a lot there. I just got to pull it out.

DS:

I bet next Thursday, instead of trying to schedule two, I could just sit down with you, basically the entire day.

JM:

Huh?

DS:

I bet we could just talk basically the entire day next Thursday.

JM:

Well sure, that would be fine.

DS:

Because you've got plenty of stuff there.

JM:

I was involved. Most of these guys just, you know, they go home and work on their cars.

[End of Recording]



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