

Abilene Oral History Series  
Interview of E. N. Compere  
Interviewed by Phil Shook  
Date: 5/27/1975  
Total time: 60 minutes (2 tracks)  
Place: Compere home in Abilene

*Mr. Shook:* This is going to be for our special Bicentennial Edition and we're talking to people that have experience in banking and in business and can give us something about the early background of the Big Country-Abilene area. And I think Kathryn Duff told me that you can, let's see how did she put it, "That you have something to say about just about everything." [*Laughs.*] But that you were an *Essex* dealer. Now what exactly was an *Essex* dealer back then?

*Mr. Compere:* Well, Hudson Motor Car Company...

*Mr. Shook:* Uh huh.

*Mr. Compere:* Built a new automobile. They'd been building Hudsons a long time. They built a smaller car and they called it an *Essex*. And it was a little bit ahead of the industry at that time, so far ahead that, for instance, so far as I know, that was the first company to ever put an aluminum piston in an automobile.

*Mr. Shook:* Uh huh. And about what year was this?

*Mr. Compere:* Oh, that was 19 and 26.

*Mr. Shook:* Ok. And you had an *Essex* dealership...

*Mr. Compere:* But really, I bought one earlier than that. I bought an *Essex*, owned one when I was in Breckenridge. About 19 and... We moved to Abilene in 1922.

*Mr. Shook:* But you actually had a dealership here in Abilene after a while?

*Mr. Compere:* Yeah, I did.

*Mr. Shook:* For the *Essex*?

*Mr. Compere:* When I came over here, yeah.

*Mr. Shook:* And this was produced by Hudson Motor Car Company?

*Mr. Compere:* Yeah.

*Mr. Shook:* I see.

*Mr. Compere:* They, they made an Essex first in 19 and 20. I know I was in the drug business in Breckenridge and the fellow that I was in with lived in Coleman. The Bowen boys, had three or four drug stores scattered around Sweetwater, Lubbock, Coleman, Eastland, and Breckenridge. And I had the Breckenridge store. Well, I went to Dallas and they had just gotten in, it was about 19 and 20, the first Essex that were made.

*Mr. Shook:* Uh huh.

*Mr. Compere:* It was just a 4-cylinder, 5 or high speed car and later they made.... Of course, they were made by Hudson Motor Car Company. They were making Hudsons all along.

*Mr. Shook:* Uh huh.

*Mr. Compere:* You could buy a good Hudson then, as good as a [*unclear*] for about 1500 dollars. Now they go talking about 5000 dollars for a danged automobile. That's ridiculous.

*Mr. Shook:* How did you get from the drug store business into the dealership for Essex automobiles?

*Mr. Compere:* Well, the first business that I's ever in was the drug business out at the little town Sylvester. Do you know where Sylvester is?

*Mr. Shook:* I've heard of it and I know you can tell me something about Sylvester.

*Mr. Compere:* It's up in Fisher County. Beth Duff or Kathryn came from there too. Her father was in the bank there.

*Mr. Shook:* Uh huh. Now who is Beth Duff?

*Mr. Compere:* She's a sister to Kathryn.

*Mr. Shook:* Oh right. Ok.

*Mr. Compere:* She's crippled girl - got a bad back. But that was... I lived there before there was any railroad built through there. But the Orient railroad built the town after the Orient went through there. They built this little town there. Prior to that the Compere brothers were in the real estate business in Abilene. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] And they and Henry James. Henry James furnished the money, I reckon.

*Mr. Shook:* Are these your brothers or your fathers now? Not fathers.

*Mr. Compere:* My uncles.

*Mr. Shook:* Your uncles. Okay.

*Mr. Compere:* We lived in Foard County ... [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] ... at the time. They bought the Sandy Long Ranch up in Fisher County and the Orient Railroad went right through it. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] The old ranch house was about a half a mile from where they made the town of Sylvester. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] And we moved, my father moved down there with us, I was about, I guess fifteen years old, sixteen maybe, [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] and he was the local representative there for Compere brothers who had bought this ranch. It was about a 20,000 acre ranch there that that they cut up into farms and it was right on the Clear Fork of the river there, part of it, the river went through part of it. Of course, the Duffs came there afterwards because the Newman group from Sweetwater build them a bank there. The only independent bank I ever knew of.

*Mr. Shook:* Uh huh. Okay now, excuse me, we've got you in Sylvester and we're going to get you into the drug business and then in to the Essex dealership.

*Mr. Compere:* Well, no from Sylvester, I went to Sweetwater [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] and sold Dodge cars.

*Mr. Shook:* That was your first automobile business.

*Mr. Compere:* First automobile business.

*Mr. Shook:* I see.

*Mr. Compere:* Well, I take it back. Uh. I had this drug store in Sylvester and the old E. S. Hughes Hardware Company, here in Abilene, had taken the Dodge agency, first Dodges that were ever shipped to this part in the country [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] came to the E. S. Hughes Company. And one of those cars was for me because I had a young fellow working for me in the drug store and I took this Dodge agency [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] And, of course, we had no garage. We didn't have anything. We had to unload the cars ourselves out of freight cars... [*Mr. Shook: Hmm.*] ... and get them together. The bumpers were off of them, they had no heaters on them then, no cooling.

*Mr. Shook:* What dealerships were in town at that time? What kind of automobiles were they selling in Abilene...

*Mr. Compere:* Well....

*Mr. Shook:* ...or the areas for that matter?

*Mr. Compere:* Studebaker, Willys-Knight. Did you ever see a Willys-Knight?

*Mr. Shook:* I've heard of Willys, but I don't believe I've heard of a Willys-Knight.

*Mr. Compere:* Willys was a jeep.

*Mr. Shook:* Uh huh, Yeah, I'm familiar with that one, but..

*Mr. Compere:* Willys Knight was a regular sized automobile. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] Pretty good automobile. It was hard to sell. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] There was firm here selling them and I was selling Hudsons. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] Buick was being sold. Franklin, did you ever see a Franklin?

*Mr. Shook:* I've heard of them.

*Mr. Compere:* This Franklin Motor Company that sold out a year or two ago - those younger boys, their, I don't know whether it was their father or their grandfather started it, but Franklin automobile business when I was, before I was here. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] Of course, Ford, Chevrolet. Chevrolet about the first, I think about the first Chevrolet made was about 1920 [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] one or two, I don't remember just which.

*Mr. Shook:* Well, how did the Essex, this Hudson car compete with these other cars? I mean did you have a foothold in the area?

*Mr. Compere:* Well, not so good because Ford and Chevrolet and Buick. Buick, of course, was General Motors then. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] But they had more agencies established. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] And, of course, the country was pretty well scattered. There wasn't so many people here and it was pretty hard to pick up. For instance, when I had a Hudson agency here, there was nobody between here and Ft. Worth. There was a Hudson dealer in Wichita Falls and for quite a long while. There was one in San Angelo and then there was in Colorado Springs.

*Mr. Shook:* Colorado Springs, Colorado?

*Mr. Compere:* Colorado City.

*Mr. Shook:* Oh, Colorado City. Okay. Now how would a person buy a car in those days? They didn't have credit.

*Mr. Compere:* Just shelled out the money.

*Mr. Shook:* They came up with the cash, huh. Strictly cash deal.

*Mr. Compere:* Yeah, when the first ones were sold, why people didn't know about credit, but the only credit, but if they did, was men going to the bank and borrowing money. If he was a farmer, why he'd borrow money to make his farm [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] because he wouldn't have any money until his cotton was picked. [*Mr. Shook: Yeah.*] Banks all over the country would lend the farmer money on "fall" time. And at one time, Mr. C. W. Bacon, who died a number of years ago, he's got some boys here now. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] He was in the wholesale grocery business, the Wooten Grocery Company, and he sold out of that and somebody else, I've forgotten who the

other was, visited with me and, of course, bankers sort of frowned on the automobile business [Mr. Shook: *Uh huh.*] and these two persons, Mr. Bacon, and that was about the first time they started financing automobiles, of course, we had national finance companies a little before that, but they wasn't so sure about financing automobiles. [Mr. Shook: *Uh huh.*] So I had this [unclear]. They asked me about what I thought of this. They knew more about financing than I did, but I did know something about financing automobiles. [Mr. Shook: *Uh huh.*] Well, they didn't know whether to do that or put their money in farm lands. [Mr. Shook: *Uh huh.*] And I said, well, I could answer that real quick because if you loan any money on an automobile, it's a new car to the man and he likes it or he wouldn't have bought it. [Mr. Shook: *Uh huh.*] And in thirty days, you've got a payment due. And he's not going to do much, do anything to that car that's bad... [Mr. Shook: *Yeah.*] ...if he knows it and every month you're reducing your investment in it. And the banks will go out here and loan the farmer on a cotton crop that has never been planted. [Mr. Shook: *That's right.*] And you don't whether it's going to rain to bring that cotton up or not. [Mr. Shook: *That's right.*] Or you take a mortgage on two or four head of mules. Well, a darned mule can lay down and die and what's you got.

*Mr. Shook: (Laughs)* That's right.

*Mr. Compere:* To me, everybody wants an automobile as soon as they can, of course, the charges then - we sold Hudsons for about 1100 dollars, Buicks was about 1100. [Mr. Shook: *Uh huh.*] Cadillac was the only high priced car and it was about, close to, in the 2000 dollars price [Mr. Shook: *Yeah.*] And we sold Essex for, well, I know they had a special on Essex. A four, a two-door sedan was 595 at the factory.

*Mr. Shook:* Hmm. I'll be dogged. That would be a bargain.

*Mr. Compere:* We sold it for 795. [Mr. Shook: *Uh huh.*] And, of course, Hudson had been building automobiles for a long, long time. They, uh, they had some features about it that was a little bit different to other cars. [Mr. Shook: *Uh huh.*] For instance, you could sit in your car, drive along if you wanted to and depending on your speed, you could pinch your carburetor down a little just by an instrument on the dash there, push it in. You get up to 60 miles an hour that was pretty fast then [Mr. Shook *laughs.*] or 50 even 'cause the roads were mostly gravel. You'd get up to 50 miles an hour and shove that little, pinch off your gas and get more air into your carburetor and you could run on almost nothing nearly.

*Mr. Shook:* Well, how long did you have this dealership and how did develop?

*Mr. Compere:* I moved from Breckenridge over here in 1920. [Mr. Shook: *Uh huh.*] I'd been in the drug business there and I'd worked about 15 hours a day for three, three and a half years and I was just about tuckered in.

*Mr. Shook:* With the drug business?

*Mr. Compere:* Yeah. I'd moved from Sweetwater. I'd spent about two years in Sweetwater selling Dodge cars. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] I'd started on that in Sylvester and then they got me to move to Sweetwater, to take Sweetwater. In 1917, it didn't rain anywhere in this country so I didn't sell any automobiles. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] I think I sold a couple the whole year.

*Mr. Shook:* So in other words, that was probably just as important to the automobile business as it was to the farming, those rains?

*Mr. Compere:* Oh yeah. Because they...

*Mr. Shook:* The whole economy was based on agriculture.

*Mr. Compere:* There was lots of farm land that was, cotton was planted and it, 'til the next year, it did had never come up. [*Mr. Shook: Hmm.*] I remember selling two automobiles.

*Mr. Shook:* The whole year?

*Mr. Compere:* Yeah and that's when I went to Breckenridge and went into the drug business. But it begin raining [*Mr. Shook: Yeah.*] and I sold my Dodge agency at Sweetwater on a, well on a funny deal. [*Mr. Shook: Laughs.*] I turned it over to a fellow and said, "I'll, all you'll owe me is 30 dollars on every car you sell." Well, it begin raining that summer and by fall, there was cotton and weeds and sunflowers as high as your head all over the place. [*Both laugh.*] He was selling all of the automobiles that he could get his hands on.

*Mr. Shook:* Yeah, and you were getting 30 dollars a car.

*Mr. Compere:* Yeah, but then from Breckenridge, I moved over here. In fact, I'd bought one of these first Essex... [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*]...and I liked it. And, of course, they were made by Hudson [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*]...and I took the franchise here and sold Hudson- Essex for six or eight years, I guess.

*Mr. Shook:* I see.

*Mr. Compere:* And from that went into the tire business.

*Mr. Shook:* Went into the tire business also or just...?

*Mr. Compere:* After.

*Mr. Shook:* Afterward. I see.

*Mr. Compere:* Every once in a while I see a... Do you remember Harvey Brown, a court reporter, died a couple of years ago?

*Mr. Shook:* It's not familiar.

*Mr. Compere:* Well, you haven't been in Abilene that long, have you?

*Mr. Shook:* No, I really haven't. I haven't been here that long that I wouldn't know someone, even two years.

*Mr. Compere:* I sold him a car, an Essex automobile. And after he got old, every time I'd see him, he'd say, "That sure was a good little old car you sold us." Well, it was smaller. It was lighter. It drove easy and rode easy. Of course, it was kind of an experiment. Took them a year or two to get it all washed out good. But, we sold some anyway 'cause it was something that didn't cost very, well, it was a lot of money then – 795 dollars.

*Mr. Shook:* Yeah.

*Mr. Compere:* Course Hudson had always been a good automobile and everybody knew it. It was then a high priced automobile. I think before I quit it got up to, a four door sedan, around 1800 dollars.

*Mr. Shook:* Hmm. Now how was the tire business? What prompted you to get into the tire business? How did that develop?

*Mr. Compere:* Course that's pretty closely associated with the automobile business.

*Mr. Shook:* Sure. Yeah.

*Mr. Compere:* And General Tire and Rubber Company kept, it looks like every morning some guy got off this Pullman down here. They run a night Pullman out from Dallas. [*Mr. Shook:* Uh huh.] I'd see him get off that Pullman and come wagging his bag over to our store 'cause we were located down where Generals is now.

*Mr. Shook:* What was your address? Do you remember where your dealership was?

*Mr. Compere:* 1517. When I went in the tire business right there where Generals is now.

*Mr. Shook:* 1517? What is that?

*Mr. Compere:* South 1<sup>st</sup>.

*Mr. Shook:* South 1<sup>st</sup>.

*Mr. Compere:* And he just kept on trying, selling me on the idea, and I was trying to get out of the automobile business because it was...

*Mr. Shook:* Tapering off some or...?

*Mr. Compere:* Yeah. Used cars particularly was hard to move. That was the big problem. It wasn't hard to sell new cars, [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] but it was hard to get rid of the old ones. Now I don't, well, the automobile business now has gotten to the point to where I think the factories own the most retail outlets. They'd have to because [*Mr. Shook: Yeah.*] the price of the....the dealers don't have enough money to stock. If they had that much money to stock all that stuff, they'd sit down and loan their money out and make more money then they were making.

*Mr. Shook:* That's a good point. Well, was a there a boom year? I mean when was oil? What created this big banking area of Abilene? The, uh... When did Abilene shift from like an agricultural economy to a more diversified economy? Do you remember that transition? Did that have an effect, immediate effect on all businesses or...?

*Mr. Compere:* Yeah, I guess you could say the oil business did it because [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh*] this has never been a very good farming country. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] I mean by that nothing like Lubbock or the Plainview about our size at that time because I've often heard it said that if we had a circle around Abilene of 20 miles, either direction, and it was all in good farm land, we'd see lots of difference in Abilene. [*Mr. Shook: Yeah.*] We still would.

*Mr. Shook:* In what respect do you mean?

*Mr. Compere:* Well, they could produce more [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] stuff and keep more people working, more stuff to sell.

*Mr. Shook:* I see. But the oil brought a boom on its own....

*Mr. Compere:* The oil, of course. Lots of oilmen moved out here and that put....

*Mr. Shook:* Was this the Cisco strike?

*Mr. Compere:* No, this was way after Cisco.

*Mr. Shook:* Oh, okay.

*Mr. Compere:* Cisco was ...there was never such a boom in Abilene. This was more to me, of course, I don't remember just when the banking business begin to flare up, [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] but we'd had two bank failures, but...

*Mr. Shook:* About what year that you had the bank failures? Was this caused by weather conditions or the agricultural factors again?

*Mr. Compere:* I really don't know. I had, I lost some money in one of them. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] I shouldn't have. Man worked for me and he told me one day, he said, "You'd better get your money out of that Abilene State Bank because I've heard some



bad things about them.. [Mr. Shook: *Uh huh.*] I said, “Well I guess I’d better.” [Mr. Shook: *Uh huh.*] But I didn’t do it in time. I thought, well, these rumors get out. [Mr. Shook: *Yeah.*] I knew some fellows in it pretty well. But I went to Dallas to buy a couple of new cars. [Chuckles.] Give ‘em a check for the cars and it never did clear at all.

Mr. Shook: Hmm. You were left holding the bag on that deal.

Mr. Compere: They finally paid off about, as well as I remember, about fifty-five percent, I think.

Mr. Shook: Okay. So, we got you in the tire business then. And how many years did you spend in the tire business?

Mr. Compere: About thirty.

Mr. Shook: About thirty years.

Mr. Compere: Yes.

Mr. Shook: Was it productive?

Mr. Compere: Oh, I’d say it wouldn’t be under today’s [Mr. Shook: *Uh huh.*] circumstances. We made a living.

Mr. Shook: Was the cost of living considerably lower? I mean, you didn’t need that much to operate, of course.

Mr. Compere: Yeah. You could, of course, it didn’t take long for your automobiles, the finance companies would sell you all the automobiles, they’d want to sell you more than you could sell, [Mr. Shook: *Uh huh.*] at about a ten percent down, which would average, oh, run about 100 dollars and then they’d *floor plan* ‘em, what they call *floor plan* for ninety days. [Mr. Shook: *Uh huh.*] Well, the first time you sold ‘em, why if you hustled enough, why you could take care of that, of course, but now I think they finance all of it. Well, the tire people were the same way. I didn’t, when I started in the tire business, General put a pretty big stock of tires here. We didn’t put a dime in it. [Mr. Shook: *Uh huh.*] They even insured it. Paid the insurance. Paid the taxes. But, of course, that changed pretty fast too. And as the years went by, why they wanted to get out of it themselves, of course, they had to get back in it because tires began to change like automobiles. For a long time, we had, we had about four different sized tires is all there was. [Mr. Shook: *Uh huh.*] And then we had black and white tires and [chuckles] I’d tell some young fellows this and it’s kind of...it’s really hard for me to think about some things that have happened and the way they’re happening now.

Mr. Shook: Yeah, I’d be interested in some of those comparisons. For instance...

Mr. Compere: For instance, we’d catch a spell - white tires was out of date. You’d...

*Mr. Shook:* Yeah. You mean “white wall?”

*Mr. Compere:* Yeah, white walls. [*Mr. Shook: Yeah.*] And they cost always three dollars more than black ones. And if you saw a car all decorated with white side walled tires, well, some colored guy owned it [*Mr. Shook: Yeah.*] [*unclear*] you associated it with [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] so black tires got to be popular. Finally come along and want to sell some white tires so they did like they do now....

*Mr. Shook:* It's like styles change, you mean.

*Mr. Compere:* Yeah and that's... And then they'd put some, some of the improvements on 'em, or improvements and some of them were just something to talk about.

*Mr. Shook:* Uh huh. Oh, I see.

*Mr. Compere:* But they built good automobiles then. I don't know how they'd, of course they made improvements along...

*Mr. Shook:* On the highways for instance? How were the highways?

*Mr. Compere:* Well, the highways....

*Mr. Shook:* Were they pretty hard on the cars back then?

*Mr. Compere:* Yeah, of course, because there wasn't many paved highways.

*Mr. Shook:* What year, for instance, are you talking about here?

*Mr. Compere:* Well, 19...I'm moved over here in 1917 and I had the automobile, I had the Hudson agency then. I bought the first car I got when I took the agency. We were still living in Breckenridge. I went to church one night and somebody stole that car. [*Mr. Shook: Huh!*] And they never did find it. He got clear out of the country with it, I guess [*Mr. Shook: Laughs.*] I got paid for it, but....

*Mr. Shook:* So they had car thieves back then?

*Mr. Compere:* Oh yes. They, wouldn't nobody ever put cars out on open lots like they do now, this is, new cars. Kept them inside. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] Kept them covered. But, of course that was expensive. You'd have, have bigger buildings. Now all we need is a lot to put them on. [*Mr. Shook: Yeah.*] Oh course, the paint is different. Don't hurt 'em to stay out in the sun now. This steering has been improved. The brakes have been improved. We had another thing on Hudson, of course, they never put it on the Essex, which was a cheaper car. They had shutters on the radiator - - just like your window shutters that you pull a string and close them [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] and open them. Except they've finally put this with a thermostat on it. You'd have to close it. In winter

time, you'd close the whole front of the radiator until you got up to a certain temperature so that any car gets in cold weather, gets to jumping and messing around. You don't take off until it gets good and warm. And besides you get a better mixture to go into the motor. You don't get too much fumes. [Mr. Shook: Uh huh.] And now the gasoline they're selling is so darned sorry. I can start my car out there and if I slow down a little to turn the corner why shush, it [Mr. Shook: Yeah.] goes out and you got to start it again. And that worries a lot of people that don't know what it is, but it's this darned gasoline that [Mr. Shook: Yes.] don't burn so.

*Mr. Shook:* When did you retire from the tire business? Or did you go into another business after that? Or was that the last?

*Mr. Compere:* I sold out to Bert Chapman in 1967. [Mr. Shook: Uh huh.] And I'll take it back, 1957, [Mr. Shook: Uh huh.] and I didn't do anything then for, oh, about three years, I guess. I found out that I didn't have enough money to go where I wanted to go [Mr. Shook: Yeah.] because it began to get high to travel around about then. But my wife and I traveled around some. And I, then they offered me a job down at the Court House in the Justice of the Peace offices. [Mr. Shook: Uh huh.] In fact, they offered me Justice of the Peace then and some fellow had a stroke. I can't think of his name right now. He worked at the Post Office. He retired from the Post Office. [Mr. Shook: Uh huh.] And he was appointed... [end of side 1 of tape]

*Side 2:*

*Mr. Compere:* ...worn out lawyer that spit on the floor. [Both laugh.]

*Mr. Shook:* That's what you felt the Justice of the Peace do?

*Mr. Compere:* Well, anyway after this boy, woman made him mad one day. She got a ticket for speeding and she upset him so that on his way home, the girl who worked for him told me this, he had a light stroke on the way home and run into a car that was parked on the side [Mr. Shook: Uh huh.] of the street. Well, he never did come back and then they got after me to see if I would be Docket Clerk. And I worked there in the Justice of the Peace office for about nine years.

*Mr. Shook:* Oh, I see. That was after you sold out of the tire business?

*Mr. Compere:* Yeah.

*Mr. Shook:* You've had quite a background. Well, what do you think about this area as a business center? It seems to be in a lot of areas free from the problems that are facing the rest of the country now. Is this in a growth? Do you feel like West Texas is in a kind of a growth area with the diversified? We have industries here now besides the oil industry, we have other...

*Mr. Compere:* Well, of course, I'm an old stycler. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] And every time I go out to some of these stores, I go to wondering how long they're going to last [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] because when I was in business, when I first went into the tire business, believe it or not, I hired a mechanic and a hard working son of a gun too, [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] for twelve and a half a week.

*Mr. Shook:* Yeah. Twelve and a half dollars a week?

*Mr. Compere:* Twelve and half dollars a week. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] And we worked from seven-thirty in the morning until nine at night.

*Mr. Shook:* About what time was that? What year?

*Mr. Compere:* Well, that was along the late thirties.

*Mr. Shook:* The late thirties.

*Mr. Compere:* I mean the late twenties.

*Mr. Shook:* The late twenties. Okay.

*Mr. Compere:* Yeah, when we had that other Depression. [*Mr. Shook: Yeah.*] And now you go to thinking about paying a fellow two dollars an hour.

*Mr. Shook:* That's right.

*Mr. Compere:* When I walk into some of these stores, I don't see the cash register running. I don't see anyone in there buying anything and it may be of these big stores, [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] see them walking around looking and the clerks looking out the window. [*Both laugh.*] So to me, I can't conceive, of course, apparently, we've got the reputation here of being way ahead of some other places. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] To me there used to two or three dry goods stores here was all, well, maybe four, [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] and then it was a town of 15,000 people.

*Mr. Shook:* When was this? When was it 15,000 people?

*Mr. Compere:* Oh, about 1922, '23.

*Mr. Shook:* Did you know most of your customers by name or did you get to know them pretty well?

*Mr. Compere:* Oh yeah, everybody did that.

*Mr. Shook:* Yeah. It was more personal back then.

*Mr. Compere:* Well, it's sort of like this Justice of the Peace I kept books for down there. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] He was raised there on the farm about ten miles south of here, this side, just beyond Wylie down there after you drop down [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] in that flat and he's well known. He went into the machinery business here. He told me one day not too long ago, he said, "You know I'd like to get back in a town, little town, little enough to where when I walked in the grocery store they'd say 'Good morning, Silas.'" [*Mr. Shook: Uhh.*] "Where you know," he said "did you ever sit down on a nail keg there and just sit there and visit with somebody?"

*Mr. Shook:* Is this Silas Clark?

*Mr. Compere:* Yeah. And he said, "You go in, nobody knows you. If you have to cash a check, they want your pedigree from here to z." [*Both laugh.*] You can't blame them.

*Mr. Shook:* Yeah.

*Mr. Compere:* But...

*Mr. Shook:* It wasn't like that. How was credit back in the early days? I mean, for your early tire business, for instance, could you trust some people? Could you give credit on somebody's word? Or I mean nowadays they have all the credit cards and you didn't have, the bank credit cards, you didn't have those back then...

*Mr. Compere:* Oh no.

*Mr. Shook:* And not everybody had cash, I don't imagine.

*Mr. Compere:* No, well, there's, we didn't have any gypers. [*Mr. Shook: Yeah.*] That's the trouble with the whole darned thing, you see?

*Mr. Shook:* Yeah. I see the con artist...

*Mr. Compere:* I got gyped out of one second hand automobile. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] And I sold automobiles, well, eight or nine years.

*Mr. Shook:* How did they do that?

*Mr. Compere:* And I had, I had one repossession during that time.

*Mr. Shook:* That's pretty good...

*Mr. Compere:* That's when I had it on these fellows, these fellows had money to invest. When I told them, "Your mule will die. Your cotton won't come up. If comes up you may get five cents a pound or you may get thirty cents a pound. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] And Mr. Caldwell was one. He used to be a name. He lived over here in Breckenridge. He had quite a lot of money. They had a lot of property. And I sold him a Hudson

automobile. And the changing was so much. Of course, you'd go in, there was lots of thirty day business in a town like Abilene -[*Mr. Shook: Yeah.*] grocery stores, [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] dry good stores, [*unclear*].

*Mr. Shook:* You mean now, today? There's...

*Mr. Compere:* There was then.

*Mr. Shook:* Oh, there was then.

*Mr. Compere:* Oh yeah.

*Mr. Shook:* Thirty day. [*mumbles*] I see.

*Mr. Compere:* Of course, they probably lost some money. We never, even in the tire business, we sold tires. One tire, you pay cash for one and then pay one each month thereafter [*Mr. Shook: Yeah.*] until you get them all paid. I never lost...

*Mr. Shook:* How did somebody take you on that used car?

*Mr. Compere:* Well, we had a bunch out, used cars. This car was, I believe, three hundred dollars. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] And the boys had put some typewritten prices on the windshield. And my brother, older than I, he didn't give a darn what I told him. It didn't mean anything to him. He did as he pleased.

*Mr. Compere:* What was his name, sir?

*Mr. Compere:* His name was Arthur. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] And he'd always worked for a salary. I never had. But he come in and told me, he said, "I sold that Essex out there to this fellow for," the man was still out there looking at it, "for three hundred dollars provided we put a new tire on for a spare. That spare tire's not any good."

*Some one calls to Mr. Compere.*

*Mr. Compere:* [*He yells to them.*] Yeah. [*Rustling on tape as he gets up and man identified as Mr. Woolard enters.*] Who is it? What happened years ago. I wouldn't leave it on for sure. [*All laugh.*] You going to tell them something like that.

*Mr. Woolard:* I will because I'm old enough to know that, [*unclear*] that was the way things used to be. [*Laughs.*]

*Mr. Snook:* Maybe I'll just keep you here to make sure he tells the truth. [*All laugh.*]

*Mr. Woolard:* Right.

*Mr. Shook:* What is your name, sir? I'm sorry.

*Mr. Woolard:* Harley Woolard. W- Double O-L- A- R -D

*Mr. Compere:* He was pastor here for how long? Six years? Down at....

*Mr. Woolard:* I was for....Let's see.

*Mr. Compere:* First Christian Church.

*Mr. Woolard:* Twelve. Nearly twelve years. Not quite.

*Mr. Compere:* Time goes by.

*Mr. Woolard:* It was right after the war. I came here as a chaplain [*unclear*]

*Mr. Shook:* Oh, I see.

*Mr. Woolard:* During the World War II, [*Mr. Shook: Oh fun.*] and I was here about twelve years and then I've been gone [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] until I retired. And there's just no quitting. [*Mr. Shook: Oh, I'm sure.*] I retired eight years ago and haven't quit yet. So go ahead and get your story. E.N., I just was going to come by and see, just chew the rag with you and see how you're getting along.

*Mr. Compere:* Pretty good. I've been over to the "retired persons" today.

*Mr. Woolard:* Oh, you have.

*Mr. Compere:* For lunch and listen to them. I didn't eat much. I ate a bowl of soup. I ate breakfast...

*Mr. Woolard:* Well listen, if I'm going to go to a place, I think I would save up [*unclear - laughing*] that soup 'til I could get that meal.

*Mr. Compere:* Well, you got to pay for your meal there. You can listen to what they tell you.

*Mr. Woolard:* Well, you know, I'm old enough that I remember the ox cart.

*Mr. Shook:* Uh huh.

*Mr. Compere:* Excuse me. [*Dog barking in background.*]

*Mr. Woolard:* I wouldn't give anything in the world for having lived then [*Mr. Shook: Yeah.*] to come from the ox cart to the going to the moon and on....

*Mr. Shook:* Yeah. That's interesting.

*Mr. Woolard:* ..... and discovering these tremendous, uh, there's no doubt, I, it may not be right, but to me, I imagine [*Mr. Shook: Yeah, that's...*] some of these larger satellites and all that [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] will begin to discover....

*Mr. Shook:* Yeah, that's interesting. It sure is....

*Mr. Compere:* Talking about that ox cart. I want to tell you all this story. I walked in down there to get a hamburger one day at Mac's on the north side. I met a fellow right in the door. And he spoke to me and called my name and said, "My gol, it's been a long time since I've seen you. What are you doing?" And I don't know today who he was. His face was familiar, but I couldn't remember his name. I said, "I'm going in here to get me a 27 hamburger." And he said, "Oh yeah." [*All laugh.*] He said and then he said, "Believe it or not," he said, "I was raised out west of San Angelo in Schleicher [?] County and when I'd get to go to San Angelo with the folks, there was a place down there I could get the best hamburger I ever ate for a dime." And I said, "That's been a good while ago, hasn't it?" And he said, "It sure has." And I said, "Well, I'll tell you one a little further back than that." I said, "I lived at Sweetwater and this four of us went down to Dove Creek fishing at Knickerbocker." I said, "Do you know where Knickerbocker is?" He said, "Gosh, yes. You cross Dove Creek down there and it's twenty-one miles the other side of Angelo." Beautiful creek and four of us was in a Ford touring car and some of us fished up the creek that evening and some down the creek. We's camped there. Been there a couple of days. And directly here come guy driving in. It wasn't none of that road was paved, it was graded. And some of it gravel. This guy was driving eight burros to a wagon and had a trail wagon and both wagons were loaded with wool. And he was unhitching those burros and staking them out there and camping himself out off the edge of the road on this creek. And that was the prettiest stream I ever saw anywhere in West Texas. It was clear as could be and running all the time. And I said, "Where did you come from with all this wool?" He had four burros in the rear and four ahead of them, you see. And he said, "From Fort Stockton." Hauling wool from Fort Stockton to Angelo. I said, "Did you ever see a burro team that big, eight of them?" He said, "I never did see 'em working burros. I know they did." And I said, "Well." He told me he was seven days from Fort Stockton to this camp. I said, "When you going to get to Angelo." He said, "I'll make it in two more days." Twenty-one miles, see. And both of you have seen enough of the burros, you know. Ten miles is a pretty good [*Mr. Shook: Sure is.*] pretty good job for them all day, but they get a lot of working out of those things. They're worth about two dollars a piece is about all.

The next thing I heard about burros. I picked up the *Dallas News* once and one of those big dry goods stores, I believe it was *Neiman Marcus*, advertising Mexican burros, thirty-two dollars. [*Mr. Shook: Laughs.*] That's a new one on me. [*Both laugh.*] Someone must have ripped their britches because a dry goods store like them, what are they selling mules for? And I found out that were really people to come in and buy one those old burros for the kids, see. [*Mr. Shook: Sure.*] They didn't need anything.

*Mr. Shook:* When was this? About what year was this?



*Mr. Compere:* Oh, this, Neiman was advertising those, I guess, ten years ago. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] And the paper ad said we'll get some more, we're out right now, we'll get some more in, in about ten days. Well, they'd go down to Mexico or get somebody to, and pay them, didn't have to pay much for them because the little dickens were starving to death down there.

*Mr. Woolard:* I tell you, it's impossible to realize how things have changed.

*Mr. Compere:* You can't imagine.

*Mr. Shook:* [*Laughs.*] Well, is this a big city now do you think? I mean compared to, is it really booming and going places?

*Mr. Woolard:* If you...

*Mr. Shook:* By comparison that is, I mean?

*Mr. Compere:* I think so. You get in the car and go out here and I'll see something they're building and I didn't know what it was. [*All laugh.*] That part of Ab....you know, this Stonegate addition out here, [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] it's surprising how fast that thing has built up.

*Mr. Woolard:* Where is the Stonegate addition?

*Mr. Compere:* It's on the San Angelo highway out there right after you get on... Do you know where [*Doc Botkin, spelling?*] used to live out there?

*Mr. Woolard:* Yes.

*Mr. Compere:* Well, he sold his property and they moved that house off. Well, it's just this side of there, but on the left hand side of the highway. Now, well, it isn't on the Angelo road either, it's on the Buffalo Gap Road. Let's see, isn't it?

*Mr. Woolard:* Yes.

*Mr. Compere:* Haven't you been out there?

*Mr. Shook:* Yes, that sounds familiar. I think it's off Buffalo Gap Road.

*Mr. Woolard:* I believe that's right.

*Mr. Compere:* Now...

*Mr. Woolard:* I didn't know that they would build way out there.

*Mr. Compere:* Well, now they, I was out that a way the other day and they're putting in an addition south of where Doc was and south of Stonegate on the other side of the road. You know out there about six or seven miles from that old [Wettice?] place. They built several houses out there. But they're building streets and putting in sewer.

*Mr. Woolard:* Well, listen, I've to go. I want to get this. You should have taped what he was telling about....

*Mr. Shook:* Well, I think I got most of it. Nice to have met you. Real nice to have met you.

*Mr. Compere:* We used to ride, we didn't ride the roads, we rode calves. [All laugh.]

*Mr. Woolard:* I tell you my children always tried to get me to ride a bicycle and I never could. My whole life just grew up on a horse. I just, I, I, I couldn't keep a bicycle under me. My horse, if I couldn't keep it under there, I knew I could fly over his head, but...[Laughs. Background noise obscures rest of sentence.]

*Mr. Compere:* I was on a mission one time about a bicycle. When I, we lived on a farm out at Crowell, I ordered a bicycle. Couldn't buy 'em. I ordered, I don't know, from who, Sears or somebody. And it came in on a Saturday morning and another boy had one ordered too. And we got those things together when the mailman brought 'em in. And then we started to riding bicycles. Well, I didn't get home 'til dinner and they didn't know where I was. [Mr. Woolard: Uh huh.] And then we hit a sand bed in the road and the bicycle got out from under us. And I ripped my britches across the knee and skinned my knee and on top of that I got a licking. [All laugh.]

*Mr. Shook:* That wasn't a very good deal.

*Mr. Compere:* ... riding that bicycle. Harley, glad you came by.

*Mr. Shook:* Nice to see you.

*Mr. Woolard:* Thank you. [Mr. Woolard leaves.]

*Mr. Shook:* Well, one more area, I think, that I wanted to cover and Kathryn recommended that I ask you about the time, town lot sale. Now I don't whether she was asking about the city of Sylvester. Probably was. I don't know...

*Mr. Compere:* Oh, she must have been talking about Abilene.

*Mr. Shook:* Yeah. What can you tell us about that?

*Mr. Compere:* I can't. Kathryn. That's of course, a way beyond me.

*Mr. Shook:* Yeah, no I knew that. That's why I thought...

*Mr. Compere:* They... Kathryn wrote a book about, or somebody wrote one about Sylvester, [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] and, uh, but she was talking about the town of Sylvester there. But I don't know. The first time I was ever in Abilene...

*Mr. Shook:* Do recall how Abilene impressed you when you first came? It was the bigger town then, most of the smaller...

*Mr. Compere:* Oh yeah.

*Mr. Shook:* What was it like coming to Abilene? Now, for instance, I remember my first time going to San Francisco. It will kind of always stay with me. What was it like coming to Abilene? [*Mr. Compere: Well...*] Had you been to Dallas or some of the bigger cities?

*Mr. Compere:* I had been to Fort Worth. [*Mr. Shook: Yeah.*] I don't think I'd ever been to Dallas. We used to, well, I'm not so sure I'd ever been to Fort Worth from Crowell. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] After we moved on this ranch out in Sylvester, I'd go to Fort Worth every once in a while 'cause they pastured a lot of cattle out there. Somebody'd ship a carload of cattle [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] and if you wanted to ride in the freight cars with those cattle or in the bu...or in the, you could get a ride to, to... they'd let one man go with the car of cattle if he wanted to. [*Mr. Shook: Yeah.*] So one or two the boys that lived around out there, usually one of us would grab that freight train. It'd take all day to go to Fort Worth over there in the train. We'd have to lay over in Sweetwater maybe for two hours. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] We go to ride that freight train to Fort Worth, ride in the caboose and then come back on the passenger train. But Abilene was about the biggest town. San Angelo, I think, was a little bigger than Abilene. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] But these other little towns... Breckenridge, when we moved over there, was about five or six hundred people, is all it was, but the oil boom really hit that country. Ranger, Breckenridge, particularly. But this was just a good sized town. I don't remember just how many people. We moved over here, and I know Sayles Boulevard wasn't paved. It was a dirt street. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] It had some gravel on it.

*Mr. Shook:* A lot of older homes that we still see here, some of the kind of Victorian looking ...

*Mr. Compere:* Well, yeah.

*Mr. Shook:*...or colonial homes...?

*Mr. Compere:* There were some homes on...the Sayles boys had commenced to building, developing some of that property at the end of Sayles. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] And that old house that there at 7th and Sayles now on that corner, there's a couple bought that and they're remodeling. That's one of the old Sayles homes.

*Mr. Shook:* Uh huh. You don't know who that is?

*Mr. Compere:* And then back of, south of there over where those two big houses sit back off of the street, one of those was a Sayles home. And old Judge Leggett used to have a home over there, a big two-story house where the Episcopal Church is. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] We, I bought a home on 866 Santos. And, uh, there wasn't a house. I bought that home in 1922. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] And one of the Sayles boys had built it to sell and nobody had lived in it. There wasn't a house south of us and there wasn't a house west of us. There was a fence west of me. There was a pasture and the streetcar out to McMurry went through that pasture. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] Of course, then they commenced to building up pretty fast, but now I go to driving around here sometimes and it seems to me like the last five or six years there has been more building, at least the last ten years, more than there ever was before that. But Abilene was a pretty good town. They had saloons here. I think there's three saloons here.

*Mr. Shook:* When you first came here?

*Mr. Compere:* Yeah.

*Mr. Shook:* And that year again, please?

*Mr. Compere:* 1922.

*Mr. Shook:* '22. They had saloons here then?

*Mr. Compere:* Down there on Pine Street about the middle of ... Let's see what's there now. Well, they tore down that building right on the alley, recently. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] There used to be a drug store there. Mr. Compton had, I believe, he had two drug stores here. The building next to that finally went into a drug store. There was a one-story dry goods store there where Alexander Building is. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] There wasn't anything across the street. Citizens Bank built that. I don't remember what year.

*Mr. Shook:* Do you recall being impressed with what Abilene had to offer? Did Abilene have it all back then?

*Mr. Compere:* [*Chuckles.*] Well, uh, most people, I think, first started to come to Abilene on account of the colleges. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] Because Simmons College was about the only college in this area that amounted to anything. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] I went to school out there. My uncle lived right at close to where, where the Alexander Sanitarium used to be. That's now that... what is it? 2121 Apartments there.

*Mr. Shook:* Oh yes, I know where that is. Yeah.

*Mr. Compere:* That's where the Alexander Sanitarium used to be. [*Mr. Shook: Hmm.*] My uncle...

*Mr. Shook:* Might come as a shock to some of the residents there

*Mr. Compere:* Well, yeah. [*Mr. Shook laughs.*] And my uncle owned about three or four, probably, three or four acres right south of us. Of course, his home has been torn down and I don't know how that's been cut up. But he had a horse and a trap buggy. That's a rubber-tired buggy with no top on it. He'd drive to, he'd drive to the office in that. He built a little shed out and tie the horse up in that shed, down in the alley. Then he had a big, had a two-seated surrey they'd use Sunday to go to church in. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] And then his oldest boy was about my age and we were going to Simmons at the same time. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] And we had a darned little old mean horse that we both could ride [*Mr. Shook chuckles.*] and we had a two-wheeled gig that we could work him to. Do you know what a gig is?

*Mr. Shook:* Yeah, I think so.

*Mr. Compere:* Two-wheeled thing [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] with shafts. They were used to break horses to work to a buggy [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] because you could strap them down to those shafts to where they couldn't kick [*Mr. Shook: Yeah.*] and they couldn't turn it over. And the biggest trouble we had, one would get in and the other would untie him. When you untied him, he would rear right straight up and try to jump as far as he could so we'd have to take a time about swinging onto the gig. So this little patch of wheat would graze those three horses there and kept a milk cow then and it was a town, oh I guess, might have been about eight or nine thousand people.

*Mr. Shook:* Uh huh. And again this, that year about the first time you came here?

*Mr. Compere:* Oh that was way back about, uh, I was about 15, 16 years old. That was right around close to 1900.

*Mr. Shook:* Oh, I see. Yeah.

*Mr. Compere:* Because I'm 89 years old now. And 16 years is a good while back there. Seventy years, you know.

*Mr. Shook:* Well, I've enjoyed talking to you.

*Mr. Compere:* I know the...for a long time they had a pavement from here to Elmdale. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] That was the only pavement 'til you got down close to Dallas. The pavement out to Clyde. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] On west of Dallas was a gravel road. Long time 'fore they got pavement through here.

*Mr. Shook:* Well, I've enjoyed talking to you about this. I know there's a lot more you could probably tell me. What I think that I would like to do is to review some my notes and to go over the tape and maybe get back in touch with you with some of my questions. But I certainly appreciate your time and...

*Mr. Compere:* Well, I... You go to talking, of course, to a man my age can talk about old times, but it don't make much of a story. [*Mr. Shook: Well.*] You just have to make the story out the best way that you can or suit yourself.

*Mr. Shook:* Well, I think it's interesting. What do you think about as far as nowadays? Do you kind of look back and say I liked the good old days or do you like the way things are going now? Do you see...?

*Mr. Compere:* Well, they were good old days at the time. They wouldn't be any good now.

*Mr. Shook:* Yeah [*Laughs.*] Okay.

*Mr. Compere:* Because the kids now, uh, they don't, I doubt if they'd half way believe the things that. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] For instance, when I married, we lived in a six dollar a month house. And it wasn't a hut. It was a pretty good two bedroom house. We raised a couple of kids there. My, uh, both of my children were born there. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] And the doctors come to the house and deliver the babies. [*Unclear*] went into the hospital... [*unclear*]

*Mr. Shook:* About what time was that? Was this back in...

*Mr. Compere:* Oh, 1910 along in there.

*Mr. Shook:* It was in Abilene?

*Mr. Compere:* No, it was in Sylvester.

*Mr. Shook:* Oh, Sylvester. Okay.

*Mr. Compere:* When we came to Abilene, there's old Dr. Hollis, you know, the two Hollis boys. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] One of them died a year or two ago. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] The older one die, uh, and Miss [*unclear*] was a Hollis. [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] They used to have a hospital out at the end of Oak Street. Covered about a block there. The hospital stayed there a long time. After we moved here, I'd never been sick in my life, but I'd the bellyache I think every day. I'd been in the drug business. I'd take doctor medicine. I'd take....

*Mr. Shook:* What caused that? Those long hours?

*Mr. Compere:* No, I finally found out that I had a chronic appendix.. [*Mr. Shook: Hmm.*] And I ate a peach one day that wasn't quite ripe enough and really it stuck me in the bed. Well, the only hospital then was over there on Sycamore Street. There's a two story building [*Mr. Shook: Uh huh.*] there. They took me down there about twelve ... [*Tape ends.*]