

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Announcer: John D. Groendyke is Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer of Groendyke Transport, Inc., the fifth-largest motor carrier of bulk commodities serving the continental United States, Canada, and Mexico.

It all began on July 12, 1932, when John's father, Harold Groendyke, transported his first load of kerosene from Borger, Texas, to Beaver, Oklahoma. He drove a two-axle Ford truck equipped with a 3,000-gallon tank mounted on a homemade chassis. That was the start of the tank truck industry and Groendyke Transport Company.

John received his Bachelor of Science in Business from Oklahoma State University and his law degree from the University of Oklahoma. He served as a Captain in the U.S. Army, and after a two-year tour of duty, he returned to Enid, Oklahoma, to join the family trucking operation.

In 2024 John received a Lifetime Achievement Award from National Tank Truck Carriers.

In his oral history interview, John talks about his father building a truck, the effect of technology on the trucking industry, and his extensive car collection on the podcast and oral history website VoicesOfOklahoma.com.

Chapter 2 – 8:25 Military Academy

John Erling (JE): My name is John Erling, and today's date is October 4, 2021.
John, would you state your full name, please?

John Groendyke (JG): John David Groendyke.

JE: Your date of birth?

JG: August 17th, 1944.

JE: You were born where?

JG: Born in Omaha, Nebraska.

JE: Groendyke—what's the story behind that name? It's unusual.

JG: It is. It's a Dutch name. My ancestors arrived in New Amsterdam, New York, around 1660 and have been here since then.

JE: We are recording this interview in the Oklahoma History Center, which is right across from the Capitol in Oklahoma City. Voices of Oklahoma is now in partnership with the Oklahoma History Center. By the way, when we hear about the Oklahoma History Society, that's an umbrella for all their museums, and we are in their Oklahoma History Center, which is a beautiful piece of property. Your parents, John—your mother's name?

JG: My mother's maiden name was Pauline Francis Jackson, born and raised in Guymon, Oklahoma. My father, Harold C. Groendyke, was born on a homestead farm in Beaver County, Oklahoma, 12 south and 3 west of Beaver, and born and raised in a sod house.

JE: Your mother's personality—what kind of person was she?

JG: Growing up as one of seven children—I think she was the third child out of seven—all of them had to pitch in and work. They mainly had a hardware store, Jackson Brothers Hardware, in Guymon, Oklahoma. Her father worked there with two other brothers, and then they farmed fairly extensively around Guymon and south of Guymon down into Texas, around Grover, Texas.

JE: So you learned the work ethic from her, didn't you?

JG: Yes, I think everybody that lived through the Dust Bowl and the Depression of the '30s developed a pretty tough, hardworking attitude.

JE: How about you and your brothers and sisters? Did you have—

JG: I have no brothers and sisters. I was an only child. It was during the Second World War, and my dad was in the truck transportation business, hauling fuel and equipment for the government for the war effort. My mother was staying with her sister in Omaha when I was born, and then we moved to Enid shortly thereafter.

JE: And your father's personality?

JG: You know, my dad, born and raised on that farm, worked hard as a young man, went to Beaver High School, and after that went to Panhandle Agricultural and Mechanical Institute, which is now Panhandle State University in Goodwell. He played football, ran track, and got a degree there. I always recall very clearly, he said the toughest job he had was making \$12.50 a month to pay room, board, and tuition. He milked about 25 cows that the university had right off campus. He said, "I swept out the gym in the evenings," and he said you had to work pretty hard to come up with \$12.50.

JE: Isn't that something? Right. We're going to want to talk about how he started the trucking business. But your education—where did you go to high school?

JG: I went to Wentworth Military Academy in Lexington, Missouri. I went there from 1957, started in the eighth grade, and stayed through two years of junior college, departing in 1964.

JE: And why Wentworth Military Academy?

JG: You know, my dad was gone quite a bit in the trucking business and everything. He just thought—I wasn't the best student in the world—and probably thought it was a good idea. I had a cousin from Guymon, Oklahoma, who had gone there and spoke highly of it, so I ended up there. I enjoyed it. It was a great experience. As a matter of fact, I was there last weekend to celebrate homecoming with an alumni group at the museum. The school officially closed in May of 2017.

JE: So did they make a good student out of you?

JG: You know, I don't know if they made a great student out of me, but at least they taught me how to study, go to class, and not miss class. I did fairly well there and went on and got a bachelor's degree in business with a minor in mathematics from Oklahoma State University. Following that, I went to the University of Oklahoma and got a Juris Doctorate law degree.

JE: OK, why did you go after a law degree?

JG: You know, we thought, in our family-owned trucking business that my father started in Beaver, Oklahoma, in 1932, it was an excellent opportunity.

Other than being in the trucking business, we've always been involved in farming and ranching. I thought a law degree would assist me in title opinions and oil and gas projects we'd been involved in—and it was. It really teaches you how to look at some of those issues and come up with a hopefully reasonable conclusion.

JE: You eventually joined the family business. Was that your goal?

JG: It always was. I grew up in that business. My father started it, as I said, in 1932. He was a little bit older when I was born, and when I got out of college, he had turned over day-to-day operations to some of the people who worked for us. I spent quite a bit of my time on the farming and ranching side of the business and the oil and gas. It wasn't until my dad passed away in 1986 that I became more full-time involved in the truck transportation business.

JE: But after school, you went into the army?

JG: I did. When I left Wentworth Military Academy, I was commissioned as a second lieutenant, subject to finishing my education in a four-year institution. I received a regular commission, and I was on delay from active duty for three years to go to law school. And then I became a first lieutenant, went into the service and served at Fort Riley, Kansas, and then at Fort Sill. I got out of the service in 1971 as a captain. I was in the transportation corps, but since I had a law degree, I spent most of my time with the Judge Advocate General's corps in the courthouse with the military or in legal issues.

JE: What years were you in the army?

JG: I started basic camp at Fort Eustis, Virginia, for transportation in 1969, and I served through 1971.

JE: So the Vietnam War was --

JG: Kind of coming to an end for a little bit, yes.

JE: But you didn't have to deal with any of that?

JG: You know, I didn't deal with it directly over there, but I dealt with it through a lot of the people that came home. They sent a lot of them to Fort Riley and Fort Sill. In hindsight, they probably should have let them out of the

service when they returned, but many of them had just a short period of time—four to six months—to finish out their terms. They didn't want to move into the barracks and have inspections every day and formal parades. That didn't go very well. We had a lot of resistance to that, which evolved into a number of general court-martials. At Fort Riley, they overran the arms room and got the weapons and the ammunition, creating some pretty lively activity around there for a while.

JE: Wow, that's amazing that soldiers would do that. But they came from Vietnam, came back home, and they were pretty—I don't know...

JG: To put them in dress and have a Sunday parade probably was not a high priority on their list.

Chapter 3 – 7:46

Built a Truck

John Erling (JE): Let's go to your grandfather and grandmother, Anne and Arthur Groendyke. Talk about them a little bit. You referred to them—they homesteaded in—1902.

John Groendyke (JG): 1902. They came to Liberal, Kansas, on the train with their wagon, mules, and horses and traveled about 40 miles south from Liberal. They crossed the Beaver River and homesteaded, as I said earlier, 12 south and 3 west of Beaver on a farm that they homesteaded on. They built a house, dug a well, and went through all the protocol necessary to qualify to be a homesteader. If you improved the property for seven years, stayed on it, and got affidavits from your neighbors that you had done that, the government would issue you a patent.

JE: So that was 160 acres, I suppose?

JG: 160 acres.

JE: Right. And he lived in a sod house?

JG: Sod house. My dad was born in 1908. He had two sisters, one born in 1898 and one in 1900, so one was 8 and 10 years older than he was born. And

they added another 15 feet onto the sod house when he was born. That lasted about five or six years, and then they bought one of those pre-cut, pre-made homes that you ordered from Montgomery Ward or Sears and Roebuck. They shipped it out there, and built it. One of my favorite pictures I have is my dad and grandfather standing on the roof of the sod house, tearing the roof off, with the new house in the background.

JE: Yeah. What a great picture that is.

JG: It really is. The thing that surprises people is they ask, "Well, I wonder why did they pick this piece of property? Gosh, I'd have gone over here where it was perfectly flat and it's all irrigated today" Today, it's all irrigated, but I tell them, "Well, Clear Creek ran right along the border of the property." They had a beautiful garden, and had all kinds of apple trees, and different things like that. The criteria for picking what piece of land you wanted was a little different in 1902 than it is today.

JE: Sure, absolutely. That's great heritage, isn't it? And that was in Beaver County, Oklahoma. So then, let's talk about your father. He went to high school in—

JG: Beaver. Beaver High School. Beaver, Oklahoma.

JE: And so this would have been in the 1920s—1927, I think maybe it was?

JG: Yes. Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

JE: When did he start thinking about a trucking business, and how did that come about?

JG: My dad and the family have always been mechanically inclined to work on stuff. When he went to college at Panhandle State, he had an old Model T that he'd patched together and had transportation. He was one of the few students who had any kind of motorized transportation at that time.

Now, as you know, those were very, very tough times. When he got out, his first job was schoolteaching job in a one-room schoolhouse. I always remember him talking about it. Some of the students would come by Enid and visit him when I was a small child. A lot of those kids in first grade were immigrant families—a lot of them kids were 17 or 18 years old and pretty rowdy. They had physically run off two teachers. The school board hired my

dad for \$25 a month and said, "If you're here at Christmas, you'll get a \$25/month bonus from the start in September." I always remember my dad saying, "I told them, 'I'll take the job, but there might not be any students there come Christmastime.'"

He had played football and ran track, but he said, "Thank goodness my roommate at Panhandle State was a boxer and taught me how to box pretty well." He said after school every day, they'd have boxing for the students who really wanted to get after the teacher. He said, "I kinda knocked some of them colder than a cucumber. After two weeks, everything straightened out, and everything went well."

The nice part of that story is that those same students would come by to see him. They'd say, "I really appreciate you teaching us basic mathematics and the things we needed to know to be successful living here in Beaver County, Oklahoma."

JE: And deportment—how to conduct yourself.

JG: That's right.

JE: I remember getting your grades in deportment. You probably did, too—a one, two, or a three.

JG: Absolutely.

JE: I think it's important that your father, Harold, met Harry McCullough. Because that's a big part of the story at the beginning, isn't it?

JG: It was. It was. Harry and my dad became friends. He was with our company over 60 years in the truck transportation business. I think you asked a little bit earlier kinda what maybe brought about the interest or the starting of the trucking business. After the school teaching—one year—he decided to become an operator of a Phillips 66 filling station in Beaver. Then he decided that it would be a good idea if he could haul his own fuel. He could get it when he wanted, and I don't know if price was a question or not, but he built a truck, had a wood-frame trailer—about an 800-gallon trailer—and went to Borger, Texas, in July of 1932. He hauled his first load of fuel back to Beaver from that.

Oh, he had flatbeds, and he hauled salt out of Hutchinson, Kansas, for

people to use for cattle and whatnot. He also had some cattle trucks. But during those tough times, I think you kinda looked at who could pay ya. Some of those people had a hard time with the Depression and the Dust Bowl. He started hauling product out of Enid, Oklahoma, for Eason and Champlin refineries, which were two inland refineries that provided most of the fuel for that area.

He moved his trucking operation—other items, including cattle hauling. We had one or two cattle trucks. I think we had about eight or ten trucks and moved over there in 1935. That's been our permanent home since then, and it still is today.

JE: In Enid?

JG: In Enid. That's where our corporate offices are, and that's been our headquarters since 1935.

JE: The Dust Bowl and the Great Depression didn't seem to affect his business, did it?

JG: You know, I think they struggled awful hard in those early days. I remember him telling me that north of Enid, about 19 miles, there's a four-way stop. He said, "I'd blown two tires out on this truck in the early-to-mid '30s. I had to hitchhike down to Enid, and I went to the bank to try to borrow \$25. They said, 'Well, you don't have enough collateral, Harold. We can't loan you any money.'"

He said, "I went over to Sears and Roebuck, and a lady in there I'd gone to school with at Panhandle recognized me. She said, 'What are you doing here?' He says, 'I'm trying to get some money so I can buy some tires, or I'll be out of business.' And she said, 'Well, here, Harold, I'll loan you 20.'"

He said, "I didn't buy tires from anybody but her for the next five years."

JE: Isn't that great?

JG: Tough times.

JE: Yeah, tough times for sure.

Chapter 4 – 7:35
Driver, Mechanic, Dispatcher

John Erling (JE): But then some of his biggest customers were Champlin and Eason?

John Groendyke (JG): Champlin was a major customer. Eason was a major customer. Phillips remained a customer for a long time, and they're still one of our top five customers today—89 years later.

JE: I see where he purchased a Model C60 International truck through the fire department in Beaver. Why that truck?

JG: They had restrictions because of the war effort -- World War II. They would only allow certain kinds of trucks to go certain places—restricted. The only ones that could get a bigger motor to haul a larger load and was more substantial truck, were the fire departments. So we talked—I think—the fire marshal in Beaver into ordering two trucks to enhance their fire department and then ended up buying the trucks off of them.

JE: Let's go back to the land. He had 160 acres. Was he able to produce any revenue from that? Did he run cattle on it?

JG: My dad, once he got out of college, was not involved in the farm there. His mother and dad continued to live on the farm until 1938, and he jacked the house up and moved it into Beaver. They lived there for the balance of their life.

A lot of people said, "Well why didn't they, as a lot of other people in that area did, go to California?" during the Dust Bowl or the bad times. And I said, "Well, he never answered that question directly, but I would say my grandfather was 62 years old at that time and probably wasn't looking for a new beginning." He had been out there plowing with a horse, and then had a tractor after that. After going through the Dust Bowl, they kept the farm—they didn't ever sell the farm—but they moved into town. They stayed there. He'd go out and check on the farm from time to time, but I think they leased it out after that.

JE: And your dad decided he did not want to be a farmer, obviously.

JG: It was tough out there. If you look at the pictures, all there was were sand dunes out there on that farm. The fences were under. That was a tough way to make a living on 160 acres.

JE: So then your grandfather eventually sold that?

JG: No, he did not. He left it to my father -- the lands and the minerals. My dad gave a third of the minerals to each of his two sisters, and he kept a third. Then he gave the farm or sold the farm to me 30 or 40 years ago. I sold the farm, last year, to a neighbor. And this neighbor has leased the farm for 50 years, and he owns all the property 360 degrees around it. I just decided—the family had been there, we looked at all the pictures and all, and he had two or three children involved in agriculture—he was the likely person to take it forward and I sold it to him.

JE: What type of mineral was in that, you said?

JG: It was mainly oil. Oil.

JE: So you struck oil on that land?

JG: Not very much, but a little over time. We leased it a couple of times, and they drilled a few wells there, but there's very little oil and gas activity there today.

JE: Yeah. I see where he said he served as his own first three employees—driver, mechanic, and dispatcher.

JG: Mr. Montgomery had Montgomery Oil in Enid, Oklahoma, and he called my dad because they were a jobber and they sold fuel to places in Buffalo, Seiling, Vici, and all over western Oklahoma. And they said, "Tell us about what you have for staff and everything." My dad said, "Well, I'm the driver, the mechanic, and the dispatcher." He said, "I'm all three."

JE: Right. And he turned the lights on and off every day -- in the morning and in the evening, right?

JG: Yessir. A normal day there—he'd get up and go to work at 7 o'clock in the morning; he'd always come home for lunch at noon, maybe take a 30- to 45-minute nap, work until about 6 o'clock, come home and have dinner, then go back and work on trucks and all until 10 o'clock or midnight.

JE: And you remember him doing that?

JG: Oh yes, I do.

JE: Wow. Then he decides he's going to buy a sleeper tractor.

JG: Yeah, right at the end of the '30s, International came out with a cab with a space behind it where you could have a bed or whatnot. It wasn't like what you see today—pretty small—but at least it served a purpose.

JE: Right. And we don't think about where these drivers slept. They would often sleep in their seats.

JG: Lay down on the seat, prop their feet over the side seat where the passenger would sit, get the pillow out, and take a nap.

JE: Or some seedy motel along the way.

JG: That's right. That's right. But I do remember—I've got a booklet that one of our truck drivers wrote in the early days, talking about my dad giving him a quarter so he'd have money to eat on for two or three meals. Because in Enid, you could go down and get two hamburgers for a nickel, and if you walked a block to the Wyble Dairy, you could get free buttermilk -- free.

JE: Well, here I have the diary of a truck driver from 1936.

JG: Harlan Clark.

JE: Harlan Clark. I'm just opening it up here. He kept details, as you know.

JG: He really did.

JE: 1936, September 30th—gas, 88 gallons, and oil -- 5 gallons of oil. October 14th—day off. Tuesday, Wednesday—farm. Thursday, Friday, and Saturday—off. The past two weeks. I don't know, but he went into detail. Here—he hauled calves from McFarland on October 29th.

JG: Yes, sir. Hugh McFarland and his brother were ranchers north of Beaver, Oklahoma. It was kind of interesting—he was the world champion bareback bronc rider two years in a row in the rodeo circuit in Calgary and different places.

What was unusual—I've given pictures of him with my father and other people in Beaver, downtown, and a picture with his horse, Tony, that he bought in Calgary. Hugh was 7'1" and weighed about 325 pounds.

JE: Wow.

JG: His car at that time -- and I only met the gentleman once—I was about five or six years old—but he'd just take the front seat out of a Chevrolet two-door sedan, sit in the back seat, and drive the car. He had a big ranch, and my dad was a good friend of his for many years. But that horse—17.1 hands high—it didn't look any too big for him.

JE: Yeah, yeah. That's great. This is very interesting, this detailed diary of a truck driver by Harlan Clark.

JG: You know, it's funny. Today, people talk about "the good old days." I said, "Well, those truck drivers—when it was 100 degrees out there and the dirt was blowing—we just talk about 'the old days.'" We drop "good old days" because those were awful tough times.

Chapter 5 – 6:40

Innovative Father

John Erling (JE): After World War II, there was a shortage of truck parts, and your father was being innovative. What did he do?

John Groendyke (JG): Rebuilt a lot of trucks, took on some surplus military equipment, repaired it, and overhauled it. They put new engines in trucks and all. I know a little before that time, Ford Motor Company had a V12 engine they came out with—a flathead 267 cubic inch—that they put in '37 and '38 Ford cars. My dad could go down and buy one of those complete motors for \$60. He said a three-man crew could install the motor in about four hours in the truck, and you were ready to go the next morning.

JE: Didn't they establish Enid Truck Parts? Was that a company?

JG: He did. It was. My dad bought a lot of surplus. I remember as a kid, I liked to go out there. We had half-tracks, tanks, and all kinds of stuff that would entice a young man to crawl around on it. Got airplanes, had a lot of parts, but then we sold parts for trucks and things like that.

JE: Don't you just marvel at what your father did?

JG: He got involved in a lot of different projects.

JE: Yes, he did. He did indeed. How old was he when he died?

JG: He was 78 years old when he passed away.

JE: What did he die from?

JG: A surgery where he developed a blockage in the intestines, developed an infection, and died as a result.

JE: And again, what year was that?

JG: 1986.

JE: Did he work in the company up until his later days?

JG: He came by, and he was at the meetings. Most of the people who worked for my father for a long, long time were people who had graduated from college with him at Panhandle State. There were a number of people who worked for 40 or 50 years there. Al Hamilton had been a classmate of his, and he was president for a number of years. Later, Max Barton, who didn't go to Panhandle—he was younger—but he worked for my dad for 40 years and was president and chief executive officer.

JE: Yeah. So then he builds a Superior gas station and truck stop—the first in Enid.

JG: 1948. Built that—24 hours a day, six days a week. It was very popular. Right after that, he built a four-bay, coin-operated car wash, like you'd see today. I know now they've gone on to the new drive-throughs and newer innovations, but it was surprising—25 cents for five minutes is what it was. Now, you get 45 seconds for a quarter. But for a quarter, you got five minutes. But it's surprising that that little car wash could generate \$500 a week.

JE: I'm fascinated. His trucks were stopping at truck stops. So he's sitting there in Enid, and he's thinking, "Well, I know what those truck stops do and what they provide. I'd like to show people what they should really do." And here, in his hometown of Enid, he sets up this gas station and truck stop.

JG: And he did. Had a service where we lubed and serviced trucks and also sold a lot of oil and lubricants to people who had trucks.

JE: So it gave an idea to other people who have truck stops to this day.

JG: Absolutely right. Absolutely.

JE: I don't know if Tom Love had anything to do with your father.

JG: No, he did not. He did not. I know they've been very, very successful as you know. They have a great blueprint for how to do it.

JE: Right, but there was no connection between the families or anything like that.

JG: No, sir. No, no.

JE: So that was in '48. Then, in the late '50s, your dad enters the chemical transport business.

JG: We did. We were mainly gasoline. We hauled some crude oil and a little bit of asphalt. But in the late '50s, early '60s, we built terminals in Houston, built terminals in Dallas-Fort Worth, and got into the chemical side of the business. Today, our business is about 45% chemical, and 45% gasoline, diesel fuel, and jet fuel. We haul a lot of fuel to airports and all. So we're pretty diversified—on purpose. We try to stay diversified because some markets go up and down and all. We had great diversity and still do.

JE: He was the only guy in this business. There must have been some time along the way when he started meeting competition, does he? Or not?

JG: Oh, we always had competition, and you met it. One of the things we did in the early '60s—we entered into a partnership agreement with Transportes Lopez in Mexico. That operation we were involved in for 40 years. Our trailer would go clear through. Our tractor would unhook from the trailer, and this Mexican company would hook onto the trailer, deliver the product, and bring it back to the border. That was a fairly active, good business for us for a long, long time.

JE: Here's a quote from your father: "I made my share of mistakes, but we worked awful hard to overcome those and become successful and just never gave up."

JG: Boy, that's true. I remember his mathematics professor at Panhandle State said my dad had a tenacious attitude about getting the job done. He said it might not be practical, but if he started, he was gonna finish it.

JE: Yeah. Sounds like he -- it's obvious -- he was one of a kind, wasn't he? We always meet people like that.

JG: He was. You know, in the early days -- we went and he went -- and he built most of those terminals. We had the office staff—my dad and the president, Max Barton. He was the pilot when we had a small airplane, and he was also a darn good carpenter. I remember my dad down there running the saw and building different terminals over the years. Built the one in Ponca City in 1948 at the same time. That terminal is still there today.

JE: Really?

Chapter 6 – 8:05 Company Growth

John Erling (JE): So then by 1962, the trucking business was operating 600 trucks, 22 terminals, and they served 25 states.

John Groendyke (JG): Yes, sir.

JE: That's over a 30-year period. He hauled his first load in 1932, so by '62, he had that many trucks.

JG: Yes, sir.

JE: By that time, when he went in and tried to get a bank loan; he must have established a good relationship with the bank along the way.

JG: He did.

JE: To be able to buy all these trucks.

JG: It was interesting. He dealt a lot with the Mercantile Bank in Dallas, Texas. I'll always remember—my dad wanted to build a new terminal, which is now on the property of the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport there. The banker—my dad wanted to buy about five or six acres—and the banker said, "Now, Harold, I'm not gonna loan you the money for that. I'm gonna loan you the money to buy 18 acres. You need it all."

He said, "I don't think I can afford that." The banker said, "Yes, you can. I'm gonna finance it. You're gonna make it work."

JE: How about that?

JE: And my dad would buy equipment. And my dad, In the early days, of the early people you see on trucks today: OTC—Oklahoma Tax Commission. My dad was number four. He said, "I got number four in a dice game at the Rice Hotel in Tulsa, and I bought all the others from one through ten out of business."

JE: Wow.

JG: And the tax commission made him the mayor of East Enid, where Champlin Refinery was. They had some underground tank leakage, and they're still pumping gas out of the ground there. From about 15 to 25 feet, it's solid rock. They produced 40,000 gallons a week with little hand pitcher pumps. They had over 400 of them there around the outside the fence of the refinery, and people were pumping it, hauling it over the road, putting it in a galvanized tank, and Dad would pump it onto the truck; but he was responsible for keeping track of the amounts to pay the tax.

Now, wouldn't you like to be out there with those little kickstart gas motors, pumping gasoline into a trailer? A good chance to have a disaster. The insurance company would not like that today.

JE: And hard work. My, oh my.

JG: Hard work, yes.

JE: So then you were shipping into Mexico. Then there was a time you shipped into Canada, too, right?

JG: We do. Yes, we still provide service to Canada and Mexico.

JE: Yeah. So the '70s were prosperous, but in 1980, Congress passed legislation to deregulate the interstate trucking industry. What did that mean to your company?

JG: It was a completely different format. We were kind of like a public utility, maybe like OG&E or other people that had to appear before the Oklahoma Corporation Commission. If you wanted to adjust the rates or your fees, you

had to get approval to do that. You had to buy authority -- not buy authority, but you had to apply for authorities—intrastate in Oklahoma or interstate with the Interstate Commerce Commission on a federal level.

We always had four or five people who worked full-time that's all they did. And some people had a monopoly. We didn't have a monopoly, I wouldn't say, but there wasn't a lot of competition. You could have competition, but it wasn't that bad. That transition was kinda interesting—of the 100 largest carriers in the country, less than 15% survived that change.

I think the reason was we always tried to maximize payloads. I've got some pictures that maybe you've seen in the book you have. I've got a picture of the 1932 3,500-gallon tank. Then I have the one that sits here in the park of the Oklahoma History Center that I donated—it's a 5,500-gallon tank. Today, they're 9,500-gallon tanks. So you can see, we're hauling two-and-a-half times as much product today as we were back then.

JE: Yes, indeed.

JG: And we were always trying to do that. Some of those companies kinda had the attitude, "I don't need to worry about it because I've got this business locked up and I can do what I wanna do," but thank goodness, we were able to make that transition. It was hard to say to people, "I'm sorry, we can't take care of that business," or, "Here's our competitor, call him." Sometimes.

JE: We're about in the middle of the country, so about how far east and west would you go, and even today?

JG: Today, we have 40 facilities today and we normally go to all 49 states at one time or another through a calendar year. We're not in Hawaii, but we haul quite a bit of wing de-icer to Canada for Alaska, out of Borger, Texas. That's a pretty good run—to Anchorage and through there.

Every once in a while, we'll miss Delaware, New Hampshire, or Rhode Island, but most of the time, we're hitting about every state. And we have terminals in northern Chicago, Florida, and the Carolinas with the company we bought -- took over -- in January 2019—Mackenzie Truck Line. We go clear to Phoenix, Arizona.

JE: What about New York?

JG: We deliver some product in New York, but we don't have any direct operating facilities there.

JE: Tell us what a terminal consists of.

JG: That has changed. Historically, we had a terminal manager and a dispatcher that took the orders that customers would call in, and he would dispatch the trucks. Depending on the size of the terminal and how big the staff was to handle the paperwork -- the bill of lading, and things like that.

Most of the places we had a shop. In larger facilities, we did complete maintenance—tearing down engines, transmissions, and all. Not much of that is done today with all the technology out there and the electronics. We do very little heavy maintenance on trucks.

But that's what we did. We usually had a washing facility to wash the equipment. We always took pride in keeping the equipment looking good. We always kinda believed in overserved and undercharged.

JE: By 1982, Groendyke Trucking operated 42 terminals, 750 tractors, 950 trailers, 914 employees. It delivered more than 165,000 loads to 48 states and Mexico, running more than 60 million miles annually.

JG: Yeah. Yes, sir.

JE: You could have stopped right there and not grown at all, but they did.

JG: They did. We've continued to grow in some areas. We got more and more involved in hauling gasoline to convenience stores, and you can haul a lot of loads in a hurry when you're delivering four or five a day.

Today, we're in St. Louis, Kansas City, Wichita, Tulsa—the home of QuikTrip, one of our major customers—Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston, Phoenix. We haul all those places. So like I said, 45% of our business is petroleum—gasoline and jet fuel.

Chapter 7 – 9:05
Technology

John Erling (JE): In 1983, Al Hamilton retires, and that's when Max Barton was named president.

John Groendyke (JG): Yes, sir.

JE: Then three years later, in 1986, you were named CEO and became 100% owner of the transportation company. But before you were that, you were on staff, before you became CEO.

JG: I was, but I spent a lot of my time outside of Groendyke Transport—trucking in the farming, ranching, and the oil and gas business. I was there, went to most of the meetings, and stayed up on it, but it wasn't until my dad passed away in 1986 that I became fully focused on that. We downsized our ranching operation and farming operation at that time to be more focused. You need to kinda spend your time where you're making a living, or a better living, and the trucking business has always been our principal business. That's where I've been focused since then.

JE: Did you enjoy the ranching business?

JG: Oh, I did. Very much.

JE: Do you miss it?

JG: Oh, I do. But we still operate about 12,000 acres in Garfield and Grant County. We do agricultural farming, raise wheat, and have about 1,600 mother cows in a ranching operation up there, so we stay pretty engaged.

JE: I'd would guess. That's more than just a finger in it, isn't it? That's a whole handful there.

JG: Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

JE: Then when you became CEO, was there a lot of catching up to do? Or not? You kinda were keeping up?

JG: Not too much. Max Barton was there, and he was an outstanding manager. Did a good job, and I had a lot of confidence in him. It went well. It went well.

JE: Then you purchased statewide authority from Whitfield Transport. What does that mean?

JG: Whitfield was probably out of New Mexico more than likely. See, there was interstate deregulation in 1981, I believe. And it wasn't for a few years later that the states started deregulating. They didn't do it all at once. They did Interstate. United States-wide went away and then they did state deregulation.

JE: Alright. So, in '89, the company bought the old office building of its longtime customer, Champlin Refinery. That's interesting how you were able to do that.

JG: When they closed, they had built a new concrete tilt-up, nice office building. We bought it when they were closing out the refinery. It's completely leveled now—gone. They wanted the building moved, and we bought it for \$17,500. We took it apart and moved it. My office is in that building today in Enid, Oklahoma.

JE: Really?

JG: Yes. And all the walls were there, all the doors—which were solid oak doors. It was a nice, nice building, and it's been very useful.

JE: Then technology comes along and affects many businesses and certainly affected the trucking business. Tell us how that happened; and was that in the '90s then when technology...?

JG: A little, but I think in the last ten years—and especially the last five years—it has changed more than anything. We went to satellite tracking on the truck on 90% of the trucks. We can tell where it is within ten feet anywhere in the United States.

I know what speed -- what gear he's got the transmission in -- the temperature of the product in the trailer. We can even preprogram the truck—if it's going from Oklahoma City to Kansas City -- the route we want it to take. And it'll light it up on a board in the office if he gets 2 miles off a route.

JE: (Laughing).

JG: So, there's no more stories about why they were over here or over there. You know where they are. And it's been good. We did not use it -- on their speed and all -- as a disciplinary or something like that, but it helps them with hours-of-service regulations and everything.

A driver can't spend a couple of hours a day in a truck stop visiting or playing pinball. They realize utilization of their time is important to them because they get paid, in our case (a lot of truck drivers are paid), on a percentage of revenue, or have been in the past, or on a flat fee per load -- a number of different kinds of things and all. I think it has made a lot of drivers more productive. And you know where they are, and they can communicate with you, and you can send them messages: "Here's your next load; here's where you need to be," and all, so... It's surprising.

JE: And if there's a breakdown, you know immediately.

JG: That's correct.

JE: That had to be beneficial to the driver.

JG: It is. Absolutely.

JE: And then you know the nearest source to come and help them, or how does that work?

JG: You know, most, mostly you know where they are, where you can get, say, tire service and all. It's very, very seldom that you have a truck tire flat today. In the early days, talking about in the '30s and all, if you had less than three or four a week, you thought you were doing well. We always had a jack and had two spare tires on the belly of the trailer so the driver could change it if he had to. That doesn't happen today. You don't even carry a spare tire.

JE: Oh, really?

JG: No.

JE: But when we're driving down, say, the interstate, we see pieces from big tires along the way. What's happening there?

JG: Most of the time those tires have got old, possibly, and we've always kind of followed the policy that you shouldn't recap a tire if the carcass is over four

years old. And if you do recap them, which we do in some cases, we're running on our trucks and trailers today all the real wide super singles. And the reason we do that—everything we haul, we get paid in regard to gallons or weight. If you have those super singles, wide tire—one tire on the tractor and the trailer—you'll save about 800 pounds. Same reason people say, "How come you don't have the big motor in the truck, the 15-liter motor?" Well, if you do—we're using a 13-liter motor—there's another 600 to 700 pounds, so it just adds up.

JE: Yeah. What brands tires do you use?

JG: You know, we run several different kinds. You know, some of the manufacturers have a particular tire they put out from the factory. Some of them are Michelin, some are Bridgestone. We have a lot of Continentals. There's a lot of good tires out there.

JE: Yeah. And what about the brand of trucks?

JG: You know, a lot of good trucks out there. We have had Internationals historically a long time. Currently, the new trucks we've been buying—we've been buying Freightliners and Kenworth. Kenworth is owned by PACCAR. They own Peterbilt and Kenworth. Good trucks, good trucks.

JE: Must make you feel good when you're just out traveling across Oklahoma, and you see one of your trucks either behind you or you pull up beside one.

JG: Oh, it is. This last weekend I went to Kansas City early, early in the morning because I wanted to go by the terminal. We just refurbished the driver's room and worked on the offices, and I was very pleased. The equipment was really waxed up, cleaned up, and looked good, and they didn't have a week's notice that I was coming. That's the way they run it, and I was very pleased with that.

JE: Is it tough to find drivers today or in the history of this business?

JG: You know, it's probably because of the pandemic and all. It's been a lot harder today than it's ever been before. It's changed the way you operate. It's changed the pay scales in some cases, and it's been challenging.

JE: What is the age of a truck driver? Is it young guys who want to drive?

JG: No, it's not. You know, hauling hard-to-handle, hazardous, flammable, corrosive material—for insurance purposes and all—we've not been able to hire a driver under the age of 23. I think that's gonna go down to 21. And I think on the federal level, with driver training and supervised with a mentor, they're gonna start issuing licenses for certain kinds of truck drivers probably down to 18 years of age.

JE: Oh, is that a standard right now—you can't hire below a certain age?

JG: Yes, oh yes, right.

JE: Below 23, you can't?

JG: Well, the insurance company won't insure you, so we're sensitive on that. We're very proud that we have always been safety-conscious. We have won the National Heil Trailer Award for the outstanding safety program in the liquid bulk truck transportation business.

Chapter 8 – 8:55

Pandemic

John Erling (JE): So we bring in the name Greg Hodgson.

John Groendyke (JG): It is. Yes, sir.

JE: He was hired as a mechanic's helper at the Denver facility, and then he becomes the executive vice president and CEO in 2001 and president in 2004. That's quite a story, isn't it?

JG: It is.

JE: Tell us about him and how that happened.

JG: Well, that came about—he was a student at Colorado State University. He married my oldest daughter, Shawn Groendyke, and at that time he had been in agricultural economics and in veterinary medicine, decided didn't know if he wanted to continue to pursue that. He was thinking about dropping out, and I said, "Well, no matter what you do, you need to finish a four-year degree." And he did at Colorado State, and during that period of

time, to help him, I gave him a job or recommended that he take a job with us at our Denver terminal. And, you know, I think he went to fueling trucks, changing oil, and doing a little bit of everything, and he seemed to like that. And from that point forward he's progressed over 20 years, and he's now currently president and CEO of Groendyke Transport and does an excellent job.

JE: That is great to have a family member that took an interest and accomplished that.

JG: Yes, yes. And he has been the president, the chairman of the board of the National Tank Truck Carriers Association, been very active in YPO, been president or chairman of Leadership Oklahoma, so he's been very active.

JE: Your daughter picked a good one there.

JG: Yes, she did.

JE: And her name?

JG: Shawn.

JE: And then his name is Greg, right?

JG: Greg Hodgen, yeah.

JE: So in the year 2000, you had annual revenue of \$122 million. What led to that? I mean, that's just amazing.

JG: Well, you know, what year was that?

JE: 2000.

JG: In 2000—well, that was a pretty strong year then. And I think diversification and all has helped that. You look at—people say, "Gosh, don't you wish you had more trucks?" And I said, "No, probably wish I had half the trucks and twice the money." You know, we're in this business to make a living; we're not in it for a hobby. It's like now, because of the pandemic we're down probably 150 truck drivers to 200 from where we were two years ago. But we've restructured some things and did some things differently, and we're building back up and we're finding truck drivers. But it's been tough.

JE: Let's talk a little bit more about how the pandemic—drivers didn't want to get out and work and mix with people, was that it?

JG: You know, when that started, you know, we weren't directly involved in it, but, you know, fuel sales in California were off 70%. One of our competitors let a thousand employees go because he didn't qualify for that PPE federal money, you know, so you could keep people on and pay them and all. And we were kind of the same way. We didn't feel like we qualified for PPE, and you know, you can't keep 200 people on salary if you don't have jobs for them. And hindsight's always 20/20, but we didn't know how long that would last. And in Oklahoma it was probably 40 to 50% in the first stages of that. And those people got off, got on unemployment, and then they've drawn some supplement pay over a period of time, some of which I think is just starting to close out. But it's been hard, once they've been off for a while, to get them back to driving a truck.

JE: Oh yeah. But we've always heard about all the other businesses, and then we forget the businesses that are being affected, which would be trucking in a big way.

JG: Yes, sir.

JE: Absolutely. Right. You know, I'm gonna go back here. Your father was always very interested in low center of gravity, and he wanted a lower truck with a wider wheelbase.

JG: And that has come about today. You know, we're now running 102-inch width requirements on trucks and trailers, and before we were at about 96. So it's another 6–8 inches wider today, and he was very interested in center of gravity because, you know, around corners and curves and all you could roll that product. And with it sloshing back and forth in that trailer you can sure turn one over if you're not careful, and center of gravity is important. And he worked pretty hard with Butler Tank that was in Kansas City and V.I. Moser, which was a tank company in Wichita, Kansas, to get them to build a trailer that had a lower center of gravity in it. So he was very interested in that.

JE: You've had trucks that have turned over, have you?

JG: Yes, we have. Absolutely.

JE: Wow. And why have they?

JG: You know, maybe driving too fast on a curve or whatnot. But, you know, these new trucks today are just like your car. In some cases, you're not gonna run into someone—the truck will stop itself automatically because of the cameras and the safety features on it. We have a lot of trucks that have five cameras on them, one on the front, one on the back, two on each side looking back, and it's got automatic braking. If they see something in front of you, it'll automatically slow the truck down and whatnot. And the trucks today have a 12-speed automatic transmission in them—it's like your car. They drive beautifully.

JE: But we'll never have self-driving trucks, will we?

JG: You know, we will.

JE: Really?

JG: Yeah, I think so. You know, in Europe and in Australia and all they'll run five or six trucks together, with the front truck controlling all the speed and all the throttle. You know, in Australia they'll tie the trucks together, all pull off, then they'll turn off the four trucks behind the first truck, leave them in neutral, let them pull them. You know, they're going across 1,200–1,400 miles of pretty open, wide-open territory.

JE: But that's not happening yet here?

JG: No, it won't. But I think there's gonna be a lot of trucks. I think it'll be less in our industry because of the type of product—you gotta have someone for safety for the loading and unloading and the management of the hard-to-handle and hazardous materials we cover.

JE: Your focus in refined products matched your chemical business, and the emphasis shifted from larger major oil companies toward convenience stores and supermarket chains. That was a nice change for you?

JG: It was. Yeah, it was. You know, we haul for a number of major chains—as I said earlier, QuikTrip has been an excellent customer for us. Their home offices are in Tulsa. And we do some in Texas for HEB grocery stores. You know, Costco—a lot of those places sell gasoline.

JE: Do you have all the business you need?

JG: We do. You know, in all reality we probably do, and the only limiting factor today is the truck driver. If we had a hundred more truck drivers tomorrow that were qualified and trained, we'd have work for them.

JE: And they won't because as part of the pandemic, they got used to not working and they don't want to come back? It's kind of like the restaurant business.

JG: That's kind of the way—that's what it is. It's what it looks like. And I think one of the issues you had, sometimes they had a hard time—for lack of a better word—controlling their own destiny. You can get over to the loading rack and you sit there for four hours. Well, you know, if he's gonna sit there for four hours and he's on duty, he's gotta be paid by somebody. Some of the customers—"Oh, we're not gonna pay for that." And I said, "Well, all we do is haul the product. We don't own the product, we don't own the wash rack or the loading rack, so we've got to pay the driver, and you've got to participate in it. If you're not, we probably don't need your business because you gotta pay the driver." And I think the driver was looking for a more guaranteed or stable income. And we're seeing people today saying, "No matter what, we're gonna pay you \$1,000 per week or whatnot, so you know that's a base." Then based upon efficiency and productivity you can make maybe another 20% on top of that. But you always know you're gonna have a base of \$1,000 or \$1,250 a week.

Chapter 9 – 5:10

Satellite Communications

John Erling (JE): 2007, you marked the seventy-fifth anniversary. By that time you had 34 terminals, 1,050 tractors, 1,700 trailers, and annual revenue of \$200 million. Wow, what a story.

John Groendyke (JG): It's continued to grow.

JE: It has, and so we're now 2021, fourteen years later. So then tell me where we are today in terms of terminals, tractors, trailers, and revenue.

JG: We're about 41 terminal facilities. One of the factors you look at—we had some terminals with, you know, 7 or 8 trucks. You cannot afford 3 or 4

non-revenue-producing people to run that facility. So we're running some of those facilities off the satellite—what I call a satellite operation. They don't have a terminal manager. They'll have one person there that's maybe a driver-manager and one shop person that can run that terminal. And today, we used to have a dispatcher in each one of our terminals. Today we've put those together, and I think in the liquids gasoline side of the business we have two centralized dispatch points, one in Dallas-Fort Worth, and we dispatch all of our chemical out of one location in Enid, Oklahoma, for the United States because you can send stuff to the truck. You can give them all the information they need over the satellite communication connections and all, so basically we don't do that at the terminal anymore, and it makes for a better operation. You know, if the guy quits or something happens, you've got a vacancy there you gotta fill, and they develop a close relationship with the customer a lot, and it's worked better for us. It takes less people. We look at about—what we'd like to have is 72% driver employment and 28% non-drivers to support that. And right now we're at about 68% driver and 32% non-driver.

JE: Have you ever had a driver just quit? "I'm done, I'm not going anywhere, the rig is here and I'm gone."

JG: Some, you know, it's kind of funny how that comes about, you know. And some people that have been with us—we have a lot of million-mile drivers, two and three million-mile drivers. Our driver had the national driver of the year several years ago out of Wichita, 3 million miles, does a great job, been a great employee. But, you know, when they get to be a certain age, they said, you know, "We just don't—we're kind of to the point we don't feel as comfortable driving as we did." And we said, "You know, if you feel that way, you probably ought to retire," you know, if you get to where you don't feel comfortable because of traffic or whatever the reason. But average truck driver age for us is probably in the mid-50 years of age. So there's not a lot of really young folks being attracted, and hopefully they'll lower that age a little bit. We talked about earlier being 23 years old to qualify to become a truck driver. It would be nice if it would go down to 21.

JE: How can we be nicer to truck drivers—those of us who are driving?

JG: You know, I think everybody has worked pretty hard. You know, the customer out there, they need to treat the driver respectfully and professionally and, you know, provide them a place to—if they have to wait

a little bit—to have a cup of coffee or restroom facility or whatnot. Because, you know, you have drivers who say, "I don't want to work for that customer."

JE: Right, but I was thinking more when we're on the road, and our cars kind of—we hate the fact that these 18-wheelers are out there, and we probably get angry and all this and we're swerving. How can we be more helpful and nicer to them in that sense?

JG: You know, I think the important thing is that the driver—you know, we believe, and I do too, that our trucks are governed at 65 miles an hour. That's not only for safety; that's for fuel burn. If you get over 65 miles an hour, the wind and other factors—you know, they used to say for every mile over 65 you give up 0.1 mile per gallon on fuel. Well, you know, when you're buying 10, 15 million gallons of fuel a year, that adds up. And I think it's telling the drivers to drive defensively, drive carefully, and don't be driving up on people's rear bumper and honking the horn and things like that for them to get out of the way. And we've been very proud of our safety record and the quality of drivers that we've been able to hire.

JE: I really respect them. I will often, if I sense a driver wants to pull out in the left lane, then I just back off.

JG: I do, too. Just let him get out.

JE: Just let him do it. I'll just give him a little wave, and often they'll wave back at you because, you know, you helped him. Because he's probably been trying to get in that left lane for a long time.

JG: Absolutely.

Chapter 10 – 15:56

Car Collection

John Erling (JE): Well, you've provided a lot of leadership and your father did too. I don't know if you've been called on to speak about leadership. What does it take to be a good leader and what is your style?

John Groendyke (JG): You know, I'm pretty laid back and pretty easy going. You know, I tell people, "This is what I would like to see happen." That's kind of like telling, "Damn it, get out there and get it done," you know? But I think you just have to—hopefully they're partners in the business with you. They take pride in the job. You treat them with respect, expect them to do a good job, give them an opportunity to be successful.

JE: Right. All right, I know you have a hobby. And that is cars.

JG: Yes, sir.

JE: And you smiled immediately, right? And by the way, I should mention here throughout this interview, you get emotional about a lot of things, and that's nice to see—that it means so much to you that you are that way. But these cars, talk to us. You've got quite a collection. We want to talk about that. What was your first interest in wanting to collect cars?

JG: You know, when my dad passed away we had, I think, four Model Ts and a '29 Pontiac convertible that we'd used off and on and all. And I'd gone to Chatham, Ontario, Canada, which was a large truck manufacturing facility for Navistar International. And we got through doing a pilot review—when we'd order 25 or 50 trucks, you always want to go look at the truck that they're gonna be building, and they'll build a pilot model for you because invariably they'll move the fuel tank, they'll move the air tanks, they'll do something, because after we get the truck we have to put a PTO and a power takeoff to run a mechanical pump or a hydraulic pump and all, and you gotta go look at them. We got done early in Chatham, and they said, "Gosh, Mr. Groendyke, would you like to go over to R&M Classic Cars? They're just a couple blocks here if you like to look at old cars." Went over there, and Rob Myers met us over there. Rob was the owner and started that company. And they had about 30 or 40 cars in there. Ended up trading all of the Model Ts and the Pontiac for one 1934 Packard V12 rumble-seat coupe. That's been 25 years ago, and since that time Rob has become the world's largest seller of classic cars. He has England, Spain, France, Italy, and he has probably the largest sales volume of anybody anywhere. I've been a customer of his, and probably 150 cars later after 25 years—I was in Saint Louis yesterday looking at cars, and they've got an auction coming up next week in Hershey, Pennsylvania, that has a couple of cars I'm very interested in. 150 cars. I keep a collection of 25 to 30 cars, is kind of what I have. I've collected a little bit of everything on the American

side and foreign—Rolls Royce, French Delahayes, Delages—but now mainly American cars. I've had a large collection of V16 Cadillacs that were built from 1930 to 1940, had 20 of them, probably one of the largest collections of those cars anywhere. I downsized it to 10. Had all kinds of supercharged Mercedes and Dusenbergs. Duesenberg was built in Indianapolis—the Model J. Built 481 of them from 1929 to 1935. And I've enjoyed those cars. It's been a great hobby, and I tell people it's nice to have a hobby that has kind of paid for itself. Hadn't made any money particularly, but it hadn't lost a bunch. You know, I'm not one of these people that like to build one and redo it, spend three or four hundred thousand dollars, go sell it for a hundred, and start another one. So at least it's been a fun hobby that hasn't been costly.

JE: So you don't refurbish cars?

JG: We do. We're completely refurbishing a couple of cars right now, but historically we have bought pretty nice restored cars.

JE: What's one car you wish you had never sold?

JG: Oh, a 1934 Duesenberg Walker Le Grand disappearing-top convertible. They built three of them. That car is probably worth \$8 million today. Kind of wish I had it back. And I also had the Ethel Mars order—I had a supercharged formal lit town car limousine with the open part in front. Supercharged, beautiful body with Broman and Schwartz custom body on the car. I owned that car for less than a million dollars, and the last time it sold, it brought over \$4 million. So those are two I would like to have back. And you know, it's surprising—people say, "Well, what happened? Where did that car come from?" I said, "Yeah, I used to own that car." I just bought a 1935 supercharged Mercedes Cabriolet A Roadster that I'd owned for 12 years. Sold it—one of those deals where you doubled your money so I could take that money and do something else with it. It's kind of like horse racing: If you win the Kentucky Derby, you're probably better off not taking the horse back to the county fair and running him because the only thing it's gonna do is get outrun at some point in time. I've showed a car at Pebble Beach every year except one in the last 20 years, won my class, and was number two for Best of Show in 2005. So it's been a great hobby, and kind of like anything else, you meet a group of people or friends that you develop relationships with. It's been very enjoyable, and I still like to do that. I'm getting ready to go on a Duesenberg car club car tour at Asheville,

North Carolina—be about 20-25 cars, and we'll tour all over that area around Asheville for three or four days and load up and come home.

JE: Right. We both know Bill Lobeck from Tulsa. He's a car collector, and I know he's interacted with you and his friend Ronnie, and they've—

JG: Yes, he's got some great, great cars, had some great Bentleys. I haven't seen his collection in quite a while. I talk to Ronnie once in a while. Yeah, he's been a great asset to maintain those cars and everything and always had very nice stuff.

JE: OK, right now, what's your best car, your most valuable car that you have in your collection?

JG: The 1935 Mercedes supercharged roadster.

JE: And that's worth how much now? I'm buying, you're selling. What, are you trying to come up with a number? No—

JG: No, no. I know exactly—I don't know that I want to say.

JE: Oh, I see.

JG: It's 35 new deluxe Cadillac Suburbans with all the bells and whistles.

JE: Wow, yeah.

JG: It's a \$3 million-plus car.

JE: Isn't that something. But that's in time...

JG: But, you know—and one thing about collecting cars today—currently today, the V16 Cadillacs and the Packards are probably off 25 to 30% of what they were worth four or five years ago. The cars that have more worldwide appeal, maybe, Ferraris—I just bought a 1965 275 GTB Ferrari. Beautiful car. I think that car will continue to go up in value. And the Mercedes, I owned this car once at a third of what I paid for it the last time, but I do believe it has the possibility to go up significantly more. If you look at the Ferraris out there, people say, "What car would you like in a Ferrari?" and I said, "Well, you're crazy if you wouldn't want a late '50s or a 1960 Ferrari GTO." "Well, why is that?" And I said, "Well, they built 32 of them, and there hasn't been one of them sell for under \$30 million in the last three years."

JE: Wow.

JG: And that's the car I'd want, you know. But I purchased—the one I bought recently was nowhere in that kind of a range at all. It's the car that I really like. It's very drivable and very comfortable and all, so it's been fun.

JE: I'm sure there's an auction when—they're all happy to see you walk in, right?

JG: They are. You know, I go, but I've had a great relationship with R&M, done a great job. I'm not going, but the young man that works for me will go up there and look at—I'm looking at a Duesenberg and looking at a 1949 Cadillac Sedanette. That was really a beautiful-looking car in that era, and I'd like to have one of those.

JE: All right, so you'd like to have that, but is that—you're buying because it's an investment, you think, "If I hold on to that for three or four years, it's gonna increase in value, and then I'll sell it."

JG: No, I don't. I would hope that they kind of hold their money together, you know, and not go down in value. But I like the '49 Cadillac. That's not a really expensive car, but had a lot of neat features on it, very aerodynamic and all. I've had one. My oldest son and I had one, number 476, won our class at the Pikes Peak Hill Climb with that car, and won in the Pan American Road Race in Mexico from Guatemala to the United States border, 2000 miles. But that car was a 180-mile-an-hour car.

JE: Wow.

JE: It looked like a '49 Cadillac, but it was a hot rod. Beautiful design on the car and all. I just like the car real well. I'll probably get it home and put an air conditioner in it and fix it up a little bit, put a new interior in it, and I enjoy driving them.

JE: So what do you drive in your get-around car?

JG: Well, today I drove down here in a 2017 Bentley Continental GT Supersport. That's a car they built in 2017, built 710 of them. It's got 710 horsepower, twin-turbo. It's a car that's supposed to run zero to 60 in 3.2 seconds and run 100 under 10 seconds and has a top speed of just a tad over 200. I'm not driving it that way, but beautiful cars.

JE: That's what you drove here to the history center?

JG: Yes, yes, yes.

JE: So, do you have access to—"which car do I want to drive today?"

JG: You know, I have that car, and then I have a car that I bought off of Bob Howard, the Mercedes-Benz dealer. They built a car called the Maybach, and they quit building the car in 2012. I've got a 2006 that I've owned for 15 years, and it's a magnificent four-door car. My wife and I both drive it a little bit.

JE: Yeah. That first car you bought, do you still have it?

JG: No, I do not.

JE: You wish you had that one perhaps.

JG: Oh no, it was a nice step-car to do it and all. I left that car and have a—I've had a number of Packards, but I've got a 1932 Packard custom Dietrich. It had a custom body on it, and that makes a car worth about three to four times more than just a standard Packard in the same year and same kind of size. But very collectible. I have one of those.

JE: So then is there a car out there that you'd love to have, but the guy will not sell it? Do you have envy of another car?

JG: No. I sold a car here seven or eight years ago that was a Duesenberg, a disappearing-top Murphy-bodied car, and it was the prototype. It had some unusual beautiful features on it, and it was in an early 1930s movie with Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire. Had beautiful pictures of the car, and what was nice about it—they showed so much of the car in the picture that we could redo the interior of the car and the pleats in the seats just like it originally was. And that would be a one-off car. I sold that car, and I wish I had it back.

JE: Yeah. What about Hollywood? They always come up with their cars. Where do they get them? Do people buy cars particularly to hold them for Hollywood?

JG: They have quite a few of those cars, yes. You know, and I probably would—I would loan one if I was gonna do it. I'd want to send one of my employees with the car. There's just too much that can go wrong with them, you know. If people don't know how—you know, those older transmissions, if you put them in gear and tie them down and that car rocks any, you take a good chance of breaking the transmission. You know, you always put the transmission—I do, and most people do—put them in neutral, and then you'll set the brake. And then you'll put enough—you don't use chains on them because you don't wanna ding up the paint on the axles or anything. We use wheel straps that go around the tire, and you tie them down to the floor of the trailer.

JE: You've got quite a few trailers, don't you, hauling cars?

JG: No, no. You have two: have one large trailer, a 53-footer, and then I have one that I pull behind the heavy-duty one-ton Ford pickup. That's it.

JE: Has Hollywood come knocking on your door?

JG: No, have not, have not.

JE: You don't need it anyway.

JG: No, sir.

JE: So your family then—you talked about your wife's name...

JG: Virginia.

JE: And then your children?

JG: Have four children: Beverly Shawn, oldest daughter; Melanie Val, my second daughter; a son, John Hayden Groendyke; and then another son that's younger, Harold Boyd Groendyke.

JE: So are they interested in either cars or the trucking business?

JG: They are, they are—in different things. Some of them are interested, you know, in the real estate, oil and gas, and the farming side of the business a little bit. But the three older children all live in Enid, and my youngest son lives in Austin, Texas, where he graduated from law school at the University of Texas.

JE: How many grandchildren do you have now?

JG: I have 10.

JE: Ten of them, right.

JG: Yes, right.

JE: And they love to go and drive—ride in your cars?

JG: Some of them do. Some of them really like it. My wife says, "I like those old cars as long as they're not, you know, older than 2018." She kind of likes the newer stuff, which is fine.

JE: Well, what a life you're still living. And your present age is 77?

JG: Seventy-seven.

JE: Seventy-seven, so you've got a lot of living to do.

JG: I hope so.

JE: What kind of advice do you give to young people who are going to college, coming out in the world, wondering what they're going to do? What kind of advice do you give them?

JG: You know, it's nice to have a job that you enjoy and get self-satisfaction out of and all. I don't care what the job pays. Do something you like to do, and if you're good at it, you can find employment.

JE: You probably haven't had a job, because when you enjoy something, it's not a job.

JG: No, it's—I enjoy going to work.

JE: Yeah, that's great. Well, thank you for giving us your time and this very interesting story, topping it off with cars and all that. I envy that.

JG: I tell people that those should be all former company cars. Then the company could pay for their maintenance and upkeep, but that's not worked. No, those are 100% mine outside of the company and everything.

JE: I hear you. Yeah. All right, well thank you, John. This was fun.

JG: Well, thank you! I enjoyed it.

JE: You bet.

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