

Life wasn't always like this. Life wasn't always this challenging, wasn't always hard. I was a prosperous man, reached the pinnacle of success, working for General Motors down on Hamilton Avenue. I had been there for over twenty long and exhausting years. Put every last tear and drop of blood I had in my body working for them, pumping out *snazzy* cars to every corner of the country. I was your average Joe, lived with my wife Rosie, my 3 years old son Mike and of course myself, David. I had been in Flint all my life, never crossed the Michigan border. I had just graduated from high school when I picked up at GM. My Uncle Robert used to own a garage back on the east side and I'd come over on weekends. Through him is where I first developed my interest in cars, a passion I've held since. He hooked me up with GM through a couple of friends he knew. I had considered going back to school a couple of times, but I just didn't have the time and money but maybe one day I could send Mike to the Flint Institute of Technology. Heck, GM is giving out scholarships like no tomorrow. He'd be the envy of all his friends, and would easily get a higher position in the factory. Flint, Michigan was the place to be in the 1920's. We had workers from Canada rushing down and some *Okie's* in search of jobs outside of agriculture coming up North. I had a nice cream color house right on Wood Street, furnished, 3 bedrooms. The house was cheap and I had gotten a nice price since the seller was a friend of mine. He decided that the factory life wasn't right for him and that he was going to move. The house was always in tip-top shape, Rosie would clean it every morning and Mike would have it dirty once more by bedtime. I drove myself a black Ford Model A. I would heckle a bit by my co-workers, thought I was a twit for not buying GM *tin can*. But heck, it's good car in good shape and was at a good price. I'll buy what I want to buy. Life was swell and all, but that feeling of joy and success didn't last for long, when my life would be scarred forever. We boys down at the plant would get the newspaper twice a week. We'd read it from back to front, not miss an article, not miss a word; we never made much of it until October 1929. In large letters, extending across the page you couldn't miss it from a mile away: Stock Market Crashes. None of us made much of it first, life was a cycle every day, come to work, go home, and come again. Movies were popular and so were board games, and our favorite was the *Landlord's Game*. We had a radio, which was constantly running every day. Collecting Baseball cards was hot, and everybody had a couple *Lincolns* on the Yankees to win the World Series. While Herbert Hoover was elected as president in early 1929, soon we made sense of what the stock market crashing meant to us: slowly but surely the "extra" workers started getting laid off and our wages went down by 40%. Soon it

became a regular pattern everyday at 11:00 A.M to see who would be getting one of the pink slips. The workplace became a place of tension and people weren't getting along. The conditions got worse and worse and we all felt that we were being taken advantage of. The assembly line got quicker and quicker; our hands went so numb they looked like they were balloons. Everyone was stressed, dealing with having to go to work one day and not knowing if you'll be able to come back tomorrow. I never thought I would get one of the pink slips. I had been working longest amongst my peers. My best friend Mark and I got called in one day to the office. Mark was second in seniority to me, but he'd been having his medical bills were skyrocketing. He had even got a heart attack a few months back. Eventually he would've quit soon on his own. I'd been up to the office a few times over my years. It always was an honor, either for a promotion or to accept my employee of the month award. Every time it was just as exciting, except this time. There he was Alfred P. Sloan, the legend in flesh- President and CEO of General Motors. We took a seat adjacent to him. He broke the news to us "I don't know how to say this is any better way", we were fired! Mark suddenly gasped; I thought he was going to get another heart attack. He didn't, which was good news. I really hated having to go to the Hurley Center. I packed up my belongings, said goodbye to my fellow friends and co-workers. I took one great good look around the room, the assembly belt, the workers, the car parts, and of course the smell of oil. I stepped out of the manufacturing plant, never to come back again I thought. I hopped into my car, it was cloudy out. But nobody would be able to predict the storm to come. Jobs were hard to come by, more and more people were being laid off. Money became scarce as banks around every corner started to shut down. I started to drive home to break the news to my wife. The drive home that day was the worst cruise of my life. I drive down South Saginaw Street and turned onto First. Many storefronts that were once bustling with customers were up for sale while others just simply said "Closing Soon". I passed by Doyle School, where I went for elementary and middle school. Kids were pouring out in bunches. As I turned the corner I passed by A.A Riker Grocery, the best place in town for any fresh produce need. I drove pass Mc Farland Park; I would go there with the boys back in high school. I passed City Hall on Third St, I wondered who inside was working to fix up this city. Get it back to the city that once pumped out cars to every corner of the country. Flint had seen much success in recent years before his Depression. Due to the car plants the population had dramatically increased from 38,000 in 1910 to 156,000 in 1930. Not the city that laid abandoned and unwelcoming. No doubt my mind was

scared how I would now provide for my wife, my child, and I? Question after questions popped into my head, but there was no answer to any of them. I asked myself, pondering over what this meant. Over the next few months I got behind on my rent, and eventually had to move out. I sold my car, not even making a quarter of the amount I bought it for. For years we lived on the beat up side of town. I would go out every morning looking for work, coming back home every night empty handed. I was able to pick up a job as a newspaper deliverer. I was paid beyond minimum wage and had just enough to survive on. I made \$5 a week for 40 weeks. Less and less people were buying the newspaper and delivery men like me would take the pay cut. Flint was still just as depressing, but by delivering the newspaper for those few years I was able to learn so much about what was happening throughout Michigan, America and the world. There was the Chaco War between Bolivia and Paraguay in 1932 which resulted in 120,000 casualties; the articles about the great Amelia Earhart who was the first women to pilot a plane. While Los Angeles held the Olympics in 1932 and the empire State Building was constructed in 1931. Detroit turned out to be the true winners in 1935 when the Lions, Tigers, and Redwings all took home the championships in their respective sports. I was the first to know about anything happening in Flint and was just as excited when President Roosevelt made a speech in Flint during October 1936. Reading the daily newspaper distracted me from life's problems. Until the day came, I would still see some of my old co workers now and then. Just like me, they hadn't had any luck finding jobs either. We decided that enough was enough; something had to be done! The idea was a bit foreign at first. All over the country people had began to rebel against the government and against large corporations, but I never thought it would've spread to Flint. In the past I learned about famous people who had gone on strike and rebelled. Like Daniel Shay, he had locked himself in a courthouse until he was given pay from the U.S government. We contacted every worker, current or old and formed the United Automobile Worker Labor Union. The year was 1936; New Year's Eve. The depression had been ravaging America for years but cities like Flint Sit-Down Strike. We needed jobs that were safe, well paying, and did not have harsh conditions. We stormed the plant, broke all the windows and had guards at the doors to make only who we wanted would get in. We took over the plant physically while occupying all of its contents. We were well organized, splitting into squads, and electing our own "Mayor" who would make any important decisions on what to do. Among the others along my side were Charles I. Krause, a veteran of World War 2 and Dean Rockwell, a Michigan State Normal

College Grad who was an Olympic Greco-Roman wrestler. We had a supply of food donated by locals, while all of our wives would stay with us also, knitting blankets, clothing and other necessities we needed. By the next day our sit in strike had spread and we seized multiple other plants. Production of cars was greatly reduced. Nobody could stop us, we had the *bulge*. We turned the whole inside of the plant upside down, using assembly lines and car seats as mattresses so we could *doss* on and car hoods as tables. We had first aid stations set up in corners for those who got sick. The factories cafeteria was where most of the socializing took place and where we would eat lunch and dinner every day. Lunch and dinner usually consisted of some beans since it was so cheap. The *bulls* constantly tried to get us out, but we would always fight back against them. Them with all their heaters and rods, think they're all cool *wearing their iron*. What a *brodie* of an idea that was. They thought we would surrender, thinking we were scared of them with their *buzzers*. When they came we screamed amongst ourselves, "the *copper* are here" , "the copper are here" . They were even about to start *plugging* at us. We were hard *boiled* though, on January, 11, 1937 the *bulls* tried to penetrate through the plants walls. We thought quick and used the fire hoses against them while nailing them with car parts. Our wives would break holes in the windows and walls to give us some relief from the tear gas that intoxicated the air. But after about six hours though they retreated in *curve*, there force wasn't as strong as it was about ten years earlier as they had also laid off many workers. We all had a toast of *booze* as we mocked the *bulls* saying we won "Battle of Bulls Run". We all gathered around the radio that played important information for us every day. To this day we all say, God bless President Roosevelt for not getting the government involved, in a matter of hours all of us would've been left dead, even after being urged by his voice he never changed his mind set on what to do. Twenty-Seven people were injured on January 11th. Many of us protestors, or as the *coppers* called, "rebels". Over the next month, National Guardsmen set a perimeter around the plant, to stop any violence from erupting. Throughout it all, we were on strike for 44 long and enduring days. We would have a lot of free time on our hands. Some would take a guitar and play some music while others made balls out of rags and used old pails to play some basketball. Even had our own volunteer barber and boy was he busy. Soon people started to become suspicious of one another, and every few days a spy would be caught. When he did get caught though, it was never pretty. On February 11th, we were finally told that GM had recognized us Factory Workers. We marched out of the factory and went on a 2 mile long parade around Flint. The Union grew from

30,000 to 5000,000 in the next year, as we all had received our jobs back with better working conditions and higher pay. The economy started to recover around 1942 and I retired in 1944. Overall the Great Depression, left over one million families losing their farms; over 273,000 families being evicted from their homes by 1932 and through it all over two million people were left homeless all over the country. Flint Michigan never fully recovered, but the ripples of this strike were felt on every corner of the country. This strike was truly, “the strike heard around the world”.

Very good=Snazzy

Average guy=Joe

Migrant worker from Oklahoma=Okie

Fool or Idiot=Twit

Car=Tin Can

Landlords' Game=Modern Monopoly

Lincolns=Five dollar bill

Having the advantage=Bulge

Sleep=Doss

Police=Bulls & Coppers

Heaters, Rods=Guns

Wearing their iron=Carrying a gun

Brodie=A mistake

Buzzer=Police Badge

Plugging=Shooting

Hard Boiled=Tough

Curve=Disappointment

Booze=Whiskey