

THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: FRANCES BOVE
INTERVIEWER: DORIS CHINA
DATE: 20 APRIL 2004

DC: Can you tell us your full name?

FB: Okay. My name is Frances Bove. I live at 2 Marine View Plaza. I've lived in Hoboken all my life. My family dates back 100 years in this town, I love it, and I'm not moving.

DC: Who was the first member of your family to come here?

FB: His name was Thomas Servo, and he came, I understand, from New York City. There was an Italian section uptown -- not Mulberry Street, all the way uptown - - then he moved to Hoboken. He had a family -- nine

children -- and that was my grandfather. Then my father, and now us.

DC: Was your mother from Hoboken, also?

FB: My mother was not from Hoboken. My mother came from New York. She lived here until she died. But I do have a story. No one is around to verify this, but my grandmother always told us this. It's about Frank Sinatra. They always say that Frank Sinatra was born at 419 Monroe Street. He was not. He *lived* at 419 Monroe Street, but he was born at 421 Jackson Street, by a midwife.

DC: Ah. Yes. That's interesting.

FB: So my grandmother always said that's where he was born. Now she's no longer here, and my aunts are no longer here, and there's no one around to verify this.

DC: How about you? Where did you live, as a child?

FB: As a child I came from downtown Hoboken, and when Hoboken was a family you knew everyone. You knew everyone who married, you knew their in-laws, you knew everyone. Now it's not the same.

DC: Did you go to Hoboken schools?

FB: Yes, but I graduated from Demarest High School, not Hoboken High. They didn't have Hoboken High at that time.

DC: What do you remember as a child? What was life like for a child?

FB: Well, life as a child, in Hoboken, was very, very happy. They were different times. You never had to worry about drugs or anything, and you were safe. You never had to worry about a gang, or someone attacking you, or what goes on in the schools -- we never had that. The janitor was the policeman, shall we say, of the school. We never had policemen. The doors were never even locked. It was different times. They were happy times.

DC: You played on the street?

FB: We played on the street. No, you never went to the playground. We played on the street.

DC: And you knew your neighbors.

FB: Yes. You knew all your neighbors. To this day, you still know everybody. In fact, sometimes we reminisce who was related to whom, who married whom, and everything. There was only one high school, so, because there was one high school, anyone who was around your age you know, you knew throughout the whole city. So that made it very, very nice.

DC: What kind of work did your father do?

FB: My father worked for (now these were Depression times), he worked for Cooper-Jarrett. Practically everybody on our block worked for Cooper-Jarrett.

DC: I don't know what it is.

FB: Cooper-Jarrett was a big trucking company. Everyone worked there. This was during the Depression, so we were lucky to have a job.

DC: Actually, I know my parents always used to say if you had a job, the Depression wasn't bad.

FB: Yes.

DC: So it was a good time.

FB: Yes. A good time. I always jokingly say I did grow up in the ghetto; that was, I came from downtown Hoboken. But, my grandmother owned all the houses in the ghetto.

DC: That's not bad. And when did you start your business?

FB: I started my business about ten years ago. Yes. I worked in New York all my life. My company moved to Connecticut, and I did go with my company -- I moved to Connecticut. Not that I moved; I went with my company when it moved to Connecticut. I did it for several

years, then one day I just go up and said, "I can't do this anymore," all the traveling.

DC: Was it fashion that you were in?

FB: No, we were an advertising agency, based in New York. We were in the 230 Park Avenue building. Then my boss decided he wanted his office closer to his house, so we moved to Connecticut. Then I had to travel, and I said, "I can't do this anymore." So I quit.

DC: What caused you to go into a dress shop?

FB: One day I said, "I can't do this anymore," I quit, and a dress shop came up and I said, "I think I'd like to do that." I decided to do it, and I was very happy that I did do it. I'm retired now. Yes. I retired so I could watch my grandchildren. Because my daughter was having another baby, and I knew she needed me. I was of the age to retire, so I said, "All right. I'll retire, and that's it."

DC: Do your children live in Hoboken?

FB: No. My daughter lives in Secaucus. But she, again, is affiliated with Hoboken. She's head of Ob/Gyn at St. Mary's Hospital. So we're very close to St. Mary's Hospital.

DC: Is she a doctor?

FB: No, she's just head of Ob/Gyn.

DC: Do you have more children?

FB: No. I only had one daughter.

DC: That's nice. Did you marry in Hoboken?

FB: Yes. I married a boy who came from around the corner. I came from Jackson, and he came from Monroe.

DC: Very nice. Well, we're sitting here in Demarest School, on election day. For me, I always recall that when I come to vote you and your sister are sitting there. So how long have you been doing this?

FB: Oh, we've been doing this for, maybe, fifteen years. We've never missed an election --

DC: -- in all those years.

FB: -- in all those years.

DC: Great. Do you have anything of particular interest that you'd like to tell us?

FB: We usually reminisce about when we were growing up in Hoboken, there were ice-cream parlors. Now they don't even exist. When you went to school, you hung out, after school, in the ice-cream parlor. That was our recreation.

DC: That's nice.

FB: It was nice. That was it. There was no drinking or anything, or bars.

DC: But you had movie theatres in Hoboken.

FB: Yes. Yes.

DC: How many did they have?

FB: There was the Fabian Theatre and the U.S. Theatre. Then there was another theatre, that they called the Scratch House. I don't know why, I've never been in it. But they called it the Scratch House. That was the Rialto.

DC: Did you ever encounter Sinatra in your days here?

FB: Not in Hoboken. He was the next generation. But all my aunts and my uncles, they all grew up with him, and they knew him. They knew him, and they knew his mother.

DC: Did most of your family stay in Hoboken? Or did they scatter?

FB: No, they all moved away. We were the only ones who really stayed.

DC: Are you glad?

FB: Yes. Because all the ones -- the relatives, I should say -- who moved away and put their nose up to Hoboken, their children would love to live in Hoboken but they can't afford to.

DC: That's fun. How do you feel about it now, in relation to the way it used to be? How does it feel to you now, as a place to live now?

FB: All right. I feel that there are too many condos. We're going to be called condo-city, soon. But, when you walk along River Street, especially around Sinatra Park and Sinatra Drive, you feel like you're on Sutton Place, that's how beautiful it's become. So that is a big plus for Hoboken.

DC: Did you ever think we'd have a waterfront like this?

FB: No. No. It's really beautiful up there.

DC: Do you remember the waterfront when it was working?

FB: I remember when I first moved to Marine View, right across the street was the old piers. They cleaned that up, and I was happy to see that go.

DC: But as a child, do you ever remember going down to the waterfront?

FB: No.

DC: I guess people avoided it.

FB: No. No, never went to the waterfront.

DC: As children, I guess, you stayed --

FB: There's a story my father told me. Years ago, you went swimming in the Hudson, from Hoboken. He dove into the Hudson, and his hand got caught in a board, and he almost drowned. So he never went swimming in the Hudson anymore. We never went. I don't think they had swimming. But this is going back many, many years.

DC: How did you feel when Hoboken became -- when you said your relatives turned their nose up at it. Things like that. Did you feel that you had kind of a special place that was like a secret, and nobody else realized it?

FB: No. We loved Hoboken. It would be very, very hard to leave it and I can't. I just can't.

DC: I can understand that. Not being here as long, but you do get so attached to it.

FB: Yes. I love this town. The only thing I can say is, I love Frank Sinatra but Frank Sinatra singing *New York, New York*, he's not singing "Hoboken, Hoboken."

DC: I think people have tried to write a Hoboken song, and never succeeded.

FB: But there is a song that Hoboken people know, that has never been published.

DC: *Born in Hoboken.*

FB: No. No. *It Takes But a Moment to Fall in Love*, and old-timers from Hoboken all know that song and sing it. My uncle was one of them who always sang that song.

DC: Do you remember the lyrics?

FB: I know the lyrics, but I have a terrible voice, I would never sing it.

DC: Can you say them?

FB: It's beautiful lyrics, and it's very true. The lyrics go: "It takes but a moment to fall in love, but a lifetime to forget."

DC: Is it written down anywhere, this song?

FB: If I thought about it, I would probably remember -- yes, I know someone -- in fact, this week we were reminiscing, and she's related to all the Tursos, who sang that song. She would know all the words. My cousin always sang that song, but she passed away. It's a

beautiful song, never published, but all Hoboken people know it.

DC: That's so nice.

Nowadays, when your grandchildren come to Hoboken, do they enjoy it?

FB: Yes. Yes.

DC: Do they think it's a special place?

FB: Yes. Yes.

DC: Well, unless you have something else.

FB: No, that's it.

DC: Thank you so much.