

THE HOBOKEN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: JULIETTE GAVIN

INTERVIEWER: ANN GRAHAM

LOCATION: 1032 HUDSON, HOBOKEN, NJ

DATE: 7 FEBRUARY 2002

TAPE 1, SIDE 1

AG: Mrs. Gavin, can you tell me when you moved to Hoboken? And how long you've lived here.

JG: I moved to Hoboken in 1932.

AG: From where?

JG: From New York City.

AG: And why did you move here?

JB: I believe because rents were a little cheaper. It was the beginning of the Depression, and my mother, when she came from Switzerland, had landed in

Hoboken, and liked it. It was a nice, small town, very friendly.

AG: How old were you when you moved here?

JG: We moved here in 1932 when I was 12.

AG: And did your parents have employment here?

JG: My father was a chef, so he always had some little places he could work for. It was the beginning of the Depression, and the big hotels he had worked for weren't hiring, because people weren't eating out. So he really had to start doing other jobs. He didn't "fear," because there were a lot of saloons in Hoboken, and he could work at the free-lunch counter. If people came in and had two beers, they were welcome to a free lunch.

AG: If they got two beers, they could have a free lunch.

JG: Yes. They had to buy two. So they got the first one because they were thirsty, and the second one



to eat. So that's what he did, until he did find employment again, in New York City, in a "diner." But most of your big restaurants in hotels, people just didn't have the money to eat out.

AG: Are the saloons in which he worked still here? Or are they all closed, and changed to other bars or other shops?

JG: Most of them are closed now, and the ones that are open are where they have dining rooms to eat.

AG: Which ones are those?

JG: Well, one down on the corner of 11<sup>th</sup> Street, Maxwell's, they still have a back room, but at one time there was a restaurant there, very nice.

AG: Was it called Maxwell's at that time?

JG: I can't remember, it's been so long. No, it wasn't Maxwell's at that time. I think it started to be called that when the Maxwell House coffee came to Hoboken.

AG: Tell me a little bit about what Hoboken was like when you moved here.

JG: Oh, I thought it was like living in the country. It was beautiful. There was a large square, and they had a lot of mom-and-pop saloons, and we had a lot of lovely stores, too. You didn't have to travel to New York or go out of Hoboken, because all your stores were right here.

AG: What kind of industry and work was available here at that time?

A: Oh, there was quite a bit. Because it was like a little manufacturing town. There was Chase and Sanborn called Standard Brands, and they made coffee. Then they started Lipton's tea, and they moved that here because of the waterfront. Plus we had a little railroad that came up river road and ran long the waterfront--- so that was very interesting. I worked in the coffee place. I started there in '37, then they started tea, and I moved with the tea down to another floor. So there was only about six of us girls. Of course, the machinery came from Germany. We

had German mechanics that we didn't understand, and they didn't understand us, so they had to learn English. I worked there five years, until I was married.

Q: So you started working there at what age? How old were you?

A: I was seventeen. When I was a steady worker, that was 1937.

Q: And this was Standard Brands, where you worked.

A: Yes.

Q: And did that name change, or was it always Standard Brands?

A: No, it was always Standard Brands. Then they moved to New Orleans, to be nearer to the water, so it could be shipped right out. Because Hoboken was really, from Second Street to Fourth Street, when the big ships came in. They were beautiful coming down and docking in Hoboken.

Q: You worked at Standard Brands for six or seven years, until you got married?

A: Five years. I worked first at Lipton's for only six months. I was laid off because of my age. I began working at Standard Brands when I was 17.

Q: Five years. Tell me about the kinds of work you did at Standard Brands.

A: Well, mostly -- I could have worked in the office, but in the office the pay was less than what you could make "out," but you could work overtime in the factory. And being that my dad was a chef, it just -- the restaurant business was way down, and places were closing. Again, as I say, this was the Depression. So for me it was better to work in the factory, because there was always overtime. The forelady in charge would say, "Who can work overtime?" and my hand went up. So that was nice. It was "Chase & Sanborn," the coffee part of it, and then when the tea opened up, and they felt that the girls that didn't take time off -- because you didn't take time off, more

than, oh, maybe, two days a year -- you could get laid off when the a big layoff came along so I was never laid off.

Q: You couldn't take more than two days off a year?

A: Yes, because they needed the workers, and this was a commodity that had to be used. Coffee was dated. It came in a bag, and there were girls in a certain part of the section who dated the coffee by the week and if it wasn't sold by that date it had to be taken back. Then it would be re-roasted, and then there were restaurant diners that would ask, "I'd like some coffee," and the restaurant would say, "Well, we have our own special brand, it's called special brand coffee," and the coffee was good because it was re-roasted. Really wonderful. I worked there until tea started, and then when Tender Leaf Tea started in 1938, then I went down -- there were six girls that worked on the tea bag machines, so by the time I left there, there were about fifteen machines.

Q: Can you tell me exactly what you did with the coffee and the tea machines? Can you describe the machines? What were they for?

A: Well, the first machines, on coffee, the coffee came down in chutes. There were four girls -two girls on bag folders and 2 girls on chutes. It came down in buckets, like a little --

Q: -- funnel.

A: Yes, that was the word I was looking for. I was thinking of a funnel -- bring the bags, and you had to put your fingers in, you had to put your hands in, and put underneath the funnel, and then put it on the conveyor, down to four girls (because there were two girls operating the coffee), and when we put it out on the little conveyor, there were two girls on each side folding the bags, and putting them into, like, a little cup, and then it would go through a conveyor that folded it over and sealed it. Then at the end of this conveyor was a girl who would take the bag, sealed, out of it, push it down the chute, and then there were two fellows at the end of the chute and they would pack the 1 pound bags into big boxes and load them into trucks

Q: So all coffee was put into bags. There were no cans, at that time.

A: They were just starting the cans when I left. They had a big machine come in, and, oh, it was so noisy. It was not a can in itself, like you see other coffee. It was where there was actually cardboard being made, and the coffee would fall into this cardboard, then it would go through another kind of a machine, where the Chase & Sanborn label would be wrapped around it. Then it would also fold up the bag and everything. It put a lot of girls out of work. One of those things. Even the mechanics working there they said it was a shame because there were so many layoffs.

Q: What year was this? When the machines started replacing the workers?

A: Well, I left there when I became pregnant, and my son was born in '41, my oldest son, so I would say it was about '38. Because then tea started.

Q: Tell me about the tea machines, and the machinery for the teas.

A: They were unbelievable. You know, as long as I've been gone from there, I can visualize it, because they were only about as tall as I am -- maybe an inch or two taller, 5'7" -- and they were just -- everything was so interesting to watch, the way all the these big round pieces of filter paper fit on top of machines -- There was this enormous filter paper coming up -- it always reminded me, when you heard about cheese, Swiss cheese, in the big roll? We had to put that on the top. Then it came through a splicer. The paper was cut, and then two little things that kept going around, where, as it spun around the tea fell down, and sent through the chute. The tea came down in little cups. The paper went around and made the tea bag. Suction brought the paper over the cup of tea

Q: So the tea was already in a bag, and it was cut in the bag?

A: When the part of the machine -- you know how a wheel has spokes on it? Well, the wheel that was going around had these spokes, but it wasn't like regular spokes, it was where the tea came down. The tea was in a



cup and then as the bag folded around it, it came around to where the bags -- and the string was on the bag, attached to the string. Then the wheel came around for each step -- and this is where the operator had to watch so many parts. It was marvelous to watch, because a little thin "cross" would take it off the cup, and it would go through and you'd have these little sheets of paper like you see on the tea bags today. And the suction thing that picked it up, the wheel would turn, the tea "wheel" would be pushed in, it would go through "printers," and come out of the conveyor, and you packed it. There was a lot of competition between the day and night shifts for how many were made.

Q: That's the same as it looks today.

A: I don't think they could change it to anything better. It was so interesting. But, if you didn't watch it, sometimes the tea would fill up too much and you'd have a bag -- something would happen from where it came from, and it would be so full, and it would jam up because it wouldn't take it out. One machine could be down for hours, if you made a mistake like that. So they weren't

very happy about it, and when there was a layoff, they would be the first to be laid off.

Q: Where was this located, this factory?

A: In the Lipton building.

Q: Did Lipton come in and take over this building when Standard Brands left?

A: No, it was always called -- The sign is still up there, isn't it? Lipton's? But, believe me, there were so many places, because -- I worked for Lipton Tea for six months, it was an age thing -- then I went with Standard Brands about a week after I was laid off.\

Q: And why were you laid off from Lipton?

A: Because I wasn't seventeen. I was sixteen and a half. And when the six months -- No, I was sixteen when I started there, and I was sixteen and a half they told me they would lay me off because of insurance.

Q: They hired you knowing you were sixteen?

A: Well, they hired me as a part-time worker, and I guess I satisfied them with what I did, so I was kept for the whole six months. Then they had to lay me off. I was out of work for about a week, and then found a job with Standard Brands. And then I was there until 1941.

Q: Now was it unusual at that time for a young woman to be hired in these factories?

A: No, they hired mostly young people, for the simple reason that if it was a commodity that -- If they didn't get enough orders, say, and they would stock up -- Now I'm talking about tea. Coffee, that was a different thing. They would sometimes have cartons and cartons of tea -- and they would have to use these tall ladders to pack the cartons of tea, because tea doesn't go bad like that. Then, all of a sudden, there wouldn't be any tea, and that's when you really worked overtime.

Q: Because why -- ?

A: Well, when the sales would come in. The salesmen would go get good orders, and what they did would keep the tea. -- There were a lot of girls there that -- It

was like a family place. If they knew you were the only one working, and you weren't out sick one day or two days and if you were late, and those were marks against you -- There were a lot of girls there who were working as a second job. Their father worked there, or whatever, like that, so they would be laid off, because they knew that someone in the family was working. Then, again, it would be counted against you if -- not if you were sick (they could understand that), but if it was a situation where once a month you would take off, or every two months, or a long weekend -- because there would be times when orders came in that I remember working three and half months without a day off.

Q: No days. Not even Sunday?

A: Nope. We worked on Sundays, and we were delighted, it was double time.

Q: But what was the normal work week?

A: We worked from Monday through Saturday, but Saturday was like a five-hour day. So it wasn't bad.

Q: And what other industries were in Hoboken when you started working?

A: Well, there was the coconut factory, up there.

Q: Can you tell me where each of these were located?

A: All of them were in the same area.

Q: A coconut factory?

A: Yes. I think it's still there. I haven't walked much in that area lately, but there was the Hostess Cupcake, and the bread, where you could go in -- and if the bread was taken back, because it was also dated, they kind of put a "cut" in it so delis could come buy it, and I would say it was maybe seven cents a loaf. Don't forget, the whole loaf was much cheaper. The prices were according to the wages of again. When I went to work for Lipton's, it was \$12.00 a week.

Q: How much did you earn at Standard Brands?

A: You never asked how much you were getting paid. That was something -- you were just happy you were hired. When I got my first paycheck, I was dying to know what was in it. It was in a sealed little envelope, like you get from the bank. It was \$16.50, so I was -- I couldn't wait to get home and tell my Mom and Dad.

Q: Any other industries that were around, that you can remember?

A: Well, you had Standard Brands on maybe three floors, and in the same building was Bulova Watch, where they made the boxes for Bulova watches. And there was a lot that I never even found out about, because there would be different entrances. So there were a lot of different factories, and, of course, Lipton Tea, Standard Brands, and Bulova Watch.

Q: And they were all in the same building.

A: Yes, they hired a lot. And then not too far across the way was the coconut factory in a different building.

Q: And what did they do with the coconuts?

A: I imagine they shredded it. They shredded it and packed it, for people to use it for baking.

Q: I heard that there was a Tootsie Roll factory here in a different building.

A: Yes. It's still there, I think.

Q: Where is that?

A: I think it's on Willow Avenue, although there is that coat factory there now. I don't know if Tootsie is there. But there are a lot of people who get on the bus at a certain area, up there. The Tootsie Roll factory -- and then we also had the Cut-Rite Paper Waxpaper factory, but that was on the borderline, between Hoboken, toward Jersey City. Then we had Levelor and there was the "GE" factory.

Q: What was the first one you said?

A: Levelor. They made blinds.

Q: Oh, of course. Of course.

A: And there was a casket factory. That casket factory was -- you know where the viaduct is? That goes up to Jersey City, on 14<sup>th</sup> Street?

Q: Yes.

A: Well, I'm not sure of the street, because, believe it or not, living in Hoboken all these years, I never go past a certain 14<sup>th</sup> and Willow you know. I would say it was maybe at 14<sup>th</sup> Street. They made caskets. They also had a terrible fire there, and they made blinds from bamboo-- I guess you could check the time of it.

Q: What was the fire you mentioned?

A: That was in that factory.



Q: What happened?

A: It burned that factory down. Because all that stuff was very flammable.

Q: Was anyone killed?

A: Not in the fire, but we had a man that owned the Maxwell saloon down here, and anyway, he had a set of twins, and he went back to see it, the twins went with him. They were not babies, but they were, oh, around seven years of age. The little girl pulled away. She was holding onto the back pocket of his pants (you know how children will do that), and for some reason she pulled back a little, and a car came roaring down and hit her, and killed her.

Q: That's terrible.

A: Yes. So the tragedy was not only that the fire was so bad, but they lost a child.

Q: Eleventh and Clinton.

A: No, 11th and Washington. That's called the Maxwell saloon now.

Q: But the factory was on Clinton.

A: I believe it was, yes.

Q: Was it rebuilt?

A: That I don't think so, and I don't think Levelor is still there. I don't know anybody who works there, you know. I know when there was Levelor's, my sister-in-law worked there, -- but I didn't know anybody else. It's changed so. I really don't know anybody in Hoboken. The ones who were a little older than I, they have passed away those my age, and the younger ones got married and moved away, after World War II. They all seemed to get houses, with the exodus to the suburbs.

Q: Can you tell me about the housing when you moved here? Where did you live? What was the housing like, in general?

A: Well, the first place, when we moved to Hoboken, in 1932, we lived right on Washington Street, 1104.

Q: In an apartment?

A: Yes. And there was a deli under us called "Nuenburg, Neuenberg's Deli, and we were right over that. We liked every day of that except on Friday, when they made fish cakes. One store that never left was Schnacky's. That was there when we moved in '32. There were a lot of little stores.

Q: What kind of little stores?

A: Mom and Pop stores. There was one called "Beck's," and it was a family-run thing, you know. And then there was Schnacky's - that was family-run. I haven't been in there for ages, but I know the lady who was running it for a while. Then we had a lot of butchers. We didn't have to go out of our area. It was really very, very nice. Nobody said, "Oh, I have to go get a dress someplace." You could get everything in Hoboken.

Q: Was the apartment you lived in when you moved here -- was it the common type of housing, typical housing for most people who lived here?

A: It's the same as it is now. Well, this apartment where I live now is more or less a cut above-- but they were mostly cold-water flats.

Q: What does that mean, exactly?

A: No heat. Coal stoves. It was a nice stove. As I said, we lived over the deli and there was a big kitchen and coal stove, then a boiler, to make hot water. If you had the stove on, you had hot water. But if it was summertime, you'd put the gas underneath the water boiler and you'd have hot water. The dishes you put on top of the stove. It was cheaper than heating the whole boiler, except for a bath. It was different living.

Q: Did you remain in this apartment long?

A: I think we stayed there two or three years, then we moved downtown to Bloomfield Street, between Observer Highway and 1<sup>st</sup> St.

Q: And were there single-family homes there, or was this also --

A: Houses like these are all like that. As it was called then, cold-water flats. Then in '36 we moved to "First Street," right across the street from the back of City Hall. But that, too, was a cold-water flat.

Q: Was most of the housing apartments, in these flats? Were there any single-family homes here?

A: On Bloomfield Street they had a lot of homes, from First Street upward -- the same as they are now. Not what you would actually call just one family, but they were two-story homes, for two families.

Q: What about the brownstones along Hudson Street? Were they here at that time?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: And were they multiple-family homes?

A: I really don't know, because I didn't know many people up around this way. When we lived on Washington Street I was going to school, and then when we moved downtown, the first place we moved downtown was like I said between the Observer Highway and First and Bloomfield. They didn't call it First Street, they used to call it Ferry Street. I don't know why. We had a trestle down Observer Highway where you went to the trolley car, and it went up to Jersey City.

Q: And what were the reasons you would go to Jersey City?

A: If you worked there. A lot of people worked there. In fact, my husband and his family lived in that area, and they had to take that trolley car, and it took you right down as far -- you came down off the trestle, and you'd take it right down to where the ferries come in.

Q: And when did they take out the trolley?  
Do you remember?

A: No, because by that time we had moved up to the upper part of town because when I started working, and I said to mom, it is silly to live on First so we moved so I could walk to work and save a nickel.

Q: When you married, you quit working?

A: No, not until I was expecting my eldest son. He was born in '43 -- I always have to think if the last son was born in 53.

Q: Ten years younger.

A: Well, there was the other son George in between born in 48. When I knew I was expecting, because they didn't want people working because of the machines I could understand that, because it was dangerous. I had an issue on time because I taught so many girls. I was glad I didn't teach one girl. I was on another machine and the girl next to me didn't take her hand away from the machine after she slid the paper in. After you slid it in you were supposed to have your other hand away from it, and they had a safety button, that if anything did happen, you could push the red button, and stop the machine. There was an

opening to put this paper through this narrow, narrow thing, put it in and close it up. Then you start the machine, and you made sure the paper was even. If there was a problem, the safest thing for a new person would be to push the red button, so there were no chances of you hitting the lever. She decided she was going to do it this way, and her hand got caught in it. So then they did ask us, "Did the teacher tell you how to use the equipment?" And I said, "How long have I been teaching?" Because I was here from the time it started, and we always teach the girls to keep their hand on the red button, if anything happens, when your knee hits the lever. Then the girl said she did what she shouldn't have done. But it still made me feel bad. But on the whole, it was wonderful work. No union. Whenever the union started to get in, the girls and fellas alike would say, "We don't need a union here. They treat us good."

Q: What unions tried to get in?

A: The CIO, the AFL. All the while I worked there, until I left, they didn't have a chance.

Q: Did they take no easily, the unions?



A: No, they really tried hard.

Q: In what ways?

A: Well, trying to get you outside the plant, walking with you, telling you what they could do for you and stuff like that. Where we knew that when it was slow, they tried to keep you busy, doing other things. There were times when coffee was so slow that when the boss would come around, the foreman and the forelady would have us go in the bathroom -- "Clean the bathroom sinks, clean the mirrors, so you're not in the head count." So, like I said, I was never laid off, in all that time.

Q: Did it eventually unionize?

A: I think it is now. I think when all of us workers who worked right from the Depression time, who worked there, we wanted no part of the union. I think afterward it came in. But after I had my first son, Tom, the forelady came down to see me. I was selling books, door to door, when my son got a little older. I happened to meet her on the street, I was selling encyclopedias and

magazines and she came to the apartment, and she said, "You know, if you do this, why don't you come back to work?" I said, "I do this only when my Mom is home, for two or three hours. I wouldn't leave my son." Plus the fact my husband went into the service when my son was three months old, so I just didn't want to leave and my mom would sit but she had a bad back. It was just one of those things. It would have been more expensive, if I had had somebody take care of him. So I just stayed home.

Q: Would you describe most of the housing here at the time as housing for workers?

A: Oh, definitely.

Q: So this was a mainly working-class town, would you say?

A: Yes. Definitely. As I say, most people wanted to work in Hoboken, because they didn't want to spend the carfare. Even five cents on the bus meant a lot. I try to tell the kids how bad the Depression was; that you were so happy to have bread. It was an awful time. When I moved to Hoboken when I was 12, my father was a chef at the

Indianapolis Athletic Club in Manhattan, and then to be reduced to working in diners. I don't mean anything against the people who work in diners, but I'm talking about where he would make statues out of ice. You've seen that. I know there were times -- I was a real, what you would call, a Daddy's girl. My Mom would dress me so warm, and we would go and pick ice blocks. There were no refrigerators then. I'd watch my Dad chisel, with an ice pick, and make beautiful things in ice. But he came from France -- Alsace-Lorraine -- and he went two years to cooking school, that he had to pay for -- just like we pay for going to college. That was one of the things he learned. It was a nice living for us, because he made good wages. But when the Depression came, he was lucky to get work in a diner. I think nearly everybody in that time suffered very much, although I spoke with a friend in this house and she had no idea what the Depression was, because she was fortunate enough to have parents -- her father always had a job. That happened to a lot of different people. They didn't have to go through that.

Q: Where did the owners of these factories live? Did they live here, or outside Hoboken?

A: A lot of them lived outside of Hoboken.

Q: In the city or --

A: Not in New York City, no. They possibly had homes that their mother and father had. They lived at home. I guess, in a sense, when you think about it, even when my husband came home from the service, the houses and the brownstones on Bloomfield Street -- you could get a beautiful brownstone for \$18,000. But \$18,000 was a heck of a lot of money, and I was always worried about getting to the point where I didn't have any money.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about getting married? And when your husband went off to the war, I understand that Hoboken was quite an embarkation place, where people going --

A: Yes, it happened where the ferry slips were, and where the Coast Guard was there. In fact, when I still worked at Standard Brands I was looking for my card like an id card that had my fingerprints on it, just to go to the waterfront. And that was in 1939, when they did that you had to have the card.

Q: You were restricted to go?

A: You had to have a pass if you worked there, with your picture on it. The pictures were taken with small cameras and it was not very flattering, because it was just one of those little things they give you on a postcard, and you had to show that when you went over the railroad tracks, toward the factories because the ships came in there.

Q: Do you still have that card?

A: I have it, but I couldn't find it. I was looking for it.

Q: Maybe if you do find it we could come back and take a picture of it.

A: You know what it's like to have a uniform on they just on they just click the picture. This is a rogue's gallery, too.

Q: I understand. It would be great, historically. So only the people who worked in that area could get a card, to get a pass.

A: Yes. Because, as I say, some of those ships came in there and docked, before the war and it wasn't just when we got into the war in '41, it was done when the war was going on with different countries. When we got into it, Hoboken was like a sailor town. No girl who wanted to go out had to worry about meeting somebody, because they were living at the Y, a lot of the sailors, and, as I say, the sailor ships were docked there. So it was a very nice little town, all these sailors walking up and down.

Q: What happened to the men who went off to the war? Did women take more and more of the jobs? Could you describe that period to me?

A: Well, I'll tell you, I knew one person they called Rose and we called her Rosie the Riveter, you know, and she was working on ships there. She had never done that before. My cousin, Nell, she was in an RCA place where they made these -- Years ago the radios had tubes in

them. Did you ever see them? She worked in a place that made these things, for the airplanes. She wanted me to go to work there, with her. I had written to my husband and said, "You know, Cousin Nell wants me to go to work there," and he said, "Please don't take that job if someone offers it." My husband went in to the petty office, third class. He took a test that others didn't pass and made second class and then first class and he didn't want me to work. He'd always worked for the newspaper, delivery, you know, with his Dad. His Dad was blind-- so he kind of did the job. It was strictly a closed union, where father and son got the union card and somebody snitched. So he lost out on the job, and his father had to go on pension and it made a big difference as far as money coming in. My husband just started going anyplace to get a job, because we were married then, and he went to the electrical union and they told him that there may be jobs in the electrical union. So he did. He got a job at Electrical Engineers-- some other kind of name -- right up in Union City. He worked with a man -- I still remember his name, Andy Janice -- because he was an older man. He took a liking to Tom who was a good student and taught him so much about the big armatures. So when he was drafted, he had a couple friends who said, "We're going into the ship repair unit, but none of them

passed the test. It was part of the Navy instead of just going into the Army. So then he got a notice that he was going to be drafted. I was three months pregnant, and he had worked so much at this electrical place he got an extension on time because he was working on armatures and the man said you make the diagram because you took it apart and we can say "we don't know to put it back together again" So first he had an extension because of his dad, and second he had it because of his work on the armature. So he had a longer time before he went into the service. Then he took the test, he passed, and he went in as an "Electrician Third Class." That was when my son was three months old.

Q: I'm not sure what an "armature" is. And I also want to clarify the father/son issue, about the union. I'm not sure I understand that.

A: I don't think it's like that now, but it started when my father-in-law worked there, and that card, because they bought into the union -- that card could only be passed to the oldest son.

Q: What union was this?



A: The newspaper daily deliveries union. I believe it's somewhat the same way still; that before anyone else can buy into it, they want to know and Tom had an older brother, so the card should have gone to him but he wanted no part of it. So then Tom was able --this was when he came home from the service and his dad was still alive-- so he signed the card over to him.

Q: That's when he started in the newspaper business. And the armature?

A: The armature is what's on a ship. It is an electrical part that sends out signals, that makes it go, really. It's a very big thing, they have to run wires through it. This man knew that Tom had gotten a draft letter -- I don't remember what you call it ---an extension of time and he knew quite a number of fellows that worked in the shipyards and they had gotten their notice too that they were 1A. So when Tom couldn't work anymore, because he couldn't go into the union, he said, "Well, I'll go anyplace." Somebody said something about the electrical union so he went and signed up. The other fellows didn't want to work in the shops because bosses could watch you

and because they barred the union. They wanted to work on ships because they could gold brick.

Q: Gold brick?

A: Yes, that was used for people who didn't work much, if you could hide out for a little bit. It's really Army and Navy slang that started during the war, when somebody didn't do [what they were supposed to do], they were "gold bricking."

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about the shipbuilding at the docks here, when you came? Was it thriving at that time? And did it thrive more during the war?

A: Well, the ships were coming in, but then they started off to the New York piers because they were bigger (the big ones were mostly in NY) and we had the big ferry boats then. They were not like the ferry boats they have today. They're small, little things. During the war, they were huge. They would hold six to eight cars, depending on what trucks got on. Then they had both sides that people would sit on. They had an upper deck. They were

beautiful. There's a restaurant now that was an old ferry boat.

Q: Where is it?

A: I know we went there. We were going to have our fiftieth anniversary party there but I didn't want people to have to go up the gangplank to get into the ferry boat. But we went there to eat many times. So it's still there. The boys used to like to go there, because they took their children there. When they were kids they used to go up to where the captain was, because my husband knew all those people and they would say, "Okay, we are going out now and you can hold the wheel." They thought they were maneuvering the ferry boat. That's what they were like then.

Q: So the ferries then replaced the big ships that came in? And the ferries brought the goods from New York? Is that what happened?

A: No, the big ships, at the piers, they still came in. I'm trying to remember. Because I know the boys were born, and my Mom had a friend who came from

Switzerland and we went down to the pier. We went on the ship, and it was really something to go on one of those steamships, and the boys had great impressions of that. But on the whole -- I think it was when New York opened their pier that they stopped going there.

Q: How familiar are you with the -- I know there was a lot of discussion of corruption on the waterfront. There was a movie --

A: I didn't know much about it. I had no idea. In fact, I saw the movie, and one of the cops, Peter King had a small role. He had the Fourth St. station near the church school. When they filmed in St. Peter and Paul church, they used the bottom of it and I had no idea they were doing it, and our kids didn't know because the youngest one was going to school there. But Peter King said they were using the bottom of the church. He was a cop in Hoboken, but he knew a lot of the dockworkers there. He said there was a lot going on that he wanted no part of.

But it's funny. You didn't know it was happening. They didn't put things in the paper like they do today. Because I had an issue of the *Daily News* then that my son brought to me. It was one he'd gotten where

he worked, that he saw on the tables and it was meant to be thrown out, and the corruption in these papers! There was a recent article about the unions in the newspaper. If I'd known all that was going on in the *Daily News* when Tom worked there I would have been twice as worried.

Q: This was corruption about Hoboken?

A: No, just the paper union. All paper unions. It was unbelievable, and it's still going on. In this paper it says that the mob is really running the *Times*. Somehow, you wouldn't believe that. And I said to "Roddy, my youngest son, " "Can you get me another paper like that?" so I can send it to Tom Jr. and he said, "Mom, take care of that one," because there weren't that many of those articles around.

Q: And when was this printed?

A: Just recently. Just recently.

Q: What was the reaction in the town to them movie, here? Did people pay attention to it, or not?

A: They were upset about it. They didn't realize these things were going on and they were shocked.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit how the town changed after the war?

A: Well, I can tell you it was wonderful just before the war. There was, I believe, a fireman who had the knowledge of how make a loudspeaker system, and these loudspeakers on electrical poles like a bell-shaped object. It was fantastic, because if there were any planes going over that they weren't sure of, the "lights" would go off, you'd pull your shades down, turn the lights off. After the war it was great, because it was used to announce different things in town. All of a sudden you heard this noise, and for example there was a little child lost at City Hall and they sent out a child distress announcement. And at Christmas time they played Christmas music over it, and if the weather was bad, they came over the loudspeaker system about what schools were closed. That was a fantastic thing. That was really great. Later people started to steal the speakers off the poles.

Q: You were going to tell me about the stores here, and how they changed.

A: Yes. We had a Woolworths --

Q: This was in the '30s and '40s.

A: Yes. We had Woolworth's, we had Grants, and Kresge's, all on Washington Street. We didn't have to go out of Hoboken for anything. Then, as far as the shops went, we had -- I'm trying to think. Well, a baby store called "Cinderella"-- they had lovely stuff. Then we had a store called "Lewis," and "Lewis" was kind of an upgrade baby store. If you didn't see what you wanted, she would get it for you. She knew what it was that you wanted. There were three baby stores. And we had Mittman's, and Lewis's and Mittman's were the kinds of stores you could say, "I'd like something like in a 'camel' color," and they'd find that. At Lewis's she would actually look for you, for stuff that you would like. Mittman's was nice, but they just had what they had. Where Amanda's is now was Helen's dress store. They would not charge for alterations. But it was great walking down Washington Street, because the windows -- that was before we had the influx of -- I'm going to have

to say -- they're not like they are today, "the Puerto Ricans." You know. Being that my Mom was from Switzerland and my father from France, we never felt you should talk against other people, because everybody in America is different from way back. But it just was when a lot of stores went out of business. Things changed.

Q: When was this?

A: It was after the end of the 1950's when people started to buy cars and go to the malls.

Before people didn't have cars. It was a much more quiet place, and it was beautiful on the street, there. The whole street was luscious. Now I call it "the outhouse," out there.

There was another store called "The Three Gs," and it was a man's store, between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Street. That was a gorgeous men's store. It was small, but they had it as "The Three Gs," because that was the manufacturing company. They made suits. You went in and tried it on and they made alterations. Then there were other stores. I said you



didn't have to go out. There was a store called Freeman's, and Freeman's had lingerie. There's no place in Hoboken today you can even buy a bra. The Five-and-Tens used to have it. Now we have that one Five-and-Ten that's junk inside. There was also a store called Geismar men's department store between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> on Washington.

Q: I think there's a fancy lingerie store up on 12<sup>th</sup> and Washington, but it's very fancy.

A: Yes, it's very expensive. Freeman's, you could get housecoats in there, nightgowns, stockings -- everything. In the summer time, lovely bathing suits, and it was reasonable. Not like on 14<sup>th</sup> Street, but, yet, it was nice stuff. Of course, "Lewis's" had wonderful things, and the Geismar's was fantastic, because once you were a customer there -- and they started going into boys' stuff, Tommy's age, fourteen, fifteen. They tried the earlier line, like toddlers, but they didn't sell. Size 34, for a shorter man, you know. They would have sales on suits for half-price. So it was a good thing. They had a "club" that they had where you paid \$1.00 a week, but it was safe. It wasn't where you lost it. And they had a bottle similar to that, where numbers fit in the decanter and every Saturday

they would shake the bottle and we knew it was for real. With the money you had saved up, you could have two or three numbers in it. I usually had three, and that money could add up when they had a half-price sale. I could get the best shirts -- Arrows -- and Van Heusen. The boys all got their suits there, and, of course, my husband too. Because they got so that when they had that kind of a sale, and they knew you were a customer, you'd get a card earlier, and it would be like a wine and cheese thing and you'd have first pick at what you got. So it was nice. But it was, again, for their customers.

Then, when the atmosphere changed in Hoboken, and the people would come in and want the loud clothes -- checked pants and what have you -- they tried to please them. Then you'd go in and want a decent looking shirt, and they'd have all these wild colors and everything, pants with a pleat, with plaids in between. They would be like sailor pants, but it wasn't, because it was pleated. So the older customers went elsewhere to buy their clothes.

Q: Did the customers that they had initially begin moving out of town, for other reasons? Or those customers never came anymore?

A: No, a lot of them stayed. A lot of us stayed in Hoboken -- myself, and there were other people who stayed -- but you couldn't get the things you wanted. So you just didn't go anymore.

Q: Because there was more of a population of Hispanics that wanted --

A: Yes. Of course, now, the Hispanics, they don't dress that way. They have become quite -- blend right in with the people. I guess when they went looking for jobs, they weren't hiring them in the kind of clothes that they wore.

Q: In your opinion, why was there such an influx of Hispanics in Hoboken?

A: You know, I often wondered that. I can't figure it out, although there were always changes in Hoboken. There were changes when the Italian people came. One time there was mostly all Irish people. The Italian people in lower Hoboken, toward the hill, and when I was young, and would come up at different times, maybe a block

past Willow. I tell you, their houses were beautiful. They brought stuff from Italy, and on Bloomfield Street, around 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> Street, there were a lot of Germans who had private houses. When I went to work in the morning, these women were out there with a broom and a pail, and they were cleaning down their stoop, and their part of the sidewalk with Lysol water, you know. They were very, very clean. They saved money.

It just was a lovely town, and it's a lovely town now. I was out in California for twelve months, and I was amazed. Nobody walks. It's ridiculous. I missed walking on Washington Street, seeing people. You wake up in the morning, you hear the garage doors open, you see the two cars arrive. The husband takes the first and puts the other one outside. I said to "Tom," "It's beautiful and you have a beautiful home, but where are the people? Where are the kids? The kids go inside, they don't even walk to the subways."

Q: So when all these stores left, where did you go shopping? And how long did it take before Hoboken started to become --

A: Well, there are really no stores now on Washington Street. There's not one nice dress shop. And the store that's Amanda's now, the restaurant? That was a dress shop called "Roses." In fact, I bought the dress that I wore on my honeymoon in there. I loved to go in there. She was also a seamstress.

Q: What other stores did you --

A: Then there was a store downtown, at 6<sup>th</sup> and Washington then she moved to where Amanda's is called Helen's. Very nice things. There was one store (I can't remember the name of it) that always had such beautiful lingerie. That's all they had was lingerie, and bed jackets, and things like that. When the movie came out -- *Mrs. Miniver* -- with Greer Garson, and, I think, Walter Pidgeon (I'm not sure), but anyhow, my Mom got Mrs. Miniver's nightgown that she wore in this picture, for my sister-in-law, because she was so crazy about it. There were lovely things.

Q: So you don't feel that the stores have come back, since all the young professionals have moved here--

A: No, and it's a shame, they should.

Because I think people would be so happy if they could go in and get the things that we were fortunate enough to be able to do, without going to New York.

Q: It seems like so many of the younger people are focused on New York. They work in New York --

A: -- and they shop in there. I think that's why a lot of them closed. But I do know Geismar's has a store, still, in another town. They had the two stores, and they kept the other one open. But it was too far for us to go.

Q: It's interesting how you call the area down by the PATH area the "downtown" --

A: This was uptown. It was always known that way. I lived uptown and between 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> it was called "Doctors' row," because all the doctors were there. Brownstones. But that's true. I say I live "uptown," and they're "midtown."

Q: Were there differences in the types of stores from uptown and downtown?

A: No. There were no stores up around this area, except restaurants. We had a little Jewish store between 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Street. It didn't last long. Because everybody was used to going downtown to the stores and walk on Washington Street.

Q: What kind of store was this? The Jewish store?

A: Just a little store with not a lot of variety where you could go in and buy stockings, and gloves. They did have slips. And, of course, a lot of that when pants came in because slips weren't being sold. I was amazed when Freeman's went out of business. So it was a shame that all those nice stores went out, because not everybody has cars to go to malls.

Q: What did they do about going shopping, when they didn't have a car to go to malls?

A: Well, you just started sending for it. That's what I did. We did have a Sears up in Union City and then they went out of business, but we had Robert Halls in Jersey City. It's a shame.

TAPE 2, SIDE 2

A: When my son married and he and his wife lived in the apartment above, and she said, "It's so much fun. Do you know everybody in Hoboken?" People knew each other. I could walk down 14<sup>th</sup> Street down to 1<sup>st</sup> and I don't know anyone now.

Q: When did people start moving in, and start renovating, and the development of the town, after it declined for a while. How did you react to that? How did your friends react to that?

A: To the new people moving in? Oh, we thought it was great they were buying the people out, saying they would help them move, and a whole row of houses were bought out. They had declined and it took years and years for those houses to improve and now they are kept in such nice condition.



Q: Tell me about when the young professionals started moving in, and how that changed Hoboken, and about the new developments that you see near you.

A: Well, I think the new developments are fine.

Q: So you don't mind the large, high-rises?

A: No, I think they are nice.

Q: What about the Shipyard building? The Shipyard -- the Constitution. The tall, high-rise -- ?

A: Well, you know what I get a kick out of? There's a certain way you go out of the area, you have so many different streets. The cabbies go crazy because they don't know the streets, and it's not quite what it used to be. This is 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, and they've got all these different names up there now, where those high-rises are. But I think the piers are wonderful. When it was warm

weather I walked up there every day, walked the piers, and I thought it was great.

Q: Is there anything I haven't asked you that's important? We've talked a lot. It's been really wonderful. It really has been. I appreciate it so much.

A: Well, I'm happy if I could help in any way. I'm just wondering what I could say as far as it goes. There were changes

Q: I notice you have a lot of books about Frank Sinatra. Did you know him?

A: Just to meet him once, when he worked at the Paramount. His cousin worked with me, and we just went backstage for one second. He had the most beautiful blue eyes. It wasn't anything where I got a picture or anything. It was just one of those things that he kind of put up with, then we came back.

Q: What year was this?

A: Oh, I guess that would be, maybe, 1937.

Q: So he was singing --

A: -- at the Paramount.

Q: In New York?

A: Yes. I think so. It was just one of those quick things.

Q: Was it crowded?

A: Oh, the place was filled. We had so many wonderful places in New York, that you could go every week to a different theatre. They all had stage shows. We saw Tommy Dorsey, Dizzy Gillespie -- they were all separate "offices" then; the Glenn Miller band.

Q: Great. Okay. It's been wonderful. Thank you so much.

A: Well, it's been a pleasure. My name is Juliette.