

THE HOBOKEN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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DATE: 10 MARCH 2001

SIDE ONE

Q: Could you repeat your name, and the exact name of the pharmacy.

A: Yes. Marvin Stemple. This is Stemple Pharmacy at Seventh and Willow, and we've been here since 1929, when my father owned this business, moved in and bought the building during the Depression. He had previously worked for the pharmacy, which was across the street before that for about twenty years. He had worked there about ten.

Q: Your father's name was Louis?

A: Louis. Right.

Q: And he worked at the pharmacy across the street.

A: Correct.

Q: From what year to what year,  
approximately?

A: Probably from 1920, and this was bought  
in 1929.

Q: What was the name of the pharmacy across  
the street?

A: C. O. Dehne Pharmacy.

Q: So he must have been pretty young at that  
point?

A: I was born in '23, so I remember being in a  
carriage outside the backroom door, that was present at the  
time.

Q: Across the street.



A: Across the street, right. I was a couple years old. I guess I was six when I moved to 266 Seventh Street, which is this building. We bought the store in 1929, and moved here with the store, onto the first floor. The family did. That was my brother, my mother and my father.

Q: Where were you living before that?

A: I was living at 722 Garden Street. I was born at 624 Park Avenue, so there was a little circle around here that I have been associated with, until I moved to Maywood, New Jersey after I was married, which was in 1951. We moved there in 1956.

Q: When your father bought this store and opened up his own pharmacy, what was the store before he bought it?

A: The store was a Butler, which was the A&P of its time. The A&P -- Butler -- moved across the street, to where the former pharmacy was.

Q: So Butler moved into the store -- the pharmacy he worked?

A: That's right.

Q: And he moved here.

A: He moved here, we moved here, and bought the building. The other two floors (there were three floors all together] were rented out, and they were heated by coal. We had a coal bin on Willow Avenue, where the apartment people heated their apartments and coal stoves.

Q: So they went to the coal bin --

A: The coal bin was right outside the store. They would order the coal, it would be filled in, they put a lock on it, and there were three bins. But the store was heated by oil at that time, and the first floor, where we lived, was heated by oil. But the other two apartments, they couldn't afford oil at that time. They were paying \$50-60 a month, whatever it was at the time, and they heated it by coal for X number of years, until it went to gas. But the store had been

oil for many, many years until it was converted to gas, ten or twelve years ago.

Q: So your father opened this store during the Depression, or right before the crash?

A: In '29. What month I don't know. But it was in the middle of the Depression, right. He worked here alone, from 8:00 in the morning to 10:00 in the evening, six days a week and half a day on Sunday.

Q: How old were you at this time?

A: Six.

Q: Do you have memories of what the store was like? The customer base was like? How busy he was?

A: All right. It was strictly a neighborhood store -- which all of them were. At that time there were twenty-three pharmacy stores, pharmacy businesses in Hoboken. Twenty-three.

Q: That sounds like a high number.

A: Exceedingly high. But at that time, even though Hoboken only occupied three-quarters of its space -- and the other quarter was manufacturing -- it was a very, very "neighborhoodly" store, and the clientele was very closely knit; the families were closely knit. The major ethnic people were the Italians, the Irish and the Germans, and the kind of struggles -- not struggles -- but for many, many, many years. It was never a busy, busy store. There were two or three competitive stores that were much busier.

But he was satisfied with what he did. It kept him busy, and everything in those days was compounded.

Q: You talk about that.

A: Even I, at the beginning of my career, was compounding medications, for the first portion --  
[Interruption] Most of the compounding consisted of mixing (the simplest ones being cough medicines), with each physician having their own particular combination.

Q: Really. That's interesting.

A: That's right. Well, in other words, the doctors knew more about this than -- They're not aware of this now, because, basically, all the medicines are prepared by manufacturers, with the preparations in them. But if the doctor wanted a stronger amount of codeine, he would write that particular amount. Expectorants we added to the cough medicines, and it was usually pine tar, and the basic flavor would be syrup of cherry.

Q: You had all these things.

A: All these things were bought or made. Simple syrup, simple cherry, you made at that time. Then eventually the manufacturers prepared them.

Q: There's a lot of work, then --

A: Each prescription took much more time. The labels were all written out; you didn't use a typewriter for many years. Those were the simple medicines. The more difficult ones were the mixture of the ointments, where the base would either be cold cream or vaseline, and then you

have any number of preparations for whatever the condition was. That was put on a slab, mixed with a spatula, and then placed in an ointment jar. The other medications were mostly capsules, and in the capsules -- for fever, colds, aches or pains -- we'd mix up aspirin, and a couple of other drugs that were discontinued later on, because they were found to be noxious. But they were very effective at the time.

Q: You're talking about drugs that are now illegal?

A: Not illegal; taken off the market. For instance, phenacetin was an anti-pyretic; it was an analgesic, and something for fever. It was in many preparations, and it was in many preparations over the counter. One of them was Bromo-Seltzer. That's why it was so effective, but it affected the kidney and the liver, in large doses. Large doses. I had occasions, in different stores I worked in, where they would buy a large bottle of Bromo-Seltzer every day. They were not addicted -- because it was not addictive -- but it would relieve the condition they were using it for.

Q: These compounds you're talking about --  
This was going on even when you became a pharmacist.

A: Yes.

Q: And just to stay on the subject of the  
interesting prescriptions, I read that there was also heroin,  
opium and other kinds of narcotics that are now controlled as  
dangerous substances.

A: Heroin and cocaine were about the '30s,  
probably. I never filled a heroin or cocaine prescription, but  
my father did.

Q: How common was that?

A: Not common, but it was used.

Q: And what was it used for? Pain?

A: Pain. Right. Or cough, some of them. But  
they would be combined with other medicines for pain. In  
other words, instead of codeine -- which was sufficient -- they

would use the heroin or the cocaine. This was a Schedule II drug. Now we can't buy it, basically, or order it. There are five classes of drugs, and the Schedule II drug is the most controlled one. We have to order that through a special narcotic form, from the wholesaler.

Q: Okay. So as a child you would come to the drugstore. You were living upstairs.

A: Yes. My brother would work in the store, and as I grew up I worked in the store.

Q: Your brother was older?

A: My brother was older. He was six years older.

Q: And what's his name?

A: Arthur. He's passed away, twenty years ago. He worked in the store -- delivery boy, cleaning -- and I did the same thing, for many years, right through high school.



Q: What are some of your more vivid memories from those days, working for school and being here? The people who would come in --

A: Most pharmacists were a form of doctor, and I still did it when I became a pharmacist. I took specks out of your eye (which, of course, is illegal now, but I was very good at it).

Q: So people would come in --

A: They wouldn't go to their doctor, or couldn't afford a doctor. They would come in for cough medicines that were prepared; for different types of pain relievers that were on the market, which was Bayer aspirin, which was very big; and Anacin, which was very big. Bromo-Seltzer. Things like that.

Q: Some things they would get without a prescription. They would just come in.

A: Yes. I think more than anything else they would come in to check with my father how sick they were, because they couldn't afford the doctor, basically.

Q: Yes. A lot of immigrants who were here.

A: Yes. Many, many Italian immigrants, who worked down on the docks, on the waterfront. A great deal of them. A great deal of them were friends of mine, eventually, because I grew up with these guys. The major part of my childhood -- I'm Jewish, and most of the boys were Italian or German or Irish. I was the only Jewish boy in this group. But, of course, I went out with the ones I belonged to the synagogue with, which was Adas Emuno. That was on Garden Street between Seventh and Eighth, then. It was a Reformed synagogue.

Q: So there was a Jewish community here, as well.

A: Yes. That was the smaller one here, but there were two larger synagogues downtown on Hudson Street, that were Orthodox or Conservative. This was more Reform.

Q: And what was the name of it?

A: Adas Emuno. That's what I remember.

Q: That sounds Sephardic.

A: No --

Q: But the name -- But you hung out with the Italian kids, the German kids --

A: Right. I played ball with them. Right. My best friends were the Italian boys.

Q: And their fathers were working on the docks.

A: And in construction. A lot of them worked in construction, whether it was in Hoboken or New York. I had a very close friend whose whole family worked in construction, in New York or wherever it was. He had five brothers, and they all would work -- At some time of their life, in their early life,

a few of them never graduated high school. They quit at fifth or sixth grade to work, because they had to make a living for their family.

But my father, by the immigrants, was always referred to as "Doctor." All the pharmacists were. At Fourth and Adam was the Albini Pharmacy. That, I think, is the oldest one here. It's still Albini's Pharmacy. His son was (still is) a doctor, on Fourth Street. Ninth and Willow was either called Seligman's Pharmacy or Willow Pharmacy. Eli Seligman was my father's age, and they were competitors and friends and everything else. There was another store on Washington Street called Kidorf's Pharmacy, which my father was friendly with.

Q: Obviously way before the days of Rite Aid and -- before the chains.

A: There were no supermarket pharmacies. There was a Hoboken Pharmaceutical Association, with twenty-three pharmacists. They formed a type of communication where two stores opened on a Sunday, all day, until 6:00 or so, and they posted a card in the window (they had them made up for each store), saying which was open.

Q: So they would rotate?

A: One every thirteen weeks, approximately, or twelve weeks, they would be open. Most of them would be open at 9 a.m. That store would stay open until 6:00, 7:00 or 8:00. There was always someone, somewhere to get medication at the time.

Q: Obviously people were much more dependent on pharmacists then --

A: Oh, yes.

Q: -- for their health needs.

A: And the doctors made house calls then. At the time, when there was nothing available, the doctor would have some samples in his bag that he could carry over to the next day. But the stores were open six and a half days a week, anyway. But many a time my father's bell was rung at 2:00 in the morning --

Q: Really.

A: -- for some reason, whatsoever. I remember myself, I was quite affected by ear infections, and we would have to call this Doctor Phlugh, up on Hudson Street, who was an ear man, in the middle of the night. We'd go up there and he would puncture my ear. I remember that very well. That happened a number of times. I was "conducive" to middle ear infections.

So these doctors were available when it was your family doctor. If he couldn't make a house call he would say, "Run over --" Because they lived there. They all practically lived in the same house they practiced in.

Q: That's the way it was. Everything was in the community.

A: Oh, absolutely. And there were family doctors like there were family drugstores. I graduated high school in 1940 --

Q: What high school did you go to?

A: I went to Demarest, it was called. Demarest High School, at Fourth and Garden. I also attended #2 school, which was on Ninth and Garden. Then #1 school, which was on Fourth and Garden, which was a junior high school for boys. Number two school, which I had previously gone to, was co-ed, so to speak, and when I got to the fourth grade -- or fifth grade -- all the boys were shipped to #1 school (that was junior high school), until ninth grade, when we went to Demarest. There I met the girls I went to school with in the first, second, third and fourth grades. The strange thing is that that school used to advance a student up until the eighth-ninth grade) -- and skip a grade. When I got to high school they were a year ahead of me. Strange, right? Not all of them, but some of them.

I graduated in June of 1940. I was fifteen years old. I happened to start school at four. I didn't skip any grades. The next month I was sixteen. So by sixteen I was in college.

Q: That's amazing.

A: Yeah. I was just a baby then. I went to Rutgers College of Pharmacy in Newark.

Q: Does that exist anymore, as such?

A: Not in Newark. It's Rutgers. It's a university now, and they have the college out in New Brunswick.

Q: But there still is a pharmacy college?

A: Yes. The war was on, and they gave us a deferment to graduate. So we went -- my class, particularly -- went through four years in three (no summer vacation), right through. So I graduated college at nineteen, and the next month I was twenty. In three months I was in the service, from 1943, when I graduate, until '46. I had a degree, but I wasn't a registered pharmacist because you had to serve a year's apprenticeship.

Q: Where were you serving, by the way?

A: I was in a medical department, and went to Germany and France. Germany, France, and back to Germany. We were shipped to France when the war ended in Germany.



The war in Japan was still going on, and we were sitting in a camp there. That ended, so they shipped us back to Germany for another six months. I got out in '46, in June.

Q: I remember hearing that Hoboken was some kind of embarkation --

A: Port of embarkation. And Fort Dix.

Q: Did you actually leave from here?

A: No. I left from Fort Dix. Right. I think World War I was a port of embarkation.

Q: That's probably where "heaven, hell and Hoboken" comes from.

A: That and World War II. Right. Okay. Yes. That's a good point.

So we stayed in Fort Dix. It was the usual boot training. I was attached to an evacuation hospital, and trained in Louisiana. Then we were transferred back to Fort Dix, to go overseas. I was there about a week. Of course, I was close to

home so I went back and forth. Christmas of 1943 they called us back and put us on a boat and shipped us. We arrived in France on New Year's Eve, January 1, '44.

Q: So were you in battle at all?

A: We were at an evacuation hospital. It was the first line of medical attention after the medics pulled them off the field. The ambulance corps brought them to us, and they were pretty well shot up. We were in tents, and we did as much surgery as we could -- We held them a couple weeks, then shipped them back to a general hospital.

Q: And you were there because of your pharmaceutical --

A: Right. I was in the pharmacy there. Right. All my life in the service I was in the pharmacy. Then I was discharged in '46, and I was in the reserves -- which was a mistake.

Q: Well, when you came back your father still had --

A: Yes. He worked all that time by himself, a one-man pharmacy. Very few pharmacists had more than one. All these pharmacists worked long hours. They gradually cut down from staying open to 10:00 or 11:00 in the evening to 9:00, and instead of opening at 8:00 they opened at 9:00, as they got older, etc. Then I was recalled into service for the Korean campaign. They needed a pharmacist at Walter Reade Hospital, so I went there for a year. That's where I met my wife; in Washington, D.C. So it took two wars to meet her.

Q: You mean between World War II and the Korean --

A: Yes. I had to take my internship -- which I did at different pharmacies -- and then take the exam. In 1947 I became a registered pharmacist, the year after. Which made me go from a \$3.00 man -- Well, that's what they paid the interns.

Q: Three dollars a -- what?

A: An hour. I did all the pharmacy work, but I was under the governorship of at least one pharmacist, and I did it at a couple of stores. I didn't do it in Hoboken. I didn't do my technician work here. I don't think they would have liked that. I worked at another store, in Jersey City. Then we worked together here for a number of years; then he passed away in 1960, and I worked alone for many years. Then I had part-time work. It was getting busy. All the stores were getting busier after the war.

Q: After the war. And why was that?

A: People came back and had money. Right? The fellas in the service saved money -- discharge money. They were sent to school by the services. I wasn't, but the ones who did go to school, used the GI bill. Right.

Q: So people had more money and were spending it.

A: Yes. We had more physicians --

Q: I guess there must have been more drugs, too, on the market?

A: Yes. Then penicillin came out.

Q: What year was that? Or decade? I don't even know --

A: We were in Germany when it first came out. I think that must have been '44, that the army got it; or the services got it. The end of '44, or '45. That's when it came out, and it was allocated to the public in small amounts. I know when I got out of service, it would be in vials and you would make up solutions with it. Then became the tablet form. There was one form of penicillin called Penicillin G. That was the first one used. At that time, the dose was like 100,000 units, a day. Today's dose is 500,000 units, per dose, four times a day. Because you build up an immunity.

Q: Oh. Okay.

A: They kept getting better, with different combinations and stuff. Then other antibiotics followed.

Q: And in the '50s, how did Hoboken -- Was it changing in other ways? Was the area changing? The retail stores? The population?

A: Right. Well, I remember supermarkets being, even before that time -- because I used to go shopping for my Mom, when I was a child -- so I remember the A&P being around and things like that. I'm trying to think if there was any other one, but I just remember the A&P. Of course, there were a lot of local shops; butcher shops and fish stores.

Q: People would do that at the end of the day

--

A: That's where everybody bought. You had to be brainwashed to go to a supermarket. It just wasn't accepted. There was a live chicken store down the block, on Second Street and Willow, that had live chickens. You would pick out the chicken, and he would kill it for you. You would wait there and he'd take the feathers off and give it back to you.

Q: What was that called?

A: I don't know. I have no idea. I don't remember. He'd go into the back room, slit its throat, let it drip, put it in hot water and take off the feathers. And everybody bought the chickens that way, before it was packaged. It was years before my mother would accept the chickens in the supermarket.

And the pharmacy business, later in the '50s, really started to become much more drug-oriented. That's what really made it popular. The drugs were getting much more beneficial.

SIDE TWO

A: It's progressed, in the last few years-- That's why the age of the population has progressed. I mean, they are so tremendous, and this is only the top of the iceberg. What the hospitals and these clinics can do now is amazing. I just had an occasion the other day -- One of my customers was -- He had a quadruple bypass about six years ago (or maybe longer than that], and he went back to Hackensack Hospital. They didn't know whether to operate because of his weak heart, right? They had a special -- I think it's called a

"PET" scan now -- I'm not sure if that's it, but there's only two in the country, and Hackensack had it. They set him up, and the doctor wouldn't do anything until he got this reading, because he had all the other scans, all the other tests. They ran out of fluid in this "PET" scan, and they phoned up Virginia, and in two hours they flew it over there. Isn't that strange? He was waiting in the room, they finished the "PET" scan, and the "PET" scan proved to the doctor he could undergo the operation, and he was out in two weeks, and I saw him. Isn't that something?

So medicine has progressed past the pharmacy stage. Pharmacy now is more consultation; making sure that we don't make any mistakes. Because the medicines are so powerful they can counteract each other, and this is what we have to be wary of. Our memory, and our computer helps us with this.

Q: So when did you get a computer, by the way?

A: Well, we were forced to get computers, because third-party prescriptions were sent through the computer in a telephonic way, and if you didn't do it, you had



to do hard copy -- which we did at the beginning, which was a form we had to fill out, and mail in.

Q: Was this the '80s?

A: Yeah. And that was tedious.

Q: So when you came back, things were picking up and there were more drugs, in the '60s, did your client base change at all? Or were they still going to the local pharmacies?

A: Well, they were more family oriented. They had more children then. But that's not now. In this particular area they're not family oriented. The people who have moved in in the last ten or fifteen years don't have families. Or, if they do, within three or four years they move out.

Q: So that's something that started to change.

A: Oh, that was radical. Radical. We always had more children then, or treated more children. I remember

treating more children; growing up with them. I grew up with their parents, and here I was, treating their children.

Q: And that was going on until --

A: For years. Until the '80s -- '85 or something. Then when Hoboken gentrified itself, the yuppies moved in, and they became two or three in a \$1,000, two-room apartment, they lived here but they didn't shop that much here.

Q: So that obviously had an effect on it.

A: They did. Right. Had an effect on it, right. And they weren't that ill, but they were all health conscious.

Q: Right. So if you're eating a lot of granola, you don't have any need for Bromo-Seltzer. And as things got quieter --

A: No, not necessarily. No. It was just that the population -- What happened to our population, in other words -- the increase in new population -- I lost -- Let me put

it this way. Hobokenites disappeared. The enterprising men bought their houses and condoed them; gave them a great offer, and they moved out. And that's where we got the young couples coming in here.

Q: Right. And how were you affected by this? When did the chains start moving in? How did that affect you?

A: Oh, about fifteen years ago. I had occasions where -- Everyone had new customers, but I had customers who had never spoken to a pharmacist before. They would work in New York, drop their prescription off, pick it up from some clerk or whatever, and go home. But when they came in here -- or to any of the local ones, let me put it that way -- they spoke to a pharmacist; he would discuss the condition, and if they asked questions -- which they never did before -- That's one of the reasons, I guess, they would like to participate in a local pharmacy. But their insurance company won't let them. That's something you're not aware of. Some of them are on third-party, because they're all on prescription plans. I do not take all prescription plans, because they will eventually dry up the neighborhood store. Because there's no money in prescriptions. There's money in the front of the store

now, because they take a major discount from our cost, to fill a prescription. Cash customers are a rarity. I'm sorry for them, because if you fall in the cracks -- Jersey is lucky that they have the PAAD plan, for \$5.00, for the seniors. It's wonderful. Wonderful for them. The only thing that basically keeps us alive is that we deliver and pick up, and we're there. We're still there. I have a great many older people here --

Q: -- who have been coming here for many years.

A: -- for many years. Right.

Q: Is that most of your client base now?

A: Yes. Right. And I have people who have moved away who still come back -- Union City, Jersey City. Things like that. This happens to every store. You build up friendships and things like that. But it's much more difficult to make a living. I don't know how many of the twenty-three stores -- with attrition and things, they've passed away and things like that -- but they were driven out of business because of third-party, a number of them.

Q: More so than CVS, or the fact that --

A: Some plans, it didn't pay for me to join up, because I would lose money, actually. And some stores do lose money. Because if you make \$3.00 and it costs you \$5.00, with the computer and everything else, you just lose money on a prescription. So CVS and Rite Aid, they take all plans, and some of the other stores take most of them. But they just cannot exist -- There was a store out in Ridgewood. It was a big store, and it had a surgical supply. They stopped the pharmacy part, because they lost money on it, and they just kept the surgical supply. Big store. Did well, and still couldn't do it. I had three pharmacists -- three clerks -- that worked here as delivery boys and everything. Three of them were pharmacists. Each one had a store. No more. No more. They had to sell out to Rite Aid. Not from Hoboken, now, but Cliffside Park, Hillsdale, North Bergen. They work for Rite Aid, CVS, Pathmark. They were younger so they could do it, but I couldn't -- It was very difficult for one gentleman, who's a little older, to adapt. Because these stores really wear you out. You don't get enough help. You're doing 100-200 prescriptions a day by yourself. I had an occasion where one of the people

who worked for me part-time, a young, virile, knowledgeable, healthy person, went to another store. They offered her a fantastic salary. She was bilingual. She lasted there a year. That's terrible. A terrible situation.

Q: You have somebody who's been here for many years, still -- Louis, or -- ?

A: Louis is, yeah. He's going to pharmacy school, maybe, this year. He's been taking courses part-time, at Fairleigh Dickinson and Hudson, getting different courses, which he'll get credit for as he goes to pharmacy school. Which should be this September. I hope.

Q: One thing I wanted to ask you, is, are there any particular customers you have a vivid memory of? Like, I know there was this lady wrestler -- this famous lady wrestler. Do you know about her?

A: No, no.

Q: I can't remember her name right now, but somebody else said she used to come into their store. I was

just wondering if anybody popped up like that, that you remember? Any kind of Hoboken characters who used to work around here, or come in here.

A: Well, I had transvestites.

Q: Really. What year was this?

A: Now. Now. Very interesting person. Very interesting person. I had one that -- She was a male. I knew her mother. They lived around the corner. She was the second person I think who changed from male to completely female. Completely.

Q: And the first one was the tennis star.

A: Oh, yes. Yes. I can't think of her name.

Q: Oh, yes. [Christine] Jorgensen. It'll come to us. [Renee Richards]. This was the second person you knew of?

A: That I knew of, who went through the complete change.

Q: How long ago was that?

A: Oh, fifteen-twenty years ago. She passed away maybe five, six, seven years ago. A very nice person. A very good business person. Had some property in Hoboken.

Q: And you own this building, right?

A: I still own the building. Yes. I still own the building.

Q: So that was probably the best move your father made, right?

A: That was the best move at the time. My worst move was not buying property in Hoboken. At the time I was brought up here, in the 1940s and '50s, before I got married -- and even after I got married I was still here four or five years. I moved away in '56. I was not that enterprising.



That was where the money was, because friends of mine -- many of my friends were.

Q: Did you have children, by the way?

A: I have three children.

Q: But none of them have gotten --

A: No. The two boys came down and worked here a summer. That was the end of that. They're out on the West Coast. And I have a retarded daughter. She's in Jamesburg, in a group home. She was born retarded. She's forty-one. In fact, I'm visiting her tomorrow. We see her every month. The boys live on the West Coast, and we don't see them enough.

Q: Now, you're Jewish. Did your parents emigrate here, or did their parents?

A: No. I'm second generation.

Q: Could you just talk a little bit about your family history, and how they ended up in Hoboken?

A: That I don't know. I remember that they came from Brooklyn, and my mother came from Islip. But they were born here. My father was Romanian/Austrian and my mother similar -- Hungarian. I'm second generation. My grandfather, who lived with me -- us -- maybe until I was five years old -- He was a Russian Jew, and I remember one of my grandmothers lived in Brooklyn, when I was five, six, seven, eight.

Q: But you don't know what brought them to Hoboken.

A: No. My parents? Not really. He became registered -- He went to the Brooklyn College of Pharmacy, then moved to Park Avenue, where my brother and I were born, and worked in this pharmacy here, I guess forever. Why, when, I don't know.

Q: What hospital were you born in? Or were you born at home?

A: I was born at home.

Q: At Park Avenue.

A: Right. I was born at home. So was my brother.

Q: The doctor came to the house.

A: Right. My children were born at Christ's Hospital, two of them, and one of them was born in Hackensack.

Q: Is there anything else you remember about the Jewish community? Obviously, it must have been bigger than it is now.

A: Yes. There was a big orthodox community. A lot of the merchants downtown, on First Street, all had stores, and they were Jewish. And Washington Street, also. But I was working so long, I didn't become a part of any community, basically. In other words, my father was here

sixty-seventy hours a week. Our biggest thing was on Sunday afternoon to go to a restaurant, on Washington Street.

Schwartz's was the name of that place. Schwartz's.

Q: Washington and what?

A: Second and Third and Washington, I think it was.

Q: And what was that?

A: Just a restaurant?

Q: Like a diner type thing?

A: No, a restaurant-restaurant. Not a diner. Then we would go to the Fabian. That was the movie on --

Q: I heard about that.

A: You remember that one? That's where CVS is.

Q: Right. There was a movie theatre there, and they knocked it down.

A: Right. And the U.S. Theatre was where the Public Service is, on Washington Street, between Seventh and Sixth. And there was one on First, between Bloomfield and Washington, and one on First and Second and Washington, called the Rialto, and the Palace. That was it. Jersey City had the bigger theatres, which was Loew's --

Q: Which is still there, apparently.

A: I think so. The Stanley went out. That was another big one. And the Grand, I think, which was around the bend, on the Boulevard.

Q: How would you get to Jersey City?

A: My father didn't drive. We went by trolley. There was a trolley you picked up where the PATH station is; a trestle that ran up along the edge, and left you off at Journal Square.

Q: Oh, I didn't realize that. I wish that was still there.

A: The trolley. And we had a trolley here. Oh, yeah. There was a trolley on Clinton and Willow, and then buses. But trolleys, with the wire, we used to hang onto the back of the trolley and have a ride.

Q: Go all over town.

A: Well, no. Just kidding around. We weren't permitted to do that. You'd pull the wire off, so it couldn't go any further. That's where they got the electricity from.

Q: Oh. They were just doing that, in youthful shenanigans.

A: That's right. Youthful shenanigans. That's right. I think my Dad had a car for about a year, and I think I was the last boy on the block to have a bicycle, a little tricycle. I think my father was one of the last people to have a TV. They were poor people. Poor people.

Q: So you went to business, and still --

A: Oh, very difficult. After the war, then, he made a decent living, but never a lot of money. Never a lot of money. You have to be in a very progressive store to make a decent living. Otherwise, you work hard. Right now I work a lot because my pharmacist, that I had here, who was eighty years old, passed away last November. He went to school with me; he was a year ahead of me at Rutgers, so I've known him for fifty years. And he would give me two days a week. He loved to work. He shouldn't have been working. He was not well, but he just loved to work.

Q: So how long was he here?

A: Three or four years. Before that I had different ones.

Q: So you always had a pharmacist --

A: There was always a pharmacist, who became a pharmacist and worked here, or different ones --

Never full time. I couldn't afford a full-time pharmacist.

Q: What was his name? The person who died?

A: Hugo Palmitessa. He lived in Cliffside Park, and he had a store in Cliffside Park. So he retired from there, and worked in different stores a couple days a week, here and there.

Q: In terms of business now, it's still pretty steady?

A: It's ver quiet for me right now. I'm waning, because of the situation with the third-party. I'm losing customers because I don't take their particular plan.

Q: I should find out if you take my plan. I could bring you stuff.

A: There's no money in plans, basically. But I'm here, because it keeps me busy. And as long as my health, which is pretty god -- I mean, I'm arthritic and have sciatica and things like that --



Q: Are you seventy-five now?

A: -- seven.

Q: Seventy-seven. Okay.

A: I would last a year or two, maybe. Perhaps. I'm waiting, basically. I was waiting for Louis to become a pharmacist a long time ago, but he never had the time to go to school full time and stuff like that. Maybe he'll do it this time.

Q: Then he would take over --

A: Well, I don't think I'll be here that long. That's another four years -- three years, or two years.

Q: So what do you think might happen?

A: I'll retire.

Q: Any thoughts about what this store might become? When you retire?

A: No one will buy this drugstore. No one buys neighborhood drugstores. I'll sell my prescriptions to some store; a local one, or CVS. They usually buy you out, and the prescriptions go to these particular stores, and you can get your prescription filled there. Then the patient eventually picks their own pharmacy.

Q: And what do you think would happen to this space?

A: I'd rent it out.

Q: To, just, who knows?

A: To whatever. That's right.

Q: By the way, the store itself -- the look of the front, the facade, the setup --

A: The facade has changed.

Q: Okay. That's what I was wondering.

A: The ceiling and the side cases are from 1929, and the metal ceiling is from '29. Everything else has been revamped.

Q: When was the front redone?

A: Nineteen-seventy-six. These were all wooden cases. These were all wooden doors, stuff like that.

Q: The cases in front are from when your father came.

A: From '29. Yep.

Q: Well, is there anything else? I've probably asked you almost everything I can think of --

A: I really enjoyed my camaraderie in this place here. I developed a lot of friends, close. They were still customers, believe me. Just the other day I had one from Bayonne, whom I haven't seen in ten years. But she calls me up for advice, here and there (maybe twenty years, I'm not

sure), and always sends me a card for the holidays, for my birthday, for Christmas, and everything else. And she always writes such a nice message on all of these. That's the part -- I had someone call me the other day saying, "You saved my life," because of whatever I did for her. A young person, basically. She couldn't get to the doctor. So this is what makes it go for me.

Q: That's something you don't see in chains.

A: Never. Never get that familiar with them.

Q: I never do.

A: No, you cannot. They don't have the time. They don't have the time.

Q: Well, thank you so much. Right now I'm not thinking of anything else. Maybe later I will.

A: All right. You can just write it down. As you see, we hardly got interrupted on a Saturday. So it's very quiet here, for me. And, oh, Saturdays during the summer I

close. I've done that for five or six years. My customers have gotten used to it. They say, "Good for you."

Q: So it went from your father being here, a zillion hours a week to --

A: I have customers who remember my Dad. My mother and dad used to sit outside the store, when it was quiet. There were times when there was nothing to do. Up and down people would, "Hello, Doc -- "

Q: And they'd just sit outside, and people would be walking around.

A: Absolutely. If someone came in, he would come in.

Q: I'm interested in your mother. Did she work here all the time?

A: No, she was a homemaker. She was a homemaker.

Q: All right. Well, thank you very much.