

THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: DOMENICK AMATO

INTERVIEWERS: HOLLY METZ & ROBERT FOSTER

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TAPE 1, SIDE 1

RF: You can start anytime you want.

DA: Okay. Domenick Amato; 167 Eighth
Street is my address. How old am I? Fifty-nine years old,
as of two weeks ago.

HM: Ah! Happy birthday.

DA: Thank you. September 9th, 1948.

HM: Were you born in Hoboken?

DA: No, I was not.

HM: Where were you born?

DA: Italy.

HM: Cool. Where in Italy?

DA: I was born in Salerno. It's a small town called Monte San Giacomo, in the hills. There's a club. There are quite a few. There are two contingencies in Hoboken. One is San Giacomo, and Molfetese. That's been the contingencies since the '50s and '60s, to the present day. Because you have the two feasts. You have St. Ann's Feast, which is Monte San Giacomo [?], and then you have the Molfetese Feast, which is the Madonna di Martiri, on Labor Day or whatever --

RF: The weekend.

DA: The weekend after that -- September 9th. But those are the basic groups in the city of Hoboken. That's historically been the case.

HM: So when did you come to Hoboken?

DA: It was at the end of January, 1958.
That's when.

HM: So you were ten years old.

DA: Nine years old. Yes.

HM: And did you speak English?

DA: No. I learned within three or four months. Yes. And I started to work on a fruit truck, probably in the summer, in '58.

HM: Did you start working with Bobby? Who did you start working with?

DA: No, no. Bobby had nothing to do with the business. It was Mike Ferrante. That's his father. He had been in the business probably since the Depression. He started with a cart and wagon. He transformed. He had a truck. A friend of the family introduced me, "brought this kid over to Mike." The man had a heart of gold, without question. I worked for him for ten years, and

those were the best ten years of my life, being associated with him.

HM: Why did they bring you there to work?

DA: I was ten years old. I had just finished school, so I had to do something. So this lady who knew him -- her name was Michelina La Sagenda. She was a good friend of my mother's. It's not a last name.

HM: It means something?

DA: It means "a sergeant." But that's the Italian culture. Even in Hoboken, they have a name -- they don't say Domenick Amato or whatever. Everybody has their own call card. Okay?

HM: What's your call card?

DA: It's Italian!

HM: Tell me.

DA: I'll ask my father what it was.

Giakendallata. That's in Italian. Giakendallata.

HM: So what does that mean? Is it
repeatable?

DA: I don't even know. It sounded good.

RF: Ha, ha. Like a little tick.

DA: I don't know. [Laughing] Let me think
about that.

HM: Okay. I have a question mark next to
that.

RF: Who calls you that now?

DA: That was my father.

RF: Your father called you that. But it's
an affectionate term.

DA: Yes, yes. They all have names for each other.

HM: But you don't have one now?

DA: Not really. I'm called Domenick.

HM: Not Nicky?

RF: Formally.

DA: No, I've always used Domenick -- as soon as I came over to this country.

HM: Okay. So Michelina is a friend of the family --

DA: -- and she tells Mike, "I have this kid. Would you like to meet him? He's ten years old." So she brought me to him. And she said, "All right."

HM: Now was he a neighbor? Where did he live, and where did you live?

DA: We lived on Second and Clinton at the time, 227 Clinton Street, when we came over here.

HM: And also when you were meeting Mike. You were still living there.

DA: Yes. We lived there for a year or two.

HM: And that's mother, father, and -- any brothers and sisters?

DA: Yes. I've got five sisters.

HM: And no brothers.

DA: No brothers.

HM: Where are you in the scheme of things, with the sisters?

DA: I'm number two. There was one that was born over here -- Anna. That's the baby.

HM: Okay. So now you have to name the
sisters.

DA: Antoinette, Rose, Marie, Francesca,
and Anna.

HM: And you told me them in order.

DA: Yes.

HM: So you're after Antoinette and Rose
Marie.

DA: No, no. There's Rose, and then there's
Marie.

HM: Oh. Rose and Marie. Right. Because you
said five. And then Francesca.

DA: They were all born in Italy.

HM: Except for Anna.

DA: Except for Anna, yes. I have a
picture.

HM: And your mother and father's names?

DA: My father was Frank Amato, and my
mother is Carmella Amato. My mother's still living.

HM: Does she live in Hoboken?

DA: Yes. Same place.

RF: I see you up there.

DA: Yes. With the grapevine.

RF: In the house with the great grapevine.

HM: How old is that grapevine?

DA: Over thirty years old. Caroline, the
photographer --

RF: Carlson.

DA: Carlson. Yes. I gave her a bag of grapes about a month ago, sweet as sugar -- in August.

RF: They're ripe.

DA: Sweet as sugar. Ask Caroline. She'll tell you. I know Caroline from when she was at Stevens, in the '70s. A very nice person. So she got some. Helen Manogue got some, also.

RF: I want to be on that list.

DA: You have to pass by there.

RF: You have to drop off bags, right? And you just shake the vine.

DA: Dan Thompson always gets his annual bag.

HM: Oh, that's so funny.

DA: It's famous over there. But the grape is good. It's a seedless grape. That's a treat for everybody. I give it to people who are friends. You're considered friends.

HM: Thank you.

DA: But usually around August.

HM: Was the vine originally from Italy?
The seeds?

DA: No. No. My father got a cutting from someone. He just took the cutting and put it in the ground, and it grew up two stories.

HM: Yes. I noticed it for years.

DA: It grew up two stories. It has gotten big, yes. It's taken root. It's got all the right conditions, you see. It's got the water, it's got the air. In Hoboken, on Bond Street -- once you go down three or four feet, you hit water. You go down below Willow Avenue, you go down two feet.

HM: Yes. And people know that. When we have a strong storm, they know for sure that this --

DA: Jackson Street, Monroe Street, Madison Street. Yes. No question. No question.

HM: So back to the story. You meet Mike.

DA: Yes. Michelina takes me over there. She was a good friend. She always helped my mother, because there were five of us at the time and she was telling my mother how to get acclimated to this country. I spoke enough English already by the summer, so she took me up there and he said, "Okay, well, take this bag up to this lady, up to the third floor. We have a good customer on Seventh and Willow, a great good customer. They'll give you a tip, maybe twenty-five cents, ten cents," whatever it was. The first week, Mike Ferrante gave me \$3.00 for the week and all the food I could eat.

In that summer I earned \$200, and I opened a bank account with that money. That account is still open today.

HM: Where is the account?

DA: It was originally Hoboken Bank for Savings, which became Washington Savings Bank, which in turn became Hudson [United]. The banks were changing, but I still have the book -- the original book with the same numbers. I have the book from today with the same numbers. The account never was closed, so I've never gone belly-up. I've never done bankruptcy in my life, thank god. [Knocks wood]

Well, because I had a good start with Mike Ferrante. He taught me the right way.

HM: So what was he selling?

DA: He was selling fruit -- apples, peaches, grapes.

HM: Did he go to Hunt's Point? Where did he go?

DA: No. No. The market was not at Hunt's Point at this point in time. That wasn't until about the mid-'60s. The market was right down by the World Trade

Center, on West Street. You came out of the Holland Tunnel, and you were right there. Mike would go there every morning. His son, Bobby, was not in the business at that time. Bobby came into the business -- I took him out for the first time when I was about fifteen or sixteen years old, which was later. But Mike Ferrante, I tell you without reservation -- he's as good as they come, as far as I've met in my lifetime, and I've been with governors, deans -- but in my estimation he can judge character -- I haven't seen anybody else do that. He can size you up. He can tell you right then and there. He knew how to deal with people.

That's what he did all his life. He probably had maybe a fourth- or fifth-grade education, at the most, the same as my father, but he could judge people. He had the capacity to give you \$100 -- which was worth \$10,000 to you -- because he knew when to give it to you. He had that capacity. It's an innate capacity that he had. He gave me a \$10-bill, but it would be worth hundreds of dollars, and he did it over and over and over. And I seen it. I seen it. Because I would deal with him day in and day out. We got to know each other to the point where it's something like husband and wife. He knew what I was going to do before I did it, and I knew what

he was going to do before he did it. He had a tremendous a trust in me. I grew up in his hands. That was the thing.

HM: I guess I need you to give me examples of how he sized up people's character, and what you mean by the money -- when to give it to you. Give me examples.

DA: Well, I went to college because of him. I'm going to take you to a few years later. My senior year in high school -- I worked for him from about 1958 to about 1966. That's seven or eight years later, or whatever. I'd been working for him seven or eight years.

HM: Always in the summer, or during the year?

DA: Oh, after school. At 3:00 I'd go over there, until it got too cold and you couldn't go out with the fruit trucks. Well, we had the fruit truck; we had the store on 3rd and Madison; we had another area where we loaded up, which was 1st and Madison, originally. It later became Jefferson Street, "Michael" Gugliemelli's, between 4th and 5th on Jefferson Street. The garage is

still there. The garage is still there. We used to load up -- it's in the back. We used to load up over there. That used to be factories. There used to be factories across the street -- Minervini's, I guess, was one.

But mostly what drove the fruit business was the coat factories. We're going to get to this, but we finally wound up -- well, let me keep going one story at a time.

HM: You said he helped you go to college.

DA: Yes, yes. That's jumping the story, but I'll do that story now.

In my senior year in high school, I was top-notch. I had the highest grade of anybody in mathematics, all four years in high school, at Hoboken High School. I was going to go to college. I was going to go to Rutgers. At this point, of course, he paid me whatever it was -- so much a week or whatever. We'll get to the best part, right now.

He comes up to me, Mike, at the beginning of the summer. He says, "You're going to go to college, come September." I said, "Yeah, Mike. I'm gonna go to college. I'm smart. I got accepted and everything." There

was also Vietnam. But I was going to go to college. I was too smart. I had the highest grades of anybody, in all my four years. I was strong in mathematics. That's where I excelled. And also chess. We were state champions in chess. Hoboken High School was the state champion in chess. I was co-captain of the team. That was my strength, mathematics. Writing I had difficulty with. It didn't come easy to me. I was frustrated. But he gave me many ideas, many thoughts, which, if I had put down in writing at that time, would make a bestseller. I think that highly of him.

But he comes up to me and says, "Domenick --" "Yeah, I'm gonna go to college." "You're going to need money to go to college." "Yes, it's going to take money, to pay tuition, you know." So he goes to me, "Okay, here's what we do." His business, now, in the mid-'60s -- he'd been at it since the Depression, and he also had a brother, Nick. He took care of the store. His son, Bobby, had a truck at that time. We had a couple of trucks. So he goes, "Okay. Here's what we do. We pay the bills; we pay the garage; we pay the bags." He had credit at the fruit market, because he could get all the credit he wanted, because at the end of the week he would pay everybody, and he had the good word. Everybody knew him.

Everybody knew that when they were dealing with Mike Ferrante, they were dealing with quality. He was respected.

So he says, "We'll pay the bills and everything at the end of the week, and every Saturday we'll split everything 50-50." He gave me half the business. That's what he thought of me. And that's how I went to college. I didn't have to take any loans over the four years. I worked for him a couple more summers after that, but that's the kind of man he was. He had a heart of gold. That's the only way I can describe it. I have gold in my hands, thinking about it.

HM: Where was Mike from? Was he born here?

DA: No. No. He was from Foggia. Him and his brother came over here. Foggia, Italy.

HM: And was that near San Giacomo?

DA: No. We're on one side of the country, and he's on another. That didn't have anything to do with it. He just took this kid, and just formed me. He

sculpted my heart, my soul, and my character in the process. No less than that. No less than that.

RF: Why do you think he did it?

DA: He liked the kid. He took a liking to me. And you had to be honest. That's what he expected. Because I'm dealing with a lot of money. I had money in my pockets at all times, from the first day I started. He's got to be able to trust me with the money, because everything was cash. He knew what he had in his hands. You couldn't take advantage of him like that, believe me. You couldn't. I couldn't see anybody having the heart.

It was exceptional. He started me when I was nine or ten years old, and I had thousands of dollars. When Bobby got married, his son -- I guess I was probably sixteen or seventeen years old. I had already worked for him for six or seven years at that point. Everything was cash-on-the-barrelhead. He got married at the Holiday Inn by the Holland Tunnel. I was maybe sixteen or seventeen years old. What does he do, Mike Ferrante? I'm sixteen years old, and he's got to pay the bill at the end of the night, because everything was

cash-on-the-barrelhead, whatever it was -- a couple hundred people. Here's the trust and faith he had in me.

Before the wedding he says, "Domenick, come over here." He took me over and says, "Okay --" He took a roll of cash, like this, and says, "I want you to take this money." He pinned it into my suit jacket, and he said, "You give this to me tonight, after the wedding." That was to pay for the whole wedding. He gave it to me because he thought those were the safest hands he could put it in, including his son and two daughters.

HM: He didn't want to hold it himself because he thought he'd be drinking, or whatever?

DA: Well, yes, yes -- well, I'm not going to --

HM: Because he was going to be enjoying himself?

DA: Not only that. Not only that. There's also another thing. People would know he was going to be carrying money, and he's got all different kinds of characters. He was very smart. So rather than him having

the money in his pocket -- because they knew he would be carrying it -- he gave it to me, because nobody would think he would give the money to a kid. I'm sixteen-seventeen years old.

RF: It's like he doesn't want to worry about it, and giving it to you is like giving it to the bank.

DA: It was in safe hands. I put myself in his hands, and he would more than gladly -- like I said, it was a give-and-take type of thing. There was complete trust between the two of us, such as I don't think I've experienced since. He would trust me with his life and I would trust him with my life, and I have no regrets. I didn't have to think; he would do the thinking for me. It would be the right thing to do, when you have that confidence.

RF: Yet you were fifteen or sixteen. That's what's amazing about it, too. It sounds like two brothers.

DA: Well, he was like a second father to me. He was a father to my soul. I had my father, but he was not -- I would respect him much more so -- I had that much confidence in him.

HM: Did he teach you things by example, or did he tell you stories?

DA: He would tell me stories, but things were done by example every day. Oh, yes, there was storytelling by him, and I would tell stories, as well. He would tell me stories, yeah.

HM: Do you recall a story?

DA: Well, that's a story right there, that I just told you.

HM: Well, I know -- but others.

DA: I don't know. He would teach you about life. He would tell me all about Hoboken. He told me, in the '60s, that Hoboken was a good town. I trusted those words, and I never left Hoboken because of that. This was

in the '60s now. He said that Hoboken was a good town, he felt, at that point in time. Of course, it's transformed itself now, but it's still -- its basic ways is what I've gone by.

HM: And he felt it was a good town because of the people, or -- ?

DA: The people. Because of the people.
That was the story.

See, there was a lot of trust. He used to tell me stories -- this was in the '60s now. We've got the projects just a couple blocks away. But he would tell me -- people knew him and trust him, etc. -- but they would load up the truck, the fruit truck, okay? In his day in age -- and he was probably talking about the '50s, more or less, after the war -- he would load up the truck not in the morning, but the night before, he'd leave it there, and nobody would touch nothing. Years ago, yeah. Right now, they would rob you blind if you left the truck alone for fifteen minutes.

But that's how much they respected him. He would load up the truck, load it up in the back -- you know what I'm talking about. He would have apples and

oranges or whatever, but he would load it up the night before so the next morning he could start it right up and go right to work.

HM: Now what time did he start up in the morning?

DA: Well, at that time, before he went to Hunt's Point, he would go to market at 2:00-3:00-4:00 in the morning. I didn't go with him. I used to go maybe once a week. He would be back by 8:00-9:00 in the morning. Then we would load up the truck. We would take the stuff off the truck --

RF: It would be the same truck, that you would go around in, right?

DA: A flatbed, right. It was a '48 Chevy at that time. Then Bobby had his jeep or whatever. It was mostly Chevys that we had.

RF: Then you would sort it out?

DA: Well, yes. You'd load it up, the flatbed -- ten boxes of grapes, ten boxes of apples, peaches, whatever. You'd just load them up. Then you would bring the truck to 1st and Madison, or Jefferson Street, then you'd take all the stuff off. You had celery, you had lettuce, escarole. Mostly fruits and vegetables -- lettuce, celery, mushrooms, depending on the time and the season.

HM: Did you have certain things that Italian families wanted?

DA: Most of them were Italian customers, and Yugoslavians. If we had the book over here, I could show you the customers, in that book, in the '70s. There are many faces --

HM: Next time.

DA: The one that depicts best what I'm talking about is the Carmine Iannacone picture that was by Benedict, I think. It's in the '70s photo.

HM: Fernandez?

RF: It's John Conn's picture, right by the bank --

DA: Right by the bank, yes.

RF: -- what is the Commerce Bank now, by the Hotel Edwards.

DA: Yes. But basically it's at 7th and Willow, where we park most of the time now.

RF: Since we brought up Carmine -- could you mention the different families, again, at the fruit market? Who, specifically, did trucks around town and their locations, if you remember them.

DA: Basically, it's on Willow Avenue. When we first started, it used to be 12th and Willow, and there used to be a police station there. We started over there. Usually, it would be after 3:00 in the afternoon, because all the factories would come out.

RF: Which factories?

DA: Coat factories. They would all be on the west side of town -- west of Willow at Clinton Street, in that whole area. There were a whole bunch of factories, coat factories -- all coat factories, from about 9th Street and Clinton, going west, going up to maybe 12th or 14th Street, going west.

RF: This would be just a little bit north of the Wallace School?

DA: Below the Wallace School, as well. But yes. In 1960 we started over there. Then we came down to 9th Street, 9th and Willow, and there was Sonny Martella. The Sillettis came through Sonny Martella. John Silletti worked for -- they have the store.

HM: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

DA: John Silletti is about my age. He came out of those people.

HM: So he worked with Martella.

DA: Sonny Martella. That's right. That was 9th and Willow. We also parked at 9th and Willow when we started, too.

HM: They also sold fruit?

DA: Yeah. Yeah. They all had fruit trucks.

HM: Because I remember there was a Tripe guy.

DA: La Tripa, yes.

HM: You've got to tell me about him, too.

DA: No, no, I'll tell you about the fruit business. He had eight trucks, he had.

HM: Who had? Martella?

DA: No, no, La Tripa.

HM: La Tripa. I remember him.

DA: With the red vans. Well, these are fruit trucks.

RF: Let's stick to fruit!

DA: Yeah, yeah. Let me just go through this.

So we parked over there for a little while, but that didn't work out so we went to 8th and Willow. Eighth and Willow was the Blue Point.

RF: Azzolini?

DA: Yes, yes. That was the place at the time. They had weddings and stuff over there. Everything happened at 8th and Willow. There used to be the Grand Bakery right across the street. It wasn't a bread place, it was more cakes and stuff at that time.

Now over there -- when we got to 8th and Willow there was us, and there was also Joe Sacco. That's another family.

HM: Joe Sacco?

DA: Right. That's a second family, already. Then there were also the Iannacones. They had Sammy Iannacone, Carmine Iannacone, Mike Iannacone. It's a whole family there.

HM: Sammy, Carmine, and who else?

DA: Mike was afterwards.

HM: And these are brothers?

DA: All brothers, yes. There were about five or six. There's one left, but he was never in the fruit business, this one.

But Sammy Iannacone was a really hard worker. He was a hustler. He could sell a lot of fruit. He was good.

Yeah, we would sell fruit -- peaches would be like five pounds for fifty cents. Grapes would be three pounds for fifty cents.

RF: So what were they costing you?

DA: Mike was buying them -- probably a couple dollars a package; \$4-\$5.00 a package. I don't know.

RF: You never got into that.

DA: I never had to. Mike would take care of that, because he went to the market. I would go there once in a while. Bobby could have told you. He passed away.

So those are some. Sacco was also big, because Sacco --

HM: So just to go back -- everybody had a different territory, though.

DA: No, no, no.

HM: Not really?

DA: I'll get to the story.

So we went to 9th Street, and there was Sonny Martella there, so that wasn't -- so next we went to 8th Street. There was Joe Sacco and a few others. It

changes over the years. Also, another good friend of Mike Ferrante was -- I can't recall his name -- but he was on 8th Street. They would have a few beers, at "Willow Point" over there. There were a couple bars. I would take care of everything, and they would go inside and have a few, at the end of the day -- 5:00 or 6:00. I can't recall his name. He was a good friend of Mike. They got along very well, and they used to go to market together.

So because this friend was there, we finally wound up on 7th and Willow. I can easily name about a dozen trucks, right off the bat.

RF: Let's hear'em.

DA: Well, Sammy Iannacone had one. Okay? Carmine Iannacone, his brother. We had two trucks -- Mike Ferrante and Bobby Ferrante. That's four right there. Sacco, they had a few. There's a son, Joe, who had a truck, and the father had a truck. The father, Joe Sacco, was a good friend of Mike, also. Sandy Sacco, later on he had the fruit store on 15th and Willow. He's also the brother-in-law of Russo, Anthony Russo. The Saccos -- there were four or five of them at least.

RF: And what were the businesses, the store businesses, at that time at 7th and Willow?

DA: Oh, at that time there was Ralph's candy store, and there was Stemple, Marvin. There was also a television store, on the other corner where the candy store is now.

RF: Bill's Corner.

DA: That used to be a television store. I forget what the name of it was. Then on the other corner was probably a dry-cleaners.

RF: A butcher shop, too?

DA: No, the butcher shop was on 9th and Willow. The butcher shop was 9th and Willow. Piero. His grandson is a fireman now, Andy. His sons went into business, and they went from 9th and Willow to 10th and Bloomfield. It's a real estate office.

RF: So you're continually moving south.
And why?

DA: Well, Mike's decision. It's his call. I'm just a kid. I didn't question it. I guess to find the right spot, where we could do the most business. Well, the mother lode was 7th and Willow. That's where we stood.

RF: The epicenter.

DA: Yeah. This is over a couple of years. That became our corner.

RF: For how long, do you think?

DA: We stood there through all the '60s, and Bobby took it over into the '70s, '80s, and '90s. Bobby was there until the '90s. Bobby Ferrante was one of the last, in the late '90s. But it originated in, let's say, '62-'63. Something like that.

RF: It is the geographical center of the town, when you think about it.

DA: But what it was -- there would be waves of people coming out of the factories -- the

Yugoslavians, the Italians. They would come out of the factories, they would buy their stuff, and go home. There was Ralph's candy store there, etc., but also there was the A&P on Clinton Street. Well, it wasn't A&P at that time, but there was always a supermarket there.

RF: When did that go in? That supermarket?

DA: In the '60s. In the '60s. The whole thing with us, in the fruit business, was that we could undersell them by a wide margin. So they helped us. Because people would go into the supermarket, and then come and get their fruit from us. That was the whole beauty of it. Our prices were going to be half of what theirs was. If we were selling three pounds for half a dollar, then they were selling three pounds for a dollar. Something like that.

RF: Do you remember the prices of things?
Or is that too specific?

DA: Peaches would be five pounds for half a dollar. This is in the '60s now. Grapes would be three pounds for half a dollar. Tomatoes would be four pounds

for half a dollar. Oranges would be seven for a quarter. Nectarines, etc., they would be three pounds for fifty cents at that time -- in the early '60s now. Then of course it changed. Potatoes would be five pounds for a quarter, onions would be three pounds for a quarter, or whatever.

DA: And would you have things that the Italian community, specifically, would like -- like a special type of lettuce?

DA: It was iceberg lettuce. There would also be fennel [finocchio], celery -- but basically fruit -- apples, oranges, peaches, grapes, nectarines, plums. A basket of plus would be two pounds for half a dollar. Escarole, potatoes, onions, celery, mushrooms. When Thanksgiving came around, there would be chestnuts. On the bed you would have the basic fruits -- apples, oranges, peaches, pears, plus. We had certain things -- the grapes we would put on one end. Pretty much, it would hang over and you had the scale there.

HM: Did you have grapes for wine, or they were for eating -- table grapes.

DA: No, this is table grapes. No, nothing hard.

HM: Just curious.

DA: This is all for eating. Table stuff. And there was volume there, because everybody had four or five kids. I told you. I went to college with this. And, of course, you're not going to find another person -- and he asked me. I didn't ask him. He said, "You're going to need money." I didn't have any money. I said, "Yeah." He said, "Okay. Here's what we're gonna do. Bing. Every Saturday, we'll split. We'll pay the bills." Because you had to pay whatever it was -- he could get whatever he wanted, because his credit was -- whatever he wanted. No problem. Because he'd been in the business thirty-forty years, whatever.

HM: Did he go to your graduation, or celebrate with you?

DA: In college?

HM: Yes. Or high school.

DA: No. I graduated. It wasn't a celebration, in that sense. He might have been, yes. But we didn't make a big deal of it, no. I graduated. He knew I graduated. We got together on different types of occasion. His sons' weddings, I was at.

RF: It's still sinking in, so I'm just going to ask, but if you don't want to answer -- was this in lieu of wages?

DA: Yeah. I was getting paid so much a week. I was making as much then as I did as a civil engineer, four years later. Yes. In lieu of wages. That is my wage.

RF: Those were your wages -- the college tuition.

DA: No, no, no, no --

HM: But he got half of the pay.

RF: I understand that.

DA: Instead of my getting paid, we just split whatever the profit was from the business. He took half, and I took the other half.

HM: He was a partner.

DA: It was a partnership. I'm a partner. And I didn't have to put nothing up. It's his business. Where are you going to find that?

HM: Amazing.

DA: Yeah, it was.

HM: He must have really, really cared for you.

DA: We cared for each other. Yeah. Yeah. I was good, too. I was quick, I was fast, I was could do things that he could not, because he was getting up in years. And I was quick with the customers, because I was quick. Well, I could hold two or three different accounts

in my head, simultaneously. He would say, "Okay. Fifty cents for this, a dollar for that," so he'd be adding it up, and I'd be adding up my customer. I would put my stuff in the bag -- \$1.50-\$2.50 -- and then at the end he's figuring how much his is, and I'd say, "Mike, that's \$3.50."

HM: Your good math skills!

RF: So was your nickname like "the Calculator?"

DA: No, everything was a quarter or fifty cents or -- it's automatic. Because you'd say fifty cents for apples, four pounds of bananas, fifty cents -- he'd be going through it, and in the meantime I'm counting my customer at the same time I'm listening to him. It's by osmosis. It's so natural. You don't think about these things. I thought about them afterwards. You don't know how good you have it, until it's not there.

He was a motivational force. I would go to work -- I wasn't going to work. I was learning something else about people's nature, and so forth. That's what he taught. He'd say, "Well, this guy is going to do this and

that." He would tell you what the flaw was going to be in this guy's character.

RF: Say again?

HM: Flaws in the guy's character.

DA: It wasn't work. It wasn't work. It was, "I'm going to learn something else about human nature. About people."

HM: Now you said early on, about bags -- did he give you bags --

DA: Clear bags.

HM: You'd carry it upstairs into an apartment, for people?

DA: Yes. Yes.

HM: So you would deliver it, basically.

DA: Yeah. Yeah. The lady would be up on the third floor. I'd take the order. I would tell her what we had. She'd say, "Well, give me three pounds of apples, four pounds of bananas, four pounds of escarole." Then I would go downstairs, put it in a bag, and bring it up to her." You have a customer, he would say, "Okay. Take this down the block." Everybody knew everybody at that time. I would deliver it. When he said what person it was, I knew exactly who to bring it to. We had one customer, a regular customer, in a red-brick building. I would go there on a regular basis, on a Friday or whatever it was. I would say, "Do you need anything?" and the lady would say, "What have you got?" "I've got lettuce." "Okay. Give me some lettuce. And give me three pounds of peaches," or whatever, and we would bring it up there. Or people would go to the truck and they couldn't carry it or whatever, and that was my job; to bring it up to people's house. I would go up three or four stories with an old lady or whatever --

HM: -- carrying her groceries.

RF: Did anyone ever lower a basket, that you would put stuff in?

HM: We had some of that. Yes, we did. We did. There was one lady on Jefferson Street who always gave me a quarter -- which was money at the time. Not only did we stand on the corner -- that was like 3:00 or 4:00 -- but we also worked the streets. We started on Madison Street, then we would work -- the part I'm talking about Willow Avenue, that was more or less 3:00. But in the meantime, we worked the streets before that.

RF: Before that.

DA: We would holler, "Peaches! Tomatoes!" or whatever. Bobby would do that, and they would come out the window: "Mike, give me three pounds of peaches." They'd yell it out. That's how it was. That's how it was.

HM: That sounds so great.

DA: Mike would holler, and people would come out the window. And I would take it up to the lady on the fourth floor. He would take the order -- "Give me three pounds of peaches, four pounds of apples," whatever, and I would bring it up there.

RF: Holly was asking before how you figured out who was going to be on what corner -- like 7th and Willow. How did you divide up turf?

DA: Okay. Sonny Martello was on 9th Street. That was his. The good friend of -- I always forget his name. He was a real good friend. He was real close with Mike; they used to go to market together. And Sacco. They were on 8th and Willow. We wound up on 7th and Willow.

Now here's a case in point. Carmine Iannacone. We had been there for a couple of years. This is mostly like 3:00-4:00 in the afternoon. Usually after 3:00 in the afternoon. That's usually when we got there, because we wanted to get the wave of the people coming out of the factories -- the Yugoslavians, the Italians, whatever. The women coming out of the coat factories. Whatever. There was Ralph's candy store at the time, and we were parking there for a number of years already. Carmine Iannacone, another fruit truck -- we parked on one corner, and he parked on the other, right next to each other. Now instead of Mike making a fuss about it -- no problem. That wasn't his thing, and I that was

diplomatically, one of the things in life -- I always remembered that. He passed away.

Carmine Iannacone had his customers, we had ours. We were able, on the same corner, and basically with the same kind of stuff, to live peaceably and work peaceably together. That was the kind of thing. He said, "Let them eat. There's enough for you and for me." There were customers who would only come and buy off of our truck -- Mike Ferrante -- they wouldn't go to Carmine. Or if they did go to Carmine, Carmine would tell them, "You have to go over there." That's how much respect there was. "You have to go buy from Mike. If Mike isn't there, then I'll give it to you. But I'm only going to give it to you --" There was no animosity whatsoever, and we both made a living. That wasn't Mike's nature. There was enough to go around. He was very good-natured. Very good-natured. And the customers, Carmine would tell them, "You've got to go buy from Mike." Because he knew that Mike was letting him come to the corner -- because we had been there before. He could have said, "Look, you've got to find someplace else." No. It was okay. "As long as everybody's eating, there's no problem."

So back to back, we'd be on the same corner, and it all worked out fine.

HM: Did everybody buy the same produce, or were certain people known for certain kinds of -- ?

DA: Well, it was mostly the same kind of fruit that we had. Originally, we used to go down to where I said -- West Street -- but then that changed. In the '60s the market -- that broke Mike's heart when that happened, because he couldn't go up to Hunt's Point. You had to go over the George Washington Bridge, etc. What happened in the '60s was that -- he used to go to market -- you'd come out of the Holland Tunnel, right where the World Trade Center, a few blocks --

RF: That's why it left, right?

DA: Yes. Exactly. Because the World Trade Center -- that's why they moved it up to Hunt's Point. They moved it up there. Now what happened when they went up to Hunt's Point -- it takes you a day just to go up there and get the fruit. So what he had was, we had a buyer, this guy Anthony. We had a buyer go up there. It was between 2nd and 3rd on Willow Avenue. He had a fruit store. There were a few fruit stores. There were a lot of

fruit stores around. We had one on 3rd and Madison. There was one on Willow Avenue. There were two or three of them on Willow Avenue, between 2nd and 3rd. There was also 15th Street later on -- a whole bunch of fruit stores. There were a few, like 4th or 5th Street and Grand, etc. There were a lot of fruit stores around, and there was enough for everybody because the population was there.

TAPE 1, SIDE 2

DA: Where were we?

RF: He was working through a buyer.

DA: Oh. Yeah. So he would go to the market up at Hunt's Point, he would go there a couple times a week, and he would go there with a big truck and he would buy for everybody. Then we would buy off of him, and there were at least half a dozen of us -- all fruit trucks. So basically we're buying off the same --

RF: You had the same product.

DA: Yes, but there could be differentiation. Because you could say, "I don't like

those peaches. I want -- " Because you had a whole line. You had a big refrigerator. "Do you want peaches?" Fine. If you don't want peaces, you can carry nectarines. You can differentiate that way. But it was more limited than it was before. When we went down to the West Street market, it was open to everybody.

But it worked out for us, and we probably made more money from, I'd say, '63-'64 -- I worked for Mike until probably '69-'70, so it was about ten years; or, '58 to about '69 -- my sophomore year in college. Then, since I was an engineer -- I worked for a couple of summers in college, but, of course, I wasn't there -- I was in college, so I wouldn't work after school. I left high school in 1967, then I worked every day. Sundays, we didn't work. And usually Mondays, probably. But 3:00, I'd be out of school -- bang -- and I'd work until 6:00-6:30, until it got dark -- 6:30-7:00, almost every day, day-in and day-out. In the summers, 8:00 in the morning until 7:00 at night.

But, see, I was quick. I was fast. It was a perfect fit. And he knew the business. He had all the contacts necessary. He knew what to buy, and he would buy. Then Bobby came into the business.

RF: When did Bobby come into the business?

DA: Okay. That was, I would say, '63-'64, something like that. What happened was, just before Thanksgiving -- it's a father-and-son thing. We've always had conflict about it. They're father and son, yes. But there's also that the son is going to think differently from the father. So, probably, Bobby would wish to work on the docks, at the piers. So it was, I don't know -- I don't remember exactly. I had been working for Mike four or five years. I was probably fourteen or fifteen years old.

What happened was -- Mike had gone to the market. It was still down on West Street. He had gone to the market, he came back from the market, and at that time we were loading up -- it was '62-'63, something like that, in the early '60s. We did that for a number of years before 1967. So Mike had come home from the market that he had gone to, through the Holland Tunnel, and I go to 8:00, and the truck -- usually there would be Mike and another guy over there, helping us out. They would start taking the stuff off. By the time I'd get there at 8:00, I would start taking the stuff off and start putting the boards, with the [?].

So it was just before Thanksgiving. It might have been Tuesday or Wednesday. I go there at 8:00 in the morning, and nothing has been done. The truck has come from the market, but it's still stacked up. The boards haven't been started, the stuff hasn't been taken off, and the son, Bobby, is there. Bobby looks at me and he says, "Domenick, you have to come with me." Mike wasn't there. He was supposed to be there, and he wasn't there. He said, "You're going to have to come with me." He took me to the house at 419 Monroe Street. I go there, and the old man is in bed. In fact, Frank Palimisano was in that room. This was 419. Mike owned both houses -- 414 and 419. They came down through the fruit business to Mike.

I go over there and Mike is in bed, laid out. His back went out. So he goes, "Listen. Take Bobby over there with you. Let him drive the truck." Because I was fourteen or fifteen years old; I couldn't drive the truck. He said, "Tell him where all the stops are." He couldn't get out of bed. He says, "Put the stuff on there, go to all the customers we have, etc., and try to sell -- " Because for Thanksgiving, you load up. You put on extra mushrooms, extra celery, because it's a holiday.

You load up, and he had. That's probably why his back went out. Whatever.

He said, "You know all the customers -- " I might have been about fourteen. Yeah, probably about fourteen. I was young. Thirteen, fourteen, whatever it was. He said, "Take Bobby with you. Tell him where to stop." I knew all the stops we had, because I used to work them -- 1st and Madison down to about 4th and Madison. On a Saturday we would clean out a whole truckload, in just those four blocks. Because people would just buy from Mike Ferrante, nobody else. Furthermore, there were certain customers who could only be waited on by Mike Ferrante. If I tried to wait on that customer -- "No. I have to be waited on by Mike Ferrante." That's the special touch there. Because he knew where to throw in extra apples or something. If the lettuce wasn't bad yet, but -- he would take the lettuce and put it in a bag for the ladies. I'll get back to the story, but just keep that thought.

A lady would come over there and say, "Mike, I don't have any money. I can't do this right now." And he'd say, "No problem. Take whatever you need. Take the whole truck," and he meant take the whole truck.

Let me just get back to Bobby for now, but that's a thought for later.

So Mike goes, "Tell Bobby where to drive and everything," because Bobby never had anything to do with the business until that point. He had a station wagon, so if Mike would say, "Send this order over there," or whatever -- but basically he was working on the docks. Mike said, "Sell whatever you can. If you've got extra chestnuts," all the stuff -- apples, pears, whatever. Everything was a little extra for the holiday, because that was a big holiday, Thanksgiving, for us. Because people used to cook at home at that time. They went to restaurants very little. It was totally different. It's a blue-collar town at this point in time; it was not what it is today. He wouldn't recognize Hoboken if he came back. Maybe he could still pick out some stuff.

So he said, "Sell whatever you can, because it's a long week." After Thursday is Friday and people have a day off, and the stuff is going to go bad. So he said, "Try to sell whatever you can," and that's what we did. We loaded up, and I told Bobby, "Okay, we have to stop over here." I tell him the different stops, and I'm going to the customers, and they say, "Well,

where's Mike?" I say, "He's sick." They would ask about him.

So we sold most of the stuff, and what happened was the next Monday I go back to school. Mike is still -- that's how Bobby worked his first day. He came out with me, and we got along. Well, he knew that I was a special [?]. We became almost like brothers, in many senses. We respected each other. These are stories he's heard -- his wedding and all that stuff. We always talk about it, on special occasions when we get together, even until the day he passed away -- because you don't forget those things.

So there was a good bond between me and Bobby, but my bond was with the father and he realized it. He knew it, and he accepted it. He accepted it.

HM: Do you think that, if Mike hadn't hurt his back, Bobby would have stayed away from the business?

DA: It's possible. It's possible. Who's to say? I don't know.

HM: So thereafter Bobby worked in the business?

DA: What happened was, they sold us the stuff for the holidays and everything else. The next week, Bobby took out his father's truck -- for a number of weeks, until his father got back and could go to the market again. So Bobby took it over for a couple of weeks. Then when Mike came back and got better, Bobby got his own truck.

Because, look -- he went out with me. I showed him what the business is, he saw what it was, and the next week -- Of course, his father told him, "You've got to go to the market," or whatever. "You have to go get the stuff." Those were the terms. It's just that with father and son, sometimes -- The same thing with my father. I see things one way, and -- it's just a natural phenomenon. Of course, I respected him as my father, and he respected -- but if it weren't for that particular -- I don't know.

HM: But he didn't go back to the docks.
After that, he started to work --

DA: Well, that's what happened. For a week or two he took out Mike's truck. Then when Mike got

better, he got his own truck. But he did it for a couple weeks, because he wanted to keep the business going. I couldn't do it, because I had to go to school. Come Monday or Tuesday -- but that's how it worked out. But that's how he went out for the first time.

So we sold most of the stuff, and he could see what was coming in, what money he could make and everything else. It was a good business. We enjoyed what we did. We enjoyed what we did. There were no ifs, ands or buts about it.

RF: It's kind of ironic that you showed him the business, rather than a father, in a way.

DA: Well, yes. I understand -- for the first day, yes. But after that they went to the market together. When Mike got better they went to the market together. I'm sure Mike told Bobby, "You go buy off this guy," that guy or the other guy, "when you go over there." I couldn't tell him that. There's a God, and there's a fate, and that's how this one happened. To his last, dying day he never forgot that. We always talked about it -- the first time he went out.

HM: Okay. I have a question about trucks, in general. I remember the "Tripa" guy.

DA: Those were vans.

HM: Okay. But what else did people sell from trucks?

RF: Or vans.

HM: Or vans. Did they sell fish? I'm just trying to get a sense of how much selling was on the street. Meats?

DA: No, not so much meats. For meat, you had to go to a butcher shop.

HM: Did they sell fish?

DA: Fish. Fish. No. For fish, you went to the fish store.

HM: And not eggs, or anything like that.

DA: We could carry some eggs, on occasion. Well, what's-his-name, Carmine Iannacone, in the picture he's got eggs on the floor there. We did carry some, sometimes, because they were at the same market or whatever. But yes, we could carry eggs, but not that much.

RF: There is still a guy who sells eggs. He delivers them. He's got a station wagon.

DA: Yeah, yeah. He's got his own farm. Yeah, yeah. That's true. But if you look at Carmine Iannacone, the picture from the '70s there, you'll see that there are eggs below --

HM: I ask because the guy -- actually, I think Bobby was the first guy who sold fruit and eggs, when I came in '79.

DA: He may have carried them once in a while. Carmine Iannacone -- he's got them on the floor there. He's got eggs on the floor.

RF: In the John Conn picture.

DA: Yeah.

RF: I guess we should ask you. Do you have pictures from when you worked on the truck?

DA: No.

RF: Do you think Bobby's wife has pictures?

DA: Christine might have some. I'll have to ask Michael, the son.

Mike's great-grandson just had his first birthday -- Mike Ferrante, also -- on the 16th of September. Mine's the ninth of September. That's Mike's son. Bobby saw him. He passed away in January; he was born a few months before.

RF: Bobby passed away in January.

HM: That's I met his wife for the first time.

DA: They're nice people. No question.

RF: So there's Tripa, there's -- what else?

DA: What do you call it -- marutz, marutz, what is it? They've got shells, and they come out --

HM: Snails. So there was a guy who sold snails? Wow.

DA: He also used to take apples, and put the candy --

HM: Oh, candy apples!

DA: Yeah, candy cane. He used to have them on Madison Street.

HM: The same guy?

DA: I think it might have been. It might have been, yeah.

RF: That's quite a specialty -- snails and apples!

HM: So the snail guy. Do you remember -- ?

DA: And Biggie's used to have watermelon outside. Oh, yeah, watermelon. We got it for a dollar. Here we got it for a buck. The best idea -- watermelon, for a buck, for a dollar. You got a whole watermelon!

HM: Then did you sell it cut up?

DA: No, no. He'd sell you the whole watermelon. And you would just have watermelon, on the whole truck. That's how it was. The volume was -- everybody bought three pounds of this, four pounds of that, and it would be \$4 or \$5 -- \$10, whatever it was -- but you got a whole bunch of stuff. As I said, grapes would be three pounds for half a dollar; peaches would be five pounds for half a dollar; apples four pounds for half a dollar. This was the heyday, and we made money. Potatoes, you could get five pounds for a quarter, or a 50-pound bag or whatever.

RF: You have a good, strong voice. Would you advertise?

DA: It was more Bobby and Mike. I used to -- okay: [Seller's sing-song voice] "Pea-ches! Oran-ges! Strawberries. Strawberries." The watermelon guy was good. "Best idea. Best idea. Water-melon! Get it for a buck. Here you get it for a buck! Water-melon!" Even [?] like Vezzetti.

RF: Sort of like fruit-seller rap.

DA: Mike had his own Italian, and it sounded good.

HM: He did it in an Italian -- that's what I was wondering, too. Italian English, or just Italian?

DA: It was mostly Italian. Bobby would do it in English. Bobby would say, "Pea-ches! Oran-ges! That would be Bobby. But Mike used to -- he had his own. [Laughing] For the life of me -- I've tried to remember, but he had his own song, and it was melodious. It was

Italian, though. It was Italian. Sweet potatoes, we would get for Halloween and Thanksgiving.

HM: Because you were out on the street, did people kind of tell you and Mike stories? Did you know all the gossip and stuff?

DA: We would hear the stories, yes, not that I remember. But yeah. Sure. They would tell him all their problems, and he listened to them. And he would know. Like I said before, a lady with four or five kids would come over -- and he would know. Mike would know -- she would say, "Well, my husband just got laid off, and we're havin' a hard time." She would tell him the story, and Mike would say, "Well, what do you need? Take whatever you need." He'd give her four pounds of apples, or give them whatever, until she had the money to pay it back. My job was to recall this, because he wouldn't have the courage to tell the lady, "Listen, you owe me \$5.50 from a couple of weeks ago." I would go to her and (and it could be in Italian or whatever) say, "You owe Mike \$10," or whatever it is, and they'd go, "Oh, yeah, yeah, sure," and they all paid. They all paid. They wouldn't

stiff him. They wouldn't stiff him. It would be like stiffing yourself.

But I would recall. "Mike, do you remember the lady -- " "Yeah, yeah. I know." "Do you want me to go see her?" "Yeah, yeah. Okay." So I would go upstairs, and they would, "Yeah. Sure. No problem."

RF: And knowing you with numbers, did you remember this? Or did you write it down?

DA: No, this was all in my head. This was all in my head. Occasionally, maybe, but no, this was all in my head. This is all in the head, yeah. Total recall. There wasn't one that I missed, and not one can I ever recall who said, "No, I'm not going to pay you." They all would say, "I've got \$5.00," and these were all good customers. They were all good customers. There was not one who would say no. They wouldn't even think of stiffing him.

HM: So you're saying that he would sometimes put in a little extra, because he knew that someone had a lot of kids, or a new baby, or -- ?

DA: Sure. Sure. For the customer. I don't know how many times he would say, "What do you need? What do you want? If you want to take the truck, take the truck." And Bobby, because he was around this stuff, he was the same way, too, because he took after him. But the original was the original, and the original was Mike Ferrante.

They had their houses at 414 and 417. That was all through Mike's hands. Four-fourteen, 417. He already had those properties by the time I started working for him.

RF: And they also owned -- half-owned -- 415?

DA: The lot burned down --

RF: Frank Palmisano's --

DA: I think Frank Palmisano and Bobby bought it together, but that wasn't Mike.

RF: Oh, I see.

DA: Because I think Mike had probably passed away by that time. That was like in the '70s.

HM: When did Mike die?

DA: January of 1972.

RF: And Bobby died in January too, right?

DA: Yes. But Bobby was like the fifth of the month, and Mike was the 21st or 22nd of the month.

RF: Bobby used to park his truck at 415.

DA: That was afterward. Because in the heyday we would park at Gugliemelli's, which was between 4th and 5th Street, on Jefferson Street. That garage is still there. Then we had a fruit store on 3rd and Madison. There's a park there now. There used to be a butcher shop right next to it. One-half the building was a fruit store, which -- that's where we started. When I started, we had the fruit store at 3rd and Madison. We used to load up at 1st and Madison, between 1st and 2nd, on Madison Street. Then it became Cordt's Furniture, or whatever.

Well, it was right in that building -- I remember, with the Cubans and Castro, I remember, being in the newspapers in the late '50s, early '60s. Then we shifted and went over to Gugliemelli's a couple years' after, because that became available and it was bigger. By that time, Bobby had started working with us, and we could put two trucks in there.

HM: So just to get this straight -- first it was 1st and Madison --

DA: -- between 1st and Madison, on the west side.

HM: -- where the Cordt's Furniture --

DA: Yes. I don't know if it's still there. But yes, that's where we started.

RF: Did you say that's where the truck was parked, or that's where you started?

DA: We loaded up, because there wasn't enough room -- it was only so wide, okay? It was just a

long thing, where we could put all our stuff in there overnight. By the way, we had the refrigerator at 3rd and Madison, where the fruit store was. We had a refrigerator there. When we went to Gugliemelli's, then we put the refrigerator in Gugliemelli's garage. It was a big-sized refrigerator. But also we stored potatoes and apples. Not everything had to be in a refrigerator, at that time.

RF: Did you ever have a retail store?

DA: We did. At 3rd and Madison. A fruit store. Right next to it was a butcher shop -- John's Butcher Shop. That's where the park is right now. It would be one or two houses off the park.

RF: That whole lot, on Madison.

DA: Twenty-five-foot wide or whatever it is -- it would be two storefronts on the same property. We were on one side, and the butcher shop was on the other side. It would be 50-foot long --

HM: -- and narrow.

DA: Yeah, but it was enough. Because we would have a stand and -- Nick, Mike's brother, would be working in the fruit store. Later, after I left, after I went to college, then the brother -- Nick -- worked for Mike for a couple years, and Bobby always had his own truck.

So we had two trucks, a fruit store, and a garage, in the heyday.

RF: So once winter set in, you didn't do the trucks, you just did the store.

DA: Mostly it would be in the store, yes. You might have two days when it would be cold, then it would break for one or two days. As long as it was over 30-35 [degrees], we would go out, even though it was winter time. It was tough in the winter time, yeah, but still we went out. Definitely, for Thanksgiving, we was out. As long as it's above 30 degrees. If it's above 30 degrees, we could -- You might not be able to start early in the morning, but by noontime or whatever --

RF: -- sundown.

DA: Yeah. And then you'd come early, because the days were short. By 4:00 or 5:00 it gets dark, and your day is done because you can't work in the dark.

RF: And you were just down the block from Biggie's.

DA: Yeah. That's where the store was. That's where the fruit store was. Biggie's had the watermelons outside, at that time. I know Biggie from 1950 or '55 -- Brother Biggie. The grandson, Mike Ferrante -- I just saw him the other day -- he's working at Biggie's, right now. He's running Biggie's -- him and his cousin, Frankie Palmisano. He's a fireman. They're both the same age, Mike Ferrante and Frank Palmisano. They're the same age; they went to high school together.

RF: So Junior's son-in-law -- I mean, Biggie Junior -- "Brother" -- his son-in-law is not one of those people. That's the boss, in a sense. Because the brother is kind of retired.

DA: Yeah. He's only there one day a week. But Mike and Frank Palmisano -- the fireman -- he works a couple days a week. But mostly it's Mike, more times than not, four or five days a week.

HM: They're running Biggie's.

DA: Yeah. They're running Biggie's, presently. But ever since I can remember, as a kid, I used to go in -- There used to be a factory right across the street from Biggie's at that time, a coat factory. [cross talk] When I say "factory," I mean coat factory.

RF: That was a big one, too.

DA: This one wasn't that big. What I would do was -- It would be right across the street from Biggie's, just a little bit north, further, but almost right across the street. I can't recall -- I'll recall the name, but it's not coming to me right now. What I would do was I would go in there -- it would have to be before 12:00, because at 12:00 they would all come out, so you had to wait. You wanted to free yourself up when they came out at 12:00, because they'd only have an hour.

They would buy something, and then -- There were a whole bunch of factories there. Dell'Aquila was over there. That was on Jefferson. But this one -- what I would do -- It'll come to me. Next time, I'll have it for you. Right across the street from there. I would try to get in there about 11:00. I would walk in there. The ladies would be working, sewing or whatever, and I would walk in and say, "Signora, do you need anything?" "Yeah, what you got?" "I got peaches, cucumbers, whatever." "Okay. Give me three pounds of peaches." I would take that information. I would get six or seven different orders. They'd be working. No problem. I wouldn't bother them. Because as they're working, I would tell them what they could have. "Okay. Give me this. Give me a head of lettuce. Give me three pounds of tomatoes. Give me whatever it is." I would take six or seven orders. I would go outside, by Biggie's or wherever Mike was parked at the time, and I'd say, "Mike, give me three pounds of peaches." I'd get a bag for each order, and I would take them back. Then we'd get a double shift, because I'm doing this before 12:00, and we've got those customers already taken care of, and they didn't have to buy off of us now, because they already got theirs. I'd say, "Okay, this is \$4.50," while

she's working over there. "What do I owe you?" And it would be on the money, every time.

HM: The foreman or whatever must have let you in, though.

DA: Yes -- because they knew I worked for Mike Ferrante.

HM: Oh. Very cool.

DA: As soon as they'd see me, they knew I worked for Mike Ferrante and that opened doors to anything -- except for Dell'Aquila. The old man. He used to get ticked off. They're working and -- yeah, the old man. This was the father of the guys that are over here now -- Patsy and -- but I knew them well. I used to play basketball with them.

RF: Was the name of the factory Pescatore?

DA: Pescatore! That's the one! Pescatore!
Yeah! How did you know that one?

RF: I don't want to take up too much tape.
It's a long story.

DA: That's Pescatore's, yeah. That's
exactly the factory. That's exactly the factory.

RF: I'll say it quickly. A woman came into
the museum about a year ago with her son, and she gave us
a trophy from one of the early baby parades in Hoboken,
which was like 1912. Her name was Pescatore, and she
donated all these shears -- big shears -- and she said
they had had a coat factory, and her father ran the coat
factory.

DA: Yes. That was the father. That was the
father -- a very nice man. It's right on the money.
That's exactly it.

HM: Very good. This is combined
intelligence.

RF: But this is your interview.

HM: I don't have to look it up now.

DA: I do have it in my notes. We'll talk. There is Ann and -- there is a few of them that I can talk to. There's Christine, Michael -- but Michael isn't going to know too much. I know much more than Michael.

HM: I like that idea of the factory, because in a way, for the women working -- this means that, especially if it's starting to get dark early or whatever, they don't have to go outside later and get it from you, they can just go straight home.

DA: Yes. Twelve o'clock --

HM: -- they would have everything they needed.

RF: So what do you think now, when you see these trucks parked on the corner that say Fresh Direct on the side of them? Have you seen these, here in town?

DA: Oh, yeah, yeah --

RF: -- which are bringing organic food
(supposedly) to people. It's the same kind of thing --
bringing it to the door.

DA: Except that ours was open --

RF: -- open and a lot cheaper.

DA: Well, yeah. It was nice. That's why I
enjoyed working the streets -- the open air.

RF: You must know every corner in Hoboken.

DA: I did know. Not only could I tell you
every corner, I could tell you who was living in just
about every building at that time.

RF: So what do you think now?

DA: It's totally different. It's a
different world. A totally different world. I'm talking
about, I'm not talking -- but Mike Ferrante said, "This
is a good town." That's what he said, in the '60s. "This
is a good town." When I came out of college, I had the

opportunity to [?], and Mike said, "This is a good town," and I stayed in Hoboken.

RF: So the big question is, would he say it's a good town now?

DA: Well, yeah. It's going to be different. Everybody knew everybody at that time, etc., etc. Because I just seen, right now -- if you go to the PATH, if you go there between 8:00 and 9:00, they have a wave of people. It's like New York City was in those days. There's a human wave, from Washington Street to the PATH. I just noticed this in the last few weeks. It's a wave, one continuous wave, right into the PATH. But probably, in the '50s, we had more people than we have now. In the '60s, we probably had as much. In the '70s, that became hard. The '70s became hard.

Because the '60s were good. What's good about the '60s -- this is good, the money and everything else. But it was good because of the quality-of-life, the family structure. Everybody had four or five kids; everybody respected each other -- totally. Can you imagine parking a fruit truck overnight? I didn't see it, but that's what he told me. He would park the truck the

night before. Of course, they respected it because they knew it was Mike Ferrante, and everybody knew him. But still and all -- somebody could say, "Well, I'm just gonna go over there and get what I want!" [Laughs] Of course, they had to stop that after a certain time.

But he said he used to park the truck, totally open, with four or five boxes of peaches; four or five boxes of apples or whatever -- cases of 100 -- leave them there, and come the next morning --

HM: I have a question. Describe to me what he looked like.

DA: He was pretty heavy-set. I didn't realize it, but he was a lot older than -- he didn't look his age. He didn't look it -- he was strong. He was about my height, maybe a little bit shorter, possibly a little bit shorter. He was pretty heavy-set. Facial features? [Laughs] He had a good-natured face. His hair was white. He always had a hat on. They used to call him "Biangini." "Biangini" means white. Everybody used to say his name was "Biangini" -- the people who knew him in this town. They used to call him "Biangini." "Biangini" means a "whitey."

I guess he must have had blonde hair, or lighter hair, but when I knew him he always wore a hat. He had a sweater on, and he was probably a little more heavy-set than I am. He was probably a little bit shorter than I am. He was actually in his seventies, and I didn't realize that. I thought he was in his sixties.

HM: So when you met him, he was already in his seventies? Sixties, maybe.

DA: At least his sixties, yeah. He was up in years. I've gone to the cemetery. It's 1899, I think it was. He was in his seventies, and I didn't realize it. Because we didn't ask each other. We just assumed. It wasn't a society where you asked questions. You'd take things --

HM: But it seems like you thought he was younger, because he was involved with all that physical work.

DA: Lifting packages.

HM: Sure.

DA: We're talking about 50-60 packages, 40-50 pounds. A bag of potatoes is 50 pounds, and a box of [?] is 30 pounds. Peaches [?]. A case of celery would be heavy. But a 50-pound bag of potatoes -- that's 50 pounds, the packages.

No, he was in good shape. And as soon as he stopped -- yeah, he passed away in '72. January of '72. My grandmother was '71, that's right. Bang, bang. But you don't realize what you're losing until you miss it, and it's not there. Then you realize all these things. I had gold in my hands. I knew I had something good, but I didn't know how good it was. Here I am, 40 years later, 50 years later, and I can't find anybody who has his judgment. I told you a dean of engineering, okay -- my junior year in college -- I'll get into that. I just told Bob Foster --

In 1972 (that's when I graduated), he stated it -- Dean Elmer Easton. I ran into him two weeks ago, at a luncheon. Anyway, he was the Dean of Engineering. He's got a Ph.D. in electrical engineering. That was his field, okay? And he stated that, "The thing that will transform our society in the next ten years, in the next decade, will be the downsizing of computers." At

that time you needed a room-full, just like this, full of IBM 360s, to do what you can do on a calculator today, or a personal computer today. Literally, you would need this whole room in 1972, when the calculator was just beginning at that time. But he said, "In the next decade --" and that's been true not only for that next decade, but the next couple of decades.

Now why he comes to mind is -- in my junior year in college, we had a sit-down between myself -- a 21-year-old junior in college (I was a civil engineer) -- between myself and three other persons. One was a dean of the engineering school, Dean Easton. Another was an associate dean, who was also my professor -- Dean Del Mastro -- and the chairman of the Department of Civil Engineering. We sat down, and the issue had to do with Vietnam, etc. -- Vietnam, and also what I was going to do in the next year, etc. There was a bit to do, with me and the three of them. In the conversation, we got to talking about life. Well, at that point in time Domenick just went -- I threw at them, all three of them, everything that the old man had taught me for ten years; everything he taught me, by osmosis. They just threw up their hands and said, "Domenick, whatever you want to do, that's fine with us," and they just kept quiet. Because

there was a competition between wisdom and knowledge. Mike Ferrante had wisdom, they had knowledge. They all had Ph.D.s, and they would not contest what this old man had taught me. The only one who had any idea of where I was coming from was Dean Del Mastro, because I had him for a course.

But they were engineers, and they knew about numbers and physics and etc., but this was, for me -- I wish I could write down -- if I could write it down. Because he taught me principles and ideas and how to deal with people. We did good for people. They benefited, because he did good for people. And that's not an easy thing to do. But he did. There was not a person who run into him who could say a bad word about him. To this day -- the esteem -- people remember him today. They only have good to say about him. I can only say the best, never mind the good. He's the best quality.

And Bobby Ferrante, being his son, also had many of his qualities as well, too. He did. He did. But Mike was an original.

RF: So as you tell the story -- as you went on with your professional career in engineering --

did you find the same satisfaction, or meet people that you had the same type of work connection with?

DA: No. No. No, there has been no -- no, nothing close to that. Nothing close to that. Nothing close to date, anyway. One guy who could have been governor -- he was Secretary of State. I worked for him. We were the second largest in highway construction. But the judgment of people? No. There's nobody. This guy could have been governor. Well, even Dean Easton. Of course, I didn't get to know him that well, and we had a number of meetings. We respected each other -- a very nice gentleman -- but as much knowledge as you could expect [?] -- anybody smarter than that.

No, there's nobody who's come close, so far as I can see.

HM: So do you think Mike -- was it that he observed? Was he a good observer?

DA: What it was, was that he went through the Depression. That's what I think it was. When you've gone through -- we don't have the same concept. When you've gone through the Depression, and you see your real

basic -- I think September 11th brought it out. People got close. Because, "What's going on here?" But there are certain things we don't experience. We take a lot for granted. We do. But they seen it in its basics, when you can't put bread on the table. And he had a heart of gold. His daughter was [?]. She passed away, just like Frank Palmisano's wife. She had some of his qualities -- the giving.

I had to stop thinking about him in the '70s, because after I seen what I missed it would drive me crazy. I had to go on with my life. We did what we did, and I had to leave it there. Even when I talked to Bobby, etc. -- you could only go so far, because then you start losing it. You do. Because you can't duplicate. And this came natural. He was a natural phenomenon.

So do you want to talk about the fruit business a little bit now? [Laughter]

RF: It's amazing, listening to you talk about him.

DA: Well, he was amazing.

HM: But he was a great man. That's what it is.

DA: In his own way. See, I was one-dimensional. I could do mathematics, but I had a hard time putting things on writing. I could put things on writing now, but --

RF: You speak very well of him. It comes through.

DA: Well, I find no equivalent. I'm sorry. I don't. I'm "over fifty years old."

HM: Was it that you watched him -- He had respect from people. He worked hard.

DA: Oh, yeah.

HM: He was honest. He was genuine.

DA: And he had a heart of gold. He knew how to give. He knew when to give. He knew that I -- my father offered me, when I bought my car -- it's not the

same thing. See, he would give it to you when you needed it. It's a whole different thing. If somebody knows you're starving, and gives you \$10 -- well, you can eat with that. That's worth a heck of a lot more than giving you \$10,000 when -- I'm telling you. It's a question -- he had that judgment. He listened to people, and people would talk to him. Yeah. You could tell your story to him. You're in the business, and sometimes you have time, just sitting around or whatever, and you'd start up a conversation and talk about things. He would talk about the characteristics of people, the way human nature is. He would explain to you why we do certain things. That was a thing that he had. Every day I went in there, he told me something else about people -- the good qualities that we have, okay? Because he'd deal with you -- you're in the middle of the street, on the streets of Hoboken, your natural forum -- but he'd be able to pick it up. It was experience, basically. Mostly from experience, I would think.

HM: How great that he was able to pass that on, though, too; that he could tell you.

DA: He'd tell me, but also his sons and daughters. They had the same qualities, of giving. She passed away.

RF: Do you know much about his father?

DA: No. They came over from --

TAPE 2, SIDE 1

HM: -- set it up on an angle.

RF: That's right. We can do that. Watch out for the speed bumps.

HM: Oh, I always liked that.

DA: It showed you everything -- four or five boxes.

HM: And the signs could actually be cool again.

DA: Well, the signs will be exactly like Carmine Iannacone's got in the picture.

RF: So who wrote them out?

DA: That was my job. Bobby was good. And Mike might print....

RF: Who had the nicest signs? Do you remember?

DA: Bobby had nice --

RF: -- nice handwriting.

DA: Tommy Iannacone had nice handwriting. What we used to do -- we would take the bags, the paper bags, and put it right over it. You'd print on that. The big bags. You'd just slip it right over, and change it.

RF: So the truck bed is slanted up. Is that mechanical? Or is there just wood holding it up?

DA: What you do is you put something at the end over there, so it would stick on there --

RF: -- so it wouldn't fall off.

DA: Yeah. You'd put a two-by-four on the front and on the bottom. Then what you do is you make an overhang over the flatbed. You'd put a stick or something. We'd put it in there. Then you'd put another two-by-four under the board, you'd nail on; therefore, it would hang off the truck. It would make it a little lower, because the truck would be high. You can't reach it. But by putting an overhang of three or four feet, it would go down lower, and you can get stuff --

RF: You can get at it.

DA: Yeah. Sure. Because it's hard to go after a second box or whatever. A third box, forget about it, you're not gonna reach. Then you have to go up on top. Then you have a horse in the back --

RF: A sawhorse.

DA: Yeah. Yeah. The wooden -- and there would be like a four-by-eight. You'd take a couple of pieces of four-by-eight or four-by-tens of plywood, and

that's how you formulate it. You make it hang off the back of the truck by two or three feet or whatever, and then I could reach the second -- Then what you do is you go to the back of the truck, take out the front boxes, and --

RF: -- switch them around.

DA: Yeah. You bring them down. You had about five or six "lines." You would have eggplants, cucumbers, etc. in bushels. You'd put the bushels in the box. The bushel is round and it would cause stress, so you took a grape box, you'd gut it out, and you'd put the bushel in a box. You'd get four or five of them, about five deep, five high, a box of peaches, apples, whatever the boxes, and you had about four or five lines.

RF: I can remember Bobby -- if he changed his location, he would drive away very slowly --

DA: Well, yeah. You'd take the scale off.
Yeah.

RF: But he wouldn't put the truck down. There was too much weight to get it back up. He would just drive slanted.

DA: Yeah, you can drive it. No problem. Then at the end of the day you'd take it off, and the next morning you'd put it back on again. You might even leave the boards on, actually, depending on what the plans are. If you have to go to the market, though, you've got to take the boards off in order to go to the market, because it's gonna be a flatbed, in order to go to the market. Because you're not gonna get too many cases up there. You're talking about 50-60 cases, easy. Ten grapes, nectarines, plums -- whatever it was.

RF: They wouldn't be truck guys, but you'd also have people selling fruit around the train station, right? Inside the train station?

DA: Yeah, they'd do that. They're still there today. But they've only got a couple boxes. They sell it by piecemeal. We'd sell a few pounds, because they was big families. It's a blue-collar town. That's how it changed. These younger people, they buy one or two

of these, one or two of that. It's totally different.
Because they're only buying for one or two people. But
the woman was buying for four, five, or six people. Three
pounds of peaches or whatever --

HM: -- goes fast. Those hungry kids.

RF: I was thinking -- we remember another
fruit seller who's fairly short, always wore a cap, but
his big distinction was a big cigar, and maybe overbuy at
the "Clam Broth House?" Across from the post office? Do
you know who I mean? Sam maybe?

DA: Somebody is coming to mind.

RF: I have some pictures. I'll show them
to you.

DA: I can picture something, but --

RF: He's by himself.

DA: Yes, but it's one of the families. I
can't recall the name right now.

RF: Sorry about that. It just came to me.

DA: No, no, no, no, no! You're painting a picture. I can see the cigar. Yeah.

RF: And I'm talking about one of those extra-long ones. It wasn't a little cigar. He also sold at the train station, too.

DA: I can think of that. I can think of that. He probably wasn't in the business at the time when I was, going back earlier. Because this would be later. Basically, I'm talking about the '60s. Bobby did it after that. I'd still see them, etc. But the "Cilettis" also did it for a lot of years.

RF: When did Bobby stop? Because he ended up working for the city --

DA: -- in the '90s. I can get that date.

RF: It's got to be --

DA: -- in the '90s. In the late '90s.

RF: That's what I figure, too.

DA: Ninety-seven, '98. Because he was seven or eight years with the city. I can pin that down. I can pin that down. That wouldn't be hard to do.

RF: No one's doing it now.

DA: No. Bobby was probably one of the last ones. Bobby was probably the last one. And he continued to do 7th and Willow. That was the mother lode. That was the corner. Because all the other ones fell apart. Ninth and Willow fell apart, 8th and Willow, 7th and Willow, even through the '70s and '80s. But, of course, Bobby took it over. He continued the tradition.

But the business goes back to definitely before World War II, and to the Depression, very easily. And he did it with a cart and wagon --

RF: -- and a horse. Oh. A pushcart. Did he have a horse? Did he have horses?

DA: I suppose so.

HM: I hope the family has some pictures.

DA: He's got some pictures. [Cross talk]
After this, I'll go to see Christine and Michael.

HM: That would be so good.

DA: I'll see what I can get you. I don't
have anything to that effect.

HM: Even if it's just Mike with the cart.

DA: I can get a picture of Mike. I have a
picture of Mike.

HM: Good.

DA: I know Bobby had it. Let me talk to
Christine and Michael. They'll get something.

HM: And they know about the booklet, so they know it'll look really good, and we'll credit the family and everything.

DA: There's also Peter Palmisano. He's a priest at [?]. That's the grandson of Mike. [?] remembers a little. Christine might be helpful. There's also Ann Cappiello, who is Frank Palmisano's sister. She has good recall. She was one of our customers. If you have the booklet from the '70s, I can show you the customers, etc.

HM: Once I get the transcript, we'll do another meeting, and we'll go through it.

DA: I thought we'd have the '70s book here. You have a copy don't you?

HM: Yes. What I'll do is when we get the transcript -- because you'll need to correct it -- we'll give you a copy, you'll correct it, and then we'll meet again and we'll go through stuff.

RF: Since a lot of these people had stores, and they were also doing the trucks, I was wondering -- did they need a separate license for the truck?

DA: I don't think there was licenses.

RF: Well, you know -- the city is always trying to --

DA: I know. That's what it is today. This is a different Hoboken. This is a totally different Hoboken. Everybody knew everybody. The only thing maybe was that the scale has got to be --

RF: The scale has got to be authenticated.

DA: That's about all that I can think of. Bobby could tell you. It probably got tougher, later on in years, for Bobby. But these days, everybody knew each other. It was a different world, Bob. You can't picture it -- to leave a fruit truck overnight, Bob -- and this is close to the projects! On Madison Street. This is Madison Street, at that time, which was time. It became

real tough. But there was respect. Everybody respected -- everybody looked out for each other. Because they all knew each other, in every neighborhood. You couldn't walk in a neighborhood unless -- there were certain neighborhoods where you were know, and we always left our doors open. In his house, he always left it open.

HM: He was good to people, so there was no reason for them to steal from him. Do you know?

RF: It doesn't always work that way --

DA: -- but in this case, that was how it worked.

RF: He felt that comfortable.

HM: But also the people knew it was his truck, not to steal from him.

DA: You wouldn't. You wouldn't do it. You would be harming yourself if you did something like that. It was a different kind of town in the '60s, and the '50s, before my time, as well. They used to talk about

the '50s. There was trust. There was a lot of trust. Everybody looked out for each other. If your neighbor was getting hurt, you were getting hurt. That's how it was. That's how it was. You can't duplicate it.

In the '70s, I had to stop thinking about this stuff. I had to. You can't continue -- I talk about it now, but me and Bobby wouldn't talk about it, for a number of years after his father passed away. Because it got to be too touchy. It would drive you crazy.

HM: Because you can't recreate it.

RF: Timing is everything.

HM: But you were lucky. Now you see how lucky you were that you experienced it.

DA: Definitely. No question.

RF: So it's good to have had that.

DA: Yeah, it was a good experience. I enjoyed it. They were the best ten years of my life. No question about it. No question about it. He was an

exceptional man. He had tremendous judgment. He could judge people. I've seen that quality in other people, but -- and also he would do good. He would go out of his way.

RF: Would he go to church on Sundays?

DA: I guess he did. I guess he did. He believed in God.

RF: But you know, sometimes --

DA: We'd pass any church, we'd have to make the sign of the cross. St. Francis was where -- I don't know if he went every Sunday, but he did go to church.

RF: It sounds like he worked really hard, and he might just sleep late that day. [cross talk]

DA: I can't attest to that.

RF: I was just wondering.

DA: What he did on Sundays -- I just know what I saw with my eyes. Bobby could tell you. And Christine may be able to tell you. But he definitely believed in God. Yeah.

RF: Remind me again -- Did Bobby and Christine live in his old house?

DA: When they first got married they lived at 1st and Madison -- let's see -- 111 or whatever it was. There was Frank, who used to work for the City of Hoboken. Later he moved to 414 Monroe Street. But the first year or two, it was a relation of theirs, an uncle or something like that. But he lived on the top floor for about a year or two. We went across the street when we loaded up. That would be 111 or something like that, Madison Street.

RF: So that's where he lived, on Madison?

DA: Yes. That address.

RF: I was just curious.

DA: Biggie owns the building right now. It would be 109 or 107. Something like that. On the corner was Amato's Drycleaners, "Andrew" being Andrew Amato. The next building would be Frank -- I don't remember his name. He passed away now. Biggie owns that house. It's a four-story tenement, and Michael Ferrante -- Michael presently -- was born there. After a year or two he moved -- I guess probably rooms weren't available or whatever, but then he moved to 414 Monroe Street, and they've lived there ever since. But Mike Ferrante owned both those buildings -- 414 and 419 -- when I started.

RF: And are you any relation to Andrew?

DA: No, no, no.

RF: It's a common name, I know.

DA: No, we're no relation. I think I got more education than he got.

HM: By far.

DA: But he was at there at that time, though. He was at that corner -- a drycleaner. Then he picked up a lot of properties after that. I think his brother passed away, as a matter of fact, Amato.

RF: Are we stopping?

HM: We should, I think. Because we'll get too tired. This is a good amount of time for the transcriber to do stuff. Because what's going to happen (you know how this works) is that she'll transcribe it, there will be mistakes -- [Interruption]

RF: Go ahead.

DA: There was us and Carmine Iannacone at one time, on 7th and Willow. I can't remember what the hell was his name? And Sacco. There was two more on 8th and Willow. There was at least another one or two on 9th and Willow. That's already five or six right there, operating, and then there was other ones, that just worked the streets -- like Sammy Iannacone. I'd say there were easily a dozen trucks in the '60s. Sammy Iannacone, Carmine Iannacone, Mike Ferrante, Bobby Ferrante, Joe

Sacco, Joe Junior Sacco, Carlo Sacco. He did it for a while, too. Not that much. Then Sandy. He was mostly with the fruit store up on 15th Street. Then there was Mike's good friend who was on 8th. I can't remember his name. That's ten right there.

RF: Silletti.

DA: Silletti, yeah. But Silletti was with Sonny Martello, mostly. Then later on he got his own truck.

RF: I think you mentioned some of those before.

HM: Yes. But just to count -- that's at least a dozen trucks.

DA: There were a few others.

RF: I'm surprised you didn't drive the supermarket out of business. At least their fruit department. [Laughs]

DA: We undersold them by a wide margin. No, they drove us out. That's what happened. The small guy -- what happened was you went to the supermarket. Now you get everything at the supermarket. You don't even bother going to the fish store or the butcher shop. The supermarket knocked the little guy out.

HM: Because it's all centralized now.

DA: You go to one spot.

HM: But the stuff is so bad, though.

RF: And much more expensive. So as people got paid more -- the convenience.

DA: That was the whole thing with the fruit truck -- we were economical in the setup, because we don't have the expensive rent.

HM: And you want to move it fast.

DA: Yeah, yeah. Sure. And that's the reason why we kept going.

HM: I have a question. Maybe the answer is both of these things, but do you think that people bought, like you said people just bought from Mike. Did they buy from him because his fruit was better, or because of the relationship they had with him?

DA: No, we had good quality. We had good quality. But it was also the relationship you had with the man, because you wanted to talk to the man. You wouldn't just buy your fruit off of him. You would also tell your life to him. He would know you after a while. He would know his customers.

No, we had very good stuff, and I was quick. We had good stuff, at a good price.

HM: I'm getting the sense that, as you said, people said, "I'm going to him," because it was him. Right?

DA: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Like I said, some of his customers -- I couldn't wait on them. They had to be waited on by Mike, because he had a special relationship

with them. Also, he treated them a certain way. He knew when to put in a little extra for somebody.

HM: Or they maybe went back from the years before.

DA: Yeah, yeah. They knew him from -- yes. Many people did. Many people knew him. You would go to him because of Mike Ferrante. He would give you the fruit and everything else, but you would go for the man himself.

HM: Now do you feel that with the other fruit sellers it was the same? That people formed relationships with them?

DA: I can't tell you. I can't address that. I know what went on with us, but at the same time I don't know -- I don't imagine it did, but it may have. I'm sure there were special -- but I can only tell you what I saw.

RF: The other factor was how cheap it was, too. I don't mean comparing it to Food Town.. But I can

remember seeing it on the truck. You'd look at the prices, and it was like, "Whoa! This is like double what I get in the supermarket." And if you needed a lot of it, you were in heaven.

DA: Yeah. Yeah. But there weren't many of his customers -- they only wanted to be -- there were a couple of policemen or whatever -- if Mike was there, there was no way in the world that I could wait on him. I could not! Okay? They wanted for Mike to wait on them. I would give them the same stuff. But that wasn't it.

HM: Oh, I understand.

DA: That's wasn't it. I'm not Mike. Nobody else --

HM: Well, part of their day was connecting with him.

DA: Yeah. Yeah. But like I said -- Carmine Iannacone -- that's why I thought that was special. We were parked in the place, and he said, "No, I won't serve you. You have to go see Mike." And this is a competitor.

HM: Yes. But that's respect. But look -- he let him work on the same corner, and he didn't make a fuss.

DA: No, he didn't say nothing. No problem. That was his nature. That was his nature.

But there were many concepts, etc. -- they talked about human -- that's why I wish Bobby was around. With Bobby around, I could -- if he was here and we'd start talking a little bit over here, some of these things would come back. Because he knew some of the principles -- he saw the same principles as I saw. He was no dummy.

Well, that's one of the reasons I'm doin' this -- for Bobby -- his passing away, etc. If this had been a year earlier -- of course, in the last year he wasn't all there. It was tough, with cancer and everything else. But it would start coming out, when we would start talking about some of these stories.

HM: Well, when we talk to the family for pictures, we'll see if we get anything else.

DA: Yeah, I'll talk to Christine about pictures of Mike and the trucks. I don't think we're going to get much.

RF: The picture that's on the -- you know that calendar they did in the '70s, that's got a picture? Caroline took the picture, actually. It's a fruit-seller. I think it's a young Bobby. You'll have to look at it.

DA: Do you have it over there?

HM: Maybe it's on mine.

RF: It might be, actually. We can look. We can look. I do have them in storage, in another pile. I'm just not sure I can pull it out right now. I have a lot of stuff on the computer, and whether that's in page by page, I'm not sure. Anyway, that would be a good picture of Bobby, actually. He's on the front -- himself and other people.

DA: If you've got it. Because when he passed, he didn't really have much. Because I looked. The picture I'm thinking of, as a matter of fact -- I think

Bobby had it, but I'm not sure they have it. Because he had it on his truck. He always carried it, on his truck. He always had it.

HM: The picture of his dad.

DA: Yeah. I don't think I kept a file, when he passed away. But he had a picture of him.

RF: There was another picture in the book.

HM: Somebody has to have a picture of him -- I hope.

RF: Well, let's go look. We're putting it on Pause.