

THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: MICHAEL "BROTHER" YACCARINO

INTERVIEWER: ROBERT FOSTER

LOCATION: HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM

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TAPE 1, SIDE 1, SESSION #1

RF: Your name, sir?

MY: Hi, Bob. Okay. I'm Michael Yaccarino, the son of Joe "Biggie," a blackface comedian. He was a prominent comedian in the early '30s. He went under the trade name of Joe "Biggie." In the early '40s, he had a pushcart. My older brother, Pat, and I, we worked -- the pushcart was located on Fifth and Jefferson Streets, and there clams were sold two for a nickel, which is thirty cents a dozen. We worked that during the summer months; in the winter months, we had an old Chevrolet, we took the rumble seat out, and we put in the pails of clams and all sorts of other pails, and we went and made about six

stops to various taverns. Patrons were there, waiting for us, and we shined their shoes. Shoes were five cents, and the bar gave away some finger sandwiches. Today that's a no-no with ABC.

We did that about six times, and we made a little money. Keep in mind that it was the early '40s, and there wasn't that much work around. Daddy was a self-made man, and he liked the fish business. After a few years in there, Dad got a brainstorm and he opened up Biggies T-Bone House, located at 506 Jefferson Street (it was Grandma's property), and we did that for about a year and a half. It was a yes-and-no deal, busy at times, but maybe the timing in the business wasn't right for a restaurant. We switched over to 318 Madison Street, our present location. There Biggie started a place called Biggie's Clam Bar. We sold hotdogs, clams, sausage sandwiches, corn-on-the-cob, and odds and ends. We were the largest user of Long Island clams. This went from March to Labor Day, then he shut down.

Dad worked for the city, and he was a maintenance man there. He put in twenty-two years at Hoboken City Hall.

In the winter months, he loved Florida. He was a big booster of Florida, just like Arthur Godfrey.



He sold Florida to people who never went to Florida, and he loved it.

We used to shut down our business, and we would open again in the springtime. Every spring, Dad would say, "Come on, Brother dear, it's time to open up for another season," and we did that. As the weather got warmer, our business increased. People stayed out late at night. There was no air-conditioning in these apartments. There were big families downtown, and watermelon was a good summer food. Clams were cheap, but, there again, a summer fruit and very nourishing. Sandwiches were good, and we sold until 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning. I had school the next day; I don't know how I got by in Hoboken-Demarest at the time.

But it was a good, honest living, and it was a family of seven. I, Michael, was right in the middle -- three over me, three under me. There were seven children, four girls and three boys. We didn't have much. Well, nobody did. Families were large. There wasn't much work offered people, and if you made a decent living you were happy. We went to local schools, we played a little ball, and you saw the game from the perspective of the neighborhood.

That's the way it went for eighteen years. In 1965, Daddy gave me the reins to carry on the tradition of Biggie's Clam Bar. I was married to Marie, my present wife, for forty-nine years as of 2007, and we have two children.

In business, it's no easy task. The food line is very hard, and you've got to be dedicated to the business. You're actually a slave to the business. Marie and I rolled up our sleeves, and we took over where Daddy left off. Daddy had a big pair of shoes to fill, and to this day I think I filled it very well. As we raised our children, I bought a home on Garden Street, and the girls attended local schools. They've done very well.

The business went on as I went in there. A new broom sweeps clean. I had new, fresh ideas. I increased the menu. I served all of Hudson and Bergen counties, a lot of sports figures, writers, working people, lawyers, and everybody liked my sandwiches. At that time, on downtown Madison Street, there were only three businesses that were doing business -- Leo's Grandezvous, Biggie's (myself), and Fiore's Deli. Now, today, you've got Burger Kings and Johnny Rockets and you name it -- and Starbuck's.

So we went downtown and we were happy, and the big families, teachers, ball players, they all patronized me. I was happy, because they would talk sports and about current events. There was no liquor served there. We were like Robert Hall -- plain pipe racks. We made a decent, honest living.

Every year, instead of closing up around September 10<sup>th</sup> -- the weather was so nice and we were having an Indian summer -- I proceeded to go with the business until December 1<sup>st</sup>. When I did close, I took the two or three months off, from December, January, and February. I took my family on vacation, and I enjoyed my home life with my children.

This went on for a number of years. Then my daughters grew up, and my oldest daughter -- her husband came into the picture, a nice, aggressive young fellow by the name of Steven. He assists me. He took over the cooking duties, and he left no stone unturned. He worked hard, and I saw a lot of dedication in Steven. When time went on, in about twenty years, I called him in one day and I said, "Stevie, starting at the first of the year I'll make you my partner." He was happy, and I was happy that I was able to do it without being pressed to do it. A few years later my other daughter got married,

and her husband was in a different line. But Stevie was the main one. Then I made him my partner, and today my daughter and him have my "stock," and they're running a real first-class business. In fact, in the year 2002 we entered a contest that was started by the *NJ Monthly*. It wasn't for taste, it wasn't for sales, but it was for longevity, and we had four generations -- myself, my father, my daughter and her husband, and her two boys. Believe it or not, we were in a good competition with the big companies, but the bottom line was we won it all. We were the champions of the family business of the year 2002 for the state of New Jersey. I was happy. We had two tables that day in this big room at the catering hall, nothing but cheers and delightful. Everybody was high-fiving and handshaking on the award. I found that, like my dad, I was very happy that my little place, in the middle of the block on Madison, between Third and Fourth, came out smelling real good. I was happy on that.

RF: Going back to the peddler days.

MY: Yes.

RF: Now most people don't even know what a pushcart was. Could you describe what that was?

MY: Yes. It was a cart that had big giant wheels, and it had handlebars. Ours was lined with tin. This way, when you put in ice-cold clams, with ice, that would hold the ice. We were trying to put a square piece there, and we lined up the clams, rows of clams with lemon things, and it was very attractive. Fish is very nourishing. Today, with today's prices, fish is in big demand. Eating clams by us was an event. You say, "What do you mean, an event? A clam's a clam." No. A clam shucked by Biggie and his boys is something special. The art of shucking clams is holding the clam firm, keeping the juice in there, and getting all that "veil" out, cut around and double-cut it so you're free from the muscle. The clam is cheaper than the mussel, and it looks plump. It's cut nice. It's attractive, and the presentation is there. When you get a clam from me, within seconds you see something of beauty. If you go into a big restaurant, there is a prep man, a salad man, a "potato" man, but there's no clam man.

So what happens? They shuck the clams, they ring the bell, the waiters -- by the time it gets to

you the clam -- it slides down in the shell, the juice runs out, and it's not as appetizing as when you get it from a clam bar at Biggie's. That was a big selling point.

RF: I know a lot of people who swear they'll only eat clams from your bar.

MY: I get people -- well, they're spoiled in Hoboken. They're spoiled with Fiores and the mozzarella. They're spoiled with Leo's and the bar pies. So in Hoboken, the three main giants are down there. And you know what? Competition is great, and nobody felt, "Hey -- " Everybody was happy campers. But if you're going to have clams, you'd better have them by me, because I sell a lot, we cut them right, we keep them fresh, and every bit of clam is tagged, and we don't buy them from any local merchant, we buy them from a qualified commission house to clear the tag by the Fishery Department. I keep my tags; this way, nothing can backfire. They're ice cold, and they're cut nice.

RF: So the cart -- could one person move this cart?

MY: It had wheels. We used to push it. But we stood stationary. We sat on the corner, and we paid to double-park.

RF: What was your corner? Did you go to different corners?

MY: In the early days, we would start on Fifth and Jefferson Streets. Now, today, I'm in the middle of the block. I have photos of that here. That's where the clam bar remained. We set the clams out in the middle of the night. We never locked up our bar. When the night was over, we'd just ice them up, and put a cover on the clams. They'd say, "Biggie, aren't you going to lock up your clams?" "No, I'll leave them, -- so I'll come down and I'll cut them for you."

RF: Because you lived nearby.

MY: We lived in a house, at 318.

But we made a decent living. At the family business, everybody jumped in. My sister was behind the

counter, my mom, now my nephews came into the picture. They all help. Everybody got a little shot at Biggie's, they earned a little money, and Biggie's, as it was -- This is important. Biggie's was headquarters then, and still today, in my sixty-fifth year, it's still headquarters. The family meets there, we greet there, we entertain, we break bread, we have our coffee and eat some goodies, but the place is family headquarters and that's the way it should be. Those are the values we were taught, and I'm sure everybody who reads this has the same value from their mom and dad.

RF: When you say "family headquarters," do you mean that it's family who works there?

MY: They didn't have to. If they wanted to see you, they just came to your business. We had a table set aside. If friends of mine came in there, Mom made coffee, we had a soda and ate sandwiches. That was a place where you'd meet, and sat down. It was a nice upbringing. It wasn't the fanciest, but people were coming for the food, for the clams. When the people see a husband and wife team, they know that that's straight-up. They're going to come, and I'm going to tell them what



they want to hear. I'm going to sell my fresh stuff, my tasty sandwiches, the presentation is there, and the good will that goes with every business. Your personality is up front. In fact, anybody in any business today, whether you go into any store throughout the country, the person, he or she, behind the counter is a front-line ambassador. You say, "What do you mean?" Because they're going to greet you either way, take an order, they're going to send the order in to the next step, they're going to fill the order, and then it's delivered. Time is important, and every customer is a king and queen. It's their money, their business can go elsewhere. If they come by you, every employee should be happy, from the top man right down to the bottom man.

Now, today, Biggie's is rolling. I serve Hudson and Bergen counties, all around, and today they always think of clams and I get into the subject. In fact, when families call up, "Come on over." "What are you having? What are you cooking?" "We're going to have a Biggie tonight. So not only do I have a nice trade name, I'm a household word. So that fares well with me.

RF: I'm getting confused. What was the "Brother?"

MY: That's a nickname that Daddy gave me. He was a minstrel man, like I said earlier, and he was an end man. When two men entered the center stage, they basically had a one-line joke: "Hello, Brother this," and "Hello, Brother that." So when I was born, they called me Brother. It was nice at that time, but then as you get older -- my name is Michael, and you want to be introduced as Michael. But there again, a name's a name, and it stuck.

RF: The "Brother" stuck.

MY: Yes.

RF: But your dad's nickname was Biggie.

MY: Biggie. I don't know where he got that name from.

RF: Then, of course, a lot of people call you Biggie.

MY: They call me Brother Biggie. Right.

RF: Brother Biggie.

MY: Right.

But I'm happy the way my life unfolded. If I were to do it all over again, I would do it the same way. My wife came from Monroe Street, around the corner. I didn't have to go looking far for her, and when we got married we lived in the next block from my store, and my rent was \$33 for my apartment. I got married in 1958. My two girls are doing well, I have four grandchildren. I didn't have a chance to take my girls to the Dairy Queen for ice cream because I was always working, but when they got married my wife and I gave them everything any parent could give their children. We had big weddings, and that was our day all summed up, of all the hard work we did raising our children. I love Hoboken and Hoboken loves me. The neighboring town of Union City, which is called West Hoboken, North Bergen -- a lot of people patronize me. Jersey City also comes into the picture. Now they're coming from Nutley, Glen Rock, Fair Lawn. From Bayonne I get a lot of patrons now. If your name is out there, your food is out there, your business is going good and you have a nice product, they're going to get to you. Still,

today, I don't have no parking lot, but you know what?  
Thanks to the city, double-parking is there. I'm happy  
that I'm able to get a little help from the city in that  
department.

RF: Have you ever thought, over the years,  
to move further up, to the business district, to  
Washington or -- ?

MY: I wish I was up on the avenue, or on  
the waterfront or someplace with more room. I could put  
in a nice fish display and parking. I could do more with  
businesses. Here, I'm very limited in space and all that.  
I do the most with it, but I wish I was up here. Now,  
today, it's -- when you move things change. Sometimes for  
the better, sometimes you can fall on your face.

RF: Sure.

MY: So we've got a winner. We own the  
property where we're at. So we stay there, and we're  
happy, with our feet planted firmly on the ground.

RF: And how has Hoboken changed over the years?

MY: For the better. There were a lot of old buildings. One building had fifty children. At Christmas time, extensions on top of extensions, kerosene stoves and Christmas trees. Your heart is in your throat; you don't want things to happen. Today, the buildings are all nice and shiny. They meet the code. That's because it's all branched off. It's safer, it's brighter, lighter. The area really did change for the better. I'm happy to be there, and I welcome the new, young professionals. They discovered me. As they come in from their day's work, they dump their clothes, and they come down for a little snack down at Biggie's -- chicken salad, ribs, clams, franks, sausage, sandwiches, and they have a nice cold Heineken's, and there is some wine on the premises. They discovered me, and I welcomed them.

RF: You're making them happy.

MY: I'm making them happy. They're happy with me and I'm happy with them.

RF: That's interesting. Because a lot of times a lot of older residents, people who were born and raised here, there's a bit of antagonism of the newcomers. They feel people aren't as friendly; that they don't know the town well enough. You know what I'm talking about, what you hear.

MY: I think that part, of the old Hobokenites and the new, has been sort of blown out of proportion. I think the young professionals, they make nice money, they invest in Hoboken. They come from great families, great areas -- Short Hills, Bergen County, Bridgewater and all -- and they chose Hoboken. I don't believe they're second-class citizens at all. I think they should be heard. They're bright, they're on Wall Street, they have big jobs, and I see them as -- Is somebody coming in?

[Interruption]

RF: When would you set up? Would you set up in the morning? Would you be there all day?

MY: All day. You were a slave to the business.

RF: And what time would your day start?

MY: Well, naturally, I went to school, and my dad had a city job. But when I opened my business, at the noon hour, you had your lunch time period, then you had the mid-afternoon, and then nighttime was big business. I actually went with sandwiches down to Joe Beer's. You know Joe Beer's, the bread store?

RF: Right.

MY: I went down at 12:00-12:30, and gave them some more rolls because they were sold out and "we'd get a call." Many times, five guys from Palisade Park would come down. We were closed. My dad's sitting on the table, on the other side. "Hey, Biggie. I've got five cars here. We all want sandwiches." My dad looked at me and he says, "Ready, Son? Give us ten minutes." We'd go in there, get [food ready.] That's the goodwill of the business. That's what made you. It wasn't that you'd come in and take in the money. You had to work at what you were doing. They'd pass a lot of places to get to you,

from Palisade Park. They're not even on your turf, and you've got to put your best foot forward.

RF: You've got to do it.

[Interruption]

RF: Now would your dad -- would Frank Sinatra have come to the clam bar? Or was that later?

MY: By the time we started, Sinatra had already hit the Rustic Tavern and gone on to the Paramount. My dad took my sister over when he appeared at the Paramount. Johnny "Long" was the bandleader. My dad went backstage, one of those -- "Come on in, Joe." He had maybe a thirty-second audience with my daughter. My sister was very thrilled.

This is me and my nephew. This is Dad, the picture -- he was dressed as a doorman, a black-face comedian, so we have to be careful how we use that.

RF: This says Joe Biggie. So Joe was his official name.



MY: Yeah. Joe Biggie. This was the old pushcart, in the street.

RF: So that's your dad?

MY: That's Joe Biggie. That's his -- I've got a program here, which did not appear in the papers.

Here's me when I was young, shucking the clams. Okay.

RF: Now, is shucking clams dangerous? I mean, can you cut yourself?

MY: No. We use a dull knife.

RF: Okay. That's the secret?

MY: Did I tell you about that *NJ Monthly*? And the business. We won it all. The judge -- we were facing all big companies, the sponsor of this, and we won it all. We made a proposal to the judges -- this is what we set up in: "Family Who Works Together, Stays Together," and -- good work ethics. My workers have become policemen, a fire captain (there's my daughter),

an accountant, a doctor (my son-in-law), a priest -- Peter Palmissano -- all these workers for me went on to bigger and better things. That's what made Biggie's unique. I've been a Kiwanis member, and I'm a member in good standing.

Now the *Times* gave me a nice write-up about the clams. I can't see the end of it now. As long as the water don't run out, Biggie's will still --

RF: "Hoboken has changed a lot since 1946, of course, but as long as the supply of clams doesn't dry up, it's safe to expect that Biggie's will be around for at least four million more."

MY: The *New York Times*.

RF: Very good.

MY: This is my menu when we started -- clams 40 cents. Clams on the half-shell went to 40 cents at that time.

RF: What year is this?

MY: In '46.

RF: So how much are clams on the half-shell now?

MY: Ten dollars a dozen. Four generations. Biggie's Clam Bar, winner of the regular award. See it? That's what we were talking about before. The mayor gave me a proclamation of that. What is this about? "Business takes home awards."

RF: Did your mother work in the business?

MY: She cooked in the background, there.

Somebody sent me a picture. This was a menu. We called ourselves "Little Coney Island," before we took on the name "Biggie's Clam Bar."

RF: Really.

MY: Yes. That first picture. Here's our specialties: Clams on the half-shell; cheese steak; hotdogs. This is a family atmosphere -- informal, open collar. Today, you go today, on a cruise, in a boat

atmosphere, and it would be open collar. Years ago, you didn't go into a hotel but you had to wear a jacket. My dad was way ahead of that. Some of the pictures -- there's my first shot, with the pushcart.

RF: Here's the pushcart too.

MY: That's the original picture. There's the watermelon case. Here's my dad's famous picture. Today, you go by the big old Garden of Eden, you see one case today. But we were ahead of that.

RF: Do any of these old signs exist anywhere? Like in the basement or anything?

MY: See, when we [approached] New Jersey Monthly, we did our homework. The judges seen that. The judges seen that. Every other one, "Hey Brother, how are you?" and kissing. Every other one, people -- So they seen the family atmosphere. You read this story about Biggie's. There it is. It's a nice story. My son-in-law took over, my daughter, myself -- see where the clams are displayed?

Now this was a picture [looking through pictures], an old shot of "Biggie's, with the bar on the other side

and only twenty-three tables. See, now, I opened my yard,  
and took my yard up.

RF: Because, used to be, you could sit in  
the yard, right?

MY: Yeah.

RF: Right. I remember that.

MY: My father would be amazed. He worked  
with Cary Grant, too, you know, briefly. But he had five  
children at that time --.

This is Mr. Marciano -- Rocky.

RF: Rocky. It's a news photo. So did you  
ever get involved in boxing?

MY: No. I'm just a fight fan.

RF: Okay.

MY: My dad seen a lot in me. It says here what are your family businesses, what your philosophy is.

RF: The ten questions.

MY: Now nobody has this here. Joe B, he had his own group.

RF: Okay. Tell me more about that.

MY: Well, 1935, Joe "Biggie" belonged to the Madison Minstrel Show, which I showed you in here. He had his own group -- fifty cents, okay? January 12<sup>th</sup>.

RF: So these are blown up from small cards, right?

MY: Yeah. I got that. Yeah.

Oh, there might be something in here about Hank Foster, your friend.

RF: Hank Forrest?

MY: Yeah. He was my neighbor. He seen me "laboring" there on Third and Madison Street. He was there. He was there with his young lady.

RF: Stella.

MY: Yeah. And he wrote about me. At that time, I had a bid on the Waterfront. We won't get into that. That's tacky. We put a bid in. Biggie was there before civilization, the way he put it in words.

Okay. Now. The Third Ward Democratic Club, 1938, they had that Joe "Biggie" was in charge of the entertainment [with] his "Blackbirds" -

RF: So was he a singer?

MY: No. He was the emcee.

RF: Emcee. Was he a good speaker?

MY: Well, yeah, he was a nice speaker. I've got a picture of him.

See, today we do that on Halloween. But years ago, it was Thanksgiving [dressing up--Ragamuffin Parade]. Do you recall that?

RF: I don't, but I know of it.

Tell me again what your dad did when he worked for the city.

MY: He was a maintenance man.

RF: Maintenance. Right.

MY: Nineteen-thirty-eight. Daddy was very instrumental in the May Walks. He was the standard bearer of the club. Biggie was the host --

RF: Did you play sports?

MY: Oh, yeah, but not in high school. My dad's mom and his sister -- this is my sister and sister-in-law, this is Mom. These are the two brothers I lost -- baby Joseph, Jr. He was christened by this guy -- he owned the Royal Restaurant, right near City Hall, where Carlos's Bakery is. It was called the Royal Restaurant.



RF: Because it used to be Schoening's. But  
before Schoening's?

MY: Yep. The Royal Restaurant.  
[Looking at pictures]

RF: Who's this?

MY: A singer downtown. Pinto.

RF: Tell me about him.

MY: I don't know too much about him. He  
sang at my wedding, a nice singer. Nice songs.

RF: Italian.

MY: Yeah.

RF: What's the first name?

MY: I'll get the name.

See, years ago you had contests. Palumbo's Tavern, at Third and Monroe, off the corner. In fact, his daughter is the principal.

MY: Patty Prince.

RF: Wow. The Hoboken Four.

MY: He was my neighbor. Now the els.  
Remember the els?

RF: In Hoboken.

MY: Yeah.

RF: On Observer Highway.

MY: Yeah. Still.

RF: Because this would be Washington, City Hall, right there. You hardly ever see it.

MY: You got a picture like that? You want it?

RF: Yeah, that would be great. There's Palumbo's again.

MY: -- taking out the votes. I don't even know who all knows.

RF: It looks something like that. It's not the police station site? The recorder's? So who would have collected the pictures? Your dad?

MY: My dad. Yeah. He took pictures.

RF: And would he have gotten involved in politics?

MY: He was a half-assed politician.

RF: He would have had to walk a fine line.

MY: See, he worked up there because he didn't want to go any further. He had a hand in a business downtown. He went to school with Borelli, DeSapio, Grogan, all those mayors. "McFeeley." Even

though he got beat by Grogan, by Borelli and the Grogan team, the fusion ticket --

I've got the story.

"In the spring of 1946, Joe Biggie, a well-known minstrel man, opened 'Biggie's Little Coney Island.' The menu: hotdogs, sausages, steaks, corn-on-the-cob, ice-cold watermelon, clams on the half-shell. Patrons would stop -- good family mood, nice general atmosphere.

"...Anxious to get their goodies before the season ended, which would close up the season."

RF: What was your mom's name?

MY: Rose.

RF: How did they meet? Do you remember?

MY: No.

[reading] The restaurant "seats fifty people, the [menu ] has been expanded, family atmosphere, waiters pleasant, the food is good. Clams are their specialty, and hotdogs...

RF: So would you say that you're retired from the business now?

MY: Well, I had my operation December 4<sup>th</sup>, and I'm going to go back there.

RF: Oh, this is a good one. So he's [Joe Biggie's] an end-man.

MY: End man, 1935. See the two guys meeting on the center stage? [Photos of minstrel shows] -

RF: Now what do you know about the Madison Athletic Club?

MY: The Madison Minstrel Club. It's a group of guys that put on a show every year, the minstrel show, in 1930.

RF: And where would this happen -- the show?

MY: At the Oxford Hall on 5<sup>th</sup> and Jefferson. The Oxford. This was before the war.

Oxford Club had their members who dressed like Groucho Marx, clowns, it was really a top show.

[looking at photo.] There was 4,000 at the May Walks.

Four thousand kids used to march in the May Walk. That was the stand, at the May Walk.

They gave out 2000-3000 Dixie cups, candy and all. Four thousand. Cup cakes, too. Four thousand. Imagine "these days," minstrel shows.

RF: Here's Biggie -- the end man. "The end man will be Joseph Biggie."

MY: Oh, yes. He was popular.

RF: So the end man. Talk about that more. What does the end man do?

MY: Just tell jokes. Come in and tell jokes.

RF: It's like a parade, in the reviewing stand.

MY: The King and Queen went on, we take that picture. The King and Queen was voting, and they showed them around in an open convertible.

This was all done [at the recreation center]. They used to make the Maypoles.

RF: Right. Did you ever do it?

MY: No.

RF: That was before your time.

MY: No, that was the Girls' Department, not the Boys' Department. But it was an after-school program, making them really, really nice.

RF: [Now let's talk] about the celebration for your anniversary.

MY: On September 17<sup>th</sup> of last year, we put together a block party, in celebration of our sixty years in business. We had food stands, food court, platforms, food was given out free, and any money that was donated would go to the homeless. I used the churchyards, St.

Francis -- I gave them a \$1,000 donation. I gave away a total of \$3,200, and I was happy to do it, to give back to the community. We gave away 1,800 sandwiches, 1,200 hotdogs, twelve bags of clams, 900 ears of corn, and nine bottles of soda or water, fifty watermelons, and six big sheet cakes and everything. For the children, we had face-painting, crayons, and a good time was had by all. Well-wishers came out to say hello to me, and thanked me for the years. Old-timers came from out of town to visit me. There was family there, and everybody had a very nice time. The food was good, and I had a couple cops there but you know what? We didn't need them. We had no crowd control. It was a pleasant day, it was a walking promenade, everybody eating and talking. Just perfect. I thanked the weather man for cooperating-- and Mayor Roberts gave me a proclamation with the City Council. He spoke to me and to the public about my longevity in business, and how I'd been an asset to the community, and how my daughter, who runs the business -- they spoke briefly, and in turn the Hoboken Boys' Club and the Hoboken Girls' Club sang "Happy Birthday" to me, and they put a little performance on. It was just a great day, and a good time was had by all. I was lucky that I was able



to do this for my town. I love it, and it's very good to me. They made my life interesting.

RF: Okay. That's a good way to end for now. That's great. [Interruption]

TAPE 1, SIDE 2

MY: It's a good appetizer [clams]. You can have a couple dozen. People want to go into a restaurant with a friend or whatever, you'll have half a dozen or a dozen as an appetizer, depending on the entrée. But it's a great way to start off a meal. You can have them baked, steamed, you can have them with pasta. There are so many ways you can enjoy clams. But it's a good food, a healthy food, and if you deal with Biggie's, buy from him, he'll cut them as an expert. I'd rather lose a clam than a customer. That's my motto.

That's another thing. I don't fool with it. If it doesn't live up to my expectations, it will be "twelve or thirteened." They say, "Well, Brother, how do you know?" By the sound of the knife, going through the clam. You hear the hollowness. If it's hollow inside, you open it up and the shell will be dry. That's a no-no.

That's got to go out. You say, "Well, why did they put it in the bag?" In that bag, you're going to find a mussel or [something else] -- as they reel up from the ocean, they're going to take everything. So you're going to get it. But you know what? When it comes down to the push and shove and the final note, he's the one who's going to give you the product, and it's going to pass a rigid inspection. I'd rather lose a clam than a customer, because if you have a bad clam, you're going to stay away for quite a while.

RF: Definitely. Definitely. That's a good quote. And do you still taste the clams?

MY: There again, I loved them in the beginning. I love them baked, in my pasta.

RF: But you don't like them as much anymore?

MY: No. It's like the candy man. The candy man doesn't eat candy. Once you handle it, and you see it every day, you sort of shy away. That doesn't mean I don't like them, but I like them with the vinegar and the

cocktail sauce. Sauce is a great asset to the clam. Some like the vinegar with the hot peppers; some like Tabasco; with lemon, you taste the ocean. Some like a nice spicy cocktail, made with horseradish. That's another popular item. There again, it depends on your taste buds, but as far as I'm concerned, I like a little lemon and I can taste the ocean. That's the first thing. And keep in mind: Clams have no calories. It's a good, nourishing food, and if you want a diet of fish, clams are what you want. Any fish lover will tell you, if you want a good complexion, eat a lot of fish, and your face will be red. A nice complexion. That's why the Europeans, throughout Europe, they eat the catch-of-the-day, and they look great.

RF: [Interruption]

Okay. We were talking about your dad.

RF: Yeah, my dad, Joe Biggie, was a very good storyteller. Before the clam business he worked in the produce business, and his area was Cliffside Park. So he knew it very well, and he seen his family grow up in there, and he sold fruit. Then he [left] that business, the produce business, and he concentrated on Biggie's

Clam Bar. People from his own neighborhood came to visit him, and one guy stood out in my life. My dad was talking about his family. This so-called "gentleman" was sitting on the edge of his seat, facing my dad, looking him square in the face, as my dad expressed the good times and the stories about their parents. The guy was on the edge of his seat, listening. The guy had tears in his eyes. My dad was a great storyteller. Maybe he got that from his vaudeville days, being an actor -- he knows what to tell them. Make them happy. You'll forget your troubles and be happy, and you had a nice evening.

So these comedians, don't sell them short. Each one has a story, they make you forget your troubles, they entertain you, and you get your money's worth.

TAPE 2, SIDE 2, SESSION #2

RF: This is our second meeting with Brother, and the date is Monday, 6/25/07. We're continuing our interview, and you're going to give us a little more background on your dad. So, anything you want to start with?

MY: [reading] The profile of Joe Biggie. Joseph Yaccarino came from Naples, Italy at age one. He was the oldest of eleven children. He was a showman. He played the part of an end man in minstrel shows as early as 1935. He was a jokester. End men entered the center stage and told jokes and stories, and people enjoyed their comedy and talent. He was very popular in the Third Ward, and very active. He was in charge of all the entertainment throughout the minstrel shows and other clubs (the Oxford Club). He was a black man dressed in a doorman's clothing. Joe Biggie also had his own rhythm girls, who danced to the routine.

Today, we celebrate Halloween with costumes and fancy hats; years ago, it wasn't like that. We'd celebrate that on Thanksgiving Day, on Thursday morning. The band picked up Joe Biggie at his home on Madison Street, and the fun began. Biggie dressed up in his costume, and walked with the band, and gave out candy. A lot of people knew him, and a lot of "patrons" also knew him.

Joe Biggie started on 5<sup>th</sup> and Jefferson Street, then later moved to our present location, which is 318 Madison Street, in 1946. We were what you called Biggie Little Coney Island.

Okay. On 318 Madison Street, we had a pushcart on the street, and a watermelon case on the sidewalk. The food concession was on the inside. It was a seasonal business. There we sold sausage sandwiches, steak sandwiches, corn-on-the-cob, French fries, and hotdogs, and cold drinks. I'm sure we had the coldest soda in town.

Our hours were from March to September; then we shut down for the winter. In 1965, his son Michael, who was called "Brother Biggie," took over the reins. Even though Joe Biggie had a big pair of shoes to fill, Michael handled himself admirably.

Now my history. Joe and his wife had seven children, and each one of us -- them -- helped and served. We worked long hours, and the store was open to 1:00 in the morning. The downtown area was very crowded, and everyone sat on their stoops until midnight. Few had air-conditioners, some did and some didn't, and some enjoyed the late, cool weather.

Michael and Marie were married in 1958. We had two girls, Rosemary and Judy. Both girls worked at the restaurant. They did their homework on the back table. My oldest daughter, Rosemary, was "courting" Steve Rennaro, and went on a date. We had to cancel that date;

he had to come to work. We were short-handed. Because there were no substitutes, and we'd lose customers if we were shorthanded, when you had family. Steve, again, he took the bull by the horns, he rolled up his sleeves, and he worked very hard to get the night in. It was only one night. It happened many nights, until I put him on the payroll.

This was the start of the Rennaro era. Steve was very alert. He had one year of college, and he had a business mind. He worked the grill. He put a lot of time into the business. We had worked at St. Ann's Feast. We went all over, and people looked for us. Our name, in the clam business, I think, was tough to beat. One night we'd cut a clam, we'd serve it, we'd keep it chilled in the proper sauce and presentation. All that with one shuck of the knife, and you got it.

Everybody said nice things. "Biggie will tell you what you want to hear, whether you're a golfer or whether you're a fisherman." He liked to touch base and find out where you were coming from, so I became a frontline ambassador -- which means that I'd greet a person, take their order, fulfilled it, and I told them what they wanted to hear. I think that's the key to winning. When you have that going for you, I think, the

food speaks for itself, and that's how I was able to last a lot of years.

I find that I developed a lot of pleasure from working, and dealing with people. I think this business was tailor-made for me. Because I went as far as high school, I went into service, and my brothers and sisters minded the store while I served my time in Korea. I came back, I took over, and it was like I never left. The business was there, greeting me, and we went on with the business.

My wife worked very hard, and so did my children. Everyone had a hand in it. [Interruption] Being in the food business is no easy task. It is long hours. Dedicated owners or people help us, and this way this leads out to the customer. It has to be up to par. Today, that man has a talent. When you go to a catering hall, he wants all the business to go out and he gets 5% of the wedding party.

I enjoy working there. I talk sports. I've served the likes of fighters, boxers, , football, Leo Kelly for the Yankees -- and bowlers. They all, at one time or another -- Hudson, Bergen County -- they all came in.



When we started, we introduced the Italian hotdog, with French fries on it. "Say, Brother, what does that mean?" You buy the piece of bread with the hole in the center, you cut it in half, you sit it down -- you make like a pocket -- and you put your hotdog in there, with some French fries and Peperonatas. That was introduced in New York, but I picked it up in Hoboken. And you know what? Today, they had the hotdog on a hot roll. An Italian hotdog.

Going back to the Mom-and-Pop stores -- on my block there were about fourteen businesses. Two butcher shops, a furniture store, two delis, a children's store, a candy store, a Chinese laundry, an ice house, and we were there. It was a busy street, Fourth and Madison. These Mom-and-Pop stores, throughout the country -- I think I stand to be corrected -- were the foundation of our country. They were dedicated people who put in long hours, raising their family, sending them to college, and making a better life for their children. My hat's off to all Mon-and-Pop stores, throughout the country.

RF: What was on the corner of 3<sup>rd</sup> and Madison? Where the playground is?

MY: That was a furniture store.

RF: A furniture store. Do you remember the name of it?

MY: Not really. It was in just about the 300-block. The food store -- that came with one of the butchers. The shoemaker was downstairs. Then came the ice house. Then came us. Then came a Chinese laundry. Then, later, a small deli. A candy store. Another butcher, and a child's dress shop. On the west side of the street came another deli, another deli... There was a guy who sold fish AND ice cream. How that went together I don't know, but both things were good. "Marouts," as they say in Italian, which is snails. There again, [they were] very, very good.

Then further down the block was a nice coat shop called the Pescatore family. He made a nice coat. In fact, one of his sons went on to be a priest. He served in a local, downtown church called St. Joseph -- Father Terence.

When I first started, in the early '40s, my dad was cutting the clams. I couldn't cut them then. I was eating more than I was serving. Someone mentioned to my dad, "Hey, Biggie, this guy's eating all the profits." He says, "Oh, he'll get tired of it." Sure enough. I stayed away from the clams for years. It's like the candy man; he doesn't eat candy. When the patron wanted to pay my father -- Biggie -- he said, "Who shall I pay, you or your son?" He says, "Pay my son. Tonight I'll turn him upside down." I looked at him and said, "Hey, Dad, give us a break." But no, he was a funny man, and that was one of his ways of being funny.

There were months when we sat down, in September or October and that there, or the summer time, we went to the taverns and the taverns would "pail the clams." We made about six stops. Their pages would wait for us, and I was the pail boy. You've heard of bat boys, ball boys, but I was a pail boy. In one hand I carried the clams, in the other hand I carried the ketchup, the horseradish, and everything else. And the pages would wait for us.

Trivia question: The price of clams was two for a nickel, and people would buy some. At that time, some of the taverns gave away finger sandwiches --

a free lunch -- and there again, they ate, had their clams, and this happened almost every night, weather permitting.

RF: So what were some of your stops when you were a pail boy?

MY: Sixth and Adams, 6<sup>th</sup> and Monroe, 5<sup>th</sup> and Monroe, -- 3<sup>rd</sup> and Monroe, and then 1<sup>st</sup> and Harrison, and then 2<sup>nd</sup> and Jefferson.

RF: So those were all primarily bars?

MY: Six bars, primarily bars, patrons there. At that time there was no TV, and the men would talk sports -- baseball and whatever.

RF: So would you go into the bar?

MY: Yes! I was carrying the pail! They would say, "Here comes Biggie and his family, with the clams!" They would order them, and we would shuck them right there.

RF: Would you have to pay the bar something?

MY: No. Once in a while you'd buy them a drink -- "Give the boy a drink on me" -- and that's what I experienced. It was good. When I went to market with him, I used to fall asleep. I was going to bed late at night, and the next day I was going to school. It was no easy task, but he wanted me to go to market with him.

RF: To where?

MY: To the market, to market. I used to fall asleep in the truck, and I'm bouncing around in the truck. My eyes are closed. But you know what? He was teaching me every step of the way, and I think today some of that goodwill, that teaching that Daddy passed on, toughened us up -- the business approach; walking around the market, looking at the clams on the rack in the market -- clams came from all over. Clams from Long Island, Carolina clams, Virginia clams, Long Island, Connecticut. So you've got to know what you're buying. You want to put the freshest up that are tagged, and once it's in our truck, it goes right to our stop in the

walking box, waiting for the next day's serving. So we would sell quite a few. There were two other bars [who sold them] -- one on Jefferson Street, also, and one on First and Willow. These guys did equally well, but we pursued it more because we were out there more. Then we went into our present location.

Now people ask me, "How many clams did one person eat?" My modern record I served was fourteen dozen, in one sitting. He took his time. I didn't want to put a knot in his stomach. I worked with him. He had a couple sodas in between, and that's the way he had all those clams.

I forget the name. My dad said they ate more but, there again, I wasn't there so I couldn't back that up. But clams don't fill you up, and if you go to a restaurant today and have six or a dozen, that's a nice appetizer. It's a summer fruit. It's refreshing, and from there you go on to your entrée, which is meat or fish, and I think that is a very nice thing. Today, for my holiday table, I take home over ten dozen clams, baked and raw and some with the pasta. Clams are a must in my home. We all love them, and they're not fattening. There are no calories in clams. You say, "Well, I'm eating too much." No. [Pasta] may be a little bit fatty, but the

clam itself has no tumors, it's a nice piece of fruit,  
and it has no calories.

RF: And you call it "fruit."

MY: Well, it's a summer fruit. It's a  
fish, it's a fruit. It's not a fruit, it's a fish. But  
the terminology that you eat a nice, fresh, cold clam,  
it's like a fruit. You're satisfied.

RF: And where was the market?

MY: The Fulton Market, in New York. You go  
early, you pick out your fish, you come home, and then I  
had to change. I had to go to school.

RF: Do you have someone bring the clams to  
you now?

MY: I get sidewalk delivery. The guy knows  
what I like and what I don't like. He's told what to get.  
Each bag is tagged. You don't buy from no -- somebody  
went clamming -- thanks but no thanks. We buy from a  
quality house, and they're tagged -- when they're picked

and where they're picked, and what clam bed they're picked. It has that marked on the tag. Years ago they sold them by the bushel; today you get a bag, and it's a 400-count. Clams are graded in four sizes -- little neck, top neck, cherry stone, and chowder. So we look for the little necks for people. Some people like the bigger ones -- the top neck. Those are a nice clam, a mouthful. Chowders I don't deal with too much unless they come in big. But I don't order them.

RF: And the idea that if it's a really big clam, that doesn't make it particularly tasty.

MY: They're good for chowder.

But it's amazing that you're able to take a product at random -- my father went from the produce business to the fish business -- take this product and work at it. I give a clam away because I want them to taste it. They have to acquire the taste. Of course, I give them a clam but I'm drumming up tomorrow's business. People say to me, "If I'm going to have clams, I'm coming to Biggie's for clams." They know they're fresh, they



know they're cut nice, and they're going to be presented nice. Because I'd rather lose a clam than a customer.

RF: You said your father was in the produce business before?

MY: Yes. He had a little stand, selling fruit and produce, up at Cliffside, also a wagon and also a truck. He did that for many years, then he switched over to the fish business.

RF: Did he live in Hoboken at that time?

MY: Yes. In Hoboken, yes. That was his horse, up there.

Now that I'm looking back, I started working with him at ten years old. Behind a successful man is a woman -- my wife. She worked with me. She done whatever I asked her to do in the business. Many times she called me -- "Your food is ready" -- and I'd say, "I'm not ready. Put it on the stove." I was a firm believer that my customers -- You've got to eat early. You don't eat early, then you're caught in the supertime. Then you can't eat. So

you've got to serve the food early, then freshen up and hit part two, which was the night business.

RF: Because you've got to serve everyone for *their* dinner. So what time would you eat, usually?

MY: Four o'clock. And at nighttime, the Yankees -- I had Joe Page, and Joe DiMaggio -- I had the radio on. There was "downtown" sports, and we had that. We kept scores. Daddy was a good -- when he worked for the city, he was a fight promoter. Did you see that picture? Did I show it to you? I've got that. He was an emcee in the ring. Daddy was good friends with James Seeger, Sinatra's uncle, and he was a boxing instructor for little boys and girls. Then one night the heavyweight champion of the world, came to visit us, and other fighters. It was a nice night in our city.

Also, they used to make -- okay. The Maypole. And Mrs. Kennedy and her associates would teach the young girls how to make these "nice things" with the Maypole, when May 1<sup>st</sup> came, the Maypole. The women and the kids dressed up, and they parade. That was a highlight.

Then they had the king and queen contest for the Third Ward. See that picture? There we go. There

again, popular kids got the most votes. But they were given a treat. They rode in a convertible, around the downtown area, and they were greeted, we were waving, as the king and queen, prince and princess. It was a nice thing, and it kept them out of trouble.

Then we gave away -- when I say "we" -- the club, the Oxford Club -- over 1,000, a couple thousand, Dixie cups holding cupcakes. They enjoyed their day, and the goodies they got with the day.

RF: Where was the Oxford Club?

MY: The Oxford Club was located on Fifth and Adams, upstairs. Oxford Hall.

RF: Is that where the fights would happen, too?

MY: No. The fight was in the [Rec] Center.

RF: Oh. Where the Boys' and Girls' Club is.

MY: Yes. [The parade was great.] People on skates, you name it -- people in costumes. Some of the costumes were real nice. Expensive. But they made the day. They went into the downtown area, and that was the Thanksgiving Day parade.

But Oxford was a good club. A lot of men were in service, and when I went to visit the club I saw all the servicemen's pictures on the wall, every one of them, in a nice row. The servicemen were well represented, the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, and Coast Guard. Every one was represented, members of the Oxford Club.

Dancing was something else. Dancing was 35 cents I think.

RF: So how would the club be run, do you know? Was your dad a member?

MY: Yes. Well, all of downtown became members. They all did things. It was cheap then. Rent was cheap. They had fundraisers or whatever. But it was just a place where they talked shop and politics, naturally, was always on the table. McFeeley was a great man. He was our leader at that time, on the fusion ticket and so on.

RF: Sure. But you don't really remember McFeeley do you?

MY: Oh, sure.

RF: What are your memories of him?

MY: A super man, a great leader. He came from the St. Joe's area. His brother was superintendent of schools. He helped the poor people, and he stayed in power for years. He took care of Hoboken, while Hague took care of Jersey City. He had the makings of a president. In 1960, they waited for these two counties to come in. That's how they carried the state of New Jersey, and that became one of the pivotal states to bring in the votes.

But McFeeley was good. They were all good. My dad once told me that he worked with all of them -- McFeeley, John Grogan, the union leader, Louis DePascale, Cappiello, Vezzetti, and a few others. If you had a city job, you became an organization worker. You worked for the guy who paid your bills.

RF: So you'd get a little involved in politics when that came up.

MY: I must say, we didn't put a sign up. He said, "Son --" He warned me -- "If you put one sign up, you've got to put up all the candidates." I knew where he was coming from. I said, "Okay, Dad." He watched me and I didn't make many mistakes. It was simple. I mean, a hotdog. How do you hurt a hotdog. If it wasn't well done, I gave it away for nothing. And then I had to sit down with any -- talk. For what? We owned the building. My daddy bought that from back taxes, from the city. It was simple. I walked to school, and ended up playing ball with the local league. Every chance I had to play ball -- I wasn't that great, but practice makes perfect. The more you're out there, the better you're going to be.

RF: Where did you play? Where was the field then? Same place?

MY: On the soccer field; the lots around; the "gated" corner. We played in the lot around the corner. We played St. Francis, different leagues -- the

Hudson Aces, everybody had a team in there. I have a good memory, and I knew St. Joe's and St. Francis as pioneers, the Cascades, the Monroe Buddies, the Hudson Aces, the "Delta" Triangles -- all those guys I knew and I served them at one time or another.

RF: What grammar school did you go to?

MY: I went to No. #8 School, which was Sadie Leinkaupf. I went to Demarest. I had very good teachers. In those days, if you didn't bring a book home you could only go so far, and in our family times were tough. We had to work. My father went to the fourth grade. The other thing -- I had an opportunity, when I came out of the service, I could have gone -- I had a free pass to go to college.

RF: On the GI bill.

MY: I went to my daddy, and I decided to go into the business.

RF: So why did you go into the business, and your other brothers didn't?

MY: My brother would have helped, but he was a traveling salesman and he traveled around. It wasn't his thing. But he was a good brother. He never bothered me, and I was doing my own -- When Mom sold the house, I said, "Mom, sell me the house," because I did some renovations. I said, "Go to your daughters and come back with a price. You're going to live rent-free for the rest of your life. I'm going to watch you."

Time passed one. I didn't give it a thought. Then one day my mother was calling me, saying, "Brother, sit down. I've got something to tell you." I spoke to your sisters, and \$7,000 is a lot of money." So I was able to buy a two-family house with a storefront. So you see, the way our parents taught us, if you do good, you're going to find good. And I think that's the way it happened in my family. I got my education, I helped, and I got paid by getting the property for a minimum price, and life went on.

RF: So that's the house behind the store.

MY: Mom's. Right.



One night -- it was a long night. We were closed, and Dad and I were sitting on the watermelon case. Five carloads of cars came in with fellows from Palisades Park. One guy, "Hey, Biggie! You're closed? I've got five cars here." Here's where the goodwill came into play. He said, "Fellas, just give us ten minutes." He said, "Come on, son." And those guys today, they'll never forget that. We were closed and we opened up the store for them, and they enjoyed themselves -- corn-on-the-cob and all. So things like that. Like the note that the daughter gave me, that that little girl wrote to me. The teacher asked her, "How did you spend your summer?" She said, "I went to a fast-food place, and I met an old gent with gray hair who was very nice to me. The food was good and I enjoyed the French fries." That was one of the highlights she told the teacher. When I heard it, I said, "Honey, you're going to get some goodies from me, but thank you for singling out me, during the summer highlights."

My sisters and brothers, they were all good to me. It's just that they didn't have the luck that I had. I lost five of them -- they all passed on. They say, "Brother, how do you smile, going through these aisles, working these tables, when you've had all those

problems?" I said, "Listen. It's just got to be done. Every home has something, so you've got to roll up your sleeves, say a prayer, and then continue on with your business." So today, thank God for my blessings, my family. My dad gave me the opportunity, and [now ] my son-in-law and my daughter, they're carrying on that tradition. My grandson is in the picture. The other daughter is not in it, but she got her share in some other way, so she's fine and happy. But we're all family.

Listen. [Having celebrations like the one we had on the street,] it brings the kid out in you, just like getting a home run. The ball's going to "fail or foul," he's jumping up and down, because he's happy. It's a home run. It brings the kid out in you, and that's what we all had. Never lose that kid in you. That's so important in life. Because when you read the papers, the news, it's kind of discouraging and negative. But when you have the attitude that it's all part of life, and if you pass it on to your children, along with the values -- so I could go on saying a lot.

I had an opportunity to work the St. Ann's Feast. I loved that, because that's my church, and I enjoyed being a member over there. I worked on the one on the waterfront, there again -- the price was right, and I

was able to enjoy -- People had a nice cold beer and cold clams, and face the waterfront. That's Hoboken, how good it is. It don't get any better than that. It don't get any better than that.

We had pictures on the wall years ago, fighters and this and that, baseball pictures, but now we put up these pictures with of all the items. But I carry a big stick. I don't want no picture on the wall if I know it isn't worth it. To me, that was a wall of fame, not a wall of shame. I made sure nobody put a picture up. I was very tough on that.

RF: One of the pictures you had on the wall is probably one that you loaned us, and that is of Patty Prince.

MY: Yes.

RF: What do you remember of him?

MY: Patty lived next door to me at 316. He married a girl, Jeannie, and they had a son. He worked at the Red Robin Nightclub on 48<sup>th</sup> Street years ago. He was

one of the Hoboken Four Quartet, which was Skelly, Tamby, Patty, and Frankie [Sinatra]. They're all gone today.

Patty was a funny man -- short, witty. Mostly he did an impersonation of Jimmy Durante. I haven't seen anybody duplicate that. He put his hat on, and he had a nose on. He did "inky-dinky-do" all over the place, and the patrons loved him. With Sinatra as singer, he played the guitar and Frank sang. I never met Frank. I never met him. Patty took my sister, when he appeared at the Paramount. My older sister, Lucille. For her birthday, he took her backstage. He wrote a note to the bodyguards, "Tell Frank Joe Biggie's outside." "Come on in." My sister was very thrilled. She'll never forget that. She had an audience with Frank. She was a bobby soxer, like all the rest of the girls. They used to swoon their way down the aisles. Frank was Frank.

In another situation, when Daddy was in Florida, Frank Sinatra was appearing at Eden Roc. There again, they went backstage: "Tell Frank Biggie's outside," and he just acknowledged them. Because we were good friends of Dolly and Marty, his father. His father was a nice, quiet guy, an okay club fighter. But Dolly was it. She was it. There was a lot of Frank from her. She was tough. She rubbed noses with the politicians. And

she was proud of Frank. A lot of Frankie's traits were from the mother.

Now, if you'd go to a couple clubs in town -- Leo's. They've got Sinatra songs on the jukebox. Piccolo's. They've got a nice array of musical Sinatra. I don't have any, but I still love him. I love music, generally.

RF: You have a kind of very gregarious personality. You talk to people, you really extend yourself. Did you get that from your dad, or is that just more from being in the store? Or a combination?

MY: Well, Daddy was a good storyteller. He was tops. I talk sports a lot. I tell them what they want to hear. I read the papers, and I try to hit something that's going to be amusing. That's an act. You don't buy it the way you buys your wines, in the liquor store. You've just got to have that little thingy.

RF: You really give people your attention.

MY: Oh, 110%.

RF: You're focused.

MY: 110%. I work at it. I work my tables. You see a little kid with a soda, give him a soda. Then when there's a little fight in the area, the kids come on in the store. We're like a hotel, when they say, "I'll keep a light on for you, at the Motel 6." I keep a light on for people who went to Bingo, and they were happy it was open. My light was on, and I said, "Okay, honey, just go up to your stoop and wave when you're in the door," and they did that. They were happy.