

THE HOBOKEN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: CHARLES LALLO, JR.

INTERVIEWER: PHYLLIS PLITCH

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SIDE ONE

Q: This is Phyllis Plitch interviewing Charles Lallo, Jr.
of the House of Charles. What is the address?

A: 404 Washington Street.

Q: Okay. In Hoboken.

Well, first of all, can you just tell me a little bit about
your family history and how you ended up at this store in Hoboken? The
year and --

A: Okay. Well, my father and mother lived together
here in Hoboken, with my mother's family. Not with them, but my
mother's family was also located in Hoboken. My father's family was
located right up the hill, in Jersey City.

Q: What was your mother's last name?

A: My mother's last name? Petrozelli. Not related to the suit makers.

Q: I don't know about those people.

A: There was Petrozelli and there was Petrocelli. My mother was a Petrozelli. My father's family was located up in Jersey City, but his father -- my grandfather -- was in the fruits and vegetable business. He was from New York, emigrated here to Hoboken, then to Jersey City -- if I have that correct. That's close, anyway. So my mother and father were married, I think approximately in 1947, and lived in Hoboken. They had me in 1948, and my father, seeking employment, newly out of the army -- a few years out of the army -- From what he tells me -- At that time they had some sort of a career test, an aptitude test. He was always good with people, and somehow he was directed to this particular shop here, which was looking to hire a sales person.

Q: We're talking about '48.

A: Approximately 1948, yes.

Q: And he had served in World War II?

A: He was in World War II; served in Germany. He came to this shop. I guess they did some sort of interview. They liked him very much. They hired him. I'm just scanning it very briefly; there were more details involved. He was working here since that time. I don't remember the exact year -- I would say mid-'70s -- he purchased the store from the owner, and the building, and he's been here since that time. He's been here fifty-two years, and I'm the only son of my father and mother, so I've worked here on and off, with my own little avenues that I've explored and gone down. Basically, this store has been here since 1948. My father, even when he was working at that time he was always very, I guess, let's say, aggressive; motivated in the things that he's done. He really built up this business. He purchased it, and he's built up quite a substantial clientele over the years, and here we are.

We've seen the changes that have occurred in Hoboken, with the types of communities. Going back when he first began, there were a lot of Italian/Irish/German communities. I don't know if I'm leaving anyone out. Yugoslavic --

Q: Latin American, at that time?

A: No. Very little Latin American. But it was around, maybe, 1954 or '55 [Interruption] -- Well, we were speaking of the type of cultural influences we had in Hoboken, and I would say it was around 1954 (I was about six years old; '48-'49-'51-'52), I remember we started to see more Hispanic growth in Hoboken. Just at that particular time we had moved out to Jersey City, but my father had remained working here so I always had ties. I grew up, basically, in Jersey City.

Q: Did you say what street you lived on, in Hoboken, by the way?

A: No. I wouldn't tell you that. Actually, it was 319 Adams Street, and it was right across from what they call, now, Clock Towers, Keuffel and Esser. I can remember as a little boy -- because I had uncles who worked in there -- watching everybody come out for lunch. They blew the whistle. It was something.

Q: So your father's brothers worked there?

A: My father's brothers. It might have been -- Yes, I think it was my father's brothers. I don't think any of my mother's brothers worked there. But her brothers-in-law, and her sister's husband

may have worked there. And I can remember in our back yard we had this huge, huge smokestack. It's still standing there.

Q: Really.

A: Yes. And I can remember seeing the guys climbing up that thing.

Q: So you were that close to the factory -- ?

A: Well, we were right across the street from a factory. I don't know if this smokestack had anything to do with them. It may have. I'm not sure.

Q: That's amazing. That's still there?

A: The last time I looked it was. I think it still is.

Q: We'll check that out.

A: It was an enormous thing. Right across the street from Clock Towers. And at 319, the house we grew up in, there was a tavern downstairs. Hoboken was noted for its taverns.

Q: What was the name of the tavern?

A: Oh, God. I don't know.

Q: Do you remember if there was a particular clientele who hung out there?

A: I think it was owned by a Yugoslavic gentleman. I remember one night him announcing that the house was on fire. I was just a toddler. I remember getting carried out of the house in a blanket.

Q: You have a great memory.

A: Certain things. Certain things. Visions just stay, you know, and I remember that. But Keuffel & Esser was an interesting place, and they were very active, I think, in making precision instruments in World War II, that company -- Keuffel & Esser. I still have a slide rule made by them, in a nice, leather pouch. It's very old. Well, very old -- about fifty years, maybe -- and it's like brand new.

Q: Wow. Maybe we could get a portrait of you, where you could be holding that.

A: My slide rule? With my hair all a mess, like I'm trying to figure out a massive equation?!

So at that time, I remember my first friend was an Hispanic kid, because I did go to school, my first year, of kindergarten, and half of first grade, here. I remember looking over the fence at my first rainbow with this little kid. I remember that, at 319 Adams Street.

Yes. So we moved to Jersey City, but then more and more Hispanics were starting to move into Hoboken, and we've had, I guess, maybe twenty, twenty-five, thirty years of a very strong Hispanic influence in this town. And they were great. They brought a lot of great music, a passion for life. They were great spenders. They always liked to dress up and have parties. So they influenced Hoboken quite a bit. It was a lot of fun during that entire period.

Q: So a lot of the people in this community were your customers? Because you were saying they liked to dress up --

A: Oh, yes. Yes.

Q: Could you talk a little bit about what this store is, because --

A: Okay. It's a men's clothing shop, from underwear to upperwear; from raincoats, to T-shirts, pajamas, belts, socks, denim jackets and jeans, dress slacks, sweaters --

Q: And it always was?

A: Well, I understand before my father's time it might have been a card store. But when he started, fifty-two years ago, it was always men's clothing. Yes.

Q: What was the name of the shop when he started working there?

A: Well, let me go back. When he started it was owned by a man who had the name Sid Switzer. The store -- I'm not sure of the name. It might have been Switzer's. I'm not sure. But a very short time after, Mr. Switzer sold the store to Herman Gartner, and for a good number of years the store was called Gartner's. Most people may know it by that name. The store was sold from Mr. Switzer to Mr. Gartner, with the premise that my father remain with the store, because he had known it so well by that time. He was very contributory to the revenue-generating ability of the store. He was an attraction.

Q: So he was the key sales person.

A: Well, he was it. It was just him and the owner. And the owner's wife.

Q: He must have been very good at what he did.

A: Well, he still is. It was a small store; a two-man store. When he purchased it, when he made his purchase, it was from Mr. Herman Gartner. And it was during that time when things were very, very active. Like I said, a large Hispanic influence, and we had like five people working there, six people.

Q: In the '70s.

A: Yes. At Christmas time people would line up -- The store was almost like the St. Gennaro Feast.

Q: You're kidding.

A: Yes. We had four or five other salesmen, six at times, and two or three of them -- sometimes four -- were always Hispanic, because we had Hispanic friends. One of the main salesmen

who worked there with my father, Freddie Flores, he was a Puerto Rican fellow, and he was very instrumental, also -- He was a great salesman, he spoke the language and knew many people. We had a lot of fun during those days.

Q: Do you know if most of the clientele -- I guess you were talking -- One of your sales people was from Puerto Rico. But your clientele -- were they from various Latin American countries? Or was it mostly --

A: I would say early on it was mostly Puerto Rican. I may be wrong but I think I'm correct with that. Mostly Puerto Rico. Then I would say you started to get, maybe, some Cubano. Then some of the other Latin American countries started to migrate here, also. But I would say Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans were the first here, of the Hispanic community. They played a big influence and there were a lot of them; a large population they had.

Q: But that's decreased, actually.

A: Well, look at the rents. I think a lot of them just couldn't afford to stay here. Real estate skyrocketed because of the proximity to New York, and with that demand prices shot through the

roof. How could an average working person really afford to stay? So I would say they moved to Jersey City, Union City, and scattered about. There are some still here but it's been tough. I think it was very difficult for them, and for a lot of the natives of Hoboken. Because it was a very close-knit community, a mile-square city, self-contained. People had been here for hundreds of years. No Indians, though, come to think of it. I guess we chased them out -- the "Lanappis."

Q: Oh, yes. There might be some remnant, of some Native Americans. I don't know.

A: Well, something that has always bothered me is the fact that this entire area -- Hoboken and Manhattan island -- was the prime hunting ground for the American Indians. All the tribes, twice a year, would travel to two main hunting grounds in the nation, and this was one of them. It flourished like crazy -- buffalo, pheasant, you name it.

Q: Wow. Wow. I didn't realize. You mean up there where Stevens is, in that area?

A: Well, I know mostly the island of Manhattan, so I would imagine over here, also. Not just Stevens. I would think this whole area. The entire town, probably. Right?

Q: Yes, that makes sense. I know it was an island, the town itself.

A: Oh, was it? That I don't know.

Q: I think so, yes.

A: But I know there's a lot of water. There was a lot of water. So maybe it was an island.

So that's something.

Q: So how else has the business changed over the years? What happened through the '50s and -- If maybe your father wants to talk about that at all; how it was in the '50s and '60s. Did you work here as a kid, at all?

A: Oh, I would come down on Saturdays. Well, people dressed different. Men dressed up. Now you see mostly -- If you see anybody dressed up it's mostly women. The men don't. But that's

starting to change a little bit., because I think they're learning that you feel a little different and better sometimes, when you're dressed up a bit. Because the dress code changed, during the '60s, especially, as entertainment always seems to lead the way with fashion. That was the case then. Prior to that, the Spanish community -- Those people love to dress. They love to buy new shirts and new slacks. But prior to that you had a lot of ships that would come in. You had the Holland American Line. So the town was very active during the '50s, and people always dressed.

Q: So you had tourists coming in -- ?

A: Well, you had sailors from Greece and all over the world. Tourists? I don't know. I would imagine so. I don't know.

Q: Yes. But the Holland American Line was --

A: I guess it was tourist people, right? I don't know. You would know more about that.

Q: Yes. Yes. So, the '40s, '50s, then the '70s were very busy, then the '80s and '90s --

A: Well, we survived. But in the '80s and '90s people just -- As I said, they dress -- Well, casual's not even the word. Well, I'll say casual. But we had the jeans. We had the T-shirts. But people's attitudes have changed everywhere. It's not just Hoboken. You can see that. But at this point, now, you've got, I guess, a large influx of people who work in New York. So they've kind of made this a bedroom community.

Q: And how has that affected the shop?

A: Well, fortunately we have had people who have been here all these years. The New York community -- Well, we're getting to know them. They stop in for certain things. But it's slow going now, because they've got to get used to the town, also. But they've been here for some time, so we've got a number of customers who are people who live here in work in New York. Then I guess you've got a lot of collegiates in town, also. Plus the town is establishing a reputation for itself as a party town, I think.

Q: Right. Right.

A: So you've got kids coming from all over the different parts of New Jersey, coming into town to visit the bar scene -- which isn't what it used to be, either.

Q: Well, talk about that if you want. Like, the difference in the bar scene. Now you call it a "bar scene." I don't know if you would have even called it a "bar scene" years ago. What's the term for it? There were many more taverns and bars here?

A: Well, when I was growing up -- and I just started to turn seventeen, eighteen -- you start to get your car and come hang out in Hoboken --

Q: So we're talking now about --

A: -- the mid-'60s. And I had a band at that time, so I used to play in town.

Q: Okay. And what was the name of your band?

A: It was called The Tidal Waves.

Q: And you just sang, or did you play an instrument?

A: I sang. I played piano. I played guitar and did all the arranging. I always had a knack for arranging. I still do that. I used to do a lot of the weddings in Hoboken. A lot of the weddings at that time were just thrown together; beer and sandwiches. They'd hire a band. I was emceeing weddings at thirteen years old. I'd have the guitar, my piano, and bring my accordion to do the Italian and the Irish and the Jewish songs, you know. Okay. My father had friends in town, so when parties went on -- What kind of parties would you call them? These are private parties, or like a school throwing a party and the parents would attend. My band would be hired to do those things. It was a lot of fun. Then when I hit the age of seventeen or eighteen and was bait for the draft -- By that time we were starting to play bars in Hoboken. There weren't a whole lot of bands in the bar scene at that time. We had River Street here, which was lined with bars.

Q: It was still that rough-and-tumble, near-the-water thing.

A: Oh, it was rough-and-tumble, yes. I've never been to Liverpool, but I always kind of correlated it with Liverpool.

Q: Really. The same feeling?

A: It was odd, because at that time the Beatles came about, so I used to model these people, you know? And Hoboken was kind of like Liverpool. It was weird.

Q: In what way is it like Liverpool?

A: Oh, I don't know. I've never been to Liverpool. Well, because it was a seaport. And it was rough-and-tumble. You've got to watch yourself; otherwise, you could get hurt.

And we were kids, with ideas of hoping to "make it" and all that. We were following bands like the Beatles and the Rascals. Then you had the whole '60s thing that occurred at that time. We were playing clubs where you couldn't walk, they were just jammed, like this. Oh, yes. There's a place -- I don't know the street. It might have been Madison Street -- called Joe's Holiday Inn, and we used to jam them in there every weekend, until Uncle Sam got a hold of me, and that was the end of that for me.

Q: So you were drafted?

A: Well, at that time I was out of high school. I went to college for a year, and ended up going to a technical school, for

electronics. While I was in electronics school I was deferred. But a friend of my father's had suggested I put my name down for the Army reserves, which, as a kid -- I was gung ho and I didn't want to do that, but I did it anyway. So the same week that my deferment ended and I got my draft notice in the mail, I just, luckily, happened to get up on the list and the reserves called me. So after getting a little bit smart I decided that would be better than going to Vietnam. So I did my basic training, my "AIT" training, then came home, and for five and a half years you go to weekend meetings; two weeks away. So I didn't go active, no.

But the six months ruined my band. It came back and it was never the same. So that was the end of that. I was just saying, the bar scene, again, up on River Street -- It was bar after bar after bar.

Q: Wow. And when did that actually change? That aspect?

A: I don't recall. But I think when the real estate market started changing, maybe, and they just knocked those buildings down. I'm not sure. Hard to say.

Q: And you said you remember, when you were a kid, when they were filming *On the Waterfront*. Can you talk about that?

A: There's not much I can talk about. I just remember seeing them in the park, getting a glimpse of Marlon Brando. I was very young (I had to be under six, because we were still living here), and my mother telling me what it was. That's about all I remember of it. But I can remember being pushed, in a carriage, up First Street, which was filled with stores, just like Washington Street at the time. It was just all furniture stores and clothing stores.

Q: Really. Any particular stores you remember, that were like the places people would go?

A: My father would remember that, but I don't remember. Wait a minute. We made a list of stores here. This was on Second on Washington Street -- Reliable, Freeman, there's Weiner's, "Malacourt." Diana Bier was the store right next door, here; a woman's store. Women's clothing.

Q: That was Diana Bier?

A: Diana Bier.

Q: So there were a lot of Mom and Pop shops?

A: Oh, yes. Yes. It worked. Queen's Department Store was right up here, between Fourth and Fifth, and they were a department store that leased out space to different types of businesses. You might have jewelry, men's clothing -- a whole bunch of different things.

Q: Almost like a quasi-flea market type of thing?

A: Yes. An inside mall. It was probably the forerunner of most malls, yes.

Q: That was Queen's, did you say?

A: Yes. Not as in transvestite.

Q: The old fashioned kind.

A: Then there were men's clothing stores. Crawford's, Harry Adams, Bragg's and "Farradine's," is that; "Jackadine," rather. Falco's. Just some other stores that were around. I don't remember what was on First Street, though.

Q: And, obviously, I think you just listed place that none of them are around anymore?

A: No. And there were a number of men's clothing shops.

Q: So when did you start seeing those kinds of places close? And how did you feel?

A: How did we feel? Well, I don't think it was so much a matter of how we felt. I think we were just observing the transition that was occurring. Fortunately, my father had the foresight to purchase the buildings he was in. So that helps, because rents around here killed most --

Q: -- and you rent out apartments upstairs? That helps.

A: Yes. Because, mostly, I think rent is what kills most of the businesses around here. A lot of businesses come and go.

Q: Right. Right. So what year did he buy the building?

A: I'd have to ask him again. I would say mid-'70s.
Time is going so fast, I don't remember. Mid-'70s.

Q: That was a good move. Can I ask what it was
purchased for? The amount? Even if it's like within some range, because
I'm sure it's unbelievable.

A: Ah --

Q: Less-than or more-than -- ?

A: It was less than \$70 [thousand]. Yes. What else?

Q: I wonder what it would go for today.

A: I don't know. I'm not going to venture to even say.
Do you have an idea?

Q: I don't know.

A: Take a guess. Maybe.

Q: I would think -- Maybe --

A: Possibly.

Q: I don't know how many apartments are upstairs.

A: Possibly.

Q: But more than what he paid.

A: Yes. Yes.

Q: That's interesting.

A: It's amazing, how it just -- Who knew?

Q: Now do you remember -- Your father was saying he remembered the lady wrestler. Do you remember any -- Do you think he would talk about some of these pictures, or -- ?

A: Maybe. He might. I remember her. I met her, and spoke with her. Grace Costello. Yes.

Q: What was she like? And why was she here?

A: I can't remember. She used to buy clothing.

Q: For the men in her life.

A: Gifts. Yes. Family. Christmas time, Father's Day, Valentine's Day. We were very, very busy on these holidays.

Q: And did you realize that she was this lady wrestler?

A: Yes. Yes.

Q: How did that strike you?

A: Well, I don't know. Hoboken had -- My perception of this town was that there were a lot of tough, little wacky people in this town.

Q: Any of them you remember, by the way?

A: I can't think offhand. I don't know. We've got so many characters. But that's the nature of this town.

Oh. I started to comprise a list (I don't even know if I can find it] of nicknames that people had in this town. You wouldn't believe it . If I could ever find it. Maybe I threw it out. I don't know. I should have thought of that. I can't remember them. I can't remember them.

Q: Any?

A: I can't remember them.

Q: Well, maybe we can get the list somewhere.

A: Well, it just struck me. I had to start writing them down.

Q: But why is it so nickname oriented? Like, why was it -- ?

A: I have no idea. You've got to remember -- Let me ask you something. How many people are you in touch with now, that you went to high school with, or grammar school with?

Q: None.

A: Right. Now in a town like this, many, many people went to school together -- grammar school, high school -- and they reached their seventies and eighties together.

Q: But that's what's changed in the past twenty and thirty years.

A: That's what's changed. Because I'm hard pressed to remember who the heck I went to high school with. There are a few, but it's very difficult. Because, then again, I moved out of Hoboken when I was six. But you talk to a number of the policemen who grew up here, or the teachers -- They know each other, and I know them almost by proxy, from being here, through my father. But maybe in Jersey City you don't have that same quality that you have here. Because it's a mile square and self-contained here.

So I always found that interesting, and it was weird, because I always felt like as much as I was a part of it, I still was not -- I was born here but taken away but still being here, was kind of a strange situation for me. Because I didn't go to school with them. I went to school in Jersey City.

Q: But I just want to step far, far back. Because you said your grandfather, on your mother's side --

A: [Interruption. His father, Charles Lallo, Sr. enters.]
Can I ask you something? She asked me about those pictures. Can you just tell her who that is? Her ear is over here. [?] -- but you know better than I do about that. Well, I told her who they are, but I didn't explain about "Billy."

Q: Well, that's Jane Russell, right?

AA: [Charles Lallo, Sr.] That is right, yes.

Q: Now are you in that picture with her?

AA: I'm on this side.

Q: That's you on the left.

AA: The fellow with me passed away about twenty-some-odd years ago.

Q: Okay. And what were the circumstances, that you were there with her? Where were you?

AA: We went to dinner. He played football with her husband. In those days she was married to Bob Waterfield. He was a football player. And through him, that's how we were -- She was performing at the Latin Quarter, in New York. She expected him. We went over, we had dinner, and --

Q: I'm sorry. I cut you off when you said who the gentleman was. What was his name, the gentleman?

AA: Billy Barron. The full name is "Barondess."

Q: And he was a friend of yours.

AA: Yes.

Q: And he was from Hoboken also?

AA: That's right. His father owned Barron's Drugstore.

Q: Okay. That still exists, right?

AA: Different ownership. Yes. They're all gone, those people.

Q: So he had a connection to her, and --

AA: Yes. He was very friendly with her.

A: Now don't pry my father's brain too much.

Q: I didn't know if this had to do with this shop or not. Then, the blonde is --

AA: That is Jaye P. Morgan. She was on the "Gong Show."

Q: I knew she looked familiar.

AA: And that's him and I with her. We knew quite a few people.

Q: Now is it the Barron family -- Are they around anymore?

AA: No, they're all gone.

Q: Okay. All right. And you had mentioned Grace, earlier.

AA: Grace Costello?

Q: She used to come in the store --

AA: Yes. Grace Costello. You remember Grace. You can tell as much about Grace as --

A: I can't tell as much as you can. I remember her.

AA: Yes. She was a pretty --

A: She was a very nice lady.

AA: I wouldn't want to tangle with her, because she would beat all three of us with one shot. But I told you, if you look under Cutillo, they're related. As a matter of fact, her son was a Cutillo. And they would give you all the information about Grace.

Q: Right. Were there other customers of note who used to come in here that you have fond memories of?

AA: Only the ones Charles can tell you. My memories I keep to myself. I think you can tell why. Me, I --

Q: Do you remember any -- ?

A: I can't think of anybody.

AA: For me, that's -- Charles can tell you. This lady from the Jersey Journal wanted to do -- And I said my memories are mine. I don't need nobody else to know them. So that answers it, right?

Q: Okay. Unless there's anything else that you want to -- Is there anything else that's not necessarily your memory, but any other facts about --

AA: I just told you about the nicest one there, Billy Barron. Everything else is all --

A: I could tell her a little bit about Vinnie.

AA: Oh. Good. You do it. Right.

Q: Tell us about Vinnie.

A: Well, next door here, as we face out to the street --
Two doors over was a jeweler, and the owner of the jewelry shop was a
man by the name of Vinnie Trepani. Vinnie was the most jovial,
beautiful, giving, loving guy --

AA: -- and he's telling you about one of the best ones.

Q: Really?

A: Yes.

Q: Let me ask you about Frank Sinatra. Did he ever
come in here? Okay.

A: I think that was pre- -- Before my father was ever
involved, in Hoboken.

Q: Okay. I want to hear about Vinnie.

A: Well, Vinnie was a very unique guy; always had a cigar in his mouth, a big, big -- I hate to use the word fat, but a big, fat guy.

Q: Trepani?

A: Trepani, yes. But he was one of the most beautiful men you could ever want to meet. He was a jewelry salesman. Well, he owned the shop. He was the proprietor --

Q: And it was called Trepanis>

A: No -- I guess so. But everybody in town knew Vinnie. Everybody knew him, and he could say anything to you; he could say anything to a nun or a priest. I mean, anything, and he had the kind of personality where he could get away with it. He always had a joke, always had a laugh. Just a beautiful man, who will be with me throughout my life. He's passed away now. His family was, I think, five sons and a daughter. They moved down to Florida. They used to have the restaurant across the street -- Trap's Backdoor -- but this was well after Vinnie passed away. Because there was nobody like Vinnie.

Q: So he was just a Hoboken character who --

A: -- grew up here; I think kind of missed his calling as an entertainer. I think he always wanted to do that. He was just a really talented guy; had stories like you couldn't believe, and just one of those personalities that drew you right into him. You just wanted to give him a big hug. He was just a beautiful guy.

Q: Was he a raconteur, like telling stories? A big storyteller?

A: Oh, he had tons of stories. He could make you laugh until your knees would buckle.

Q: Does he have any descendents here, do you know?

A: They've all moved out. And within the past five years. When he passed away things changed. His wife survives, but she's in Florida with the children. The children are grown men and women now. One woman. But most people native to Hoboken would know him. But he and my father became very good friends. Vinnie used to be in here all the time, telling me stories and being funny.

Q: That raises something in my mind, in terms of just the life on the street here. The shops that are here now -- What are the things here that wouldn't have been here before? And how has the street life changed? I get a feeling that there was maybe a lot more camaraderie between the entrepreneurs in the neighborhood.

A: Yes. Well, I think it was a different time. I think people just are so isolated, and maybe defensive, if that's a good word. But I think a lot of us are, all the time. I think the times have brought about an aura that is just not as open; or, it's in a different way; or, maybe it's more -- Maybe it works more on streams of likenesses; different types of interest toward different people. Then maybe you're open with those you think are your own kind. But back then you had a lot more baby carriages, more women with --

SIDE TWO

A: So I think it was more family-oriented. As far as the shop owners --

Q: What is next door to us now?

A: Well, to our right, as we face out to the street, is "Via Mode." That's a young girl who has a women's clothing store and women's shoes. Very nice. To our left is Philipppo's Pizzeria.

Q: Okay. But years ago -- Have those two businesses changed over the years?

A: Well, she's fairly new, maybe five years here. Prior to that it was a Korean novelty shop. Prior to that I don't recall. But then, as I said, going back a ways was Diana Beer, women's clothing. Philipppo's been here a good amount of time, now. He's not here quite as long as my father's been here. Not even close, really, but he's been here a while.

Q: The thing I wanted to ask you that I didn't -- that originally I probably should have asked, is about your grandparents, in terms of where they came from, and how they ended up coming to Hoboken. Because I think you said your grandfather lived in Jersey City, did you say, originally?

A: Well, my father's parents lived in Jersey City.

Q: And were they immigrants, or -- ?

A: Well, my father's -- my grandmother came from Italy.

Q: On your father's side.

A: On my father's side.

Q: Do you know where in Italy, by the way?

A: A place called Avalina, right outside of Naples. My grandfather on my father's side, I think he was born in the U.S. I'm not sure about that. But if he wasn't born here, he came here at an early age. Because he grew up, I think, in Manhattan, or thereabouts. Maybe even the Lower East Side.

Q: But also Italian.

A: Italian descent. Yes. And my mother's mother came from Italy. I don't know much about -- Who knows where or when? But she lives in Hoboken. Her husband died at a young age, so I never knew him.

Q: Is your mother alive?

A: My mother's alive, living in Jersey City.

Q: But they live in Jersey City. And you now live in Jersey City?

A: No. Since I've been married I moved to Bergen County.

Q: So that side of the family was Italian as well? Descent?

A: Yes. Whatever.

Q: Okay. Or Italian originally. You're Italian. I'm going to pause this for a second. [Interruption]

One thing I wanted to ask about was the name -- The House of Charles -- which is -- I was thinking it was going to be French or something. It has that sort of French designer feel. He just --

A: I think he was speaking with a salesman friend of his, and they came up with it together.

Q: So people would know that Charles was still around, even if it changed or something?

A: I think so.

Q: Okay. Is there anything that happened where you just said, all of a sudden, "Wow. This town has really changed"? or was it just a gradual -- Did you wake up one day, or some event happen, where you realized things just weren't the way they were. Or was it just more like an evolution that you --

A: Well, it's always gradual. I would say most times it's gradual. But there are days when you just -- It's like having a child in front of you, and the child grows a little bit every day. You don't notice it, but one day you look and you say, "Wow, they got big." It's the same kind of thing. And this town --

When I was growing up, as a kid, there were maybe two or three bands that I would "model" out of. But as the town has grown -- If I put an ad in the paper, "Audition Singers," they'd go around the block three times, with the line, there are so many here now. For what reason? And they're all willing to play for nothing, you know? So they ruin it for each other.

Q: But back then it was --

A: We didn't have open mikes and -- Which is okay. I don't have a problem with that. But it was different. You had to work to reach a stage where a club owner is going to say, "Are you going to bring people here?" and where you had to be good. You know? It was just a whole different thing, and not everybody and their grandmother played guitar. Because the whole world, the nation, went through a transition, there, with the music, and guitar. Everybody plays guitar. So that's a change also. A lot of things changed. It wasn't just the town.

Q: It was cultural.

A: Yes. You know? But the town, I always thought, had an artistic, cultural environment. But I saw it when, I think, it was maybe as a ceiling, you know? I remember when we moved to Jersey City I used to play in the park every day. We played ball every day.

Q: In Jersey City.

A: Yes. And the park that I played in overlooked the entire Manhattan skyline, and overlooked Hoboken. And that clock, we

used to always know when to be home, at 5:00, because that clock we used to live across from -- The clock tower always told me what time it was. And they always overlooked Hoboken. I always used to intuitively -- Not with the brain of an adult -- otherwise I would have done things, businesswise, a little differently -- but as a kid I saw the changes happening. I always saw where it was going to be kind of a conglomeration of Greenwich Village and Little Italy, and Soho, and that's exactly what's happening. And I saw it happening. But I didn't know what to do about it at that age. But I always saw it happening.

Q: Observing. Well, what about food and -- I know it was longer ago, when there were these theatres and stuff like that --

A: Well, I remember the theatres. I remember the Fabian Theatre. I've been in that theatre.

Q: What was that?

A: That was a theatre -- What's there now? CVS maybe? Do you know where Barnes & Noble is?

Q: Yes.

A: You know that corner?

Q: Yes.

A: That's where the Fabian Theatre was. It was a movie theatre.

Q: And you used to go there?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: Okay.

A: Prior to that --

Q: Was it like one screen, a big movie palace?

A: Yes. Sure. And you got two movies and a cartoon in between, for maybe seventy-five cents. You had the same thing in Jersey City, you had movie houses. For fifty cents we'd go for a matinee on Saturday, two movies and a cartoon. One screen.

Q: Do you remember anything else about being there?

If there was the same woman selling popcorn, or something? But you were very young. I realize that.

A: Well, yes, but the Fabian was not my main --

Because I was in Jersey City at that time. So I've been to the Fabian, but most of the time it was the Jersey City movie theatres I'd be going to, in Journal Square. But I've been to the Fabian, and there was another one up here but I can't think of the name of it. I thought it was the Union. I remember one of the companies down here, that my uncle worked for, called "the pencil factory." I guess they made pencils. But he was in a union and they did an industrial film, and they showed it at that movie house. My whole family went there, to see my uncle. In the movie, yes.

Q: Is he still alive?

A: No. No.

Q: Okay. So he made this film?

A: No, he was just one of the union delegates who were in it.

Q: But he was in it.

A: Yes. It was an industrial documentary. I have no idea where that thing is.

Q: How many uncles did you have, who were working in these different --

A: Well, my father had a number of brothers, so maybe five of them, at least, had spent some time --

Well, you know, where were you going to work? Hoboken was the place, and Jersey City. You know? For labor jobs and -- There was the American Can Company in Jersey City. There was [?] -- and the pencil factory down here. You had had, at that time, tons and tons of coat factories, which are all gone.

Q: Wow. I didn't realize that.

A: You had maybe a couple hundred butcher shops, which may be down to three?

A: Yes. You had all that.

Q: And your uncles -- Were they all in a certain thing that they would do, or were they all, I don't know, mechanics or something like that?

A: No --

Q: They just did different jobs, in --

A: People weren't career-minded at that time. They were job-minded; to make a living; earn a living. There was a men's store down there, a very big one, called Geismar, which is closed maybe ten years already.

Q: Geismar?

A: Yes. I remember they had a little club where they would send you something in the mail, for kids. I still have -- I should have brought that. It's very old. I have a copy of one of the -- It was called "Tim." It used to give hints to kids and little word puzzles and stuff. I have that at home. I could make some copies of that for you.

"Tim." It used to give hints to kids and little word puzzles and stuff. I have that at home. I could make some copies of that for you.

Q: Yes. Yes. Maybe we'll photograph it. But it's interesting.

A: Yes, that's an interesting one. I'll think of things after you leave.

Q: Did you tell me exactly how old you were when you moved to Jersey City.

A: I never told you? Oh, yes. I was six.

Q: Six. And how old are you now?

A: That I didn't tell you. I don't talk about that. Your research will tell you, because I told you the year I was born.

Q: But what year was that that you moved out of Hoboken?

Q: I remember. And you were six. So it was '54. Okay.
Just in case I didn't get that down exactly.

AA: [Interruption by Charles Lallo, Sr. They're
apparently talking about parking meters] Oh, I remember when they
were a penny a piece, but I don't remember what year. A penny for thirty
minutes. Was it thirty minutes, or what? It used to be a penny. Then it
went to a nickel. How much time I don't remember. I think it was an
hour. Yes. An hour for a penny.

A: They had meters on the side streets, too?

AA: No. Not really Washington Street. That came later.
But what year?

Q: [Interruption] Okay. When you come back -- I
wanted to ask you, when did they start putting parking meters in to that
-- In the beginning they didn't have parking meters, did they?

AA: Not really. But let me see --

A: In the beginning there was Adam and Eve.

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-- In the beginning they didn't have parking meters, did they?

AA: Not really. But let me see --

A: In the beginning there was Adam and Eve.

Q: And there were no parking meters.

AA: When I came here fifty-three years ago there were no parking meters.

A: Not even on Washington Street?

AA: No. Then it came, later, but the year I don't remember.

Q: Thank you. [Interruption]

A: This is a good friend of mine.

Q: Who is that? Well, he was talking about Ersel Hickey, "the Rockin' Bluebird."

A: Yes. Well, he wrote a song [Do you want this?] -- He wrote a song in 1957 or '58 called "Bluebirds Over the Mountain." It was a hit for a number of weeks, in all the major markets. The Beach Boys

recorded his song. A number of people recorded his music. Then during the mid-'60s he wrote a song called "Don't Let the Rain Come Down," which he didn't record. The first song -- "Bluebirds Over the Mountain" -- he did himself, but this other song -- "Don't Let the Rain Come Down" -- was recorded by the Serendipity Singers. You wouldn't have heard of them [they were during the '60s], and they were the first ones to knock the Beatles out of the number one spot, with that song that he wrote.

Q: I'm surprised I haven't heard that. How does it go?

A: [Sings] Something like that. If you heard the song I think you would know it. It went to number one. So he is in Hoboken. A good friend of mine.

Q: Is he still rockin'?

A: He's still rockin'. He just came out with a new CD, as a matter of fact. He's kind of a mentor with me, with my projects, because I'm pretty much involved in music. Here he is. Oh, this is it. Sony just released this one on him.

Q: Wow. Okay. "Rockin' Bluebird." He would be approximately in his --

A: -- early sixties.

Q: Oh, really. Okay. So that picture is obviously from

--

A: -- from when he had his time.

Q: Is he a lifelong Hoboken person, do you know?

A: No, he's originally from Rochester or Buffalo. But he's been here a good number of years, already. Beautiful man.

Q: Well, what are you doing in terms of music now?

A: Well, I don't play out much. I'm looking, actually, to get funding for a very unique project I've been working on for a number of years, that incorporates my music with a book, and product, and some very, very insightful life things. I've been into meditation -- yoga -- since, like, 1972, and I've gained some insights that many people just don't really know. Can I tell you a little bit about it?

Q: I'd love to hear about it. I don't know if you want to

--

A: Well, I always had a strong concern for our planet, our Earth, environmentally. And I realized early on that to be truly environmental you have to be spiritual. People don't seem to realize that, but in a sense they need respect, love and an appreciation for nature. The Indians weren't environmentalists; they just had a respect for nature.

As a kid, looking for band names, I always tried to look for unique names. I remember early on passing a restaurant that said, "Tippy's Charcoal Hearth," which was in Jersey City. And I noticed at that time that the word Earth and the word heart were spelled identical. I forgot about it. When I got into meditation in '72, and I very much into my music [I was playing clubs every night. That's what I was doing, constantly -- meditating and doing yoga during the day], and I had some unique insights. I developed this project name that I have now that I call Eartheart, and it's based on a coincidence that the most important element outside of us -- our Earth, our home -- and the most important element inside of us -- our heart -- happen to be two words with identical spelling. Take the "h" from the end of the word "earth," put it in the front, and you have "heart."

This grew out of Hoboken. It was inspired to me out of Hoboken. I feel like it's something that Hoboken should be rallying, or getting into, and setting an example for this entire nation, but I don't have the funding to do what needs to be done with this. But I recorded a number of songs, I'm putting a book together, and I have an internet website, which will give you more information about it. But that's just the tip of the iceberg.

Out of that coincidence I've found many, many other coincidences, almost like I've touched onto a reality that underlines the superficiality of modern-day reality. Yes.

Q: Pretty heavy for a clothing store.

A: Well, reality is changing. I believe we're evolving into a reality that we'd better embrace; otherwise, our survival may depend upon it. It's a reality that's based on universal principles, and earth and heart -- We could be different in color, different in size, different in ethnic background, but this touches on the two common denominators to every one of us -- our earth and our heart -- and they happen to be spelled identically. Do you think that's just --

Q: A little switching around --

A: I think she's going to want a glass of wine when she's done.

Q: That would be good -- So, I'll check out your website.

A: But anyway, it's not just -- I decided not to treat it as just happenstance. I decided -- Because you hear people say these days, "Coincidence happens --" That's not just coincidence; there's a reason for it. So what's the reason for that? So I delved into it, and I've been twenty years with it, almost. There is a reason for it, and I've found so many other coincidences that just are astounding.

Q: That's great, when people find something they really --

A: But the thing is, what I'm looking to do is put an act together -- I mean a performance act -- that is really representative of this town, of this state, and that expresses these ideas, to bring forth principles that we need to live by, to make a better community. There's too much aggression.

So that's where I'm at. But the unique thing about it, you see -- Well, a lot of cultures -- We're mystical beings. Life is a

mystery, the universe is a mystery, but we don't acknowledge our mystical aspect; that "suppression" drives a lot of people to, what do you call it? -- vices, devices, because you're trying to fill that emptiness. But we are these types of beings, and I try to bring that out. Many cultures base their culture on music, geometry and mathematics. The Mayans were great for that. They held such high regard for the number nine. They used to refer to it as "three times three," because, they said, "nine was the perfection of three."

Now the word that I use for this concept -- Eartheart -- is a nine-letter word, if you make the "h" common to both of them. So it's Eartheart. So when you divide that word into three groups of three letters each, you get the words "ear," "the," "art," which is a deep, inner message; that communication -- listening, music -- you know. The information about Eartheart is proprietary and copyrighted.

So that's just a little bit of it.

Q: What's the website?

A: www.earth-heart.com.

Q: Maybe you got your thing. I was totally going to switch gears for a second, but you were talking about the --

A: The softball team. Well, we sponsored a softball team --

Q: This looks like maybe the '60s.

A: Nineteen-seventy-nine. It's right up there. That's twenty-two, twenty-three years ago. Because you had a lot of --

Q: So have you continued to do those sorts of things? Or is the opportunity not really there -- ?

A: No, it's not there anymore. No. We had a basketball team --

Q: Why is that?

A: I think a large part of the community has been splintered, segmented. Because this town was big on sports. Still is. You have a lot of people who are just athletic and sports-minded.

Q: But before you had more opportunities for retailers to sponsor teams and things like that?

A: Yes. Yes. Well, everybody was younger, too.

Q: Do they even have teams like that, that aren't part of school?

A: Don't know. Don't know. I mean, well, something else -- Growing up, as kids, we'd go to any park and start up a baseball game. Now you try and do it, and you can't play on this field -- this is for Little League; you can't play in this field -- So that has changed also.

Q: Everything's splintered.

A: Picking a parking lot or a park. We'd play ball every day, for hours and hours. When I moved to Jersey City we had a park up there. Every day we were there. But Hoboken was the same thing.

Q: The people would just go to a lot and start playing ball, or --

A: -- or play stickball up against a building wall. Or punch ball.

Q: Was there a particular place in town, where people would do that? Do you know?

A: Hoboken I don't know. Jersey City, I could tell you a number of them. But Hoboken, I don't know.

Q: One factual thing I want to ask you -- just in case I did -- When did you come back to the store, actually? Now you work full-time here?

A: More or less. When you go on the website, I've got a business for the wholesale of natural remedies -- herbal things and soy products. Stuff like that. But I'm here most of the time. I've been here, I guess, about a year now.

Q: So off and on, as an adult, you worked here?

A: Well, I worked here for fifteen years, straight. Then I was on the road for a while with a band, doing clubs and stuff like that, for a number of years. Then I also worked --

Q: Okay. So you always had music in between --

A: Yes. Then I worked with companies, doing other things, too.

Q: Then came back here, for the past year or so.

A: Yes. I'm the only son, really.

Q: And what are your plans? Do you think you'll take over the store? Will you continue the store?

A: I have no idea. I couldn't say. I don't know what I'm going to do. I don't know.

Q: And your father --

A: Don't know.

Q: Does he have thoughts of retiring or anything like that?

A: Why should he retire? How does he look? He looks pretty good, right?

Q: I think it's great.

A: Don't know. Can't tell you. One day at a time.

Q: You just take one day at a time. On that note --

A: The only thing we have, truly, is now.

Q: Okay. Well, for now, we're at Lallo's, the House of
Charles.

A: Thank you.

Q: Thank you very much.