THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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DATE: 17 JUNE 2003

TAPE 1, SIDE 1

EH: Thank you for doing this. I thought I'd start off in the beginning -- are you originally from Hoboken?

LL: Yes.

EH: I guess I would want to know some of your earliest memories of Hoboken.

LL: Some of my earliest memories of Hoboken. Well, just a little bit of my family background -- my father's father came to Hoboken with his father, my great-grandfather, in 1883. My mother's father was born in Hoboken in 1892, in his father's house at 112 Grand Street (which is now part of the "Marriott" Gardens). My father's

father was a barber here in Hoboken, and my family operated Luizzi's Tavern for over fifty years, on Second and Jackson. Some of my earliest memories of Hoboken -- until I was ten years old, we lived at 39 Second Street, which was between River and Hudson. Now the parking garage is there. In those days, it was still the "Bar"bary Coast, from the All-American Hotel, which is now Texas-Arizona, all the way to Fourth and River, was with the exception of, maybe, three stores, and a bar. When I was about eight, I guess, the Port Authority redid the piers, which were vacant up until then, and we used to climb over the fence and play on the piers. Then the piers were active.

When the passenger ships would come in -- we had homemade wagons, we would go down to the piers. They were foreigners, I don't know where they were from. I know "American Export" went to Italy, but I don't know that there were that many Italians. But we would go down and stand outside the pier with our wagons, and these people would come out with this big luggage and trunks, and we'd put them on the wagons and take them to the tubes. They'd give you, back then, a quarter, which was a lot of money.

So I guess those are probably some of my earliest memories.

EH: Did you go to the barbershop that you were talking about, which was in your family?

LL: No, my grandfather died in 1939, so the barbershop was closed before I was born.

EH: I see. And how about the tavern?

LL: Oh, sure. It was an old, family tavern. In fact, the tavern, prior to being Luizzi's Tavern, was the political club of mayor Barney McFeeley, who was in office for over thirty years and was the mayor of Hoboken for seventeen years -- the most famous mayor Hoboken has ever had. My grandfather belonged to the McFeeley Club, and he used to cut McFeeley's hair. McFeeley lived on "~~Haverson~~ Harrison" Street, between First and Second, and my grandfather -- one of his barbershops, where my father was born, was 660 First Street, which was right around the corner. McFeeley would come every morning, and my grandfather would shave him. McFeeley never rode in his car. He walked every day from "~~Haverson~~ Harrison" Street to City Hall, on First Street, and back again. So if you were seeking a political favor or whatever, you could ^ Knew catch McFeeley in the morning.

EH: How do you think Hoboken has changed, really, since those earliest memories? Lots of changes, of course, but --

LL: Well, Hoboken has changed physically, and the people have changed. At one time, people in Hoboken almost always knew each other. If I didn't know you and we spoke for five minutes, we had to know a hundred of the same people. You don't find that that much in Hoboken anymore. Of course, times change. My father would tell me stories about, years ago, during the Depression, nobody locked their doors. Nobody had anything that was worth stealing. So, of course, you never locked your door. People used to sit on stoops, people used to go up on the roof in the summertime. I think it was more community-oriented back then. The thing that's happened today -- a lot of good has happened, but Hoboken has become a very transient town. People come, they rent an apartment for a year or two, they go. They buy a condo, they stay a couple of years, they leave. The people who purchase the townhouses seem to be more community-oriented, and try to dig roots. My biggest problem with Hoboken today is that it's all transient.

EH: Right. Now, the neighborhood you grew up in --

LL: -- no longer exists.

EH: -- no longer exists. At that time, ethnically, was it very diverse? Was it mostly Italian?

LL: You see, the "sub-town" section of Hoboken was originally German, then Irish, then, when World War I broke out and German nationalists couldn't live within a mile of a seaport -- so if your grandfather was born in Germany and wasn't an American citizen, you had to leave Hoboken. So when the Germans left, the Irish filled that vacuum, and eventually the Italians. The neighborhood that I grew up in, among all the bars, was still very German. It was the "Haufbrau Haus," it was the Rotterdam Cafe, the Antwerp (that was Dutch), the Amsterdam Cafe, the Hamburg Cafe. It was basically more German, the neighborhood I grew up in, than Italian. Where my father grew up, where the tavern was, was basically Italian. But I never lived downtown; I always lived in what we called uptown.

EH: Right. Right. And how long have you lived in this house?

LL: In this house? Thirty-three years.

EH: Thirty-three years. Have you seen a lot of changes in this neighborhood?

LL: Well... ~~No~~. Physically, the neighborhood is basically the same. But, again, it's more transient. At one time we knew almost everybody on the block. I'll bet now we don't know a dozen people. In fact, Ruth was on the block, I think, fifteen years before we met her.

EH: Is that right?

LL: Yes.

EH: Sort of jumping ahead to your work as the city historian, I was wondering when this position was established, and what was the motivation for establishing it.

LL: Okay. I'm actually the fourth city historian. The position, to my knowledge, was created around 1961 or '62. In fact, I'm the only historian who knew my three predecessors. They all didn't know each other, but I knew all three of them. The first one was a gentleman by the name of George Muller, who wrote two books -- *Hoboken Yesterday, Volumes I and II*. They're in the library. He passed away. He was in a wheelchair. He had polio when he was very young, and was crippled, in a wheelchair. The second city historian was a gentleman by the name of John Heeney, who lived on Eleventh and Garden. Heeney was friends with the Stevens family; the whole world revolved around the Stevens. The third historian was a gentleman by the name of George "Kirschvestner," whose family owned United Decorating, at 421 Washington Street. They've been at the same location since 1899. George's son now runs the business, so he's the fourth generation of his family to run it. When George passed away, in January of 2001, Mayor ~~Rizzo~~ Russo appointed me as the city historian.

The motivation for it was to preserve Hoboken history, and to do things like you're doing now. Heeney wrote a book called *The Bicentennial Comes to Hoboken*. Muller wrote two books. George didn't write any books. I've written seven articles for *Hoboken History*

Magazine, which was published by the Hoboken Historical Museum. We published twenty-five volumes, but they don't publish it anymore. I don't know why. But I'm contemplating writing a book. Several people have asked me to, but I just haven't gotten around to it.

EH: What is the most surprising thing -- or what are some of the things you've learned, being city historian, and things that have surprised you?

LL: Well, I wouldn't say I've learned anything being the city historian. It was basically all stuff that I knew. Again, I came from an old Hoboken family. We sat around and talked about Hoboken, when my grandfather was young, when my mother and father were younger, and I had some very excellent teachers in the Hoboken public school system. I went to Wallace School -- not the building that's there today but the old one. In those days, back in the '50s, when I went there, that was the best public school in the city of Hoboken. We had to wear a tie every day when I was in school. When we went to Demarest, which was the high school, the first day we all wore ties, and the teachers at Demarest said, "You guys. Did you come from Catholic school?" We said, "No. Public school." "Oh. Okay.

You guys came from Wallace." "How do you know?" "You're the only guys wearing ties."

I had a teacher by the name of -- her maiden name was Heath, her married name was Smith. But there were so many Smiths that she had to use her maiden name. She was an American history teacher, and she would go off -- she grew up in Hoboken. In fact, her husband, Jerry Smith, was a descendant of Brian Smith, the butcher of Hoboken, who donated the land for the original St. Mary's hospital on Park Avenue. She had marvelous stories about Hoboken. She would tell us these stories, and I just absorbed it.

EH: And what are some of your duties as city historian?

LL: Well, my duties are very limited, actually. It's never been clearly defined. Each historian does his own thing. I give walking tours, historical walking tours. I do a walking tour of the locations for the movie *On the Waterfront*. I've spoken at the library; again, I write articles; sometimes I write letters to the editor. They don't always publish them. I've written a few articles and sent them down there, but I guess they don't have the space. I don't know.

So my job as historian is just to inform people of the history of Hoboken.

EH: When you started your career, did you work in the tavern or move on to something -- ?

LL: Actually, I never worked in the tavern. It was my uncle's tavern. When he passed away in 1975, we all sat around the table and my father said, "Okay. Who wants to run this?" And, you know, in 1975 it was a different Hoboken than 2003. No one wanted it. Another uncle took it, then eventually we closed it. I think it's a condo today. But I used to go down there, and the old public "works" garage was across the street, so all the DPW guys used to be in there. It was a great place to learn Hoboken history. It was an old neighborhood tavern.

EH: You mentioned something about real estate and having a business.

LL: I have a real-estate license, and my wife and I operated a Laundromat at Third and Monroe, which was around the corner from the tavern. Now there was a

neighborhood -- 300 Monroe, back in the 1980s --

[Interruption]--

The neighborhood of the Laundromat was at 300 Monroe Street, and that was the most dangerous neighborhood in the city of Hoboken. There were two murders outside our Laundromat. The city purchased a mobile police headquarters and used to park it in front of our Laundromat. But we never had an ounce of trouble. People knew we were taking money out, because it was a Laundromat. We knew all the people in the neighborhood, they knew me, my wife, they knew my sons. We never, ever had a problem. But that was an experience, operating that place, let me tell you.

We bought it from people who were both Hoboken firemen, and they told us -- I don't know why, but they used to take the quarters out, bring them to the bank, then go back and buy more quarters -- which didn't make sense to me. But they used to have a police car come -- which service the city provides -- and take them out, with the money. We did that once or twice, and then we said, "This doesn't make sense -- take quarters in on a Monday and buy them on a Tuesday." So we just rolled them, and took the cash out, which I thought made more sense.

EH: This was in the early '80s, did you say?

LL: Early '80s. Yes. The Laundromat is now an apartment, and now they're all new buildings around the Laundromat. And the mobile police unit is no longer there.

EH: It's changed. Were you doing real estate also before that time?

LL: ~~Quite~~ Doing a bit before and during that time.

EH: Can you talk about some of your experiences with that?

LL: With real estate? Well, I'll tell you. That's interesting, because I remember showing buildings, particularly a house at 702 Bloomfield Street, and the owner was asking $75,000 and the basement was flooded. And I thought, "My God, who's going to pay $75,000 for this?" Now, if you can get a house on Seventh and Bloomfield today for $75,000, take it. That's not even a down payment. We've seen real estate jump. It was amazing. We were so close to the forest that we really didn't see the trees. A few

people advised us to "buy everything you can in Hoboken," but we thought " " no. We like it, we live here, but -- We were smart. We invested in Jersey City. Had we known -- I say everyone who was born and raised in Hoboken today should be a millionaire, and none of us are. Well, not none of us. Some did it. A few of my friends did it. They were the smart ones. But who would have thought? It's amazing!

EH: Now do you see a lot of the folks that you grew up with? Did they stay in Hoboken and do you see them?

LL: Not many. Not many at all. Most of the people -- All of my family, all my first cousins on my father's side, they all moved to Secaucus, back in the late '60s, early '70s. They said, "Are you crazy, staying in Hoboken? Why would you want to raise your kids there?" I said, "Where were you raised? What's wrong with raising your kids in Hoboken?" We didn't stay because we thought property would go through the roof. We stayed because we liked it, and it just happened to change all around us.

EH: Interesting.

You also mentioned that you're in the film business.

LL: Yes, I am.

EH: Can you talk about that a little bit?

LL: Yes, I am. If you meet anybody on a film set, you walk up to them and you say, "Hey, is Hoboken Lenny here?" they'll know exactly who you're talking about. I'm known as "Hoboken Lenny."

An interesting story. A few years ago I worked on a Barbra Streisand film called *The Mirror Has Two Faces*. When I was introduced to Barbra Streisand, the guy said, "Hey, Barbra, this is Hoboken Lenny," and she looked at me and she went, "Hoboken Lenny?" and he goes, "Yeah. We call him Hoboken Lenny because he owns half of Hoboken." She took my hand in both her hands, stepped almost nose-to-nose with me (although she's shorter than I am), looked at me and said, "You own half of Hoboken?" I said, "Barbra, no offense, but if I owned half of Hoboken, do you think we'd be havin' this conversation?" She said, "No, I guess not."

But I used to work on "early" films in Hoboken. I don't like to anymore, because -- Years ago we

did a pilot for a show called "Dream Street," which was then shot in Hoboken. We shot it up on Ninth and Hudson. And, you know, the film crew comes in and we take up all the parking -- trucks, trailers, cars, all different things -- and I actually had someone ring my bell, someone I know very well, and complain to me because he couldn't park his car in front of his house. Like, "What do you want from me? Call the mayor. He said we could do it."

So I don't really like to work in Hoboken anymore, because I know too many people and they complain. I guess rightfully so. You know how parking is in Hoboken. It's gold. ~~Find~~ Buy a parking space. They're not making them anymore.

EH: Yes, we always have problems with parking.

Are you a member, or have you been a member in the past, of any of the social clubs? You mentioned one of them, I think --

LL: Well, I belong to the Elks. I belong to the Knights of Columbus. I used to be president of the Hoboken Jaycees. I used to belong to the Hoboken Civil Defense. We had a Civil Defense unit. They had auxiliary

cops, but I was an auxiliary fireman. Once a week we would go to a different Hoboken firehouse we were assigned, every Wednesday night, and the city gave us the helmet, the coat, the boots -- we got everything from the city -- and if a hit came in, we rode the fire engines. And I'll tell you, it was a thrill to ride the fire engine down Washington Street.

EH: ~~When?~~ wow

LL: But they don't have it anymore.

EH: When was that?

LL: Well, I was in it from 1964 to 1966. What happened was -- If there was a general-alarm fire, we were allowed to respond, and the auxiliary firemen showed up -- there was a fire on Second and Washington Street. It's now the organic food store. Okay. Well, there was a fire, and the auxiliary foremen showed up. His name was Ed "Ruger." He went down into the basement, and somehow he lost his way, and he died.

EH: Oh, gee.

LL: There was a big to-do. His wife never actually ended up suing the city. After that happened they said, "No more. That's it. That's the end of that." But it was a real tragedy. I knew Ed very well.

EH: That's awful.

What about the fires that were, I guess, in the '70s?

LL: Seventies.

EH: Can you talk about that?

LL: Well, my step-father was a Hoboken fire inspector, so he was at every one of those. People say people were burnt out because they wanted to get them out. I never believed it, and it's never been proven. There were two major fires, one on 11th and Willow, which is now a parking lot because of that fire. A ten-family brick building burned to the ground. Eight young sisters died in that fire. What happened there was, there was a party one night. I guess a guy had too much to drink and they asked him to leave. Physically. He came back with a can of

gasoline and set the stairwell on fire. It was probably one of the biggest fires in the history of Hoboken. There was another one on Clinton Street like that, the same situation. The guy came back and set the house on fire. Twelve-hundred Washington Street -- In fact, the building, today, is on the state and national registry of historic places. That was burnt out. But I don't believe it was ever done to get people out. Every case was different; they found the reasons why it happened.

But there was a lot of hysteria back then. People were saying, "Oh, they wanted to burn us out. They wanted to get us out." Not true.

EH: Were there any civil-rights type actions, or rallies around Hoboken during -- ?

LL: No, but in 1971 -- the one and only time Hoboken had problems -- there was a group of militant Puerto Ricans who, for whatever reason -- It all started at the Madonna of the [?] -- Feast, which is in September, when it used to be on Fourth and Adam. Whatever happened I don't know, ~~in~~ the beginning, but the riots started, and there were five days of rioting. Washington Street looked like "plywood plaza." My father, who was a Teamster labor

leader -- we led a rally one night. We grouped up in front of City Hall, and we marched down Washington Street. There must have been, I don't know, a hundred of us. We get to Clinton Street and there's a police barricade. Behind the police are these other people, burning an American flag, burning cars, smashing windows, and the police stopped *us*. They had on riot gear.

I come up to this cop -- he's got a shield, a helmet across his face -- he says, "Get back, Lenny." I ~~said~~ go, "Who is this?" It happened to be Tom Kennedy. He became a councilman-at-large and Director of Public Safety later on. I go, "Tom! What are you doin'?" He ~~says~~ goes, "If you don't get back, I'll have to lock you up." I go, "Tom! Lock *me* up? Look what's going on behind you!" "No. *You* have to go back." I said, "You have to be kiddin', Tom. Get out of my way." (As I'm telling the story, the hair is raising on my arm.) It's a night I will never, ever forget. Five people were arrested that night -- four Puerto Ricans and my father.

EH: Oh, my goodness.

LL: Now, they get my father in the old Hoboken jail, and the mayor at the time was a man by the

name of Louis de Pasquale, who grew up with my father. They called my uncle who owned the tavern, my uncle comes up, and there are television cameras and there's this big scene. They take the four Puerto Ricans to the Holiday Inn in Jersey City, by the Holland Tunnel, to have a meeting, and they wanted my father to "leave quietly." One of my father's attributes was not being a quiet man, and he refused to go. Eventually, they got him out. The whole thing was silly, but that cost Louis Dipasquale the mayoralty. He lost in a landslide two years later, to Steve Cappiello.

EH: Interesting.

LL: But that was the one and only time that there were agitators -- who were not from Hoboken, they were from out-of-town -- and that was it. We haven't had any, thank god, since.

Of course, today -- Well, of course, the Puerto Ricans were in the minority then, but today they're mainstream Americans.

EH: That's right.

LL: I guess the born-and-raiseds and the Puerto Ricans are the minority, and the newcomers are the majority.

EH: Yes. So because it was an outside group --

LL: -- an outside group of agitation. I don't know why -- Like I say, I know it started with the Feast. I don't know how it started, but that's where it started. If you go look in the library, you'll see newspaper articles about "plywood plaza," and all the stuff that went on. After that --

It's funny. There was a mass exodus from Hoboken, but shortly thereafter was the renaissance of Hoboken, which started in the mid-'70s, like '75-'76.

EH: So what caused the renaissance? Can you talk about that?

LL: That's a very good question. What caused the renaissance? I don't know. I guess a few people got on a ferry boat one day and said, "Wow. Look what we discovered. This has been here all along?" Well, the

proximity to New York City is what did it. And at that time, Hoboken -- as today -- was cheaper than Manhattan, and safer, and cleaner. So people thought they had a good thing here -- which we knew all along.

EH: You mentioned that [riots] -- being a difficult time. Actually, that was one of my questions. In your eyes, what was the most difficult time for Hoboken -- including going back, with your view of history?

LL: That period of 1971 was the most difficult in my lifetime. I don't know what went on prior to that. People might say World War II, World War I -- I don't know -- but in my lifetime, that was the most difficult time in Hoboken. That's the only time when there was this division in Hoboken. Hoboken is a pretty harmonious community. People always got along. People tolerated each other. My grandfather told me stories of when he was a kid -- Probably in 1900, ~~when he was a kid~~ – he was 8 years old –, if an Italian was caught east of Willow Avenue, they would grab him by the neck and say, "You little Guinea, get back where you belong!" and they would go back. But they had no reason to go east of Willow Avenue. First Street was the

main shopping area in Hoboken, not Washington Street. They very seldom ever ventured up here.

EH: Interesting. And on the flip side of that, what would you say has been the best time -- in your lifetime, and also as a historian, when you're looking back?

LL: Now, I guess.

EH: Now?

LL: Yes.

EH: And why is that?

LL: Look at it. Look at Hoboken. Everywhere you go people are restoring buildings. There's just so much going on in this town. There are so many activities. There are so many different community groups -- there are garden tours, house tours. Who would have thought there would be a garden tour in the city of Hoboken? We just had the sixth annual; it's been going on for five years. The house tour was started in the '70s, by the environmental committee.

Then they stopped it. Then the Hoboken Museum picked it up. We've been running it for about seven or eight years now, and it's a big success. It draws people into Hoboken.

EH: Absolutely. And your house is --

LL: My garden was on the garden tour, yes. We haven't put the house on it yet. We don't know if we want -- After having had over 200 people come through on the garden tour --

EH: I didn't think so.

I went on one of the house tours. I really enjoyed it. There are a lot of beautiful places.

I have specifically been told you ask you about the underground tunnels of Hoboken. Can you talk about that?

LL: Sure. The tunnel -- Well, actually, there were a couple of tunnels. There was one -- you know where the ~~"castle"~~ cannon is, up at Stevens?

EH: Yes.

LL: Okay. Well, that was the site of the Stevens castle, the Stevens family home. There's supposed to be an underground tunnel in there. But the underground tunnels that I knew of were during Prohibition, in the old "Meyers" Hotel, which was on the corner of Third and Hudson Street. There was a tunnel that went from the piers to the "Meyers," that goes all the way up to where Blockbusters is today. In fact, a couple of years ago, myself and a friend went down into the basement -- We spoke to the manager of Blockbusters, and we went down, and underneath the sidewalk there's an arch that's bricked off, that goes into Washington Street. We think the tunnels were probably used over the Prohibition era. Old-timers have told me that Hoboken was actually part of the Underground Railroad, during the Civil War, but I haven't really been able to document that. I haven't seen it documented, but I've been told it many times by old-timers. I don't know.

EH: Wow. Any thoughts for someone to go down in there?

LL: Well, the "Meyers" Hotel is gone. The piers are gone. The only link to it is Blockbusters, and that's bricked up. So we don't know if they'll ever open that up again, and

where will it go? If they ever excavate Washington Street deep, maybe we'll find it. When they tore down the "Meyers" Hotel -- I guess when Joe "Babby" built the building that's there now -- I don't know if they found anything or not. But If they did, it's gone -- which was a big link to Hoboken's history.

Now, of course, I guess you know about "Sybil's" Cave --

EH: Yes. I was reading about it in the Hoboken ~~[?~~] -- book.

LL: -- which was a man-made cave. They found a spring, and people used to buy the spring water for a penny. Then in the 1930s they found out it contained ~~sulfa~~ sulfur. But the interesting thing I wanted to talk about with "Sybil's" Cave is that one of the people who used to frequent it was John Jacob Astor, who had a villa on Second and Washington, where Johnny Rocket's is now. Many famous people would visit him -- Martin Van Buren, the former president, visited him, and one day Edgar Allan Poe visited him. Poe and Astor went down on River Walk to "Sybil's" Cave, and there was a big commotion going on. "What is it?" The body of a young woman had washed up. Her name was Mary

Rogers. It intrigued Poe so much -- and for days the New York papers had this story. It was an unsolved murder -- and it intrigued Poe so much that he wrote the first mystery novel, ever, called *The Mystery of Marie Roget*, who was really Marie Rogers.

EH: Interesting.

LL: So that's Hoboken's literary claim to ~~literary~~ fame.

EH: What about the hotels? When was the last hotel closed? Because now there's --

LL: Well, the Hotel Edwards, on Hudson Street -- which was like 74 Hudson Street -- was the last hotel to close. At one time we had over two-dozen hotels in Hoboken. We had first-class hotels. The old "Meyers" Hotel, as I mentioned, was probably the most famous and the most elegant. The King of Denmark slept there. In fact, "Meyers" Hotel's slogan was, "Known the world over." When I was a kid there was the Globe Hotel; there was the Haufbrau Haus; the River View; "Meyers"; Grand; the Lincoln Hotel on 14th Street, where the ~~[?]~~ Hess -- station is now. Pinter's Hotel.

There must have been about a dozen when I was still a kid. As the passenger ships died, the hotels died. What tourists used to come to Hoboken? Now we're going to have a great hotel again.

So Hoboken is going full cycle. I like to think that when I walk the streets of Hoboken -- I like to think that if I were here in 1903, Hoboken looked pretty much, in 1903, the way it looks in 2003. You had that influx of affluent people. You had New Yorkers. You had community groups. There were many German clubs, Italian clubs, Irish clubs -- all over the town, in their own little sections. I think the Hoboken pendulum has swung back. I think we're back where we were then.

EH: We're back to the ferries now, too.

LL: And the ferries are back, exactly. What's old is new again.

EH: That's right.

Do you have a bowling alley here?

LL: You're sitting on it.

EH: That's another thing I was told to ask.

LL: From 1900 to 1916, this building was the Hoboken Knights of Columbus. Where we're sitting is an extension. The building ended right where the telephone is. This is a "trevi-wood," two-lane bowling alley. If you look over here, you can see the circle in the floor, where they would set the pins. See?

EH: Yes.

LL: My claim to fame is that I live in an old bowling alley.

EH: That's a pretty good one.

Are the social clubs as active now as they were at one time?

LL: No, I don't think so. At one time -- see, you have fraternal clubs today, like the Elks and the Knights of Columbus. But you had social clubs. You had the "character" club, the "bantam" club, just to name a few, right off the top of my head. Almost every corner downtown, every neighborhood, had a club. Then it broke down. You

asked me before if I lived in an integrated neighborhood. My father always said he lived in an integrated neighborhood: He lived with northern Italians and southern Italians. But each group, as they came from Italy -- from wherever they came -- would have their own club. "Madonna di Matri" is the club from [?] -- and over the years that's hung in there, and it's probably stronger than it's ever been, even though a lot of them live out of town.

One thing about Hoboken that I find unique is that, whether you lived here for six months and moved away, there seems to be a bond about Hoboken; it stays in your blood. I don't know why, but it does. It's amazing. We were going to London, we were on a plane, and I'm sitting next to this young couple, and talking. She was from England. "Where are you from?" "New Jersey." "Oh. Where from?" "I'm from Hoboken." "Oh, when I married her, she lived in Hoboken. We lived in Hoboken for six months. It was great." But whatever it is -- we didn't talk about any other town. I don't know where he was from or where they live now, but they lived in Hoboken for six months, and they loved it. I don't know what it is.

EH: Good stuff.

Do you have any Frank Sinatra stories to share?

LL: Well, in 1979 I was the transportation coordinator for a movie called *Atlantic City*, starring Burt Lancaster.

Well, first of all, Frank Sinatra's uncle, "Champ Seeger" -- who was really "Galivanti" -- taught my father how to fight. When my father was a kid, he worked for the city. I met Dolly and Martin Sinatra, I knew "Champ," I knew his uncle "Babe." So I'm telling all this to Burt Lancaster. "Oh, God, I knew Sinatra's uncle." Sinatra's mother used to live on this block. She lived at 916 Bloomfield Street.

So we're down there in October, and it says on the marquee of resorts that Sinatra's going to be there for Thanksgiving weekend. Burt didn't say anymore. So my family comes down for Thanksgiving to stay with me, then they leave. They had just left, I came back into my room, the telephone rings, and it's Burt Lancaster. He says, "I have two tickets for you and your wife to go see Sinatra." I go, "Oh, my god! My wife just left." With that, there's a knock on my door, I open it up, and there's my father. "Get in here. You wanna go see Sinatra?" We go, we sat at the table with Barbara Sinatra. Burt introduced us -- "This is

Lenny Luizzi. He's the coordinator on the film. This is his father, Booby. Frank's Uncle 'Champ' taught him how to fight." I'd never been a Sinatra fan. I couldn't have taken him [?] -- or leave him I'm telling you, there was magic in the air. When it was over, they take our table -- there were about fifteen of us -- into the Camelot Restaurant, the resorts, just us. We had to wait a few minutes for Frank to come. When Frank comes, it's like a receiving line. His wife -- what a memory! -- she introduced everybody to Frank. It was my turn, "Frank, this is Lenny Luizzi. He's working with Burt on his latest film. Lenny's from Hoboken." Frank takes my hand in his -- and he was just about my height -- he looked me straight in the eye. He had steel-cold blue eyes, I will never forget it, and he goes, "Hey, kid. What's new in Hoboken." And I looked at Frank, and as eloquently as I could, I said, "[Gibberish]." What do you say to Sinatra?

But, no, we sat and we talked, and Frank made sure he spoke to everybody. Oh, and the last time -- (my wife is holding up a sign!) -- I don't want to get off on a Sinatra kick, but -- People knock Sinatra, because, they say, he never did anything for Hoboken. That's not entirely true. Frank did things anonymously, which was his style. He gave money to the Knights of Columbus (I know that for a fact); he gave money to St. Mary's; I believe he gave money

to the library. He even gave money to the Museum at one time. He never wanted his name mentioned. In 1947 they toppled McFeeley, and in 1947 Hoboken got its first Italian mayor. So Dolly was a committee-woman, very active in politics. She got Frank to come back -- It was February or March of 1948. They had a "Week of Progress," and Frank rode down Washington Street on a fire truck (they had a big parade), and that night they had a party at the Union Club, which was on Sixth and Hudson. Frank gets up on the stage and he's singing, and they start booing him. He's like, "You people didn't come here to hear me sing," and he left. He said, "I'll never go back to Hoboken again." Not Hoboken, but because people in Hoboken did things -- They would borrow money from him; they talked about him; they knocked him; they tried to use him.

And Frank didn't. He came back quietly, many times, to see Frank Garrick, his godfather, but Frank didn't come back publicly from 1948 until 1984, when he came back with President Reagan. And we have the great *Hoboken History* Magazine, we had a whole issue on Frank. We had a great story about that day. That day in Hoboken was amazing. If you can think of New Year's Eve and Mardi Gras and whatever days you want, combined into one -- It was a media circus. There were all kinds of media. President

Reagan's entourage was huge. The security detail was -- My stepfather's brother was the public safety director then, so he and the Secret Service were in charge of security. Frank was just marvelous. In fact, he left, because he didn't want to upstage the President -- which he did. No one wanted to see Reagan. They wanted to say, "Hey, Frank."

Then he came back a year later, and Stevens gave him an honorary degree. This I find interesting. He gets his honorary degree from Stevens in the afternoon, and that night -- What's the Medal of Freedom, or the medal of honor that they give -- the highest award they can give a civilian? That same night, Reagan gave him that medal. So think about it. He was in Hoboken in the afternoon, and in the White House that night.

So that's the journey of Sinatra from Hoboken to the White House.

EH: Not bad.

Do you have a collection of postcards?

LL: Yes, I do.

EH: What's the story behind that? Talk about that, please.

LL: Well, you know how some kids collect baseball cards when they're young. I collected Hoboken postcards. What was intriguing about it was that buildings had started to disappear when I was younger, then I found them in postcards. I'd think, "Wow, there's a building that isn't there anymore," and the collection just grew, to over 700 cards. We believe there were probably a little over a thousand Hoboken postcards. Every now and then a new one turns up, and there's a wealth of information on them -- not just the pictures, but what's written on the back. It's like listening in on a telephone conversation, people writing things.

We've found so many characters from Hoboken history. There was a gentleman by the name of Collins, Professor Collins. We don't know what he was a professor of. I think he was a snake-oil salesman. But he married a girl named Edith Brooks, who had a store on 11th and Washington Street, and she made postcards of Hoboken, hand-painted from Germany. Brooks cards are among the best. So Collins decides he's going to make postcards of prominent men of Hoboken. He did a series of three cards. Card #1: Professor Collins. [Laughter]

EH: Awesome.

So this is your private collection. Have you catalogued it? How do you -- ?

LL: Well, I broke it down by different publishers and different things. Sometimes I just like to come home and flip through the postcards. Being on the Historic Preservation Commission, the postcards have helped me a lot. Because when somebody wants to do something to a building -- like now, with the "Clamboth" house -- I have postcards of what that whole block looked like. So we try, when somebody comes and wants to do something to a building, we try to get it back as closely as we can. I'll produce a postcard, I'll give it to the contractor, and I'll say, "Here. Here's what that storefront looked like at the turn of the century," and most of them are cooperative. Just to give you an example -- 1002 Washington Street. We brought that back, from an old postcard.

EH: Interesting. So mostly you're using it, and you're also using it as part of being on the Commission?

LL: Yes.

EH: Do you have people asking you, sometimes, to look at them? Do you do research with them?

LL: Well, lots of people ask to look at them. And I love showing them.

EH: Did you have a website up at one point?

LL: No. I should do that.

EH: Because I saw something on the internet, referencing your collection.

LL: Really?

EH: I'm serious.

LL: I have no idea what you're talking about. Get me that website.

EH: I will. I'll call you and let you know what it was.

LL: I never thought about that. I should do a website. I could do stories about Hoboken. I'll have to get into the 21st century. You know, historians -- we're here, but we're half there.

EH: Exactly. Use that modern technology, right?

What about the decline of a lot of the industry, like Bethlehem Steel, Lipton, Maxwell House. How was that? Can you talk about that?

LL: You know, just to give you an example -- a few years ago they talked about putting a ~~shop right~~ Shop-Rite up in the shipyard, and people fought it. They said, "No, it's going to cause too much traffic." At that particular spot you had Bethlehem Steel. You had Todd Shipyards. You had Standard Brands. You had Lipton Tea. You had Franklin Bakers. You had Lightfoot Schultz. You had Hostess Cupcakes. And you had a train that ran down the middle of Hudson Street, and I didn't even mention Maxwell House.

EH: Where was the train going?

LL: The old Hoboken Shore Railroad ran from 14th Street and, probably, Garden. At one time it ran all the way to Fourth and River, to the piers. But when I was a kid it just ran from 14th Street to 11th Street, where Maxwell House -- Where the parking lot is now, that the city has, there were all railroad tracks there. There was a pier, where they would tie up barges. They would put the boxcars on the barge and ship them over to Manhattan. Well, when we were kids, we would climb up onto the roof of the boxcars. There would be four tracks, and we would play what we called boxcar tag. You jumped from boxcar to boxcar.

I remember one night there was a barge tied up at the dock, and on either side of it, it had what looked like a ship's wheel. It would have a pulley -- they would tie the rope on the barge, then pull this, and bring it right up to the railroad tracks. So we were there one night and we were spinning the wheel -- because we used to play "ship" -- we spun it and we all went out on the boxcars, but what we did was we loosened the rope, so that the thing moved out. We didn't know it, because it would rock with the tide. Now we go to get off, and -- I don't know, when you're fourteen years old, it looked like it could have been as wide as the Grand Canyon -- probably it was only maybe ten feet. A good friend of mine by the name

of Bob Taylor -- Bob was like the Fonzi of our gang. "What are we gonna do? We can't get back?" And Bob backed up, took a running -- he ran and jumped and just made it. Then he turned the wheel, and pulled the barge back in. I must say, we never did that again.

EH: Yes, I can imagine. [Laughs] Wow.

LL: But the question was about the decline of industry!

It wasn't a very good question; yes

EH: ~~That was the question~~, yes.

LL: But Standard Brands was taken over. They merged with Nabisco. They closed the Hoboken plant. Lightfoot Schultz Soap Company, which was the original "shoal time" -- Lightfoot Schultz was the man's name. He was an American Indian, and part German. "Shoal time" then moved to Clifton. Philip Morris bought the Lightfoot Schultz Soap Company.

TAPE 1, SIDE 2

EH: How about the preservation of the machine shop? Were you involved in that?

LL: Actually, I wasn't. A fellow by the name of "De la Crella" had bought the property and wanted to knock it down -- and knocked down, actually, three sides of it. All that was really standing was the Hudson Street side, the roof was gone -- a group of people got together (I was not involved in it) and saved it -- at the time they saved they didn't even know why they were saving it, they just thought that it was an important building. As it turns out, now, it's the oldest building on the Hoboken waterfront, and home to the Hoboken Historical Museum, which just happened [?] -- It was an important thing.

What "De la Crella" did was he wanted to do it on a Sunday, when people were -- in the summertime. We have a home in the Poconos, so we were gone. When we came back, the next day we heard that he had tried to knock it down and people stopped it -- luckily.

EH: Luckily. I loved that building.

LL: I was involved in trying to save the "Marker" Institute, which was built in 1866. It was the original Hoboken High School.

EH: Where was that?

LL: Sixth and Park. The Hudson School bought it, ended up tearing it down, and did a nice job replicating it. I can look at it and see the difference, but to the average person it probably looks exactly like the same building. But we lost a great building, and I hate to lose good buildings.

EH: How long have you served on the Historic Commission?

LL: Eleven years.

EH: And has that Commission been around for a number of years?

LL: Nineteen-seventy-six. When it was first formed it was just an advisory group. Now it actually has legal status, and we really can tell you what to do and what not to do. I'm proud of what Washington Street looks like. It's not perfect, because, originally, when I was on the commission, it only went from the Observer Highway to Fourth Street. Then a few years ago it was expanded for all

of Washington Street. So things like the sign at "Benny Tadino's" is grand-fathered in; you can't make him take it down. But if he takes it down, we'll make sure nobody puts it back up again. I don't want to pick on Benny "Tadino's," but that's one of the blights.

EH: Have you always been interested in history?

LL: Yes. As long as I can remember.

EH: Are there things you want to talk about, as far as stories and recollections, that I'm not hitting on?

LL: Well, one of my stories I mentioned earlier -- "Sybil's" Cave. After we moved from Second Street we moved to 11th and Willow, so I've actually lived in the fifth ward all except for eleven years of my life. We used to climb in the hills up at Stevens, at night, go up there and run around. "Sybil's" Cave -- which is buried today; you can barely find it, but I can find it -- was still pretty much open. One night we dug it out and we went in it. It stunk, because -- Today you call them "homeless";

in my younger days, we called them hobos. They were probably living in there. There were wine bottles and things. I'm probably one of the last people to be in "Sybil's" Cave.

Now this is interesting. We called it Dead Man's Cave. As I said, I grew up uptown. Many years later, someone writes a story for *Hoboken History* Magazine about Dead Man's cave. I go, "Oh, God --" But he wasn't talking about "Sybil's" Cave; there's another cave down at the foot of the Palisades, around Patterson Avenue, that the downtown kids called Dead Man's Cave.

So there used to be two Hobokens. There was uptown and downtown. The people downtown did their thing; the people uptown did their thing. So they had their Dead Man's Cave, we had ours.

EH: Did your father used to tell you a lot of stories about his work?

LL: Well, my father and my Grandfather More ~~Moore~~ -- my grandfather had a saying -- "I was born in Hoboken, and I want to die in Hoboken" -- and he did. He loved Hoboken. When his siblings moved away, he stayed. This was his town. He was a man of many careers. At one

More → Not a proper noun

point in his life he was a longshoreman, and when I walk down, now, to "P.A." Park and Sinatra Park, I look at them and I go, "Wow. I wonder what my grandfather would think. Do you think that he would ever think this would be a park?" I don't know.

I think the waterfront is probably the most amazing thing. Again, it's gone full cycle. Maybe a little over a hundred years ago we have River Walk, which today is Sinatra Drive. People came to Hoboken to enjoy the river and some liquid refreshment. And look at Hoboken today. An interesting thing -- A friend of mine named Bob Meyer has a letter from a Mayor Edwin Kerr. A few years ago, they cleaned out City Hall (not too many people know it) and they dumped all kinds of things. But Bob worked at City Hall, so he went and he saved a lot of this stuff. I'm trying to get the letter from him (I want to buy it), but he claims he doesn't know where it is now. But, anyway, the mayor writes a letter to the city council, chastising them for letting the bars stay open ~~and~~ an extra hour on the weekends. Mayor Kerr says that, "What you're doing is you're creating a carnival-like atmosphere. You're drawing out-of-towners to come into town, just to go to the bars. You're causing all these problems." And the letter was written in 1886.

EH: Oh, my gosh.

LL: I had the letter and I read it to a group, and I said, "I'm going to read you something. Tell me when this was written." And everybody thought, like, that year. "Oh, it was written in 1998." No, it wasn't.

EH: You just wrote it.

LL: So the more things change, the more they stay the same.

EH: Incredible. I heard a rumor at one point that the actual number of bars that were on River -- I forget the number, but it was unbelievable.

LL: Well, I know this -- I was told this when I was a kid -- If you started at the old American Hotel, which is Texas/Arizona, and you had one beer in every bar, you'd never make it to Fourth and River. I know that to be a fact. [Laughter] You couldn't do it.

I'm going to just ramble on. One of my favorite periods in Hoboken would be World War I. I think

that was the greatest time. My father's older sister, who was born in 1899 and died in 1999, seven months short of her 100th birthday -- they lived at 660 First Street, and the doughboys would get off the train, out of the Palisades, and they would march them up First Street. I thought, originally, that they just marched them up, they got on the ship, and they went to France. That isn't the way it always was. Sometimes they stayed in town a few days, and Hoboken was a twenty-four-hour community. It was soldiers ~~[?]~~ all over the town. The federal government had to close the bars, Congress had to pass an act, because there's a law that says you can't have a bar within a mile of an army installation. The federal government seized the piers and made them an army post. The commissioners of Hoboken would go down to Washington, because they were good Democrats, and Wilson was a good Democrat, and stalled them ~~[?]~~ -- and finally the Army said, "That's it. You have to close them," and they did. It was like Prohibition before Prohibition, in Hoboken.

EH: Right.

LL: But my aunt always told me marvelous stories about Hoboken back then. And remember, the slogan

for World War I was "Heaven, Hell or Hoboken." So every doughboy knew that slogan, and George Muller -- if you ever read his book, *Hoboken Yesterday* -- has a great story about it, where he says that every war has a slogan: "On to Richmond," "Remember the Alamo," and "Heaven, Hell or Hoboken." But when the doughboys said that, they weren't talking about "Hoboken," they were talking about "home," which was Hoboken.

I don't think there are any doughboys left.

EH: It would have been interesting to see the town at that time.

LL: Oh, a fabulous town, it must have been. But, of course, World War I really marked the changes in Hoboken, because, as I said earlier, that's when the Germans left, the piers closed down. Those piers were vacant from, I don't know, I'll say the ~~1920s~~ 1923, when they brought all the bodies back, until the 1950s. No one worked there. They were just vacant. Those industries that were related -- ship repairing, and there were lots of industries like that in Hoboken, along River Street -- were gone.

EH: Does that include the uptown area, as well?

LL: No. "Tijan & Lang," which became Todd Shipyards, and "Fletcher," which became Bethlehem -- they did big business. I'm talking about ship supply companies. When you had the Holland American line -- Years ago, all the German delicatessens in Hoboken made steamer baskets, and all the florists -- Think of it, when somebody's going, there were bon voyage parties. All that stuff was bought in Hoboken, so that really helped the local economy. The German piers -- When the United States government seized the German piers -- there was the Hamburg America line and the North German "World" line. The North German "World" line had the largest and fastest passenger ship in the world, called Die Vaterland, and it was right here in Hoboken. So the U.S. government seized it, and turned it into a troop-transport ship called the Leviathan.

So think about this. The Germans built the ships, and we used them for troops to go and fight the Germans. Ironic.

EH: Right. Now as far as German-Americans, they tended to leave Hoboken? They must have felt --

LL: Well, I guess they didn't want to, but that was the law. Congress passed a law that said if you were a German nationalist, you couldn't live within a mile of a seaport -- it wasn't aimed at just Hoboken -- so they had to leave.

EH: Where did they go?

LL: Well, a lot of them went to West Hoboken, which is now part of Union City, where [?] -- Park is. Some went to Secaucus. You'll still find a lot of Germans, and they can all trace their origins right back here to Hoboken. East Rutherford, Wallington, a little bit, and wherever.

EH: Did anyone move back?

LL: I don't know. I would think not many. The time had come and gone. They moved to the suburbs, and they started a new life. I guess they still had ties to Hoboken. The only German influence left in Hoboken is "Helmer's," which is the only German-American restaurant in Hudson County.

EH: Amazing.

LL: Yes. Helmer's hung in there all those years. We used to have little German butcher shops when I was a kid. We called the pork stores. They're all gone. All the mom-and-pop stores are gone. Every neighborhood had a Chinese hand laundry. Downtown, every neighborhood had a fish market and a chicken market. We have one chicken market left in Hoboken.

EH: Did you have a favorite store when you were a kid, that you liked to --

LL: Yes. A five-and-ten called "Fischer Beers," which was the "McCormick" store, which is now going to be a bakery. We had Woolworth's, we had "Fischer Beer," we had W.T. Grant. "Fischer Beer" was my -- I loved it.

EH: Why?

LL: That's a good question. Each of the five-and-tens -- Woolworth's and "Fischer Beer" had a food counter. They all had a pet department, with birds and fish

and things. Of course, every time my grandmother would take me to the five-and-ten she would buy me something. That's why I liked it.

EH: Sure.

LL: Then we had a lot of ice-cream parlors. Now we only have Schneckenberger's left, where I hung out when I was young. A few years ago we gave Schneckenberger's the Historic Heritage Award, from the Preservation Commission. My name is on it, and it's in their window. Many a night old Mrs. Schneckenberger, who's deceased now, invited me to leave. How ironic: My name is in her window. (First Name)
[Laughter] If [?] -- could only see it.

EH: What was it like for you, being a teenager in Hoboken? And I'm wondering, too -- were there lots of activities, such as an ice-cream parlor shop, dances? Were there lots of activities for teens?

LL: Well, at the time we hung out exclusively at Schneckenberger's. Now I'm talking about uptown.

EH: Right.

LL: In the summertime, it was Schneckenberger's -- it was the park in the daytime and Schneckenberger's at night. Every Friday night the city ran a dance at Brandt School, around the corner. So everybody would go to the Brandt dance. After that you would go up to the Flying Pizza on 11th and Washington. Then, of course, we had the Recreation Department, but the Recreation Department was downtown. So for us to walk down to Jefferson Street -- we didn't do that too often. So we would play stickball, we would play box ball, four corners, up at Ninth and Castle Point Terrace. At night, for activity, sometimes we would go up to Stevens, to get chased by the campus police. It was a game. They'd chase us so far and we ran, but we all had a lot of fun. But we amused ourselves, mostly. We hung out on the street corner, and there was a 10:00 curfew then, in the park. And when the Civil Defense cop came over and it was 10:00 and he asked you to leave, you left. You didn't give him an argument, because he knew your mother and father. So if you gave him a hard time, you were going to get into trouble at home. Most of the cops knew everybody.

Like I said, people basically all knew each other. In fact, just this morning I met Vivian on a bus, one of my former tenants, and I'll take that bus almost every day, to Manhattan, at 6:30 A.M., standing-room only. Today was the first day in about five years that I met somebody I know.

EH: Wow.

LL: And I see the faces change. I would see people for a couple of years in the morning, then you don't see them anymore. They're gone. I don't know where they go, but they're going. It's always a different group. The only guys I know is the bus driver.

EH: Just from walking around, it seems like now some people are staying and having children. Do you see that?

LL: I think the people who buy the houses, they stay, basically. The condo people, they're either young, or they get married, or for some reason they don't want to raise their family in Hoboken. I don't know why. They blame it on the schools. I don't know. I think the

Hoboken public school system is as good as any public school system. If you want to learn, you learn; if you don't, you don't. We used to have five Catholic schools, now we have one. But you've got two charter schools and you've got three private schools. You've got Mustard Seed, you've got Stevens Co-op, and you've got the Hudson School. So that can't be the reason. I don't know what it is.

EH: Did you say you had children, and they grew up?

LL: Yes. I have two sons.

EH: Do they live in Hoboken?

LL: No. Our youngest son just moved out. He had a townhouse built in South Amboy. Our oldest son lives in Middletown.

Think about this: They couldn't afford to buy in Hoboken. Those are words I never thought I would speak.

LL's wife:

~~EH~~: My sons would love to be here. [EH: It's quite a change.] ~~Because~~ But they need space, and they would have loved to have bought a house, a brownstone, or --

LL: But then parking is an issue.

LL's wife:

~~EH~~: That was never an issue with us.

LL: No, it wasn't with us, but it was an issue with some people.

LL's wife:

~~EH~~: It's an issue with [?] -- people.

LL: It's like my cousins -- I like to tease them. They bought plywood houses on an old garbage dump in Secaucus, and their only comeback to me is, "Where do you park?" And I go, "Oh, Bayonne, North Bergen." "What?" I always like to tell them, in my own, subtle way, "I can sell my house in Hoboken and I can buy the best house on your block, and I can buy two Mercedes to put in your precious driveway and have money left over, but you can't buy a house on my block."

EH: Incredible.

LL: It's amazing. No one saw it -- Well, we didn't see it coming, anyway.

I remember one of the houses across the street from us, on Ninth and Bloomfield, which was fourteen feet wide -- My mother comes home one day, in the mid-'70s, and she says, "You know one of the little houses across the street was sold. Somebody paid $40,000 for it." And I said to my mother, "Where do you get these stories? Who would pay $40,000 for one of those?" It's amazing. But it just goes to prove what we knew all along: Hoboken is the promised land.

EH: [Laughs] Now your family roots go back a number of generations here. Prior to that, where was everyone coming from?

LL: Well, when my father's family came from Italy they lived a very brief time in New York City. They had friends in Hoboken, and they came over to Hoboken. My mother's people, when they came from Italy, they came in 1888 and moved to Hoboken in 1891. He had a grocery store in Little Italy. He had three children when he came to Hoboken, and he wanted to get his kids out of the city. I

don't really know how he got here, but he must have taken the ferryboat, came over, and said, "Well, this is an easy commute," and he stayed.

EH: Did they come from different towns in Italy?

LL: Yes. My mother's people came from outside Naples, and my father's people came from Bologna. So that's a big culture clash -- from northern Italian to southern Italian. They knew each other. My grandfather was baptized in St. Francis' church in 1892. He was baptized; made ~~had~~ his communion, confirmation, and got married; baptized all his children there; his two daughters were married there; his three grandchildren, that he saw, were baptized there. Now my sons were baptized there, and my grandson. So we've had five generations baptized in the same church, but my mother's sister was baptized at the same time as ~~because~~ one of my father's brothers, the same day, together. So two of my great-grandfathers were together that day. I don't know ~~whether~~ that they knew each other, but --

LL's wife: ~~EH~~: -- and now we'll have ~~you're going to have~~ another grandson, who --

LL: My daughter-in-law, who's from Hoboken, is pregnant, and we're going to baptize the baby in St. Francis. So it'll be fifth-generation.

EH: Are there a lot of people from that town (I forget which town you said), on your --

LL: They came from outside of Naples.

EH: Naples.

LL: Avalino.

EH: Were there a lot of folks from Hoboken from there?

LL: Yes. In fact -- well, yes. But my father's people -- John McKnight, who owns "Fiola" Funeral Home -- his grandmother and grandfather were maid-of-honor and best man for my grandmother and grandfather. That's how they came to Hoboken -- through John McKnight's grandparents. They brought them here.

EH: Did you grow up speaking Italian?

LL: No. No. When my mother's father was younger, his father sent him to a school at night to learn how to speak Italian. It was on Adams Street, and he always told that story. Many years later I met a gentleman by the name of Gus Gennaro, who was originally from Hoboken. He was a former "exalted ruler." Gus was like ninety-six when we met him, sharp as a tack. We were talking, and he was saying that his father had a school on Adams Street, to teach the Italian immigrants' children, who were born here, how to speak what they called "high Italian." So we were like, "My grandfather went to your father's school." Yes. Which I thought was kind of amazing.

We met him at -- what was it? Basking Ridge? -- far removed from Hoboken. But, again, it's that Hoboken.

EH: Now you talked about writing a book. What would you want to cover mostly?

LL: Well, I would want to cover the area of, let's say, the twenty-five-year period from 1890 -- maybe a little more than twenty-five -- right up to World War I, that period of history in Hoboken, which is when all

the buildings uptown were built, when the city really grew north. I think that was, until now, Hoboken's finest hour. I think this really is. I just see improvement every day. Some people say it's over-developed. Maybe it is, I don't know. If you try to leave Hoboken at rush hour, you'll think it is. There are people living places where you would never have dreamed of living -- Eighth and Madison. No one ever lived there, but they do now.

EH: Right.

LL: So this is a whole new Hoboken. It's been reborn.

EH: Well, I know you have a lot more stories, but I don't know if I'm tapping into all of them.

LL: Yes, I don't know what direction I want to go in. We could talk about history, we could talk -- Like I said, when I was young there were so many things to do in town, but we did it unorganized. You just did it. Stickball was the greatest game in the world. We played in the old Wallace Schoolyard, against the wall -- flies up -- You talk about the machine shop -- Right across the street,

on 13th and Hudson, there's that condo they call the "tea factory." Well, maybe it was a tea factory, but people go, "Oh, I live in the old Lipton Tea building." I go, "Oh, you do?" They go, "I live at 1300." I go, "That's not the old Lipton Tea. Lipton Tea was 1500." When I was a kid, that was an embroidery place. We had a square box painted on a wall, with an X, and that was home plate. The guy had to pitch it in, and you hit it out, because there was nobody across the street. It was the shipyard.

There were good times in Hoboken. We used to hitch the train. I told you I ran down Hudson Street. Sometimes we'd hitch a ride on the boxcars, and you had to jump off before they saw you. Hoboken Shore [?] -- Railroad only had two locomotives, and one of them is in the film *On the Waterfront*. If you look very closely, in the scene where Father Barry and Terry Malloy are in the park, and Edie walks -- Marlon Brando walks down to see her on the pier -- you'll see the old Hoboken locomotive. Next time you see the film, look for it.

EH: I'll get it again, soon.

LL: Well, one of the things I like to talk about is May 10th of this year. I had Budd Schulberg, who

wrote *On the Waterfront*, come here. We had a champagne reception upstairs for him, then he and I did a Hoboken *On the Waterfront* tour. A gentleman by the name of James "Gamamour" filmed it. He's making a documentary about that. He got in touch with me about a year ago. We spoke several times, and he wanted to just interview me. Then he said, "Well, maybe you can go to a few locations." I said, "Yeah, I don't mind." He said, "You know what might be nice. Let's do a real tour, with people, and they'll ask real questions, that we may not think of." I just happened to say to him, in passing, "Wouldn't it be nice if Budd Schulberg would come on the tour?" He said, "Well, he's eighty-nine." Just a thought. Two weeks later he called me up and he said, "I've got great news. Budd's going to do the tour, and he's real excited about it." And he was.

He was fabulous. His mind is sharp as can be. When I did the movie *The Amityville Horror* I got to meet Rod Steiger, and I told Rod, "You know, I grew up in Hoboken, and the first movie I ever saw being made was *On the Waterfront*. I lived right in the neighborhood, I was a kid. One night Rod and I were in a bar -- because that was filmed in Toms River, New Jersey, and the Holiday Inn on Route #37 was our headquarters -- I sat at the bar with Rod one night for about three hours, and we talked about *On the*

Waterfront. He told me different things about Brando, and different things about the film. I never thought I would ever do that tour.

What happened was, we did it for *Hoboken History* Magazine. The guy who wrote the story's name is Nick "Aquavella." Nick came over to my house, I put the video in, showed him these guys from Hoboken and we started to talk, and he goes, "That would make a great tour." I said, "Nick, no one cares. Half the buildings are gone now." Today, they're all gone. I said, "Half the things are gone. No one cares about this." So when that issue came out it was very popular, and the Museum had -- I don't know what the event was, but I used to like to work the door. This woman, Sada Fritz, walks in and says, "Oh, that was a great story about *On the Waterfront*. You should do a tour." So I go, "Come on. They told you to say that, right?" She says, "No. What are you talking about." So I go, "Okay. I'll tell you what. I'll do this tour."

I picked a Sunday in July. It was ninety degrees. I said, the night before, "When no one shows up tomorrow, I'm not going to say 'I told you so.'" Well, we started the tour at the Shannon Hall, and when I walked in the room there were fifty-seven people. Now, of course, there was no tour, because we'd never done this. So I just

did what I do; I just did with the film, told them different things, then we went to different locations. I've done it for six years, and every time I do it I say, "This is the last time." But doing it with Budd was --

EH: That must have been fun.

LL: That was great.

EH: So, as a kid, do you remember the filming of the movie?

LL: Sure.

EH: Can you talk about that?

LL: Well, as I told you, I lived on Second Street, between Hudson and River, and the rooftop scenes were shot on Hudson Street, between First and Second. So we would be up on the roof, watching them. When they threw the dummy off the roof -- we saw all that. It was very exciting. We'd never seen anything like that in Hoboken before. I didn't know who Marlon Brando was, but it was,

"Oh, they're making a movie. Isn't this great?" Again, it was like a carnival type atmosphere.

On the Waterfront was probably the biggest thing that happened in Hoboken since World War I, up to that point. Now movies are shot in Hoboken all the time. No one even cares anymore. Now they complain.

EH: Do you think that inspired you?

LL: You know, somebody I told one time -- I told them that, and they go, "Is that why you got into the film business?" I go, "No, but that's a great story."

No, that had nothing to do with it. There was a career change, and that just happened to be it.

EH: Collecting more stories.

LL: Yeah, right. We hope to, next year, God willing -- Budd will be ninety, and it'll be the fiftieth anniversary of the release of the movie. So I already spoke to Budd about it and he agrees. We're going to come back, we're going to do the tour, we're going to have a screening of the movie and then a cocktail party, where you can ask Budd anything you like.

One interesting thing, though, on the tour. Like I said, nothing is scripted, nothing is planned. The only thing the man who made the documentary said to me was, "When we get to Sinatra Park," which is where the "shape-up" scene was filmed, he said, "I'd like to put two chairs there, and you and Budd sit there." Budd and I sat there, and we talked about the movie. Then I said to Budd, "Now there's always been a rumor that Kazan negotiated with Sinatra to play the part of Terry Malloy, because, originally, Brando refused to do the movie -- even though he knew Kazan well. Kazan gave him his break on Broadway, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and then the film. Even Steiger thought it was just a wedge, to get Brando. Do you want to tell us the story of what happened?" So Budd said, "Well, it's a half-truth. Brando did refuse to do the movie, originally. We really did want him, but we did negotiate with Frank, and Frank really wanted to do the film." I said to Budd, "Did Frank know it was going to be shot in Hoboken?" Now this is 1953. He said, "Oh, absolutely." I said, "He still wanted to do it?" "Oh, yes. We were ready to sign Frank --" Like there was a story that they signed Frank and he sued them. That's not true. They never signed him. Just at that point Brando came around and said, "Okay. I'll do the movie," and they signed Brando.

and ~~he~~ I said I've always been told that...

So now, when they signed Brando, they were still negotiating with Sinatra. So Schulberg says to Kazan, "You're going to have to tell Sinatra that he don't have the part." So Kazan says, "Well, you're comin' with me." So they flew to California, they meet with Frank, and they tell him he doesn't have the part. And Budd goes, "Frank screamed so loud you could hear him from Hollywood to Hoboken." [Laughter]

Now think. A little over a year later, Brando and Sinatra make *Guys & Dolls*. What do you think the atmosphere was on that set? Well, Steiger had said that no one could get close to Brando. No one was Brando's friend. Brando just did his own thing, and Budd verified it. You know the famous, "I coulda been a contender" scene, in the car? Well, they almost didn't shoot that. There were problems. But Steiger wanted to do it, and Brando really wanted to do it, but played it ~~cool~~ coy. They both knew that this was the memorable part of this film.

So, anyway, they do it. But Brando would have to leave early every day to go to his therapist, or his psychiatrist, or whatever. So they shoot the master, then they shoot Brando's close-ups, and Steiger's feeding him the lines. Now it's time to shoot Steiger's close-ups, Brando leaves. Kazan had to feed Steiger the lines. Steiger

told me, "I'll never forgive him for it," and when I'm talking about this with Budd, Budd says, "and Steiger was quite annoyed, and I don't think he ever forgave him." And I said, "He didn't." [Laughter]

EH: Interesting to hear this behind-the-scenes --

LL: Yes, that's why people like the tour. It's not so much the "this is where the building was." It's all thanks to Rod Steiger. If I had known I was going to do the tour, I would have asked him a lot more questions.

Pat "Florio Kolwork" wrote a book about Hoboken. Actually, it's more [~~?~~ postcards] -- than it is a book. She came here and I identified some pictures for her. She said, "Why don't you really do the book?" I said, "Well, Pat, I just might." Oh, you have it. There it is. In fact, it's in her acknowledgments. She thanks me and my wife. Somewhere in here we're mentioned -- Yes, see, she mentions George Muller, and she mentions John "Heeney." They were the first -- Muller was the first historian, "Heeney" was the second.

Now if you'll notice -- interestingly, I'm the fourth city historian. You had Muller, "Heeney,"

"Kirschvestner," Luizzi. Two Germans, an Irishman, and finally an Italian.

EH: That was the way --

LL: That's the ethnic breakdown of Hoboken. Exactly. The synagogue did a cookbook -- *Hoboken Cooks* -- and they used all my postcards.

EH: Did they?

LL: Not all of them. But all the pictures in that book are my postcards.

Oh, here we are. Here's her -- my wife, and George "Kirschvestner."

EH: I've enjoyed some of the pamphlets that the Museum has put out over the years.

LL: In the magazine they used a lot of my postcards. The Museum has a nice postcard collection, too.

LL's wife ~~EH~~: Do you have the magazines?

EH: I don't. I need to... I've seen them at the museum.

LL: I have some back issues.

EH: I've seen it at the Museum, but I haven't --

LL: I got rid of them all. I had to get rid of stuff. People send me stuff. People send me newspaper articles. A lady from upstate New York sent me (which I thought was very nice) two postcards, which she must have bought at a flea market. I always ask them, "Is this for the Museum?" "Oh, no, it's for you." A lot of it I give to the Museum, because there were doubles. I'll say, "That's very nice, but I'll donate it to the Museum in your name."

EH: So some things are at the library, as far as archives? And some are at the Museum?

LL: The library archives came mostly -- There was a camera club called the Elysian Camera Club. It disbanded in 1933, and what they did was they donated all their photographs to the library. Somebody was really thinking. On First and Washington -- I think it's 125 Washington Street -- I think it's called the Whisky Bar now, or whatever it is -- that used to be "Zell's" Import

House, ~~and "Schirmer"~~ a German Delicatessen. "Zell's" name is still in the tiles on the floor. Back in about 1976 they were cleaning out the basement, and they found glass negatives. There were some great old Hoboken things. I was there, and a gentleman named Bill "Tremper," who was [?] -- Jersey City, was a photographer. We gave them to Bill, and he's made posters out of them now. We didn't know he was going to do that.

Interesting. Somebody gave me a book about Abraham Lincoln, photographs by Matthew Brady. There were two brothers, one worked for ABC. Their grandfather was the biggest Abraham Lincoln collector. In the foreword of the book, he mentions that some of the pictures in this book were glass negatives that were found in Hoboken, New Jersey -- probably in the basement of "Zell's." We think Matthew Brady rented space in Hoboken. We know he'd been to Hoboken, but we think that those glass negatives were Brady's.

EH: Interesting.

LL: Yes. Also, the story goes that (although I've never been able to document it) Hellman's Mayonnaise was invented in the basement of "Zell's"

Delicatessen. Mr. Hellman and Mr. "Zell" were friends, and supposedly the first time it was ever made was in the basement of his delicatessen, upstairs. In fact, I had a lawyer, "Carluccio," who's on First and River -- he faxed me a sheet of paper that they "wrote in." I've heard this story, but we have to find it.

When we did *Hoboken History* Magazine, we tried to be as truthful as we possibly could. We tried to verify all the facts. Some of it we were sure -- they may not be 100%, but we're sure they're at least 80% or 90%. The stories may have been embellished as time went on. That's why I think this oral history program is excellent.

EH: Did you have different people writing articles for that magazine? A committee, or -- ?

LL: What we would do was we would advertise in the magazine if anybody had a Hoboken story. And we didn't want stories about politicians, we wanted stories about you -- your family. We have a guy from Phoenix, Arizona named Joe "Fenety," whose cousin used to live two doors away. He was a councilman. He wrote several stories. Another guy, Jack Fitzpatrick, who lives in Summit, New Jersey. I wrote a story about World War I, and he wrote a

very similar story about -- I wrote about my great-uncles, he wrote about his great-uncle. I wrote a story about when we went into "Sybil's" Cave, and how we played boxcar tag. Now Jack is like forty years older than I am. Maybe not quite forty, but at least twenty. He then wrote a story -- Now he grew up in the same neighborhood I did, and they did the same things we did. It was so similar -- boxcar tag and all those different things.

Among his schoolmates was G. Gordon Liddy. Did you know he came from Hoboken?

EH: I did not.

LL: He lived right around the corner. He lived on Hudson Street, between Eighth and Ninth. In his book, *Will*, in the first five chapters he talks about growing up in Hoboken. He went to St. Peter & Paul's School, and I have the fiftieth anniversary book from St. Peter & Paul's, and Gordon Liddy's standing on the steps of St. Peter & Paul's. I always put him on my history tour. I stop in front of his house and say, "He's famous or infamous, depending upon your political point of view."

I wrote Gordon Liddy a letter (I have a copy upstairs. I think I was the vice-president of the Museum at

the time), asking him if he would come to Hoboken and give a speech, because in the mid-'90s he was the highest-paid speaker on college campuses.

EH: Is that right?

LL: Yes. He wrote me a letter back, saying, "Oh, my heart is still in Hoboken, blah, blah, blah." Then I wrote him another letter, and he never answered the second letter. So I guess his heart is here, but -- although he came once on the Hoboken house tour, many years ago, when the environmental committee ran it. This girl, Rose Perry -- They used to give you this thing that said, "Hello, my neighbors," so she was like, "What's your name?" and the guy goes, "G. Gordon Liddy," and she goes, "What's your name?" He goes, "G. Gordon Liddy." She goes, "Yeah, and I'm Minnie Mouse." And he goes, "Hi, Minnie. Nice to meet you."

He's actually very charming when he wants to be. But he lived in Hoboken until he was like eleven years old. His father's family, the Liddys, came from Hoboken, very prominent, very wealthy. They had a maid. He tells a story about how the pastor of St. Peter & Paul's (which was a German parish) would come on a Sunday night, in the mid-

'30s, and they would listen to Adolph Hitler on the radio, which a lot of Germans did. You forget. At that point we were still basically a German town -- not as prominent as it was before World War I, but -- In fact, we had, during World War I, after "Black Tom" blew up, they came and locked up one of the pastors of St. Matthew's Lutheran Church. But they got him out right away. They thought he was a conspirator, a Fifth Columnist, but he wasn't.

EH: Interesting. Wow.

LL: In fact, one of the guys -- I can't think of his name. We have this story, we have this documented -- who supposedly made the bomb that blew up "Black Tom" lived on Eleventh and Clinton Street. We have his address, his name and everything.

EH: Do you incorporate that as part of your tour, or is that -- ?

LL: Well, we don't go down to Eleventh and Clinton, but I try to incorporate a lot of it. When I do my tour, I always tell people this; that when you're finished

with me, you'll know more about Hoboken than you wanted to know.

EH: [Laughs] When you were growing up, did you hear different languages spoken a lot? Or Italian? Just around the streets?

LL: No, not at all. Not until the mid-'50s, when the influx of Puerto Ricans came. When the immigrants came -- maybe they spoke it in their house. But I can speak for the Italians, in my family particularly. When my ancestors came here they wanted to be Americans. That's why they came here. So they spoke English. That's why, when my grandfather was young, he was sent to a school. His father didn't want them to lose all their culture, but he wasn't going to learn a dialect; he was going to learn how to speak what they used to call, then, "high Italian."

But no. There was an influx of Yugoslavs who came, ~~from~~ Fled Communist Yugoslavia. They went to Italy, and then they came to the United States. They sometimes would talk Italian or Yugoslavian, but just the real old people, not the kids. Everybody spoke English.

EH: I wonder why they chose Hoboken. Or, there were other parts of New Jersey, too? The ones from Yugoslavia?

LL: Well, you know, the first few came over -- what would happen was that somebody would come. They would get an apartment, then they would bring their brother or their sister.

I'll tell you an interesting story. In 1994, on the Isle of Capri, and all throughout England and Italy, I wore a different Hoboken T-shirt everyday. This one day I had on a shirt that said, "'~~Jowan~~ Delaware,' Lackawanna & Western Railroad, Hoboken, New Jersey." My wife said, "Go over there. Let me take a picture of you, with that rock coming up out of the Mediterranean." I go, "Wow." "Go ahead. Let me take your picture." I walk over to the rail, and as I'm posing, this elderly couple is walking in. The woman goes, "Stop. You're in the way. She's taking a picture." The guy looks at me, he's staring at me, and my wife snaps the camera. The minute she takes the picture, the guy makes a bee-line to me, and I'm thinking, "Am I gonna have a problem with this old guy?" He walks over and grabs my arm, he comes up into my face, and he says, "Where do you work at 'Jowan?' That's an old ~~slum~~ song." That's a million-to-one

shot. I go, "On the Delaware Lackawanna." The guy hugs me, and he's like --

TAPE 2, SIDE 1

LL: He walks over to me and I go, like, "~~You're~~ Are you from Hoboken!" and he says, "San Francisco." And I'm scratching my head, like, "Wait a minute. Hold it. You asked me how -- How do *you* know that song?" He says, "Well, when my father's older brother came to America he settled in Hoboken. Then he got a job on the Lackawanna Railroad. Then he brought my father. Then my father brought my mother, and she became pregnant." He was eighty-five. "She became pregnant with me in Hoboken, but she didn't like Hoboken, so they moved to San Francisco. My father had that record, and he played it every day of his life. That was his favorite song. I never met anybody who knows it." So. And his wife says, "You know, he didn't want to make this trip. You just made it for him."

There's a gentleman in town, Jack O'Brien, who's with the fife and drum group, and he's active in the "veterans." He tells this story, to a group of friends. About two years later Jack O'Brien calls me up and he goes, "I have a present for you." "For me?" "Yeah, I have something for you." He comes -- he found, in an antique

store in Morristown, New Jersey, an old seventy-eight of that song. I'm like, "Wow! My God."

Also, I remember, on that trip, we're in Ravenna, Italy, at a sidewalk cafe, and these English people are on the tour. They like Americans and they're trying to talk to us. We were with her sister and my brother and we're talking. I don't know why, the guy picks on me and he says -- he doesn't know me at all -- "I love American cinema -- and my wife looks at me, and I go, "Oh, that's nice," not to get into this. And he goes, "Do you know what my favorite American cinema is?" "No, I don't." He goes, "*On the Waterfront*." I went "I tried!" We became great pals. When I told him, I go, "My wife teaches in the kindergarten, where the 'church' scene, where the meeting was held. Come here, pal." And that's even before I did the tour.

In fact, I told that story to Budd. The gentleman's name was John West, the Englishman, and Budd was like amazed. That's the universal appeal that movie has. And this guy had no idea it was shot in Hoboken. He'd probably never heard of Hoboken, but he loved *On the Waterfront*, and he had to meet me. I must have a sign.

EH: Yes.

Of the rest of your family, does anyone else live here?

LL: I have two cousins left who live in Hoboken. One is a retired Hoboken police officer, and his son is a Hoboken police officer. Then I have another cousin up in [?] -- There's just the three of us left, in town. They're spread out all over. But they still come to Hoboken, for the bread, for the "mozzarella." You can't beat it from Hoboken.

EH: Do you have a lot of stories about the fire department and police department?

LL: Ha. Well, a few stories about -- Well, back in 1947, just before McFeeley was deposed, there was a rebel cop by the name of George Fitzpatrick. That's what he was called, "the rebel cop." My uncle had the Leonard Luizzi Democratic Club, on Madison Street, and he was Fitzpatrick's biggest backer. As I said, my grandfather used to "shag" McFeeley, and McFeeley sees my father one day and he says, "Hey, listen. You wanna be a Hoboken cop?" My father goes, "Oh. Okay." So McFeeley goes -- right across from City Hall, which is now 84 Washington Street --

there was a doctor there. "Go in there, tell them McFeeley sent you. You'll get the physical, and they'll appoint you a cop." So my father goes. When he comes out, he meets George Fitzpatrick. Fitzpatrick says, "What're you doin'?" He says, "I just had the physical. McFeeley's gonna make me a cop." "Nah, you don't wanna -- Wait 'til we win the election. I'll make you a cop." Well, they won the election, and they never made him a cop. [Laughter] But my father would have been a Hoboken policeman. Maybe I would have been a Hoboken policeman. It seems like it's generational --

EH: Right.

LL: -- if you look at the Hoboken police department. You've got people whose grandfathers were Hoboken policemen.

One of the things we were talking about -- restoration -- they're doing a great job on the library dome. They're doing that from old photographs. When we came in here, where that refrigerator is, there's a dumbwaiter, and when we ripped it out -- after the bowling alley, years later it was converted back into a house -- there was a false floor. We thought, "Wow, look at this. What's under

here?" We found old paychecks with no money, but we found photographs from the Elysian Camera Club, and one of them (I'm the only one that has) is a panoramic view of Hoboken, and it's written, "Panoramic view of Hoboken, 1900." Somebody went on the Palisades, on the hill, and took three photographs and put them together. It was such a clear day that you could see the twin spires of St. Patrick's Cathedral.

EH: Oh, my gosh.

LL: What a great photograph.

EH: I'd love to see that.

LL: I'll show it to you sometime. I'll have to dig it out. That's one of my treasures. And we found it underneath the floor. Do you know how many hidden treasures there must be in buildings in Hoboken? Oh, God. Thirty years ago, *Life* Magazine did a story about passenger ships, and they talked about the North German [?] -- Line and the Hamburg American line, and they had photographs. Someone wrote a letter and said that he grew up in Hoboken, and his family traveled on those ships, and he has

photographs of his family in those salons. And there was a bust of Kaiser Wilhelm's father, Kaiser Wilhelm I. He said it's in different locations in different pictures, and he said in the letter, "I wonder if that bust is in somebody's attic in Hoboken." George "Kirschvestner," the city historian, is German. His grandfather decorated all the German steamship lines. When World War I broke out, when they seized the ships -- they were all Germans up there, and they knew George's grandfather, and they gave him different things. I said, "George, have you got that bust of Kaiser Wilhelm?" He said, "I don't know. I never saw it."

But there must be lots of artifacts left. In fact, every now and then we have a dig, and we dig up different bottles, from the old outhouses. We dug in my yard, but we never found anything -- mostly uptown, around here, on the high ground.

Do you have any more questions?

EH: I think I'm finished with my questions, but is there anything else you want to share?

LL: No, we could go on and on. We could talk about lots of different things. But I hope you have

everything you need. Don't hesitate to call me. I hope this has been useful for you.

EH: That's great. Thank you very much. I appreciate your time -- all your stories. Thanks.

[Interruption]

Okay. This is an addendum.

LL: We were talking about Our Lady of Grace Church, and I told you my ancestral [?] parish is St. Francis, and then we went up to St. Peter & Paul's. Both my sons ended up getting married in Our Lady of Grace. Now at one time, the Emperor Louis Napoleon [Napoleon III], when he was in exile, lived in Hoboken for one year, and Father "Garvin," who founded Our Lady of Grace, who was a Frenchman, must have been friends with Napoleon III -- When he was restored to the throne, Napoleon III sent a solid gold chalice to Our Lady of Grace Church, which they only use at midnight mass. Now when my youngest son was married -- Father [?] Eid -- had baptized my daughter-in-law, and the night of the rehearsal I asked him, "Father, would it be possible to use that gold chalice from Napoleon III?" And they used it at the wedding.

They also had -- what do they call it? A "monstras?" -- okay. Right, exactly -- from the first king of the unified Italy, Victor Emanuel I, who must have been friends with Napoleon III, and sent that to Our Lady of Grace, and they have both those treasures. They had a Tiffany stained-glass window in the rectory, which they recently took out and sold. It's just a marvelous building. Have you been in there? I would assume you have. It's on the state and national registry of historic places. At one time it was the largest church in the state of New Jersey.

EH: Well, you helped to get it on the registry.

LL: Yes. We were invited to the ceremony, but -- But a lot of people don't know about the chalice and Napoleon III. The next time we have the talk at the library we're going to talk about famous Hobokenites. We've had an emperor of France; two of the richest men in the world; the 1864 Democratic Party candidate for president lived in Hoboken; the richest woman in the world; and, of course, the most famous entertainer of the 20th century. But that's another story.

EH: Who was the richest woman in the world?

LL: Hattie Green.

About ten years ago I did the Yellowbook pages commercial with James Earl Jones. It was like a three-week job, and we ended up in Huntington, Long Island at the Smith mansion, this gorgeous mansion right on the water, on the north shore of Long Island. So I met Mrs. Smith and I go, "Wow, you have a marvelous home. Does it have a history?" And she said, "Well, kind of." And I go, "What is it?" She goes, "Well, believe it or not, the richest woman in the world at one time lived in here," and I go, "Hattie Green?" This lady looks at me and she goes, "How would you know Hattie Green?" "Because I'm from Hoboken, and Hattie Green lived in Hoboken."

Hattie Green's daughter had bought the house, and when Hattie Green was older she lived with her daughter. She lived there until she died, in this house. I go, "Wow. Did you find anything?" She goes, "In the basement there was a walk-in safe." But Hattie Green didn't keep her money in safes or under floorboards, she kept it in a bank. She goes, "No, we never found anything. Now we keep our Christmas decorations in there." [Laughter]

EH: That sounds like a good idea.

LL: We'd better stop, or we'll go on all night.

EH: We'll stop with that.

Transcription approved as corrected.

Elizabeth Halloway
August 3, 2005