

HOBOKEN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: BETTY SILVANI

INTERVIEWER: ARLENE SILVER

LOCATION: SCHNACKENBERG'S LUNCHEONETTE

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SIDE ONE

AS: Okay, Betty. Could you tell me your relationship to the luncheonette?

BS: Well, my mother and father opened it up in 1931.

AS: And what were their names?

BS: Dora and Henry Schnackenberg.

AS: Dora and Henry.

BS: Yes. My father died in 1950, and in 1952 my mother remarried Fred Van Dyken, and he eventually learned how to do everything, and helped her here.

AS: And where were they from?

BS: Germany.

AS: Do you know what part?

BS: Around Bremen.

AS: And do you know when they came here?

BS: Oh, in the '20s. Twenty-four, '25, somewhere thereabouts.

AS: So were they part of a German community in Hoboken?

BS: No. No, what happened was, my mother's aunt, who lived in Secaucus, sponsored her to come over. My mother worked as a mother's helper or something like that,



then she met my father. They married in 1930, I think, and he was an apprentice at an ice cream parlor in Jersey City. The opportunity came up for them, after they were married, for them to buy this place because it was in bankruptcy. So they bought it, and when they came and looked at the place (we always loved this story), there were nice tables and chairs and stuff. After they bought it and came, all the nice tables and chairs were gone, and it was all broken stuff and they had to replace it all. But everyone said, "Oh, you won't make a go of it," because the other people couldn't. You know. They bought it at bankruptcy.

But they did. They didn't know my mother and father. They were happy if they just made it through a day. If they didn't lose money for the day, that was fine. Then they just worked and worked and saved, and eventually they bought the building.

AS: Did you grow up in Hoboken?

BS: Yes. Here. Here.

AS: In the luncheonette. Where did you live, though?

BS: First we lived across the street. Then after they bought the building we lived upstairs.

AS: Do you have a real early memory of this place?

BS: Oh, yeah. Before they renovated it the soda fountain was on the other side, and there was a dumbwaiter that would bring stuff up from the basement. I can remember my father giving me rides on this dumbwaiter. I think it was around 1940 that they renovated, so I was really little. But that's the thing I remember most; him giving me rides on the dumbwaiter.

AS: And where was the dumbwaiter?

BS: It was right over there. Of course, the soda fountain and everything was on that side. Then they did a major renovation and everything was minted, like new. It was like 1940. That's when we got the booths in the back. Before then we just had tables. Then we got the booths.

AS: You were pretty young then. So what was your day like? You'd come home from school, and come here.

BS: Right. But at lunchtime -- Well, like when we were in grammar school it was during the war, and it was busy at lunchtime because there was a lot of industry around. My sister's job, when we were home for lunch, was to do any frying that had to be done -- fry the bacon or the eggs or whatever -- and my job, I could not go back to school until I dried all the dishes.

AS: What school did you go to, Betty?

BS: Wallace School. Number 6 school. Then to Brandt, and then to Demarest.

AS: You were pretty young during the war. Were you born then?

BS: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I just turned sixty-five.

AS: Do you have any memories of that particular time? You said it was really busy during the war.

BS: Yeah.

AS: People were coming in. What made it so busy? .

BS: Because there was so much industry -- the shipyards, Maxwell House. The industry that was here was in this neighborhood. We were very busy at lunchtime.

AS: Maxwell House was -- ?

BS: Oh, yeah. Maxwell House was here.

AS: And they were customers? The people who worked there? .

BS: Oh, yeah. At lunchtime, in those years, it was very busy.

AS: Now it's very quiet. What was the difference in atmosphere? When people came in, do you .

remember how they dressed? Kids come in now in their sneakers. Do you remember what they looked like?

BS: Well, I say that TV was the downfall of ice cream parlors. Because before TV, what did you have to do in the evening? All the young girls and young boys, they would go out and sit in the ice cream parlors. The girls were always dressed to the nines, in their nicest dresses and stuff, and they'd sit around and meet the boys. That was the teenagers. The older people, well, they would go out at night for ice cream. We were open until 11:00 at night, because there were people around. I say that TV was what did in ice cream parlors, because people had something to do in the evening.

AS: And were you here? Would you be here at night?

BS: Oh, yeah.

AS: Helping?

BS: Oh, yeah. Because there were always people coming in, and my sister and I used to take turns. This

would be her side and that would be my side, and we'd wait on whoever. Because Helen worked for us then. She worked for us for sixty-five years, I think, until she got sick and couldn't work anymore. She worked sort of split shifts. She was here for lunch, then she went home in the afternoon for a while, and came back at 8:30 for the nighttime crush. Then when Helen wasn't here my sister and I used to wait on people. But my sister was older than me, and she liked to sit with the boys instead of working.

AS: How old is Dorothy?

BS: Sixty-seven. But when you're teenagers, two years makes a big difference.

AS: I'm wondering if you have a recollection of what some of the teenagers -- What the dates were like; what did they talk about? Adolescence has changed a lot. There's nothing that sticks out in your mind?

BS: No.

AS: How about the way they looked? The clothes they wore?

BS: I don't remember exactly what it was, but everybody was always dressed up. Nobody went around in jeans, sloppy. Everybody was always neatly dressed. All the girls had skirts. No pants.

AS: And the men? Did they have hats?

BS: That I don't remember, but everybody was neat. None of this sloppy stuff, like the kids today.

AS: Yeah. It's changed a lot.

I was thinking about this luncheonette in particular and the kinds of things that you made back then, as opposed to the kinds of things you make now.

BS: We made basically the same thing except we didn't make hamburgers. But that sign over there: That had to be displayed during the war, and you set your prices and they had to stay at those prices, by law. See. It says, "Our Ceiling Prices," and it was signed by whatever the name of the

board was that was located in the "war office" -- It's from like 1943, that sign. You could not raise your prices.

AS: So a ham and cheese sandwich was thirty cents?

BS: I don't even think it was that much. Oh, yeah. I guess that was the most expensive. That even had tomato on it, for thirty cents.

AS: And that was given to your parents by the war office?

BS: Well, the sign. Whatever our prices were, they had to stay there.

AS: They were frozen.

BS: Yeah.

AS: That's interesting. I guess from the Department of Defense.



BS: Yeah. Something. It says on it the exact department. I don't remember, off the top of my head.

AS: Then after the war, do you remember things changing as far as the number of people who were coming in?

BS: That's the kind of thing I really don't remember.

AS: What do you remember about Hoboken as a child, that you don't see anymore.

BS: Well, everyone stayed. The people I started school with I graduated school with. I don't think you see that now.

AS: Do they come back, then?

BS: Everybody I went to school with, maybe there's one or two that's still in Hoboken. But everybody moved.

AS: Do they come back to visit some of the time?

BS: Yeah, I think so. But, you know, my class has a reunion and we always have a pretty good turnout at the reunion.

AS: What class was it?

BS: Mine was 1952. Demarest.

AS: So people turn out at the reunions?

BS: Oh, yes. And my sister just had her fiftieth reunion from Demarest, and they had a very, very good turnout. There's going to be a story about it in the "historical" magazine, because whatever money they had left over they donated to the museum, which I think was very nice.

AS: Talking about the weather. You were talking about the snow days. Do you remember big snows as a child. Did you have to shovel the walk or do any of that stuff?

BS: I only remember that when I was a teenager my job was -- Because my father had died, and I was the strong one that should go out and shovel. All I had to do was step out the door with a shovel, and someone would take the shovel from my hand and shovel for me. Now I'm an old lady, and a few years ago, when there were big snows, I'd go out with my shovel and nobody wanted to help this old lady. But a nice teenager girl -- Or maybe it's that the people were different then. All I had to do was step outside with the shovel. I never had to shovel. Somebody would take the shovel and do it for me.

AS: That's a big change. I think the whole of the population of Hoboken has changed.

BS: But they were all families. Because I'm sure the population of Hoboken is much less than it was back then, because everybody had a big family. There were lots of children.

AS: And being a neighbor really meant something to them.

BS: Yes.

AS: That's changed a great deal, even from when we moved here it's changed. So that's a big change.

Who were some of your friends as a child?  
Were they your neighbors? Were they your school friends?

BS: People I went to school with.

AS: And they all lived in the neighborhood.

BS: Yeah. Or, how big is Hoboken? Because you went to Number #6 school, so at Number #6 school there were all the people from this area. It's not like now. I think in Hoboken you can pick any school you want to go to. You went to the school that was in your neighborhood, so that the people you went to school with, they were your neighbors.

AS: Did you friends come here after school?

BS: Some.

AS: You were talking about how the ethnic groups in Hoboken have changed. When we bought our house we bought it from a German family, on Bloomfield Street, and there were at least six German families we knew of. So it was very German at the time. Do you remember when that started to change?

BS: There weren't that many German families, specifically, that you hung around with or anything. People from church, you would know them.

AS: Which church?

BS: St. Matthews. There were a lot of Germans. When I was a child there was even a service in German.

AS: I didn't know that. Did you have extended family here? Like aunts and uncles?

BS: Yes. My father's sister and my mother's brother. That's all. Everybody else stayed in Germany.

AS: They lived in Hoboken?

BS: No. My uncle lived in Secaucus and my aunt lived in Forest Hills, in Queens.

AS: So what were those communities like? Did you go visit?

BS: Yeah.

AS: Do you remember the difference between a Seacaucus and a Hoboken at the time?

BS: No, no, it was just --

AS: It wasn't like going to the suburbs, growing up in the city and visiting somebody --

BS: No, no.

AS: -- from another country. Did you prefer Hoboken?

BS: Well, it was what I knew.

AS: I remember, some other people I was talking to were talking about there was a German school, way back when --

BS: That I don't know anything about.

AS: There was a German club, and riding club. There were a few specifically German activities, like the Italians, who had their own activities.

BS: Well, my step-father belonged to the Hoboken Soccer Club. I think he was even secretary or something. But they were all German, German men, who went up to Scheutzen Park and played soccer on Sundays.

AS: Scheutzen Park is still there. So you don't have any sense of that whole ethnic group moving away, and then [ ? ] -- taking over.

BS: No. When I went to school my classmates were Italian, Irish and German, and there was a lot of mixed

Irish and German. Their parents, you know -- One was Irish and the other was German. I guess the Irish and German got along good together. But that was just about it -- German, Irish and Italian.

AS: I was thinking about what you were saying about somebody coming out and helping you --

BS: Oh, yeah.

AS: That whole sense of community has changed in Hoboken.

BS: Well, there was such a turnover. Like the people on the block. You don't know them anymore.

AS: That's kind of a sad thing, isn't it? Do you remember, as a child, being part of the store, that neighbors would come in and help, or neighbors would -- What do you remember about the sense of community? Were there some specific incidents where something may have happened where somebody came in to help?



BS: No, I think we had enough built-in help.

AS: With the family.

BS: Yep.

AS: Now the traditions that the store started a long time ago, the "candy-making," has continued?

BS: Yeah.

AS: Who is doing that now?

BS: My nephew and my son do the candy now.  
Mostly my nephew, now.

AS: And what does he do with the candy?

BS: He makes it.

AS: All of the candy?

BS: No, but most of it. You know, the molding and the dipping and all that.

AS: Is that something that was carried on?

BS: Oh, yes. Because you have to know what you're doing in order to do it. And somehow, by one watching the one who went before them you get the knack. It takes a while to get the good knack, but it comes with time.

AS: So who passed that down?

BS: Well, I guess the present generation, most of them, are from watching my step-father.

AS: So your step-father made the candy --

BS: They were here, watching, helping, whatever. You get a general idea of what you're supposed to be doing. But my father did it all on his own, when he was here. Then he had a heart attack in January, and Easter was coming up. A bunch of confectioners came, and one day they spent, but there must have been half a dozen of them working

non-stop, and they made all our candy for that Easter, for us, because he was sick. Because, when you think about it, that was --

AS: They just came in and offered to do that?

BS: I don't know how that works because I was just a kid, then, but they came and spent, I remember, one day. They made all this candy, and it was non-stop. There was so many of them working and everybody had their job or whatever, and in one day they did -- But we didn't do the amount that we do now, because back then there were at least half a dozen places in Hoboken where you could get that kind of candy. At least half a dozen. So you didn't have the volume. But now we're practically the only people left to do it, so we do sell a lot more.

AS: I didn't know there were other candy-making --

BS: Oh, at Umland's they sold them, at Kielmann's and --

AS: I remember Umland's." That was still here in the '70s, I think. And now you just sell to just neighbors and people who --

BS: -- from the neighborhood.

AS: Now do you have a different clientele? Do you have stores buying from you?

BS: No, no, no. But people who know of us come specifically to Hoboken to buy our homemade candy, at Easter time. Easter's the only holiday where they would come in droves. We make for other holidays, but there's not the call for candy as there is at Easter.

AS: So you have some people who used to live here?

BS: Yeah. And they come back.

AS: Do they ever talk about why they come all the way to Hoboken? They can't find chocolate?

BS: Oh, I think they just want the quality.

Because you can't find candy like ours anywhere else. Because we still do the individual touches to it. Everything has a bow or a button. There's eyes in it. It's all individually made. When things are mass produced they just don't look the same.

AS: That's true of a lot of stuff. So you don't sell your stuff to stores.

BS: Oh, no. We don't have enough help to do that. Because we do it all by hand. We don't have any machinery. Most places these days have machinery. We do it the same way my father did it when he started in 1931. That's how we still do it.

AS: So your father died pretty young.

BS: Yeah. He was fifty.

AS: And how old were you then?

BS: Fourteen.

AS: Was that a tough time for the family?

BS: Oh, yeah. But then -- I said that the confectioners came in that year. Well, the next year they came again and did it for us, because my mother, by herself, couldn't do it. The confectioners came. And I think the following year my step-father, he was in the picture and I think somehow he started doing it. But back in those days we didn't need as much. But eventually he could do more and more and more.

AS: So particularly in those days, when your mother needed a lot more help, what would a day for you be like? You'd go to school in the morning --

BS: You'd go to school, come home from school, and my mother used to go and rest, I think from 5:00 to 7:00 -- something like that -- and from 5:00 to 7:00 I was here by myself, running the store so she could have a rest.

AS: Then you'd go --

BS: I used to go take sewing lessons down at the library, and I remember she always said she always had to make sure she came down so I could get to the library, for my sewing lessons.

AS: Sewing lessons at the library. Tell me more about that.

BS: At the industrial school. There was the Hoboken Industrial School and they had, oh, a lot of different -- cooking and a whole bunch of different classes down there. But what I thought was the most amazing thing -- You paid \$5.00 to register, and the course was two years. You had to go for two years. So when I completed my two years I got my \$5.00 back, but because I was the best student in my class who was graduating, I got a \$10.00 prize. But the funny part was, I was the only student in my class graduating, because everybody else -- either they didn't finish or they were in the first year and they hadn't completed the two; so besides getting my \$5.00 back I got a \$10.00 prize.

But it was a very nice setup. It was the Hoboken Industrial School.

AS: What other kinds of things did they do?

BS: I think maybe they had shorthand and typing. But I went to sewing, and I had a very nice old lady teacher and I really learned how to sew from her. She was really excellent.

AS: And this was something you did after school?

BS: It was from 7:00 to 9:00 in the evening. Three times a week. It was all in the evening. I don't know when the Industrial School closed, but it was there for a lot of years. You never heard of the Hoboken Industrial School? It was upstairs in the library. We were in the children's room. That's where we did our sewing. There were big tables for cutting and sewing machines, off in the corners.

AS: Did you make all your own clothes then?

BS: Oh, back then I did.

AS: I guess a lot of people did.



BS: Oh, yeah. The styles are too different now. Everybody wears jeans. You can't sew jeans. When my children were little I made all their clothes, but then when they got to the point where they were wearing blue jeans and all that stuff then you couldn't do it anymore. But I'm still the world's champion pants shortener. I can shorten pants better than anybody. I don't have to go to a tailor and pay \$5.00 or whatever, when you need your pants shortened.

AS: So where did you buy fabric? Was there a fabric store?

BS: The Economy store. The Economy store that was between Fifth and Sixth. They sold curtains and upholstery material and regular fabric. But also, where Blockbuster is now there was a Grant's. You know, the Grant's five-and-ten type store? They sold fabric. They had it downstairs, and all the fabric you can imagine; three yards for a dollar.

AS: Now is that something you would do with your sister or with a friend? Would you go to the fabric store? Do you have a recollection of a group of women -- ?

BS: No, no. I always went by myself.

AS: Did your Mom sew, too?

BS: Not that well. She could sew a straight seam. That was about it.

AS: So that's gone, too. There are no fabric stores here.

BS: Oh, no.

AS: That whole culture, of people sewing or --

BS: But anything you needed, you didn't have to leave Hoboken for. You can barely buy spool thread in Hoboken these days.

AS: It's true. Yes. There are no clothing stores. Very few.

BS: No.

AS: There are no neighborhood grocers. Well, some neighborhood grocers, but they're not the same.

BS: No.

AS: You can't really get everything you need. I'm trying to think of the things we have.

BS: Every block had a delicatessen, a vegetable store and a butcher. And sometimes our block had two butchers, two grocery stores, one vegetable store, plus the paper store.

SIDE 2

AS: Do you feel you missed something, by having your life centered pretty much around the luncheonette?

BS: I always wanted to have a regular home life, like other people.

AS: I can understand that. I kind of like that, too. Because you were here the whole time.

BS: Yeah.

AS: And basically, this was your home.

BS: Right.

AS: So did you do your homework here?

BS: Oh, yeah. You ate here, you did your homework here. You went upstairs to go to bed. Well, back then there was no TV or anything. You listened to the radio, but you had a radio down here. And I have to tell you something about my mother. When we listened to the radio, we were not allowed to be idle. We always had to have knitting, crocheting, embroidery or something in our hands. You couldn't just sit and listen to the radio. What good was that? You always had to have something in your hand. So I was a

very good crocheter. Knitting, I never got that good, but I could crochet good. I crocheted a big tablecloth once.

AS: So why do you think your prices have remained so low?

BS: Oh, because in the '50s the prices were comparable to any other store you could go into. And in the '60s, when things started to deteriorate in Hoboken, my mother decided that she would keep her customers coming by keeping her prices lower; not raising them, like everyone else was. Somehow they've always been lower than everybody else's.

AS: Do you remember other shops going out of business?

BS: Well, we're the only ice cream parlor left in Hoboken.

AS: How many were there back in the '50s?  
Lots?

BS: Yes. Umland's, Ables, Jeannettes, Kielmann's, Jackodines. And those were the only ones close to Washington Street, and downtown. On the back streets there might have been some but I didn't know them.

AS: And the ice cream parlor -- Was that *the* place people would come to gather, for a day or --

BS: Yes. Until TV.

AS: So this place must have really been hoppin' in the evenings.

BS: Well, the reason we have these booths in the middle is we had a jukebox. We had a jukebox in the back and this was all open, and people would dance. But in those days (it might still be true) you needed a license, if people were going to dance. My father was so frightened of getting in trouble and getting fined, for people dancing in his store, that he had those booths built; because nobody ever sits in them. Right after he put them up, nobody ever sat in them.

AS: Oh, what a fine story.

BS: But the main object of them was to close up the space so people wouldn't dance; because he was so frightened of being fined. Because any chance they had they would get up and dance, and he had to yell at them, "No dancing. No dancing."

AS: Did he get rid of the jukebox too?

BS: Oh, no. As the business went down and there were less teenagers to play it -- We had it on consignment, and when you're not making any money with the jukebox, they don't keep in. They don't let you keep it, they take it out, to a place where possibly more people will go and spend money in the jukebox. That's why we have no more jukebox.

AS: So the booths in the back were --

BS: No, those were there. Just these. Just these ones in the middle. But he also was doing a nice thing, because he had some veterans just returned from the war, who

were opening up a carpentry business. He had them build them for him. So he was giving work to a returning veteran.

AS: That was a good thing. Do you have any memories, Betty, of the changing politics in town? As the administration changed, did you have any memories of --

BS: Oh, I don't know anything about the politics.

AS: This was not a place where politicians would necessarily --

BS: No, no. I've never met the mayor.

AS: It doesn't seem like a place where politicians would come. Let's see. We talked a little bit about the shops that existed. What about movies in town?

BS: I only remember two -- "Fabian" and the "U.S." "Fabian" was where CVS and Sam Goody and all that stuff is. The U.S. was where the "Haven" Bank is.



AS: Do you remember going to the movies a lot?

BS: Oh, yeah.

AS: And was this a place where people would come before -- ?

BS: No, it was too far from the movies. Because there were closer ice cream parlors to the movies than we were. We didn't get that many coming after the movies.

AS: Isn't that amazing? You're only talking -- but there were ice cream parlors pretty much on every other block?

BS: Oh, yeah.

AS: And that's where people would come.

BS: Yeah.

AS: And what was a favorite thing for people to come in and order? Like teenagers on a date? Was there a special thing you did? I remember as a kid, if you went on a date you ordered the most expensive thing, if he was paying.

BS: No, they mostly had cokes, and the big thing was that my mother decided that if they were sitting in the back and having a coke, it had to be fifteen cents instead of a dime. Well --

AS: That caused a lot of --

BS: Yes. Because it took them a while to get used to that one; that their coke was going to cost a nickel more if they sat in the back.

AS: That is amazing. I guess fifteen cents was a lot of money in those days. So they didn't come in and have big ice cream sundaes?

BS: Oh, no. Mostly just to have a coke. But never a plain coke. You had a vanilla coke, a chocolate coke, a

cherry coke, a lemon coke. You never had a plain coke. It was an unusual person who just had a plain coke.

AS: So what was it like for you, as a teenager here, watching other teenagers come in on their dates. Did you meet your husband here?

BS: No. I met him at school.

AS: So he's also from Hoboken?

BS: No.

AS: Were you able to feel part of the teenage community?

BS: No. No. Well, no, the thing was I knew more boys than any other girl in my class. I went to "Brandt" School when it was all girls. Brandt was girls and Rue was boys. So the first day in high school the girls I knew couldn't get over how many boys I could say hello to, because I knew them from here. But it was just that they were friends, to say hello. I didn't date them or anything like that.

AS: So you had this huge group of friends.

BS: Well, I knew a lot of boys.

AS: It probably made you the envy of other girls.

BS: Yes. Well, but I was a fat kid, so they weren't that envious.

AS: You were? You're so thin now.

BS: Oh, yes. You know. You're around candy and ice cream and stuff, you can't expect to be thin.

AS: Did you parents put any restrictions on what you could eat, they way kids do.

BS: No, not really.

AS: So you could eat as much candy as you wanted?

BS: I don't think I wanted to eat that much candy, and when I was -- I'm trying to think how old I was when I did it. Maybe from like ten to fifteen or sixteen. My New Year's resolution was to not eat any candy from New Year's until Easter, and I didn't. That was very difficult, when Easter came, because -- I don't know if you know marshmallow eggs and marshmallow chickens and that stuff -- When they would come in, oh, they were so good. But I wouldn't eat them until Easter. I don't even know if my mother saved some special for me, that I would eventually get to eat one. That was sort of a sacrifice. But from New Year's to Easter I did not eat any candy.

AS: And you eat pretty much the same candy now. I remember this.

BS: Oh, yes.

AS: So we were talking about how people walked everywhere, because they had --

BS: Oh, yeah.

AS: Do you remember when people started driving and leaving town?

BS: Well, not many people had a car. Well, I'm thinking, it was the war years. There weren't that many. You didn't have to worry about parking that much, in the '40s. Not that many people had cars.

AS: Did your family have a car?

BS: We got one in 1948.

AS: And you just started taking trip out of Hoboken?

BS: Oh, yeah. But I would say that the parking, even in the '50s, was kind of a problem in Hoboken. Because I started driving in '54 or something like that, and then it was a problem already. And that was around the time they changed, to send it from Eighth Street down to the "Angle" parking, and that gave you like twice as much parking, which was a help. Because before then everybody was on the

curb, and this section of Washington Street was really, really wide.

AS: Maybe because of the industry.

BS: Yeah. But when I was in college I wrote a paper for my municipal government course, and one of the problems I wrote about was parking in Hoboken. Imagine now! When you think how it is now, it was nothing compared to now. But even then you had to drive around a while to get a space. I used to come home from my job after 11:00 at night and I could find a space. It might be blocks and blocks away but I could find a space. I don't think you could come into Hoboken now at 11:00 at night and find anything. I forever get phone calls that they want to talk about my business phone account. I have a pay phone. That's all I have. "Oh, I want to speak to the person in charge of your phone bills." I don't have a phone bill; I only have a pay phone.

AS: I get that too. I'm happy with our phone service.

What were we talking about? Oh. We were talking about walking to places, instead of driving. What else

do I remember? I remember the laundry thing. When we first moved here there were lines in every backyard.

BS: Oh! Nobody has a wash line anymore.

AS: Everybody did everything. It's changed a great deal. You mentioned school. Where did you go to school after Hoboken?

BS: Oh, I went to Rutgers in Newark.

AS: So how did you get there?

BS: Oh, on the train, until I got a car, and drove. But as I said, you could get anywhere in the world from Hoboken. It's the most convenient place to live.

AS: Did you have a job after school?

BS: Well, I was a nurse.

AS: And where were you?



BS: Well, I was at the medical center, then I was public health in Montclair. And then I had my children, and that was the end of nursing.

AS: And when did you decide to come back to the store?

BS: When my mother needed me. It started out ver gradually. She needed me to go to the store. Then she needed me for something, a little more and a little more, and then eventually I was here every day. And then when she got sick it made it that much easier that I could take over full time, when she couldn't do it anymore.

AS: And she had Helen here, as a helper for a lot of --

BS: Oh, yes. And Helen lived with her at the end, after Helen's mother died. See, Helen lived with her mother up the street. Because until she got sick and had to move in with her sister, she lived on this block, her whole life. So she moved from her mother's house, upstairs, to my mother.

AS: And then when Helen and your Mom were here together, is that when you started coming in?

BS: Yes.

AS: So what happened? Was it her health?

BS: Yes. My mother had a stroke, and that was the end of it. They carried her out and I said, "That's probably how I'll go. They'll carry me out, and that's the end." But she never would have left of her own accord. As long as she could come down here and work in her store, she was happy. Because she was eighty-nine.

AS: She was eighty-nine when she had the stroke?

BS: Yeah.

AS: She was working every day. So now you and your sister pretty much have the responsibility. Have you made any decisions about it?

BS: No, we don't -- Well, my nephew is very interested in it. Whether he would eventually want to take it over completely, himself, I don't know. But he's involved; the most involved of the younger generation.

AS: But you and your sister decided to keep it.

BS: Oh, yes. As long as we can. Because it's such a Hoboken institution.

AS: And you feel that, that strongly, about the connection.

BS: Oh, yes. Because there are so many people who come in here. It's a place to go. Where would they go if they couldn't come here? I'm sure they would find somewhere, but for now we want to be here for them.

AS: There's a woman who comes in here every day that I see. I don't know her name, but she was also with the film --

BS: Gertrude.

AS: Gertrude. Gertrude's been coming in here  
for --

BS: Oh, maybe twenty years.

AS: Every day?

BS: Just about.

AS: And Vera?

BS: Vera, now she comes every day. I guess  
maybe it's ten years that she comes every day. But she used to  
be an occasional customer, maybe a couple times a week. But  
now she comes every day.

AS: So when you say they wouldn't have  
anywhere to go --

BS: It breaks up the day for a lot of people.

AS: And it always has.

BS: Yes.

AS: So even way back when, it was --

BS: Oh, yeah.

AS: -- a place for people to come and --

BS: Well, I say when I was young it was a teenage hangout. Now it's a senior citizen hangout.

AS: And a place for people to meet.

BS: Yes. Oh, yes. I love that, when they come in and the whole counter is talking to each other, everybody knows each other and are interested in what's going on. You know. Where else can you go and have that?

AS: There are very few places.

BS: And even if you come in here a stranger, you're not a stranger very long.

AS: I've seen that happen. That's a nice way to be.

Okay. What else can we touch on that we haven't touched on? Was the luncheonette ever used as a place where people would have regular meetings? Group meetings, like a rotary club?

BS: No, no.

AS: It was always individuals, just people coming and meeting other people they knew?

BS: Yeah. Occasionally we'll have people come in who need a quiet place to have a meeting. I can think when the charter school was starting up, I think those people -- They would come in, a whole group; they would get coffee and they would sit for like two hours, with papers, writing. I'm sure they were conducting some kind of business here, and it was quiet so they could do it and nobody bothered them. And it was free.

AS: Okay. Good.

BS: I think you should go over your notes and everything, and then if you find something you've forgotten, you can always come back and ask.