

THE HOBOKEN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: JOSEPH TRUGLIO

INTERVIEWER: MELANIE BEST

DATE: 30 APRIL 2001

SIDE ONE

Q: I'd like for you to talk a little about the history of your business (I understand your grandfather started out), and how you ended up in this space. If you could just start at the beginning and go from there.

A: Okay. Truglio's Meat Market on Thousand Park Avenue. We started, actually, in 1952 but my uncle opened up the store in 1945. In 1952 my father bought it and took it over, and he's been here ever since. So together it's over fifty years that we've been here. He opened up in 1952 at 252 Tenth Street, and we were there until 1990. In 1990 we broke through the wall and expanded the store. We've been here on the corner of Thousand Park since. So we're almost ten years in this space.

My grandfather, he worked on Fifth and Grand. He emigrated from Italy to Brazil, and from Brazil they came to Hoboken. He

was twenty-one years old and he met my Grandma. Truglio's has been here since then. He worked at Lupo's Store on Fifth and Grand for many, many years, and my father opened up -- Well, he actually married into the meat business. He married into the meat business. My uncle on my mother's side had a store at 302 Madison Street. That's where my father learned the business, after the war. He went to school with the GI bill. From there he opened up here on Tenth Street. My brother and I took it over, so it's still in the family and, hopefully, it will stay until we retire. I don't know if our children will -- But we've been in Hoboken all these years, and Hoboken's a great town.

Q: So you're born and raised --

A: Born and raised here, went to school. We saw the ups and downs of the town.

Q: Did you grow up in this building?

A: Yes, we moved here, on Tenth and Park -- I was born on Eighth and Willow, then from Eighth and Willow we moved here. I was about five, my brother was about two. So we've been here all this time. My father bought the building in 1955; he opened up the store in '52, and three years later he was able to buy the building.

Q: What was in this space before?

A: There was a delicatessen here -- Fred's Delicatessen -- which was here for a long, long time. I think originally it was an A&P or a Safeway, a small store. That's how far back you're going. Before they got to be big stores they were small stores, and Fred was here many, many years. Fred was our tenant for a long time, but he had an option to buy the building at the time. He passed it up and my father bought it, but he kept Fred in the front. They had a verbal agreement, which you don't have these days anymore. They stood by a verbal agreement and they were loyal. So until Fred passed away and went out of business, which was around 1989 and we broke through and took over the space -- But all those years my father was loyal to Fred. All those years. And we've been here ever since.

Q: What are your memories of how Hoboken has changed? In the '50s, I guess, some streets were Irish and --

A: Yes. Uptown was mostly, actually, Dutch, as it started. Dutch-German, then Irish, and the Italians mostly lived downtown. But as time went by we started to move up. My father had one of the first stores, Italian oriented stores, uptown. But the town's

changed. We went through the rough periods, in the '60s, with the riots on First Street and things. That passed. Then in the '70s and '80s -- I would say the late '70s -- the town started to change and people started to find Hoboken again, its being so close to New York. The people who moved out in the '50s and '60s -- their children started to move back. They were buying the brownstones. Up to today, the town has really flourished and people are building all over now. And it's good for business. We saw the business go up and down, but we stuck in there. We hung in there when people were moving out.. We held in there. Now things are turning around, and it's a benefit for us. They're looking for a quality store that gives service, and that's what we supply.

Q: During the '60s, during the riots --

A: Business was down but we hung in there. What made us survivors was that a lot of people who moved out of town, they still came back to Hoboken to shop. They were more family-oriented, and the blue-collar workers, they did well and they moved out. They moved out to Bergen County and stuff . But I see all those children moving back to Hoboken now, and that's why we have them. It's really interesting to see.



Q: What about the neighborhood directly around the store? How it's changed? From the late '60s to now.

A: Well, this neighborhood was always fairly good. We always had a really nice, close, family neighborhood here. But a lot of people moved, and a lot of people have passed away since. So we're seeing a whole change. We saw a whole generation pass by, and I've seen all new people. It's a very family-oriented neighborhood, even though there's a lot of transit here. You get to know the people, from them coming in.

Q: When I first moved to Hoboken in '92 I was down on Third and Adams -- which is a great neighborhood, too. But uptown it seems like more people own.

A: Because they're buying up the homes now, you see. Buying up the homes. In my mother's family, my grandmother on my mother's side, they emigrated from Italy in 1912. They got married, and a month later they left for America. On my father's side -- I told you about my grandfather. Well, my grandmother, she came to America in 1888. They carried her here; she was six months old. She's been the longest in America.

Q: Were your grandmother and grandfather from the same place?

A: On my Mom's side they came from the same town, but my grandfather and grandmother on Dad's side -- not far. In the south. My grandmother emigrated from a small town near Avellino called Monte San Giacomo. My grandfather wasn't far from there. It was in Avellino Province. But my grandmother and grandfather on my Mom's side, right outside of Naples -- Caserta . It's about ten or fifteen minutes from Naples.

Q: I've heard people say that a lot of Italians [who came to Hoboken] were born in the same town.

A: Yes, from certain spots. Yes. A lot from Monte San Giacomo, a lot from Molfetta, and I would say a lot from Naples. Then we had a big influence of Yugoslavian people.

Q: I didn't know that.

A: Yes. But a lot of them have moved out, moved on.

Q: Peter Volaric? Didn't he used to --

A: Right. Peter lived in Hoboken . Peter's family had a house right across from where you live, on Willow. Yes, he grew up --

Q: He's Czech, isn't he?

A: He's Yugoslavian, or Croatian. But a lot of those people moved out of Hoboken, especially when we lost the piers. The Waterfront. A lot of them were longshoremen and they moved out, because it really was a blue-collar town, and it's really changed.

Q: That's one piece we're trying to capture in this project, trying to find longshoremen, and it's tough to find anybody who's left or has any connection with that.

A: Yes. Well, they had the play in Sinatra Park last year, and there were a few people who were in that movie that --

Q: [ Inaudible]

A: Yes. Capture some of those people. Because they're passing away now. But the town still has a good flavor. It still has a really nice flavor. You've got your Italian flavor. You've got the feast -- St.

Anne's Feast . What's good about Hoboken, a lot of people still come back, and they still have the flavor of the town.

Q: I lived in Boston for a while, and I loved Hoboken right away, because it reminded me of the North End.

A: Yes, it's similar.

Q: The first time I saw Hoboken I didn't know anything about it. I was looking for an apartment and I didn't know where to live, and I immediately thought of the North End --

A: Narrow streets.

Q: Absolutely.

A: The flavor's the same, the smoke, with the restaurants and the small stores, pastry store --

Q: What about you? Have you seen the kinds of customers change, as to what people want, in terms of products? What are they buying?

A: Well, we were strictly always poultry and meat, and that's what we mostly sold. Plus, when we went into the small store we had no pastas or anything. It was strictly a meat market. We took care of mostly families, and you saw, as time went by, when they were moving out, the people used to come back and shop with us. There were still families. Then the people were working in New York, they were buying less, and just for one or two people. That's how it changed. Then the beef scare -- people were getting less beef and having more poultry. But we mostly stuck to our meat trade. We don't cut anything ahead of time. Everything is cut fresh. So that's why --

Q: I understand you and Peter Luger's buy your beef from the same place.

A: Yes. Where I buy my beef in New York -- a lot of real high-quality places buy there. Peter Luger's buys there. Citarella's in New York.

Q: Is that in the meat district?

A: Yes. Fourteenth Street. Which is disappearing, too.

Q: Where are they going?

A: Mostly to the Bronx. And there's a market in Brooklyn, too, but a lot of them are going to the Bronx. But they're still a small section. I've been shopping at the same place since we've been in business.

Q: You personally go there and pick what you want.

A: Yes. Every day. Yes. Monday through Friday, we go every day and pick up poultry, everything. And I've started going to the Bronx now, one day -- reluctantly, because it's so far away. But we go to the Bronx now, once a week. We had to give in.

Q: Well, I see that neighborhood in Manhattan is changing a lot, too.

A: Right. But hopefully they'll keep a small pocket of it. And most of the people I buy from are in that area on Fourteenth Street. They have quality stuff and they still have hanging beef where I buy. It doesn't come in boxes; it comes in by trailer and it's hanging. They cut it up here in New York so it's a different quality of stuff.

Q: I know there's one other meat market in Hoboken, on Washington. Is that it?

A: There's Joe's Market on Washington, there's John's & Sons on First Street, then Johnny's Market on Third and Willow. But one by one they're all starting to close. Small stores were all over the place, here in Hoboken. Is it because the children of the current owners aren't taking it up, or is the cost going up, or -- ?

A: Well, most of the people who are taking over -- There aren't small stores any more. It's hard to make ends meet now, with rents and stuff. If you don't own the property, you're in -- The rents are sky high and it's hard to open up. And the big stores cut into your business, too. But the people who are looking for quality, and looking for a little extra service, they'll still come to the small store. We're finding that out. Because each time a supermarket opens we worry about it, and we notice that business doesn't change. Doesn't really change.

Q: So the change hasn't affected you too much.

A: No, not really. Not really. Not really.

Q: Anything else you can think of?

A: Just that it's a great town. I've lived here my whole life and I really like it here. I don't think we'll move. I think we'll stay here.

Q: Compared with Manhattan, Hoboken feels much more comfortable --

A: It is. It's very comfortable.

Q: It's quieter. It's safer. You can walk around the whole town.

A: It's a mile square. We're like a little box here, and you feel good. You get to know everyone. Everyone's friendly. It's great. It's great.

Q: It's a totally different environment, but [ ? ] --

A: And we have good service here. We have a good police department and fire department. The library is great. Parking is a problem.



Q: What's going up across the street now? Do you know?

A: A tavern. It's a tavern. It was a great food and vegetable store years ago. Oh, it was really, really good.

Q: All we need is another bar in this neighborhood.

A: Well, that's how it's changed now. But thank God it's staying -- It's still a great town.

Q: Well, thank you so much. This was great.