

**Interview with Mr. John Jackowski
conducted by Marian J. Krzyzowski
for
the Chene Street History Project
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MK: This is Marian Krzyzowski and I'm in Warren at the home of John Jackowski, John and Clara Jackowski. We're here to talk about Chene Street. But before we do that what I'd like to do is ask a few introductory questions to Mr. Jackowski. I'd like to ask you a little bit about where you were born, when you were born and a little about your parents and brothers and sisters. So could we begin?

JJ: Yeah. I was born in 1915 and of course my wife was born in 1918. We were born in Detroit and we grew up in St. Hyacinth's parish from the time that I was baptized until we were married and we still attend St. Hyacinth's, even though we live in Warren. And we had a family of five brothers and sisters together with my parents. And they all attended St. Hyacinth's school until it folded. So, my memory of childhood and teen age until we got married was about St. Hyacinth's and the vicinity which includes what then was the center of our business area was Chene Street.

MK: Was your father, were your father and mother born in America or where they born in Poland? Who came from Poland?

JJ: They both came from Poland. And they came from different parts. My father came from near Warsaw, Mława. And my mother came from Rzeszów.

MK: And his name was?

JJ: Józef.

MK: And your mother's name was?

JJ: Katarzyna Dec, D-E-C.

MK: Her maiden name, okay. Do you know when they came to America?

JJ: They didn't come together because they didn't marry until they met in Detroit. And this is the part about immigration from the old country, from Poland to the United States, for instance. It came in waves. But the people that came here, had to be sponsored by American citizens. In another words, they couldn't just come here. They had to have somebody that was kindly enough to sponsor them. It meant that they were going to take care of them until they were established and they were self dependent. So, my mother came to the United States when she was a young person. She was only 15 or 16 years

old. And she couldn't think of living in Poland the way it was at that time. That was just before World War I. So, when she came here it was to get away from the oppression that was rampant in Poland. And she first came to Pittsburgh. That's her half sister who was her sponsor lived in Pittsburgh and they moved to an area called Schenley Heights. Now Schenley Heights is the area where the Schenley Distillery was. And was a cliff kind of high up in the city. But she couldn't visualize living in Pittsburgh because of all the emissions from the steel plants. The air was polluted and she says she's going to die of *suchoty*, that's tuberculosis. So she moved to Detroit to her other half sister.

Now she had half sisters because her father married twice. First wife died so he married the second wife. Strange thing is that both women that he married, were Veronica. So first wife is Veronica, second one is Veronica. Anyway, when he came to Detroit, they were again gravitating to some previous immigrants, who was my father's sister and in my case, my mother it was her half sister. They were both living in Detroit.

MK: Where in Detroit, do you know?

JJ: Yeah, they were right in the center of Detroit, what is now the old called Polonia. For instance, my mother's half sister lived in a living quarters above a bar on Hancock and St. Aubin it was. It was the corner house but the first floor was a biergarten, bar, biergarten. And I remember from my childhood days that when we were going there you had to go up the up the stairs to the upstairs living quarters. And those buildings were frame buildings. And the bars they had bare wooden floors, no ceramics, no linoleum, nothing. And they were just saturated with the smell of beer. If you went into the building, you knew that you were in a drinking place. So she stayed with my aunt a while.

Now my father, when he came here, it's strange. I said when they came in waves, because they didn't all come as a family. First, the sons came. My father was one of twins. So when they came from Poland to the United States we always were a little confused because they said, *Caso Granda*. And we thought *Caso Granda* meant the area around Ellis Island. They did not come through Ellis Island. But then we found out that it was a different area entirely. So, when they came to the United States, they went to a place in Newark. There was a big Polish immigrant settlement in Newark. And their sister who was senior to them lived there. And first thing they do is start looking for work. The only work they could find was in Passaic, which is close to Newark. P A S A A I C. But it was a shoe manufacturing. They made shoes and the employers were mostly American companies that hired female workers because they paid them low wages. So my father and my uncle says, "This is not any better than Poland. 'Cause here we will have to work for minimum wages." Whereas in the old country they used to cross the border and go to what they called *Pomorze* or Pomerania, which was Eastern Prussia. And they worked in Prussia for German companies and they were paid relatively better. So when they came to Passaic, employment was very low so they said, "Let's get the heck outta here." They didn't say heck, they said something else. So they said, "Let's go to our sister Mary," who lived at that time in Detroit. And she lived in the neighborhood of, that would be about Hancock and St. Aubin, which was later on, we'll see it's close to what's now Eastern Market--Ferry Market.

Now there is a very interesting thing about my aunt living in that area.

MK: Excuse me, you said Hancock and St. Aubin. Hancock is further south from Chene Ferry market.

JJ: Yeah, it's couple blocks south. But anyway it might been not Hancock.

MK: Hendrie?

JJ: No, no, no, no, no. Probably Kirby, Kirby instead of Hancock.

MK: Kirby and St. Aubin?

JJ: Yeah. And when I say St. Aubin, it's the main street. Actually, they lived on a smaller street called Dubois. Right on Dubois. And here's a very interesting thing that describes, are you taping?

MK: Yeah, I'm taping.

JJ: What they did. Well when Mary came here she was already married to her husband.

MK: Now Mary is who?

JJ: Mary is my father and mother, uncle's older sister. Mary Borowski. Her maiden name was Jackowski. She married Borowski. Now her husband's name was Alexander and he was from Poland. They married in Poland. He was an officer in the Russian tsarist, not communist, tsarist. He had a very beautiful cossack costume, uniform and the imposing hat. And he was really a very handsome trooper let's say. So when they came to the United States, he was by profession then a bricklayer. So he took jobs building houses for independent contractors. He would lay brick. At that time they considered laying brick, four hundred brick was considered a day's work. So the faster you worked the quicker you were done. So that was his trade.

Now his wife, that's Mary, my aunt, they had purchased a house on Dubois near Kirby. It was a big rambling house. And this is something important about the way people lived then. She didn't need all the rooms in the house. So she furnished them as sleeping rooms, like bedrooms. They had more than one bed in each room. And they rented those rooms out to recently immigrated Polish men who came from Poland. Most of the time these men left their families and wives and kids if any, in Poland while they came to Detroit to find a job and establish themselves. So, they bunched up into these homes that were privately owned. They had no, no city regulations. They could have as many roomers, they called them, as they could accommodate. And the thing was this, that my aunt was a very ingenuous person. She found out that she could use one bed and have three roomers use that one bed. They worked different shifts on different jobs. So, one went to work, another man went in his bed, which was probably still warm. Then when

he got up and went to work, the third shift came in. So, she had those rooms occupied and the men were very happy because they were all probably from the same area from Poland. They were near relatives and friends and then she provided them with food. The food that she cooked was traditionally Polish. And these people that came there and they were interested in just having a place to sleep between going to work.

Now, what did they do for entertainment? Well, they gravitated to Chene Street. Chene Street then, as well as some side streets, had biergartens.

MK: So what years were these? Do you know what years we're talking about?

JJ: Yeah, I'm talking about between 1905 and 1915, that ten year period. So these people, the men came there looking work, to get a little money together and then they would save the money for what they called *shipkarta* [*szyfkarta*—km] that was ship cards to get their wives and children from the old country here. In the meantime, they would look for a house they could afford to buy for their wives.

Now, where did they spend their time? Well, along Chene Street and other streets in the area there were a lot of restaurants. These were not fancy restaurants. They used to be sitdown. They didn't have what do we call the—buffets? No, not buffets, they were at the table. So, the men that didn't want to eat in a restaurant, they went to bars and the bars usually had a counter where they had all kind of sandwiches and stuff that they could eat. While they buying their beer they also had their cheese sandwiches, kielbasa and that. And so they had a sleeping place and they had an entertainment place.

And as far as churches, well there weren't very many. St. Josaphat's was the first church [not true, St. Albertus was] there. And that's probably where they picked up the parishioners, which were single men, separated from their wives. After a few years, they brought their wives over and then they bought small houses. Well a lot of people then called those cottages, because those houses were wooden framed houses, usually no basement, outside toilets, limited utilities in the house. But that's all they could afford and that's what they had. And then later, when the mothers with the children came in here, there was a need for kids to go to school.

Now, from myself, I was eight years old before I went to school. Eight years to go to the first grade. And the only language I could speak then was Polish. It was very difficult for me to go to a school that was bilingual and I only knew Polish.

MK: Can I ask you where you were living at the time? Do you remember the street, your address?

JJ: Oh yeah.

MK: Where were you living?

JJ: My father and mother lived, again with his parents, that was my grandfather and grandmother. They lived at 3395 Palmer which was close to Moran. Between Moran and McDougall. And they had a house that was at the rear of the lot, right at the alley line. And I pride myself of the fact that that house in that area, it was a modest house but we had the first indoor, what do you call it?

MK: Plumbing.

JJ: Plumbing, toilets, for instance. Water, everybody had water. Pipes came in from the street. And about water, at that time, the water board in Detroit charged you two dollars per year per faucet. So, the poor people that limited themselves to the number of faucets. Because if you had one faucet all you paid was two dollars a year. They didn't measure how much water you used just one faucet. And they used to have the water come to what they called a summer kitchen, which was an addition to the regular house. And they did their cooking, because of the heat that woodstoves generated, and they had a faucet in that room which was the kitchen. From then on, they used to cheat by attaching hoses and then they watered everything. But they didn't--city didn't care how much water you used so long as you paid two dollars per faucet.

And then this house that my grandfather had at the rear of the lot, was so close to the alley, which enabled him to have indoor toilets because they went directly to the sewer in the alley. Other people that lived at the front of the lot, they didn't have sewage lines from the front of the lot to the rear of the lot. So we were the first ones in the area, irregardless of the other homes were bigger and more expensive. We were number one.

Then later when they got the money, my uncle who was a bricklayer built this substantial brick home, which is still standing on Palmer, 3395 Palmer. It was the biggest house on the block. Him being a carpenter, he could afford to use more brick and material. Then after I was a year, no, I was a couple of years old, my father and mother bought a house a block away. This is on Palmer. And we lived there from 1915 to 1926.

MK: Do you remember the number of the house?

JJ: Yea, it was 962 on Palmer. But after that the city changed the numbers and it was not 962, it was 3692. 3692 because somehow they had to allow for the new homes being built. And there weren't enough numbers. And we were let's say two miles from Woodward where the number was one and where we were at it was 962. Incidentally, Palmer was the house that we lived in until 1926. Then I--

MK: Was that house between Moran and Elmwood or was it between Elmwood and--?

JJ: Mt. Elliott, Mt. Elliott. Close to Mt. Elliott. Fourth house from Mt. Elliott. And then when they bought this house on Ferry, which was 3400 ferry and it was almost on a line with my grandfather's house 3395 and this was 3400, it was like back to back only one street over. So my grandparents, mostly my grandfather, he would come over to my mother's house and mind the kids. There were five kids.

MK: So across the alley?

JJ: No, he went around the block. You couldn't go—no. It was a different street. He was there apparently every day. And he was very good with the children. The children they all loved him. He was a gentle fellow. He had a big mustache. He could take care even in his advanced years, he could take care of kids, change their diapers and everything.

MK: What was his name?

JJ: His name was Jakub. And in memory of his name, today, the fourth generation of people that are his descendents the last child was born, his name is Jakub. J A K U B. Now why is Jakub so popular? Well, there is no James in Polish names. There is no James. Wherever you see reference to Jakub in the Polish Bible, in the English it's James. So, Jakub and James are synonymous for the same saint. That's--some people don't know this but I know this for a fact. And see we have this, shows everybody's, if the houses it was my grandfather's house. You can see it's a big house [he's showing me a family history book].

MK: So where did your father work?

JJ: Well that's another thing. When they came to Detroit, jobs were kind of easy to get if you wanted to do manual work. In other words unless you were skilled, unless you were a machinist or something like that, you had to take work that involved a lot of labor. The way I recollect is that because they did live with my aunt up there in that rooming house until they got married--

MK: On Dubois.

JJ: On Dubois. There was a street called Russell and it went towards Milwaukee and they said they were working at the car shop. Now everybody thinks that working at the car shop they were working in a automobile factory. No, not so. Was not an automobile factory, it was a railroad car shop. They built the carriages and the freight cars. And occasionally they built passenger cars for the railroads. And that building I remember it was a huge wooden structure and they tried to utilize sunlight instead of electricity. And they had thousands of one foot square lights, panes, window panes. And that's where they built it and they shipped them out. But again they were always looking for something better. And in 1907 Packard Motor Car Company opened up their factory on East Grand Boulevard at Mt. Elliott by the railroad tracks. So, it wasn't that far for them to walk from where they living to Packard's.

Now my grandfather lived on Palmer and Moran and then all you did was walk to Mt. Elliott and then make a turn and go on East Grand Boulevard and you were at work. At that time some of the people that were working at Packard's actually during their lunch break, crossed the railroad tracks even if the locomotives were moving they went

between the cars, jumped. Which was very hazardous but they did it and they went home for lunch. My father did that. They lived four blocks from Mt. Elliott and they were close to the shop so instead of carrying a lunch pail he came home. And they worked, my father and my uncle worked at Packard's until the factory folded. That's when Studebaker bought them out and after Studebaker they liquidated the plant.

MK: Do you remember if that was that in the early fifties or late forties?

JJ: No, it was more like in the—yeah, around 1960 when they folded. My grandfather was also employed at Packard's. Between my uncle and my dad and my grandfather total they had 135 years of seniority. Total. He had a job in the plant where he lubricated equipment and he was a general handyman. Everybody called him "Pop." And he had this that he never smoked but he had a five gallon metal pail in the plant department DL. And he asked the men that smoked cigars to throw the cigar butts in that. Now why did he do that? Well, at his home in the back yard he had grape arbors and he used to have smudge pots made from these cigar butts, and the smoke from these smudge pots just killed off all the bugs that used to get after the grapevines. They just couldn't stand the smoke. And the people should have learned then that smoke was not good for you. It killed the bugs and it's killing the people now.

But anyway, when Packard's folded they were too old to find other employment. So they had to fall back on their so called pension and social security. My uncle did continue living until he died on Palmer. My grandfather occasionally went to a farm, which was owned by Mary Borowski who was his daughter, the one whose husband was a bricklayer. And he had that rooming house.

Now when he was living in Detroit, my uncle developed some kind of lung problems. This is going to be very interesting. The doctor told him he says, "Alex, you cannot live in Detroit. You got to live on a farm where you got fresh air. Otherwise, it's gonna kill you. So Alek took the advice of the doctors and he went to live on a farm. They didn't move out very far on the farm because they were this side of Mt. Clemens off of Gratiot, near the Clinton River. And here's the funny part. The top doctor told him to live on a farm. But didn't say nothing that you couldn't come to the city to work in the city. So he lived on a farm but in the morning he came to Detroit, laid his 400 brick and then went back on the farm. So, the fact that the city was full of smoke didn't enter in his mind. He said he was living on the farm.

MK: He was literally taking the doctor's advice--

JJ: The doctor's orders. But ignoring the fact to avoid the smoke. Now talk about smoke in the city: when we lived on Palmer near Mt. Elliott, on a winter night, if you get up in the morning and look n the windowsill and they were covered with snow and on top of it was a smoke soot from Packard's. You actually couldn't see the snow, fresh snow because it was covered with soot. That's how bad it was with those great big coal fired. Now Packard had their own generators. They made their own electricity. They thought that Ford Motor Car Company was self sufficient, well Packard Motor had two great

electrical plants where they made their own electricity. The factory itself was built the architect was Albert Kahn. He's the one that built Fisher Building, General Motors and a lot of other--also Packard's. Packard's is still standing because the interior has no wood. It's all got steel structure. And it cost them a lot of money to tear them apart.

So, while my uncle was living on the farm, my aunt and uncle, and my grandfather would go and help them so that the family from Detroit--and because the fact that the farm was so close to Detroit, my uncle used to come to Chene Market. Now Chene Ferry Market was a open field. It was like one square block. It was just Ferry to Palmer, Chene to Dubois. It was vacant. Except on the west side was a line of alley, garages. Come to that later. So the farmers used to come there and park on this open dirt field. They brought in their own folding tables and on Wednesdays and Saturdays, people came to shop at Chene Ferry market.

MK: What years are we talking about now?

JJ: Well, that was from the beginning. I mean that was gradually built up. There was no staring date. More farmers kept coming in and more people, so it just--

MK: But when he was coming in and he had this farm he would come in there, what years was that?

JJ: Oh, that would be from about 1920, 1925, something like that. And they kept coming there all the time until he got old and sick and he died. But that was something they used to come Wednesdays and Saturdays. Now you could bring in anything that you could sell. Anything. In the winter time when it was cold enough, the farmers brought in hunks of pork. They used to have chickens that were dressed out. Freshly slaughtered but they were still intact. They had their feet on, their heads on except the farmers had the feathers off. They brought in eggs, they brought in home made cheese, they brought in something that was always sought after, was farmer's cheese. It was a dry cheese that the women bought to make *pierogi*. That was the stuffing for *pierogis*. And they sold live chickens, they sold--I raised rabbits and my uncle sold my rabbits at Chene Ferry Market. Rabbits were either small for pets or big for meat. So, I also worked at the Chene Ferry Market when I was a teenager and he paid me to carry the produce that people bought. And I carried it for the ladies to their car. Or if they lived close in the neighborhood, actually carried it to their home. And the Ferry Market got so popular that that street block between Chene and Dubois and Ferry and Palmer was too small to accommodate them. City came in and paved the area. Which was better and the farmers used to put up canvas covered shelters to shade themselves and their produce from--

MK: Do you remember when the city paved it?

JJ: No. No. But it was probably, oh, it was probably 1920. And then after it was paved, it attracted more people. Winter and summer because they had solid pavement. So then the city put in a brick structure with doors that opened up, stall doors that the farmers could back in with their trucks and close down and protect themselves from the winter.

Still that was too small. So across the street, across Ferry where there were just residences. All the way from Ferry [he means Chene] to Dubois, the homeowners let the farmers come in and put up portable tables in front of their houses and they charged them like a dollar a day. And the farmers had additional stalls. So, maybe they parked across the street but they had the stalls across the street from the market. And it was something that sometimes, when the crops were in you could hardly walk through Ferry Street because of the traffic, pedestrian traffic. People were coming from far away. Ladies were pulling their pull carts and I worked there until I thought I was too smart for it and went to school and I didn't work at the market.

MK: So, let's back up a little. Do you mind? When you were eight years old, you started school, right? And you didn't go to Ferry School?

JJ: No.

MK: So you went to St. Hyacinth?

JJ: Yea.

MK: And you went through school all the way through St. Hyacinth?

JJ: Yeah, but see when I was at eight they said this kid is too smart for the other kids, so I skipped grades. If I could do the homework and this, they would jump a year. So then I moved up with the older kids, with the older kids. And that was--

MK: What was it like at St. Hyacinth? Did you like it? Was it tough, were the nuns tough?

JJ: Yeah, oh the nuns, but see we always had respect for the nuns. I don't care how they tough. I associated with gangs there were kind of notorious, they were trouble makers. But that didn't mean that you didn't respect the nuns. When you were in school, you had to behave. You take for instance Fr. Gramza, Frank Gramza, he was assistant pastor. Where we lived on Ferry near Moran, there was a Callahan Playfield and they had a ballpark for playing baseball. And sometimes the smaller kids like, from St. Hyacinth's they would get pushed off the playground because the bigger kids, the Kirby Gang, would want to play ball. Father Gramza used to come from the rectory. He used to take his Roman collar off his neck, put it in his pocket, and fisticuffs he could fight with those--actually he ended up with bloody nose and black eyes too. But that was his nature. He was the "fighting priest," Fr. Gramza.

MK: What year was that?

JJ: See, years, I got a good memory.

MK: What grade were you in?

JJ: Oh, that would be around between 1926 and 1930.

MK: So you lived at 3400 Ferry, the whole time from the time you moved in there?

JJ: Until Clara and I got married.

MK: Until you got married. Okay.

JJ: And the house was probably the last house, no, her mother's house was the last one burned down. We just went there Sunday and her parents' home was burned. But ours was the second newest house on Ferry, second newest. And it was built, I later on found out, by the police commissioner. Girardin, Ray Girardin was the--

MK: I remember Ray Girardin, his black book.

JJ: His father built the house, passed himself off as a bachelor, but when he died we found out that James Girardin was son of the one that died,

MK: So, when did you first kind of, when can you first think of your memories of Chene. What are they? How young were you?

JJ: See Chene Street, not only my mother but my wife's mother, used to go from where we lived between Mt. Elliott and Moran on Ferry, they used to take one of those buggies.

MK: Two wheelers?

CJ: I used to go with my mother.

JJ: Yeah. What the hell, the kids used to have them. Coaster wagons. Coaster wagons and they went up and they bought all the produce. They had to buy stuff that wouldn't thaw out last. And they would fill up their carts. Right?

CJ: Yeah.

JJ: And lot of people did that

MK: At the market, Chene-Ferry market?

JJ: Yeah.

MK: What other stores did you--

JJ: They main attraction was Wednesday and Saturdays at the market, they got their vegetables and their fruit. Then the rest of the stuff they got in the--now shopping on Chene, let's see it started from Canfield all the way to Milwaukee. I'll say that that, it was kind of far in between but that was the center.

You could buy anything on Chene Street! You could buy anything. I mean from home furnishings like refrigerators, kitchen furniture,. My parents bought a lot of their furniture from outfit Perkowski. P--

MK: Where were they?

JJ: That was on Chene at the other side of Warren. Between Warren and Hancock. Perkowski and later their son and me, my son John, they were both Johns. We both went to St. Joe's Commercial. He died recently. And they had five floors of furniture. You had an elevator that only ran when the customer came in. And they took you up and showed you what they had.

MK: What side of Chene was it, the east side or west side?

JJ: On Chene he was on the west side. And he was across the street from something that's very, very interesting to recall. Perrien Park, P E R R I E N. Perrien Park. It was one block square. It was between Warren and Hancock from Chene to Dubois.

MK: Grandy.

JJ: Grandy. Clara's grandfather lived across the street from Perrien Park. Now Perrien Park was a very small neighborhood park but it had park benches, it had a gazebo in the center, where weekends, the weather permitting and on holidays, bands would come in. You didn't know who--it would be like now we have Chene Park right at the river. This was our original Chene Park. Bands came in and people came. And they played popular music. People joined in the singing. If you wanted to you probably could dance. It was all outside except for that gazebo, where the bandstand that was not protected.

MK: Did you go there to hear bands?

JJ: Oh, yeah, yeah. We went there lots. On Sunday afternoon, that was the place to go. You'd get the kids cleaned up and go out there. And they had limited facilities they had fountains, drinking fountains, and the park benches. Nobody vandalized anything. But I was talking to Clara today I says do you recall there ever being restrooms? No. Never was city-provided restrooms. People either had to have good bladders or they were--

CJ: They lived close to it.

JJ: Yeah, they lived close to it because they all walked there. That area there was kind of a center. It was very popular with the merchants because people used to come there. On the corner of Chene and Warren, Anthony Rathnaw had a big men's clothiers. He had very, very select line of clothes. Families took their boys for communion suits and everything. Anthony Rathnaw became a councilman in the city of Detroit.

MK: What was his ethnicity? Do you know?

JJ: It's Polish.

MK: Polish guy?

JJ: R-A-T-H-N-A-W.

MK: Was he Christian, was he Jewish?

JJ: Oh no, he was a Catholic. Yeah, Anthony Rathnaw. My father would go to the store and they knew themselves on their first name basis. One thing I never found out why, but whenever they shook hands they shook hands with their left hands not with the right hand. Now that's something. I don't know what it was. But they did.

Then on the next block there was a store, Wilkowski, like "wolf," W-I-L-K-O-W-S-K-I. He had a very beautiful hardware store and eh sold all hunting equipment.

MK: Is this going north up Chene?

JJ: This is going south.

MK: This is going south from Rathnaw?

JJ: South from Perrien. Yeah Rathnaw was on one side here and he was here, diagonally across and then there was a ladies', Szmigielska.

CJ: That was a bridal shop.

JJ: Bridal shop. And she had girls sewing gowns for the weddings. She went to--Clara went to apply for a job and her mother was with her. And they said, "Well, how much you pay?" "Well we don't pay anything but the girls learn how to sew." So talk about slave labor here they--

MK: What year was that, do you remember?

CJ: That was about 18. 19? And my mother said, "She doesn't have to work for nothing because she knows how to sew." I knew everything, how to sew dresses, shirts, everything. From my mother so I didn't start work.

JJ: She can sew men's outer garments for winter.

CL: I'm not going to work for nothing.

JJ: So later on then she got a job a block away for Variety Nut Dates. She always thinks dates because they were taking the seed out. Variety Nut is now on 13 Mile and—

CJ: 13 and--

MK: So it's the same family, same business?

MK: Yeah, we go there and we say, "She worked for your grandpa sixty years ago."

MK: So where was it on, relative to, you know Rathnaw's and--

JJ: Well they were on Forest and--this was on Forest, we were on Warren you know.

MK: So Variety was on Forest?

MK: Yeah.

MK: So it was further south?

CJ: It was on St. Aubin.

JJ: Yes, St. Aubin and--

CJ: And Forest.

MK: St. Aubin and Forest.

JJ: But see he started it out repackaging fruit that was dried fruit from you know Mideast, smaller packages. There was for instance like this, right next to where this was, there was a man that bought aspirin by the 54 gallon barrel. Aspirin came in big barrels. And he packaged them like six aspirin to a cellophane bag and stabled to a cardboard and that was put on bars, counters in bars and they charged like a dime or quarter for that. I knew of them because I sold them the stapling machine to attach the packages of whatever they had. They had aspirin, and they had other kind of over the counter pills. That was Owl Packing Company. O-W-L.

Now down the street there was, on Grandy, which is one block over from Chene. Don't forget one thing, where else in Detroit area was streetcars coming south from Hamtramck, south on Chene until they got to Gratiot and went down to the city hall. Baker Streetcar.

MK: Right, Baker.

JJ: To get back there they didn't go back on Chene, they went one block over to Grandy and went north on Grandy. Okay now Grandy and Chene Street go together because of this common Baker line. It served south one way and north the other. And why was it there? Well, before Couzens decided to rip out the streetcar tracks, DSR was the transportation. So, the streetcars that went down from Hamtramck took all the men working, Gratiot, then went west to Rouge plant. The Baker Streetcar name, nobody

knows what it is, but I do. In Dearborn in the Ford Motor car company complex, that was a turnaround. There was a street called Baker Street that's still there. So the cars went there and they were called Baker because that's where they turned around.

MK: Turned around, and came back all the way to Grandy and Grandy up to Hamtramck.

JJ: And there they serviced all the cigar factories that had the women working, living in Hamtramck, coming to Grandy and all the cigar factories. Mazer Cressman, Sentalese, there were so many of them. Every block had a small cigar wrapping. They were all custom made. The women used to, one of them would lick them and that. And my aunt used to work there.

MK: Which one did she work at? Do you remember?

JJ: Probably Mazer Cressman. It's still standing. Now it's owned by the city as a social service building. I worked there too in the welfare department when I used to work nights.

MK: I know where that is. Right off of Grandy.

JJ: Yeah.

MK: Yeah, I know where that is. Big tall building. It's FIA now or something like that.

JJ: Yeah. So across there...those people, those ladies that worked in the cigar factory, they had friends, men friends, husbands, relatives. They used to sneak out cigars in their bosoms in the you know--generously endowed so they took about a dozen cigars. Nobody missed them. And those were Havana leaf. And one thing that they objected to is the owners would ask the ladies to make fancy cigars. But they only paid them the price for production cigars. Another words, cheap cigars and these had to have a certain leaf, leaf was thinner and harder to work with and they didn't want to pay them anymore. That was the first union problems they had.

Then further up the line, when Chene and Grandy blended, it became Jos Campau. And then the street cars on Jos. Campau went all the ways. And that problem persists to this day. That it's so narrow a street and it hardly can accommodate traffic, on certain days of course.

But now on Chene Street, let's go back to the time when the people were living in the area, immigrants. And they had between Perrien Park and Milwaukee, there was a theater called Perrien Theater. Then there was Fredro and the third one Home, then when you crossed East Grand Boulevard was Iris Theater.

MK: I remember them. I went there to the movie theater.

JJ: Oh yeah. We got dishes here.

MK: The Fredro became the King after a while. But my mother would go to Iris on Wednesday at one o'clock for the matinee and they would give dishes. She got an entire, her first when we came to America, that was the first set of dishes she got was from the Iris.

JJ: Gilt edge, we still got them. Beautiful!

MK: Can I see one? Do you have one? Are they up there?

JJ: We got some over there. But anyway. Right near where the streets come together there was a sweet shop. They made hand dipped chocolates.

MK: Was it next to the Home Theater? [no, he's talking about a different place]

JJ: In that area. Across from that bank. That was Commonwealth Bank. The manager of the bank was the father of a kid I used to go to St. Joe's. There's two women living there, Ronnie Kuskowski and Gertrude Minkiewicz. They're still alive, they still attend St. Hyacinth's. They operated those sweet shops. [Kuskowski operated Dane Donuts].

MK: No kidding. Wow

JJ: I know their names. Those candies were better than Sanders. They were quality ingredients. They were hand dipped according to the seasons.

MK: Do you remember the name of the sweet shop by any chance?

JJ: No. I asked my sister she doesn't know. Maybe in this book.

MK: What side of the street was it on? On the same side as the Home theater or not?

JJ: Across the street from the bank. Yeah, the same as the Home Theater.

MK: Same side, because I think it was--I have a picture of that block in the 1930s and I think it's on there. [wrong sweet shop]

JJ: Yeah. It was there along time and they had ice cream too. Three cents you could get a generous cone.

MK; Can I stop this and I will flip this over.

Break

MK: September 20, 2002

A blank section follows.

JJ: Since then they had been taken over by Yugoslav or Croatian people. Further on there was another bakery on--

MK: This is the Palmer Bakery right on the corner of Palmer and Chene?

JJ: Uh Huh.

MK: I remember that one as a child too.

JJ: That's when the people used to go to the Chene Ferry Market, they used to buy their breads there.

MK: And there used to be a Kroger store behind it.

JJ: In the back, yeah, yeah. Yeah the Kroger store. People that lived around there came to St. Hyacinth's, you know, they're parishioners there. The last one that lived there they used to sit in front of us in church, in the pew in front.

MK: The owner of the bakery you mean?

JJ: No, no the people that lived next to Krogers. And then they shook hands with us and says, "You won't see us anymore. Our daughter wants us to move to Toledo" because during the night somebody pounded on their door and says, "You better get out of the house." The guy next door, they had a single story house, threw a burning mattress out the window. It landed on their roof. So they didn't want to be burned up alive. You know, because these so called minority groups they burn down the homes. I have a theory of why they do it.

MK: I want to get back to the bakeries. So there was the Palmer Bakery. I remember that one. What other bakeries do you remember?

JJ: There was another to Max's. Max's Jewelry. Now that was a Jewish owned outfit.

MK: Do you remember Max's Jewelry store? What was it like? Was it a well run business?

JJ: Oh, yeah. No they were good service, courteous, good service. It was one thing you had to be courteous and good to stay in business. Other people wouldn't patronize you. I'll tell you something about, you might say like how about Jewish people. My mother that lived on Ferry at Moran. And walked all the way to Chene Street and I would be with her. I was a small kid then. She would go shopping. I would be pulling the cart. And she says "Johnny, you know what I forgot? I didn't take my purse. I have no money." Now in the farmer's market, in the center of that area that was paved with a roof, in the center, dead center, it had like a crosswalk. In the center there was a weigh

station where people that sold every product so you could weigh it. Scale man they used to be. Next to the scale man was Louie the Banana Man,. He was a Jewish fellow, portly man, like that. So he sees my mother fumbling, no money. He says “Mama, come over here. What’s the problem?” She says, “Louie I came shopping and I left my purse in the house.” “Here’s twenty dollars. Next time I see you, you pay me back.” No relative, he’s Jew, we’re Christians. “Here’s twenty, you want more?” Just like that. And he had bananas, like three pounds for a quarter. For a quarter, now they’re 59 cents a pound. So my mother says “Well, gimme some of those.” “Mama you don’t want that. Good ones, nice half green ones, that’s for you.” You see that’s how--One thing though she could speak Jewish some. Not real good but she could speak some. So if you go shopping on Chene Street there were stores that sold clothing you know, for kids and everything. Three Brothers, for instance.

MK: Right, I remember Three Brothers.

JJ: They’re all Jewish men. There was another window shade company.

MK: Do you remember the names of the guys?

JJ: No, no. She’d go shopping. She knew this much, this for your information if you don’t know it. Monday, go into a Jewish store, like on Chene Street, if you’re the first customer through the door, the operator of that store doesn’t leave you out without you buying something. He’s got to make that first sale. First man or woman through the door, you got to sell him. So my mother goes and says, “How much is this?” And the woman, the wife says, “Three dollars.” And my mother says, “It’s too much.” So the woman’d call back in Jewish to her husband, “How much can I sell you?” you know, in Jewish. He says, “Make it two fifty. And if she doesn’t want it, sell it for two.” And she understood it. So I’m just, I’m going--and she says to the woman, “Do you want two dollars?” And she did that often. I’ve seen her do it, see? But that’s the advantage that she had.

Now you talk about the old Jewish people and their kids that used to help them. Some of those peddlers they were at this business for 25 years. Now they have sons that were twenty years that were going to college and they were educated. So, they came to help their father out. And I would go out there because we lived in the neighborhood and I’d say, “I want two pounds of those green beans.” He’d put them on a scale. First thing, the scale says “Not for commercial use.” It says so right on it. But they used it commercially. Then--

MK: Do you remember which store are you talking about?

JJ: No, no, this is the farmers market. First thing I knew that, see. So, you take it and then you take one bean off of the scale, rip it, put this in the bag. I says “Are you that anxious to, you know, you can keep all of them. I wouldn’t buy any.” I walk away. “Mr. come back.” “No, no, no I don’t deal with anybody that breaks something because in the Jewish kosher religion anything that’s damaged is *trefne*. And I’ll tell him,

“Trefne. I, I don’t buy garbage.” They have a display of oranges. But you had to deal with them because they understood you just like now in Israel I wouldn’t know how to deal with them.

Listen, they had a great big display—she knows--all beautiful oranges lined up. Twenty-five cents a dozen. I say, “Are these for sale?” “Yeah.” “I want two dozen.” He’d go behind and take something that I don’t see. I says, “No, I want these.” I says, “Are they for sale?” He says, “Yes.” “I’ll take the bottom one.” And they would all spill out. I’d walk away. I taught him a lesson. You know, don’t take advantage of the Christians.

MK: What about the other, there were, I know there were other--Max’s was a Jewish store. The Three Borthers. There used to be a store called Raimi’s Dry Goods. Do you remember Raimi’s? What do you remember about Raimi’s?

JJ: Raimi, they got to be high class. The Raimis went on Chene Street, they went on Gratiot, they went on Jos Campau. Raimi, R-A-I-M-I. They’re good stuff.

MK: You know, I want to tell you something about that. One of the grandchildren became, is a famous movie director. Sam Raimi. He did Spiderman.

JJ: Oh.

MK: That’s the grandson of the Raimis that were on Chene Street.

JJ: See you’ve got to remember that the Jewish people that operated those business places on Chene Street, invariably, I would say 85 percent of the time, they came from Poland.

MK: So, they spoke Polish?

JJ: Yes and they got along real good. They were very cordial and friendly. And one reason for the success is that the people respected them. Nobody ever said, “You dirty Jew” or anything like that. No, we knew they were Jewish, they knew we were Polish, see. There was no animosity. There was nothing, no signs, nothing, never, never, never, never, never. So then there was the bakeries, then on--

MK: Do you remember the American Bakery, by the way, next to the Home Theater?

CJ: Yeah.

MK: Near Lyman.

CJ: Yeah.

MK: You know that bakery when I came to America, my mother bought cookies made of rotten eggs from that bakery and I almost died.

CJ: Yes?

MK: Yes, they had to rush to the hospital and so I remember the American Bakery.

JJ: How come we never went there?

CJ: No because we were mostly between Ferry and Kirby and Palmer.

JJ: Here is Rathnaw, here is Wilkowski, here is Perrien Park. Right on the corner of Hancock and Chene Street there was a bakery there, what was the name?

CJ: Hilke's.

JJ: Hilke's, Hilke's. The lady was very religious. In the store, she had a little table with artificial flowers and a statue, a religious statue. You go in there and get a sack, big sack like a peck sack, one dozen mixed cakes. Whatever the price, like 75 cents, whatever. Then as you were leaving she says "I'm going to put two of these, no charge, yesterday's, free. So you got twelve cakes plus two for free. Hilke's and they had good stuff. We were fortunate to find a bakery here on Van Dyke that still makes Russian rye with the caraway seeds like they used to before.

MK: Was Hilke's Polish or not?

CJ: They talked Polish or they were Kashubian.

MK: Kashubian? Yeah. Do you remember the People's Bookstore, Księgarnia Ludowa?

JJ: Yeah.

MK: And the owner Martin Zukowski? Do you remember him?

JJ: We used to buy greeting cards there. Next to the Księgarnia Ludowa, next door was Sfire Brothers. I worked there.

MK: What was the name of the store?

JJ: Sfire S-F-I-R-E. Sfire.

MK: Okay, and what were they?

JJ: They were, they just said they were--huh?

CJ: Lebanese.

JJ: Oh, but wait a while. He said what were they? You mean nationality?

MK: Yeah.

JJ: They were probably Lebanese. Lebanese. There was five of them: Eddie--

CJ: I don't know the names.

JJ: But there were five.

CJ: All I know we were going there.

JJ: But one was a gigolo. He went to the barber shop right next to it, there was a barber shop. Shaved twice a day because he always wanted to look, you know they had that dark like----. I forget--He would bring in newspaper. I was working there.

MK: When were you working there?

JJ: 1934 to 1936. Listen, you'd come in you'd have the *Free Press*, you'd have the *Times* and the *News*. He'd say, "Come with me." Just like that. I says, "We got customers." "Come, I'm the boss, come with me." You'd sit down on a packing case in the storeroom. "Read. What's the news?" He couldn't read. I had to read everything to him and more or less tell him what it is. Then he got done, put the papers in his pocket and went to the barber shop. There he could expound on what he just found out, believe me. But he did it where nobody could see. Okay. Eddie, Freddie, Sammie--that's three. The others went along. Freddie used to go on the wholesale produce market and buy the stuff by the truck. Yep, during the night, between two o'clock and four o'clock.

MK: At Eastern Market?

JJ: Yeah and there's another place on Fort Street. Produce, came off the trains. So this Saturday I'm working there and he says, "Today you're going to stand in front of the store on the city sidewalk," which is illegal "and have three or four melons in your arm. And anybody comes Chene Street you ask him, 'smell these melons?'" So, I know the law because I had finished high school and knew that you cannot not do this on city business. Now they even have barbeque garbage cans and you know, oil drums. So, all right, I'm doing this and in comes a man I didn't know. I says, "Mister," you know, "smell these, see how good they are, smell good." He took them off my hands and went in the store, like to pay for them. When he went in the store, went in and Sfires was a big store, had about six clerks, besides the butchers. They're all laughing and all behind the counters, laughing like anything. I says, "What's the joke? What's this thing here?" He said, "Freddie bought those melons at four o'clock in the market and now when he was here to check up what their moving, you sold them to him a second time." He's the guy that bought them! But he was concerned because they were a little on the ripe side. So, you know, he wanted to know if they would be moved. And I sold it to him. They said, "Never in his life did he buy something twice." You know what I mean? And another thing--

MK: Which side of Księgarnia Ludowa was it, the north or south side?

JJ: It was the north, on the corner was a **armor**, Jablonski the dentist and then there was Sfires. And across the street was Przybylski, the drugstore.

MK: So this is the new location of Księgarnia Ludowa because it used to be down the block, one block. They moved over at some point.

JJ: Maybe.

MK: So 'cause at one time there was a Jaruga Music next to him, a Raimi, but that was an old location, and then they moved one block near Kirby. So, you worked near Kirby? Was that--

JJ: Yeah. Sfire Brothers. Across the street from Przybylski.

MK: Przybylski on the corner. I remember Przybylski.

JJ: My brother worked, my brother married the girl that was working at Przybylski's. And she lived in the first block off of--

CJ: Kirby.

JJ: Tony and Joann. When I worked at Sfire Brothers, even then, I'm talking about 1934, there were people mixed marriages, whites and blacks. And usually if it was a white woman she came in shopping to the store and her husband, they weren't rich enough to have a car so they had a pull cart. She'd buy the groceries and she said, "I'll take them out." I says, "No, no, too heavy. I'm gonna take them out for you." She was hiding the fact that was black husband. So I put it in the cart. I didn't make anything of it. Tell you something funny. Working at Sfire Brothers people would come in sometimes, buy a whole crate of eggs. Whole crate. I'd put it on my back and I carried it wherever they want to go. Here was snow on the ground and there was a one dollar bill laying in the snow. And I'm following this man. He's says, you know, "Follow me." What do I do about that dollar? So I just took some snow and covered the dollar up took it to his car and hurried like hell get to the store, get it out. Why was that dollar so important to me? At Sfire Brothers we'd start at six in the morning, work till midnight. That's eighteen hours. Two dollars--for the whole time. It comes out to 14 cents an hour. So that was a half a day's wages. When you were still in the store and working and you took a break to eat, I would go and get a pie and get a quart of milk.

MK: From where?

JJ: From there--but you had to pay for it. So I'd eat it, see. I couldn't afford to go to the restaurant, two dollars a day. But Frank Kalish, who was the manager, he had me do something that he wouldn't trust the others. When they were checking out you know

they didn't have money. They just give you a ticket and you had to go the center and pay the cashier and pick your groceries up. I had to watch to see that somebody wouldn't pass him without ringing it up. Or a turkey or, you know, something expensive. That was my job to spot it. I didn't have to catch anybody. The fact that I stood there they knew, you know. I was the policeman that was watching. You know what I got for that? On the way home, Saturday night at one, twelve o'clock, there was a dollar inside of my jacket. Frank paid me that out of his pocket not the owner's, his. Because he figured I earned that, see. But imagine, you know, you can't get kids to work in a hamburger joint for five dollars or seven dollars an hour now. I worked eighteen hours for two dollars and I'm here, 87 years old.

MK: Let me ask you, you mentioned mixed marriages. When do you remember Black people in the neighborhood? Were there Black people there? Obviously, they must have been there very early on.

JJ: Yes and no. Who was the piano teacher on Boulevard and--

CJ: I don't know her name.

JJ: Black woman.

CJ: She was a Black woman.

JJ: She lived on the Boulevard which is the better part.

MK: Right. Big homes.

JJ: And she instructed kids in piano lessons.

MK: So there were mixed marriages, you say? You saw mixed marriages?

JJ: Well, we knew if she worked there but we didn't know who her husband was.

MK: But you said the woman came in, you know--

JJ: Yeah, yeah.

MK: Do you know if there were any mixed marriages between Polish people and Blacks?

JJ: Well I suppose she was Polish. Because, mostly if you were white, you probably were Polish. There weren't other nationalities.

MK: There weren't?

JJ: No, no. There was either Polish or nothing. Except for a few--

CJ: Kashubes.

JJ: Kashubes.

MK: They're sort of Polish anyway.

JJ: Well they're a distinct nationality, by themselves. If you really go into the origin. We, the people that lived next door to my grandfather, they were real Kashubes. They were really Kashubes. And one thing that's in that book there if you read it. I remember when we used to go to St. Hyacinth Church there were Kashubes there. Because that was predominantly, it was THE Kashube church. You go in the pew like for high mass, and they had *tapetnica*. That's a little snuff package. And they passed it down the--and if I was there with my father and my uncle I had to make out like I'm sniffing. And man, they were sneezing, ahh. But they were industrial people, they were hard drinkers, good workers, good friends, but don't make them enemies.

MK: Excuse me, I just got a page.

Break

MK: You were talking about the Kashubian part of St. Hyacinth.

JJ: Yea, they kind of stuck together, clannish you might say, which is understandable because their language is not like Polish. It's different. If you talk to them long enough you catch on. But I could only get about one third of what they were saying. But you got the gist, you know. We got along with them real good. My grandfather and them were neighbors forever. Her cousin married a Kashube. Remember Leonard Klaba?

CJ: He was a Kashube?

JJ: Yeah, now he was the baby of the family but he still could say enough to make fun of them. He was laughing at his parents and grandparents and he was the youngest. He just died about a year ago. And.--

MK: So, you worked at [Sfires], there from '34 to '36. And then where did you work?

JJ: Oh, I didn't work there steady. I worked there only like on their busy days, Saturdays. Heck, they didn't have a--you know, my brother Tony worked there more than I did. But I started working for the city of Detroit in 1937, when I was twenty years and six months. I went in there and I worked there until Coleman Young got in and then after I had 37 years out of the blue, they said, "You're starting on vacation tomorrow and after that you're on pension." I was 59, affirmative action says that Blacks have preference over white. So here I worked from '37 to '54 [he meant 74] and they kicked me out. Fifty nine, you don't get any social security. You gotta wait till 62. Then you get a reduced one. And she gets a reduced one. So we're hurting. But I'm here.

MK: So, what year did you guys get married?

JJ: '41.

MK: Did you have your own house at that point or not?

JJ: No, once we got married then yeah.

MK: Where did you live?

CJ: We lived on Palmer for a while.

JJ: Oh, yeah, in my mother's house at 3692. She kept the house. When they moved on Ferry they kept the house. And then we were the first ones to move in. We lived there about a year or so.

MK: And then where?

JJ: Then we bought the house on Ferry.

MK: What number on Ferry was your house?

CJ: 3638 right?

JJ: Yeah.

MK: That's the house you lived in for most--

JJ: Until we bought this one.

MK: Until you bought this one.

JJ: Until 1974. We've been here twenty, from '74.

MK: Twenty seven, twenty eight years.

JJ: Yeah.

MK: So when you, do you remember other stores? I'm thinking I can remember as a child some of the stores. I mean, I remember Margolis Furniture. There were a lot of furniture stores on the street. Maliszewski.

JJ: Maliszewski, he was high class. Perkowski.

MK: Margolis, and I remember there were a lot of bars too. I didn't go to bars as a kid, you know.

JJ: Yeah, they had a write up in the paper, you know the church paper, that there were more bars than any other business in the area. But there was a reason for it. I told you why. The men that slept in the rooming houses, once they got out of bed they just washed up and left. And they didn't come back except to sleep. In the meantime, they went on Chene Street to the bars and there they could go on and get their free sandwiches and pretzels and whatever else they had. They had those little kielbasas there. So that's why there were so many bars. There was more bars, I think they made a joke of it. There were more bars than all the other businesses together, you know, numerically.

MK: So the only one left now is New Elk. That's still there.

JJ: What, the one on Chene Street used to be Martin's.

MK: I remember Martins.

JJ: Martin's. Their son was to St. Hyacinth's on nativity, church on Christmas Eve. He was saying mass, concelebrating with the pastor. Marcinkowski. Marcinkowski, Martin's Bar. So I said to him, I says, "Father," you know and he's younger than me but I'm saying Father. I says, "When I was a kid I used to patronize your father's restaurant." He says, "I hope you only ate there and not drank." Well they used to have good food. And those farmers that keep their market they all went to Marcink--Martin's because they had real good, all the best,

MK: Polish food.

JJ: Well, I liked their roast veal. They had roast veal with onion, and carrots, and celery. That was really good. But he was there and he was, they're going with censer, and the pastor, Fr. Skalski, says that the censer that you smell was brought here from Jerusalem, because Fr. Marcinkowski was in Jerusalem and he was stationed in Rome. So here, the bar owner's son is stationed in Rome in the Vatican, some kind of job. And he came to the old neighborhood, you know, for Christmas Mass. So--

JJ: So what other restaurants do you remember?

JJ: We didn't go to restaurants. We couldn't afford them. Right? But I'll tell you where Sfire Brothers used to be there by the library. On the second floor there used to be a high class restaurant, a real sit down tablecloth restaurant. Second floor, not on the ground floor. See, they cater only, not to the street trade. Customers that were regulars. But we never went there.

MK: What about like--I'm going to be talking in about a week. I have an interview with Ed Nowak, who had, they had the Nowak Hardware store. Do you remember that one?

JJ: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. But that was near Palmer.

MK: Right it was right by Palmer.

JJ: Yeah. Yeah, we went to their store. Yeah. That's all gone now. I go out there and that Chene Street is enough to make you cry.

MK: I know. But there were a couple of Woolworth stores on Chene?

CJ: Yeah, one.

MK: There was one by Lyman.

JJ: Yeah. Adele? Lyman. My sister used to work in that one. My sister did, The youngest sister. Not Genevieve that was here at the table. Our younger sister. She was the baby. She used to work there. And--

MK: Which one, the Lyman one or the one by Kroger?

JJ: Lyman. She was there. She had the habit if there were elderly people and they made a purchase, she walked to them and hold the door open. As they were leaving she would hold the door, you know courtesy. The manager of the store said, "Virg, come over here, I wanna say something. You don't have to do that. In fact you shouldn't do that. You shouldn't favor certain, you know." And she says, "Mr. So and So when it's Christmas time and those people come in here with little gift wrapped packages, do you get any or do I get them all?" See what I mean? She was getting homemade stuff, knick knacks that they brought for her. He didn't get any.

MK: What was her first name?

JJ: Virginia. Her son, that Jimmy, he put this book up, with my assistance, the one you saw. He's a good guy. Well when Virginia worked at one of the restaurants on Chene Street, she had to work because her husband, he got some kind of manic depression. RC Mahone didn't promote him. He was in line for the job, he didn't get it. They gave it to another guy and after that he just wouldn't go to work. So she had to work. So she was in this restaurant in the morning this owner of restaurant says, "When you get this stuff out of the refrigerator," he says, "take that moldy stuff off like this." You know. And you know what she did? She took this plate, she says, "See that?" She says, "Would you eat this? Would you eat it?" She put it in his face. Of course she got fired, you know. But she was that strong of, you know, conviction that--you know, if you if you don't eat it don't sell it to somebody else. Because how the-- like you had that rotten cookies. See what I mean? So she was a very--she'd be so proud of her family. [To Clara:] You don't have that picture that Richard took, isn't it in there? That Life magazine, that picture, is it still there? No it wouldn't be here.

MK: Do you remember the Frank Jaworski stores?

JJ: Oh yes, Ochylski too and Koszorek. Well--

MK: What were the differences between them? What did people choose between Jaworski and Ochylski and Koszorek?

JJ: Ochylski had a wide range of meat. You could buy any kind of meat.

CJ: And Koszorek and Jaworski had mostly lunch meats.

JJ: And sausages. Now Koszorek and Jaworski were the same thing only competitors. But you go to like Ochylski or next door to him was a Jewish place. That was the place.

MK: What was the name of it do you remember?

JJ: Chene something [Premier Dairy Products]. But anyway, his was strictly Jewish. You walked in and they still had sawdust on the floor. And they had barrels or tubs, wooden tubs. Actually wooden not plastic. Nobody invented plastic. They had these wooden tubs, like a half a barrel and they had lids on them and then they had spoons there and then they had little like what would you call it?--little trays. They were stapled at two ends. They were made then out of wood, real thin wood and shaped like a little bolt and you put on whatever you wanted. In Polish you called it *powidla*, they had raspberry, strawberry, prunes, peanut butter, everything, and then you waited and whatever, you paid for it. Then they had something that, it never got repeated, herrings. They had two barrels, the raw herrings and the marinated ones. Marinated ones were the ones that had marinade in it and onions, carrots, celery, and all kind of spices, vinegar, and whatever. And they had special ones, the fat ones, *szmalcówki*, *szmalcówki*, *szmalc*, Jewish for lard Polish lard. Those were the fat ones. At that time you paid thirty five cents you got a *szmalcówki*, 25 cents for the--

MK: Was this before the war or, are we talking before the war?

JJ: Yeah, once the war came in and they didn't bring in that stuff from the old country. See that came from Denmark. Those herrings were Danish herrings. And they took them only in the winter time when it was cold enough so they wouldn't spoil. And they always had those two kind. We went for the prepared ones because they were select, they were nice fat ones. And then they had cookies, the boxes were square boxes with a glass lid on it. You tipped them up. The only thing is, Meijers has them now. You know that and here's a bulk store. You could get cookies by the pound you know and then they had all kind of cereals and grains, rice and coffee and anything. That was in those Jewish stores. They were very popular because you could buy as little or as much as you want. Right, your mother went there a lot. Right?

CJ: Yeah, you buy by the pound, half a pound.

MK: This store was on what block now, where was it exactly?

JJ: It was in the middle between Ferry and Kirby on the west side of the street.

MK: Were these--let's say this store, right here, the Jewish store, were these Jews, were they Orthodox Jews? Did they dress as or were they pretty assimilated Jews.

JJ: No, no like you say assimilated they were very much with the community. They didn't stand out. No. Fact is until we moved here in Warren, you see with the yarmulke. I see that in Warren that we didn't see there. They did observe the holidays, you know when the high holy days. And I know about **chucki**. My mother worked for very wealthy Jewish people. Off of Pingree, Woodward Avenue. Pingree. They had those high rise apartments. And they were Orthodox. And she learned the Jewish from them. She said they treated her like a daughter. She was a live in maid. And she learned the Jewish from them. They wouldn't strike a match to light even a candle of during the high holy days. No you couldn't. The other thing about Jews, they had to live within walking distance of a synagogue. On their holidays they could not take a horse and wagon, they had to walk. That's why they had like Catholic churches, numerous parishes. Well that's how they were. But she learned a lot from them. Business acumen too. Because you cannot take it away from them, they're good business people. They're born with that thing. Can I tell you a Jewish story on this?

MK: Sure go ahead.

JJ: There was a Jewish man whose son was growing up. He was around 12 years old so the father says, "I want to talk to you." He says, "So I can make my point you have to climb on this table and I'll be talking to you and you do what I tell you." So the son, huh, he agreed. So he got on the table and he says, "Now walk." And the son is walking walking And he come to the edge of the table. He says, "Walk." He says, "Daddy, if I take another step, I will fall on the floor and fall on my face." He says, "I am your father and I'm telling you, take a walk." So the kid steps off and falls and he's crying. He says, "Sonny, you just learned the first lesson in business. You can't trust your father." I tell that to priests and everything.

Another Jewish story. In the old country in Poland, they had *wioska*, village, they had *karczma*, *karczma*. And the Jewish owner of the *karczma* had a beautiful Jewish daughter. On the *folwark*, the estate, the Polish owner had a son and they met up with this daughter, that son and the girl, and nature took its course and she got pregnant. So the *karczma* owner went to the and he says, "*Panie*," and they used all kind of honorary terms. He says, "I respect you this and this but" he says, "I know you're a Christian and I'm Jewish and our kids got together and they're going to have a baby. So what do you think you should do?" So the owner of this estate says, "Well that's okay. When the boy is born, you can send him to the best college, give him the best education in business so he'd be successful man." "Ok, *dobrze, dobrze, dobrze* but if it's a daughter?" "Well if it's a daughter, you know how it is. They don't go to school. I would make up a dowry better than you could afford and she would be a rich woman. She can marry anybody she wants." *Dobrze, dobrze, dobrze*, He says, "What if it's twins? What if she has a son and a daughter?" The man says, "I'll double it. Kid goes to college, she gets the dowry." And they shake hands on it and he's walking out the door and the Jewish man turns

around and he says, “OK *Panie, Wielmożny Magnacie*, what if she has a miscarriage? Will you give her another chance?” You got it?

I know lots of them. And you know who I learned them from? My uncle the farmer. See when we used, we kids used to go on the farm, there was no television, no radio no nothing. We sat in the circle and everybody told stories. I was a kid, I was sitting there and, you know, big ears, listening. I can still remember. And those people that were there working on the farm, they were migrant workers. They traveled all over the world, including the Orient. But then they had no jobs so they worked on his farm for minimal wages good food. But one of the things was they wanted to have one or two shots even during dry times. So he had to get whiskey. They had to have it. You know they’re addicts. And the stories they told, I remember. Some of them are fantastic. BUT they came to pass.

My grandfather, he was 16 years in the Russian tsarist army. My grandfather--sixteen years! So when he came out, he married Eleanor, my grandmother. And the age, you see there’s 20, 16 years difference between their ages. Then he would tell us the story. You know, like they got Afghanistan? He served in the Russian army that was even then fighting like they’re still fighting now in that--what is that--Chechyna? They were fighting then! They took form Poland, from Poland, conscripts, no volunteers, all conscripts, you know. And they marched them. No wagons, no trains, no horses--marched them on foot all across Poland, across Ukraine, Romania all the way to where I’m talking about is Kazakhstan. Six years they marched – six years! When they go there you know what happened? Oh! Why were they going there? Tsar Alexander wanted to kick the Turks out of the Holy Land, like now. He wanted to kick them out because they were sacrilegious in the way they treated the holy, the sepulcher and that. He wanted to kick them out. When they got there, the war was over so they said to those Polish conscripts go on home. Took him six years. You know how long it took him to get back? Three years. Yeah, see so when he got outta the--he says, “None of my kids are gonna grow up to be soldiers in the army.” That’s why he came here. That’s the motivation. He had land. He was a landowner in Poland. But to get out of the country they had to make out like they went across the line to Pomerania. And then from there they went to Bremen. But they couldn’t sell the land because that’d tip them off. That land--

MK: Disappeared.

JJ: Yeah, I can tell you the stories about what happened in the old country that they told me.

MK: I wanted to ask you some more about some of the theaters. Fredro, because Fredro was originally a real theater, not a movie theater. They had a stage. Did you ever go see anything at the Fredro?

JJ: No.

MK: And then it became a movie theater and did you ever go to the movie theaters on Chene Street?

JJ: Movies yeah.

CJ: Iris. That's where I got the dishes.

MK: What about the Home, did you ever go to the Home Theater?

JJ: We went. We didn't go there on our own. See what happened is my uncle, the twin of my father. He never married. So he was good to his nieces and nephews. And he would take us. He was a bachelor, single. He liked kids. It's too bad he didn't marry because he--but that's what he did, he would take us and not only there, but when we got older, I was in the Fox when it opened. I was in the State. I was in the Michigan and Broadway. All those. He took me. But we used streetcar to go down there. So even when the Fox was playing it was 75 cents admission, you know. Then it was a lot of money. But he was a good man.

MK: What about like--do you remember at all, down towards the Boulevard there was that bowling alley. Do you remember the Chene Trombly--

JJ: Oh yeah, Chene yeah. But we didn't--

MK: --Rec. Or the Chene Trombly Market across the street?

JJ: Yeah, yeah. How do you know all this?

MK: Well I remember them. We used to get bagels every Sunday from Chene Trombly Market.

CJ: Well you lived over here.

MK: When I lived on Elmwood, when we lived on Elmwood and then, I lived on Elmwood between Palmer and Ferry.

JJ: And you walked there.

MK: Yeah, we walked there. I used to walk with my mother all the way. We used to go down all these stores. I remember them all. You know, I remember especially those the area you said, essentially from Canfield to the Boulevard, I knew it very well. We used to go Dom Polski you know.

JJ: Well she lived in the same block as Dom Polski. That's closer to the alley toward Chene and she lived at the other end of block. They were at this alley and she was at the other alley, Dom Polski. My sister that one that worked on Chene Street, that Virginia. She and the one that you saw

MK: Right, Genevieve--

JJ: Genevieve and Virginia, they both went to Dom Polski. And they were there and Virginia, she says, "I wonder what this Jaczkowski looks like?" Her name is Jackowski and Jaczkowski. And they asked him. And that's where she met him and you know they got married and she had seven kids with him. So something was pretty good. But anyway how did they get that z there? That Jaczkowski, that's Virginia's father-in-law, he had a falling out with his brother in Cleveland. They were on the outs. So that one in Cleveland says, "I got nothing to do with you. I'm not a Jackowski anymore." He put the z in.

MK: So the z was second. So it was originally without the z.

JJ: Yeah, yeah, yeah. But that's see how people can be for generations, his stubbornness, his animosity to his own brother carried on for generations. See that's like when you throw a rock into a lake, waves all over. What he did was stupid. I tell that to my nephew who's his father. And you know he kind of agrees with me. Jim's a nice— my nephew--we get along like this but.

MK: Which one is this?

JJ: That's the oldest, Jim. He was the father of the bride at the wedding. Of course you went to the wedding. Was a big wedding at St. Hyacinth's. They had Father Skalski and they had a Black priest from Africa, he was celebrating. And a third one, what was the third one? From Florida? Kaczorowski?

CJ: No the other one from Orchard Lake. **Okuczbowski** was there too.

JJ: Yeah, there were five priests but only three concelebrating.

MK: Did you ever go to St. Stanislaus?

JJ: Oh yeah. Beautiful church. My brother married his wife in St. Stannie's. Did you see what they did to it lately?

MK: Yeah.

JJ: Edison School

MK: Yeah, they renovated that whole school

JJ: Ten million dollars.

MK: They turned into a beautiful school.

JJ: They got elevators in there and the principal is a kind of a hazel complexion, she isn't darker than these furniture, Negro woman, nice, very presentable. Very pleasant woman. That's wonderful they did out there. And they gotta waiting list that long for kids. My daughter works at Bishop Gallagher, which is now called Trinity. St. Florian's, Bishop Gallagher, and a third school joined up. It's Trinity. She works there. She's not a nun, she's a married woman, and she looks after the accounts. They are infamous for being delinquent with their tuition. So she has to be on their butt to keep up their tuition. Because all at once it's a big pile. So she that's her job. She's working there right now. Oh no, now she's home. But that's her job. So Trinity, if you ever hear of Trinity three schools.

MK: There used to be a bakery near the church, near St. Hyacinth.

JJ: Oh yea right across the street.

MK: Singer, Singer Bakery?

JJ: Oh that one.

MK: What's the story on that one? Who was he, who were they?

JJ: That was across Elmwood and on the corner of Farnsworth. So the church was here, it was across.

MK: Kind of kitty corner?

JJ: Yeah, yeah, that went down so long ago nobody knows. Even Fr. Skalski doesn't know there was a Singer Bakery. Yeah, but that was a bakery that used to--they didn't depend on the local trade. They delivered to groceries.

MK: They were more a commercial bakery?

JJ: Yeah, they had a clientele that, independent grocers that would have some come in

MK: Were they Polish?

JJ: I think they were.

MK: The name sounds Jewish even.

JJ: Well?

CJ: And there was one on McDougall and Frederick.

MK: McDougall and Frederick.

JJ: There was?

MK: No kidding. What was the name of that one? I can't remember that.

JJ: The house we owned on Ferry before we moved here was owned by a woman that worked--

CJ: She was working there.

JJ: Before we bought the house, the apples that came from our backyard went into the pies on that Frederick and Palmer. And when we bought the house the apple tree was so big we couldn't grow any vegetable underneath it. So her father, my father, and my uncle they were pulling the rope and I was cutting it and when I cut it the tree tips over and they all fell on their butts. You know they didn't expect it to fall that quick. Apple trees crack quick. But that was a smaller bakery. It lasted until the minority took over. It wasn't safe anymore. People, well people, the neighborhood people moved out so they didn't have enough trade. You know. Because you have to depend on local trade. Next door to her when her parents lived on Ferry the bakery, right across the alley, Ochocki, they had a bakery too.

MK: What about there used to be on the corner of Ferry and Elmwood there was a bar. Do you remember that bar?

JJ: There were two bars.

MK: There was a big brick, it was like a red brick.

JJ: No the yellow brick—

MK: Yellow brick. It was yellow brick.

JJ: It was a yellow brick. On the other side was a frame. They were right across the street from each other. How they stayed in business I don't know. That got torn down only about two years ago, that big yellow one.

MK: No kidding?

JJ: Yeah, yeah. They stayed there a long time. And across the street where the bar was they tore that down and the city put on a HUD house. It only lasted about six years and they demolished it.

MK: Do you know who owned that bar?

JJ: No. See we were not bar people. Even our parents, like her father and my father they were friends. They knew themselves before we met. And they didn't go to bars.

CJ: Ferry and Moran that's Zmijewski?.

JJ: Oh that's relatives, right? Rosie, Rosie? Was your aunt.

CJ: Yeah. But they weren't relatives to us.

JJ: The bakery and across the street on Ferry there was a bakery, Moran Theater, Grzescianek and Zmijewski. She had a white fur coat and everybody knew who she was because she came in that first pew with a big, year after year, that furskin coat.

MK: Her name was Zmijewski?

JJ: Yeah like snake, Zmijewski.

MK: Do you remember the Lutnia house?

JJ: Yeah,

MK: I think I mentioned, I went to Polish school there for a number of years.

JJ: Oh it's all overgrown. It's still standing. They got a big cyclone fence around it and it says "Keep Out." It's still standing. Yeah, and right across the street from Lutnia was a fire station. And they had a horse drawn fire truck.

MK: I saw a picture of that fire station from the 1920s. It had a tower.

JJ: Yep.

MK: But it doesn't have a tower now [yes it does].

JJ: No, they actually looked to see where the fire was [not true, see Kaperzinski interview].

MK: Oh that's what it was.

JJ: Those towers had a staircase that you went out to see their observation, actually so. There were some terrific size fires but they had a two horse drawn steam boiler that was to get pressure to.

MK: Do you remember there also used to be a library on Grand Boulevard, the Butzel, Butzel Branch library? Was that there early on?

JJ: Yeah. Oh yeah.

MK: So even before the war that was there?

JJ: Yeah. See the Butzel people were Jewish people. They were quite wealthy and they were civic minded. They built up Butzel. Oh I cried when that library got torn down.

MK: Why was it torn down? It was such a solid building.

JJ: It was beautiful! It was architecturally it was a gem. They had all solid--

MK: Right, why did they tear it down?

JJ: I'll tell you something. One day I met three women, they were all Claras, she was one and the other two they both worked for the library. So while I'm working for the city, all at once I get a--from Clara Booth, she's with the library commission. She wants me to come and address a dinner they were having. I says, "Why?" I'm working in the city of Detroit in the, well it was like a garage, maintenance, you know, all the fleet. "I says, "What've I got to do with that?" "We want you to come." So, the question was, we want your idea because I was a innovator. She said, "We want to consider abolishing branch libraries and having mobile vans to take books to—" like for a while they had these swimming pools, remember? Kids used to go there. Tuesdays and Thursdays. "We want that."

I said, "Let me ask you a question and you will answer your question. "Who did the most for the horse? Who did the most for the horse?" So they said the well Belgians had the Belgian horses. The English had the race horses and the Indians had the ponies on the desert, the Arabs had the beautiful stallions and everything. You figure any one of them, they were saying this is it. I says, "No, you're all wrong." I says, "You know who did the most for the horse? Henry Ford. He eliminated the horse. You're doing that with the libraries. The minute you do that you're gonna do."

MK: This is Marian Krzyzowski and I'm at the home of Mr. John and Clara Jackowski in Warren, and today is November 12, 2002. And we're continuing our discussion about Chene Street businesses. So you were saying something about the Ivanhoe Café.

JJ: Yeah. The Ivanhoe Café, the family that owned it were Sobczak. And I had, in fact when they were remodeling the bar, I got some of the tiles, ceramic tiles that were part of their bar. But the top bar was marble, and the sides were ceramic tile. So Mrs. Sobczak expressed a interest in it and she was gonna see what she could do about it. So the two ladies came over to the house, elderly as they were, they managed very well. They carried it out of the basement and took it. But in front of that bar there used to be a cast iron trough. It was set up by the City of Detroit Water Board, and it had some kind of a mechanism where the water came up to a certain level and shut off. They had a cantilever there and whenever the horses drank water, more water came in. Now, at that time, when this thing was in use, there were people that were junk collectors and people that used to be vendors. They used to go with a horse and wagon and sell vegetables. On Fridays they always sold fish. They had big crates of ice and they had the fish in the ice, and when you picked out the fish that you wanted [phone call]. So during the week that these Chene men that were selling the fresh fish, they used to either sell vegetables, or they were

going through the alleys and they were junk collectors. And strange thing at that time, that they used to buy soup bones. So I was just a little kid, so I used to save up soup bones, and I asked him, what do they do with those soup bones after they give me three cents a pound for them. Well, they made buttons. They actually made bone buttons. And when these men with the horse and wagon, they'd also collect newspapers. And they would pull up in front of Ivanhoe Bar and I saw them do it, they would take a pale of water and slush it over the, over the newspapers so they would have additional weight. So I was thinking, you know, that they were cheating whoever they were selling the paper to. They sold, they bought everything, brass, and the kids had to, that was ancient recycling. You had to have brass, and lead, copper, all different piles, and then they'd give you ten cents for this pile and then that. And that I associate with Ivanhoe Bar because of the fact that that was one place they could depend to get water. So much for Ivanhoe Bar. But on Chene Street, itself, there were a lot of establishments that were surprisingly numerous considering the time of the happening. They had a lot of photographers. Real good photographers. And the equipment they had in their studios were top of the line. We had occasion to copy some, and at that time the men wore shoes with buttons. And you had to have a button hook to hook the button through the hole. And my nephew enlarged some of those pictures that were from the studio, and these were about from the year 1910 and 1912. And when he enlarged them he said, "Uncle, I can get such clear enlargements that I can tell the name of the manufacturer of the buttons on the shoes." That's how clear they were. And I said, "How can you do that?" He says, "Well, we had to start out with a photographer that had real good equipment that made true pictures." I've got some of those pictures. So there were several of them like that. And their main business was taking pictures of weddings, anniversary groups, of family get togethers, and, the very popular was when the babies were a year old, two years and three, the parents used to take him for pictures.

CJ: First Communion, too

JJ: Oh, and First Communion. Thank you. First Communion pictures, too. Because the girls had their, you know, outfits. The boys went to Rathnaw's or what was the other one on Chene and—

CJ: Witkowski

JJ: Witkowski, and the third one, that Polish one across from Nowak Hardware.

MK: Zarembski

JJ: Yeah. Zarembski. We even gone there. And they sold the suits complete. You got the trousers, you got the coat, you even get the shirt, and they even sold you the boutonniere, which was an artificial one. And you were all set except to go the church and go through the ceremony. And that was very profitable because the people, they didn't stint. And to prove that, I have some of these pictures that were taken of young men that came to this country, and these pictures were taken no more than two years after they arrived. And

you'd be surprised at how fastidious they're wearing their clothing. They had clothing that was right up to snuff. You look at them now and it seems the styles are coming back.

MK: Do you remember the names of the studios?

JJ: I'll see if some of them show on the picture. Then I'll recognize them.

MK: I know there was, the ones I've heard are Central Art Studio, then there was Hoffman and there was Genca.

JJ: Genca we don't know about.

MK: Genca was on the corner of Medbury and Chene, by St. Stanislaus. But Central Art Studio was on the southern part of Chene. [To Clara:] And how are you doing?

CJ: Better than before. [unintelligible, conversation about health]

JJ: This is my father and his twin brother. Now that picture was taken within—

MK: 1913. Where was that taken?

JJ: This looks like "S," but I don't know.

MK: It's hard to tell.

JJ: Yeah. Now you'll notice how long their suitcoats are. You'll notice that these are twin brothers, but their suits are not identical. One is longer, and the corners of the coats, square and oval. And this is my father and his cousin. You'll notice again that they were taken about the same time, but they have new clothes. How they could afford to be really dressed, you can see they are well dressed. They have neckties and they have shirts, and that's the buttons I was talking about. Now, in that period, this was salvaged from a picture that the kids tore up. That's my grandfather, my grandmother, and that's, one of these two, my father, in here. This is a recent picture to insert, and that's my mother. See, so these are also copied from real old pictures. And they remarked how good they were. Now, see, my family's got nephews that can take little snapshots and blow them up. This is at St. Hyacinth's church for 40 Hours, Boze Cialo, you know what they have--

MK: Right.

JJ: My father and his brother—twin brother—are carrying the church banner. That banner happens to be St. Hyacinth's, I can recognize it. Now nobody noticed this, I just noticed it this morning. This enlargement, I can see this lady, and she's with the Ladies' Society—Bractwo Matek? Right?

CJ: Who?

JJ: Society, Ladies' Society, Bractwo Matek.

CJ: Oh, yeah.

JJ: And that's my mother, because I recognize the purse she's carrying. And her mother used to be, probably, accompanying her in the procession. So they were gonna—

MK: Where is this exactly, or this is what, what building is this?

JJ: That's a house that doesn't exist. It's on the corner of Elmwood and Farnsworth. They were turning the corner. See—

MK: So is this Farnsworth?

JJ: Farnsworth this way. Elmwood goes this way.

MK: So what are they walking?

JJ: They walk around the church. See, the whole block. So during the beginning of the thing the priest comes out; he was following, probably, behind them here. And they had that—

MK: The banner?

JJ: No, like a tent. The four—

CJ: Four poles.

MK: Right. Okay, yeah. Yeah.

JJ: You seen them, in the old country. And here too, they held it over the monstrance—

MK: Right, right.

JJ: So that birds or whatever, and they would leave the church, and this is the block, and this is where the main door is, they would go like this. They'd go, McDougall to Frederick, this way, and then from Elmwood, then they went here to Farnsworth, and they came back in. But after they left the main altar of the church, there was a sisters' convent that was decorated with flowers and candles. Then on the corner was another one. On Elmwood there wasn't any. Then here and here were two. This one was a rectory. So there were four outside altars. East, west, north, and south. Then they went back in the church.

MK: And where is this picture in this scheme of things? Where are they walking? Can you recognize where they're at?

JJ: Here.

MK: So they're on Elmwood?

JJ: Yeah. Elmwood, they—

MK: They're heading towards Farnsworth.

JJ: Farnsworth. And they they were gonna turn. See, the steps are here. And then they turned. And people who owned those houses, you know, they were parishioners and they decorated them with all kind of flowers and candles and it was a big thing. And all the time, the church bells were ringing, you know, real loud. Four church bells. And then they were playing—sometimes they had a band. And the people would be singing religious songs. It was real good. At that time, the city administration in Detroit was white. So if they notified you, they came, the day or two before, and they swept the streets. You know, the machine swept, so it put everything all nice and clean. So I remember that, and this picture, I just got this about two weeks ago. My nephew found it and he says, “Can you tell me which is my father?” Well I says, “Yeah, I can tell you. This is my father and that's my uncle, because my uncle was the one that liked, the straw hat, see. So that's him. They're identical. Nobody can tell them apart. Then here, you see, the lady with the purse—

MK: The convent, which was located on Frederick past the school, can you describe the convent? What did it look like? What did the convent look like?

JJ: Originally, you have it probably in the old books, but originally it was a wooden-frame house. They bought a house that was there, a residence, the biggest one, frame house. It had wooden siding on it, white. And then they renovated it so they made rooms for the nuns. They had as many as twelve nuns living in it. Each one had a separate room. And then they improved that property by putting a brick veneer. So that sisters' home—they never called it a convent; they called it a sisters' home—had the same outward that blended with the church. The church and the sisters' home was the same brick structure. Underneath the ground they were connected to the central heating plant, which was in the old church. When they built the new church, that old furnace that was in the original church provided heat to the church, and to the school, and to the convent, under ground. It was steam heat. To this day they still have the cast iron furnaces, you know the radiators in the church, very expensive to maintain. They paid six thousand dollars for the sisters' home. Then the improvements, I don't know how much they cost. But later, when they were going to renovate something, the city said it's got asbestos. Well the asbestos was the ceilings that were soundproof, and what the hell you call it—insulation—and on the furnace pipes that came from the main vent, the pipes were wrapped in asbestos. The parish paid thirty-eight thousand dollars to demolish and remove the debris for something that originally cost six thousand. So they paid six thousand and it was a plain old frame house. Then when they tore it down, thirty eight thousand dollars. Since then it became the parking lot behind the church.

MK: Where was the old church?

JJ: The old church, the original church, was in a house on the corner of Theodore and McDougall. There was a house on the rear of the property. And on the front, they considered McDougall as commercial, so they had a little store. It was very insignificant, but it had something of a store. And the man that lived in that house let them use that store whenever they needed services. So that's where the first Mass was served. Before that, there was another house. It's in the book. You'll find it in that book. It was just in a residence. It was not like every day, only on a Sunday the priest would come in and say Mass and the people come in, there were maybe twenty people at that. Then, after that, then they built a combined school and church. The school was on the ground floor; the church was on the second floor. And that stayed there until the present church was built. And when it was built, then the second floor was converted into schoolrooms, where I, you know, sixth grade was on the second floor. And there was no partitions except canvas curtains like in hospitals. You know, they separated it. And the pews of the church were still there, and the kids sat on the kneelers and they used the seats to—

MK: To write on

JJ: Write on. Until they built the new church. And then they ripped this out and then they, regulation schools.

MK: Okay.

JJ: That was before the city had anything to do with what schools had to be, you know. There was no, no—

MK: Right. Let me ask you, okay, I listened to your interview and I had some questions I wasn't really clear about. One of them goes way back to your family back in Pittsburgh. And you said they were from Schenley Heights. What is—how do you spell Schenley Heights?

JJ: It's the whiskey! S-C-H-E-N-L-E-Y. Schenley. That used to be a distillery, Schenley distillery. Because that was an important business place. You know, they hired people, they had a, people making the whiskey there, you know they were crating it and everything. So that was Schenley Heights. It was a higher part of Pittsburgh. I think the maps still show that Schenley Heights. The brewery isn't there anymore. But it was Schenley brewery.

MK: Okay. You said that your brother Tony worked for Sfire also.

JJ: Yeah.

MK: How's that spelled, Sa-fire?

JJ: It's S-F-I-R-E. But they put in the S-A. To be Lebanese or whatever they were, Chaldean. They pronounced it Sa-Fire. Not Sfire. Sa-fire.

MK: Okay. And is he living? Is Tony living?

JJ: Oh no. No. No. No. He was my sibling by five years.

MK: Oh, older.

JJ: He was younger than me but he died. Yeah. He was five years younger. And he was the strong man. He was the macho guy. And he got cancer and he lived up in Lewiston. You know where Lewiston is.

MK: In Michigan.

JJ: Yeah. And he had a home there with acres and he had a lot of wood. And then he went there where they made fence posts, and when they take logs, and they shave off the round parts, he got those slabs, and he used them in his coal furnace. Not that wooden furnace, because he didn't have any gas out there.

MK: You mentioned the owner of Martin's Restaurant, Mr. Marcinkowski. And you said that his son was a priest. And I wonder if you know the name of Father Marcinkowski and where he is now. Is he still alive?

JJ: Yes, he's alive. He is—he was stationed in Rome for a while. In fact, not last Christmas but the Christmas before, when we were observing that Midnight Mass? He was a co-celebrant and the pastor, Fr. Skalski, said that Fr. Marcinkowski is using the incense burner and the incense came from Jerusalem. Because when he was in Rome, he also went to Jerusalem, and then he got what they consider regional authentic incense. And so he's still alive. Where he's stationed, I don't know. Because he wasn't assigned to a parish. He was working like for the Pope. And he was given different assignments. And so—

MK: Somebody told me, too, that the owner of the Round Bar was named Mackowski.

JJ: Round Bar, I don't even know—

MK: And that he had a son that was a priest, too. You know anything about that?

JJ: No, I don't know what Round Bar was. I don't even know where it was. See, my parents, her parents, they weren't frequenters of commercial drinking places. We did our drinking at home. We bought the what they call hooch or moonshine and you drank at home. Because these other places were—

MK: So where did you buy your hooch or moonshine from?

JJ: Well, it's out of business. But, funny—

MK: But where was it, a private owner?

JJ: Yeah, yeah.

MK: Or was it businesses or—

JJ: No. They were people who made it at home. In fact, the people that we bought it from, their daughter is now Clara's sister-in-law. We used to go—I went with my father—

CJ: Who?

JJ: Dabrowski.

CJ: Oh, Jane.

JJ: Jane's father. They used to make it at home—

CJ: I didn't have any moonshine

JJ: No, no. Well your father went more for beer instead, and beer was made at home. And excellent beer to tell you the truth. I used to go with a pull cart to St. Aubin and Canfield. And that was in back of St. Joseph—no, not St. Josephat—St. Albertus church. Where St. Albertus church stopped and there was a rectory? Then there was a little space and then there was a store, feed store they called it a feed store. And see at that time people kept a lot of chickens and rabbits, so, and pigeons. So they were selling the feed. And he also had the ingredients to make beer. Now the beer that they got, it was already started. You didn't start from scratch. You bought a three-gallon container. It was made out of real thin metal. And it had a wood veneer brace. And you got three gallons of it and you got some malt. And you got some hops. And then you got a piece of paper that tells you how to mix it. And then you took it home and you put in the city water and the sugar and whatever they told you. And your beer fermented, and when it was ready capped it in bottles. I got cappers right now. Two kind, for capping beer bottles. And you'd, you didn't have to use the small beer bottles. You could use any size, because the caps were uniform. And some of the beer was real good. It was so clear, if you made it the right way. Because they also sold you filters. That, you know, when the beer was done, you filtered it and poured it into the containers. And her father's tenant, he used to have real, real good beer. You know who I mean. They lived in your father's house, they made beer, and my father used to go. That's how they knew themselves.

MK: What was your father's name?

CJ: Rybycki.

MK: Rybycki. And his first name?

CJ: William. William. Boleslaw.

JJ: Boleslaw.

MK: Boleslaw, but he went by William?

CJ: Yeah.

JJ: Because how would you spell it, if you say your name is Boleslaw? How you gonna spell it, the people wouldn't understand it. You just say, "Bill." We went, "Bill" [pronounced "Beel."] "Bill," I'm thinking. "Bill."

MK: And your mother's name was?

JJ: Anna.

MK: And what was her maiden name?

JJ: Nowinski

MK: Nowinski?

JJ: Uh-hm.

MK: One of the things I wanted to ask you about, you talked a lot about this Sfire, and next door to them you talked about this Jewish store that had the barrels, the herring in it. I wonder, was that Premier Dairy.

JJ: Could have been.

MK: Because I was looking at the list of stores and you said it was right next door to Ochylski's. And next to Ochylski's on that block, right next to them was Premier Dairy.

JJ: It could be. It really, the "dairy" part was misleading because they didn't stress or favor dairy products. They were a whole menu. You could buy anything there. Because they had herrings and hams and meat products and sausages and they had bulk foods. You could buy grain. You could buy rice, beans, sugar by the pound. They scooped it out, weighed it, and tied it in a paper bag and you bought it in bulk. So those were, you could buy soda crackers by the pound. You didn't buy them in containers. You could get preserves, strawberry, raspberry, prune jelly. Everything was in buckets and you just scooped it out, put it one of those paper containers and they weighed it and that's how we bought it. That stuff was really, really good. Because it was sold, high value turnover, so it wasn't laying on the shelf for one or two years. They opened up a bucket, five, oh it was like a five gallon bucket and inside of a week everything was gone. You had fresh stuff. They sold lard and peanut butter, everything. Talk about, what would you say?

What do they have in that store here on—bulk, bulk stores. But they didn't go into candies, for instance. They didn't go into a lot of fancy candy products. They went more for condiments for the kitchen, you know, that you cook and bake.

MK: You mentioned in your discussion of some of the kids at St. Hyacinth and the priest, who, you'd get into fights with them. What was this priest's name, the spelling of his name? Gramza?

JJ: Yeah. Frank.

MK: G-R-A-M-Z-A?

JJ: Yeah.

MK: But you mentioned notorious groups and I talked to several other people and they mentioned to me the Kirby Street Gang.

JJ: Yeah. Kirby Street Gang.

MK: And they also mentioned the Harper and Palmer Street gangs. And I wonder, what do you know about those gangs?

JJ: Well those were all native boys. In other words, their parents lived in the neighborhood. And like now the call "colors," like they wear something on their clothes that you belong to this gang, to this. Well they didn't have that there. They were mostly closely knit together and they were very loyal to and supportive of each group. And actually they didn't have warfare, you know. They didn't go with weapons and kill each other. But they did get into fistfights, usually over terrain. In other words, if somebody was gonna use a certain area, have a ball game, and they said, "No. We already got rid—this is reserved for us." That they would fight over the fact that they want possession of an area for playing ball. But it didn't get into bloodshed. Mostly fistfights. I never saw a weapon, like a knife or even pistols, none of that. That was just plain old fisticuffs, you just, bare knuckle fights.

MK: So were you involved in those?

JJ: I was too young. I was a delicate physical—I was not a well—I used to be the bookkeeper, I used to keep their books for them.

MK: For which one?

JJ: Kirby. Yeah. So they trusted me with anything they wanted somebody to keep, they knew, until later. They trusted me. And, well, I had the respect, you know. In other words, supposedly I had the brains and the ability to keep these accounts straight. And they never questioned me, so nobody bothered me because Johnny was our man, see, so I didn't have any problems. My brother Tony, he was known as Red. He had red hair and

freckles, so, and he was really good at baseball. He spent most time on the ballpark playing ball. And then we had this playground a couple doors away from our house that the city would put up, this time of year, they would put up a culvert, earth culvert, and then when that froze they took the water from the fire hydrant and plugged it in and it froze over: it was a skating rink. Well, you had that skating rink, you didn't want the surface to be contaminated with tin cans or anything that you would throw in there so they used to have a watch, twenty four hours around the clock. People, kids, volunteered to scare the other kids that were throwing stuff on it, so when the ice froze over it was nice and smooth. You know, you could really skate. And there would be two hundred kids on a night that was, you know, good for skating, and then they would have bonfires to keep warm. So they didn't go like distant places, they didn't have any transportation. So they brought in firewood and had fires going. And there never was too much trouble with those.

MK: Did you have a name, too, like your brother had Red. Did you have a name, too?

JJ: No, I was always Johnny. Always Johnny, yeah.

MK: And the name Kirby Street Gang makes you think that everybody was on Kirby. But you weren't on Kirby—

JJ: No.

MK: Where did the name come from?

JJ: Well, the—

CJ: There was no Ferry Gang.

JJ: No. No. Next block, see, because Ferry joined the Kirby. But the—is this on?

MK: Yeah

JJ: There's a surname there, it was Nowak. N-O-W-A-K. And he was the strong man. He was the Fidel Castro. He—

MK: What was his first name?

JJ: I'm not sure. It'll come back.

MK: Okay.

JJ: But he was the leader. He was the man that said so, and that was what the others agreed, and—

MK: Where did he live?

JJ: On Kirby. That's, see, because his immediate neighbors were the nucleus of this organization. So his friends—relatives—so they didn't call it the Nowak Gang. They called it the Kirby Gang. But they were centered on Kirby. Now my nephews lived on Kirby. But because they were younger, they were too young to be in the gang.

MK: What years are we talking about now?

JJ: Oh, you, that's like Harry's and Joey's, they didn't belong to the Kirby Gang, but that was when they were still single.

CJ: 19—

MK: The thirties?

JJ: Yeah. Yeah. Before the world war. Before World War II. The World War II did, that broke up everything. Every—it just fell all apart. The neighborhood changed. People, you know, got older, they got married and moved out. But World War II, with the, the whole neighborhood kind of disintegrated.

MK: So Nowak was the chief guy. Who else was important in the Kirby Gang? You said you, keeping books.

JJ: Yeah. Well they had, that was silly because they had even tournaments, mind you that you know, you give the idea that there was a gang and it was vicious or rough. But some of the stuff that they brought over to me were hand marbles, they call them "shooters," you know? Agates. And they would have bags and boxes because they'd have games, you know. Well, it would have a contest and so much and some—you know. So they had a lot of it. And they brought it over. And then I had to keep it. I had to identify whose was whose and when they came to claim it, the right people got it, and I was a clearinghouse, see? And it was not mean or vicious. It was, they were contests of skill, you know, they—skating for instance. They would clear the ice and, you know, the best ones were skating like now they have this fancy skiing, iceskating. Well some of those skaters were really, really good. My brother Tony was a good skater. And like I said, the police never had trouble. If the neighbors complained that it was getting noisy they'd come and they'd say, "Well, put out all the fires and that's it for tonight." Tomorrow there'd be another day. But that was where the young guys, because there weren't, see, girls didn't go there. If a girl went there, she would be kind of looked down on, that she was, you know, mixing in with boys. So those were mostly young guys that were skating. Girls did go, but they were there during the day, skating. I got snapshots of people skating there.

MK: Where did the Kirby Gang meet? What was it like? I mean, did you guys meet in houses, or—

CJ: Did you meet anyplace, or did you just—

MK: Where did you keep all this —

JJ: No, they didn't have any offices or any facilities. They just gathered at some location where they're going to have this —

MK: Where were the marbles kept? Where were all these things, you know, that they had?

JJ: Well they brought it to my house.

MK: Oh, to your house.

JJ: In the basement or in the garage. But nobody, you know, they came in and they said, "Well, here, I'm just giving you this stuff," and that was it.

MK: When you say the Kirby Street Gang, what did they consider their turf? What did they consider their area? What was their territory that they felt that they controlled in some way?

JJ: Well I don't think they crossed Chene. You know, up to Chene, this was Mt. Elliott. Between Mt. Elliott and Chene. And then from Warren maybe to the Boulevard. That'd be the extreme. Boulevard to Warren, and Chene to Mt. Elliott. So that would include mostly St. Hyacinth's parish and that's about it. St. Hyacinth's. Because

CJ: Fr. Gramza used to go to Perrien Park.

JJ: Yeah. I've seen him rip his Roman collar off, and it was somebody, you know but because guys who were troublemakers, well he got shiners, too. Yeah.

MK: There were other gangs that you mentioned. Harper Street and Palmer Street Gangs.

JJ: Yeah well that's, see that's from the other side. From Harper, that was St. Thomas church. They had about the same situation. But it —

MK: St. Thomas the Apostle on Miller?

JJ: Yeah. They had the same idea, you know. Because that was popular, the parents didn't mind it at all. Sure, there was some fisticuffs, but that was all over, that was in the old country too, they used to have, like, gangs where they were —

MK: What about Palmer? Palmer was the other side of Chene, or what?

CJ: No.

JJ: No. This side. Yeah. To the Boulevard.

MK: Somebody else was telling me also about a couple organizations that were supposedly involved in really organizing all the numbers and some of the blind pigs. And they mentioned two names: Polish Bank and Villa House. Do you remember those terms used, Polish Bank and Villa House?

JJ: Well, the numbers was an illegal operation. But I don't think that the Police Department got really concerned about it. They tolerated it. It was an outlet for the people, for ladies, grey haired old ladies, they would buy the numbers, they would go to the grocery store, and my brother Tony, who owned a grocery store—

MK: Where was his grocery store?

JJ: On Moran and Frederick.

MK: What was the name of the grocery store?

JJ: Just Tony's.

MK: Tony's?

JJ: Yeah. You know, it was just a, like they said, a pop and mom's store. It would just be his wife and him. They were still young. But see, to make money then, you couldn't just depend on one source of income. And like this, that's a very good example. They owned this, they owned, they didn't own the building. They rented the store. They lived in the apartment behind the store. So when there was no customers, there was, in the kitchen, you know, she'd be cooking, whatever. And there wasn't enough business for them both to be there to substantiate his income. He drove a Tasty Bakery truck. Delivered bread to the grocery stores in the neighborhood. And they would go and get like four hundred loaves of bread of one kind and some cakes and distribute them. Just like milk men, well he was a bread route. And then he would have contact with different grocers. That was his front. That he was delivering bread. But in the meantime, he was also picking up numbers. So his wife in the store, in the grocery store, she took, you know, numbers, and whatever they give for the numbers, and she kept that separately. And then he would be on the route and pick up numbers. And sometimes, the day's receipts would be mostly, they'd come from having the numbers. Because then they had a pick up man that would come and pick up, you know, the tickets, and pay it off. Well he's the guy that, see this was on the honor system. In other words, the pick up man had to trust his distributors, and then in the meantime he had to pay off. If he didn't pay off, well he's out of business. You know, nobody would deal with him. And there was this thing here that I was never clear cut, like between the names. They had territories and how they administered them, I don't know. But Tony said, without the income from the thing, sometimes they wouldn't be able to make a living. So then, when the war came, he was drafted. So he went to the army and she kept the store. Well, it was tough going. But still she had to depend on that numbers. The people still liked to come to her store. They came to the store for—it was a front, you know. So, you know, it's not like going to a residence. And she was very, she's still, you know, part of the family. Tony died, but she's still part of the family. And so

that's how they operated. And that's how a lot of these other numbers businesses were. And some places, like candy stores, they didn't have it. Because candy stores depended mostly on kids. And somehow there was an onus, that you don't want kids—they talk too much, they might steal money. And you didn't want—that was tainted money. So if you were a customer and you knew who they were, you honored it. Like I said, honor system. If they had a winning number, they came to the store and they did that, and you gave it to them. It was, as far as I was concerned, it's no different than these casinos now. Only on a smaller scale. And it was limited to, you know, an area. It wasn't millions. It was a few hundred bucks a week and that's it.

MK: So the names Polish Band and Villa House are the ones that you also heard, that they were—

JJ: Well we didn't know them by name. In other words, that was usually undercover, you know. You know, they didn't broadcast it. They didn't advertise, you know. You might have known where the money was going, or who was clearinghouse, but you didn't care. You cared that if Tony sold you a number, Tony paid off. And then Tony had to make sure that his pick up man, where he got them, I don't know. Because sometimes they'd have to lose money on it. If they had a lot of people hit a number, and Tony would say, "Well, we had a bad day," he says. They paid off a lot of, and then they had to go on this headquarters to back him up. And sometimes they reneged. Sometimes there was a situation where there was too many winners, nobody got paid. How they handled that, I don't know. Well there was bad blood, people got mad, you know, but you know how gambling is, it's addictive. They go back. It's just like drinking or smoking, you figure you're going to make up for it and you never did. Now you take stores that were big stores, like where we worked at Sfires, they didn't get connected with that. That was closer family units. Where you trusted each other.

MK: Somebody else was telling me that there was a section of the neighborhood, south of Hamtramck, but towards the north end Chene, was kind of a no-man's zone. That the Hamtramck and Detroit police were essentially paid off not to go there. And that there were a lot of blind pigs and billiard places where young people were served, and so on. Do you know anything about that?

JJ: No. No. We, in fact, when there was a—oh, I want to tell—shut this off.

MK: Tell me about Father Ripl. I remember him because he was sort of a round pudgy guy.

JJ: Yeah.

MK: Yeah. He wasn't popular?

JJ: Not with me.

MK: Yeah, we didn't think that much of him either, but—

JJ: There you go. I'll tell you one incident. These two guys, these two guys, they died one day apart. They died a day apart.

MK: Your dad and his twin brother?

JJ: They were born the same day, and they died, after they were seventy-some years old. And one lived on Ferry, one lived on Palmer. So I had spoken already with Fr. Ripl, for him to have the funeral Mass for my father. The next day my uncle dies. So then I get Uncle Tony, Tony, and we both go to the rectory, and we says, "Father, dad died yesterday. Wujek Wladek died today. So we want you to have a double funeral." Twins, you know, same Mass. Now Wladek wasn't married. He was a bachelor until he died, until it was the seventies, and died.

MK: His name was, again, Wladyslaw?

JJ: Yeah. So Father Ripl says, "No. You have to have two Masses." I says, "What are you talking about?! They've been members of this parish since 1907 or 1910, whenever, you know the parish, and now, you know, they're twins. He has no family. You know, the people that go to this funeral will also go here, and you say you gotta have two Masses?" I says, "You don't know what you're talking about." I says, "You don't know what you're doing. You got a cigarette in your right hand, you got a cigarette in your left hand, and you're smoking for two—this actually happened. So he realized he had two cigarettes, you know? He was a chain smoker. Okay. So then, I said to my brother, Tony, I says, "Okay. Let's go. We're going to find a priest that's going to have—" He said, "Don't," he said, "We can handle it." And he did.

MK: Who did he find? Who was the priest that you found, do you remember?

CJ: He did.

JJ: What?

CJ: Fr. Ripl finally did.

JJ: Yeah. And they were buried from the same mortuary. You know, from—

CJ: Sobocinski.

JJ: Sobocinski. They were laid head to toe, you know, one casket here and one here. So when the people came there were the two. You're going to have two Masses?

MK: Why do you think he wanted two different Masses?

JJ: I don't know. I don't know.

CJ: Different people would come.

JJ: Yeah, how would the people know?

MK: Did you have to pay for a funeral Mass.

JJ: Oh yeah, you always--

MK: So if you paid for two funeral Masses rather than one—

JJ: I don't know how that came out. Tony handled that end of it.

CJ: Tony did, because Walter lived with Tony.

JJ: Yeah, because Tony kept the house after my grandma died, Tony kept it, and Walter kept living there and she did his laundry, she did his cooking. So they stayed there until he died. It wasn't easy taking care of him because he had two, he had two bouts of cancer and they they had to look out for, so my sister-in-law, Joanne, did a lot of work for her husband's uncle that daughters wouldn't do. She's, and [unintelligible] Joanne would cook a meal and Tony'd bring half the meal to my father, who was also a widower. He'd bring the food over to my father and the other one, Walter was there. He opened the thing, he said, "Pa!" He said, "What?!" He said, "Yesterday's food is still here. You didn't eat it." "I wasn't hungry." So he went and, in the garbage can. He says, "Now here, eat this while I'm here." You know? Tony was strong. I couldn't handle it like he did, but he did. So then these people lived all their lives. They were born together, one hour apart, and two funerals, you know. So I said, "Fr. Ripl, you got your symbols crossed. We will find a church and that's, on it so, because we were there before he did. See? I was very outspoken at that church, there.

MK: What was Bishop Woznicki like?

JJ: Oh, he was a jewel. He was a jewel. He was like this. That was during the Depression. He performed the wedding ceremony, you know, for us.

MK What year was that?

JJ: '41.

MK: 1941.

JJ: And at that time, see, that was just when we got into the war, okay, because Poland got bombed in '39. And we, United States, got in in '41. So times weren't good. And he said, in the rectory, you know, he'd be out in the albana, on the pulpit and he'd say, "I heard that a lot of people are not coming to church because they don't have any money to put into the collection basket." He says, "You were given these envelopes." You know, little paper envelopes. He says, "Take that empty envelope and put it in the basket so I'll

know that you were in church. Because I want to know if you're coming to church. There's need for that." And he said, "If you want to make sure that, when you throw the envelope, that it'll sound like it's got some money, put in a button in it." He said, "Put a big gold button in it and people'll think that it's a half a dollar." Just like that. And, he says, "When it comes to getting married, I heard that some people are getting married in court because they can't afford the church, church ceremony. So let me know when you come for your instructions. I will perform the wedding ceremony. And the wedding breakfast is going to be in the rectory for free. I'll pay for it." You know, for the—and he did that.

MK: So after him came Fr. Rippl?

JJ: Yeah.

MK: And how long did Rippl stay there?

JJ: Well he stayed there until he died. And then this guy here, this guy here, I'm going to let you read this. He was about six years old. Was Mike about six years old when Rippl died? Five years? So Rippl was laid out in church, you know, in front of the--

MK: What year was that? What year did Rippl die?

JJ: I wouldn't know, but you'd have to look at the—But anyway, our grandson, who, he stayed at our house, he was like raised by us. Our daughter lived on the second floor, we lived on the first floor. We owned a house. The back porch was enclosed, so he just walked out the back door, came down, without even changing clothes. And he stayed there, we fed him and everything, then when it was time to go to sleep he went up to his mother's house. On Ferry. That house is still standing. So okay. We took Michael because he was living with us to see Fr. Rippl. So he was still small. He was older than James. But we walked around, you know how you walk around the coffin and pay your respects. You know what he said? "Grandpa, in the morning after he gets a good night's sleep, he'll feel better." I will never forget that. See, he was too young to realize that he was dead. "In the morning after he gets a good night's sleep he'll feel better."

MK: I was going to mention to you, you know I contacted the people at Variety Nut.

JJ: Oh yeah?

MK: Yeah. I called them and—where you worked—and the guy is the grandson of the founders. And he told me he was very interested and he wants to meet me. He's got some photographs of that store on St. Aubin and Forest. And he said that that particular store was run by his grandmother. His grandmother was the manager of that store. Her name was Virginia Champagne. His name was Dean Champagne. But he said that particular store, he had a picture of the store with his grandmother in it. And he said it was in, probably—they operated 1917 to 1926 or something like that. '27. When did you work there?

CJ: I worked there before we got married. We got married about '41? I worked about '38 and that's all I remember.

MK: So she left, I mean, she had left by then. I mean the store was there but she, she was the manager from 1917 to 1926.

JJ: You wouldn't know her.

CJ: No, I wasn't involved then, no.

JJ: She packaged dates. Dates.

CJ: Yeah, the nuts and the dates. Right, honey? It was cheaper then.

JJ: They didn't pay anything, though.

CJ: But they didn't pay much. But then that's why I was going to go to a bridal shop, because I could sew. And you know, so my mother went with me, because I was only 18 at that time—

JJ: The Smigielski bridal shop on Chene Street.

MK: Yeah. Smigiel?

CK: Yeah, and so then, first, she said, yeah, I can come and work for her there. And then my mother said, "Well, how much are you going to pay?" And she says, "Oh," she says, "No," she says. "She's going to learn how to sew."

JJ: She's going to get experience.

CJ: Nothing. No pay. And my mother said, "Well she don't have to learn how to sew because she knows how to sew." And my mother says to me, "No. You're not going there." She said, "Not for nothing." So I didn't go in there.

JJ: What she's wearing now, she sewed that.

CJ: Then I got into the linens shop.

JJ: General Linen.

MK: Which one? Where were they at?

JJ: Where the expressway takes a turn. On 75.

CJ: At Russell, I think.

JJ: Yeah.

MK: Near Russell?

JJ: General Linen. But she was sewing the shirts.

CJ: Yeah, I was, because when I was going to Girls Vocational, I knew how to sew a shirt and like that already.. Because when vacation came, my mother was sewing everything for school for us. So when I got older, well then, I started.

MK: So when did you work at General Linen, what years?

JJ: Just before '41.

CJ: Yeah.

MK: In '41 you went to—when were you at Variety Date, then?

CJ: Well before then.

MK: Before then. Oh. And then you went to General Linen.

CJ: General Linen. Then I worked till I got married.

MK: And that was at Russell and what, Milwaukee or something?

CJ: Yeah, Russell and—

JJ: It's a dead end up there. I don't know if it's still there. Telephone book. But that was owned by Jewish people, and here's how they took advantage of her. Now she was getting paid piecework for sewing shirts. Shirts like they work in the gas stations. You know, those kind of shirts.

CJ: More aprons than shirts.

JJ: You know, rough stuff. But the holidays came around and they wanted her to sew dress shirts for their friends. The boss wanted to give handmade, custom made shirts to his relatives. And pay her the same price for sewing a finished product compared to a stock item, you know what I mean? There's a difference. So they didn't compensate for the time that it takes to finish a product. Mazer-Cressman cigar factory, my aunt worked there. They were making cigars. You know, hand rolling cigars. Christmas came around and they wanted all best grade tobacco leaf made cigars, special, for friends. Not for sale, you know. For friends. They didn't want to pay them any more for making the fancy cigar, compared to just the cheap cigars. Oh, my aunt was married to a socialist, labor activist, you know--

MK: Which aunt?

JJ: The one that lived in Hamtramck. That was this man's—

MK: What was her name?

JJ: It was--

CJ: Ostarski

JJ: His wife.

MK: Ostarski?

JJ: Yeah. Yeah. And on Chene Street they owned a bakery, you know. His son owned a bakery on—

MK: Do you know which one?

JJ: Yeah. Oaza, across from Martha Washington.

MK: Oh yeah, on Campau, yeah.

JJ: So he used to work as foreman at Dodge's and run a bakery, because he'd bake the bread at night. So when they didn't want to make these cigars, the women there, well they had always, you know, somebody's a troublemaker. My aunt was a troublemaker. So they're making the cigars, they took pubic hair and put it in, between the cigars. Unbeknownst.

MK: What was her name? What was her first name?

JJ: Josephine. Yeah, but their son, see their son that owned the bakery, Oaza Bakery? And worked at Dodge's, he lived on Seven Mile and, between Seven and Eight on Yonka. Yonka. And he was, two jobs—foreman of Dodge's, owner at the bakery, and was putting in carpeting at his house. You know, wall to wall carpeting. So his wife, Eleanore, says, "Frank, when are you going to get done with it?" He keeled over. He was dead. Died with his hammer in his hand. See what I mean? Too much work. And she's still living.

JJ: I'm going to have my—Joe, that took the pictures of St. Hyacinth's church—he's going to make copies of this. So he's going to make copies of this and, you know, somebody wants it, okay. And they can send them through the—

MK: Email.

JJ: Yeah. So then they can even get them.

MK: That's great. Well thank you very much. This was wonderful.

JJ: Because they don't, they don't correspond like then.

MK: Well it's a lot easier if you have computers because then you can—

JJ: We have a computer.

MK: You can send emails.

JJ: I cannot run it. I used to be a payroll typist.

[back and forth with CJ]

JJ: I used to be an office worker. I never worked in a factory. Always clerical work. At one time I was a payroll typist. You had a sixteen-inch carriage you had to return it by hand, there was no button returning it. You had to return it. Six copies of paper with carbon paper to make six copies of payrolls. No erasures. The minute you erased it, you had twenty-six names, you had to type that over. No erasures. When you typed, you had to get good copies of your—If I go up there, the minute I hit it like that, so, the minute I go there. Then, my vision, I got cataracts, I couldn't read that, couldn't read that. So they were going to get me an adapter, to magnify it, no, I don't want. No. No.

[break in recording]

JJ: Now, on Chene Street, this happened on Chene Street. It entails a candy store and a photographic studio and a shoe store. Three things. I had a aunt who was my youngest aunt. She was still a single girl and she worked at a candy factory. And in the candy factory, which lasted a long, long time, and they used to make these hand-dipped chocolate candies. So, on the way from work, she'd stop at our house. Then we lived a block away. She'd bring us bunches of hand-dipped, hand-wrapped candies, chocolates. And I had as much as a suit box full of candies. Well what happened is, my mother would always invite the kids from the neighborhood to come here and get candies because they had so much of it. That was the candy part. Now that same aunt that worked in the candy store, I was her favorite grandson. That was easy, because I was the first one. There was no other, so I was her favorite. And then when it got to be that I was a year old, she prevailed on my mother, who was her sister-in-law, to have a regular photographer take a picture of me on my one-year birthday. So, my mother says, "Okay." So then we were going to the photographers on Chene Street, and my aunt says, "Now he's got to have a nice outfit because that's going to be an expensive picture." So she said, "Let's go to the shoe store and buy him a pair of shoes." And my mother started looking at the shoes that were black or brown. And my aunt said, "No. He's got to have white shoes. He's got to have these nice fancy party shoes." And my mother says, "No. We can't afford it." "Just a minute. Don't say anything. Let's get the shoes and then we'll go to the photographer." So they took this picture that shows me with these white shoes. Well, then there was a

fight. “What are we going to do with white shoes? First time he wears them they’re going to get dirty and they ain’t worth the money we paid for them.” So my aunt says, “Just listen. Come back to the shoe store.” So they went to the shoe store and says, “We changed our mind and we don’t want the white shoes. We want black ones.” So I owned a pair of white shoes exactly one hour. And since then it’s been back to black shoes. Back to the economical thing. And I think about them white shoes. And I think about my aunt. Who worked in a candy factory and also had my picture taken.

MK: What was her name?

JJ: Her name was Helen.

MK: Helen what?

JJ: Well, Helen because she was my father’s sister, Helen Jackowski.

MK: And she was married then?

CJ: No.

JJ: No, no. She was the baby in the family. And she came over from the old country. When they came over from Poland, the boys came over first. That was my uncle and my father. So then when they got enough money for a szyfkart to get the parents over, they got grandpa over. So grandpa came over himself. So by then there were two sons and their father. Then they all were working and they were saving money, and then they had enough money to bring grandma over, and with auntie Helen. She was the youngest. She was the baby. And that finished the migration. That’s how the Jackowskis came to Detroit.

MK: and what happened to Helen?

JJ: Well, she got married. She had seven children. And she died because she was getting on in years and because she had all kind of sicknesses. She had seven children but only four of them—three or four of them—survived. The others died. And she had that many operations that her doctor said, “I took out more out of Helen than I left in her.” And her husband, his name was John, he was a very devoted husband. He looked after her until she died.

MK: What was his last name?

JJ: His name, Polish name, was Rzepka, R-Z-E-P-K-A. Rzepka. That means radish. But in United States, nobody knew how to spell Rzepka. So they changed it to Zepke, Z-E-P-K-E. And that’s the family name, and all the children are left, they go by the name of Zepke. But I think kindly of those old timers, because they were good family people. John Zepke worked two jobs. He used to drive a Parker Brothers truck, delivering coal. And then when he wasn’t driving that coal truck, then he would be working at White Star

gas station on Forest near the tracks. Near Dequindre tracks. So he used to pump gas, at the two jobs. Most of it, the owner of the gas station, who was incidentally his wife's—my aunt's—doctor. And so he just endorsed the checks to pay for the medical care. But like I said, they stayed married until she died. And then he never married, never married.