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2/8/82
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Buxton Project: 424-2104
 Narator's Name: Mr. Stein
 Tape Number: ~~76~~ 75
 Date of Interview: July 29, 1971
 Place of Interview: Ottumwa, Iowa
 Interviewers' Names: Elmer and Dorothy Schwieder

- Q. Put a little bit on. This is the 29th, we're talking to Mr. Stein in the furniture store in Ottumwa on July 29th. Okay now we're in business.
- A. Well as I recall way back when, my dad had a clothing store _____ increased our business over here. We were in the clothing business here since 1902 in Ottumwa.
- Q. *Where did your father come from then when he came to Ottumwa?
- A. Where did he come from?
- Q. *Uh huh.
- A. Loats Holeman
- Q. *Loats Holeman.
- A. Yeah, it was an article in the Currier last night about it I think. That they're having quite a thing on food over there _____ but anyway my dad used to peddle around here with bags.
- Q. The traveling men?
- A. Well it wouldn't no traveling man,
- Q. *A peddler.
- A. A peddler, it wouldn't no traveling man in those days and in fact most of the Jewish people in this town did the same thing whether you know it or not. They had pretty rough times to get started, don't look at what it is today a lot of it and if they were fortunate enough they slept in the barn if they weren't they slept under a wagon regardless to weather. They had bags, my dad had two suitcases which I wish I had kept some but we all wish we could keep something and look like two pregnant women had to carry and he'd get a train from here to Hykeman or somewhere and walk the rest of the way.
- Q. *And he carried those bags?
- A. Sure he had to, you had to make a living when you first come you know before there was ever even business. But anyway then we had these two stores here used to be we started in the next block down 300 block and then they bought these two buildings and these two buildings used to be the clothing business, shoe business. But anyway before all this here, he heard of this opening over here in Old Buxton. I think it was called Buxton 18 if I recollect because
- Q. *But you do remember that it was the site of the original Buxton though?
- A. That was the original Buxton but the company store, there was a little birdge there. Of course I couldn't MEMOR away from folks then because I very very young, less

*Father
over*

- A. than 10 years old and I know he was in a cement block building, that was a hotel.
- Q. *Do you remember if it was the Buxton hotel?
- A. I think it was, if you recall a few names I could
- Q. There was a White hotel.
*And a Perkins
And a Perkins.
- A. The fellow's name wasn't Perkins, he was tall slender colored man, _____ in fact he saved my life, my dad's life on there At one time, food when it rained you either are there or you don't come in there, into Buxton because it was all dirt roads I can recollect that even from new Buxton, old Bucknoe see cause I went with my dad one time a little later on. But anyway he got food poisoning and Dr. _____ put him in the hospital up there for a while but finally that hotel burnt and I think the hotel proprietor's name begins with an S I don't recall it exactly but he was a tall slender person.
- Q. *Was he a white man?
- A. No he was colored _____
- Q. *Gaines, would it be Gaines, Ruben Gaines? He had a hotel.
- A. It could have been, I don't _____ exactly. I know he was a tall slender fellow if anybody recalls any of that _____ but when the fire burnt, my dad was in the hotel, they used to sleep right there I guess and there but when you treat a person right regardless to color, creed or religion or anything, they treat you the same way and my dad always got along with them and so he never had no trouble with them whatsoever. He knew his place and he knew all about them and he lived like they did. But when someone mentioned about mingling, it wasn't much mingling. They paid in gold cause my dad used to bring home the gold pieces and I used to separate them out in fives, tens, and twenties.
- Q. They paid in gold piece.
- A. Gold only.
- Q. *Gold coins.
- A. Gold coins, that was the pay over there and a majority of them bought at the company store but that's how we got to buy floor shine cause they bought the best there was. Two or three things they got money for is booze, clothes and women. That's all they had money for, they spent it.
- Q. *That's how they spend their money?
- A. That's right. They lived in little shacks and stuff but and then when my dad closed the place up actually toward the end, we had floor shine shoes here _____
- Q. *So you remember that in the lines your dad carried out there these were

A. We lived in here, we used to live, we moved in here over in the other place where we first lived, we lived behind the store, slept on chairs with a feather bed. And here when they moved up here and bought this building it wasn't like it is now and we lived upstairs and this was our light and first it was downstairs and the upstairs into the kitchen, the back. It was a hard life any youngster think that they have hard times today is dreaming or on cloud 9, they never had nothing and so actually when the health situation and the mine played out and of course from there I don't know how much after he went to Buck^{see}. He had a portion of a butcher shop there. That's when I went

Q. *Your dad did?

A. My dad and this colored fellow name, he was a big colored fellow, a big heavy sat colored fellow that ran this butcher shop.

Q. *Armstrong, Hope Armstrong.

Armstrong
We know who ran that, Hope Armstrong ran

A. He was a big colored man. Well he had a little porch or another and of course we just brought in enough stuff there to possibly make a few dollars in there but the life was very bad and the food situation was bad see.

Q. *Now how was the food situation bad?

A. It was bad, well there's certain things if you want to eat certain things everyday some people could eat fried steak everyday today and potatoes and come out and never bother them and other people couldn't eat fried food at all but we didn't have too much I'll tell you that as far as eating was concerned. So we were there and I remember as far as the weather is concerned because it rained and this butcher shop was like down and once you're there and I don't care if a truck comes in with beer or pop or whatever it happened to be, he's there until it dries up. Now you may not believe all that.

Q. Oh yeah we've heard that.

*I believe that. I come from a town like that, I believe that.

A. So as I say I was quite young, and I didn't MEANER away from there to explore like they do today and go out but it was pretty rough so my dad just gave it up and we went and expand with these two buildings here in clothing. But that's about a fair share as I can recall of those towns and then they dismantled some of those homes over in old Buxton and they sold some of them over here in Ottumwa.

Q. Did they cut them in half, do you remember that, we've heard that they literally cut them in half, took the side down, put them on a flat car and moved them.

houses
A. I don't know they cut them in half. Well I really don't remember that there part of it but I do know that I've heard that some of them were some of the little four room houses were sold, five room houses came from over there. What they did to them afterwards I wasn't in any of those homes over there at all and because you kept your place I'll tell you that.

Q. *Now can you expand on that a little bit, what do you mean by keeping

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A. Keeping your place, in other words the colored people would mingle with the colored people, the city people I mean the white would mingle with the white people and that's all there is to it, it wasn't no ifs, ands or buts about it and any time they

- A. tell you that it's like today or otherwise, they're on cloud nine again that's not true.
- Q. *You really remember a distinction?
- A. Yes, cause I know I heard my dad tell me and we had a couple of cousins also that tried to go in there and they tried to mingle at those dances, they were older than I was and they tried it and they got out in a hurry, didn't even stay around Buxton.
- Q. Now they tried to mingle with the black?
- A. With the black ones and go to these dances and places see.
- Q. And they threw them out?
- A. That's right and so they didn't stay around Old Buxton very long at all because anybody see somebody making a few dollars why some of them in there to try to get a portion of it see. So I know with that even happens later or not today you know I don't care what you think, what you tell me but I know it's true.
- Q. You say they didn't dance together, they had roller skating, they didn't roller
- A. I didn't say roller skating, I said they had dances. I didn't know anything about roller skating, but they had dances over there but dances was for colored people only.
- Q. And their lodges I think were the same way?
- A. Well that part I didn't know anything about because as I say I was quite young to know anything about lodges or anything else like that.
- Q. Or school or any of that?
- A. No that part I didn't know because we only went when Old Buxton when I went over there I was only over there probably for a couple of hours and that was about all and then this fellow that took us over there brought us back and I wouldn't even know what route to go, I know it was over toward Albia or somewhere.
- Q. *How did your dad, did he have a manager who ran the store for him over there?
- A. Lady he ran it himself. There was no such thing as a manager, you're talking today's times not those times.
- Q. *Then would he stay over here?
- A. The company store had everything but they knew how to charge because
- Q. They had them by credit too.
- *But your father's business though would he just stay over and keep the store open
- A. Yes he was there all the time, yes.

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Q. *Who ran his business back here then?

A. I had a brother that ran it here.

Q. *I see. How long would you estimate that your father had the business in Buxton then?

A. I don't think he had it even a year. It was a very very hard life, a very hard life.

Q. *Well the traveling back and forth I would think would have been.

A. Yes and you know the fact of it is he'd go on train probably and I don't know where he'd walk from because in those days most of the fellows did it only went a certain and the rest of it they had to walk.

Q. *They had to walk, yeah.

A. I wish I had kept some of the things my dad had when he was peddling cause I had a little biddy book that he had the charges, I don't know how much he charged different ones and that's all in the coal mining area, Hykeman, Bidwell and all that there

Q. White City

A. Yeah, that was in that same area but you had to do part of that there because you couldn't stay at a person's house around his grounds see and sometimes they even leave your in the house why something was missing and it wasn't anything you could do about it. And if you wanted to go that route and so forth, I wish I had kept some of that who knew what tomorrow as going to bring.

Q. *Well at the time we don't think have value.

(Can't understand) You go to one of these second hand store and I saw a sign in one that said tell me you had one everybody in town had one, you go through and say oh we used to have that, we used to have that you know, the antique store, sure but you threw it away. One thing that you raised, collaborates what we've heard before, they made pretty good money but they spent good money

A. That's all they had to spend it for see they didn't think about coming to Ottumwa to buy or shop, they wouldn't things like in those days see. Like if you want to go to the mall or Cedar Rapids to shop you don't find HERE in those days it wasn't.

Q. *You shopped at home?

A. You lived there and everything else right there. And you paid the price for it because they made and people back in those days it was a little different story. THERE ARE groups today don't value money for the tomorrow either regardless of whether it's black or white or OTHERWISE

Q. They one thing that it seems to us was that the family lived in Buxton lived better maybe they spent all their money but in the process of spending their money they lived better.

A. On the other side of the bridge I don't know because as I said I didn't move away from this hotel or my dad had his hotel because you just don't wonder around, a kid 7 or 8 years old or 9 years old whatever it is and I went over there actually to be with my dad so that's it's about all I remember of it. It couldn't be too

CRIME

STORES SHOPPING

- A. distinct because _____ I could remember the shelves or the cotton boxes they put the stuff on or stuff of that nature. But I know it was a cement block hotel it was on this side of the bridge, there was a bridge there.
- Q. *On the east side of the
- A. I don't know east, west, north or south I know it was on this side of the bridge and there was a pretty nice little building but I do know as you look out from the hotel and you look up the hill, there was the company store. Now does the surrounding sound familiar?
- Q. *Yeah. You were on the main drag or the main line of businesses.
- A. Well I guess that's what it was but I didn't go out of there I don't know who was next door or anything like that.
- Q. *Was there any competition between what your dad was selling?
- A. The only competition was actually the company store. That Happens anywhere even to this day and age, you go to different parts of the world I think you'll find that there.
- Q. *The thing I'm getting at is sometimes the company store didn't want anybody else in business.
- A. They don't who knows how that hotel burnt who can accuse anybody, no they don't. That's in fact the houses belonged to the company store. These here are just conversations that I absorbed when I was at was at 8 see I don't actually know too much basically but.
- Q. Well we had heard that if you got in debt to the company store and then you tried to buy from anybody else they leaned on you very heavy and most of the miners owed the company store.
- A. _____ even in this business or any other business when you're in debt to you don't buy from any manufacturer if you could buy it less but you paid up these jobber even to this day. What they have they can have a hundred stores and they don't manage it, they got an investment in there. They don't have to worry about delivery or anything else. In other words, they don't do it for nothing the jobber make 25 to 40 or 50% according to how the buyer is. And so in other words you get a little piece of the cake but they get a big chunk of it without any headache. _____ investment and I knew of a store one time that was in there about 35-40 thousand dollars and that was about right before World War II. World War II pulled that store out of the red see if it wasn't for that, they would just work up junk. So that happened the same thing with the company store. That's why they know that don't want no cheap shoes, they don't want no cheap clothes like that they want the best because that's what their money is for. They never thought of saying. I don't think you ever found any where in your records very many ever saved any money.
- Q. *Well coal miners overall had a reputation of being hard drinkers, big spenders and big _____ fighters and you know obviously there are some exceptions to that but that's the reputation that has followed them.

- CO. STORE

consumption
FOR THE jobber

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- A. Well possibly a very very little exception, of course I couldn't elaborate on that because I don't know but the ones that make the money there wasn't a man 65, 75 years old in the mine so in other words he probably learned his lesson, he better _____ it was entirely different life, average individual
- Q. Do you remember not just the parts of towns that were supposed to be red light districts
- A. That part I could never remember, that part I never heard my dad even speak about.
- Q. See we got some black people that say there weren't any
- A. I don't think so because, if they drank, they drank in their own place and their own group. I don't think that was true cause I SAID I heard some of the things and I read some of the things in the Des Moines Register about that. I told my wife I was going to write in this little Q'WELL or write somebody about it _____ but some of them wouldn't believe you anyway you tell youngsters today that corn was burned for coal and sold for 5 or 10 cents a bushel, _____ oh nothing I could pay 4 or 5 thousand dollars an acre for and think it's alright see. They don't believe a lot of these things that happened see.
- Q. *I'd be interested in knowing a little more _____. I teach a course in Iowa History at Iowa State and I try to deal with different ethnic groups and different religious groups in Iowa but I would be very interested in knowing more about _____ the family history. Why your dad left Poland, why he came here, why he came specifically to Ottumwa.
- A. I couldn't tell you too much about that. I've always been the type of person like to sit around when older people converse first and even if I went to Florida _____ learn anything from the young ones, they don't have experience but the older ones do and I've always thought the education comes from older person but abide by their past because that's the cheapest way to know. It was a very very hard life over there. In fact the fiddler, if you saw the Fiddler on the Roof, I think a fair share of that was a same It was compulsory to go into service at a certain age and over there I don't think it was a big question of money, it isn't like here if you don't pay me \$7.00 an hour I'm not going to work for you and you don't have the food situation over in foreign countries as you do here. I mean you live on just modest food and that's all there is to it and you're satisfied.
- Q. *What did your dad do in Poland, was he a farmer or?
- A. No, I don't think so, I really couldn't tell you on that basis because he's never spoke much but when he first came to this country.
- Q. *And how old was he when he came over?
- A. That part I couldn't tell you either. Now they didn't bring their wives originally most of them never had the money. He and a fellow by the name of Joe Cone. Joe Cone had a little store over here on the corner before the building was tore down, came to Chicago and they worked as bakers and then he had a sister and I think another brother and they ventured out this way. They had the money
- Q. *As peddlers?
- A. No, to make a living out here.
- Q. *To move out here?

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A. To move out here and after a while when he got started I think he sent for my mother. Almost all of them sent for their wives or families they left behind. But actually that's approximately the way a majority of them did out in here and then there used to be a fellow here by the name Freedman he had a very very large department store, some of the old timers would remember that there because he was quite a person and he used to be able to give these peddlers credit out of his store that's where they got the money to do it see and of course they would pay him back. He was very very nice about it, just like J.B. Sacks maybe you've heard about that.

Q. *Is this the Sacks store in New York or ?

A. No, this would be they owned some of the property yet, the Sacks and they all would help out a little bit.

Q. *To the new comers in?

A. Coming in, yes a little bit and some of them even peddled utensils and things like that but what they did would peddle legitimately.

Q. *They peddled what?

A. Peddled legitimate merchandize. It wasn't no whiskey or dope or a lot of stuff of that nature like you see today see. But it was very very rough times.

Q. *Do you know how long your dad had to operate as a peddler before he was able to start the store?

A. Quite a few years and then he started up the place down the next block, 317 I think it is East Main down there and we had a little clothing in there. Well before that where this building is right here he went in with partners with another individual. My dad did the peddling in the mines and places this fellow ran the store. I remember distinctly, very distinctly I won't mention the names, they stole him blind, when they come back here there was nothing here, the money was gone. So he pulled out and went in down into the next block at 317 East Main, I remember that there distinctly and we used to have clothing and a pawn shop both and some of the old, Ottumwa used to have quite a reputation nationwide you know that.

Q. A tough reputation?

A. Very rough. You ask some of the old timers or get some of the old POLICE LOGS this down here is known from coast to coast. You didn't off Main Street.

Q. *What was it that made it that way the fact that it was a river town or coal mine?

A. It used to be a very good town and that whole next block was all and used to be prostitute houses there. This town was a very wild town see. You get some of the history on this town and I'll tell you you'll have a history that you could write a book on and I remember I was a little boy about 5 years old possibly when we had this store down here. I was sitting on the counter, my mother put me on the counter, a fellow come in there and ran out with a great big 45 gun. I told you we had a pawn shop and everything. They found him down here below Main Street and it was nothing much you can do about it but you couldn't believe actually what went on in a town like this, and these here were three shacks in here. I personally saw when we moved up here, it used to be a colored pool hall across the street and where this laundrymat is it used to be a garage and I saw a fellow, his name was Dollar Bill and this other fellow he must have owed him money for something. I saw him

HE had a
POOL HALL

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- A. get down on Dollar Bill, knock that fellow down _____ and he had his knees on his shoulders. He took a razor out of his back pocket and slit his throat and cause the hospital used to be right up here on the corner, the County Hospital. That colored fellow, I clear get the fellow's name, I recollect back and forth occasionally. Names I forget pretty easily. Incidents I can remember. He ran up there to get his throat _____ but this was quite a rough town.
- Q. We had heard that there was a lynching in this town. Do you remember anything about that at all?
- A. There was, I think that was on account of a rape deal, if I recollect and I think if you go to the library, possibly you may find some of that there. There used to be a young man here name Dr. Sam Bookin and he was writing a history about the Jews in Ottumwa. This used to be quite a community at one time, Jewish community here and whether it's there or I don't know where it's at but there was one time I mentioned here and I think it was up there near where the court house is now or somewhere in there, I don't recall exactly.
- Q. We keep picking little scattered rumors about things you know and you put them back and you think back and well I'll ask somebody who _____ your information about Buxton comes very close with the other whites who said yes they were allowed in the company store, there was no problem there and they were allowed _____ but we didn't dance and we didn't, any intermarriage was strictly not looked favorably. It happened a couple of times but it was not usual.
- A. These articles says they did but I read or something. Whoever that, there was a fairy tale and it's alright if _____ want to believe it you know but even this day and age lady, I said even this day and age you can mark it anywhere you want to, I helped a lot of _____ colored people on their feet. _____ Dr. Gates Moore, Iowa City, he was one of the best skin specialists in the state of Iowa. They used to send him from Iowa City down here. He came here and never had transitions which I helped him out. I bought a home for him _____. At one time I wanted to buy a home for him it was in the state, which the bank wanted to get rid of and I told the bank what I'm gonna do with it, make an OFFICE FOR HIM downstairs and store building and live upstairs. He wouldn't sell it to me. That wasn't too long ago so you may not believe some of this history but I'll tell you take off some of the clothes GO LIVE in those districts, I mean you'll find out it's a little different story THAN today _____ what they paint pictures. I'm sorry to say it.
- Q. It is too bad.
- A. Even myself being Jewish, I can afford to go in the Country Club. You would think the ones I do business with, fraternize with and say come on play golf _____ you talk to sometimes too gentle people on the outside on some of those subjects and you'll find out that you're living in a different world. I'm sorry to say it, you got to be better.
- Q. *The separation is still.
- A. I know I went to Florida this colored doctor, he was a very good doctor. He had the largest funeral this town ever had in the history.
- Q. *And what was his name?
- A. Dr. Gates Moore. The whole family on both sides were professional people some kind or other, either engineer or something, very fine people and you couldn't get a doctor hardly FOR LOVE OR MONEY

Q. (Can't make out)

A. Ronald will show it to you.
Right over here girls.

But he went south one time. Regardless to how much money you got, I've seen this down to Florida, the average individual can't appreciate. I've seen signs out there in 39 ^{when I} ~~down there~~ the first time I went, no Jews or dogs allowed.

Q. Is that right? I saw that, no sailors and dogs allowed when I was in the service.

A. I saw this and regardless of how much money you got. The average individual can't understand and before World War II a lot of these colored people or black people as they call them today, I'd always call them colored and I lived side by side with them when I was young down the next block, across on the other side of the hall was colored and the other side was white, I always got along I'll tell you that. I could tell you stories lady that you could write five books on. Well anyway when he went down ~~down there~~ went on a vacation, he would never go back south again. Before World War II they lived, did you ever see a barn door? That was their homes, their stove was a KETTLE outside.

Q. *Now you're talking about in the south?

A. The south. And even to this day, Yankee or otherwise ~~down there~~ and I know my boy was in service, I went down there I didn't think about separate toilets for white or black or filling station, the white man would sit in the filling station the black fellow would do all the work all the white man do is run the register and of course Lived here all my life, I never encountered things of that nature see. Ride on buses the whites in the front.

Q. *What do you remember living in this town and like with your father, did he confront that kind of prejudice when he came here?

A. No because I'll tell you, we've always kept our space. We always tried to be just ourselves and not try to mix in well some of them do.

Q. *And you think that accounts for the fact that there was better acceptance?

A. Yes, yes and you treat them royally. I mean you treat them like a human being and even today if you do, they're your friend lady and I don't care who it is and if you don't, they're just as human as you are, stay away. And we just never subjected to anything at all by a colored person ever.

Q. *Well what about the white community though, the ~~pre~~ predominately white community did you feel

A. I don't know, who went out of these here two blocks. This was our community.

Q. You stayed right within.

A. Sure Lived uptown used to live in the back of this other store here and that's when you got in the chits a little bit you know.

Q. And you knew the streets, you knew the people on the street?

A. That's all. I'll tell you there's a lot of history, good history if somebody, people will abide by and believe in it and as I say it makes good movies, it make good shows and make good books but a lot of them just like there's people that don't believe in the holocaust did you know that?

Q. *I know that, they're trying to dispute.

A. Yes I have a salesman travels that makes our territory, he works for a very fine company in the Carolinas, he's from the south. He said if anybody ever tell me that, he said I'll tell them there's a big damn lie because I helped free him, I was there see but it's things propaganda and things are going on in this country today it's pathetic, it's very pathetic and if you want to know Eisenhower pulled off some of the colored one respect a little bit helped because at one time they would never respect a colored person in the army. If you ever been in the service you ought to know. Eisenhower says I don't care who it is you respect them if not they'd let the colored guy _____ up, I don't care if _____ or anybody else and nothing was ever done about it. This doctor I told you he was very little respected. If they ever going to call me back he says they're going to have to come after me. He was a lieutenant or whatever CAPTAIN and I'll tell you a lot of people cant understand a lot of people won't tell you some of the truth and outspoken about it you understand but I'll tell you it's a little pathetic, very pathetic all the way around and of course there's two sides to everything and there's good and bad regardless _____ Jews I wouldn't go from here where you're satting to say hello to you and whether even if Catholic, Protestant or black or white or otherwise but I know when I was a youngster going to school some of the Jew or the colored ones that some of the white ones would pick on me, I was very small at the time, they'd say leave him along. They would be friendly, if you treat them like a human being lady and that's anywhere. They say there's even friendship among theives you know.

Q. *Were there a synagogue here then in the early days?

A. Well there wasn't a synagogue, there was up above the store up here on the corner and that's where they held their _____ synagogue I can tell the synagogue which was quite a nice and perise town _____ and those days you didn't go out and solicit anybody else. You just _____ among yourselves. It's a different world today.

Q. *So what you're saying then is this area, this part of town, this part of main street then was largely Jewish businesses?

A. All Jewish, outside of the _____ that was a front porch or back porch after they get through it see and it wasn't no 9 to 5 deal, 5 and 6 in the morning and until the last customer of the street. The only thing you have to be a little LEAKY of if some of them would knock on doors where people live upstairs you know and they think it's a house of prostitution. That whole block next block down there is wired if they would raid one place, don't forget there was prohibition for a while. Of course there used to be salones down there. Some of the parents would send their kid down to get a nickel or dime bucket, the whole family would have it see. There was less drugs, there was less of anything there is today. I remember that because there was salones all around in here see and even the prostitution isn't like it is today, by a long shot.

Q. The whole place is wired so if they get one

A. If one place is raided from the _____ the rest of them knew it see, it was little fine wires. It was quite a

Q. *Well did you go through grade school and high school then here in Ottumwa?

A. Yes.

Q. *Did you go on to college?

- A. Lady I had one year of high school that's all. Unfortunately and you don't miss it, a lot of them never went to college. Things were tough and you had to make a living.
- Q. *Was this largely you quit to help your father, that he needed you in the business?
- A. Well that's partly, yes that was partly that. It's although you miss it later on in life as you probably recognize I don't have a vocabulary, I don't have the education but when it comes down to this thing right in here I can teach anybody anything and no one runs over me cause I learned the hard way and that was during depression. When you sleep under rags and paper lady you can't afford to go to a hotel you learn a lot and during the depression, people never went to some of those districts you don't know what's all about. You'd have to leave a man with your truck, they would steal all padding, whatever you got in there and if you had an extra dollar you'd send somebody down to get when you're _____ if you're a little better off you'd send somebody down to the junk shop to get a few more rags so you could pad the furniture and everything back. The poor people didn't go broke, they didn't never _____ broke the first during the depression whether you know it or not. We had merchandise in here, what you call antiques, we had merchandise in here that was imported from the old countries by millionaires but today it's probably somewhere stashed or something like Elbany and stuff of that nature, grand pianos like your grand pianos that you could buy for a couple of hundred dollars, at those days it was worth before it's worth \$3,000. It wasn't a question of material it was a question of living of having something to live in. If I could have some of the merchandise that I bought _____ chestnut, things of that nature. I started the antique business. I forgot more but some of these antiquers suppose to know about it they don't know half about these youngsters. A round table is not an antique, an oak round table, china _____ not. If they buy _____ and laying out money and you could get reproduction and some of the first ONES used to go down to the dime stores and buy this glass and put it up and auction here's an antique. They don't know anything about it. They refinish, I forgot what it is now that raises the bangs on your wood and we used to use ft to clean cook stoves, get the grease of gas stoves and cook stoves and they take off the varnish of furniture, that ruins it see but I'll tell you they won't listen. You have a family?
- Q. *We have two children.
- A. They listen to you, they listen to their neighbors a little bit.
- Q. *Well they're doing better, got a little older.
- A. Oh you mean after they got married and got _____ I mean _____ they don't. It's just that behind closed doors you'll find, oh what do our old folks know, they don't know nothing.
- Q. *That's right but fortunately I think most of them do get past that point.
- A. Very very few, very few are very fortunate and the poorer the family lady, the better off it can be, the child could be better off.
- Q. *Well I don't know if I agree with that but Affluency could _____ a problem.
- A. You know why, when they said no, it's no, when they said okay, okay. When I used to help my dad out, I was a youngster now clothes he gave me but money to go to a dance and intermissions, you ever tried to go intermission was half price?
- Q. Uh huh.

- A. Well I think this gentleman here had a little more experience than you did and you know that dance is out. Now if it food, he'd let me go down here to _____ it used to be one of the finest ice cream and restaurants in the state of Iowa at one time SALOME Brothers. I'd satting on the _____, the cases was all Italian marble in there, they made their own candy, own ice cream. Now he'd give me money for that but for dances, no. Clothes, I had clothes. I used to wear stiff collars when I was a kid at 13 years old believe it or not see. _____-rubber in the winter see now maybe here you could recall some of them see but you know something I would stay without dinner and super and I would stand on a little wood box because the showcases in those days were higher than they are today to wait on tray. I didn't get anything, you know what I got. My dad bought a bailor, _____ the first bailing wire he gave me for nothing see, said after this you bail your own and buy your own. That's when I bought SAVING stamps, you ever hear of them?
- Q. *Oh yeah.
- A. For a quarter you buy in the schools. And he only told me once, the second time he didn't tell me, I don't care if its in my jaw, my nose or anywhere else, he didn't lay it over your knee, you were trained.
- Q. *Were you an only child?
- A. No, I had a brother and I had a sister.
- Q. *So there were three?
- A. Yes.
- Q. *Did the other two follow along in the business too or work in the store?
- A. Oh yes my brother did yes. But my sister never did. After I started the furniture business yes, she helped out in bookkeeping for a while.
- Q. *Your father and your mother were they the only two out of their families that came to this country or did their brothers and sisters?
- A. Yes they're all past on in fact her last sister past on about two years ago.
- Q. *In other words more of their families also came?
- A. One brought the other. Whenever ONE got a little money they get passes and brought the other see.
- Q. *And send for another person?
- A. That's right.
- Q. *Did most of them end up here in Ottumwa?
- A. Well sure they did, _____ the ones that brought them.
- Q. *Came to the same, uh huh. That's very interesting. You got any other questions.
*Well no I guess.
We've taken nearly an hour of the man's time.
- Q. That's alright I got to take my wife to lunch see so I understand what that part is But sometimes I recall back and although sometimes it hurts very much how some of ther

- A. think that they had to go through, I had them come in here and Jews were very very ridiculed, it's nothing for them to come in and say what are you SHEENE doing here and I'm going to Jew you down see, even this day and age. I say a lot of that though actually a good refined, a good educated person you don't hear that IN THE FAMILY. And that actually I think comes original.
- Q. That's where it comes from, starts when they hear it in the home.
*It's an attitude, I agree with you.
- A. And what I told you I think I can back up very much so because I know what I was talking about when I say belong to different clubs and so forth. For a time I could not get into the Elks, I could not get into the Masons. The only time you know when of course there's Jim Townsend, respected Jews and Jews _____ and he says Morris I'll tell you, I'll get you into the Elks he says in the summertime cause he _____ if you belong to any organizations I don't because I know what the score is, I don't want to be in business, he said the summertime a lot of those guys that blackball are on vacation, I can get you in there. Now you just don't realize what goes on even.
- Q. That's too bad.
- A. Being what you are, you can't begin. Well did you see the one about Gregory Peck, what was the name of that, it was about a Jewish _____ he went into a hotel and he says he was Jewish and they didn't let him go in.
- Q. *Yes, Gentlemen's Agreemen.
- A. Gentleman's Agreement, lady it's so much of that's so true that you actually wouldn't believe, you can't appreciate actually appreciate being white and being Gentile. We were one knoch behind a colored person, one knotch that's all. When up until recently until they raised a lot of holy hell, they couldn't go anywhere either. They sacrificed to do that there see and they call this a free America. But after World War II, Eisenhower you've seen new homes the colored people have down there. Of course I've said before several times during those periods and _____ a quite a while to my sorrow but you couldn't begin to realize what it was down there. They didn't have no washing machine.
- Q. *I know the poverty among the blacks.
- A. That's why there was a lot of sickness and illnesses and short life and stuff.
- Q. *Yeah, right. High infant mortality. One other question, do you know how to spell the name of the town that your dad came from in Poland?
- A. It's in last night's, L-o-d-z I think.
- Q. *L-o-d-a and it still is there, it still exists?
- A. Yes, in fact there is quite a bit of property now and also famine in there, they're trying to get so the United States, Russia or whatever it is to _____ I don't know what it is.
- Side 2
Q. *And your dad had a butcher shop or he still had the clothing?
- A. No, we never had, no he never ventured out of his own category.

Q. *Okay but that was very short lived then huh?

A. Yes, I think the whole thing was short lived.

Q. *It was and that was about 1919 or 1920 that that was?

A. I couldn't remember the year.

Q. I have a quick question, we been interviewing a number of things, we're interested in coal mining now but we did some work with the old order armish and I've had some contact with them and one of the things that I'm sort of curious about in terms of the community itself is, well in the coal mining community as you went on to peddle your ware.

A. I never went anywhere except right in the store on both places. I didn't yander around for one thing and the second thing is I couldn't tell you on that subject there because I never heard him talk about it. The only thing I heard him talk about is what I told you.

Q. Well let's come back to Ottumwa then. We were interviewing in _____ with some Czechs form Czechoslovakia and they said they had 750 people maybe 800 and they had 5 stores, now they've got 500 people, they got 1 store and I said what made the difference. They said the mail order business nearly ruin the

A. It wasn't no mail order back in those days. The company store was the mail order now if you can call that a mail order store you can call it that. They had the merchandise right there.

Q. But when the mail order came out that didn't bother you a bit, when Sears

A. The fact of it is, we're one of the first ones they asked to build them a building.

Q. Is that right, that's interesting.

A. See we didn't have no building here. That was back in 1936.

Q. They left the impression that when you got the mail order catalog

A. Mister I'll tell you something, you take a thing right here in Ottumwa, if you're acquainted and want to stay a day or two, I started a business back in 1926 or 7 I seen the big ones come and go if you had the right kind of experience and profit by someone else who mistakes, regardless of whether it's in school, or whether it's on a paper writing a paper or book or anything else, you can accomplish a lot and it don't cost you anything either. So I've seen them come and go in this town ones got much more money and much more better off than we were and I'm still here and they don't touch me either and I don't care if 5 others come along beaause when you WIFE FILIATED during the depression you know every trick in the book when you talk about professionals you don't forget them very easily, at least you shouldn't, there's some of them do, they get a little rich you know what I'm talking about in the head see. You can overcome anything and if you went through a depression you can live on \$20 a week and not 200 and you won't starve to death if you're willing. So mail orders may hurt some, it's just like groeery stores, if they're not on their toes, they'd rather go out and play golf or go out and play bridge or something and not what they call sacrifice, you got to sacrifice on anything, even a parent must sacrifice and that's part of the trouble I think with youngsters today, that's my opinion. I may be wrong, I don't know but I call a spade a spade, I always have and I don't care whether you like it or don't like and I tell the customers the same

- A. way and that's why we exist. We live on our reputation right here we don't do very much advertising and that's why I say very few could come in here and jolt me you see, buy me out and hire me. That's the only way they're going to get ahead. I don't want it because I'm getting a little too old in this day and age it's another ball GAME you can't even leave your house in _____
- Q. Mr. Stein we wanted to ask you here on this project, one of the things we have to do is get a permission slip from you that says you give us permission to use the information it would be mainly the information of Buxton.
- A. Lady let me ~~tell~~ you something, you're asking to the wrong guy for the wrong thing. I never been in a court for that, I don't ask you for a dime, I didn't ask you anything about what're going to do with it or anything. I just told you the facts, you can take it from there. I don't care what you do with it but you take it as I gave it to you as long as I'm living see, don't misquote me.
- Q. *Oh no, we'll be as
- A. Cause I'll never sign anything for anybody.
- Q. *You won't sign it?
- A. No.
- Q. *Okay, but we have your permission?
- A. Otherwise I wouldn't be as OPEN with you as I did.