

Transcript of Interview with Sybil Epstein
Small Town Jewish History Project
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Transcription:

Eric Lidji: Alright, my name is Eric Lidji. This is the Small Towns Oral History Project. I'm here with Sybil Epstein. Today is April 15, 2015, and we are in the library of Temple Hadar Israel in New Castle, Pennsylvania. So Sybil can you tell me how your family got to New Castle?

Sybil Epstein: Okay, that I am not sure. As far as my father, he was from Cleveland and he came here when he married my mother.

EL: What was his name?

SE: His name was Robert Pickel.

EL: Okay.

SE: His father was Hungarian, and his mother was Austrian, and she had a pretty tough life. His mother, when she was sixteen years old, well, I think the year before that her mother died, he father remarried and her stepmother didn't like her. So she came to America on her own. How she got to Cleveland I'm not sure. She wasn't one for talking. And his father was, and he was a chef. And when my dad was twelve his father died. I don't know what he died of, again my grandmother was not a talker, she was a bitter woman. I never saw a picture of him until probably fifteen years ago and anyway he had three brothers. He was the middle. His oldest brother's name was Leonard and he graduated high school at the age of fifteen, I believe, and my father did not go to college because his brother that graduated at fifteen, Leonard, he helped support him. His first job was at the Piggly Wiggly in Sharon. And his younger brother, gosh I can't remember his name right now, he died when he was twenty-one. And in the old days when you went to the cemeteries there were pictures on the headstones. He was buried in what they called the Marmescher Cemetery in Cleveland, which was the Hungarian-Romanian peoples, cemetery. And I look very much like him and I recognized that when I saw his picture and it used to scare me. My grandfather's parents, they came from Russia, my grandfather came from Russia and his parents came here also. What year they came, I don't know.

EL: This is your mother's father?

SE: My mother's father and mother and her grandparents. Her grandparents came here. He, his name was Abraham, her name was Rose. He was a scholar and she worked her butt off because he was a scholar. And they lived on the south side of New Castle and he used to watch the streets in his long black coat and he had flowing white hair and a big full white beard and my mother said the children used to run after him, they thought he was Santa Claus. And they'd run after him, "Santa, Santa!" And they had a little grocery store, originally I believe on Reynolds Street. And Rose ran the store while Abraham studied the Torah.

EL: What was their last name?

SE: Wolfe.

EL: Okay.

SE: Their name was Wolfe.

EL: With an 'E'.

SE: With an 'E'. And my grandfather had seven brothers and some of them didn't talk to each other, and some of them did. My grandfather's name was Harry Wolfe. He had no middle name. But in his later years he gave himself an 'H' because he felt like he should have a middle name. And where he and his parents came in from Russia, I asked what town were you from and he said there was no town, we lived on a farm. Now my grandmother was a big city girl. She came from Odessa. Actually though, he was much more sophisticated once they got here than she was.

EL: Harry was more sophisticated?

SE: Harry really was more sophisticated. He went to school, his English was excellent, he read English, he wrote English. Whereas my grandmother, she spoke English, but she never really read English that well and she didn't, she'd write her grocery lists in Yiddish.

EL: What was her name?

SE: Her name was Goldie.

EL: And this was Harry's wife?

SE: This is Harry's wife, Goldie, and they had one daughter, my mother, and she was born Bertha Sonya Wolfe. All her cousins called her Sunni and when she got older she hated the name Bertha and she had her name legally changed to Harriet [laughter].

EL: How is Harry related to Abraham and Rose?

SE: He's their son.

EL: Oh, so that's your great-grandfather.

SE: Harry was my grandfather and Abraham and Rose were my great grandparents, I did not know them, they were dead by the time. And my grandfather Harry, he was a real go-getter. He originally started out, he had a horse and wagon, and he went around and collected rags and stuff, but also he took that horse and wagon to Pittsburgh to the Strip District, and he bought fruits and vegetables. And they lived at the time on

South Jefferson Street in New Castle by the Little Big Run and they had a house slash store there where they sold fruits and vegetables. Obviously the man was wonderful with fruits and vegetables. He taught me how to pick them out and nobody picked them out better than he did. I mean when we would visit him in later years when he moved to Florida, there were tomatoes the size of cantaloupes in the refrigerator when we got there. The man was a wonder. How you tell a good cantaloupe is you smell it. And if it smells sweet it is, and if it isn't, don't buy it. That's one of the things he taught me.

Okay, so he started out in this horse and wagon and he had this little store and they sold of course fruits and vegetables, and they had thread and pickles in barrels, and I don't know if they sold any meat but I'm sure they sold you know like butter and bread and things like that and my mother said you know it was a mixed neighborhood. The south side was a melting pot. There were Jews, there were Italians, there were Greeks, there were Lebanese, there were blacks, there were every nationality and my grandfather by the way spoke all those languages. Anyway, on Friday nights, my mother told me this, on Friday nights the neighbors would each, they'd bring chairs and they'd come to the store. And everybody would sit around, and somebody would sing opera, and somebody would play the violin, and somebody else would tell funny stories, and somebody else would dance. Everyone had some kind of talent, these were Polish, Italian, Russian, Greek, Lebanese, the United Nations. And they would eat pickles from the barrel and whatever else and she said it was just wonderful, wonderful, wonderful.

Well, my grandfather, being the smart man that we was, he decided he needed a location for his business. So he purchased land on Moravia Street where now there is a, like an industrial park, but before that Johnson Bronze was there, and before that my grandfather was there. And he started a business called H. Wolfe Iron and Metal. And what he did there, he went around on his horse and wagon until cars came out, and he brought in metal and stuff like that, and then he put in a scale and people brought it in. And the business grew and grew. And he outgrew the lot, and he sold it to Johnson Bronze who put up a factory there. And he moved to, down further south on Moravia Street to Gardner Avenue where he built a building, a warehouse, and firmly established H. Wolfe Iron and Metal Company, it was under the Mahoning Town viaduct, and you can still see it today if you go across the viaduct but it's no long H. Wolfe Iron and Metal.

EL: What was the street address, do you remember?

SE: 215 Gardner Avenue, New Castle, PA 16101. Right alongside was the Shenango River and there was a creek, the Little Big Run went through. In those days it was a brick road, the street car line used to run through there. And a funny story about grandfather, he always drove a big car. He was, he was a chubby man, so he always drove a big car, and years ago when my dad already came into the business when he married my mother he came into the business with my grandfather, and my grandfather used to park his car under the viaduct so the sun would not ruin the paint job and it wouldn't be too hot. And my dad would say to him, "Harry, Pa! Don't park your car under the viaduct, somebody's gonna steal it." Now remember this was probably like in the forties, fifties, you know while the war was going on, they were very busy. My dad

was still there, they wouldn't take him, they said he couldn't see and he had flat feet and we was in the scrap business so he better stay home and help the war effort. So my grandfather parked under the viaduct as usual, and it was quite a walk back to get under the viaduct, but he was in good shape. He gardened, he had a beautiful garden at home. And he went back to get his car and it was missing. Not only had they stolen his car, but in white paint they had written his license number on one of the pilings of the Mahoning Town viaduct. And when we were children and you could still get back there, my father would drive us back there and say, see that? That's your grandfather's license number from the thief who stole his car. I kept telling him not to park there. He had the audacity to paint his license plate number under the viaduct.

EL: [laughter] Just as a further insult?

SE: Yes. Insult to injury, exactly. And my grandfather was really a good man and he was mad, but he never, I never really saw him get really angry. I really, he was very smart, he knew business, he loved to garden, and he passed that on to me. He grew tomatoes and cucumbers, which he made pickles. My grandmother made dandelion wine, believe it or not. She was a diabetic so she did a lot of canning. It was saccharin. She was the happiest woman in America when Fago pop came out and it was sugar-free. The woman was ecstatic. That was one of the high points of her life, she could finally have pop. Not that it's any good for you, but she didn't drink a lot of it.

But he grew tomatoes, cucumbers, carrots, garlic, oh just all kinds of things, but basically he loved flowers and trees. He had beautiful lilac trees, purple, red, pink, lavender, white, and when they came out in May, he would bring me bouquets of lilacs to my house. It was just a wonderful, wonderful experience. And he had dogwood and he had azaleas and rhododendrons which he called ruddies. And when he moved to Florida and he lived in a condo he used to walk every day. And in Florida on the circles, in Miami Beach, they had flowers and the public works department took care of them and every day he would walk and he would consult with them about what they were planting and what fertilizer they were using and if they were, he used to say to me, well he used to say to his neighbor, Tony, he and Tony were close and they gardened. They would come and work on my house and my mother's house and believe it or not, my neighbor's house who was a widow lady, he knocked on her door one day and said, "Do you mind if I take care of your yard?" Of course she was thrilled to death. And he would yell at Tony, "Break 'em up the clumps, Tony!" When they first worked the yard, and even now, and my grandfather's been gone a long time though he lived to ninety-six, I'm working in the dirt and I hear, "Break 'em up the clumps, Tony". And that was a real experience too. He and Tony would come. That was after Zacharefsky died. When Zacharefsky came I don't know his first name, they'd be yelling at each other in Polish on my front yard.

EL: This was just a friend of his, Zacharefsky?

SE: Yup. Another gardening friend. And then Tony would come and my grandfather would be wearing dress pants and a sleeveless undershirt and brown shoes, and Tony would be wearing shorts and a sleeveless undershirt and bowling shoes and he would

have a big straw hat, and he would bring his mandolin. My grandfather had the requisite three lawnmowers in the Cadillac, plus the gallon jug, or two gallon jug of water and two gallon jug of lemon juice, I have no idea. And when they would take a rest, Tony would take out his mandolin, and he would play and they would sing and it was just days gone by.

But back to the business. The business grew and grew, H. Wolfe Iron and Metal Company at 215 Gardener Avenue, and we were, I would say a medium-sized business, bordering on large, but not tremendous. We had three cranes, we had, we got into the roll-off service where we would leave containers in plants then pick them up. So we had a roll-off truck. And probably thirty containers. We had, I think, maybe four or five dump trucks, we had a large press and in the warehouse, which we had a scale, and that's where we kept the metals and believe it or not when computers first came out and they used those punch cards, there was metal in those cards. And so the companies that used them, we'd pick them up. We'd pick them up and you had to sort them. They came in yellow, pink, blue, and white. And they had to be sorted because I guess there were different things, there was actually gold and platinum and different things in them. We did not extract the metals. We had big bins in the warehouse and there'd be all white cards, all red, all pink cards, all blue cards, all yellow cards. And then we'd sell them to somebody who would actually extract the metal and they went for so much. It had to be a pound, it couldn't have been a ton, because it would have taken a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot of cards to make a ton.

But also in the warehouse that's where they kept the metals and there was a guy there, the warehouse foreman, and he sorted metals. People would bring in stuff. It was basically, people would bring in stuff. Then you would sort it like the brass would be in one pile, but not just the brass there's red brass and yellow brass. You had to sort, the reason you had to sort is in those days the metal prices went by the American Metal Market, which was a newspaper that everybody read and so yellow brass would be one price and red brass would be another price and then you had like zinc, you had iron, you had, and the way you could tell what the metals were, if you didn't know, you had files. And like on the brass, you'd make a file mark and if it was yellow it was yellow brass, duh! And if it was red, it was red brass. And then you'd get in copper wire. And in those days you'd strip the coating off of the copper wire so, you didn't want to pay for rubber and people who bought it didn't want to pay for rubber. So that was one of the things that the metal workers did in the warehouse or the foreman, they had a thing like that they would pull along and strip off the rubber. And then you took it and, I ran this machine when I was quite young, and I'm not going to say how young because, you know, this was a different era. It was a cold a copper briquetter and it was like a mini-press and what you did was you put the copper wire in and then you pulled a bunch of levers and it came out like a brick. Hence the name copper briquetter. And that made it easier to store and easier to ship. Because if it was all in a bundle all over the place you'd have a very light truckload and it wouldn't be to your advantage or the people buying it. If it was in bricks you could stack it up nicely and get a lot more weight in and get more money, which was the main idea to be in business, hello.

There were all kinds of things. Then out in the yard there was the big press and there were things like what they called sheet iron and that was just kind of stuff that came off of building, you know, mills used it. You would take them to the steel mills and, but you had to have an assay on the material.

EL: A what?

SE: You'd have to have it assayed because if you didn't know the content of the metal that was in the material, you might spoil a heat. And you had to carry insurance for that. Because if you spoiled a heat at a steel mill it was very expensive and it was your responsibility if you supplied the material going into the furnace. So you'd have it tested and you would provide an assay sheet of what the scrap contained. It's not all just a guy pulling in with junk and dumping it off, it's a lot more complicated than you think it is. So there was sheet iron and then there were things called turnings, and we had that across the way. And turnings are what happens in a shop when they, machine shop, when they machine something, the little parts that are machined off, like the corkscrew things, those are called turnings. The reason they're turnings, they came off when they turned the lathe or the machine on it. There are wood turning and metal turning, they're called turnings. And people would buy them. There are different kinds of turnings.

And then you'd get in some, one, we used to every now and then get in raw platinum. If you've never seen raw platinum, it looks like a hunk of steel wool. You would never guess it's platinum. We couldn't weight it on our scales because our scales were meant for big trucks, you know they'd weight in and then they'd weigh out and you'd calculate the difference. And we had a book, we wrote it down and that sort of thing. So once and while we'd get this raw platinum and we'd take it up on South Jefferson Street to Wasilewski's Market. Wasilewski's made their own sausage and it was famous around here. They still make it, but it's not Wasilewski's anymore, it was bought out by Druso's or somebody. But we'd, they'd take it up to Wasilewski's Market and Mrs. Wasilewski's just loved when they came up with the platinum, she was like, she just, I don't know why. It just turned her on or something. The fact that it was platinum and it was being weighed on their scales you know and everything, it was always a big deal with her. So they would weight it up there and come back and have the weight and we would pay them.

As I got older I was in charge of the metal book. And what that was, there as a page or pages for each kind of metal that came in. Things like torch tips, were, not titanium, oh gosh, that's what happens when you get old, but they, quite expensive, quite expensive and a little bit, they went for a lot of money. There were things like molybdenum and caladium and you know, just things you wouldn't expect. There was the usual you know, brass, red brass, yellow brass, copper, copper wire, zinc. Jar lids in the old days used to be zinc, canning jar lids. You could always tell the ones that had the white porcelain inserts, those lids were zinc.

EL: Huh.

SE: And then there were things called caulks and faucets. Those were actually faucets and the various parts that hooked them together. And that was a big deal then. They probably don't have cocks and faucets today. Radiators. Radiators would come in, batteries, and there was one guy, he had a little shed in the back, Mr. Tanner, and what actually, well Tankowitz, Peter Tankowitz. He sorted metals in his little shed in the back and all day long, there was a lot, there were a lot of metals in batteries but it takes a lot of time and patience. He retired from something else, and he came to work there because he wanted something to do. And he was a really nice man and he just worked all day. And we're talking in all kinds of weather. My dad and my husband, even though they were in the office, they were out in the yard every day. If it was ninety degrees or if it was nine below zero. They were out in that yard every day.

And we had things delivered by railroad car, the P&LE, the B&O. We bought rails, my dad bought rails, we dealt in rails also which he used to go to the B&O sale in Baltimore and buy them directly. They would have a rail sale, B&O would have a rail sale every so many months, and he would go there and he would buy rail. So it was just, Mr. Tankowitz, Peter Tankowitz, he would get the metals out of the batteries and this is very sad. His grandson used to pick him up every day from work because he was an older gentleman and I don't know if he drove in his younger days, but he wasn't driving at that point. And he always came to work he had his black lunch bucket. And at that time, we probably had about twenty-five employees. We had Tommy Lordi was our office manager and our secretary was Edna Mihok, and her twin sister Ellen filled in when she was on vacation and most of the guys didn't know it wasn't Edna. And my father and my grandfather, my brother, my husband, Jack Kramer, our cousin, was our foreman for a while, for a long time. Anyway, Peter Tankowitz's grandson came to pick him up and we didn't notice him clock out, we had a time clock in the office and uh, my husband went back with his grandson and there he was, he had put on his coat, he had his lunch bucket in his hand. He was sitting on his little chair and he was gone. But it's the way he wanted to go. He was a man that loved to come to work every day. He loved what he did, he was a happy person and he would have wanted to go with quote, his boots on, unquote. And he did. We all had a good cry and you know we remember, we talk about that every, every now and then you know, we'll ah, remember Petey Tankowitz, there he was.

EL: Were your grandparents religious?

SE: Pardon?

EL: Were your grandparents religious?

SE: My grandmother was more religious than my grandfather. It's just like the rabbi's kids, the preacher's kids, they had enough of it. He knew a lot, he was very shy. Every year they would give him an honor, every year he wouldn't show up.

EL: Like an aliyah or something?

SE: Yes. Every year he would not show up. He was shy, he didn't like to be in a crowd. He was not comfortable in a crowd at all whereas my grandmother was much more gregarious. As a matter of fact, when they lived in Florida in the wintertime before it became South Beach, they lived in South Miami Beach, they used to stay at the Shore Club. And they had a little night club there, my grandfather would play cards. They were all old people and there were all these chairs on the porch. No chairs on the porch now when it's South Beach, but in those days, and it was mostly Jewish people you know. You could hear Yiddish being spoken. And they'd rock on the chairs. And during the day my grandfather'd play cards. They'd open the door to that card room, you could die from asphyxiation. He didn't smoke either. And he wasn't really... he played a lot of pinochle, pinochle and poker. And my grandmother, she had her friends, and there was a little night club there and the headliner and dance instructor was [announces expressively] Jimmy Lovaca! And Jimmy Lovaca was Cuban and he wore one of those ruffled shirts and he had maybe a five or six piece band and he gave dancing lessons, rumba, mumbo, samba. And Mrs. Silverman, let me tell you, she was always taking the trophy, almost every night. Now my grandmother when she would go there my grandfather would say to her, "Why are you going there? You don't dance, you don't smook," he would say smook for smoke, "and you don't drink!" She'd say, "I don't know I enjoy myself!" But anyway, those were the days, when South Beach was Miami Beach South, and really hopping. There were just, all these old people went down for the winter, they sat on the porch, they played cards, they learned to rumba, samba, whatever and there were a lot of Jimmy Lovacas, I'm sure, in all the little hotels.

And even I remember when the Cubans, the first wave or Cubans came, and a lot of them were Jewish, the first wave of Cubans. That's when the professionals came, the doctors, the lawyers, they came, they came with nothing. They left everything behind, their professions, their money, their homes, their way of life. And they came to Florida and they worked in South Beach. The elevator operator was a doctor, the desk clerk was a lawyer. We went to the emergency room with our son, there was a doctor, he was working to get his certification in the United States. Those, that first group that came, the intelligentsia, they knew what was coming. And especially the Jews, because who are they gonna pick on? And they weren't all Jews, but a lot of them were. And they left.

EL: How did your parents meet?

SE: At a picnic. In the old days a lot of people met at picnics. So my dad had a friend in Youngstown, Greenberg, what's his name, he was a dentist. And he went to school with my dad, and I don't know somebody was having a picnic, and everybody had picnics, and I'm sure that the younger people here in New Castle, just like when I was a kid, we went over to the JCC dances to meet guys. You know they heard about the picnic so they decided to go check out the guys, I'm sure. And usually these picnics there were card games, there were ball games. My dad was a very athletic guy, he was a good ball player.

EL: What was his name?

SE: Robert Pickel. Bob, he went by Bob.

EL: So he was very athletic.

SE: He was very athletic. His real name was Rafael, but you can imagine growing up in a tough neighborhood with a name like Rafael. He changed it. His name was really Rafael Robert Pickel. He changed it to Robert Ralph Pickel because he wasn't going to be Rafael for reasons of avoiding fights, I'm sure. And they met at a picnic.

EL: And he, he immediately went to work for your grandfather?

SE: No, he was working, he worked for Pick 'N Pay grocery stores. He was a grocery store manager, that's what he did. And my mother at that time must have been done with college.

EL: Where did she go to college?

SE: She went to Penn State for one year, she hated it. She came home and she went to Pitt and she commuted on the train.

EL: What did she study?

SE: She was a social worker. In those days there were, you know, the occupations that were open to women: teaching, nursing, do-good works. So she became a social worker.

EL: How many kids, how many were there. How many siblings do you have?

SE: I have one sibling, a brother, Bruce. And he was in the scrap business as well and now he was his own business, it's called Gardner Steel Corporation. And off the record, he doesn't talk to me. He deals in new and structural steel, like I-beams, angles, channels, sheet and plate, like those big rolls you see. And he sells them to people who use them in manufacturing or like in plants. If you've ever been in a plant you'll notice that the floors, if their metal, the metal is kind of in a checker pattern, that's for safety purposes. That's actually called checker plate. He sells that. Let's say in July, a lot of plants close down the month of July to refurbish, a lot of times they'll replace their checker plate because it gets worn down.

EL: Yeah.

SE: And of course angles are used when you build a building, for windows and doors to frame them up. I-beams are used to support the roofs. There's rebar which, and mesh, which supports your concrete.

EL: What was it like growing up Jewish in New Castle?

SE: You know, we belonged to the temple so that was, we were Reform. My grandparents belonged to the synagogue. The second day of Rosh Hashanah we would go to the synagogue. I knew that I was different and I know some of my friends, including my brother, had problems. I can honestly say that at least not to my face, and Marsha and I graduated together, though we did not know each other 'til sixth grade. I personally did not experience any overt anti-Semitism, however I was a candidate for, I forget what they call it, for like foreign students, or semester abroad or year abroad, you know through the, what's that Rotary, I believe or something like that. And I basically, it never occurred to me, but then I found out that the reason I was not chosen even though my grades were better was because I was Jewish and they were worried they wouldn't be able to find a family that, you know, I could stay with. But as far as from peers n'at, I was a very, I was very active in a lot of things, in Jewish organizations plus in school.

EL: What kind of Jewish organizations?

SE: Like BBYO, BBG, and AZA. They had NFTY at the temple, but I was really more interested in AZA and BBG type of thing. Very active. I participated all through junior high school and high school, went to all the conventions, played on a travelling volleyball team. I loved it. Went to Jewish camps in the Poconos, maybe that's another reason. I went to Pine Forest, which was owned by Jews from Philadelphia, and it was basically all Jewish kids. You know, it was the Catskills for kids, only it was the Poconos [laughter]. But when my family decided we had outgrown our home on Glenmore Boulevard, and our neighbors were all not Jewish and we never had a problem with them. But when we decided to move there was a house up the street, two blocks up and it was owned by an old town family, the Fotes, and my mother loved the house. And it was for sale and they wanted to buy it and it was right in the deed that they could not sell the home to Jews. So my mother said basically... you can imagine. And they bought a lot in Neshannock Township at the corner of Plank and Maitland Lane, 203 Maitland Lane. Bruce Waldman lives there now. He's Jewish, and before him the Fishers, they were Jewish. And my mother got an architect, and my mother was very talented in the architectural and design, that's what she should have done. She was way ahead of her time. She got Architectural Digest 'til the day she died. She got an architect, Edward Kwalwasser from Pittsburgh, he designed several school and things, homes around Pittsburgh. And they designed the home, very modern.

EL: Is it still there?

SE: Yes. Very modern. Bruce Waldman lives there. Very modern, flat roof, fit the lot, Esli Black was the builder and he chased my mother many times with a 4x4, Esli didn't use 2x2s, he used 4x4s, and it was his house until it was built and that's the way it was and if you didn't like it T.S. And after we moved in they burned a cross on our lawn. Because we don't want those people moving into the township, what will happen next? God only knows! Didn't bother us a whole hell of a lot, we kind of thumbed our nose at their cross on the lawn, and they kind of decided they were gonna accept us. And the only problems we had after that was when the garage door was open they saw our hoses hanging there, they thought we were the fire station because they had never seen a house

like that before. But you know my brother went to Neshannock, I went to New Castle. He did have one problem with one kid. He beat the crap out of him. He did not get suspended. The kid never bothered him again and neither did anybody else. Called my brother a dirty Jew and my brother beat the crap out of him so he was in the hospital.

EL: Tell me a little bit about south side of New Castle, Long Avenue.

SE: Long Avenue. Long Avenue was the melting pot of merchants. And our scrap yard wasn't far from there, and we used to eat on Long Avenue. It was a wonderful place. There were Jewish merchants, there were Syrian and Lebanese merchants and restaurants, and all kinds of things. You started at the one end and there was Jewish business Alpern Bakery, they had absolutely marvelous bread that they would bake, their rye bread, their pumpernickel, their apple squares have not been duplicated 'til this day and I miss them still. The Meyer's Shoe Store, Haenick's had a shoe store. There was Oscar Levine Menswear, which he was Jewish. There was Josephs' Market, they were Lebanese. There was, oh lemon ice, lemon ice, I can't think of the first name, they were Syrian, they had lemon ice, you'd go down and get like a quart like you got in like ice cream in a pint or a quart, but not like lemon ice today, not like that frozen lemon ice you buy. And it was so fine, it was like ice cream, oh, Nadar's! Nadar's Lemon Ice, oh, it was to die from! There was Kantz's Department Store, they were Jewish. There, my uncle Shleimi, Solomon Wolfe, who was my grandfather's brother, a little guy, and my aunt Frieda had a grocery store, Wolfe's Market down there. My uncle Shleimi was a little, wiry kind of guy with a big nose and ears, and Frieda was absolutely gorgeous, she could have been a movie star and they had six daughters. He was one of seven brothers and he had six daughters. They were all great gals, too.

My mother had a lot of first cousins, and when I was growing up here I had a lot of first cousins. A lot of cousins. I mean when I was a teenager in BBG, I had so many cousins, and people would say, the other kids from the other town like Beaver Falls and Butler and all the other towns, listen, don't say anything about any kids from New Castle to other kids from New Castle because they're all related. And that was pretty much true. I felt very insulated, it was great for me, because I was younger, a lot of them were older, especially my cousin Reenie, who really looked out for me, and I looked up to her because she was a cheerleader at New Castle High School and she worked in Strauss' in the cosmetic department. And her father, Al Goldman, he worked for Strauss', too, in the appliances, he was a good guy. And my aunt Adele, his wife, she had polio when she was younger so she wore a high shoe. They were very kosher, she was a great...and she and her sister, my cousin Harriet Steiner, Adele Goldman and Harriet Steiner were the first two special-ed teachers in this county. Maybe in Western Pennsylvania. In those days they called them, my aunt, or my cousin, we called her aunt, but she was my cousin, Harriet taught what they called the "trainables" and my cousin Adele taught what they called the "educables". Now today you would never use those terms. And let me tell you they loved it. They loved it, they were wonderful to their students and their students loved them and I admired them so much because they did that. They were kind of like my ideal women because look what they did, you know, that was a new thing, it was, and

they did it. Probably they were the only ones that were willing to do it, but they were real trailblazers for doing that. Both smart women, very smart women.

EL: What happened to the business?

SE: What happened to our business, in the mid-eighties, when the bottom fell out of the steel market and there was a recession, we were a mid-sized business with a large business overhead. We had a lot of equipment, the cranes, the trucks, we had a lot of employees. We had a union. Our employees got profit sharing, every Christmas, every Thanksgiving they got a turkey, every Christmas and Easter they got a ham. Two reasons. One, we wanted them to have something, and two, some of them drank and we wanted to make sure their families had something to eat. We just could not sustain. About eighty percent of the mid-sized scrap businesses in the country went out of business at that time. The small ones survived because they could. They had much less overhead. You know, for us it was the way our business was, we couldn't downsize. You know, we just couldn't downsize, we had the equipment, we had the, I mean we did lay people off but it still didn't matter. And if you were very lucky, there were conglomerates like Luria, they were very huge. And there was that place in New Jersey, they used to come to the conventions, why can't I think of it right now, they were huge, Schiavone Bonomo. They were into rubbish too. They were probably into the mob as well, I'm not sure on that so don't quote me. But it just became impossible for us to continue. The markets, the prices were so low that you couldn't afford to ship it, and you couldn't afford not to ship it. And you were, you were just raiding Peter to pay Paul and after a while my husband just couldn't do it anymore. My dad was gone, my grandfather was gone, and it was just him. And he couldn't do it. He just couldn't get out of bed after, there was no saving it, there was no way that we could save the business. Very sad, we both cried.

EL: Did he go into a new business after that or did he retire?

SE: No, he, nobody would hire him. Well one guy would hire him, he was offered a job in Oneida, New York. And it was me who said I wasn't going to Oneonta, New York, I didn't like the winters in New Castle, and I certainly wasn't moving to upstate New York and that was that. We survived. People wouldn't hire him, they said he was overqualified. He's an engineer. He's an industrial engineer by education. Finally he ended up in business brokerage, you know, he's still working because he's the kind of guy that needs that. You know if he stays home for three days I might have to kill him.

He might have to get, I mean I'm retired, I'm retired from working. I mean I worked in the scrap business, and then I worked for the University of Chicago, for NORC doing government sponsored research studies. And then through a fluke, while I was waiting for a study to come online, the newspaper was looking for people to sell subscriptions over the phone and the ad had been out of the paper for a couple of weeks but I went down and interviewed and they hired me and I did that. In between I did some marketing research, and I worked on, for Booth Allen Hamilton, a friend of mine and I, before Pennsylvania started its lottery, the state of Pennsylvania, they hired Booth Allen

Hamilton to survey the residents of Pennsylvania to see what kind of lottery they might be interested in. What kind of tickets, what kind of prices. Of course they didn't know they were being interviewed about the lottery and we were not allowed to tell them. And we worked on that, and we both worked for Ohio Edison and Penn State doing some marketing research for them. Three nights, six nights a month, we worked for them. We did an acid rain study for a business research services who was the company that Ohio Edison used their marketing research projects.

I also worked for Starch Inra Hooper doing impressions on ads in magazines. And then I got this job at the news, and to make long story short segued into I, the classified advertising director thought we should have a telesales department, we started it, I became the head of that. Then my brother needed help, I left work for him, that's how I know about what he does. He was impossible to work for. He thought if you stood next to it, it would speak to you. Well, I was gonna die if I continued to work for him, he would throw chairs at me every day. So I left and fortunately for me the news had a magazine that they were having problems getting, it was going under, and I came and took over that and I made it go, and eventually I did display and classified advertising and I worked on 100% commission, all the advertising people did. And when I started Chris D'Angelo, who was my mentor and at the time the classified manager, said to me, "You know some people have an eye, you don't. You're gonna have to learn." And I did learn, and some of my ads are still running which is unbelievable because I've been retired for over seven years. And some of my ads are still running, I still miss my customers and they miss me. I had the biggest accounts at the news, I gave them very good service. I loved my job and if my mother hadn't died suddenly and I hadn't gotten breast cancer, I might have stuck around a little longer, but as it was I was just about sixty-five then and it's very demanding work and I put in very long days. I'm say I, I loved it, I just couldn't do it anymore.

EL: How was the Jewish community changed in New Castle during your lifetime?

END OF INTERVIEW