

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Zinz Family

Family History

O. H. 818

ROBERT W. ZINZ

Interviewed

by

Ken Zinz

on

January 1, 1973

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: ROBERT W. ZINZ

INTERVIEWER: Ken Zinz

SUBJECT: furniture business, parents, family life, early cars, education

DATE: January 1, 1973

KZ: This is an interview with Robert Walter Zinz Sr. on January 1, 1973.

First of all, where were you born and where were the various places you lived?

RZ: I was born in 1911 on April 30th. I was born on Oak Street. As much as I can remember we moved from Oak Street when I was approximately four years old to 1014 Delaware. I lived on Delaware with my parents from then until 1925 in the fall when we moved to 43 North Schenley. We were the only house on the street; there were no other houses, only a little bit of a double garage.

KZ: Who built this house?

RZ: My uncle, Fred Theis. That was my mother's brother.

KZ: Do you know what grandpa paid for the house when he bought it?

RZ: I believe at that time it was \$7500. We had to pay for the improvements, like the sidewalk, the streets. There was no driveway; we put that in ourselves. That was about all on improvements.

KZ: When you were a little boy did you go to school at Washington School?

RZ: No. When we first moved here I was about fifteen years old. I had to go to Washington School; that was down off of Mahoning on Lakewood. I went there one year or part of one year; then I went to Chaney. I was just in Chaney about a year and I was

sixteen and then I started working.

KZ: What would that be, about tenth or eleventh grade?

RZ: I think about the tenth grade. I didn't go through high school.

KZ: Then you went to work for grandpa?

RZ: Yes.

KZ: That was at the furniture store?

RZ: Yes.

KZ: What did you do at the furniture store?

RZ: Blackened stones, polished furniture, helped with the deliveries, cleaned the store, dusted the store, anything that had to be done. When I turned eighteen then I got out on the truck.

KZ: Was that one of the used furniture businesses in Youngstown at that time?

RZ: Oh yes. We were the biggest. Uncle Will was on West Federal and we were on East Federal. We were the biggest new and used furniture store in the city of Youngstown. We could buy and sell any one of them.

KZ: What other sorts of things did you do down there?

RZ: Naturally as the years went by I went out and appraised furniture; I went out and bought furniture; I was the salesman in the store; I was the receiver; I was the shipper, a jack-of-all-trades; I did everything, bookkeeping, selling; I took care of the books. Grandpa did most of the bookkeeping, but there were times when I helped him. We had inventory and stuff and I had to help do that.

Then in 1929 grandpa went to Europe for four months. During those four months, I was manager of the store. That was just at the time of the Depression. When he left things were good and while he was over there things went kaput. In fact, while he was over there . . . We used to have the really large dollar bills. The dollar bills used to be a foot long it seemed. The money that we had here, when we turned them into the bank, they gave us the small dollar bills. When grandpa came back and he came into New York he had some money on him, American money. He went to the bank to cash traveler's checks and they gave him the little money and thought it was script. When he came back there was really a Depression.

Uncle Will and grandpa had a piece of property on Rayen Avenue. We were offered, at that time, \$18,000. That was at the

corner of Fifth and Rayen, across from Grace Church. On this piece of property was a large building. There were storerooms and an upstairs and downstairs. You had to drive in from the side. You drove in from Belmont Avenue and could drive in on top. We tried to negotiate that sale, but while grandpa was still over there Uncle Will didn't know what to do because it was a partnership property. I had no say-so. I wired my dad over in Europe and told him we were offered \$18,000. He said, "No. We're not selling until I get back. I think we can get more money." In the course of three months or four months the Depression hit and when he came back he wanted to sell it for \$18,000. A Chrysler-Plymouth dealer wanted to buy it. Anyway, when he came back they got their heads together--Uncle Will and dad--and they didn't want the property at any price. They couldn't even sell it for \$10,000 or \$12,000. They just had to keep the piece of property and eventually they did sell it, but they didn't get the price.

KZ: What were the gross sales for a given year when things were going pretty good in the 1920's? How much did you pull in?

RZ: I would say that they took in \$6,000 or \$8,000 a year; that was good business. We used to sell kitchen chairs for a quarter. If you rented a house it was \$12 a month rent. A store was \$25 or \$35 a month to rent. You didn't have too many expenses. The wages, I remember when I started I got \$5 a week. Grandpa took home \$15 or \$20 a week, something like that. There was plenty of money.

KZ: When was the best time for the business? Was it during the war and before then?

RZ: After the Depression things got better. As wages went up in the mills our prices went up in the store.

KZ: Whatever happened to the business? How come it folded up?

RZ: We were forced to move out of one place because the lease ran out and some grocery store--a fellow by the name of Cohen--wanted that building. It was a big building and they were going to pay more rent than we were paying. We just left.

In the meantime, a fellow by the name of John Parlink had a used furniture store on the next block. Dad went up and bought him out lock, stock, and barrel, everything. That used to be in the old Clemmin's building. It was a really large building, double storeroom, loading dock in the back, a big garage in the back for our trucks. Rent was cheap at that time. The whole building was \$100 or \$150 for that big store. Then I stayed in there. We must have gone in there about 1927, 1928. We stayed in there until 1948, but before 1948 grandpa died. He died in 1944. In 1944 I took over the

business and ran it from 1944 to 1948 on East Federal. In 1948 that building was sold. I was paying \$100 or \$150 and they tried to raise the rent to \$300 a month. I refused to pay it.

In the meantime, the Grand Rapids Furniture was selling out. They were going west and wanted to break up. We went down--Jack, Johnny, and myself--and we bought the contents for \$12,000, cash money. Eventually Johnny wanted out after a couple of years. The business was going but we weren't getting too much in return for the three of us. Jack and I bought Johnny out. In 1953, 1954, things down on East Federal were going kaput. You weren't getting the class of people anymore. Business was dropping down and the accounts we did have, we got beat out of them. In fact, when we closed up in 1955 we had over \$12,000 on the books which we didn't collect. In 1955 we just sold out and whatever was left Jack got half of it and I got half. We didn't get all of our investment back, but we didn't owe anybody money when we left. We didn't go bankrupt. We paid all of our debts and we still had money left. We didn't get our full \$12,000 back.

- KZ: Would you attribute that to the other used furniture stores coming in?
- RZ: No. For one thing, Christ Mission was getting all the furniture for nothing. You can't compete with anybody when you have to pay your men and you have to pay rent and there are no donations.
- KZ: Do you think the location on West Federal Street had anything to do with it?
- RZ: No. West Federal Street was going just like East Federal. There were more colored people moving in the territory and the white people just didn't come down.
- KZ: How about if you would have moved in the heart of the town, would that have helped?
- RZ: We couldn't have moved there; we couldn't afford that much rent. Rent up there was \$1000 a month. We were paying \$300 and even then \$300 was hard to make and keep your head above water.
- KZ: So that is the story of the business?
- RZ: Yes, I closed it up in 1955. I believe it was around March. In thirty days I had the place cleaned out; my lease had run out. I was running on an option and I could leave any time I wanted. The landlord wouldn't come down on the rent so I told him, "Rent it to somebody else." From the time I left in 1955 I don't think the building was rented until they tore it down in 1972. If it was rented they weren't getting

anything, maybe just enough for taxes.

KZ: I don't know too much about grandpa because I wasn't alive at the time. Maybe you can tell us a little bit about him.

RZ: He was a shrewd businessman. He taught me everything I know. He had some good fellows working for him: A fellow by the name of Johnny Cannon--he was a young fellow--and a fellow by the name of Charlie Seador. At different times they worked for him and I was always under them. I was the boss' son, but that didn't make any difference. I had to take orders from them. Those boys really taught me what I knew about the business. Of course, Uncle Glen worked at GF and he used to come down and help out. When we bought Grand Rapids out Glen came in as manager. We made some money down there in the early 1950's. The money went as business got bad; it just kept eating and eating until we had to close up.

KZ: How long was grandpa sick?

RZ: He got sick in 1940. That is when he went in first for an operation. He was back in for treatments and so forth and he lasted until January of 1944; that's about a little over three years.

KZ: Meanwhile you had to take care of the business?

RZ: I took care of the business. There was no hospitalization then.

KZ: Was there social security?

RZ: No. They didn't have social security for the businessmen. It was in later years that the government granted that.

KZ: Just the working men?

RZ: Yes, anybody that worked in the mill. Business didn't have it. You had no security.

KZ: Tell me a little bit about some of the early cars and maybe even some of the cars that you first owned?

RZ: The early cars, I remember we had a 1919 Dodge. It was a two-door--one door on each side and the doors were right smack in the middle of the seats. When you walked in you could either sit in the back seat . . . There was a little space where you could put your legs and you could sit on the left side or the right side. It was like bucket seats. Dad made a little board and put leather on it so when three sat in there you put that board in there. Kids could stand in the cars. The starter on the car was almost as big as the engine. It must have been fifteen or eighteen inches round. It was a good car though.

I also remember the trucks we had. There were no heaters in those trucks. You cut a hole in the floorboard and put a piece of tin under the exhaust pipe, under the manifold, and as you were driving the heat from under the car would come inside. In the back nobody got heat.

I remember if we went on a trip in the car in the wintertime, grandpa would put paving bricks in the oven. He would pull them out, put them in a blanket, and he would put them in the car. Until the bricks cooled off we would be pretty near Farrell. That was how we got heat.

The windshield wipers, they were not automatic. You had one windshield wiper and it was operated manually. The handle stuck out and you cleaned it with that. I remember dad said, "Why shouldn't we have two on there?" Dad drilled a hole in the other side of the windshield and got another windshield wiper on there. He put a piece of wire across and he had two of them working.

KZ: Do you remember when your dad got his first car?

RZ: Dad bought a brand new Ford. In those days you had to wait three months before you got it. He was down at the club one time and the salesman brought the car down there. They had a big doings at the club. Dad had a horse and buggy there. I think the salesman drove the car home for him that night. That night while grandpa was in bed sleeping the store burned down. He never drove that car because he sent it back. He needed the money to start the business up; he had no insurance.

KZ: How much did the car cost?

RZ: I think about \$500 for a brand new Ford.

KZ: Was that a Model T?

RZ: That was the only thing they had in those days.

Let me talk a little bit about prohibition. That is something. I was just a little boy and it was during the war years. The women got their opportunity to vote so when all the men were fighting in Europe the election was up. They voted the country dry. This country had booze flowing. There were speakeasies and you had to go in back doors. If they didn't know you, you couldn't get in. I remember they raided Campbell one time. The whiskey was flowing down the street. The prohibition officers brought the barrels out and poured them in the street and just got . . . It stunk.

KZ: Was there a lot of drinking during prohibition?

RZ: Oh yes.

- KZ: Tell us as a young man how you met mother and some of the things you did when you were young.
- RZ: I had different girl friends around Youngstown, but George Barent and I were good buddies. We went west, to Salem, Alliance, and Canton. We met these girls through the Saxon people and their lodges and so forth. It happened to be that basketball season was our main event. Mother used to play basketball. We were down at the Saxon Club on Franklin Avenue and she was there but I hadn't met her. She was a star on the New Castle team. We were dancing and a fellow came over to me; he liked mother pretty much. He said, "Hey, Bob, we're having a tag dance. When I'm dancing with that girl somebody will tag me and when you see that you tag him. Then I'll tag you back." That's the way it was. He would be dancing with her and somebody would tag mother. Somebody tagged him and then I would tag them back. He, in turn, would tag me to get back to dance with mother. He liked mother a whole lot. That went on the whole evening. Naturally, when I danced with mother I got to know her and talked to her. This went on the whole evening and I was having a good time just doing that and dancing with other girls. In fact, I was loose on the floor. He dated her quite a bit, and then George dated her. Me, I never dated her or anything. Finally, this guy quit going with mother and I heard it through the grapevine. One time we went over to New Castle, Mike Welther and I. We went over there and we started our renewed friendship. I went over there and I took her home from the dance that night and asked her for another date. It developed into what we have right now, our marriage.
- KZ: Were the Saxons a pretty good group of people? Did they like to have fun?
- RZ: We had grand times.
- KZ: Mostly dances?
- RZ: There was no bowling in those days. We had basketball in the winter and the men had baseball.
- KZ: Did mother live at the GBU then?
- RZ: No, not at that time. She lived at the GBU before I met her.
- KZ: Did you hit it off immediately with Grandpa Roth?
- RZ: Oh yes! He and I were good buddies.
- KZ: How many years did you go with mother?
- RZ: Three years.

KZ: Did you go back and forth with Mike Welther a lot?

RZ: Mike and I went there all the time. We took whatever car was in the best shape, and we shared expenses. If I was broke he paid the bills; if he was broke I paid the bills. There was no problem. We went all over.

KZ: What kind of car were you driving then?

RZ: When I first met mother we had a Chrysler, but it was on its last legs. We got rid of it and we bought an old Buick temporarily until we could get money. Finally, we got a new Plymouth; that was in 1934. I married mother in 1936. We had the a Plymouth four years or so. I ran that car over 100,000 miles. It was grandpa's car; he bought it. He said, "Don't buy a car; you can use the family car." I would take grandpa somewhere at 7:00 and he would say, "Pick me up at 12:00." From 7:00 to 12:00 was five hours, so me and Mike would get in the car and we would go all the way to New Castle.

When I was dating mother, Mike and I used to pick up the girls in Youngstown that didn't have dates. We always went over five in a car. We would take these girls to New Castle and the New Castle boys used to dance with them and have a good time. They would stay there in the club until I would take mother home and Mike would take his girl home. Then I would come back and pick the girls up and bring them back to Youngstown. There was never any dispute in your mother's mind or anything if we had girls coming over. We made those arrangements and they knew. All of the parents were so wonderful. They treated us boys like kings.

KZ: Your father, do you know where your father was born and raised?

RZ: He was raised in Europe in Transylvania. It used to be Austria-Hungary at one time; that was when he was a child. After the First World War it was made into Romania. That was after 1918.

KZ: Do you know the specific part over there?

RZ: Transylvania is a city in Romania. It is a small suburb.

KZ: How large was grandpa's family?

RZ: I believe five or six. He had a brother in this country and he lived in Farrell. Then he had a sister in Salem.

KZ: What was her name?

RZ: Her name was Faulk. Then he had a sister in Farrell. One was Mrs. Henning and one Orendi. One was Mary and one was Sophie.

KZ: Were there any brothers or sisters in the old country?

RZ: I don't believe so.

KZ: Grandpa went back to visit in the late 1920's.

RZ: He came over here in 1900. Then he went back in 1929. He went over in the summer. While he was over there is when the Depression came. Banks had closed then and he had money in the bank that he couldn't get out. People owed him money and he couldn't collect it.

KZ: Did grandpa ever talk about the old country?

RZ: Yes. He always said things were different over there. If you committed a crime over there you were prosecuted. You weren't processed and then months later received a sentence. When the crime was committed you were taken care of right there. If it was the death penalty, that's what you got.

KZ: Also about grandpa's parents, did he ever mention what their names were? What is his father's name?

RZ: I believe his father's name was George.

KZ: Was the name always Zinz?

RZ: It was Zinz all the time.

KZ: It wasn't shortened or anything?

RZ: No.

KZ: How about his mother, what was her name?

RZ: I don't know.

KZ: Do you know anything more about them?

RZ: His father came over to this country before the war. He wasn't here long and got sick.

KZ: Did he stay with grandpa?

RZ: Yes.

KZ: Do you remember him at all?

RZ: No.

KZ: Grandpa did mention him coming over?

RZ: Yes, he was here. Dad brought him over. He didn't have the money. Dad sent him money and wanted him to stay here. Then grandpa's mom was supposed to come, but they never did.

When dad went back over they had already died. Grandpa had a sister over there. When the parents had died dad had property; he had a farm. When he went over there he transferred everything he had. The whole farm wasn't worth \$2,000, \$1,500; that was big. Grandpa put electric in the place; it had no electric. He put a toilet in there, bathroom. He fixed the place up so it was really liveable.

KZ: This was in the 1920's right?

RZ: In 1929. I was just a young fellow, about eighteen years old. I took care of the store.

KZ: Do you know anything more about your dad's parents?

RZ: No.

KZ: You never met them personally?

RZ: No. Dad must have sent them money off and on and mom must have not known it.

KZ: Things weren't that well-off then over there?

RZ: Things were rough over there too. They had the war over there and it took everything from them. They took cows, chickens, every doggone thing. They didn't have anything. I remember mom used to get letters once in a while. All they asked for was money. In fact, they would have brought them over here, but they didn't want to come. They thought grandpa was making money hand over fist.

KZ: They thought of the United States as a place where you made a lot of money.

RZ: If you had bills in your hand that was money, and if you dropped any change or anything you just kicked it on the side; that is the way they thought.

KZ: What did grandpa do before he came to the United States?

RZ: Over there you're either a farmer or you have a certificate that says you do something.

KZ: Grandpa had a certificate.

RZ: He had one as a businessman. The way it works over there, if you want to go into a store, a general store, you have to study for three years. He left home and he worked over there in Transylvania.

KZ: He was like an apprentice?

- RZ: That's right. When you start you groom the horses first. Then you come in and get your master and clean his shoes and press his clothes. Then you clean up. That is all done early in the morning. In the evening you do the same. Then he went to the store about 8:00 in the morning. He got up at 6:00. He had vacations and days off, but he couldn't go home; it was too far. After three years of this he got a certificate. After the three years that he had studied, if he wanted a job he could go anywhere in Europe and show the certificate and his credentials and they would hire him immediately. He was a full-fledged businessman.
- KZ: When he came to the United States then he already had training in business?
- RZ: He had training but he couldn't talk. What good is the training when you can't talk? He had to get a job somewhere and when he came to this country he went to Leetonia and Lisbon, which were close. He had an Irish aunt that lived there. His uncle married this Irish woman and had come to this country years before. They got him a job in a coal mine. He worked there a couple of years. He had friends in Lowellville and that's where he went. When grandma came she went there.
- KZ: Did they come at approximately the same time?
- RZ: No. They weren't married. When they came over here they got married.
- KZ: About grandma, when did she come?
- RZ: I would say about three years later.
- KZ: She had brothers and sisters too.
- RZ: Yes, but none of them were here.
- KZ: How many brothers and sisters did she have?
- RZ: I don't know.
- KZ: What about her parents? Do you know anything about her parents?
- RZ: She never talked about them.
- KZ: About the early years, you probably don't remember much about living on Oak Street.
- RZ: I was born there.
- KZ: How old were you when you were on Delaware?
- RZ: When we moved I was three years old.

KZ: Then you were how old when you moved to Schenley?

RZ: I believe fifteen. In fact, when we moved on Delaware that was the foreign section. We didn't go to public school. I went to St. Paul's. They were on Berlin Street. They had two floors; the school building was a frame building. Right next to the school was the church.

KZ: That was a Lutheran church?

RZ: Yes.

KZ: And it was a German Lutheran church?

RZ: Yes. We went to school there when I was five years old.

KZ: Do you think that might have been the reason grandpa moved over there, so you could be close to the school and church?

RZ: It could have been. After the war they changed the name where the school was. They changed it from Berlin Street to Funson Street.

KZ: Because of the anti-German feeling?

RZ: Right. We were forced to close the schools down and then I went to Jefferson. That was only two blocks.

KZ: Was there any harassment of people of German background?

RZ: No.

KZ: How about the German school, didn't they shut it down then?

RZ: That's why they shut it down.

KZ: Did it ever reopen?

RZ: Never. I went to Jefferson until 1925. I must have been in the seventh grade then. Then I went to Chaney for a few more years.

KZ: I think you told me when you lived on Delaware that you had a blind horse? What was this horse's name?

RZ: Billy.

KZ: What about this horse?

RZ: There was a big field on Delaware. That horse would go there at night.

KZ: He was completely blind?

- RZ: He knew when he had to cross the road. If he crossed a road he knew where the ditch was. Dad used to hook him on the wagon and dad was his eyes. That horse would run and dad would tell him to stop; that horse knew there was something in the front. That horse trusted grandpa. That horse stayed; you didn't have to tie him up.
- KZ: Did grandpa take the horse back and forth to work?
- RZ: Yes.
- KZ: Do you remember the horse?
- RZ: Yes.
- KZ: Do you remember the streetcar?
- RZ: The streetcar used to go down Federal Street and it used to go all the way to Warren.
- KZ: Where did you catch it?
- RZ: We could go down over the hill and catch that one, or we went up Delaware to North Avenue. The streetcar line ended at North Avenue.
- KZ: When they ended how did they switch the cars?
- RZ: They didn't switch them. They had a handle and when they wanted to go the other way they would take the handle from one end to the other.
- KZ: You mentioned they had nets in the front?
- RZ: This big net would catch people so they didn't get run over.
- KZ: They were a safety precaution?
- RZ: Yes.
- KZ: Were those electric?
- RZ: Yes.
- KZ: What did it cost to ride the streetcar?
- RZ: 5¢.
- KZ: What kind of people rode the streetcars?
- RZ: Everybody.
- KZ: Probably in the winter too?

- RZ: Yes, because they were warm. They had electric heaters under the seats. In the winter they would have a snow sweeper.
- KZ: The city?
- RZ: No, the streetcar company. They worked the same way as the street cars. They had a big brush in the front and in the back. On a winter morning they would send these sweepers out and they would have to sweep the tracks off.
- KZ: Getting back to your neighborhood, do you remember some of the people that lived on the street?
- RZ: Joe Valisente, Fabby Valisente, Jimmy Valisente.
- KZ: Did they live on the same street?
- RZ: They lived on the corner of Sunset and Delaware. Across the street from them were Evans', Babe Evans. Then on Seneca Street there was another Evans family. Bill Sanders was a Saxon. Mike Kleir. There was Uncle Fritz. George Unch, Bill Brenner. There were a lot of German Saxon people.
- KZ: Was that a fairly new neighborhood when you moved there?
- RZ: No. The houses were old then. The houses were probably twenty years old.
- KZ: Would you say that there were a lot of different nationalities living in that neighborhood?
- RZ: All kinds. It seemed to be segregated. One street might have been Slovaks, another street Polacks. In general most of the families on one street were of one kind. There were a lot of Italians.
- KZ: Was that when you were marble champion? Is that where you learned all your marble shooting?
- RZ: I went to Jefferson School.
- KZ: At school?
- RZ: Yes, I was second in the whole city of Youngstown.
- KZ: Were the fellows mischievous in the neighborhood?
- RZ: Yes. Nothing bad. We used to steal grapes, or if somebody had a pear tree we would take some. We used to play with tin cans like they play hockey. We made our own bikes and sleds. Grandpa made us a bobsled for twelve people. There was a steering wheel on it and runners. It was really heavy. It took half of us to pull it back up.

KZ: How many rooms were in the house on Delaware?

RZ: Nine rooms.

KZ: That was a big house.

RZ: It wasn't large when we moved in.

KZ: You enlarged it?

RZ: Yes. We made about four rooms.

KZ: Do you remember what he paid for that house?

RZ: I don't know. I don't think he paid over \$4,000.

KZ: After you moved to Schenley you still kept the house, didn't you? Didn't you rent it out for a while?

RZ: We rented it. We borrowed money on the house there to buy the other one. We rented it for a while and then we ran an ad and sold it. Somehow or other a guy only lived in it about a year or two and he left town. I guess it was land contract and we got the house back. Then we rented again and we were beat out of rent. They busted things so dad decided to sell it again. Italian people bought it. In fact, they still have it.

KZ: You said you remember the big flu they had in 1918.

RZ: They closed Jefferson School and they used it as a hospital.

KZ: Did you have the flu then or did anybody in your family get it?

RZ: They could have been sick, but it wasn't bad. The funeral parlors didn't have enough room to lay the bodies down. They would have to stand up against the wall.

KZ: When you moved to Schenley you mentioned that you had a fire one time, when was that?

RZ: About 1933.

KZ: How did that happen?

RZ: Everybody used to throw clothes down the shoot and one time they just laid there wet and there was spontaneous combustion.

KZ: Was that at night?

RZ: Early in the morning.

KZ: You smelled the smoke?

RZ: Yes.

KZ: Did you call the fire department?

RZ: Yes. I found grandpa in the bathroom; he was overcome by smoke.

KZ: Who were some of your friends in this area?

RZ: Skip Miller.

KZ: Was it difficult to have nine kids in a family?

RZ: It was a lot of fun. There was always enough to eat, grandpa made sure of that.

KZ: Who was the disciplinarian in the family?

RZ: I think grandpa because we would run away from him. She would forget when we came back, but grandpa never forgot.

KZ: What would he do, whip you?

RZ: He hit the hell out of us. He would hit you and then forgive you.

KZ: I've got some other questions about the business. Can you explain what happened to the business after grandpa died?

RZ: Nothing happened. It was just transferred in his will to me. I didn't do a thing about it.

KZ: According to the will you were given the business and the residence.

RZ: I was the executor of the will. I took care of grandpa for four years while he was ill. I also took care of the business. There was no hospitalization; I paid for it.

KZ: How did you eventually become partners with the other people?

RZ: Grandpa died in 1944 and I kept the business until 1948. Then Grand Rapids was up for sale and Jack and Johnny Keckus said we should buy it out. They figured to get out of GF and work the business. The business wasn't that big for them to quit their jobs.

KZ: It was an investment for them.

RZ: Yes, but it didn't prove out because we were only in there four or five years and things weren't going right. The colored people moved in and the white people weren't buying and sales were dropping off. It didn't pan out the way they figured so in 1955 I paid Johnny Keckus off in full. Then I started to

pay Jack back, but it got to the point where things weren't going and I couldn't pay.

KZ: How much money are you talking about when you say you bought out Grand Rapids?

RZ: About \$12,000.

KZ: You shared that equally?

RZ: Each one of us put \$3,000 or \$4,000 in. Johnny got his \$3,000 back plus interest. Jack was getting his because he wanted out. Jack was bookkeeper and Johnny was on the truck. This was part-time work. I told Jack I couldn't pay him off and that we were going to sell the thing. Whatever we got we would split fifty-fifty, and that's just what we did. Jack came out with about half of his investment. I had my investment plus another store. I was the one that had actually lost the most.

KZ: What was the year you eventually went out of business?

RZ: 1955.

KZ: What were some of the other businesses down there at the time things were really going good?

RZ: Everything, you name it. We had Max Glick Poultry, and Berkowitz, and Sandine Jewelry. We had Oster Brothers Furniture. Humes was on East Federal; they had a new and used furniture store. On every corner there was a beer joint. There was Frank's Cafe.

KZ: In your store you had a main floor, basement, and an upstairs.

RZ: We had two storerooms. We had a lot of room.

KZ: Who were some of your employees?

RZ: We had a colored fellow by the name of Albrick, myself, and grandpa. We also had a fellow by the name of Steve Stare. When we moved to Grand Rapids we had a fellow by the name of Bill MacNinney; he was a truck driver. There was Jack, Glen, myself, and Johnny.

KZ: What kind of customers did you have?

RZ: We had whites at first, and then a few Puerto Ricans and coloreds.

KZ: Where did you get your furniture?

RZ: Everything was bought locally.

KZ: You told me at one time that the business was listed with Dunn & Bradstreet. Was that in the 1950's?

ZINZ

18

RZ: Yes. I have a letter to prove it. It was listed that I could buy up to \$30,000 on credit, without a penny. I had a good credit rating.

KZ: How much would it cost you to take mom out in those days?

RZ: It would cost you \$1 for gas, \$3 or \$4 for a show and some sandwiches. \$3 or \$4 was enough.

END OF INTERVIEW