

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Life on the East Side of Youngstown in the 30s, 40s, 50s

Personal Experience

O.H. 1274

JOSEPH M. ZIDIAN

Interviewed

by

Ronald W. Stoops Jr.

on

July 17, 1989

JOSEPH ZIDIAN

Joseph was born March 20, 1924, at 1323 Wilson Avenue on the East Side of Youngstown. He and his six brothers and sisters were raised on the East Side and all worked with their father who owned a neighborhood grocery store. In 1950 Joe married Shirley. Joe and Shirley have three children: Joe, Michelle, and Yvonne.

Joe belonged to Sacred Heart Parish where he attended elementary school. Joe then went to East High School. After two years at East, Joe began working at Truscon and attending night school at South High School. He then served in the Army from 1943 - 1946. He completed high school after the war.

Mr. Zidian recalled that the East Side was a very friendly and close community. There was a wide variety of nationalities that interacted and helped one another. He also remembers how tough life was during the Depression. His father extended a lot of credit to people and at one point did not have enough money to stock the shelves, which forced him to reorganize his business with the cooperation of Golden Dawn Foods out of Sharon.

Presently, Mr. Zidian teaches at Lincoln Elementary School on the East Side and is a member of St. Dominic's Parish.

-- Ron Stoops Jr.

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Life on the East Side of Youngstown 30s, 40s, and 50s

INTERVIEWEE: JOSEPH M. ZIDIAN

INTERVIEWER: Ronald W. Stoops Jr.

SUBJECT: Life on the East Side of Youngstown during the 1930s thru 1950s, childhood, grocery business, entertainment, schooling

DATE: July 17, 1989

S: This is an interview with Joseph Zidian for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on life on the East Side of Youngstown during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, by Ronald Stoops Jr., at City Annex I, 9 West Front Street, Youngstown, Ohio, on July 17, 1989, at 1:45 p.m.

Mr. Zidian, can you tell me something about your early childhood or your background and family?

Z: Well, when my dad was a young man, he was located down on East Federal Street. He had a beer garden and a pool room, and restaurant. He married my mother, who was very much younger than him. He didn't want her around the pool room or beer garden, so he moved up to Wilson Avenue and opened up a grocery store at 1322 Wilson Avenue. There were five children born at 1322 Wilson Avenue. One child was born across the street at 1326.

During the 1930s, the Depression years. . . . In the grocery business my dad gave out a lot of credit and it got so bad that there was nothing left on the shelves. Of course in those days everybody was hurting bad. The only

strong business then was the Golden Dawn and the Roosevelt Company of Sharon. He wanted to fill the store up with groceries and had the idea of paying them so much a month. So, that is how my dad got started back in business after the Depression. He built a store at 1326, across the street from 1323 Wilson Avenue. He lost that and moved back to 1323 Wilson Avenue.

Early childhood, like I said there were six of us in the family, four were boys and there were two girls. There was John, Chuck, Ronald, and myself. I had a sister Josephine and a sister Freda. We all lived on top of the grocery store on the East Side.

- S: Let me get this straight, was that at 1323?
- Z: That was at 1323 Wilson Avenue.
- S: So your house was above the grocery store?
- Z: We were all born in that house too, upstairs.
- S: So then, during the Depression when things went bad he built another store across the street after the Depression?
- Z: No, things weren't going bad. Let me see if I can remember now. It's really foggy in my mind. I know that he built the store across the street.
- S: This was the second store, though?
- Z: Yes, that second store.
- S: He closed the first one down and built a new one.
- Z: He lost it and then came back across the street again to where he was before.
- S: To the original place?
- Z: Yes, the original place.
- S: It was this outfit out of Sharon, the Golden Dawn, that helped him build this second one at 1326?
- Z: Yes, the Golden Dawn.
- S: I see. Did the children help out at the store?
- Z: We all worked in the grocery store. Especially the brothers. We all learned

how to cut meat. My dad taught us how to cut meat. In 1941, just before the second World War started, my dad bought Smitz Beer Garden on Wilson Avenue and converted it into a grocery store. The liquor license at that time was only \$1500. About two or three years later the liquor license was worth about \$15,000.

S: Wow.

Z: But at any rate, in this beer garden that we bought--it was called the German beer garden--and down about three blocks was the Irish beer garden. So, there was always a lot of competition between the Irish beer garden and the German beer garden. Well, right next door to the German beer garden was a lady by the name of Mrs. Meyers. In those days the men did a lot of hunting. There were no women in the beer gardens in those days, all men. Smitz beer Garden had the best turtle soup in town. They made a lot of turtle soup. They sold approximately four or five pounds of tobacco a day to the mill people going back and forth down to Hazelton. So, they went out hunting and shooting, and they caught a raccoon. They brought this raccoon back and had Mrs. Meyers cook the raccoon. She set it out on the window sill right next to where the beer garden was for the pool. The Irish beer garden heard about it so they came up and stole the raccoon and took it down to their beer garden and ate it. This is a true story which made the Germans very, very angry about it. They decided that they were going to get even with them, so they let the word out that they had another raccoon--this was about one month later--and that Mrs. Meyers was going to cook another raccoon. Instead of cooking a raccoon they cooked a cat and in those days they did a lot of crazy things. Well the guys down at the Irish beer garden came up and stole the cat and they all got the diarrhea from it. This is a true story.

S: Is that right?

Z: Yes, it was really funny.

S: Was this a friendly rivalry?

Z: Oh, yes.

S: Do you recall the name of the Irish beer garden?

Z: Yes, Varley's beer garden.

S: Varley's?

Z: Yes, and the other beer garden was named Smitz's. When my dad bought out Smitz beer garden, the length, I think that it was 60 to 80 feet long and about

60 feet of the flooring was a crock. Under the bar where the men sat, the water used to flow through this crock and they used to take it down to the sewer.

S: Now was that man made?

Z: Oh yes, it was man made. We had to fill the grocery store with cement and that is still there, the part we filled in.

S: Was that the beer garden that you turned into a grocery store?

Z: Yes.

S: Would this be a third one? Is this the third grocery store? The two on Wilson Avenue and then this one?

Z: Yes. Across the street from the grocery store was Mrs. Wilson and they named the street after her. When we converted the beer garden to a grocery store . . . back when I was young around four or five years old, I used to watch her and her sister both. They had electric automobiles.

S: Is that right?

Z: And the street was named after that family. If you would go down that street today the house is still there. It is a very, very large house. There are two stone lions out in front of the house.

S: Stone lions on the corner of Wilson and. . .

Z: Wilson and Truesdale.

S: What did their family do that they got the street named after them?

Z: I really don't know. I have an abstract with all of the Wilson Avenue property but if I remember correctly they were about the fourth or fifth family in Youngstown at the time. The Young's were the first family in Youngstown, the Shighi's were the second family in Youngstown. George, the last of the Shighi's, lived about five houses up from the grocery store going towards town. Of course the house isn't there anymore. They tore it down about three years ago. George died about four or five years ago and he was the last of the Shighi's that originally settled in Youngstown.

S: And the Wilson's were one of the first families, also.

Z: Right.

- S: That is interesting.
- Z: And all of the properties at that time in my abstract name were all named Shighi, Wilson, and Young. Another prominent family at that time was the Roskin family, of course the other grocery store across the street from my dad. In those days there was a grocery store on every block and mom and dad's store. Every block there was a grocery store.
- S: I have heard from several people who have told me about these grocery stores. People used to walk to and from, really they were neighborhood stores.
- Z: Everybody had credit. Everybody was on a book. You never went into the store and ordered a pound of sugar or a box of sugar. You always got a big bin where you would pull out and scoop out five pounds of sugar or whatever you wanted. When my dad moved from 1323 Wilson Avenue up to Smitz old beer garden on 1266 Wilson Avenue, of course there was an apartment upstairs. We lived upstairs, too. My dad and my brother John and I, mostly my brother John, converted that store into a . . . we were the first independent store to use buggies.
- S: To use buggies?
- Z: Yes, self serve. We had everything set out. When we put the store up we put it as a self serve. My brother John was kind of proud of it.
- S: What do you mean by self serve or other than that? You would get everything for the customers?
- Z: You would stand behind the counter and the customer would stand on the opposite side and say, "Give me a pound of sugar." You would run and get the pound of sugar. "Do you have a box of macaroni?" And you would run and get the pound of macaroni. "Give me a can of beans." So, you would run and get a can of beans.
- S: You would get everything for them?
- Z: Yes, everything for them.
- S: Back from a warehouse?
- Z: No, right inside the grocery store.
- S: But they didn't help themselves or anything?

Z: No, no.

S: Oh, I see. So, you converted. . . .

Z: It was converted to a self serve where they had a buggy and they went around and picked it up.

S: How did the customers react to that?

Z: They liked it very much.

S: They did?

Z: Yes.

S: How about a time frame on that like what years would we be talking here?

Z: 1941.

S: That would be 1941 when you converted Smitz beer garden?

Z: Yes.

S: I see. We talked about credit. Did people cash their checks there regularly?

Z: Oh, yes.

S: All of them?

Z: Not all of them but some of them cashed their checks there. Of course they would bring the family there and they would pay the bill. Sometimes they wouldn't have enough money and they would say, "Alright," and they would maybe let it ride \$10. Of course my dad lost in those days and it made him very depressed. He probably lost about \$6,000, \$7,000, or even \$8,000 during--and in those days that was a lot of money.

S: So, people actually . . . the credit alone didn't sometimes turn out to be good?

Z: It wasn't really a good way to do business, the credit system. The kids used to come with their fathers and mothers on payday and they would pay the bill and then they would get a bag of candy. Life was so different in those days. It was slow and easy going. Every corner had their own ball team, their own softball team. My dad had a softball team, Imperial Street had a softball team, Hans Street had a softball team. That is in the area of four or five blocks. We used to play each other. I mean, really play each other. There used to be a

crowd there. My dad ordered sand bags down there by the railroad tracks between Edgewood Street and Wilson Avenue. There was a big open field there and my dad paid \$100 for the city to level that off so we could play ball.

S: Is that right?

Z: There were two small lakes down there and there was a spring down there on Edgewood Street down by the railroad tracks. It had the best water in the world. The water was so good. I don't know how true this is but here about 10 years ago I was talking to a guy and he said, "Hell, that never was spring water coming out of the ground. That was the city's." There was a pipe under the city's water so you were always drinking city water. But I don't believe that.

S: It tasted different, huh?

Z: Yes, it tasted different. These old timers try to put it on you.

S: Right. How long did you work in the grocery business? When did your dad open his first store at 1323 Wilson Avenue?

Z: He opened up about 1922.

S: So, before you were actually born he opened?

Z: Yes.

S: So, you worked there up till . . . explain how long.

Z: Well, everybody worked in the grocery store putting milk away in those days.

S: The family?

Z: The family. We lived upstairs. Four of us slept in one room, the boys, and the two girls slept in the other room, and then dad and mom. There were three bedrooms. Of course in those days, you did sleep down there. I can remember my brother Johnny, he bought a lock and a key for his dresser drawers because he couldn't get in to get his socks.

S: So nobody could steal them, right?

Z: Right. We would steal them because he was the oldest.

S: Where were you in relation to the others?

- Z: John was the oldest and I was the second oldest. I went to the service in 1942. My brother John played football for East High School and dislocated his shoulder. After that I think that it came out of place about 20 times. So, finally he had to wire it.
- S: Besides cutting meat and your sister running the cash register, were there any particular chores or jobs that were unique things?
- Z: We used to burn the paper, scrap the meat block. We would put salt on the meat block and scrap that dog-on thing.
- S: I worked in a meat store and I know what you are talking about.
- Z: Then we would sweep up and put saw dust on the floor. There were always papers to burn and cleaning to do and stock to put up. I mean, you were never done. Work constantly.
- S: Did you make any sausage or any particular foods?
- Z: Yes, we used to make food. Dad would make sausage. We made different items for ethnic people. The Lebanese people would like certain kind of lamb ground and things like that. And in those days everyone had a big families. There were no small families. The two black families in the neighborhood--there were only two at that time, the Clarney's and the Williams'. They both had large families. I can remember my mother had multiple sclerosis, **Lugarick's** disease, and she contacted it when she was thirty one years old when my last brother was born. I can remember Wayne Clarney taking care of my brother Ronnie for my mom.
- S: Is that right?
- Z: Yes. He took good care of him.
- S: Was there much animosity or friction between black and white at that time?
- Z: No, no way.
- S: Not like go to the back of the line or back of the bus?
- Z: No. Nothing like that.
- S: They got treated equal in the store and in most places?
- Z: Oh, yes. Definitely. They had their own book and charge.
- S: They got credit also?

- Z: Yes, they got credit, also. We had real good neighbors. One of the best neighbors in the world. Just like my son Joey said, "I grew up in the best neighborhood in Youngstown." Well, that is the way I feel. I grew up in the best neighborhood.
- S: How about some of the other families, was there any one large ethnic group or a big variety?
- Z: Yes, there was a variety in our neighborhood but up towards Lincoln Park and up towards Cregly and places like that it was all Irish people. And of course there were a lot of Italians sprinkled around there and a few Lebanese. There were a few Germans. I can remember Mrs. Schultz living on the corner. They had two daughters who lived on Truesdale. I am pretty sure that they were German. Then we had some Slovak families and one Russian family. Quite a mixture.
- S: A variety.
- Z: There was no just one click. Of course I would have to say that the Irish church, Sacred Heart, drew a lot of people. They all lived in that neighborhood.
- S: And that is where you belong at Sacred Heart?
- Z: Yes, that is where I belong. I went to school there for eight years.
- S: You went there for elementary school?
- Z: All of us went there for elementary school.
- S: Can you tell me a little bit about that?
- Z: What can I tell you. I had a nun for the first grade. I had a Lay teacher for second grade. A nun for third grade. Sister Anna Marie was in the first grade, she was a legend. Then I had Miss Hems in second grade. The Sister I had in third grade must have been 105 years old. God, was she old. I don't know how old she was but she was old. She used to strike me on the back on the legs all of the time. She used to call me "Fat Butcher." Of course she had a name for all of the boys. She loved to hit you on the back of your legs when she knew your religion. She only stood about 4'8" and she was real small. Then in the fourth grade we had another Lay teacher, Miss Brenhol. In fifth grade I had Sister Mary Ester. In sixth grade I had Sister Coletta. In seventh grade I had Sister Mary Ester again, and in the eighth grade I had Sister Amelia. I think that I did most of my learning between the fifth and seventh grade. Most of my learning was down then with Sister Coletta and Sister

Mary Ester was the other one.

S: What order of Nuns was that?

Z: The Ursuline.

S: They ran Immaculate and Sacred Heart. What kind of an influence do you think that the parochial school had on your life?

Z: Well, you know, I thought that I wanted to be a priest when I was in grade school. Of course, I thought that I may pursue it when I got into high school but I got a job in the summer at Truscon Steel when I was 16 years old, and I went to work at Truscon Steel in the summer months. I brought my pay checks home and I was making more than my dad was making so I said, "Let me go to night school dad." I was working for him and helping out quite a bit. So, that is what happened. I kept my job. Even when I was playing football they wanted me to come back but the thing was I was making \$125 every two weeks and boy, that was good money in those days.

S: Sure.

Z: And I was only 16 years old. So, of course then the war broke out and everybody needed a birth certificate and I couldn't find my birth certificate, so I quit there and I went to work at Republic Steel in the bottom floor of the open hood. I worked there for quite sometime until they demanded a birth certificate.

S: Why didn't you have a birth certificate?

Z: I had a birth certificate but I was under age.

S: You had to be 18 to work?

Z: Right.

S: At Truscon?

Z: Truscon and at the work mill you had to be 18.

S: Was that just once the war started?

Z: No, that was always.

S: Oh, always. So, you were in there illegally?

Z: Yes, illegally. See, I left Republic Steel when they demanded a birth certificate and I went to work at United Engineering. Then they wanted a birth certificate there and I couldn't finish that so by that time I turned 18 and I went back to work at Truscon.

S: Well, I'll be darn.

Z: So, I had four major jobs by the time I was 16 through 18. You can't do that today. No way. I was making good money.

S: You mean you went to night school during high school?

Z: Yes.

S: Is that how you finished?

Z: Yes, by going to night school.

S: Where did you take the classes at, East High School?

Z: South High School.

S: Did that give you the last two years of your high school?

Z: Yes, the last two years of high school.

S: Well, that must have been quite difficult?

Z: In fact I was drafted into the Army before I finished high school. Then I came back and graduated. I came back, took a couple of courses at South and graduated from there. The night I graduated, the auditorium was full of people and not one person that I knew was in that audience. I didn't know one person in that audience when I graduated from high school.

S: This was after the war?

Z: After the war.

S: How old were you?

Z: About 22, I think. So when I walked up to get my diploma there was one person clapping real hard in the back. I couldn't figure out who that was. I found out later that it was my typing teacher.

S: It seems like quite a few people on the East Side worked with Truscon.

Z: Oh, yes. The majority of people did work at Truscon.

S: How was Truscon affected by the Depression?

Z: I can't remember.

S: They kept alive, though?

Z: I guess. I was too young then.

S: What might a typical day be like for you or for. . . .

Z: What age bracket?

S: Say starting with eight, nine, or 10 years old. Are you able to leave the house a little bit and play with some friends.

Z: Well, in back of the house where we lived was a dump. You could walk around the fringe of the dump. There was a path. Straight down was nothing but tin cans and bottles and everything straight down. Of course every so often, every half a block from Center Street clear back down to Shighi--that is about one mile to a mile and a half--there were paths where you would walk down to the railroad track and there were all kinds of trees down in there. We would run under the trees and hide and play maps and hide maps and things like that.

S: Any other games in the evening?

Z: Oh, we always had games. I think that the best time that we had was riding on the skies, those iron curtain rods that your mother had. You would get on those skies and ride from the top of Truesdale, go all the way around Hans Street, on to Carlson Street, and down Wilson Avenue. That was a long ride and in those days they didn't put salt on the roads or anything like that so by the time the kids played three or four days it was nothing but a sheet of ice. We really had a good time then. Of course then we played release the den and buck, buck how many fingers up. Every night there was something playing around the store, baseball. A lot of baseball.

S: Was the store opened in the evening, too?

Z: Oh, yes. The store was opened until 9 or 10 o'clock at night. The highlight of the evening sometimes was my dad would race some big, heavy set woman up and down the street. In those days . . . had a gas station in those days when I was young. They had a gas station up on Wilson Avenue and his wife Josephine used to work the night shift. She used to change tires. Josephine

would come out, Doctorate of Education back about 20 years ago and they got divorced. She died about two years ago. Then there was another gas station by a man up on the corner of Wilson and Truesdale across from dad's store, Smitz beer garden, his name was Misatti. He finally opened the Youngstown Manufacturing on Wilson Avenue. In fact the first radio that we had in the house was a Clarion, and in those days the gas station sold the refrigerators, rather than an ice box, and radios. I think that it was back in 1930 or 1931 we got our first radio. It was a Clarion and I remember sitting there listening to it. We bought that from Mr. Misatti. And in our language, in Arabic, that means money. So, we used to always say Mr. Misatti, Mr. Money. He had all of the money.

S: Do you remember listening to F.D.R. with one of his Fire Side Chats?

Z: Oh, yes. Many a times we listened to him. We listened to him on the day Pearl Harbor got attacked.

S: So, you went off shortly after the war started. You were drafted or did you enroll in the service?

Z: Yes.

S: How did the war affect the grocery business?

Z: Well, according to my dad, when I was in the service, business was real good because he was able to get the meat. He was able to get all of the meat that he wanted because this Zimmerman Packing on Tippecanoe Road used to cure their own cattle, so my dad was fortunate to have enough meat for people. Of course they had to have meat stamps in order to get meat.

S: Right. Did they do much dealing or trading stamps, "I'll give you meat stamps for somebody else's coffee stamps."

Z: I don't remember that because I wasn't home. I remember bumming gas stamps off of guys though. I had my license when I was thirteen years old. I went downtown and got a driver's license when I was thirteen down at the auto club.

S: All you had to do was pass the test?

Z: Yes. Of course at thirteen I was a big kid. Not only that, my dad needed someone to deliver groceries and plus there weren't that many cars on the road in those days. You sit out at 12 o'clock at night and there was maybe one car from 12 to one o'clock going up Wilson Avenue. There weren't that many cars on the street.

- S: So, then you did deliver groceries?
- Z: Yes I delivered groceries.
- S: People that were sick or just too far away to walk?
- Z: Just too far away to walk. We had customers on the South Side. We had customers in different parts of the city. You would sit there and take an order, grind a pound or two or hamburger, write it all down, and then you would deliver it. Then again people would move out of the neighborhood like to the North Side. Even Varley's, when they moved away, bought from us. I don't know whether I am telling you about the East Side or not. Am I talking too much about myself?
- S: No, you are doing just fine. Do you think that the East Side of Youngstown was a close community?
- Z: Close? I think that it was very close. Of course it was different and it all depended on the neighborhood. Our neighborhood, we were the lower East Side. We were down almost by the railroad tracks over the sand bank by the Mahoning River. We were just up from the river. There were no houses in back of our grocery store. In the back of us were the railroad tracks and the sand banks. Of course there was Rigby Street up to Shighi. In between there was a . . . group and then you would hit Himrod and down to Oak Street there is another bridge. We were very close knit. The neighborhoods were close. A lot closer than they are today.
- S: It seems like the people on the East Side have a special pride about the East Side. They are very quick to tell to you.
- Z: No matter where you go . . . if you go to Austintown, Boardman, everybody is from the East Side originally. There was no money on the East Side so they stayed home and made babies. They multiplied a lot, sure. I can walk into any place, "Hey Zidian." Everybody knows that you're from the East Side. We multiplied on the East Side quite a bit.
- S: Besides that, are there any other reasons why you think that is so?
- Z: Because it was a close, ethnic community. It was a melting pot back then.
- S: If the melting pot theory is true then the East Side was it?
- Z: Yes. If there was a melting pot anywhere in Youngstown it was on the East Side. I don't care if it was blacks, Jew's, it was the East Side. In fact Mr. Aeronaut had a junk yard and he lived on Truesdale and he was Jewish. Two

of his sons became doctors. Just from that junk yard his son was at Ohio University. And they worked all day long. They were always dirty, the two boys. But when they made enough money he sent them off to the University and both of them are doctors today.

S: How about to the other groups of people? Was education really important? I know that they played a lot of ball and sports were important but was education?

Z: Well, not as much as it is today. Because the mills were working good and there were jobs around. Personally, I don't think that I would have went to a University myself if I hadn't spent so much time in the Army. My idea of an education . . . well, when I went for my education I didn't want to go back into the service as a private again. I wanted to go back in as an officer because I had such a rough time. I had a rough life in the service. I really thought that we would go to war within a year with Russia because just before I left Austria, I was up in the Austrian Alps and these border Russians up there took me prisoner on Christmas Day 1945.

S: Is that right?

Z: Yes. There was a Catholic Church on their side of the line and on our side of the line we used to bring them down to our mess hall for dinners and stuff like that. Bobby and I, another soldier and I, we said that we were going to church for Christmas Day so we pulled the car around and he hollered over to the guard who said, "Okay, come on." So, we went in and no sooner did we get in they took us.

S: They took you prisoner?

Z: Yes.

S: Well, how long did they keep you?

Z: About six hours and then the Colonel came in and picked us up because the other guy saw what happened.

S: So, then they released you?

Z: Yes.

S: Where did you serve and under who did you serve?

Z: I served under Bradley in the First Army. My commanding officer was General Bolton. I was in the fighting 69th division. I was a . . . Lieutenant.

S: Where was your duty? What regions or countries?

Z: Europe and New Zealand, that area. Going into France, Belgium, Luxembourg.

S: Did you come across any concentration camps?

Z: Yes, in fact there was one big one in Luxembourg. Mike, I can remember the last letter that I got from him. He was somewhere in Germany but couldn't tell me where he was at and said that the fighting was intense. That is the last that I . . . the next time I saw him was our division of. . . His government camp that he was in and that was near Limberg. Later on I went to places like Austria.

S: You did after they were liberated?

Z: Yes, I went to Austria.

S: Were most of the prisoners there liberated or taken out of there by the time that you got there?

Z: There were an awful lot of prisoners there. I don't want to talk about it.

S: Would you care to?

Z: No.

S: Alright. How about going to the East Side then, what did people do for entertainment?

Z: Oh, there was a lot of entertainment. They told stories. A lot of races and games that they played. There was four guys playing five hundred draw. Stuff like that. We played a lot of cards. We would go to somebody's house and play 500 for hours at a time maybe.

S: How about much gambling?

Z: That I don't remember, gambling. We used to pitch baseball cards you know and once in a while we pitched pennies but there was really no big gambling, dice or anything like that. I don't remember any gambling. Of course there were no drugs. Nothing like that in those days.

S: How about as a young child, do you remember any boot-legging or any stories about it in the 1920s?

Z: Oh, yes. There was boot-legging going on Wilson Avenue in a few places. The thing that used to make Rocky mad was that he had a place upstairs on top of the Chick's beer garden on Wilson Avenue and the beat man, the cop, would get his pay off like \$10 a week.

S: Who was this Rocky?

Z: Yes, his name was Rocky.

S: What was Chick's?

Z: Chick's Beer Garden. Well, it wasn't a beer garden at that time. It was a grocery store and later on after prohibition, they opened up a beer garden but upstairs with a little bathtub of whiskey and stuff. Rocky told me when we were older and sitting around the table he said, "Joe, the beat man, I had to pay him \$10. Then when they got a new beat man then I have to pay the old beat man \$10 and the new beat man \$10 and pretty soon I have another beat man and they break me. I couldn't make it."

S: Is that right?

Z: Yes, it was so funny.

S: Even after they go off and beat they still wanted paid?

Z: This is just like after the grocery store on Wilson Avenue. The war was over and my dad had a stroke and there was the Puerto Rican's that started to move in, Emmanuel, he used to run the card games upstairs on the top of his restaurant. Every cop would stop there to get \$5.00. They would stop for their little pay off.

S: So, Emmanuel would pay the cops off. Is there any other stories or things that you remember about the East Side?

Z: I remember Mr. Shighi, the last of the Shighi's (George). He used to tell me stories about Young and he had his great-grandfather jailed up in Trumbull County for trespassing. He didn't have any trouble with him but it was territorial lands and stuff like that in Youngstown. They were always bucking each other.

The story that I would like to tell is about George himself. He used to come down to the store every morning when I had the grocery store and he used to stand in front of the counter and of course they had steam heat in those days and George never did put a separate heating system in that house. He just heated it over with the stove.

S: Is that right?

Z: Yes, he never had a separate heating system. Of course when his mother and father died and his brother left he never dressed. He never went to church. He just slipped. He never worked. George never worked. He more or less lived on a pension that he was getting from the service in World War II. So, he would go down to the store just about every morning. So, one morning, it was a Saturday morning, he didn't show up and I didn't see him. I didn't think too much about that. So, Sunday morning he didn't show up either and I thought, "Well, he was getting ready for the World Series." So, Monday morning he didn't show up and I got worried and I went over to the house, and of course, he was about 79 then. I went over the house and I see the doors and I said, "George, George." He said, "Jesus Christ where have you been?" He said, "Get in. I have been waiting on you." I went in and there he was tied to the bed cowboy style with his arms and legs stretched out. His wrists started to bleed from him trying to get loose. Someone had tied him in bed and he had a lot of beautiful cut glass and things like that so they took that and they took his auto-revolver. It was just sad. So, I called the ambulance and I took him to the hospital. I visited him several times and he got a little rambunctious there for awhile so they had to strap him into the bed. So, he kept saying, "Cut me down. Cut me down." So, he wanted me to go over there with a knife and cut those straps off and I wouldn't do it. So he said to me, "Why don't you do me a favor. Why don't you bring your son Joe up." He said, "I want to see Joe." Joe was about six years old. I said, "Well, what do you want to see Joe for?" The first thing that he said to Joe was, "Joe, cut me down."

S: So, this would have been about 1960?

Z: Yes, this was in the 1960s, about 1964. There was another fellow, too. George was kind of like . . . I wouldn't know what to say he was. He never went to church. He never dressed. He wore the same clothes every day. I guess that he just let the world go by him. He never advanced. He never bought anything. He never bought any meat. He lived on vegetables and things like that. He was called the pigeon man. He had a lot of pigeons. He used to raise pigeons.

S: Did the Shighi family have a lot of money?

Z: Well, nobody really knows. When I took George to the hospital I left him there and he went to . . . and he made out his. . . . How you want to be buried and everything. He got that straightened out. He paid for that and about two years later I took him up to the veteran's hospital and while he was there he made out a will and left everything to the guy in the next bed. So, how much he really had, the undertaker and I never did know.

S: He didn't know this guy in the next bed?

Z: No, he never knew the guy in the next bed. So, I know that I got \$10 from him for carrying his coffin. Everybody who carried his coffin in his will got \$10. So, the guy that inherited the money no one knows. I know that he had some oil stock. I know that. I know that he had bonds. But really don't know how much money the family had.

S: How about robberies during the early days? The Depression?

Z: If there was a killing in those days you always had an extra . . . but it was so rare to have anybody killed or a killing.

S: How about robberies with the stores?

Z: I don't remember too many robberies.

S: Not too much problems with that ever?

Z: No.

S: Even during the tough times?

Z: No.

S: How about did you sell any beer?

Z: No beer. We didn't get a beer and wine license until 1941 in our store.

S: So, you started then when you were in the service?

Z: Yes.

S: When you came back and after your dad got sick and you were selling beer in the 1940s and early 1950s was there much trouble with young kids or high school?

Z: I was cutting about two cattle a week when I first started out but I was down to one and a side of beef and I went down to a hind and a quarter. When I got that low I was doing most of the wine and beer and things like that. Most of the people started to move out of the neighborhood and it was changing.

S: Can you tell me about what years you ran the store?

Z: From about 1958-68. About 12 years or so.

- S: How about the years from 1946 to 1958, in those years did you. . . ?
- Z: I worked at Truscon.
- S: Of course, the mills were working good and guys would walk to work with their lunch buckets and they would stop at the beer garden, buy their tobacco, and they would come home and stop at the beer garden and have their beer. I can remember when the farmers would come in and drop their potatoes at my dad's store and the chickens and they would always go to the beer garden and have a glass of beer. Once in awhile they would take me with them when I was five or six years old and they would put me up on a bar stool and buy me something. My mother used to get angry with my dad because she didn't want me to drink beer and here I am I never did like the stuff anyway. But it made my dad happy.
- S: What places would they take you? Where were some of the frequent places they would take you?
- Z: We would go up to Smitz's or Varley's. German or Irish beer. We were right in the middle. You could go either this way or that way. Mr. Barley was tall and had real deep, dark eyes and he would push a beer up to me right in front of me. He would grin ear to ear. You couldn't do that today.
- S: Okay, is there anything else that you would like to add or talk about that we may not have touched on?
- Z: Not really except that the times were a lot better. Things are really not the same today as they were then. The music is different. In those days there was a big band era. Now you have all of this noise and clanging going on. Of course kids like it today. They go into a different era, that is all. Personally, I think that I lived in the best time. We really did. I don't know what the kids are going to say 25 or 30 years from now.
- S: It is interesting that you say that. And even though you went through some of the hardest times during the 1930s, and then the war years, too. Would you have traded that for anything?
- Z: No, and I wouldn't have traded the experience in the Army for anything either. I think that it made a man out of me. In fact I think that it put me through college, too.
- S: If you had a chance to live in some affluent section of town or on the North Side or something like that, would that have appealed to you?
- Z: If you asked me that today? From where I live now?

S: No, I am talking about if you had a chance to do it back over again would you have traded where you lived?

Z: No, no, no definitely not. Too much spunk. Nice neighborhood. I would have never traded it. I am satisfied.

S: Anything else?

Z: I am happy.

S: Did you sell the ice boxes at the store?

Z: No. The gas station across the street sold it. I can remember when the ice man would come. He would put 200 pounds of ice on his shoulder and he would back up. . . . The ice went on top of the ice box. He would back up backwards on the steps and throw that ice over top. He would carry in maybe half a ton of ice. I can remember when we changed over to refrigeration. It was so much better, the change over.

S: How about people in their homes, did they tend to come in daily or every couple days?

Z: Every day they were in the store.

S: They didn't buy for a week or two?

Z: No, no, no. That is why there were so many stores. Every day they were in the grocery store.

S: That was pretty much a stop for each family almost every day?

Z: Oh, you would see everybody every day.

S: Well, I would like to thank you very much. It has been a pleasure.

Z: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW