

JOHN E. WIESSNER

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Historical Society of Hammonton Oral History

John E. Wiessner

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Interviewer(s)	Janet Hasulak
Interviewee(s)	John E. Wiessner
Others Present	Deborah White, Historical Society of Hammonton

This is Janet Hasulak. I am interviewing John Wiessner for the Historical Society of Hammonton. It is June 30th, 2023.

Question: John, do you have a middle name?

Eugene.

Question: Eugene.

Yes, Eugene was my father's middle name. also.

Question: What's your birth date and your age?

October 6, 1942. I'll be 81 in October.

Question: God bless you. I know you've lived in Hammonton a long time, were you born here?

At the time, there was no hospital in Hammonton, so most kids were born at a place called the Swenson Home, which was on Horton and Pleasant Street in downtown Hammonton. That's where most of the kids were born back then, right in the town by midwives and doctors, but mostly midwives.

Question: It sounds like a nice birthing center.

Yes, that's where it was at the time just after the U.S. involvement in WW II.

Question: They strived to have alternatives later in time.

Yes. Because then you'd have to go either to Atlantic City or Philadelphia, that was the narrow choice.

Question: That was where the closest hospital was at that time.

Yes. In Camden, I believe.

Question: Did you grow up in Hammonton?

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I was born here. I lived here for 10 years, and I played Little League baseball here in 1951 for the Exchange Club, which the following year was DiDonato's Bowling.

Question: After the championship team.

Yes. There's a story here because in 1952 I played in Hammonton. I played with David Parkhurst, Billy's younger brother, my closest friend who got me involved in Little League, because we lived across the street from each other. His father Hub Parkhurst owned the Parkhurst Farm Supply, and my grandparents had the Square Deal Farm Market, which is closed now, but it was a popular market back then. So, that was 1952, and after my family moved to Pennsylvania, in March of 1952, in 1955, I made the Levittown, Pennsylvania Little League All Stars, and we played against Morrisville, Pennsylvania and they beat us by two runs, if I remember. Morrisville went on to win the Little League World's Championship. Levittown, Pennsylvania, in 1960 went on to become the Little League's World Champions. So, there's three connections I've had with the Little League World Series, and one is here in Hammonton, which won it all in 1949.

Question: Your team took things pretty hard. You did well. I'll have to tell you a story about Bill Parkhurst and Little League when we're done. It's a little involved. Do you remember the home you lived in where you were raised?

Yes. My father was drafted in the Army. My mother met my mother when she attended a wedding with a Hammonton friend in Baltimore, and that's where she met him. Dad came to Hammonton and lived here, and he owned a garage on the White Horse Pike, which is now a beauty parlor, situated right next to the now-closed Square Deal Farm Market. That building was his garage in the 1940s. Then, I remember in 1952 the New Jersey Highway Department expanded the White Horse Pike from three lanes (I believe) to four lanes. The new fourth lane, used for additional auto traffic, was paved on the Square Deal side of the busy highway, so after WWII, Dad was a car mechanic and had gas pumps in front of his station. He had to take the gas pumps out because of the expansion of the road. That's when we moved to Pennsylvania; my father, a WWII army veteran, began working in Norristown, Pennsylvania as a shop foreman in a stainless-steel fabrication company.

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Question: That highway expansion really affected the future of his business.

That's right.

Question: Just widening the road.

That's right, exactly.

Question: At what point in time did you come back to the Hammonton area?

It was 1959. My grandparents had Square Deal Farm Market, and my parents had purchased Pete's Farm Market in Elm on the same side of Route 30, which is now Vega Car Detailing. My family had two farm markets on the same side of the highway heading toward Atlantic City from 1959 until 1971.

Question: This might be a silly question, but did you have a farm also? Did you raise the produce that you sold there?

No. Back in the 30s and 40s, my grandparents were pioneers with Square Deal Farm Market, and they would buy fresh produce from all local farmers. At the time, Route 30 was the major traffic artery from Philadelphia to Atlantic City before we had the Atlantic City Expressway and the Black Horse Pike as competing thoroughfares. I remember as a kid that there was bumper-to-bumper traffic on Route 30 in the summertime. The highway was the main artery to the shore beaches. If you wanted to go east to Atlantic City, or if you wanted to go to Ocean City or Wildwood, you would use that popular highway.

Question: If you were going east to get the shore that was the road you had to take.

Exactly, yes. I remember as a kid I was like 10 years old, and my father was a mechanic, he could build things and repair motors. I recall that he had built a concession stand inside the Square Deal Market. I remember as a kid that I would sell cigarettes at 10 years old.

Question: You would work the stands.

Yes, I would work at the Square Deal Farm Market. I would dip Breyers ice cream; I would electrocute hot dog., I remember we had a machine with 12 sets of prongs. and I put the hot dogs onto the prong sets, and at age 10, I would sell hot

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dogs. I was working as a 10-year-old kid; you could not do that type of thing anymore; the State of New Jersey would shut you down. Back then, you just helped the family survive.

Question: It was a family business, and you were working your family's business.

That's right.

Question: Nobody looked any further than that.

My father had been drafted into World War II; he was drafted at age 35 into the Army.

Question: What was his name?

John, also. He's buried in the cemetery with my mother over here at Oak Grove on Old Forks Road, which I remember was called by local residents "Cemetery Avenue". Dad was in the Army for three years from 1942 to 1945 when Germany finally surrendered and after Hitler committed suicide. Dad only told me one story about WWII, and that was Hitler's Nazis blew-up all the bridges going across the Rhine River to prevent an allied invasion of Germany. He was one of the guys that built the Pontoon bridges across the Rhine River that the tanks and jeeps could go across heading towards Berlin.

Question: That was his job.

That was part of his job. Dad also looking for bodies inside buildings that had been blown-up, and all this sort of stuff. He was on the Rescue and Recovery Team.

Question: Recovery Detail.

Yes. On my father's side, Dad was born in Michigan at a Polish-oriented town called Posden, which is near Alpena, at the top of Michigan. The family men were loggers. He was only an infant at the time. The business had a big forest fire at the logging camp that burned and destroyed their business and equipment, and the family lost everything. Dad's older sister, my Aunt Marie, the eldest of six kids, got them all onto a train and traveled from Michigan to Baltimore, Maryland. The clan wound-up with relatives in Baltimore, Maryland. At the time in the early 1900s, it

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was very hard for Polish, Italian, and Irish people to get jobs in the major cities. The jobs were monopolized mostly by early British settlers and Germans. Our original family name was Wishnesky (phonetic). About four blocks away, you can look this up on the Internet, there was a brewery called the John F. Wiessner Brewery in Baltimore, Maryland. The whole family was named after this brewery, and that's where my name went from Polis Wishnesky (phonetic) to the German Wiessner.

Question: That's a big difference, it doesn't sound similar.

The family members wanted to get good jobs, and the names had to sound German. Dad didn't work at the Brewery, but that's how the family was named. The Brewery went out of business after the Depression during the Prohibition Era.

Question: That's what gave the family the idea, "Oh, this is a good name. This will go over big."

Yes, exactly. You can look that up on the Internet, the John F. Wiessner Brewery. There are pictures of the Brewery in Gay Street, Baltimore, Maryland.

Question: How long do you think that stayed in business?

It was in the 1880s until 1929; it was a pretty big brewery.

Question: It definitely had a good run. This picture you're showing me is your paternal grandfather.

Yes. I never knew him; he died heartbroken right after the Michigan forest fire, I understand. My maternal grandmother on my father's side, I never knew her either. She died in Baltimore, Maryland in 1917 during the Spanish Flu plague.

Question: It killed so many people from 1918 to 1922, I think.

The Spanish Flu, that's what it was called. So many people died in Baltimore that the funeral parlors could not accommodate all of those needs, and my father's mother was buried in a mass burial site inside a cemetery. I never knew my paternal grandparents on my father's side.

Question: We heard these stories, but we never thought we'd witness anything like that, but we had those issues when it came to COVID-19 initially, too. It was

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wild and crazy, for sure. What do you remember about the house you were raised in?

I lived in two houses. We had a little white bungalow next to Square Deal Farm Market. I think it only had two bedrooms. I stayed mostly in the brick house behind the market; yes, back of Square Deal, where my grandparents had a spare upstairs bedroom, and I slept upstairs I remember as a kid.

Question: So, you staked out territory at your grandparent's house?

Yes. We just helped each other and went places together. Now my grandfather, Antonio Giacobbe, is on my mother's side, and my mother's father. He spoke broken English; it was first generation Sicilian. He arrived in America from Messina, Sicily in 1903, at age 10. He was a passenger on a cattle ship. He hooked-up with other Italian relatives who were already in the U.S. Grandpop Giacobbe had a push cart in Philadelphia, and that's where he started-out in business. He sold fruit and vegetables off the push cart near Ninth Street in Philadelphia.

Question: He was just 10 when he came over though, he was just a boy.

Yes, he was 10 years old. He had such a bad experience crossing the Atlantic; he never went in water again, anything like a lake or ocean. He would go to Florida every year and just sit on the beach with Grandmom Annie. They owned a house in North Miami Beach. Working hard after the Depression, my maternal grandparents owned nice cars, Cadillacs and Oldsmobile, they had money during and after the Depression because they had that successful Square Deal Farm market business.

Question: Like you said, the traffic that you had on Route 30. You had a good market because you had all the tourists going back and forth. Where else were they going to stop?

Exactly. What I remember about my grandfather was, he would take me around to various farms, and he like adopted me. And I'd go around with him in his truck and we'd buy corn, tomatoes, peaches from local farmers.

Question: It sounds like you were buddies.

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Yes. We'd go out on 206, and there I was, maybe eight or nine years old. He would ask me, "What does that billboard over there say?" Grandpop Tony did not know how to read or write. Here I am, an eight-year-old kid telling him what it read on the billboard. Then, he would take me into Philadelphia, like 2:00 o'clock in the morning, just to show me how to buy merchandise and things, which later caused me to be able to buy merchandise for the boardwalk stores in Ocean City, Maryland, and Rehoboth Beach, Delaware, where my father-in-law and I had those successful businesses. I had learned those important business skills when I was a kid.

Question: He was trying to teach you the business.

Yes.

Question: Plus, you were helping him if you ran into a situation where he needed to read as well.

Exactly. I remember, when, I think it was 1952, that the Ben Franklin Bridge was just built connecting Camden to Philadelphia. Grandpop Tony would take me in his truck over the bridge, and I can still remember in my brain, we were passing farmers from New Jersey, with their horses and wagons, taking produce into Dock Street in Philadelphia to resell to various commission houses. Philly didn't then have the Food Distribution Center in South Philly; Dock Street was located near the Delaware River towards Center City, Old Philadelphia. Kids today don't have that kind of experience where they learn academics in school, and where they have few hands-on business opportunities.

Question: You don't see too many of that generation doing apprentice work or work in a family business.

Exactly.

Question: I think it is something that is unique to Hammonton and that generation. People stayed with their grandfather's and father's business. First of all, you wanted to preserve the business that your relatives have worked so hard to climb that high on the ladder of success, that's what you do.

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I remember one other story when I was 10 years old. My father told me to go and close the garage door on his business. My father was a mechanic in that garage with the gas pumps and all. I go there, and I had to pull on a rope to close and lock the huge door. And then being a young wise guy like I was, I wanted to see how strong I was. I strongly and forcefully pulled the garage door down, and it landed right on my left big toe. It was bleeding excessively, and I was afraid to tell my father, but I was in such pain, and I knew I needed medical attention. Dad finally saw the bleeding, and he took me to Dr. Elliott. I don't know if you've heard of him.

Question: I've heard the name.

He was a prominent physician in town. Dr. Elliott, on his own, gave me the needle and took the entire toe-nail out; cut it out. Today you'd have to go see 20 specialists in order to have that minor surgery performed.

Question: You wouldn't find a general practitioner that would even attempt that. He would say, "Go see the right foot man."

You're a nurse, you would certainly know that.

Question: Oh, yes. You would have to go for x-rays somewhere else. It would become an ordeal for sure.

It still impresses me how professional Dr. Elliott was. He didn't flinch or anything; he just looked at the ugly wound like it was just a little scratch on my finger. These sort of lasting impressions stay welded inside your brain.

Question: That would stick out in your memory, especially an injury like that.

Yes, exactly.

Question: Was it your grandfather Giacobbe?

Yes, Antonio Giacobbe. When we would go to Philadelphia, he'd have to sign the Bill of Sale and he just knew how to write two things: His initials, A. G. That's all he knew how to write.

Question: He was your mother's father?

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That's right. His wife Grandmom Giacobbe; she was Annie Giacobbe. She went to elementary public school, and she had to wear her father's shoes to the school. And the other kids made fun of her. From her poor upbringing, she was determined that she was going to be successful in life. Grandmom Annie was one of the few businesswomen in town, and my wife Joanne (Battaglia) Wiessner's grandmother Annie Curreri owned a feed store on 3rd Street, and my grandmother had the Square Deal Farm Market on the White Horse Pike, and my mother had Pete's Farm Market in Elm; they were female business pioneers in a sense.

Question: They were very business-minded women, in that day and age especially.

Yes. Back then, the women in the family were usually dependent on their husbands for financial security, and so on.

Question: Right. That's just how things were done at that time. What was your mother's name?

Marie Giacobbe. Back then in the 1920s, a lot of women in town were named Marie. Mostly because of Madam Marie Curie. She was a prominent female scientist who had discovered Radium as a new element.

Question: Well-educated, successful.

Yes.

Question: I can see why that would make the name popular. What about your school years? Do you have any memories of your school years? Who were your best friends and teachers?

In Hammonton here I had several close friends. Mark Watson was a good friend of mine. Warren Benedetto, who later became the Hammonton Superintendent here, and also at one time the President of the School Board, he was another good friend at St. Joseph School on 3rd Street. David Parkhurst was a good early friend of mine. A lot of my future wife's friends, when I took Joanne Battaglia to the St. Joe Prom in 1962, were also my high school friends. Joanne was the prom queen in 1961, but I got to know a lot of her friends like Johnny Kryvoruka and

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Phyllis Amedio; a lot of these names come up that were in her class, so I got to know kids from St. Joe High. I also got to know kids from Edgewood, where I went to high school. I graduated from Edgewood. After I moved to Pennsylvania, I think I had attended six different schools before I graduated from Edgewood High School.

Question: Did your family move around a lot in that area?

No. Levittown was new at the time, back in 1952. 17,000 new homes were quickly built in five years. The new town couldn't accommodate all that new population. So, what happened is I went to St. Joe's to 5th Grade. Then in April of 5th Grade, we moved to Levittown. Then in 6th Grade, I attended St. Marks School in Bristol, Pennsylvania. 7th and 8th Grade, I was a student at St. Michael the Archangel School in Levittown, Pennsylvania. 9th Grade, Immaculate Conception School in Levittown, Pennsylvania. 10th and half of 11th Grade, I attended Bishop Egan High School that no longer exists, but it was quite popular school in Bucks County back then.

Question: Was that parochial as well?

Yes. Bishop Egan High was four stories high, and it had the big cafeteria and the large gymnasium constructed on top of the cafeteria. The high school was shaped like a "T". Now its title is Conwell Egan, presently located in Fairless Hills, Pennsylvania. I don't know if you've ever heard of that. When I went to Egan, I remember that the rules were so strict that the girls had to use one staircase to go from floor to floor, and the boys had to use another.

Question: They had to keep you separated.

Yes. You could not use the same staircases; I still remember that.

Question: The children nowadays don't realize the freedoms that they have.

Yes. We were very restricted, and we were very much afraid of strict Father Anselm, the disciplinarian at Bishop Egan.

Question: You respected those rules.

They had physical punishment in the Catholic High School.

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Question: Do you remember ever not respecting those rules? Did you ever get in any mischief?

Yes, I did. I stayed away from it as much as I could because we had this disciplinarian. His name was Father Anselm. You'd walk down the main corridor past his office, and he had the door open. He also waited until the change of classes, and he'd have a kid leaning over the desk, and he'd be whacking him.

Question: So, the world could see, that was all about intimidation.

Yes. You didn't want to see that happen to you.

Question: To be humiliated like that. Public humiliation as well as getting spanked.

What I relate it to is the Romans used to capture barbarians, and they'd line them up 10 in a row and kill every 10th one. That's where the word "decimate" comes from because that's how they would intimidate the rest of the captives.

Question: That's how they kept the public in line.

Exactly. I remember one time at Bishop Egan, two kids got in a fight and what happened was, it was like eighth period. There was an announcement that everyone should report to the gymnasium. We all went into the gymnasium, and those two kids had a fight in front of the whole school with boxing gloves on.

Question: The Priest just decided to let them duke it out?

Back then, that was the behavioral method. If you wanted to fight, you had to go somewhere else other than inside the school, and it worked.

Question: He kept the kids in line. What would have been considered as something wild to do back in the day, when you were a teenager? How did the kids dress and what did they do for entertainment? What did your crowd like to do?

I often went to the Feed Bag Restaurant on Route 13 in Levittown where kids often hung-out. I was influenced by rock n roll music in WIBG AM radio. Bill Haley and the Comets and many other groups that became popular along with Little Richard, Chuck Berry and Fats Domino.

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Question: The '50s.

I was like a greaser want-to-be. I had friends that had cars, but they worked on the cars, and I always wanted to do that, but I never had a car. We moved here to Elm when I turned 16, and I got my driver's license here in Jersey. It's really something that your past experience influences, how you think and act, and what you think about.

Question: You were just showing me the two novels that you've written, and you said they are a Trilogy. Tell me the titles and why you wrote them.

The first one is "Black Leather and Blue Denim". When I moved to Levittown, Pennsylvania, I had a lot of friends. We were all greasers; we admired the greaser culture with the Fonzie look of the leather jackets, the engineer boots and the dungarees. This novel, I think is 450 pages and it's like 35 percent actual experience, and the other 60 percent or so, fiction. The same with this one, when I moved from Levittown back to Hammonton, New Jersey. I was inspired to get the information for the Great Teen Fruit War, which is a fictional war between the sons of blueberry farmers and sons of peach farmers and Route 206, Bellevue Avenue is the agricultural dividing line between the two fruit gangs.

Question: Is that what that represents that Avenue?

Yes. On one side all blueberries, and the other side all peaches.

Question: I'm looking at the cover and your pen name is?

Jay Dubya, which is a corruption of my initials John Wiessner (J.W.).

Question: I read that on the small biographical piece of information that you gave me. I thought that was hilarious and very clever.

Here's a third book that completes the Trilogy, and that's called "Frat' Brats, A '60s Novel" We go from the '50s, to 1960, to the '60s, which would be Frat' Brats at Glassboro State College. In fact, my wife is even a character in that book.

Question: You've well-preserved your teen years in those three novels. What happened to you and then some.

That's right, exactly.

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Question: If people want a feel for the time, what is was like to grow up then, they should read your novels.

If you go onto Google Images, you can type in "Black Leather, Blue Denim" and then it will show you related "Images".

Question: I've never done that.

You hit "Images" right above the menu on Google for Black Leather and Blue Denim, Jay Dubya. If you just type in say "'50s Novel" and then hit "Images", this is the top '50s Image now shown on Google Images.

Question: It will give you graphics.

This is the top one for 1950; the Great Teen Fruit War is the top book image for 1960, and Frat' Brats is the top one for '60s Novel. Look for "Image" above where you type in whatever subject or book you are searching for.

Question: Did they take your graphics that have been made up or did you take what was in that program?

Google does that process automatically, so I guess it's based on how many hits or clicks they get for each image that determines your priority in the image listing.

Question: It became popular in searches.

Yes, because when you think of the '50s, this is what you think of.

Question: Yes, very definitely. That Fonzie character with the black leather jacket, riding a motorcycle maybe, or having a hot '50s car.

Or Elvis, or Marilyn Monroe, or James Dean or someone or something like that, yes.

Question: Yes, that's typical of the era, the stereotypes that we have.

In this one, the Reds (Peach gang) wore James Dean jackets because of the movie "Rebel without a Cause"?

Question: Yes.

They had a red jacket on.

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Question: Yes, that would make it popular if James Dean wore that style.

Denim jackets were popular back then also, so the Blues (Blueberry gang) wears them in the novel.

Question: So cool. What did the kids do for entertainment? As a teenager, you were still over in the Levittown area. When did you come over here, when you were 16?

We went to dances a lot. We watched a lot of television, "Bandstand" I remember. I had a friend, Bob Jelonek, who was my idol back then, and he was like a jokester, a really good punster. A lot of my personality is based on his personality; the way that he would talk, and so on.

Question: You looked up to him, it sounds like.

I wished that I could be as sharp as he was with the witty stuff. I remember he and I went to American Bandstand one time; we got tickets from somebody whom we knew.

Question: That would have been a big deal.

That was a big deal, yes. Going to 48th and Market, I remember, in Philadelphia. We took the elevated train from North Philly down to Market Street also, and we first boarded the Frankfurt EL line going that way toward Bandstand. Yes, that was a big deal. Going to amusement parks was big, too. We didn't have the big theme parks like we have now. We'd go to Clementon Lake Park. We'd go down to the Shore. There was another show on TV called "Grady & Hurst"; the two DJs were on Channel 12 in Philadelphia, but they had dances at the Steel Pier. We would drive or take a bus to the Steel Pier and go dancing there.

Question: The dances were televised?

Yes, on weekends. The hotels in Atlantic City, the old hotels, I would go with friends, and we would enjoy swimming at the Ambassador Hotel, I remember it was something to do. It was mostly clean fun.

Question: Right, fun things to do.

Yes. We didn't like to fight or rumble.

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Question: That was smart. You stay alive that way, you stay uninjured that way.

But my Levittown friend, Bob Jelonek's father had a green-and-white '57 Chevy, which was the coolest car back in 1957. It had skirts and the hub-caps had spinners.

Question: You guys must have loved cruising around in that car.

Oh yes, and going to a hamburger stand or a custard stand, and just hang out there. The impressed girls would always come over and talk us.

Question: That would be the thing to do, that's very stereotypical of the '50s teenage years, I would say. Then you went to college. Tell me about your college years, what did you study?

That's another story. Wait until you hear this one. In March of 1959, I transferred into Edgewood High School in Atco. They did not accept me at St. Joe's, even though I started there and went to 5th Grade. In high school, you asked if I ever got in trouble. Yes. In 9th Grade at Immaculate Conception School, we had an old nun, she must have been 90 years old teaching Algebra. There was an wild kid on the other side of the classroom, who threw a tennis ball at me, and I caught it, but this nun just turned-around and saw me catching the tennis ball.

Question: You were the one that got caught red-handed.

I was caught, and was suspended. When my parents tried to get me into St. Joe's, administration wouldn't accept me. The nun thought I was a juvenile delinquent because I was suspended. At Edgewood, there was this one teacher – well, first, I went to Catholic school for high school. I was very adept at History and English, but very poor in Science and Math. When I entered into Edgewood, they put me into an advanced curriculum. I was probably the top student in Language Arts, Social Studies, but the worst in Science and Math. I had this one teacher, Mr. So and So, and he failed me in Algebra II. My parents were angry because I couldn't work on the Farm Market (Pete's Market) in Elm, down the road from where I now live.

Question: Did you have to go for tutoring or summer school?

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I had to go to summer school. I had to travel to Collingswood High School for summer school, and take the Public Service bus back and forth. The next year, I had a summer school teacher at Collingswood High, who recommended and signed the form showing that I had passed the course, so I passed Algebra II. Then, I'm a senior in Edgewood and I got that same Math teacher again for Trigonometry.

Question: Same math teacher?

Yes. He failed me in Trigonometry. So, my parents are livid now. How am I going to go to Collingswood? They said, "You better solve this problem yourself." I asked around, and there was a teacher at Hammonton High School, his name was Charles B. Siple. He accepted me as his student. I went there and I was tutored. He had tutored my wife's sister, Eileen, too.

Eileen was a little deficient in math also. What happened was in a matter of one month I had bonded with Mr. Siple, and I learned Trigonometry, I knew all about the four trigonometric functions

Question: Maybe that other teacher just wasn't a good teacher as far as how you needed things to be explained.

I go back to Edgewood in September to obtain my high school diploma. I couldn't go to college because I wasn't out of high school yet. I couldn't graduate with my class at Edgewood; the administrators wouldn't allow me on the stage.

Question: The Trigonometry kept you from going across the stage?

Yes, and I still remember that quite vividly. That impacted me; the fact that there are these powerful people out there who can really do damage to you; they can actually ruin your life.

Question: You might not have finished high school.

Exactly. So, I go back in September to Edgewood. My parents said, "You better go back and get your diploma." I had a letter from Mr. Siple from Hammonton High, who is a distinguished teacher and had a good reputation. I presented the letter to Mr. Pinkerton, who was the principal at Edgewood. Mr. Pinkerton said, "Well,

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we don't know if we can accept this letter." He stated, "I have to call Mr. So and So down to confer with him whether or not we're going to give you the diploma."

Question: This was your senior year.

Yes. Here I am and the teacher comes down and says, "No, no, we can't accept this letter. You have to come up and pass my final exam." I followed him up the stairs to his classroom. He gave me the final exam while he's teaching the class. In a matter of half a period, maybe 20, 25 minutes, I had finished the exam. I raised my hand, "I'm finished, Mr. So and So." I went up and handed him my exam paper. He looked at it, he couldn't believe that I got everyone item right. Yes, every one correct.

Question: You had a lot riding on that one exam.

That's right. He said, "I'm not going to give you an A, but you will get a C for the course." He gave me a C for the course. So, he gave me a C. But I couldn't go to college because it's September now.

Question: You couldn't make plans.

After the summer farm market season, my father was working later in the year in Norristown, Pennsylvania. When we moved to Levittown, the Plant's business moved from Philadelphia (near Connie Mack Stadium) North Philadelphia to Norristown. My Dad was the foreman, and he got me a job there. Here it is like November, December, January, February, March before the Farm Market opens up. I had to do welding; I didn't like it one bit. It was a negative experience, being a welder and breathing-in the shop fumes.

Question: Maybe that made you decide, 'I'm not going to be a blue-collar worker, it's not for me.'

Exactly. My father always isolated me from working with my hands. He always said, "You've got to work with your brain; with your head."

Question: As far as working in the Farm Market and stuff, you worked more with the sales instead of the back breaking work.

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Exactly. It was such a negative experience; I didn't want to do that, and that's when I enrolled into Glassboro State College and decided that I was going to become a teacher. I was determined to become a better teacher than that Math instructor at Edgewood.

Question: That gave you direction, and your bad student experiences formed you.

That's right. I would have more sympathy towards the students than what had been exhibited towards me. Then, I'm a student at Glassboro State College. It's Freshman year and here I am; it brings back these negative memories. I had this female professor who, from my impression, she did not like men, and she did not like my writing style.

Question: She was tough on you, apparently.

Here I am, I'm going to be an English teacher, high school, that's my curriculum.

Question: You had decided that already.

Yes. That was my major, High School English Teacher

Question: This was your goal to be good at this.

This teacher, who did not like my writing style, gave me two Ds in first and second semester in Fundamentals of Communication. Here's another person who's out to wreck my life, from my perspective anyway.

Question: That could have changed your career path quickly.

Exactly. What happened was, I no longer could become a high school English teacher. I'm demoted to a middle school English teacher, which I eventually became. So that was that. So, that's another story in my biography.

Question: The point that you mentioned earlier about how these things shape and form you, all these experiences. Sometimes it really is fate, it's circumstance, you go through the teachers you happen to run into. But you're so impressionable at that age.

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Exactly. Adversity made me very resilient to the point where this teacher who failed me in Glassboro, this strict-grammar professor, she had written one children's picture book, and I've written 62 published books.

Question: Revenge is sweet. Lessons were learned. That must give you some satisfaction.

That came from my grandparents and my parents that you just keep fighting and you don't take no for an answer, and you don't let anybody decide your destiny.

Question: You have that stick-to-it-tiveness.

That's right.

Question: You wanted what you wanted, and you went after it.

Nothing was going to stop me from getting it, exactly.

Question: That's what helped you persevere.

Yes.

Question: Not everybody would have done that. Like I was saying, that could have changed your career path totally. You could've thought, 'Oh well, this isn't for me.' If you valued her opinion, you would've thought badly yourself and believed what she was telling you.

A lot of it has to do with, believe it or not, there was a lot of prejudice against Italian people, especially Sicilians in Hammonton.

Question: You were half Sicilian.

I am half Sicilian; my maternal grandparents were Sicilian.

Question: And half Polish.

Yes, that's right. That's another story.

Question: That's an interesting combination.

Right. Because back then Poles married Poles, Irish married Irish, and Italians married Italians.

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Question: That would have been a mixed marriage nowadays, back then.

My wife and I are both Catholic, so that was the bond and that made it okay, eventually. Over here in Hammonton, where my grandparents were, my grandfather had bought that five-acres of ground, where Square Deal Farm Market is; my father had his auto-mechanic garage there. The Parkhurst Garden Supply, which was a big distributor back then, selling to farmers bulk fertilizer and sprays, and all that sort of stuff. You had the Fittings who were peach farmers. You had the Ransoms, they were peach farmers, also; they were all of established British descent.

Question: This was all along the White Horse Pike here?

Yes. But they were all English. One of those English families did not like my grandparents (who were Sicilian) being there. They bought the property right next door and built a farm market right next to their newly constructed farm market in order to drive my grandparents out of business.

Question: Interesting. They really took their prejudices seriously.

Exactly. My grandmother Annie Giacobbe would not put up with that; she was a tough cookie. If a car stopped in front of the other farm market, she would run over there and get the prospective customers, and bring them to her farm market. She had that drive, that determination. You weren't going to pull anything over on her without a fight.

Question: She was going to make the situation work in her favor.

I think I had inherited part of that resiliency from her that we're in competition, and we've got to be better than everybody else challenging us. But we aren't going to brag about it.

Question: And be tougher.

We're going to be tougher, if that's what it takes.

Question: Did you know you were impressed by your grandmother at the time, or did that come out later?

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No. I just knew that there were tough people in the family, so much so that other people were trying to take-away what they have. I was aware of that.

Question: And about survival of their business.

Exactly, economic survival. Darwinian ethics became involved in our family businesses as well as in biology.

Question: I think so.

That's what I'm trying to tell you. Later in life, I went as partners with my father-in-law, who owned Whiter Horse farms in Elm. We had a boardwalk business in Ocean City, Maryland, a very good business. It was a casino, basically.

Question: Were you still teaching at the time?

Yes, I would do this during the summertime for 16 summers, and that enterprise did very well down there. Every poker machine was a dime, ten cents to play. We had a pokerino, and it became the most popular amusement game on the Ocean City Boardwalk.

Question: What is that?

Poker machines. We had 15 on this side, and 15 on that side, 30 all together with 30 stools in front for the players to sit upon. We had 25 feet frontage on the boardwalk, in Ocean City, Maryland.

Question: The machines were popular?

Yes. This was like 1966, '67 up to 1981, we were down there. They'd take in maybe \$1,000 to \$1,500 a day just from dimes.

Question: You had a lot of people coming through, tourists that wanted to spend.

If they put a dime in, they got jacks are better, then they would get a ten-cent coupon, at two pair, they would get 20 cents; three of a kind, they would get 50 cents towards merchandise prizes, a straight, they would get 75 cents, a flush, they would get \$1.00, a full house, they would get \$2.00, a straight flush, they

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would get \$5.00. A Royal Flush received 25-dollar prize, either a large stuffed animal or a household appliance.

Question: Those would be their winnings?

But they add-up all their coupons, and all the things have a numerical value, like a \$10 prize, \$15 price, and so on. If you were lucky and made a royal flush from the machine's 5 windows, you earned choice of the house, which would be a big stuffed animal, or maybe a blender, or a skillet. What I'm trying to tell you is I learned to buy and budget all this merchandise that we needed from my experience with my grandfather, when he'd take me to Philadelphia when I was a little kid. During two years, I had trouble getting people going down to work there. My parents (who were retired) came down to Ocean City, and they worked for me. and helped me run the store down there. This represented to me the importance of family loyalty.

Question: They were retired?

That's right. In 1971, they had sold the Pete's Farm market business here on the Pike, and they were down there in 1972 and '73. My younger brother Skip (Anthony) also came down to Ocean City, MD, and he worked down there with my parents.

Question: How did you end up being located down in Ocean City, Maryland?

I needed that summer job. I wasn't getting-along that well with my father-in-law. He was a tough Italian cookie, and we didn't hit it off that greatly. But he eventually became my partner. There was a Hammonton teacher named Bob Edgerton, who is 1967 taught 6th Grade with me. I started out as a 6th Grade teacher here. He gave me a call, and asked, "John, how are you doing..." He goes on, "I need an assistant manager. I got this boardwalk job in Ocean City, Maryland."

Question: He was thinking you would want a summer job down there?

Yes. I went down there as the assistant manager, working on salary. I liked the business; I saw a great potential in it. The year after, Bob Edgerton moved to Maryland. I got to know this fellow Manny Wolfe, who had the patent on those

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profitable poker machines. He wanted to have Dealers Choice poker machine locations, and he did eventually in Wildwood, Atlantic City, Seaside Heights, and Ocean City, Maryland. Manny wanted to expand his business empire, and he needed money. My father-in-law bought into the other end of the Ocean City business. I had previously borrowed money from him; I also borrowed money from my parents, and in addition, I had saved wedding money from when Joanne and I had gotten married. We invested all of that in the Ocean City amusement arcade business, and it turned out very well for us. That's how I owned and paid for our two-story colonial house situated across the White Horse Pike, did well in the Stock Market, and was able to completely college educate our three sons, simply because I was in business, to complement my and Joanne's teaching salaries.

Question: Things went your way; you took some risks and things.

Exactly. Everything was a dime with the thirty poker machines; it was just amazing. However, one day in July of 1976, IRS agents came into the arcade amusement store. They said, "These machines are illegal." I replied, "What do you mean they're illegal?" I further commented, "They're amusement devices." "No, they're gaming devices," the two agents maintained.

Question: That's a serious accusation. That was your whole business there, a big chunk of it.

Exactly. I said, "Look, it's a game of skill." "No, it's not." So, Fernando, who worked for me, and who also lived in Hammonton, was asked to demonstrate forming a winning hand on the poker machine. I had often imported reliable help from Hammonton to serve as my managers, many of whom were former students of mine. I learned that if I would pay for their apartment down there, I would always have dependable management help. In the past, several times, our help was transient, or had to get ready for college, and floor workers often quit in August.

Question: Then you had people you could depend on.

I could come up here and get merchandise and bring it down there without any worry that the business was still operating as normal. I would have three

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dependable former students living in Apartment 6 above Trimper's Amusements, while my family lived in Apartment 10.

Question: That was smart, you were a good business man.

The two IRS agents played "good cop, bad cop". One guy pretended to be my friend, while the other guy was giving threatening accusations. I said to Fernando, "Get four aces on the machine." He was able to obtain four aces on the designated machine. I said, "Fernando, get a straight flush on the machine." He skillfully obtained a straight flush on the machine. I said to the IRS agents, "This is a game of skill, not everybody can develop the skill to do that." I continued, "What's all this mean? The head agent declared, "Well, there's going to be a \$500 tax on each of these machines. So, you've got 30 machines so you'll owe \$15,000 or something like that." That sum was a hell of a lot of money back in 1976. Then, he proceeded, "How long have you been in business?" I said, "I'm not going to tell you." He goes, "I know, you've been here 10 years."

Question: Were they going to try and get back taxes from you as well?

Yes.

Question: That's just plain dirty.

That's the IRS for you. That's what's they were pursuing. 150 thousand dollars then in 1976 would be like 1.5 million dollars today in 2023.

Question: To put you out of business.

That's right. The main agent verbalized, "So, you now owe Uncle Sam over \$100,000." Which obviously, would be more than \$1 million in today's money.

Question: Was that 1982 when you decided to give up the business?

No, this was 1976, that's what went on there. Then the IRS representative said, "Also, there's interest in penalties involved, too." What happened next was that we hired lawyers to fight the government, and we found out that the lawyers were in a part of another parasitic syndicate besides the IRS, and we had to pay the DC attorneys, too.

Question: Did they help you? Were they in your corner?

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The DC attorneys were somewhat helpful, but they were privately negotiating with the IRS, when, in retrospect, we could've probably done it ourselves. Then, we had to solve the problem. I'm looking around at all the large boardwalk arcades and there were these money-pushing coin machines. I don't know if you've ever seen them or not.

Question: There's coins and stuff, and ledges are just push the coins forward a little tiny bit at a time, and you hope the coins or dollars will fall over the edge?

Exactly. I bought three of them to add additional revenue to our arcade business. We got a Pot of Gold machine that did quarters. We got a Flip A Winner, where three people can play at the same time. That machine flipped inserted coins up, and the arms push them into piles, and they fall down, with some falling into a money chute. The big one was located in the center of the store, and it was called Splash Down, which was shaped like an eight-sided space capsule. This one cost \$10,000 which would be like \$100,000 in today's money.

Question: Those were big investments for you.

Yes, back then. We had to save the business.

Question: You were trying to make money to keep the other poker machine business afloat and to also pay-off that IRS?

Yes, to make money there. To pay our bills, pay the IRS, make money and whatever. Eight people could play this machine at one time. The first day we had this machine was in May of 1978. We had it '78, '79, and '80; we had the Splash Down three for summers. The first day we had this one machine, it took in \$1,700 in dimes. That's an amazing 17,000 dimes, or plays.

Question: In one day?

In dimes in one day.

Question: That's a lot of plays. You had people through constantly.

Yes, back then in 1978. We had the 30 poker machines, and we had this Splash Down machine. This goes on for three years and we're doing okay, we're burning through a lot of merchandise, and I didn't care, because we're still making money.

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Then in 1980, we had these three revenue agents come in from the State of Maryland. "This Splash Down machine is illegal. You have to get it out of here." Every major arcade on the boardwalk had these coin-pushing machines. We all had to get rid of this machine.

Question: They were doing that across the board with everyone who owned these machines?

Yes, they did. Then we decided to do the poker game business one more year, 1981, and that would be it. I only wanted to work until I was 40 years old. I did not want to work 12 months a year, burning myself out. In 1981, we had a chance to sell the business, and we finally got out of there. Going back to my grandmother and mother in Rehoboth Beach, I had a boardwalk t-shirt store in during that same time.

Question: That didn't involve any gambling of any sort.

No, we sold mostly sweatshirts and t-shirts. We had these heat transfer machines, you've probably seen them up here in Jersey; they transfer the decal onto a t-shirt.

Question: You could print the t-shirt yourself.

Yes, print the t-shirt out, yes, inside the store. Believe it or not, my mother and my maternal grandmother worked there from 1972 to 1981.

Question: That's a long time, a decade.

So, I'm saying it becomes a reverse situation; instead of me working for them on their farm markets from 1959 to 1966, they're now working for me. I trusted them beyond a doubt.

Question: They were family, they would look out for the business, and they weren't going to pilfer from you. You could trust your family.

That's the way that worked out for us, so we were happy about that, too. My grandmother was a toughie. See, in Rehoboth, the summer visitors come in from Washington. But in Ocean City, they mostly come in from Baltimore.

Question: And it was a resort town still?

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And it was a resort town. One day in 1978, a busload of inner-city kids came in from Washington into Rehoboth. One kid attempted stealing a t-shirt. My grandmother's outside and the kid leaves the store, and she instinctively grabs the shirt from him. There's a wild tug-o-war, and she pulled it away from the astonished teenager. Condominium spectators were watching from up on the balconies overlooking the boardwalk, and the incident had occurred under the Star of the Sea Condominium. The residents were all applauding my grandmother for taking on this inner-city kid stealing a t-shirt.

Question: She wasn't about to let him get away with that. That's hilarious.

That's the resiliency that she had. He could have had weapons; he could have had a knife or something.

Question: She didn't care, she was determined. He wasn't going to pull a fast one on her.

Exactly. When we couldn't get t-shirts, grandmother would go to Joe Ryan, a Rehoboth merchant who also had a place in Ocean City, Maryland. Joe was big merchant operating in that type of venue. Grandmom Annie would go and buy 50 t-shirts at a time from him, and he wouldn't want to sell them to her.

Question: No? Why not?

Because he needs some to sell himself. She didn't care; she would pay the retail price and then resell them, and that's the way she was. When she owned Square Deal, often came over to White Horse Farm Market, she would buy peaches from Joanne's mother, who claimed that she needed the peaches in baskets to sell for herself.

Question: And then sell them at her stand?

Yes.

Question: She knew how to mark things up a buck or two.

My grandmother would say, "No, I need these peaches for my market." She would just put them inside her car, "How much do you want?" That's the way she was.

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Question: She's going to make her way, what a lady. Going back to your college years, were you already dating Joanne by then? I've talked to Joanne, and I've heard her story about how you met and were married.

We met here at the White Horse Farm Market. I later knew that she was a student at Glassboro; I would see her around the campus. Back then, in the summer, we'd go on dates to Atlantic City, I remember.

The big deal was going to the movies, and she had to be home by 11:00 from Atlantic City. Once I had gotten a flat tire, and we just made it home on time.

That's right, Atlantic City. Also, the boardwalk movie theater in Ocean City. We went to that movie house a couple of times, too. But mostly Atlantic City, you're right.

Question: Was there a movie house in downtown Hammonton at that point?

No, because the Rivoli Theater located at the corner of Bellevue Avenue and Third Street closed in 1960. I did some research on this topic last week; it had opened in 1927, and closed in 1960.

Question: I didn't realize that long ago it closed.

With the competition, with the dominance of television and TV movies. Yes, there was an ornate movie house, the Rivoli Theater. In fact, Mr. Frank owned it; his corporation owned about 50 theaters, and it was a big deal. Mr. Frank would come to Square Deal and buy peaches, tomatoes, corn and apples. I remember that man because my grandmother always admired him because he was very successful. I and she always personally catered to him.

Question: He was a big deal.

Yes, Mr. Frank.

Question: You and Joanne got married in what year?

1966, April 24th.

Question: How many children do you have?

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Three. Joe's a real estate broker, now. John, or J.T. lives in Woodbury. He's a writer, and he has a hyperacusis problem with his ears. I have a son Stephen, who lives in Saddle Brook, New Jersey, up in North Jersey in Bergen County. Steve runs a place called Flat Rock Brook, which is a large nature center in Englewood, New Jersey.

Question: It sounds like an interesting place. Do you have grandchildren?

We have four. We have three girls and one boy. Steve, up in North Jersey, has two girls, Sierra and Lindsey. Here in Hammonton, Joe Wiessner has Dan and Karly.

Question: How has Hammonton changed since you were younger? You've mentioned some changes with the stories that you've told, but what stands out in your mind as being significant changes that have occurred. There's less peaches being sold, we've established that.

When I drive through the town now, I never see anybody on the sidewalks. It's always like, where are the people? All the parking spaces are taken, so the shoppers must be inside the buildings. I remember as a young kid, my mother on Friday and Saturday night would take me to downtown Hammonton. I recall lots of people, lots of traffic, everybody shopping. I remember almost on every corner there was a soda fountain like where Bellevue Drugs is now.

Question: Yes, they had the soda fountain and snacks inside.

Godfrey Drugs was in there right where the Egg Harbor Road and Bellevue Avenue Mexican Restaurant is now. Godfrey's Drugstore had a soda fountain. So did Kerns, which was across from Second and Bellevue on that same side of the main drag.

Question: My daughter married into the Kern family. She's married to Donald Kern.

Then, you know about the pharmacy back then, right?

Question: Yes, a little bit of that history.

J J Newberry's was a 5 & 10, that was the big 5 & 10 in downtown '50s Hammonton.

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Question: My very first job was at a J J Newberry's, but I worked in the office up in East Brunswick. I'm very familiar with them, yes.

And then next to the Rivoli Theater, there was a snack bar that we used to go to. Several banks have occupied that location since 1960.

Question: So, people congregated at all these places.

Yes.

Question: I think for the teenagers, they would be a fun place to be. But you didn't have the fast-food places that we have nowadays.

It was a social phenomenon. If you had a nice car, you always cruised town all night long; cruising was a big deal back then, teenagers just be going cruising around on Friday and Saturday nights in circles.

Question: You were out there to be seen and see people and watch.

Today it is just the opposite. The high school kids don't want to be seen in public; they just want to have a private event happening inside the house. If the parents go away on vacation or a trip, the teens all congregate at that house. I was past President of the Lion's Club, and I was often present at Lion's activities like dinners and so on. Joanne and I came home early one night, and there were cars all the way from our house across the White Horse Pike peach orchard to the White Horse Farm packing house. No exaggeration; there were like 200 high school kids inside our house and in our back yard.

Question: Were your children having a big party?

All three of them were in high school at the same time.

Joanne W.: "It was like Animal House".

It was Animal House personified. That's the way it was. They had beer there, and were celebrating a five-keg party, whatever that terminology means.

Question: How would they think you wouldn't find out?

We came home early.

Question: They were busted.

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Joanne W.: “They never did any damage, nobody took anything. The only thing we did was have a sewer back up in the downstairs powder room.

All the flushing. We had like three bathrooms.

Joanne W.: Our kids were interesting and business-oriented. It was right before the time of the police charging parents for their underage kids drinking alcoholic beverages illegally, and we were lucky to get past the incident without any fines, accidents, or penalties.

Question: You would have been absolved; you would not have been held responsibly. But you didn't know, it's not like you were supervising it or saying, 'Oh yeah, go ahead and have a party.' You had no knowledge.

Joanne W.: “That was tough, but you go through that embarrassment. We were fortunate. On several occasions, we did have kids who stayed overnight; we didn't want them to drive.”

Question: It's good you came home when you did to help protect them.

When we showed up, the kids would see us arrive, and then they'd get in their cars, and they'd peel-out. The irony is that three or four of them that were at the party, in the future, became policemen themselves.

Question: Teenagers are teenagers. I think it's human nature to try and get away with stuff when you're trying to exert your independence. Tell me about your teaching years, I know you retired as a teacher of English. Did you still teach Junior High aged children when you retired?

I had an interesting career in Hammonton because I started as a 6th Grade teacher. I applied at different schools and got a job offer at Edgewood. I didn't want to go there because the math teacher with whom I had had trouble was still on the faculty. I had a job offer from Orange, New Jersey, and I went up there for an interview, but I didn't want to teach in an inner-city school. Then, I had to settle for something I didn't want in order to get what I eventually would want. There was an English job opening up here in Hammonton, and then the superintendent Dr. Garafalo hired me to teach 6th Grade, which was all the curriculum subjects, and I did that task for three years.

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Question: You knew you just preferred to teach English.

English and History, yes. That was for three years, and then I received a call that I could go to the high school and become a permanent sub. We had two permanent subs there. When teachers were out, the two substitutes had the priority; Bill Capella and I went into those principal situations, and then the outside subs would come in after that for other faculty teachers who were absent.

Question: It would have been full-time hours?

Yes. I was tenure at the time, so I said, "Yes, I'll try it." I wanted to get out of 6th Grade. I did that substituting for two years. Going into my sixth year, a job opening for the main 8th Grade English teacher came up, and I applied for and got that assignment. I was happy about that curriculum responsibility, and that's where I stayed from 1970 to 1999, serving 29 years in that capacity. That was almost my full teaching career.

Question: That was a long time in one spot.

Back then, I was a little radical. Your friend Bill Parkhurst may have been on the Board of Education at that time, and I had the reputation for being an opinionated, militant teacher representative.

Question: Yes, he was on the Board. When we were doing the yearbook display, he said being on the Board, he was given a yearbook every year, as that was a gift to the Board members. He, at some point, gave his away, so he didn't have any. I was thinking of reaching out to other Board members to try and get other yearbooks.

I was first the Hammonton Education Building Representative, and then I was Vice President of the Teacher's Association here in Hammonton for six or seven years. I was later the head negotiator for the teacher contracts, which just came into existence around 1970, if I recall. The Board had to finally by law negotiate with the teachers. Before then, you received what salary and/or privileges the Board wanted to give you.

Question: You had a little bit of leverage with negotiations with the teachers.

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Yes. That's why I made some enemies with the Board of Education, too. Bill Parkhurst might have been of those enemies, even though in my youth I was friendly with his younger brother. It was in the 1970s when that happened, I was the Vice President of the Teacher's Association. All these memories now come back.

Question: You did a lot over the years. And then you went on to become an author. When did you start doing the writing seriously? I don't know how you had time for that if you were still working.

I was doing it mostly during the summertime, and I was doing it even in Ocean City, Maryland. I remember I would go down there, set the store up on weekends in April, and then wake up 2:00 in the morning. I recollect that, one of my first novels was "Ron Coyote, Man of La Mangia". I remember it being 3:00 in the morning. I'd be awake writing-down ideas in the Apartment #10 in Ocean City, Maryland, so I was writing in the 1970s. Yes, from 1973 to 1999.

Joanne W.: "It was very difficult for me trying to keep three boys quiet while he's trying to write, it was crazy."

Question: I can imagine, yes.

Joanne W.: "It was tough."

Question: Trying to let him concentrate and focus.

Joanne W.: "I used to come to my mother's house a lot, or go into my sister's house and take a nap."

Question: Just to get them out from underfoot.

"Yes."

Joanne W.: "How about when you were correcting all those damn papers?"

Yes. The requirements for 8th Grade English were abominable. Now, we're in competition with every school system in the State. The kids had to write six-paragraph compositions, and I had about 130 students in five or six daily classes.

Question: Was that a final exam?

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No. It was whenever you gave an assignment for writing. You just go blind. Then, the school supervisors wanted you to just look for one thing in each theme. Every time the students wrote a six-paragraph composition, this time we're going to do punctuation. Next time we're going to grade capitalization. You wouldn't really correct the whole paper, which I was always trained to do in college courses.

Question: You weren't really correcting the whole paper as you saw it, you were looking for one theme, one type of error.

That's right. I was the type of teacher that if you're doing things wrong, I'm going to tell you what you're doing wrong. It was driving me crazy with 130 students.

Question: Because the students needed to give it their time and attention and correct things. You didn't want to let it slide.

"Yes, exactly."

Question: That's funny because you're bringing back memories for me. I remember my daughter coming home in tears in 8th Grade. She was fed up with this teacher, she couldn't make this teacher happy. She kept writing in a writing class, I believe English Literature class maybe. She's writing it and the teacher keeps giving her the papers back and saying, "Correct this, correct that." She was very strict and very hard on her and the rest of the class, as well. She disliked the teacher, but she managed to get up to snuff with everything. The reason I'm telling you all this is that my daughter, Casey, the one that I said married into the Kern family, she became a teacher of English Literature. I've always told her, "You learned a lot from the teacher you hated the most. She made you the writer and the reader that you are today."

Joanne W.: "A lot of kids have told us, if it wasn't for my husband, he was like the best teacher they ever had. He would incorporate humor; John had a pretty interesting style of teaching."

Question: That must have given you a good repertoire with the kids.

Towards the end, I went video, and the kids loved that. Textbook Grammar would turn them off. We had the Warriner's Grammar Book, adjectives subordinate clause; adverbs subordinate clauses; participial phrases. I was getting it through

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to them, but it wasn't working; it was not classroom happiness. When I decided to implement video, I did that mostly for writing. For example, I would show the movie, "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid", and I would establish a certain theme. "Today's theme is problem solving, and there will be 12 problems in the movie, and your responsibility is to identify the 12 problems and determine how each problem had been solved by the main characters." Then, the students would write the six paragraph composition about that assignment, rather than just give them a subject to explore on their own— "problem solving".

Question: I can see that sparking their interest, you were creative that way.

Then, we would analyze the lyrics to a song, like one by Madonna, and then show the video. Then, we would break it up in grammar: subject, verb, adjective, type of sentences in the lyrics, etc.

Question: But it was a current song that was popular, the top 40, that was the hook right there.

That was what worked for me. Other nearby teachers didn't like my method because the music would permeate through the walls, and then the principal or a supervisor would come and say "shoosh".

Question: You weren't in there just partying, they were learning something.

You're right. When I was the teacher negotiator at THE BOARD OF EDUCATION SESSIONS, I did create a lot of enemies with Board Members.

Question: I'm sure you had to be tough with that. You talked about your writing career. How many books have you written?

Sixty-two, and I'm just about at the end of my career now; that's around 6.2 million words in print.

Question: That's amazing, I admire you.

I'm not a good typist, either. Sometimes I have to read and edit a manuscript five or six times to get all of the kinks out

Question: I'm here with John and he's telling me about his technique for how he edits.

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A lot of things happened that I remember. One thing that comes to mind right now is that it was 1981. I was in charge of the Middle School Spelling Bee. We have a Middle School Hammonton champion, and then we have a contest between Hammonton, St. Joe, and Folsom. Naturally, they pick me to run that Spelling Bee. The Knights of Columbus found-out about me being a spelling bee moderator, and that organization wanted me to run their Spelling Bee; it snowballed into that added commitment. Again, it was 1981, I believe. We were at St. Joe's and inside their gymnasium/auditorium. Classes from all three schools came, and a big crowd was present there. As I recall, it was an unbelievable Spelling Bee, and each school had such great spellers. Usually, we get the assembly program done in 45 minutes, but the contest went on for an hour-and-a-half. I'm getting signals from Sister Barbara, the St. Joe Principal that the competition had to end somehow. I had some really, really crazy words that I was putting out there.

Question: You couldn't get the kids out, it just kept going on and on.

Yes. It got down to the last two or three participants, and they were really excellent spellers. Finally, we had a really good kid from our school, Hammonton and this girl from St. Joe's, and the St. Joe girl eventually won. When she won, it was crazy. She had 50 or so friends and girls in uniforms, and they all bull-rushed the stage, stampeded the whole area, they almost knocked me over with the whole podium, too. They went wild. When everything finally quieted-down, I got the microphone and I said, "Congratulations! You are one of the best spellers I've ever seen in my life. Can you tell us what your name is?" She goes, "Kellyanne Fitzpatrick." All the kids go, "Yay!" Come to find out years later, Kellyanne Fitzpatrick turns out to be Kellyanne Conway, advisor to Donald J. Trump.

Question: Wow, she was quite accomplished even back then.

Joanne W.: She was outstanding, yes.

That's just one of the anecdotes that I remember, and I put the occasion and other events and situations into this book, "So Ya' Wanna' Be A Teacher". They're all in here. Generally, the book tells and describes what I consider what's wrong with American public-school education.

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Question: It's a good historical novel of your career in Hammonton.

Of my career and what I think is wrong with education. There's a lot of things I think are wrong.

Question: My daughter would enjoy that.

Yes, you can look this title up on the Internet; this is, in various parts of the world. Another book title is, "The Arcane Arcade." Have you ever heard of Leonard Streitfeld?

Question: I have not.

Leonard Strietfeld was a prominent optometrist in Hammonton for many, many years. His son Steve Strietfeld took over his business. It was where the Funky Cow Restaurant on Bellevue and Central Avenues is now.

Question: The Funky Cow, that restaurant?

Yes. That's where Leonard Streitfeld's optometrist business was, right there on that main town corner.

Leonard was there in 1949. After he passed-on, the business lasted until 2020 when his son Steve finally also passed-on. This fellow, Dr. Streitfeld, was a B-29 bombardier during WW II. He flew in 14 missions over Germany, and usually, B-29s flew two or three missions and then get shot-down. Dr. Streitfeld was on the Board of Education here in Hammonton. I would often be in the middle school office, and Dt. Streitfeld had heard that I was writing some stories, and I knew that he was writing some stories, too. In his writing style, the characters didn't have names, he'd begin sentences with pronouns, which is a general writing taboo. He does all this stuff that you aren't supposed to do that I know from experience teaching literature you aren't supposed to do, because I had also worked for two years with a literary agency in Pittsburgh and I learned, if something's wrong, I know right away it's wrong and how to correct the defect. The discrepancy immediately jumps out and stands out in my head.

Question: You started working together?

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I knew he was writing stories, but he wouldn't let me read any of his manuscripts. I said, "Just let me read a couple of your stories. I'll try to maybe look at them, and maybe make a few suggestive notations." He let me read his first story, and it was a really good story, "The Chess Set." I read the literary endeavor/ 'This is good literature', but it will never sell because the characters don't have names; they don't have professions, they just do things. Your good story could be great if I can add more descriptive details."

Question: It needed to be tweaked.

I said, "I read these stories and I could do something with them and organize the titles into a book. These 16 tales could become really tremendous stuff." I convinced Dr. Streitfeld that I could read and edit all 16 of his stories. He did not want to give me co-authorship 50/50, and the finished book turns-out to be 350 pages. I would say at least 200 of those pages were mine, and the other 150 pages are what I seriously edited. It was much more my work than his work, but he still just wants to give me a 20% editing fee. We had this disagreement out, and this controversy went on for about three years, and nothing happened. Dr. Strietfeld, the father, died, and I'm friendly with his son Steve, who's in the Hammonton Lion's Club with me. Steve gets sick with terminal cancer, so he also dies. I'm at the viewing at Carnesale Funeral home. I was the main speaker representing the Lions Club. Dr. Leonard Streitfeld's other son, Rick Strietfeld, who was living in California, was impressed with my speech at his brother Steve's funeral. Rick thought I was honest and sincere. I later talked to him about the proposed book "The Arcane Arcade". He answered, "We'll see." If you look on the inside of the now published book, it reads, "Copyright. John Wiessner, Jay Dubya and the Estate of Dr. Leonard Strietfeld."

Question: Leonard had died already?

Leonard had died.

Question: When he died, this whole thing was on the table and hadn't been published yet.

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No. He had originally published it, but the publisher went out of business. I looked out from my perspective. He was using my material; I was angry then, because he was publishing much of my material and saying it was his material.

Question: His heirs agreed with you.

That's right. This book is now out there, and the stories are remarkable. Leonard possessed a tremendous imagination. If you ever want to read science fiction, you might want to read "The Arcane Arcade". The book exists in hardcover, softcover, and also in Nook, and Kindle e-book formats.

Question: Would you say they're young adult books?

The Arcane Arcade could be read maybe from 7th Grade to adult, and there is no adult language. I write in eight different genres, and some of my literature is adult, too. This book, "Plots" I'm holding and showing you. it's Edgar Allen Poe, Jack London, O. Henry, Mark Twain, and William Shakespeare. I take their terrific literature and rewrite it in adult form, so that's one venue. If you hear anybody say, "He writes dirty material" yes, but I also write it in seven other genres, too. No one can't typecast me like actors or other authors. A British author writes "Harry Potter", and that's all the public wants from her and nothing else. J. K. Rowling, she writes Harry Potter, that's all she'll be remembered for. She's been typecast.

Question: Yes, you've got the other genres to your credit.

Exactly. So, I figured I'd come out with all of this material after me stopping teaching. With the adult stuff, I figured I'm not going to come out with it until after 1999, when I retire from teaching. I'll get my pension, and I'm free from any accusations of me being immoral while teaching.

Question: Then nobody can make a big deal out of it and associate it with you.

If I came out before, there might have been a big problem.

Question: The town is conservative enough that it might have happened, definitely.

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Yes. You may hear, "He writes garbage." Yes, okay, you may call it garbage, but I also write children's books, I write Sci-Fi, I write non-fiction, I write mythology, detective stories, and I author other genres, too.

Question: You're very diverse that way.

I got the idea for writing adult satirical books when I was teaching 8th Grade English. I had two accelerated classes, which were the advanced students in the school system, and in addition, I had three or four general classes. The administration came to me and said, "John, we'd like to have you teach an enrichment class, too, for our 8th Grade enrichment students." I replied, "Okay, I'll do that. I'll do it if it's literature-based." The principal said, "Okay." When I developed the special literature curriculum, the authors E.A. Poe, Jack London, O. Henry, Mark Twain, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Washington Irving were selected to have their works read. Those were the principal authors that we covered in the new enrichment course. That's how I became very familiar with their work. With their short stories especially, because I would assign enrichment students to give oral reports on their short story titles. They would have to read the story and come up front and give those speeches at the podium. I really learned a lot about those great authors. That enrichment course was going tremendously. We had the literature component, and then we did the Mini-model Congress. We'd take the kids to Trenton, and they would debate bills and topics with other kids from other New Jersey schools. They'd write a Bill at the State Legislature in Trenton. We also did the Stock Market game. We had all these other activities integrated with the Literature Program I had prescribed and authored. In 1994, the curriculum coordinator came to my classroom and informed, "John, guess what?" I said, "What?" He continued, "You got to change your curriculum." I ask, "Why?" "It's working fantastic." "I know." he answered. "But we're going to go now with something called "The Great Books." I said, "What does it entail?" He explained, "I have a copy." I read the copy, and concluded that what we already had developed was much superior to "The Great Books".

Joanne W.: "This was the beginning of "Woke"! That is what that new program was. Wokeness with the multi-cultural stuff."

Question: With all of that needing to be covered, yes.

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The school curriculum then also took my conservative Literature book away. Everything was then produced by unknown authors, maybe three or four stories in the whole book were still included from the aforementioned established authors that I was familiar with, whom I had taught to students in the traditional English curriculum.

Question: Couldn't your students have missed the Classic Authors?

Yes, they would, because most everything presented now is authored by minorities. The curriculum coordinator, to top it off stated, "John, you must teach "The Great Books Program". I replied, "Well, I'm working in the summer. I'm the main Field Manager of Atlantic Blueberry Company, so I have a summer job." The curriculum coordinator wanted me to travel to Temple University and take a course on how to teach The Great Books. I said, "I can't do that. I have a summer job; I'm working at Atlantic Blueberry. I have a life outside of education." The administration took the advanced literature course away from me. To make a long story quicker. The next year I wound-up teaching 6th Grade English.

Question: You went back to 6th Grade.

Yes. I had taught Gabe Donio, he's the editor of the Gazette, I guess the owner, he just sold the newspaper to somebody.

Question: I heard they're stepping down as editor.

That's right, and Gina Rullo, his wife and Gabe are selling the newspaper. As I've said, I taught him in school, and he was a very good student. Then Gabe establishes the Gazette paper; he knocks the Hammonton News out of business, the other competing paper. He's doing very well in town. I wrote a couple of letters the Editor, he liked them, and he asks, "Would you like to write for the paper?" I said, "Yes." So, I wrote about 15 articles or so.

Question: Just freelancing as you felt like it?

Yes, just for the heck of it, just to do something out of boredom. Then soon, a couple of vocal people in town didn't like what I had critically written about education. Gabe wasn't publishing my articles anymore; they would be like an 800-word article. I went up to his office and asked, "Hey, how come you aren't

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publishing my editorials anymore?" He answered, "Well, there's a lot of people where you ruffled their feathers, and I don't want to have any powerful enemies." "Okay, all right," I said. And that was that.

Question: He must have been getting a lot of grief from the things you wrote.

Sure. Then I wrote an article, "Letter to the Editor" about some political controversy that I can't even remember. Some kid from Stockton College wrote a nasty letter-to-the-editor and honestly slandered me really bad. His retort featured low-information value judgments, innuendo and name-calling, of which Gabe published. I was upset about that Stockton student letter, coming from a total stranger. I wrote another "Letter to the Editor" refuting that offensive letter. Gino Rullo, Gabe's wife calls me and says, "We don't publish retortions to letters. You can only write one letter, and then you can't retort somebody who challenges your point of view." I said, "This guy slandered me."

Question: It was more than your point of view.

Exactly. I became so angry that I think I hung up on her and ever since then, I don't hold a grudge, but apparently, Gabe and Gina occasionally see me, and that's it. We just wave, acknowledging one another.

Joanne W.: "They totally ignore you."

Yes, they ignore me, basically. Yes. But it all goes back to that one incident about me being slandered in the Gazette, and them allowing it to happen.

Question: Again, grudges being held.

Yes. The Hammonton mentality, these established families the way they think towards each other.

Question: It's just how things are done. Before we wrap things up, can we talk a little bit further about your mother and your father? A little bit more personally about them. What was your mother's maiden name?

Giacobbe, G-I-A-C-O-B-B-E, Marie Giacobbe, yes. In town, there are a lot of Italian people who have the name Jacobs, instead of Giacobbe. They changed Giacobbe to Jacobs, I think. I think Giacobbe refers to a stone worker or a cobbler, you can

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see “cobbe” in the word. Geo would be earth from Latin and Greek, maybe, so that was the origin of that last name.

Question: Where was Marie born?

My mother was born in Philadelphia, I believe? Yes, because my grandfather had lived in Philadelphia when she was born in 1922. She was one year younger than my wife’s mother, who was born in 1921.

Joanne W.: “No, in 1920.”

So, my mother. Marie Giacobbe, was born in 1921. Our parents went to high school together. My Mom, Marie Giacobbe, said that she used to sit in class with your mother (Anna Curreri) at Hammonton High School. Your mother went to high school; she didn't graduate but she went to high school before opening her hairdressing shop on Bellevue Avenue.

Joanne W.: “Yes, your mother Marie did graduate.”

Yes, right. But then, my mother used to go to her mother’s shop; my wife’s mother was a hairdresser.

Question: So, they went back a long ways before you two were ever close.

Exactly. So, these people in our family’s kind of knew each other.

Question: Were the families happy when you got together? You were long established families in this area, with family members knowing each other like your mothers' being friendly.

Now, we know a lot of people from Hammonton who married like my wife’s friend Barbara's N’s daughter; the guy was from Arizona. They met each other; they marry, and two months later, they're divorced. You don't have that history where you have similar values, family ties, and the shared culture of the town. You know the other family; you know their history. My wife’s ancestors came from the same Sicilian village as my grandfathers did. Its name was Cavalruso, just outside Messina.

Question: You know what you're marrying into, if you come from the same cultures, I think helps, you have that in common.

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Joanne and I did travel to Sicily about 10 years ago, and we saw the village where our ancestors came from, both my grandfather and her grandmother.

Question: This was on your mother's side?

Yes. There are three villages right outside Messina. Have you ever been to Sicily, to beautiful Taormina?

Question: No.

Beautiful. There's Gesso, Calvaruso, and Sero. Now, Franco Scianni's family is from Sero. My ancestors came from Calvaruso, and your grandmother also came from Calvaruso; they were neighbors over there.

Question: It's a small world, unbelievable.

And in regard to Gesso, a lot of the Hammonton people came from there. It's all significant because I think that the name Gesso is Jesus, and Calvaruso – Calvary.

Question: They're religious name tags.

Her father, Joseph Battaglia's father, came from five miles away, a Sicilian town called Roma Marina, or something like that; yes, from that same area. Her Uncle Dick, who was Joanne's father's younger brother, used to play sports in the Hammonton and Elm areas. Uncle Dick (Thomas Battaglia) was very talented, and he was the last one always chosen when sides were taken by team captains. The reason why is because all the other boys were Italian, but Uncle Dick was Sicilian and was dark-complected, and the other Italian kids' ancestors were all light-complected, coming from the mainland "Boot".

Question: Even between the Italians there was prejudice.

Yes, there was prejudice even right there. And that's what attracted me to Joanne; she was darker-skinned, and I liked olive-skinned girls.

Question: Did your mother have brothers and sisters?

My mother Marie Giacobbe had one sister, Aunt Frances. There was another one, I forget her name, but she died in infancy, I think. Grandma Annie had one other child, but she never talked about her. One thing about these very special people;

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they never talked about negative experiences. They endured them, but they didn't want to talk about it. I remember where the new Hammonton High School is now on Old Forks Road and the White Horse Pike; originally, that was my maternal grandmother's brother's property, Uncle Nein. He had a farm market there, too. In the 1950s, he was in competition with my grandmother.

Question: This had to be a very lucrative route for farm markets, there were quite a few with quite a few families.

I remember, I would walk from Square Deal through the various peach orchards; there was my grandfather's apple orchard, then there was Ransom's peach orchard, Buddy Zinno's peach orchard, and then Uncle Nein's peach orchard on the corner. I would walk that whole half-mile distance alone. I'll never forget, I would go inside Uncle Nein's house and watch roller derby, which was big back then. He and Aunt Jean had a large crib in the middle of the room, and inside it was Aunt Mary; she was a paraplegic, or perhaps physically or mentally retarded. Uncle Nein's nephews and nieces would say, "There's Aunt Mary."

Question: They would put her in the living room with everybody else.

Yes, Aunt Mary was with everybody else. At ten years of age, it really blew my mind. Aunt Mary's supposed to be older than me, and smarter than me, and here she's crawling-around in that playpen.

Joanne W.: "She didn't last too long."

No. But it had such an impact on my mind. What's life all about? What's going on here? I conjectured.

Question: You knew that wasn't the right order of things, that's not how things are supposed to happen.

I never saw it anywhere else but in Uncle Nein's and Aunt Jean's house. They would not put her in a home.

Question: God bless them for taking care of her. She probably lived as long as she did because they had shed good loving care for the family.

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Exactly, yes. I have a brother and sister. My sister's Anne's five years younger than me. She had been the valedictorian at St. Joe's; very academically smart, unlike me.

Question: What is her married name?

Gill, she married a Jewish guy. G-i-l-l.

Joanne W.: It's only one L.

One L? Are you sure.

Joanne W.: Yes, John.

I always put two Ls. I always say, if it's in the dictionary, I know how to spell it; if it's in the telephone book, don't hold me accountable.

Question: You can do anything with names, it's tricky.

My brother Skip (Anthony) is 10 years younger than me. I never really knew him that well because we weren't close to one another in age. He occasionally comes over here to our house, and we have pizza and dessert. He lives on Marlyn Avenue in Hammonton. Skip had managed a warehouse, Comar over in Vineland, a pharmaceutical plant. He ran the warehouse there.

Joanne W.: Anne was in fashion design in New York City.

She was in fashion, a designer for Landlubber, which is a popular blue jean company. She had a high position there. Anne started out as a department buyer at Wanamaker's in Philadelphia, then she went to Gimbel's, then to New York, Macy's, I think. She met Steve in Central Park, and they started a photography business for actors and actresses. Steve would professionally take models' pictures for display albums to New York talent agencies.

Question: Very interesting career.

Yes. Next, Steve and Anne moved to California. They journeyed out west in a U-Haul. The pair lived in Los Angeles and later lived in Palm Desert, and thereafter, Palm Springs. Then the twosome moved to Texas from Palm Springs, and now they're living in Florida.

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Question: They settled in Florida.

They lived in Cape Coral, which is next to Fort Meyers on Florida's west coast. They sold their house in Cape Coral and soon moved to Melbourne on the east coast. A week later, after they had sold the Cape Coral house, that's when the hurricane came through and destroyed that whole area. They were very lucky.

Question: The gods were smiling on them, they got out of there in the nick of time. That's an amazing story.

A lot of crazy stuff has happened to this family.

Question: Did your mother finish school?

Yes, she finished high school, Hammonton High School. That's another thing, too. She was three or four years older than Aunt Fran; I think. Their pictures used to be on the dining room wall inside the brick house behind Square Deal Market. In Aunt Francis' graduating class picture, there's a lot of boys in the class, but in my mother's graduating class picture, there are only around three or four boys in the graduating class; everybody else went to fight in World War II.

Question: That had to impact their teen years dramatically.

Yes. That always struck me when I would look at and compare those two wall pictures, thinking that "there's something quite different here".

Question: The men weren't there; the men were overseas.

That's right. Some of them volunteered too, they weren't just drafted, they felt patriotic. That's something that is very lacking in this day and age. It would bother me, after I retired. I would go in as a substitute at the high school; I would have home room period, and everybody would stand-up, but few high school kids would be saying the Pledge of Allegiance. Everybody's looking out the window.

Question: It's disrespectful.

Yes. Go live in another country, and you'll respect the freedoms that we have here.

Question: You'll have some pride.

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Yes. It would upset me because my father fought for that American flag over in Europe.

Question: They take their freedoms for granted.

But when you're cast in that home room situation, and you're the authority, and then you got to put up with this widespread apathy. The students feel like they're entitled to do whatever they want to do.

Question: That's a good word for it, that there's an entitlement and lack of patriotism. I don't know how you instill that in a person. You can't make somebody care; you can try.

You know about the white horse statue over here across the pike that was destroyed?

Question: I heard that it was destroyed and found in Galloway. Did they ever catch who did it?

The police know who did it, let's put it that way.

Question: They can't prove it?

An anonymous person, who I don't know, sent a video of the juvenile culprits taking-down the horse. I just received it two days ago. I can get it on my computer.

Question: Somebody somehow got ahold of this video.

No. Somebody came to White Horse farm, and that person wrote a poem and put it on the base of the horse with their email address. I wrote back a thank you for remembering the landmark horse. This person wrote me a nice letter back stating that they're very upset about that vandalism, and other people are upset about this destruction, too. I don't know who this person is who had sent me the video or who had written the poem. I said, "Thank you very much" and I gave the video sender a little history, and revealed that we know who had demolished it. All four juvenile vandals were from Hammonton High School; one lives in Hammonton, and the other three live in Waterford Township. We know who did it. The high school marauders promised the police that they would have their families pay for

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the horse and that was the settlement. There wouldn't be any charges against them to ruin their history or criminal record.

Question: They were minors?

Yes. It was April Fools, and they did an April Fools prank.

Joanne W.: "They all graduated from Hammonton High in June."

It was a rite of passage type of thing, that they feel they're entitled to do this or something else without consequences.

Question: That's just being destructive for no good reason, I don't get it.

Joanne W.: John just got the video yesterday.

Question: The kids shot the video themselves.

Yes, they're so stupid to put in on YouTube.

Question: I was just going to say that. It's so ignorant, they document themselves committing the crime.

I sent it to our son, the real estate guy and he says, "This is incredible; they're indicting themselves. They're presenting direct evidence, and they're proud of it. They feel as if they won't be punished."

Question: Is anybody going to hold them to paying for it?

Well, Neil Pastore is the new owner of White Horse Farm, and he also has the Farm Market.

Question: The horse actually belonged to him.

Yes. We can't do anything about it. Presumably, Neil's in communication with the police about it, yes.

Question: I hope they follow through because it was such a landmark with the long history behind it.

Yes. I'll show you the video before you leave; it's only about 15 seconds long, but it shows them taking-down the horse.

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Question: Back to your mother, she was from that town in Italy where your ancestors were?

She was born here, and my grandmother Annie was born here, also. They were very poor, my grandmother's family. I understand they lived at Sandy Cross Roads, which is down near where the Turf Farm is now, that's what they called that area, it being the back end of town. Everything had a different name back then. Old Forks Road, when I was a kid, was called Cemetery Avenue. Sandy Cross Roads, 50 years ago, I think might now be Union Road.

Question: It's probably embedded in your mind, Sandy Cross Roads. What was your father's full name?

John Eugene Wishnevsky.

Question: Did he have a nickname?

I don't remember, no.

Joanne W.: He died young.

Yes, he died when he was only 66.

Question: Suddenly, or was he in bad health?

In the '40s and '50s, everybody smoked cigars or cigarettes back then. My mom smoked, too. Dad contracted lung cancer, and then he also worked with welding and chemicals, which probably also contributed to his cancer.

Question: Nobody took precautions back then or realized it was so harmful.

Virtually every commercial, I remember seeing on TV, featured somebody puffing-away, especially movie stars like Ronald Reagan.

Joanne W.: "Our youngest son, Steve, had asthma, and I had to talk to my mother-in-law, "You can't smoke when you come here, because this is not good for your grandson Stephen." I could not stand the smoke. John smoked for about 10 years, when we first were married. I never smoked; Marie Wiessner was alone for that, I think. She did abide by what I stated, and I said, "We just can't have

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that." Our kid was in the hospital when he was two or three months old; Stephen almost died.

Question: Yes, that was important, it was significant. It's good that you recognized that the smoke was contributing.

Joanne W.: "Oh yes. But she was a very nice and polite lady, though. What did your mother do when she graduated high school?

She was a housewife, both in Hammonton and in Levittown, PA.

Joanne W.: She got married, around age 20 or 21.

Question: She got married young?

Yes, I think she did. I think she probably got married because grandmom was very authoritarian; a strict discipline, and Marie wanted to break away from that farm market scenario, I think.

Question: She was wanting to get out of the house.

Yes. And that was probably part of the motivation there.

Joanne W.: "I don't know exactly how old she was when she got married."

No. No. With the smoking thing, I would come up here, we would have merchandise at the White Horse Farm; we would also keep Ocean City merchandise inside my garage in our two-story colonial home. I would always be going back and forth from Jersey to Rehoboth Beach, Delaware and to Ocean City Maryland. I remember one time; I had a station wagon, and I would put the boys inside, hidden with the stuffed animals. I make like a tunnel, and they'd hide in there.

Question: They'd have a little fort down in there?

Yes, in the back of the green 1974 Pontiac station wagon. When we would get to the Cape May Ferry, I wouldn't pay for them (my two hidden passengers) because they were stashed and concealed in the back of the vehicle. I remember one time I parked in the front of the Ferry, and other passengers were up top there and they hollered, "Hey, can we buy a stuffed animal?" I said that we had an

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amusement arcade down in Ocean City, Maryland, and the items were for sale as won prizes down there. But you can see how close they are to each other inside my station wagon, so now you know why they call them "stuffed animals. They're all stuffed together."

Question: You would pick up the merchandise and transport it down to your stores in Ocean City and Rehoboth Beach?

Yes, 175 miles that we drove around, and we cut off maybe 70 miles by taking the Cape May-Lewes Ferry. I took that Ferry at least 300, or perhaps 400 times back and forth across the Delaware Bay over 16 summers, going back and forth every week or so. Joanne liked it down there, especially the beach.

Joanne W.: "Yes, I was used to working on the Farm, so that was like having a big deal lengthy summer vacation."

Question: You were in a resort area, that's a big change of scenery.

We were in the boardwalk honky-tonk area, I'm not sure if you're familiar with Ocean City, Maryland, but I don't go over to there much anymore.

Our apartment was down at the south end, where the fishing pier and jetty were. We were above Trimpers Indoor Rides, which was a big indoor-outdoor Amusement area. Our apartment was right on top of the oldest operating merry-go-round in the United States. At night, we could hear the carousel's calliope music until midnight. I would usually close the Dealers Choice Gaming Arcade at 11:00, and then come home, and we'd listen to that monotonous carnival/circus music. Next to that carousel was the popular boardwalk Haunted House.

Question: That noisy atmosphere didn't bother you any?

You get used to it after a while. The noise there was pretty loud at nighttime, after midnight, even it would go on. At the Haunted House, our sons knew where there was a secret door on the apartment complex roof, and they would go into the Haunted House to scare people. The venue had these carts pulled by chains that would take customers through two stories of scary exhibits, and it was pretty dark throughout the seven-minute excursion.

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Question: They probably knew that place like the back of their hands. That sounds like a lot of fun.

Yes. As I've already stated, we had two apartments; Number 10 that we lived in, and Number 6 was where our managers lived. But if you went into the bathroom in Number 6 and sat on the hopper, Trimpers had a Wild Mouse in the outside amusement area, and the Wild Mouse would be coming right at you. Ahhh! And then swiftly plummet down. The two passengers in each car wouldn't see you because they're just concentrating on what they're doing. It was kind of crazy-but-funny watching their thrilled faces as the riders zoomed down the rails, yes it was.

Joanne W.: "Oh gosh, John. Yes, when you think about it."

Question: Nice memories.

A lot of different things happened in our lives.

Question: Getting back to your dad, did he have brothers and sisters?

He had five sisters, yes. Ann Marie was the head of the clan there.

Question: Do you remember their names?

Yes. Ann Marie. Her husband was in Saudi Arabia and Egypt when the oil companies first discovered petroleum in the deserts. Uncle Henry Mayor was an engineer, and Aunt Marie spent a lot of time in Egypt and Saudi-Arabia with him. But the two had no children. Then Aunt Elsie had married Uncle Al, with no children, either. Uncle Al had two fur stores in Richmond, Virginia. He was very, very prominent and successful.

Question: What was his last name?

Al Allen.

Question: His parents weren't too creative.

Then there was Aunt Vera Fischer. She was married to Uncle Leo, who was a Sergeant with the Baltimore Police Department. Uncle Leo was quite a garrulous guy who had a lot of stories to tell. The two had four children, Billy, Jerry, Joan, and there was another whom I can't remember her name. Right now, all our

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aunts and uncles have been dead for many years. When you get to be a certain age, all you have is a few cousins left. First the parents go, and then you lose another generation with the aunts and the uncles, and now we're in the cousins' stage. I only have two distant cousins that I know of, maybe still living in Philly, in the Panachelli family, with Aunt Josie having been my grandfather Antonio's sister. We don't keep in touch with each other anymore. You soon discover that your uncles are all dead along with your aunts on your father and mother's side.

Joanne W.: "Yes."

Question: Sometimes when the older generation isn't there to have big family gatherings, the cousins kind of fall apart when the aunts and uncles aren't around anymore. That's been my experience.

We often talk about it like how did your parents meet?

Question: Do you know how they met and fell in love? Did they tell you any stories?

My mother had a friend, Rita, who lived across on the Pike next to Tomasello's Winery. That house is still there, I think, from the 1930s.

Question: Was that the Ranere's house?

No. Right next to that, on this west side here, that first house. Rita had been invited to a wedding in Baltimore, and she needed somebody to go along with her, and she asked my mother. That's how my mother met my father, I think, at that wedding in Baltimore.

Joanne W.: "Your father was about how much older? He was 10, 12 years older than your mother."

Right. She was born in 1922, and he was born in '08, so it was a 14-year difference.

Question: Yes, that's a big age difference.

Back then, the women got married at a very young age because they didn't live that long. Grandmom Giacobbe, I think, was only 15 or 16 when she got married.

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That was the reasoning, you're not going to be around too long, so you might as well do something early like getting married.

Question: Especially if you wanted to have a family and children of your own, do it while you're young and healthy, before disease got you. They didn't have the antibiotics, they really ran the risk that if you even had a simple injury, you could die from simple injuries due to infection.

Yes. That's true!

Question: What were your mom's likes and dislikes? You talked about her as being pretty hard-nosed businesswoman. What were her hobbies? What did she like to do for fun?

She liked to play cards with her neighbors on Marlyn Avenue; I know. She liked to go to the casino, I would often take her to various casinos.

Joanne W.: "And she was a good cook and baker. She always had dessert. When John and I married, my mother seldom did dessert."

She made an apple cake, flat on a pan, and delicious chocolate cake.

Joanne W.: "And tasty Apple pie."

Question: She always had sweets in the house.

I remember as a kid, even in Levittown, she'd always allow me to lick the icing bowl then. She made chocolate from the basic ingredients, and that is a great memory.

Question: You didn't want that go to waste.

No. Mom liked doing that, and then on Marlyn Avenue, and she had three ladies that would play cards with her all the time. They played Penuchle, quite often and diligently.

Question: Your parents were Roman Catholic?

Yes, but they weren't really practicing like going to church every Sunday. They were Roman Catholic, and they insisted that Skip, Anne and I go when we were young.

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Question: They saw to it that you got your religious teaching?

Joanne W.: "Oh yes, they received all the sacraments."

Question: Your father was Polish, was he born in this country?

Yes, he was born in Michigan. It's something how things just happen. What are the prospects of you having your father in Michigan, coming from there to Baltimore, and then to Hammonton.

Question: Especially back then, people weren't so mobile.

Exactly.

Question: The odds are kind of limited there. You probably going to meet somebody in a 50-mile radius, people just didn't travel like they do nowadays. Can you think of anything else I should know of your accomplishments or your ancestors that we haven't touched on?

I'm at the point now where you'd have to stimulate me to talk about something that I haven't talked about already.

Question: Any other stories about your grandparents on your father's side or your mother's side?

I'm trying to think.

Question: What do you remember? What do you remember about what they looked like?

There's a lot of crazy stories. My grandmother had a sister, Aunt Katie, who lived in Sharon Hill, Pennsylvania with Uncle Angelo. They were driving to Hammonton, visiting my grandparents at Square Deal Farm Market, and they came down Old Forks Road. And Uncle Nein, my grandmother's brother, had a red barn there, and Uncle Angelo saw smoke coming out of Uncle Nein's barn. Aunt Katie and he thought it was a fire in progress. They called the Fire Department at Square Deal, you had to use the telephone in the cradle or on the wall back then. The Fire Department showed-up with the Hammonton Police. Come to find out, Uncle Nein had a still working in his barn that was producing plenty of smoke.

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Question: And they called the authorities, that's hilarious.

This was happening around 1940, or some time like that. Hammonton did not have a jail cell to keep Uncle Nein in, and the police chief kept him upstairs in the Fire Department on Bellevue Avenue, which was then in the center of town. That was the improvised prison cell. There are a lot of stories like that, but I can't think of them specifically right now.

Question: If you think of something later, we can do an addendum, we can add to it.

I'm sure you've gotten enough material. But when I was six years old, I climbed the stairs to the red brick house, and ventured up to the attic. Inside of an old, stored mattress I discover many ten and twenty-dollar bills. I ran outside with a handful of bills, and announced to my father, "Look! I've found treasure!" My grandparents didn't trust banks, which went belly-up during the recent Great Depression. My father proceeded to administer to me a nice spanking!

Question: We'll get it in black and white and we'll get this typed-up, and we'll get a copy to you. I really appreciate you taking the time to talk to us and share what your life experiences were.

Sure. Thank you!

[End of Interview]