

This is Rose Hearn interviewing Mr. Albert Valvo in his home at 272 North Street, Fort Erie, Ontario, and the date is August 6, 1985.

R.H: Good morning Al.

A.V: Good morning Rose.

R.H: Could you please tell me when you were born?

A.V: 1921, March 13.

R.H: And could you tell me where you were born?

A.V: I was born in Fort Erie, right on Jarvis Street.

R.H: Now your father was in business I believe?

A.V: Yes my father was a shoemaker on Jarvis Street.

R.H: And he had his shop right on Jarvis Street?

A.V: Yeah right at the top end of Jarvis Street before Central Avenue.

R.H: Before Central, so that would be above Central right now?

A.V: That was the business...it would be towards the river side of Central Avenue. That was the business section then.

R.H: Did you live behind...?

A.V: We lived behind the store.

R.H: Was that a busy neighbourhood then?

A.V: It was quite busy in those days, yes that was the business section of Fort Erie, and it was Bridgeburg in those days. It wasn't called Fort Erie of course it was Bridgeburg, and each shop was individual, it wasn't like nowadays. If you wanted meat you went to a meat store, and if you wanted groceries you went to a grocery store, and so on.

R.H: And your father, where did he come from?

A.V: He came from Italy, actually from Sicily, the island off Italy down at the boot section. From a little town called Almanoosa which is adjacent to Palermo a large city.

R.H: How old was he when he immigrated?

A.V: He came over when he was sixteen years old.

R.H: Alone?

A.V: Alone, he came alone yeah. He had two brothers who joined him later, but my father settled in the States for nine years, actually nine years, and my older brother was born over there and then he came into Fort Erie then.

R.H: Did he tell you how he came here, did he ever tell you any stories of the ship or...?

Not really no I never heard any of those, but we know he came by boat as it was the only way in those days before 1900. We assume he came through Ellis Island as there weren't any ports in Canada then to bring people in there. They all came through Ellis Island and as he settled in the States, he must have come through there. He settled around the Silver Creek area.

R.H: And then he came to Fort Erie?

A.V: Then he came to Fort Erie?

R.H: And did he then set up his own business?

A.V: Yeah he set up a shoemaker's store on Jarvis Street. It was a mud road in those days, and then it became cobblestone I think after that.

R.H: It became cobblestone?

A.V: Yeah I guess you'd call it cobblestone, they were bricks you know, it was a brick road?

R.H: Was there any sidewalks?

A.V: I think there were boardwalks, and then cement walks, because as I mentioned it was a business section and they kept it up. There were trees right in with the stores you know, and right on the streets, and there'd be trees down the street too.

R.H: Do you remember the names of any of the stores?

A.V: Well Briggs was next to us, Briggs store and that would be towards the river side and they sold paint, and wallpaper, and varnishes, and so on. On the other side of us was a small fruit store owned by the Purpura family. On the other corner there was another Purpura, he owned a barbershop, Mike Purpura was his name. The father was John Purpura and he was a fruit vendor.

R.H: Was he friends with your father?

A.V: Oh yeah they were friends with us. They had quite a large family, and a good many of them are still in town.

R.H: Who was the other family that was very prominent and came around the same time as your father?

A.V: The Fredo's, the Fredo family, and the Passero family.

R.H: And you mentioned something about they used to help one another?

A.V: Yeah I think there was four Italian families then in town in those early days, and the majority of them didn't speak English that well, so were kind of cliquish and had to help each other over the rough

spots. We didn't have the social benefits in those days so if you ran into hard times you had to make your own way or help each other.

R.H: So you didn't have any community centres or things like that, like they have now?

A.V: No, to have a little social life in your own ethnic society you would go to Buffalo because there would be many more people over there, and we did that. My dad took us over every Sunday, over to Buffalo. We'd meet other people he knew from the nine years he spent over there you see.

R.H: What about school, what school did you go to?

A.V: I went to Phipps Street School. I started out there and after about four years there we used to transfer over to Wintemute school.

R.H: Did you have to walk to school?

A.V: Yeah we walked.

R.H: How far would that be then?

A.V: That would be from Jarvis Street, that would be through Courtwright Street, across the railroad tracks, and Wintemute Street, and that would be it, but of course you'd have to cross Lewis Street first.

R.H: Was that about a mile?

A.V: Oh yeah, a good mile.

R.H: Did you find it hard in the winter?

A.V: Well when you're young you don't mind those things. Yeah we'd plow through the snow, and then they wouldn't allow us to go through the railroad tracks for a while there. The authorities stopped it. They thought it was too dangerous because it was a railroad town and it was a busy area, so we would have to go round by the boulevard and up that way.

R.H: I guess there was a lot of trains running...?

A.V: Yeah Fort Erie was predominantly a railroad town, and it was a busy section there.

R.H: Do you remember your teachers, their names?

A.V: Some of my teachers? Well Miss Seaton herself was the principal, Rose Seaton was the principal, and we had one man teacher in there, Mr. McKay.

R.H: Was that unusual to have a man?

A.V: It was unusual in those days, yeah the rest of them were all ladies.

Miss Carter who is still in town, she's Mrs. Harvey now, and...

R.H: Was it a big school or was it a small school?

A.V: It was the number one school I would say, early school you know.

R.H: And from there you had to go to Wintemute?

A.V: Over to Wintemute which was a smaller school but we only went there for two years and then we would go in to high school. I think they called it continuation school in those days.

R.H: Yes I've heard that term, continuation. Did you have to take an exam to go on?

A.V: No it was just a general transfer.

R.H: Oh there were no tests or anything?

A.V: Well you took exams each year to go from one grade to the next, but to go from one school to the next you didn't take any, that was just a normal thing. If you passed the previous school you were in you just went on to Wintemute, and then from there of course if you passed you went to high school.

R.H: So then you went to...what church did your family go to?

A.V: St. Michael's, they went to St. Michael's Church on Gilmore Road.

R.H: I see, and that was on Gilmore Road at that time, and who was the priest?

A.V: Well the first priest I remember was Father Cullinane, a short jolly Irishman who used to play touch-rugby on the front lawn.

R.H: That is football isn't it?

A.V: Yeah that is football, but we called it rugby in those days. Oh he'd be still in his robes and he'd be flying around there, I can remember that, it was quite a bit of fun.

R.H: Did you play hockey?

A.V: No I didn't play hockey as I have a bad leg, but I played football for the high school, and I played baseball, and fastball.

R.H: Do you remember the names of any your teams?

A.V: Well when I was working at Fleet we played for a team called Industrial Foods and we won the Ontario championship in, I think it was 1944. Then we beat out...

R.H: Was that baseball?

A.V: That was what we called fastball. It was like say softball, but it was a faster paced game. Yeah we played off in Fort Erie against a team from Saute St. Marie, and we had about 3,000 people there

in the stands.

R.H: Where did you play, where did this take place?

A.V: At Oakes Park.

R.H: Oakes Park, and there was that many people there?

A.V: Oh yeah they filled the place up.

R.H: Was that normal?

A.V: No, this was for the Ontario playoffs, but we played all year to good crowds. We were a little better than average naturally because we won the Ontario title. Some of the fellows are still in town that played on that team. Al Reid is still here in town, and Rusty Russ, and...I can't...and Heber Lake, Heber Lake he was the pitcher on that team, and I was catcher.

R.H: So you've had a lot of sports around here then?

A.V: Oh yeah, its always been a good sports town. It has turned out some good hockey players this town that have gone on. The Reid boys, and Pierre Pilote, McMann, and Rombough's, there's quite a few of them that have made it up in the majors...the Zimmerman's.

R.H: What about...you didn't skate at all then?

A.V: Well I skated in public school, which was Rose Seaton school, and after that I did a little public skating but my leg wasn't strong enough to do any more than that.

R.H: But wasn't that quite the thing to make the ice-rinks in the wintertime?

A.V: Oh yeah the Fire Department used to come around and flood them in your backyards. They used to help you out and flood 'cause they had the hoses and the water. If you had a rink they'd stop by and flood it, and they used to flood all the school rinks.

R.H: Why did that stop?

A.V: I don't know.

R.H: You don't know any reason for it?

A.V: I don't think they do it any more. My grandchildren skate on my swimming pool now when it freezes over.

R.H: Did your family have a telephone when you were growing up, do you remember?

A.V: No I don't remember, not when I was young. Of course we had a radio that was Welland County Telephone, and...yeah we had one, we had a telephone, but I can't remember the number of it.

R.H: Did anyone else use it, like neighbours, was it sort of shared?

A.V: Yeah they were shared and they were party lines, and if you had one and the neighbours didn't, then someone would call you and then you would have to go and get the neighbour. That was quite common in those days.

R.H: And you had to get the operator?

A.V: You had to crank, oh yeah and get the operator, and her name was Ollie Bauer.

R.H: Ollie Bauer, that was her name?

A.V: Yeah you had a conversation with her every time you phoned up. She was the operator for years.

R.H: Now there was no television when you were a child, what about radio?

A.V: Well I can remember a crystal set in our house.

R.H: Was that a big part of your life?

A.V: Radio? yeah we would sit around that of course and listen to Amos and Andy, and also Fibber McGee and Molly, and if you had a strong enough set you could catch the hockey games out of Toronto.

R.H: Was the boxing broadcast?

A.V: Yeah there was boxing bouts in those old days. Well I guess you would listen to Joe Louis fights in those days.

R.H: Yeah I guess the radio was very popular then?

A.V: Oh yeah you had to have a radio. We had a...I forget the name of ours but I think it was the Silver Swan, the old cabinet type.

R.H: What about cars...did your family ever get a car?

A.V: Yeah, we had a 1927 Whippet, a Willy's Overland, and they called it a Whippet. There weren't very many cars in town, and my dad had one in 1927, and Mr. Baker, (who had Fyte's store across the street. It was a candy store, a cigar store, and magazines) he had one also. They were the only two I remember in town of that type of car and as a matter of fact it was quite comical, my dad drove it...he ran it through the fence in the backyard, and never drove it again. My older brother inherited it then.

R.H: He didn't have a license?

A.V: Oh yeah, but he didn't like driving cars, and I don't ever remember him driving it again, but my older brother drove it from then on. On our trips to Buffalo every sunday we'd take eggs and all kinds of vegetables and fruits over to his other brothers who didn't do

quite as well as he did in business so we carted groceries over.

R.H: How long was your father in that business?

A.V: I was about fifteen when he took sick, so I would say...let's see 1909...
Oh, he had to be there 35 years. I remember he rented it out for a year or so but it didn't work out and then the building was sold.

R.H: He owned the whole building?

A.V: He owned the building, yeah.

R.H: What is there now?

A.V: Niagara Falls Evening Review is there now. The place next door is all knocked down that had the fruit store and the barbershop, and Glenn's have that. Glenn's Travel Agency and Insurance Company are there.

R.H: What about the Bellard Theatre, did you go there?

A.V: Well, the Bellard Theatre was built by the Ziff family, and they were quite a large family, and as most people know the name Bellard was taken from the first letter of each child's name, Barney, Evelyn, Louis, and Laurie, and so on.

R.H: And you went there?

A.V: Oh yeah, I went there most Saturdays. It was ten cents to get in to see Matinee's and the serials that continued on from one Saturday to the next.

R.H: Cliffhangers you called them, is that what they were called?

A.V: Yeah, cliffhangers.

R.H: And every week they would have them?

A.V: Every week, yeah. There would be Buck Jones, and cowboys, and all those...Tom Mix, all those oldtimers.

R.H: You mentioned that they had a violin player, who was that?

A.V: Yeah, they used to have a violin player that played music there, and I can remember his name. His name was John LaPresti, and his family lived on Jarvis Street in an apartment, and he used to play the violin in there, for music on Saturdays.

R.H: Did he play for every movie? Was it just for sad movies?

A.V: Well, I don't know. At that time we went on Saturdays, to the matinee's, and I can remember him playing the violin in there then.

R.H: How much did it cost you to get in at that time?

A.V: Ten cents. If I shined enough shoes in my dad's store, I got a dime

to go to the show.

R.H: You were a shoeshine boy?

A.V: Yeah, and I used to shine a lot of shoes.

R.H: Did you work outside the store?

A.V: Well I had a little box that I used to put stuff in, and I would go out and shine a few shoes. We used to shine their socks sometimes too 'cause I wasn't very good at it, and in fact one day Mike Tartaglia and I decided we'd run away to Erie Beach and we took our shoeshine box with us, but we came back the same day.

R.H: You didn't make much money then?

A.V: No we didn't do too well.

R.H: Do you remember anybody you shined shoes for, any of your clients, did you have any steady clients?

A.V: No, well possibly some of the business men on Jarvis Street, because in the store there was a shoeshine stand that you would climb up on and put your feet up on the form, and you would shine them there you see. Of course my brothers did the same thing.

R.H: So that was how you got your pocket money or spending money?

A.V: Yeah, oh yeah there wasn't too much money in town in those days. I think the largest bill you would see would be a two dollar bill and in fact, in my dad's shoe store on saturday nights, he would be open until ten or eleven oclock as he did a lot of leather work for the farmers. He'd fix their harness's and so on, and when they came in why they were more or less leaving a dozen eggs, or some live chickens in a bag, or some potatoes. That's the way they paid for things.

R.H: Yeah, because there wasn't much money then, and things were pretty tough?

A.V: Yeah things weren't that great, but people managed to survive by helping each other.

R.H: Did you have any other odd jobs as you were growing up?

A.V: No, not in my younger days. No I just hung around the shoe store and helped out. Well most kids tried to get a paper route, and I had a paper route. I delivered the old Buffalo Times which was a pink edition, which went out of business

R.H: It was pink?

A.V: Yeah the Evening Times always had a pink cover sheet on it. Their front page was pink.

R.H: Where did you pick your papers up, did they bring them to you?

A.V: Well they brought them to us in a bundle much like they do now, and then we'd take them apart and deliver them, and we probably had twenty customers or so.

R.H: Do you remember when they paved Jarvis Street? Have you any idea?

A.V: No, I don't really know when they paved it. It seems to me all of a sudden it was paved. I can't remember the time, but it was a brick road before that. In the winter it would freeze over, and of course we didn't have the system for clearing snow in those days, and we would skate on that. We would skate from Central Avenue right down to the boulevard.

R.H: How did they clear the snow?

A.V: Just manpower, shovels and stuff...yeah manually. Because even the Fire Department which was around the corner from us, they didn't have any mechanized equipment, they had horses.

R.H: Did they have horses, you remember that?

A.V: Yeah I can remember the horses. The Benners owned the horses, the people that owned the coal company.

R.H: So they had the horse and wagon, the Fire Department? Was it still volunteer?

A.V: It's always been volunteer.

R.H: Did you go to Erie Beach with your family?

A.V: Yeah we went to Erie Beach, and it was quite an amusement park, in fact people say it was nicer than Crystal Beach. Crystal Beach was built after Erie Beach, in fact my mother and father had their honeymoon day at Erie Beach. There used to be a little train that run up along there.

R.H: I was going to ask you, how did you travel to Erie Beach?

A.V: Well you either walked, or if you were lucky enough to have a car, you drove, but most people went by train. There was a train that ran to Erie Beach.

R.H: Was there a bus that went? Somebody mentioned that there was a bus that you picked up, was there?

A.V: There could have been, but I don't remember.

R.H: You don't remember, but of course there was the train, was that the Sandfly, or the Pegleg?

A.V: There was the Pegleg..I wouldn't be sure but it seems to me that the Pegleg might be it. I'm not too sure of that though.

R.H: Have you heard of the Peanuts Special or the Peanut Express, have you ever heard of that?

A.V: No I never heard of that one.

R.H: Oh that used to go up to Erie Beach, and they ate peanuts all the way up, and they threw the shells all over the train so they called it the Peanut Express.

R.H: What did you do there? Was there a lot of rides?

A.V: Oh yeah, there were rides, and they had a great beach for swimming there. It was super and only the walls are still standing there, and they had a large Dancehall and Pavillion which we used later in life. You know we even used that a couple of times during the war years for dances, but the rides and amusements that were there were the usual things...the Merry-go-round, and so on and the candy makers. It was more or less a different type of amusement park than Crystal Beach put in. Crystal Beach went more modern and so on.

R.H: Was this more family type?

A.V: Well it was more for picnics and groups.

R.H: And the rides, do you remember any of the rides?

A.V: Not really, I can remember the Merry-go-round, and that type of thing but when we went there it was mostly for picnics.

R.H: When you lived on Jarvis Street was there a lot of horse and buggy...like wagons...was there a milk delivery?

A.V: Yeah there was milk deliveries, and they were horse and wagon, and on Saturdays you would see horse and wagons when the farmers came in to town.

R.H: And they brought their goods in?

A.V: They brought their goods in, yeah.

R.H: Did you have milk delivery?

A.V: Yes we had milk delivery, and ours had a little cardboard top on it.

R.H: You don't remember who the dairy was, could you...?

A.V: Well the original dairy...no I can't, I can remember Everett's.

R.H: Everett's Dairy?

A.V: Everett's Dairy but I don't remember if they delivered or not.

R.H: Did you ever hear of the Crown Theatre?

A.V: The Crown Theatre, no.

R.H: So you said you went to Erie Beach when you were more of an adult, did you go there for the dancing?

A.V: No, we had dances there, we had a couple of them, and we used to have them through Fleet, the company I worked for.

R.H: And when did you start working at Fleet?

A.V: In 1940, in the fall.

R.H: In 1940, and you were how old?

A.V: Nineteen.

R.H: And that was more or less just the beginning of the war, wasn't it?

A.V: Yeah.

R.H: So what did you do there?

A.V: I worked in the Shipping and Storage Department, and then I moved up into the office for a few years and then I stayed there.

R.H: And did you make a lot of parts for airplanes?

A.V: Oh yeah, when I first went there we were building trainer planes, Fleet Finches, and then we also built fusilages for the Hampton Bombers, and wings for the Lancaster Bomber, and we assembled Fairey Battleships there which...Fairey Battle was a bomber, a light bomber plane, and then when we really started in to making trainer planes there was the Fleet Cornell, and we built a few thousand of those as a trainer plane.

R.H: Did women work at Fleet at all?

A.V: Oh yeah there was quite a few women.

R.H: This was because of the men going off to war?

A.V: Yeah. We probably had 3,000 people at peak, and oh there had to be 50 percent women there 'cause they were housed in town. The hostels had a large group of them.

R.H: Yeah there was a hostel on...?

A.V: Central, and that was strictly for ladies. They were war-time workers. They lived there, and the buses transported them to Fleet.

R.H: So were these ladies...they must have been from out of town then?

A.V: Yeah, well quite a few of them came up from Quebec, and then of course from outlying areas in Ontario.

R.H: So they did a man's jobs?

A.V: Oh yeah, they welded...they were welders, machinists, store-keepers,

assembly workers, and riveters.

R.H: Did they get paid the same as a man would then?

A.V: I would say so, yeah it would be the same wage, and they were good too, as good and better than some of the men.

R.H: Is that right, so they could handle the job?

A.V: Yeah, maybe not the physical type roles, but when it came to riveting, and welding, and machine work, they were as good as anybody and still are.

R.H: So Fleet was really one of the biggest industries around here?

A.V: Oh yeah I think it was the primary industry in the Niagara Peninsula during the war years. They still maintain a force of 750 out there now.

R.H: And how was...did it effect the economy as far as...the war, did it effect the economy of Fort Erie, was it better?

A.V: I would say so as there was so many more people here, and Fleet used to be the thermometer for the economy. If we were busy, the economy would be up, and if not it would be down. We seemed to be the gage for it.

R.H: What about rations, do you remember the rations at that time?

A.V: Well gasoline was rationed, and of course liquor and beer were also, but I don't remember much about food being rationed, but it seemed there was plenty of it around all the time. The big thing here was gasoline rationing and you had coupons. You were allowed so much a week, or what ever it was to turn the coupons in.

R.H: So nobody was doing too much driving I guess?

A.V: No, but there was always places you could get gasoline if you needed a little extra.

R.H: So there was a little blackmarket going on?

A.V: Naturally, they are always around because I got some that way myself. We had an old Model A Ford and we couldn't keep enough gas.

R.H: Did you pay twice as much for it that way?

A.V: Not really.

R.H: You didn't have to pay extra?

A.V: No maybe a little extra, but not twice as much.

R.H: How long did you work at Fleet?

A.V: Forty four years.

R.H: Did they have a union?

A.V: Well yeah, they've had unions from day one. When I was there it was more or less a company union. Starting out, there was twelve FAWA which is Fleet Aircraft Workers Association, and I don't think they were affiliated with anyone, but they had their own group and lodged their complaints and so on through that, and from then it went on to the International Associations of Machinists and Aerospace Workers which they have now.

R.H: But the conditions were pretty good then?

A.V: Oh I thought the conditions were always good at Fleet, yeah.

R.H: Do you remember how much you made when you first started?

A.V: When I first started work there? of course I can tell you, twenty one cents an hour.

R.H: Was that a lot then?

A.V: That was the starting wage for unskilled help, which I was. You know they only just hired you as the war was on and if you had some skills, like if you were a sheet-metal worker, I think you started at about thirty cents or thirty five, something like that. But after a few months they gave you another five cents, and you gradually worked your way up.

R.H: That was a big wage though?

A.V: Yeah well in those days, sure. We worked 60 hours a week during the war years, six days, ten hours a day.

R.H: During the war, and they were busy times and of course the other industry was the Railroad?

A.V: The Railroad was a busy industry, yeah this was a border town, and you had spin-offs even in the Railroad 'cause the customs and the immigration were strong outfits. They had a lot of people 'cause there was a bridge, and ferry-boats, and trains.

R.H: Do you remember when the Central Avenue Bridge was built?

A.V: I don't remember the year exactly, but that's fairly modern.

R.H: But you remember it being built?

A.V: Yeah, that was fairly modern, and that was during Herb Guess's days, I guess he pretty well was on the...

R.H: Was he the mayor?

A.V: He was the mayor I think in those days. He was a real old time politician in Fort Erie.

R.H: And did that help...?

A.V: And that kind of joined the two ends together, a lot easier because everyone had to travel along Niagara Boulevard there.

R.H: Do you remember anything about the Southend, did you go down to the baby-hole, did you ever go down there?

A.V: Not too often. We did our swimming in the Northend of town around the Williams dock right at the bottom of Bowen Road.

R.H: Williams dock?

A.V: Yeah back there, and also at the Pump House, the old Pump House at the bottom of Lewis Street there. The building is still there, and I think the skin-divers use it for underwater teams. We did a lot of swimming there, and then we swam all along the river 'cause there was boat-houses and docks all along from Northend to Southend. We swam when we felt like it.

R.H: But you never got to the Southend very much except for the ferry-boats?

A.V: We did occasionally...we used to pull a caper at the ferry-boats. We would pay our five cents and then we'd would jump off in the middle of the river, and swim back to Canada. We'd swim from the Southend to the Northend. We'd swim out in the middle of the river and the current would take us back, and we would go underneath the International Bridge and come all the way down by Williams dock. But there weren't many boats on the river in those days, so it wasn't as dangerous as you'd think.

R.H: Did you go to Sullivan's?

A.V: Sullivan's Fish and Chips, oh yeah. Well Charlie is still a good friend of ours, in fact if there was not enough seating he would let us eat in his kitchen upstairs. Just a select few of us. I remember Rusty Russ and myself would go down there every friday for fish and chips.

R.H: A lot of people went there, and it is still there right?

A.V: It's still there and he just keeps it. He's a widower now, his wife passed away.

R.H: Do you remember what any of the ferry-boats looked like when you were on them as a kid?

A.V: Well they were all paddle-wheelers. They had a paddle wheel on the backend of them, and as kids we used to go over on them any day, mostly a sunday. We'd go to the Theatre over there.

R.H: Over in Buffalo?

A.V: Yeah, we would go to the theatre over there on sundays.

R.H: What was the name of that, can you remember?

A.V: What the boat? The theatre? Well there's was one called the Rialto, and that's the one we would go to, and I think the other one was the Victoria or something like that. We would buy a dozen doughnuts and come back on the boat.

R.H: They were pretty big were they, the boats?

A.V: Oh yeah they drove cars on them, (I forget how many cars) and the cars were on the bottom.

R.H: And then the passengers were up on top?

A.V: And passengers up on top.

R.H: Did you know any of the skippers at all, or get to know their names?

A.V: No, no I didn't know them at all or who they were, but they ran two boats at the same time you know at some time or another, and I think they got down to one eventually, but they used to run two and they'd pass one another, one would be docking and the other would be passing.

R.H: Did they run in the winter at all, do you know if they ran in the wintertime?

A.V: Well I can't remember too much about wintertime but I do remember one got away somehow. There was a malfunction in it, and it was going to hit the International Bridge in the Northend as it was drifting down.

R.H: I was just wondering if it was just a seasonal thing?

A.V: Yeah I would say it would be seasonal, I would guess at that. That river used to get pretty clogged up with ice. You couldn't run a boat across there.

R.H: Do you know any stories about the booze smuggling?

A.V: Well they used to...the rum-runners, well I used to hear a few things that they ran it across, no doubt about that, and there was rum-running going on, and if the coast guard were on the ball and chased them they would just dump all their booze overboard. For years the local fellows would dive for the bottles out there and bring them up.

R.H: They found them?

A.V: Sure there's still bottles out there if you want to go after them?

R.H: Where exactly was the rum-running docks?

A.V: Well most of it...well they were in the Northend of town, down around the bottom of Phipps Street, and Dufferin Street in that area.

R.H: So that's where they took off from?

A.V: Yeah there was a lot of rum-running going on I'll tell you, in fact there was a fellow in town named Smith who was diving for these bottles for years. What they used to do, they would go out in the boat and they cradled a large rock in their stomachs with their arms, and they'd just fall overboard. The weight would take them down you see 'cause it's pretty hard to dive down that deep. The rock would take them down and they would get the whiskey, but they also smuggled people.

R.H: Yeah wasn't that the Chinese people?

A.V: I think a lot of that wasn't very fair because they'd think they were in the United States, and they had just run them up through another Canadian site and dropped them off.

R.H: And you didn't go to the Crystal Beach Ballroom?

A.V: Oh yeah during the war years?

R.H: What was it like there?

A.V: Oh it was a beautiful ballroom. It was internationally known as they brought all the big bands in, and we'd go to all the dances up there. Of course they danced every night.

R.H: Do you remember the names of any of the bands?

A.V: Yeah, who was that?...let's see now...you know that band that had the Everly Brothers with them in those days, and oh what's her name?... she sang Green Eyes...

R.H: It wasn't the Tommy Dorsey Band, was it? Wasn't there big bands there?

A.V: Yeah, oh yeah those big bands were there. They were on the circuit. Tommy Dorsey, Glenn Miller, I'm sure he was. I can't remember some of the names.

R.H: But it was a really nice ballroom?

A.V: Oh it was a beautiful ballroom.

R.H: Was it large too?

A.V: Very large.

R.H: And that's where Fleet held all their dances?

A.V: No no, we held them at Erie Beach, a few of them at Erie Beach during the war years. The place wasn't running but the Dancehall was still there.

R.H: When did Crystal Beach start?

A.V: Well I don't know the year Crystal Beach started, but it was built

by the Hall Brothers of course after Erie Beach kind of went into oblivion.

R.H: And they didn't sell liquor in the ballroom then, did they?

A.V: No.

R.H: It was more just soft drinks?

A.V: Yeah and dancing.

R.H: And the ballroom was right in the...?

A.V: Right in the park. I think you paid a nickel or a dime to dance.

They had a rope system, and as the music ended there would be a couple of fellows with a rope who would just go across the dance floor, and all those people would go off, and new people would be coming on, or else you went around and got in line again and gave them another ticket.

R.H: Was there tables to sit down?

A.V: No, no tables.

R.H: So you couldn't sit?

A.V: No I don't remember tables.

R.H: Did they have any place where you could have a drink or anything?

A.V: Well right outside of course was the complete amusement park.

You could go in and dance or not dance, you could suit yourself, you could just watch. You could go outside or go back in a few minutes later, or an hour later, 'cause the dancing went on all night.

R.H: Oh I see, so it wasn't like you had to stay there?

A.V: No, there wasn't an admission charge, there was a dance charge. You paid by the dance.

R.H: By the dance, oh! Is that why they call it ten cents a dance?

A.V: That's probably it, maybe that was it, could be.

R.H: So you paid for each dance, how did you do that?

A.V: You bought tickets, say three for a quarter, and you could have three dances.

R.H: And who took the tickets?

A.V: There was a little booth there, whatever you call it with a fellow, and as you went on the floor you gave him a ticket.

R.H: Did you ever sneak in without paying?

A.V: No I didn't, but I'm sure people did. Well they've changed their format since, they do it much differently now.

R.H: Do you know anything about the Racetrack?

A.V: Well a little bit. Before I went to work at Fleet I parked cars up there.

R.H: You worked there, did you?

A.V: Yeah, and they used to race for just one week. One week's racing and then they would go away and come back for another week. They would go down to Stamford or Hamilton 'cause they had racetracks there, but it was two weeks of racing and then it was split.

R.H: How old were you then?

A.V: Seventeen or eighteen, when I worked in the parking lot.

R.H: What did you get paid there, do you remember what you made at all?

A.V: Yeah I think it was a dollar and a half a day or something like that.

R.H: What was it like there, was it nice?

A.V: Yeah it was very nice.

R.H: Did you ever get the chance to see any of the races at all?

A.V: Oh yeah, we'd get in there once in a while, and then I worked in the clubhouse for one year, just on Saturdays, and we'd see the races then.

R.H: What did you do in the clubhouse?

A.V: I was working in the beverage room.

R.H: How was the betting system then, did you take notice of anything like that?

A.V: No I didn't but I'm pretty sure it was much the same. They had wickets of course...

R.H: They didn't have bookies there at all?

A.V: No, no no, you bet through their mutual system which was controlled by the jockey club.

R.H: I know I've been where they've had the bookies, and I've seen the bookies right on the track.

A.V: Well they do that in the old country, but they don't do that here.

R.H: They don't do that here? So it was tickets at the windows?

A.V: Yeah it was all tickets here, and you gave them your two dollars or whatever you wanted to bet, and they gave you a ticket back on that number, on that race, and that horse. You cashed them at a different wicket.

R.H: So it was more or less the same system?

A.V: The same system but much more modernized. It's all computerized now, it's machines, and you just punch it in now.

R.H: Did you ever see the Prince of Wales Stakes?

A.V: No, but I'm going to see it this week. I'm going to see the one coming up.

R.H: So it's a nice Racetrack?

A.V: Oh it's a very nice Racetrack. Right now it's very pretty, it's one of the prettiest in North America, and we like to go out once or twice a year.

R.H: How long did you work there?

A.V: Just the one summer.

R.H: Just the one summer, did you like it there?

A.V: Oh I enjoyed it, and it was a good way to get up some extra money.

R.H: Did you get any tips?

A.V: Oh yeah that's what we counted on, 'cause the wages weren't very much. In the beverage room they paid us two dollars for the day. We didn't count on that at all, we counted on the tips 'cause in those days a bottle of beer was 21 cents for a bottle so you would pick up the extra change.

R.H: So maybe they'd give you 30 cents...?

A.V: Sometimes if there was four of them at the table they'd give you a dollar and you'd pick the difference up, 16 cents. You wouldn't give that back. You know after the races or in between races is when they are in there drinking, and then they're gone. It's hard to get those people back, there are so many people there.

R.H: Was there still a lot of people then, was there a lot of Americans?

A.V: Predominantly Americans, but then of course they ran the buses and the train from Toronto, and Hamilton, and there was quite a few Canadians. But predominantly Western New York bettors, 'cause there aren't any races in Buffalo except the trotters.

R.H: So that was quite a big part of Fort Erie too then?

A.V: The Racetrack? Oh yeah it hired a lot of Fort Erie people. A lot of local people worked there, and still do.

R.H: What was the other industries that were around then?

A.V: Well Horton Steel has been here for years, Hart and Cooley has been here for years, and of course they closed up a year or so ago, but that was a real old time factory and it had been here since the thirties. It made registers for furnaces and so on. My father-in-law was president of that company for years. The Canadian Gasket

Company has been there for years, that's another old time company, and the Mentholatum Company, and Mr. Stratton ran that company for years.

R.H: Have you heard of the Mann Stratton Building?

A.V: Yeah it's on Jarvis Street.

R.H: That was on Jarvis Street then?

A.V: Yeah we used to have dances up there.

R.H: Oh did they, and was there offices in there or business's?

A.V: Yeah there was a....I think the Knox Company were in there which was a mail-order pill-type business. They were up in there.

R.H: Was the Post-Office in there at one time?

A.V: They could have been, but I don't remember.

R.H: And what about these bowling alleys, there was bowlings alleys right?

A.V: Well there was a couple of alleys on Jarvis Street at one time, and the Heckman family had those along with the barbershop, and the poolroom.

R.H: And you went to the poolroom, did you?

A.V: Oh yeah, we played a lot of pool there, and most of us grew up there, and if you lived on Jarvis Street you eventually played pool.

R.H: What did you pay for a game?

A.V: I can't remember but it might have been ten or fifteen cents. That was the Heckman poolroom and there was another one down the street owned by Jiggs Cline, (his name was Aubrey Cline) but it was much smaller. He only had two tables in there and he had a tobacco store with it.

R.H: Is there anybody who was a great pool shark, a great pool player?

A.V: Oh yes my brother Russ was.

R.H: Was he? So did you have bets at all?

A.V: Yeah they played snooker a lot, and they played skittle pool which was what they gambled a little bit on. But there was some great games down there with fellows like Jim Hall, Russ Valvo, and Denny Burke, and there used to a fellow named Chase, Frank Chase played a lot. They were all good pool-players.

R.H: Did people come to watch these guys do their thing against one another?

A.V: It wouldn't be that big a competition, but there would be onlookers.

They knew they'd be playing every afternoon, and they'd be in there watching. I'd be one of them.

R.H: How long could a game go on?

A.V: Well if you were lucky enough you know, and some people made your ball in hurry, it could last a minute or two, otherwise it could go on five or six minutes.

R.H: So that was quite a place?

A.V: Oh yeah that was quite a place, Aubrey Cline's for people and skittle pool.

R.H: That's were you hung out, right?

A.V: Yeah, a lot of people, a lot of fellows.

R.H: Do you know anything about the hotels that were there, like the Bucket or the Grand Trunk?

A.V: Well the Grand Trunk was owned by the Primo family in those days way back then, and it was quite popular especially on saturdays. I think they served spaghetti dinners and some beer with it for about 25 cents. It was a real popular place the Grand Trunk, and then of course in the Northend we had the...we nicknamed it the Bucket, but it was the old Spain's Hotel.

R.H: That's what I was going to ask you, was it called the Spain's Hotel?

A.V: It was Spain's Hotel and after that the Merview, and now it's the Drake I guess. What is it, the New Drake now? Something like that.

R.H: And the King Edward, has that been there a long time?

A.V: Yeah that's been there for years, the King Eddy in the Southend, and of course another one was the Erie Lane, that's been there a long time too. I don't know what they call it anymore, Erie Lane, Grammy's?

R.H: There's quite a lot of hotels too, isn't there?

A.V: Yeah they always said there was hotels and churches in town...and bootleggers. There was a lot of those in the old days because the hotels hours weren't very long. They used to close at ten at night, and they used to close for the supper before that.

R.H: Were they allowed to sell booze on a sunday?

A.V: No.

R.H: So it wasn't open sundays either then? And they closed saturday nights at ten?

A.V: Yeah they opened at eight and closed at ten.

R.H: Was that eight in the evening?

A.V: I think so. They used to close at six till eight for the supper hour, and then they would be open until ten.

R.H: So they more or less closed down for the supper, and after the supper it was back to the drinking?

A.V: And then it was drinking again, and it was all beer in those days, they didn't have liquor licenses.

R.H: Oh they didn't have liquor licenses, so the reason the bootlegging still went on was because people wanted to drink...?

A.V: Because of the hour, sure, at ten oclock people didn't want to quit drinking.

R.H: You're just getting started, right?

A.V: Well, even if you're at a dance or something and the dance wouldn't be over, and say it was over at ten or eleven, you'd find a bootlegger after that. Crystal Beach had a lot of them, and so did Fort Erie. I think all towns did.

R.H: Did you have to know somebody who knew somebody else to get this stuff?

A.V: Yeah usually, but you could always get in for a bottle of beer.

R.H: What do you mean, you got in for a bottle of beer, you went in there and drank it?

A.V: Yeah, you sat at their table and drank it.

R.H: Oh I see, was it like a house?

A.V: Oh yeah they were houses, and the odd hotel would serve you a beer after hours too.

R.H: But mostly it was houses?

A.V: Private homes, and they were making a little extra money selling beer or wine.

R.H: Did they make it at all?

A.V: Oh no this would be regular beer from the beer store. A lot of it would be home-made wine though if you drank wine.

R.H: Did you ever have to go there and give a name or anything?

A.V: No.

R.H: No, it wasn't like the movies?

A.V: No you'd just knock on the door get in.

R.H: Getting back to when you were a kid, did you have a fridge?

A.V: No we had an ice-box.

R.H: Ice was delivered too?

A.V: Ice was delivered, yeah.

R.H: Do you know who delivered that, who was the ice-man?

A.V: I'm not sure, but there was a Lewis's Coal...it usually went with the coal trucks you know. It seemed to be they delivered coal...

R.H: Did you get your heat from coal?

A.V: Yeah, oh yeah.

R.H: So what did you have, fireplaces?

A.V: No a stove or heaters I guess they called them.

R.H: You had coal delivered?

A.V: Yeah coal would be delivered by Benner's Coal Company.

R.H: And that was the horse and buggy?

A.V: They had trucks, Benner's Coal.

R.H: Was the coal ever scarce at all?

A.V: It didn't seem like it, there seemed to be always enough coal. We burned hard coal, and we called it blue coal I think 'cause it gave a blue flame.

R.H: So when you got up in the morning before you went to school you had to...?

A.V: Well we tried to bank the fire so as there would be a little fire through the night but I wasn't very good at it. My brother did all that.

R.H: So it was cold when you got up in the morning, wasn't it?

A.V: Oh yeah, I think that's why we had two or three in the bed through the night.

R.H: Yeah? Did you wear your clothes too sometimes?

A.V: I used to wear my socks, and they used to use hot water bottles in those days.

R.H: Were they the glass ones, the ceramic...I guess they would be ceramic?

A.V: Well I can remember rubber ones also.

R.H: Do you remember the cures you mother use to have? When you were sick do you remember what she did for you?

A.V: I can remember some of them because we were...well being of Italian origin they were the European type. They hung a piece of garlic around your neck if you were going to catch a cold you know, and I guess the idea was if you breathed those garlic fumes it would keep everything away. Besides the cold it would keep people away too.

R.H: Ours was dirty socks. So you got this garlic hung around your neck?

A.V: Yeah things like that. I can't remember all of them.

R.H: I just wondered if you remembered what she did when you got sick?

A.V: Well we all got chicken soup, you'd get a lot of that when you were sick.

R.H: Do you remember the doctors at all?

A.V: Oh yeah, Doctor Mencke is the oldest one I remember and of course Dr. Douglas started the hospital up here. Dr. Mencke was our family doctor, then Dr. Collins. They were the real old-timers here.

R.H: Were they all on Jarvis too?

A.V: Dr. Mencke was, and Dr. Collins was around the corner there just on Central.

R.H: But there was no hospital then?

A.V: Not when I was born.

R.H: You were born at home, were you?

A.V: Yeah.

R.H: I guess when you got sick, where did they take you?

A.V: Buffalo, we would go to Buffalo.

R.H: They had some nursing homes or something...they were maternity homes I believe that did some minor operations in them?

A.V: I'm not sure of that.

R.H: So you never had any problems where you had to go for tonsils or anything like that?

A.V: Myself? Oh yeah, I had polio when I was young, and I had treatments for that. My mother used to bring a blind lady in to massage me with cocoa butter which helped a lot.

R.H: Did she come every day?

A.V: It seems like it, I was real young and I think it was the Sister Kenny method they used. They would just massage.

R.H: And that was an old sort of theory, wasn't it?

A.V: I think so, just massage with cocoa butter and...

R.H: And she did that almost every day, do you remember who she was?

A.V: No...no I don't really, but we all had those childrens diseases like measles and so on, but I don't know what they did for surgery in those days if the hospital wasn't here. I'm sure they took them to Buffalo or Niagara Falls or something like that, close by.

R.H: I know they did a few minor surgeries in these maternity homes, and they did it there in the kitchen, and I wondered if anyone in the family had experienced something like that?

A.V: Well we were fortunate that way.

R.H: Well I think I've covered just about all...unless there's anything you
can think of?

A.V: No. you've done a good job.

R.H: I have? thank you.

A.V: Yeah I think so.

R.H: I'd like to thank you for the interview, I think you're just great and
I appreciate it.

A.V: So did I, I enjoyed it very much.

R.H: I appreciate it very much.