

**INTERVIEW OF
SAMUEL MENSZER
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Menszer: -- a pretty important part of a person's life was Pontchartrain Beach. It went through certain phases. It was at Millerburg at one time, a community that – the Smokey Mary was a train, I believe, before my time. And it went from a station on Canal Street, straight out to the lake to take you to Millerburg and Pontchartrain Beach. And of course I'm not sure that the Bat family were the first ones to introduce amusement rides or not. To my knowledge, they were, but I really don't know that for sure. Because, preceding that, one of the activities was leaving West End and going across the Lake by ferry boat to Mandeville and to the other one, Madisonville. People would make a whole day vacation. They'd take lunch with them. Of course, that was before the time of barbequing. You certainly couldn't bar-b-que on the boat anyway. But still, the – that was quite an activity. I do not remember that. They told me I was taken over there as a kid four or five years old and that was quite an activity. In fact, it's not well known there was a luxury hotel at Grand Island that could only be approached by service by – by a boat of some sort. Not a ferry, but a boat. But I understand that was blown away during the hurricane. And in Mandville, there's still today a small hotel that I really can't think of the name of it. And it goes back, but a real small, not a real

hotel with balconies and all and easy chairs, rocking chairs, but it's still got a [inaudible] – it serves as a restaurant. And, of course, Pontchartrain Beach was a great source of pleasure for young and all – young and old and all. There was always a free act, very often a high-wire act of some type to bring the crowds over and have them all look up. Why they wanted people looking up all the time, I don't know. Maybe the – it induced you to look at the Cyclone or the Zephyr, the side of the Zephyr. And it involved with that, by looking up, they would see it speeding around the turns and the ups and downs. Of course, they later on came out with a small ride, but even faster and more hectic. Do you remember that ride, John?

John: The Wild Mouse.

Menszer: The Wild Mouse.

Cave: Ah-ha.

Menszer: That was much later. And, of course, at Pontchartrain Beach always the big attraction was the penny arcade. Folks gave you a dollar, you went in and you got a roll of pennies and you spent a couple of hours [consuming them]. But a lot of the people did that. And so it was a good money maker, a penny at a time. Even on dates in high school, we would often, if you had a car and you could get out there, go to Pontchartrain Beach and for about four dollars you could take – if you had a car – you could handle a date back in the 30's one or two bucks on the penny arcade, which took a lot of time, a couple of rides, a free

show, something to drink and maybe a 10 cents hot dog. Money went pretty far in those days. That was the activity for a date. **And, as a rule, you piled three couples into a car, which was a – not a big car. Today we call them, I guess – no, not as big as a mid-size; somewhere between one of our economy cars and a mid-size. That was a regular – that was a sedan. That was a five-seater, but you could always get three couples in there – three in the front, three in the back or two in the front, a stick-shift in the middle was a hindrance, a complication, and maybe someone – a girl would sit on somebody's lap in the back.** It was normal, you know. **Young people started drinking early in those days because they smoked early. Not that everyone smoked, but everyone at least had tried it. If you were 16, they'd sell you a drink or a bottle of whiskey. As a rule, you bought the half-pint size.** If you went to a dance, you were expected to have a – at least in the group – a half a pint with you. And everybody – not that we were big drinkers – they were trying to show off at 16, that we could make it with the big boys. And the most popular liquor around, here in those days, was Calvin's Special, made by Shendley Brothers, made from Baltimore. The Reserve, we couldn't afford. It was about 50 cents more. Then there came Seagram's five crown. Seven crown was too expensive. Then there came the Early Times. That's [inaudible] for the market for the young people. And they were cheap. If you really had money, you'd buy

Four Roses, which smelled of roses, it really did. It had infused in it the odor of some roses. But I don't know if I told you that story or not. But we had a date in Gretna, three couples who had had a little bottle of Four Roses and somebody in the group spills the Four Roses in the carpet in the back. And then you're afraid to take the car home because it smells of Four Roses and your folks would know you were drinking. So you didn't lie about it. We tried to wash it out. But it didn't do it. I had to admit to my folks that we were drinking that night. Get it over with. So there was a scolding and then your life went on again. At the first dance I went to when I was maybe 15 no more than 16 – probably 15 – I told about going to ask a young lady there by the name of Rita. And her boyfriend was coming later. And she actually got me out on the dance floor, although I had never danced. I held a girl on her shoulder or her hand before. But, as it turns out – you wouldn't believe it – I meet my brother there, Nathan, who was five years older. And, of course, he was older, naturally. If I were 15, he was 19 and a half, you know. But he [inaudible] and I didn't know he was going. And I meet him there and somebody induces me to go under the steps or the first floor of the steps or the second floor where you could be hidden and have a sip of Four Roses or Early Times or whatever out of a bottle, which I did. Would you believe it, my brother comes out of nowhere, takes the bottle out my hand, which I wasn't [inaudible], and starts drinking it. Then he says,

oh Sam, thank you. And so the guy was pretty P'd off. But my brother and I, we got along very well. And trying to share a car together with two young boys in a house. Because you, you know, my folks used the car in the daytime and [inaudible] it Sunday but during the week, during the nights, it – it just stayed there, so one of us could have it. But we worked it out somehow. I guess he had friends who were older than I am, naturally, and they had a bigger availability to automobiles.

Cave: Were you a Saints fan?

Menszer: Pardon me?

Cave: Were you a Saints fan?

Menszer: The Saints in those days?

Cave: Or from the 60's when they first started?

Menszer: Well, I went to the first game. I bought passes – yeah, season – on about the 35 yard line, which were fairly good, and they were terrible. They had a fairly good quarterback but couldn't get it going. Yeah, I knew the stadium well. I spent many times, many Saturdays at Tulane Stadium. Al Hirt came out with his horn and his band to play for the stands. At opening season he made all of the games. I can't quite think of the name of the quarterback. In the very beginning, the Saints had several very good quarterbacks who didn't stay here but went on other teams that became winning teams. It seems like one had a name that the first letter, initial, was a Q. Very odd, isn't that? But it

seems like there was. I'm sure the news department would know that right away.

Cave: What was the first time you went to the Superdome?

Menszer: Ooh, I was never a great fan of the Superdome, except admiring it architecturally. I – probably the first or second season. I was not devoted to it, nor I am today, of the Superdome. I find – you see, football, which I used to love and now I like but, to me, to go to the trouble of parking a car through that crowd and getting over that stadium and getting in those seats and have to fight for a bathroom – sometimes you'd get a bottle or [inaudible] – a bottle of beer – to see a game which usually was more – was poor or mediocre at best and sit through it and go back again through all that mess. Then when you get out of the parking spot you had to fight like hell to get on Poydras Street to get out of there, to me, it just isn't worth it. It's worth it to many, many people. They love it. But it never thrilled me. Now, you see, we lived near Tulane Stadium Uptown where we could walk from Octavia Street. Remember, John?

John: I remember walking to –

Menszer: -- Tulane Stadium.

John: -- the Sugar Bowl.

Menszer: Yeah, so we made all the Sugar Bowls, naturally. And other things. The Saints – the Saints team was very good for New Orleans. It's good when they win. But I'm sort of down on professional football as

a whole. It's so – pardon my language – damned expensive. You can't afford to take children there or young high school students. It costs a fortune. And these are millionaires playing millionaires, fighting over more millions. And after they make a contract, settle it, what happens? The fans pay for it. That ain't part of the negotiations. And the prices go up. Really, I mean, that's all professional football. And people go for it regardless. So that's the way it is. I'm out of sink with it. I hate to be a downer, but I am. I really don't want to see millionaires playing millionaires.

Cave: Do you remember the New Orleans sniper incident? Do you remember the New Orleans sniper incident on the Howard Johnson –

John: Mark Esicks.

Cave: Mark Esicks. Do you –

Menszer: Do I remember it?!

Cave: Yeah.

Menszer: I was almost part of it.

Cave: Tell us that story.

Menszer: Well, our son, Gary, went to [inaudible] – he was at university and he had had a very nice friend he had made who came down here to visit during that time for about a week. We were living on Octavia Street. And he was visiting with us. And I'm not sure what Gary was doing at the time. And the announcement comes out about the – there was a – there was a desperado, a shooter, maybe more than one, maybe several

guns, maybe one with several guns, in the Howard Johnson's parking lot, but shooting from different spots. And he'd shoot from one spot and 20 minutes later he was in another spot or another floor. And they really didn't know what was involved. So the police surrounded the Howard Johnson's and isolated, so to speak, and we drove down, Elaine and I and Gary's friend, Mark. And we spent quite a bit of time on the fringes looking in. Elaine was audacious to a point. I mean, she did – she didn't back off everything. Of course, we didn't get recklessly close and we stayed in the car and we did change our position. We spent down there about a couple of hours. But later on we found out that a fire got set in the parking lot and that's how they got him to surrender. But I don't know the details of how the fire got started. I recall the policeman [inaudible] but I have no idea. It turned out to be one man. They had shot him long before they were [inaudible].

Cave: How was that event interpreted by people at the time? Did people think it was racially motivated, or was it just a crazy person shooting people?

Menszer: I don't recall any being – any racial element involved. Never brought up, no. And there was another sad thing that happened in the parking lot of the Howard Johnson's. On another occasion, the husband of a friend of ours who parked his car directly was murdered in the parking lot and his body was stuffed in the trunk of a car so they didn't

know where he was. He was missing for a couple of days until they traced the car to the Howard Johnson's, opened up the trunk and there he was, the body. I think the name was Brown. A Jewish fella. I think I get – I – I'm not positive it was Brown. It could have been. Anyway, because Brown owns the Kosher Cajun and that's why I'm thinking it may not have been him. I'm going to find out this later. That's quite some crazy story, ha?

Cave: Yeah. Do you remember the airline crash in the early 80's of the –

Menszer: Do I remember the airline crash in the early 80's? We were scheduled to leave for the airport a few weeks later and this crash happened. I think it was on a take-off and the plane never got fully lifted and it went into a track of houses off of Williams Boulevard and Roosevelt Avenue. I think it destroyed about 30 houses. I'm not sure of how many – the loss of life, how many or anything. But it was quite heavy, very devastating. The schools in Little Rock were integrated. Eisenhower called out the Marshalls, as he said he would do if it were necessary. And it was necessary, done successfully. But the kids had to be escorted daily and watched at the schools in Birmingham. All the cities were becoming targets. And it was announced in advance that they were going to integrate that school or that school or that city or that city or that state. Well, when it came to New Orleans and there were rallies back and forth pro-integration but mainly anti-immigration where droves of people, thousands came out and met. I think there

were some meetings, John, at Rabouin School. Are you familiar with Rabouin School on Carondelet Street, just beyond Poydras? There was a school there that was built and they discovered that it wasn't needed. So they made a technical school out of it where they taught crafts and paintings and solicited older people. And Elaine, my wife, went there to learn how to make headboards because Anthony was on the way. So she wanted to make special headboards, two, that she needed for his bedroom. And cowboys were always popular. I didn't know they were popular with Elaine, but she fashioned the headboards, tufted, single – for single windows, two of them, out of cowhide, rugged, with the hair on it. You recall the color? What color was it?

John: Brown, white and black.

Menszer: That's right. Brown, white and black. She picked it since the headboards were not over about 40 inches wide and no more than – less than two feet tall and she had to get patterns that brought out the color variations, which she did. And she made those headboards, which we had for many, many years. I surprised we don't still have them, John. Or do we have them somewhere? But yeah, she sure did. And then she went into crafts, Elaine, in a very, very big way. I should have brought you some pictures of Elaine's work. Oh, John, remind me. I'm fooling with these pictures last night. I'm going to bring you a stack, 100 pictures of her work. I want you to have them.

This is really important. I want to call my phone at home and remind myself to put them in the car. Elaine started with maybe pottery. She went to Delgado and they had different hours. Some afternoon classes, some night classes and they were on the Westbank for some years. And they built a new Delgado on the Westbank. And they built a hand-craft room, fabulous, with the best oven for baking the pottery in the city. And she got friendly over there and went there for several years and made a lot of things and she fired them. And if you wanted glazes or many other things, you'd you want to fire it. You got that – we've got to get this into it with Elaine's work. It is superb and, when you see it – and I've got pictures – and I don't how I overlooked it. And she made different things. And the first thing she made was a life-size head modeled on the likeness of her father, Joseph Fine, around the earlier 1939. Elaine never got over the death of her father, not really, but she did a very credible model, likeness of her father, which is really in itself too big to bring here. It's heavy. But I have the pictures. And then she made a gillion things. And John got in – when Elaine got into the Holocaust survivors. Brandice University outside of Boston got established around the 40's. Oh yeah, maybe 30's. Whatever, 20's, Louis Brandice of the Supreme Court Justice was the namesake. And they opened the auxillary chapters around the country, whereby they could get local chapters, help raise a little money, but the main purpose was to get the school known and you

have – and get, you know, the student body around the country. In fact, my cousin's son, Billy Sizeler, now a prominent architect, went there for his undergraduate work. And they started a program in the library before the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., of recording stories delivered by Holocaust survivors. And there were at least 45 or 50 families, at least husbands and wives, in New Orleans, which formed a group called the New Americans where they did things together, along with being active in the community. And Elaine did interviews. I think Mrs. Lasosky in particular. And then John got involved with them too. You'll have to talk – your point of how you got involved. And from that she got into doing physical things, crafts, but with feeling and which meant to bring out strong expressions of empathy. And she did. And I'll get on with that, that stuff from [inaudible]. Work after the head of her father was the ashes from Buckenwald. Buckenwald being a – a Nazi death factory in Germany, one of the worst. It was so ugly and horrible, I couldn't look at it. I said, Elaine, get that out of my sight. I can't look at it. For years, she would put it out, visible, not to torment me, but she had a feeling for it. I don't – I won't use the word love. I think that's the wrong word. But it – I gave her – I think it gave her a certain type of pain or it gave her a feeling of respect and that the story needed to be told, constantly and forever, never let die. I'm going to have a picture of that – I won't bring you the object – of the horrors of Buckenwald. You're going to

be horrified. It's – it's a piece that sits on the floor and it's ashes and it feels like dirt and the expression of horror upon the face of this individual, this representation, is unbelievable, really. It used to horrify me. Maybe that's why I walked away from it. But I appreciate it now or for many years. She made this sometime in the 70's, the early 70's. Then she made one of the high side. In the Hebrew language, we have a word High. It means –

John: Heart.

Menszer: Right. The life blood – to like Maheim, to heim, to life. Fiddler on the Roof. The sign is very simple. It's sort of a reorganized version of the sign of Pi, the mathematical sign, 3.1 or whatever. Eveybody knows what it is. It has a top on it, it's slightly slanted, a little thicker on one end than the other, two vertical pieces of bars and I think one touching the horizontal and one near it and some Hebrew writing. Unbelievably well done. I have a picture of that. And she did others. Everything was not related to – far from it. But her work was not related to the Holocaust, just a small portion. And she acquired an imagination. She has a small I call it a Venus and I'm referring to the small found objects of ancient times that were found in Germany as well as other places of a three-breasted woman with a – it shows just the body without a head or a part of the torso with three breasts. And I think it's fant—it's small but fantastic. Then she took a face plate for a tripling – for a tub and made a face out of it very simply. We got the levers,

the nose, the two screw holes are the eyes, there's a place for the mouth. It's amazing. And I could go on and on. But I think I – then she went in to purses. And the way she went into purses that she's walking through the Roosevelt Hotel before it was the Fairmont and they were changing their carpet in some of the ballrooms and there were a lot of scraps. So Elaine said, ask the – the installer if we could have a couple of these scraps and I'll find something to do with them. And he did. He said, take what you want lady. And she'd take some scraps. When the Republicans had a convention in New Orleans – they did have a national nominating convention in New Orleans – when we met that guy Jack, Jack Spack. He was a football player. He was a councilman. He ran for the [inaudible]. He played for Buffalo in professional football. Jack or whatever was his title –

Cave: Kemp.

Menszer: Kemp. His title was Jack Spack and I've still got a memento. We were there when they were taking up the carpet a few days later and Elaine got a piece of that carpet. Well, she got the carpet all over, small pieces. From it, she made purses. And I think the first one she made, she had found an old beat up bugle and it became a handle. Then she found – which I shouldn't mention these days – it's really – where she got it I'll never know – it looked like a small stick of dynamite that you would throw like a bomb. Now, I don't know really what it is. It can't really be that. That's a handle. She had

some medical things, forceps and different types of handles. And she had the most outlandish – there's an apparatus doctors do for opening up the woman's vagina to help spread it. It's got a special name. Women know what it is. I don't. That's a handle. And she got some where she's painted. And she has an Elvis Presley picture on one when he's – it had embellishment on the things. And she got them made out of boxes, wood, as well as brass or metal, different kind of containers that she painted on. I'll show you some – some of that. And she made one that brought Snickers to people in New Orleans that was a rather large, simple black purse with three numbers on it: 7, 4, 6. 746. Today, it means absolutely nothing. In my day, before or a little afterwards, it was very important or the most important household number in New Orleans, 746 Baronne Street. Put it down. 746 Baronne Street. The building is not there, for shame. It was a second – it was a walk-up and on the second floor were girls or women and the only people who walked up the steps were young men. It was the most noted house of prostitution in New Orleans for young people, and particularly like first year college or whatever. It was a house of prostitution. And it was well-known. And it was never closed up by the police. It had been opened for many years. In that time, there were houses of prostitution. Never any street-walking in New Orleans. Never a street walker or hanging out in bars. But there was a house of prostitution. And the most famous one was Norma Wallace, who – let

me go back to 746 Baronne Street first some more then we'll go to Norma Wallace. 746 Baronne Street, the furniture was supposed to have been supplied by the several furniture houses down the block. And I'm not going to mention the name. But anybody –

John: Mintz.

Menszer: No. No, I don't want to degrade anybody living today. Pay no part of it. Anybody that wants to find out can. And they supplied the furniture and they'd always stamp the bottom of the mattress. It said, supplied by whatever, or bought from. But there's – when Elaine walked down and walked with that purse, 746, all the men would look and take another look. They couldn't believe it. It turned their heads. They never mentioned to their wives. But the wives pretty much knew. They weren't that stupid. And they would bring it up to some extent. Well, we were in New York City some years later and Elaine is wearing a purse 746 behind the Waldorf Astoria, which is, what, Madison or Lexington Avenue? Which one is it, John? I think it was Lexington, really behind and up a couple of blocks. We were going to a particular deli and it was early evening around 7:00 or so or maybe a little before that. And some men are working on the street repairing the holes in the sidewalk and they said, lady, stop. Why? What number are you wearing on your purse and why? She said, I won't tell you why, but the number is 746. Come to New Orleans and you'll find out why your first 10 minutes in the city. And he said, lady, I'm going

to use that number somewhere. She said, okay with me. So we're going to the delicatessen and we sit down on a table and get some things, simple, but nice. Food was good in those delis, like great [inaudible], great corned beef, great cheese cakes and pies in those days. That was around the time they were beginning [inaudible] craze at the [inaudible]. And while we were there the waiter said, lady, let me see what's on your purse. So I asked him, I said, what's your name? My name's Murray. Okay, Murray, take a look. 746. And he's thinking. He said, lady, do you mind if I use that number? I'm going to play the numbers with 746. She said, no, go ahead. It's been good to me. Maybe it'll be good to you. So the next day we come back over there about the same time to see Murray to find out how he did and we can't find Murray. He's back in the kitchen hiding. He was not busy at the time. And the owner says, Murray won't come out to see you. I said, why? He said, well he had a bad day with the numbers. So, finally he sticks his face out of the screened doors from the kitchen and we're at the counter to take a look at us and he sees us and he shakes his fingers at us like this [motioning] and he disappears again. That was it. That was the end of Murray. So, I'll never forget the name Murray. It's indelible. It's etched on my brain.

John: Dad, who owned the house?

Menszer: Ha?

John: Who owned the house at 746? Who owned it?

Menszer: Norma Wallace, the biggest – and she probably was an ex-prostitute, but she was in her 50's or 60's. And gained respectability, some, but she gave to charities. And she – the house, I think, was in – on Conti Street in the first block off of North Rampart. And – and after the war, she bought a small plantation called the Tchoupitoulas Plantation on the West Bank up the river from the bridge just before Waggaman, past the shipyards at Avondale and made a very respectable restaurant out of it. I don't know if you ever ate there, John. And on it she had peacocks and a couple of other things and she had a very respectable restaurant. And she had a picture of herself right in the middle of the dining room on the wall. Of course, if you didn't want to look at it, you didn't have to. But it was a very decent picture. Wearing a red dress.

John: [inaudible].

Menszer: Yeah, at the restaurant. Yeah. And New Orleans, that story was famous. New Orleans never gave up its houses of prostitution, except during the wars, both wars.

John: Did people hang out at this house of prostitution, the young people, or did they just go in and [inaudible] and leave?

Menszer: Go in. Well, the routine was, you could dance. They had a juke box and you could dance if you put the dime in the juke box, or three tunes for a quarter. But you couldn't fool around. And well the high school

boys – New Orleans, that's the way high school boys went a in those days. But –

John: What did they charge?

Menszer: What?

John: What did they charge?

Menszer: A dollar. A ruble. They called it a ruble.

John: A ruble.

Menszer: A ruble. It was a dollar. Baton Rouge, it was two dollars. But there were never any troubles over there, or riots or fights. No heavy drinking. You couldn't bring liquor in there. And they didn't serve liquor. Oh, none. You'd spend your dollar or play the music box. And you could hang around a little while, but you couldn't spend an evening there. You couldn't, say, spend a – maybe you could spend a half an hour, maybe. Oh no, they didn't want you cluttering up the place. It was a business to them, John. And the – let's stop here for a second.

***pause

Menszer: For entertainment, of course, you had Pontchartrain Beach. There were small little places around, one on Holiday Drive and General Degaulle, right in that general area, which was called the Varsity Club in Algiers. It was well-run. It had dancing and a juke box. Even all during the week – I guess you could. I guess they sold beer there. Probably nothing else. They'd get up a small band on the weekend.

There was one on Fourth Street Highway near Westwego called the Key Hole and they had a – it is a neat little place. Nothing to it. It was near – it was a key hole. You walked in through the key hole. Clever as can be. And there's one place I think I mentioned the name called Gennaro, G-E-N-N-A-R-O on Old Metairie Road under the overpass. That would be Causeway Boulevard. It is still there. I went in there once about 10 years ago, but the guy didn't know anything about it or why it's called Gennaro's. See, it seems – I guess I really ought to go find out why it's called Gennaro's. To the people who knew it when it was active was myself, you know, they're gone. They're gone to a better place maybe. I'm not sure about that. Maybe. And of course we had the Blue Room and the – there was a cocktail lounge that young people did not go to at the Monteleone. There was a cocktail lounge at the Jung, which was an active hotel at that time. And they had a roof garden, not open, with big wide windows on the top of the Jung Hotel where they would open up to have dances, high school dances and all or maybe occasionally there would be a dance there. And all the high schools had dances, at least several, at least two or three a year. Not balls, but dances. And I mentioned girls would be taken there with a date. They would not go there alone. And men would be there in excess. Men could go. They were welcome. They formed stag lines where everybody understood if you danced with your girl there, if you were engaged, a man in the stag line, a rotation,

they'd come up, tap you on the shoulder and you were expected to give up your dancing partner for the remainder of that dance. Not necessarily – and if you wanted your partner back, you could come back and get her at the end of the dance. And not – you would start the next dance with the same partner. And dance numbers were not like forever: three or four minutes. They were not these 10 minute deals, but they played over and over again. And it – it worked fine. I told you about the time – and I'll repeat it – I was at a [inaudible] hall in Algiers where Gretna boys should not be or they might get ganged upon or the Algiers boys, you should not be in Gretna. And I was chewing gum. When dance was over I couldn't find my gum. Evidently, I [chewed] it to her hair, but she didn't know about it at the time. And [when I tapped her head]. When it was over it was over. She just looked up and she found a wad of gum in her hair. I'm laughing, but it's a funny story. Those were act—of course, we went to the movies. Movies were 10 or 15 cents, 25 cents for adults and you always got in for 15 and you never got older or went up in age. Or 12, you'd stoop down. And you'd go to the movies by yourself if you were in New Orleans. You could travel anywhere. So the afternoon you'd – it's funny how I did so much on Sundays because evidently it must be different periods of my life or maybe – of course it was – I never did the same thing. Every Sunday, of course, after eating with Aunt Sadie a big lunch, every often I'd go to the movies around 4:00 to

the Lowes State or the Saenger and all and the street car would take you down for 7 cents. And the windows of the stores on – Canal Street was a beautiful street – the stores were lovely. A lot of women's stores. Models. New things. They'd change the windows at least once every two weeks, some places every week. So if you went back every two weeks, you saw new things. For Christmas, they always had the greatest display of animated toys in the window. The same with Maison Blance and Mr. Bingle. And [inaudible] a lovely coffee shop, nice food. And the – and they made some of their candies and a few other things for sale. And Maison Blance had the Rendesvous, which is a coffee shop, not [inaudible] – Holmes was a dining room. Maison Blance was a coffee shop. Maison Blance had a candy department where they made – certain candies they made themselves, which were very good. Not all their candies. They used a candy called Price candy, P-R-I-C. It was not well-known in drug stores or anything, but they were made from people and it was a very good brand of candy, very good. And they also made a few specials. The – and my folks always believed – my father didn't believe in good suits for himself. He always believed in wearing a hat, never throwing it away or getting a new one. It angered my mother. She said, oh Joe, never cut your mustache. One time, he had it trimmed off and she put him out of the house, at least for one night. He – he never shaved himself, but he had it shaved every -- three shaves a week or maybe

four at the barber down the block. And shaves were – haircuts were 25 cents and shaves were I think 25. A shoe shine was a dime. For 15 cents, you got a spit shine. They spit on your shoes and then shine them or with another coat of varnish. Fantastic. I'm going to skip to Chris Owens. No, I don't want to skip that. I want to tell the story of Chris Owens. But I want to get it in [inaudible]. Let's talk about Bourbon Street more. What do we have? We had the German restaurant, Kowles, which closed about 20 years ago serving German food. They did well. Not a huge business, but a good business. And they had the set up of fans and one guy turning like a [inaudible] direct to the fans with pulleys and belts and the fans turning very slowly, about a dozen all over the restaurant. Fantastic. It should be there. It should be there. And they had a Tops, a [inaudible] restaurant next to them. Around the corner. That's on St. Charles. On St. Charles, around the corner from the St. Charles Hotel, there was a Holsun, H-O-L-S-U-N cafeteria. It was a very fine – another cafeteria, even better, a very [inaudible] beautiful building between – on Gravier Street right off of Baronne going toward Rampart. It had – it had a ceiling similar to the Saenger Theatre, which was an old Italian, Tuscan or Venetian, the buildings and all. And the fake sky with the stars that would twinkle. The cafeteria had them. I can't think of it – I can't think of –

John:

Morrison's.

Menszer: Morrison's. And the food was quite good. And we'd go there occasionally. And the Bourbon Street. Well, the hit of Bourbon Street was the Puppy Club. It was in the second – the first block of Bourbon Street was another restaurant called Glucks, G-L-U-C-K-S, similar to Kowls but different food. Now they had a – it felt similar – maybe it wasn't. They had a big bar like Kowls. Kowls was a popular fast service. And they had a bar, a counter top [inaudible]. And I remember their soups were out of this world, very special. Then on Royal Street – no, that was on Royal Street, the first block. Down the block on the corner where Mr. B's Restaurant is was Solari's, an institution in New Orleans, S-O-L-A-R-I. He ran a high scale, upper scale grocery where they served you. Beans came in sacks and whatever they were they scooped them up and served you, fresh bagels or whatever. And they had a counter that would seat about 30 people, two-sided, in the center where they served three meals a day. It was always popular. It was not the best food in New Orleans, but it was very good food and fast, never overpriced. Solari's specialty was the [cheese], Italian sausages, many things. But the people often went there just to eat. I wish we still had it. There was Lala Zan's was a restaurant right down the block on Bienville Street. I think the building is still there. At a later date, Diamond Jim Moran came in there and [inaudible] he puts diamonds in your meat balls and he got away with it. He – he made a good living out of it. And he could pick

fake diamonds, you know – he would get fake diamonds, you know, out of the [inaudible] the glass. And that came a bit later. Then there was Pete's Spaghetti House next to the Puppy Club. And there was a –

John: It was Tony's.

Menszer: Tony's. Tony's. I'm sorry. I [inaudible]. Of course, Galatoire's was always there. And before Galatoire's there was a very good Italian restaurant called Turci's or Turci, T-U-R-C-I, excellent. The main dish was chicken a-la-Turci. They specialized in the red gravy and put small tiny meatballs with the chunks of chicken. It was very, very good. And they had a restaurant called the Vieux Carre on the corner of Bourbon and Bienville one buck. The price of a meal was a dollar and delicious! It started off with two or three shrimp in a cocktail sauce and a small bowl of vegetable soup or soup of the day and a tiny salad with a slice of tomato and a few leaves of lettuce with French dressing and, of course, French bread. You're not going to believe all of the small pieces of fish! Then a quarter of a chicken, roasted usually or broiled. A buck! And the coffee was separate and dessert was extra. Isn't that amazing! And around the corner was Arnaud's, of course, different prices. [inaudible] because Antoine's was there. And then there was not all the junk shops you have today. No t-shirt shops. There was a few – oh, Royal Street was loaded with very fine antiques. At the height – antiques, you know, it's still strong, naturally, but they were even stronger [inaudible]. And so there was the 500 Club, where

the high school students went to, on the corner of about – it's a jazz club now. And there was a man and a woman who were married and she played the piano and he played a saxophone. And they had a screen where they flashed the words of the music and you sat there and you sang with them. It was very, very nice. After all, there was anywhere from 20 to 40 people there, not more. And you sat and you sang. I think it was wonderful. We'd go there on a high school night. Not expensive. And these are – these are the entertainments. Then they had the Dog House, where we didn't go to, on Rampart Street about – about around St. Louis or maybe before. And, of course, right in that neighborhood, there had the very fine New Orleans Athletic Club. The building is still there. It was a fine institution in those days. It isn't that they limited their membership, but they were somewhat restricted. I mean, if you were sort of a ruffian type or something, you couldn't go in. You couldn't get a membership. You may go as a guest of somebody. Very fine facility. I could barely make it to the facilities. I was a member for a few years when I came back to New Orleans. And – and of course you had the President boat on the river. And you had another one called the Capital, a little smaller. And Al Streaming was a conductor of the music on one of the boats, and he teaches John's brother Gary, who happens to be a doctor -- Gary Menszer – how to play the piano. He'd come to the house to play. And Gary – Gary could only master one song after about six sessions.

Heart and Soul. I fell in love with you, heart and soul. Da-da-di-di-do. Da-da-da-da-da-dey. Do-de-de-do. Heart and soul. Not body and soul. That was another. Body and soul was a little earthy, probably a better known song, maybe. But Heart and Soul is well known. That's all he could play. I wonder if he could play it today? I bet he can.

John: What was the Puppy Club?

Menszer: Pardon me?

John: What was the Puppy Club?

Menszer: Oh, it was a strip joint. Oh yeah. You had about – the Dog House was a strip joint and maybe there was another strip joint. Later on, there got to be a couple more after the war when the Quarter was allowed to re-open. But it was not topless, John. It was not bottomless. They had to wear something, not just a cup. They had to wear at least a bra or something. And I remember getting hustled one night. I don't know why I would go there by myself. How in the hell I got out. I got to the French Quarter in an automobile by myself. I can't figure it out. And there I am by myself and I go to the Puppy Club and I sit down and have a drink – you've got to have a drink – and a V-girl they called them, the hustler comes to me and wants me to dance with her. Of course, maybe they made dates for later. There was no sexing at the clubs themselves, definitely not. On one occasion, LSU was playing Tulane, always a big event, especially in New Orleans. If LSU won, then all the Tigers would end up in the Quarter. And we did it with

my friend and roommate, Stanley Fink, about the year 1940. Sammy was a loud-mouthed guy and a hustler. He said, let's go to the Puppy Club so we all go to the Puppy Club. While he was there, he picks purposely an argument, not a fight – not a fight – an argument when somebody thought Tulane was cheating. They really won the game but they were cheated out of the score, the victory. And he pursues it. So he – he says, come on Tigers, let's all get together and get anyone from Tulane. Let's beat them up. And he's in a club. Once he gets a crowd together, he leaves. And he gets away from the action. I don't think anything happened, but it probably got really pretty rough. But he gets out of there and I followed him. Yeah, he was – one man in front of the few clubs they had there would be a full-time barker, very often a New York type with a lot of fast talking or like maybe the guys who sold products on Atlantic City's boardwalk. They said Atlantic City probably still has the boardwalk. But, years ago, there was a beautiful wide boardwalk where you could rent a chair and you'd roll somebody or you'd roll yourself or you'd roll somebody and an old fashioned huge, beautiful hotels. And they would be in places in between where they were selling combing irons or special shampoos. They'd particularly liked to show off a lady's hair because they made a great display that they could turn it with a nice looking girl and you'd turn her around with her long locks to the crowd, after you got a crowd

there, and start doing things with her, messing it up then getting it back into shape.

John: Did you feel safe on Bourbon Street back then?

Menszer: Oh sure. New Orleans was safe. You wouldn't go to an all-black section, you know. You wouldn't walk in the cemeteries at night but, yeah, New Orleans was safe. We used to go all over. I used to roller skate from Gretna to the Algiers Ferry for the ferry before I was 14, at least maybe when I was 14. Oh yeah. I went to Canal Street during the day time when I was about 12. Oh yeah. I used to go to the [inaudible] I got my glasses. Maybe I was younger than 12. Maybe I was 11. And he wanted me to come down and have them adjusted. And I found out later what the deal was. They didn't need adjustment; he wanted traffic in the store. The oculars who made the glasses always would tie in the with jewelry store somewhere in the back. Maybe he had them in a [inaudible] or something. They didn't need much space. And he had me coming almost every week for a while until I got onto him, Dr. Feldman, because he wanted traffic in the store. He had a bunch of people coming all the time.

Cave: You were talking about being hustled at the Puppy Club.

Menszer: Yeah, of the girl, but nothing ever happened.

Cave: Oh, okay.

Menszer: I – she tried to get me to buy a drink and dance with her, but I didn't do it. Drinks were about 35 cents, so she'd – maybe she'd make 15 cents.

Things were tough, you know. But there was a particular barker whose name was Izzy Nuts, I-Z-Z-Y N-U-T-S. And we all would know that was not his real name. But, God, he had a gift of gab, was he sensational. He wouldn't curse, now. Wouldn't go beyond the word damn. He wouldn't use S-H-I-T. Oh no, no, no. No SOB or big words, nothing. But he had a gift of gab and every now and then he'd bring a girl to the door who would shake her thing a little bit and he'd say, come on inside, you'll get more. Drinks are cheap. But I'll tell you, it all, see, is part of the show. See, with the show, what they put on about every hour, hour and a half, two hours or whatever. No, about every hour and a half. And he'd be part of the show cracking a few jokes or kidding about the girls. They had about four girls who would come when he's doing a routine. And they'd have a three-piece band. Really, yeah. And he's a hustler. He was fantastic. Izzy Nuts. Absolutely. Should we cover some more?

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