

Interviewer: Welcome to another interview for the Kansas City Garment Industry Project. Today is February 3, 2011. I'm John Dvorak, and I'm interviewing Eileen Garry, whose husband, Marshall, operated a company in Kansas City called the B. Garry and Company. She's going to tell us a lot about how the garment industry was supplied with things like cloth and machinery.

[0:00:30] The videographer today is Mark Titus. Eileen, tell us when you met your husband to be and how you two became a couple.

Respondent: Okay, I met my husband in 1945, in New York. Introduced through a mutual friend. And we became engaged four months later and married a year after that.

[0:01:01] So it was the end of the Second World War pretty much. He was in the service. He was in the Merchant Marine when I met him. I was in college. We were very young. Oh god, were we young. But we opted to move back to Kansas City. I'm from New York, and he wanted to live in Kansas City, so we moved back.

[0:01:29]

Interviewer: My guess is you knew nothing about the garment industry at that time.

Respondent: Absolutely nothing. I knew nothing about Kansas City. I had an uncle who was the most wonderful designer and tailor in New York, actually, made a lot of my clothes when I was a little girl. And he came to me and hear that I was going to Kansas City, and he said to me, you must tell me something. What ocean is it near? That was his reference, because water was such an important part of our lives on the East Coast.

[0:01:59] And when I told him there was none, he said, how could you go there? And I said, well, I'll let you know, because I'm going. But I was that kind of a kid and got married. We were married in '46 and moved to Kansas City. Been here ever since.

Interviewer: Were you from New York City?

Respondent: From Brooklyn, New York.

Interviewer: Now, your husband was not in the garment business immediately upon your marriage?

Respondent: Well, he had made the decision.

[0:02:27] When we came back to Kansas City instead of staying in New York, he made the decision to go into business with his dad, who was Burt Garry and who had been in the industry for a number of years, knew everybody in the

garment industry. Those were his friends, those were his cronies. And he introduced Marshall to all of those people.

[0:02:57]

Interviewer: Your husband made a decision that he wanted to go into business with his father. Did you know about the company?

Respondent: Absolutely not.

Interviewer: Was all of this news to you?

Respondent: Yes. I knew nothing about it. Nothing. My only introduction was when my father in law to be came to New York and spent time with my family and proceeded to tell my family that this is what Marshall was going to do and go into the industry.

[0:03:34]

Because let me tell you that it made a very fine living for Burt Garry, and during those years, when things were hard to get, he had great sources in New York that could bring all of that kind of commodities to Kansas City.

Interviewer: Tell us about the company.

[0:03:58]

Respondent: Well, the company was a little teeny – they had an office in the Manufacturers Exchange Building on 8th Street, and they represented fabric people, the Maimin Company who made the machines that cut the fabrics. They represented every aspect of the garment industry. You name it, they represented them.

[0:04:28]

Marshall traveled on the road some. He traveled to various communities out here, whether it was Topeka or Wichita, Des Moines. He had five states, as I remember. I'd have to think about which ones. Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma. Yeah, those were the five states. And he traveled. Actually, I guess you could almost say that he was a traveling salesman.

[0:04:58]

That's what he did, and he loved it, because he met people, and he had friends all over the place. And everybody bought from him. There was no question.

Interviewer: Was it a large company, or did they need many employees?

Respondent: No. Just the two of them. And they had somebody who was in the office. And don't ask me who she is, because I don't remember. They had somebody in the office who did the book work.

Interviewer: So their job, then, was to match the needs of garment manufacturers with the equipment or the supplies that they provided.

[0:05:32]

Respondent: Exactly.

Interviewer: What types of things did they sell?

Respondent: Well, it depended upon what the need was. If a firm came to them and said, we need corduroy, they supplied the corduroy. If they needed velvet, they supplied the velvet. If they needed just plain cotton fabrics, they supplied those fabrics.

[0:06:00]

Interviewer: And they knew where to go to buy those things.

Respondent: In many instances, they were already representing those firms that executed those needs that helped them to create those needs.

Interviewer: Do you know much about the history of the company, how far back it went?

Respondent: No. Off the top of my head, I cannot tell you that. I do know that my father in law was doing this before I met Marshall.

[0:06:27]

So it was certainly in the forties, and for all I know, it may have reached back into the thirties. Because my father in law also came from New York, and he created this for himself, because he wanted to get out of New York. And he originally was working for the post office, and somebody said to him, there's a great need for salespeople, and you fit the need, you love people. It will be easy for you.

[0:06:58]

And he was so friendly with all of the people, whether it was Brand and Puritz or Henry Present. There was a slew of people who were doing this, and he knew them all, and so he filled a need.

Interviewer: What kind of a man was he?

Respondent: My father in law?

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: My father in law was probably one of the most outgoing – very much like Marshall, actually. He loved people, and as a result, he was able to make these connections that created this business for him.

[0:07:27]

And as I said, he did very well with it. He really did.

Interviewer: And he founded the business from nothing?

Respondent: Yes. I would imagine in the thirties. You know, it's interesting, I used to have a little ruler – I don't know where it is – I looked for it before you guys came – that said, B. Garry and Company on it. And it said the date that it was founded. And I don't know where that ruler is, and I'm sorry, because I would have been glad to give it to you and you could have photographed it and all that good stuff. And I will continue to look for it, but I had it, and I don't have it anymore.

[0:07:57] I don't know, maybe one of my kids took it, because they have a way of absconding with things that have some kind of memorabilia.

Interviewer: What did you think when your husband told you that he was going to be going into business with his father?

Respondent: I thought it was great. I had no compunction about it. My father in law sold it, said that it was going to be great, and Marshall would do well in it. And I was a young kid. What did I know? I had no clue.

[0:08:29] And I had just graduated from school.

Male Voice: Where did you go to school?

Respondent: NYU, in New York.

Male Voice: What did you major in?

Respondent: Sociology. Didn't do me any good, but I did. So I didn't know what I was doing or where I was going. I went back to New York five times the first year I was here. That's how lonely I was. Had no clue what Kansas City was like. And the interesting thing is, this Marian Leonard that I talked about, who was at Harzfeld's for 110 years, was my first friend here.

[0:09:03] She befriended me, and it was a lifesaver. Really was.

Interviewer: How did things go in the early years with your husband at the company?

Respondent: Fine. We had no children until we were married for three years, so I went with him when he traveled.

[0:09:28] We had a great time. And as I say, he loved it.

Interviewer: How often would he be gone?

Respondent: Almost every week for four days.

Male Voice: Did he drive or did he take the train?

Respondent: Drive.

Male Voice: What kind of car did he have?

Respondent: Holy cow.

Male Voice: I mean, John didn't ask that question, I did. I'm just curious.

Respondent: I'm just curious, what kind of a car did he have? Oh, I know what kind of a car he had.

[0:09:55] His dad – we had no car. We didn't have that kind of money, remember. We didn't have a lot of money. And so his dad bought him a four door Chevrolet. I did not drive at that point in time. And so it was like a vacation. We had a great time.

Interviewer: You went with him a lot of the time?

Respondent: A lot.

Interviewer: Tell me where you would go and what would happen when you got there.

Respondent: Well, he would introduce me to a lot of these people who I had no clue where I was or who I went with.

[0:10:32] I remember driving with him someplace, and we ran into an electrical storm, into a thunderstorm. I had never seen such lightning. We were out on the plains of Kansas. And it was so new to me. It was like a revelation. But I went with him, and we had a great time. Met some of the people he knew. I'm still friendly with some of the people from Wichita where we stayed, who he knew, where he was received with great aplomb, if you will.

[0:11:07]

Interviewer: What types of companies would he be calling on, on these trips?

Respondent: Manufacturing. All manufacturing. He never sold little stores that had piece goods or fabrics in them. He only went to manufacturing.

Interviewer: Companies that manufactured clothing?

Respondent: Right. Primarily.

Interviewer: Not shoes or hats.

[0:11:30]

Respondent: No, clothing. All clothing.

Interviewer: Were these big companies, small companies, in between?

Respondent: All that. But manufacturing companies. He didn't go into a little store. That wasn't who he was. That was it.

Interviewer: Do you remember any of the particularly important companies that he called on? Do you remember them by name?

Respondent: Well, most of them here in Kansas City.

[0:11:56] I don't remember them from out of town. But here in Kansas City, all of them, whether it was Brand and Puritz or whether it was Henry Present, or whether it was the Rose Company. I'd have to think. There were so many in Kansas City. It was really a major hub for all of that.

[0:12:27] And I remember when one of them – I don't remember which one – was manufacturing the garments for TWA.

Interviewer: That was Brand and Puritz.

Respondent: That was Brand and Puritz? They were really a mainstay of his life. He supplied all of the stuff to Brand and Puritz.

Interviewer: Really?

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Brand and Puritz made uniforms for most of the TWA employees, whether they were stewardesses or pilots.

Respondent: All of them.

[0:12:57]

Interviewer: And so then your husband's company would have provided that raw fabric?

Respondent: Right. Fabric, thread, cutting machines, accessories, like if there was something on them that had to be accessorized. All of that.

Interviewer: I see. When you went with him, you would occasionally meet some of these manufacturing company representatives. What were they like?

Respondent: They were like people. They were just nice people. I was just thinking to myself, he was not the only one that did this.

[0:13:30] Because remember, this was a large manufacturing area, and he was not the only one providing these accessories to the garment industry. I think there was somebody by the name of [Loubin]. What was his first name? I don't remember offhand. I'd have to think. But what I'm saying is that he wasn't the only one, nor was my father in law, the only one that was providing.

[0:14:01] Although some of the things they had, they were the only ones that had it, in terms of providing for the garment industry.

Interviewer: Though this was a likeable bunch of people, the manufacturers and their workers?

Respondent: Yes, right. Well, you talked about the garment industry, the meeting – what did you tell me the name of that was?

Interviewer: Kansas City Apparel Association.

[0:14:26]

Respondent: These guys loved each other. They met all the time, and it was not me against you, it was a real affable group of individuals, and they were all different people from the garment industry.

Interviewer: After your husband had been in the company for a while, was he really enjoying it?

Respondent: Well, he stayed there for a period of time, and then he branched out into other things. He did not remain. Because you see, the garment industry in Kansas City kind of dissipated and was not what it was when he first went into it.

[0:15:03] So he had to find other avenues and other venues and other people to – because he was a commission merchant. Actually, that was what his title was. And he had to go find others outside of the garment industry, because it was losing its force, if you will.

Interviewer: When did that start, that he had to branch out?

Respondent: I knew you were going to ask me that, and I'm not sure.

Interviewer: In the fifties?

Respondent: Maybe in the late fifties, early sixties.

[0:15:31]

Interviewer: So he had maybe ten years, 15 years, with the Garry and Company that things went real well?

Respondent: Yeah. And it always remained Garry and Company. You know, Marshall kind of changed it to M. Garry and Company, but it was always Garry and Company, even when he went into other avenues.

Interviewer: When things were going well in the fifties, did he really like the work and liked the company?

Respondent: He loved it.

[0:15:57] And you know, the income was good, and the people were nice, and he loved it.

Interviewer: The company made a good...

Respondent: Good living, yeah.

Interviewer: Good revenue.

Respondent: Yeah, it did.

Interviewer: What happened, then? You said that he had to branch out. Was that because the garment industry began to change and dry up?

Respondent: Yeah, it did, absolutely.

Interviewer: What happened?

Respondent: I don't know whether it was overseas imports that changed the minds of the people here.

[0:16:33] Whether it was just the whole emphasis of the garment industry moved elsewhere, maybe to California. I don't know. I guess the labor market was what directed it to a great degree, and Kansas City lost out. There was no question about it. It wasn't in the sixties, and certainly not in the seventies, what it was in the forties.

[0:17:00] No way.

Interviewer: Do you remember your father in law talking about this, or was he still around at that time?

Respondent: Well, toward the end he was. My father in law had an unfortunate ending. He was hurt in an automobile accident, and so his involvement was cut short. As a matter of fact, Marshall, the day that his father was hurt in the accident, was in Chicago at a convention.

[0:17:36] Not only a convention, but an industry association, looking for new lines and talking to people and seeing where to go. And he had to come back from Chicago when that happened. The first week in January, I think, was the show in Chicago. I think that was right.

Male Voice: At the Merchandise Mart.

Respondent: Thank you, that's where it was.

Interviewer: And then your father in law was no longer involved in the company after?

[0:17:59]

Respondent: Couldn't be. He died.

Interviewer: Oh, he died as a result of the accident?

Respondent: [nods]

Interviewer: Approximately when was that? Do you recall the year?

Respondent: Well, it had to be in the sixties. I'm trying to think. My oldest son Josh was six, and Josh was born in '49, so that was approximately – or maybe Josh was a little older than that.

[0:18:32] Six, seven years old.

Interviewer: Right around 1960?

Respondent: That's what I said. Things began to change dramatically after that. And then of course Marshall took over, so he moved it in his own direction.

Interviewer: Do you recall, was your father in law worried about the company prior to his death?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: He thought everything was going great guns?

Respondent: Fine, yeah.

[0:18:56]

Interviewer: So he had a good living and good fun throughout his life with the company?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: What happened, then, when your husband took over the company? What types of things did he try to do differently?

Respondent: Well, he had to fill the holes for those people that were moving on, changing their mode of operation. And there was a lot of change going on here, there's no question about it.

[0:19:27] It was primarily in the sixties.

Interviewer: What types of things did he do differently?

Respondent: Well, he engaged in representing different kinds of firms. He represented – you name it – linens, furniture. I mean, he just branched out. He just went his own way, because the garment industry had kind of lost its glow.

[0:20:00]

Interviewer: How did your husband feel about that?

Respondent: Poorly. He was very upset over it. He really was. But there was nothing he could do about it, because he was just a little cog in a large wheel that just wasn't turning as efficiently as it had. And he had little children, and he had to go out and make a living. It was just that simple.

Interviewer: Did he talk to you about it a lot?

Respondent: Sure. Not a lot, but he talked to me about it.

[0:20:29] I knew that it was happening, and I knew that things had to change. And he knew that things had to change and change they did.

Interviewer: You knew there was trouble in the garment industry.

Respondent: Yes. We saw it coming.

Interviewer: Could he have done anything?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: Or was it all beyond his...

Respondent: It was totally beyond his scope of influence. Nothing, nothing. And he wasn't terribly upset about it, because it gave him the opportunity to meet new people, go and see new faces.

[0:21:03] His scope was changed. His whole idea of who he was and what was going on changed a great deal. And it was good. It was good for him. He traveled, and he was able to do things that he probably also wanted to do when his dad was alive, but because his father's influence was pretty strong, he didn't. So this was an opportunity to do different things.

[0:21:28]

Interviewer: He was still selling. It was just different types of things that he was selling.

Respondent: Yeah, sold until the day he died. That's who he was. Loved it.

Interviewer: Did he still travel a lot when he was selling furniture?

Respondent: Not as much, because there were thriving people here. It's interesting, the Nebraska Furniture Mart, one of his clients, in the early, early years, he knew Mrs. Blumkin.

Interviewer: Mrs. B.

[0:21:58]

Respondent: Mrs. B. And he was a good friend of hers. Weren't they in Omaha, originally?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: And he loved going up to Omaha, because he had all kinds of friends there. And she was very loyal to him. Very loyal to him.

Interviewer: He knew her before she was 100 years old, probably.

Respondent: He knew her when she was using a golf cart in the factory. Because it got so big, she couldn't walk it, and so she had a golf cart.

Male Voice: That's before Warren Buffett.

[0:22:29]

Respondent: Yes, it was before Warren Buffett. It was. It was her and her kids.

Interviewer: I'm from Nebraska.

Respondent: Oh, well, then you know this.

Interviewer: I sat on, lied on, and slept on Nebraska Furniture.

Respondent: All your life.

Interviewer: Well, I still am, to a degree. And several of my relatives worked for the company.

Respondent: Well, he was a good friend of hers. He really did. He used to go up there, and he would take her out to lunch and all kinds of stuff.

[0:22:59]

Interviewer: Did he continue to service the garment industry as well?

Respondent: As much as there was here, yes. It seems to me, as I remember it, it kind of went downhill quickly. I guess it was the labor market that really hurt it drastically.

Interviewer: Did he tell you what he saw wrong in the industry?

Respondent: No.

[0:23:29]

Interviewer: Do you think he even knew?

Respondent: Do I think he knew? I would assume that he knew or had an idea of what was going on. But we didn't discuss it, because it was his decision as to where he would go and who he would see and who he would deal with. Marshall could sell anything to anybody at any time, so he never felt that he was restricted in where he could go and what he could do.

[0:24:01] And if it wasn't going to be in the garment industry, if the garment industry didn't do for him what he wanted it to do, he went elsewhere. And he did. There was no question about it.

Interviewer: Do you think he loved the garment industry, or did he love selling primarily?

Respondent: He loved selling. He loved selling. He'd get a kick out of it, because if somebody bought into what he wanted – because that was his personality. He loved people, and that's who he was.

[0:24:31]

Interviewer: Now, you say he was active with the industry association here in Kansas City and went to their meetings. So he knew a lot of the people involved in the industry?

Respondent: Oh yeah. Interesting, Regina Pachter, whose husband was a manufacturer, one of the manufacturers, the Pachter Brothers, if you will – can't think of their first names.

[0:24:58]

Male Voice: Meyer?

Respondent: Who's the other one?

Male Voice: I don't remember the other one. I just know Meyer.

Respondent: Okay. Well, it was Regina's husband. She brought me a picture of all the guys from the – you're going to ask me where it is.

Interviewer: No.

Respondent: Oh, I know where it is. We gave it to the archives, the Kansas City Archives, of all the men in the garment industry that he was friendly with. And he was very friendly.

[0:25:28] I don't think it was Meyer. Maybe it was Meyer. And he knew them all.

Interviewer: What were they like?

Respondent: They were like guys, men, and they had a lot in common, and they enjoyed each other's company.

Interviewer: So they weren't a hard-bitten, competitive group in the sense that we sometimes see today?

Respondent: No. No, no, no, they were not.

[0:25:57] They really were all good friends. There was a club here called the Standard Club located in the Ambassador Hotel, I do believe. These guys met two and three times a week and played cards together. Very social. Very social. And Marshall didn't play cards, because Marshall wasn't a card player, but my father in law was a card player, and he was at the Standard Club two and three times a week.

Male Voice: Bridge or poker?

Respondent: Poker.

[0:26:30]

Male Voice: Because we did an interview...

Interviewer: They played bridge.

Male Voice: They played bridge downtown.

Interviewer: Well, where is the Standard Club?

Male Voice: Well, the Ambassador Hotel is on the west side of Broadway, a little bit south of the KC Life Building, at Armour.

Respondent: Right, and it was the top floor. They had the top floor.

Interviewer: The top floor of that building?

Respondent: Of the Ambassador Hotel.

Male Voice: Across from the Congress Building.

Interviewer: Right.

[0:26:57]

Respondent: And then they moved out on Gregory, the Standard Club moved out on Gregory.

Interviewer: So they're not in the garment district, per se.

Respondent: No, not really, but they all met through the garment industry. They all enjoyed each other through the garment industry. So that was the thread that went through that made this thing work. And they loved being together.

Interviewer: You kind of describe a more civil lifestyle, if you will, sort of a more appealing way of life than what we have today.

[0:27:36] Do you ever look back on those years in the fifties and sixties and think that they were pretty good years?

Respondent: Well, I think they were pretty good years for those of us who were raising children and doing all kinds of things. That's who we were.

[0:27:57] But I think that it's the nature of the individual. I think Marshall loved people, so that's what made him successful in what he did. Because he enjoyed the people that he was working with, working for. And I think they were more civil, but I don't know, because I don't know that industry – of course, that industry is gone in Kansas City, which is really kind of a real sadness, but it is gone.

[0:28:26] But the people that were in it at that time were very civil to each other. You never heard the wrangling and the arguing. I'm sure there was. I wasn't in on what was happening on a day to day basis as to how they were working. And I'm sure there were disagreements and arguments and stuff like that, but by and large, they enjoyed each other.

Interviewer: Tell us about the company in the sixties and what happened with the company, ultimately.

[0:29:02]

Respondent: Marshall's company?

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Well, what happened was, with the drying up of the involvement of the garment district and those companies, he had to look elsewhere, and he did. That's what I said – he represented furniture companies, he represented all kinds of people, all kinds. And you're going to ask me the specifics, and I don't remember them.

Interviewer: How did that go? Was he successful at that?

Respondent: Yeah, he was successful.

[0:29:28] Because as I said, Marshall was a born salesman, and he could sell anybody anything. That's the way he was.

Interviewer: How long did the company last?

Respondent: What, B. Garry and Company?

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Until about – well, I'll tell you how long it lasted. As I think back, it lasted until he had to move out of the MEB Building, because it was destroyed. They tore it down.

[0:29:56] Then he went elsewhere. And in doing that, he wasn't part of that place, that garment center. That was no longer. And so whenever that happened, he looked elsewhere and did other things.

Interviewer: Where did the company move to?

Respondent: Where did the company move to? The VFW Building.

Interviewer: On Broadway?

[0:30:29]

Respondent: Mm-hm. He was there for many years. Had an office there and worked out of the VFW Building. Had many friends there too. Knew everybody. But that's where he ended up. Not ended, but that was where they went, to the VFW Building.

Interviewer: Did the company then finally close?

Respondent: Well, it just wasn't anymore. It just wasn't. It was just Marshall Garry and an office with many clients and many people that he represented.

[0:30:57] And it was no longer. It didn't have the same emphasis. The initial emphasis was the garment district, and that disappeared. And it disappeared. Just that simple. So sad.

Interviewer: When did the company come to a final end?

Respondent: Well, it really came to a final end when Marshall passed away, as such. I mean, because he was at the VFW Building for 30 years, easy.

[0:31:27]

Interviewer: When did he pass away?

Respondent: I bet you think I know that exact... I think it's four years ago. Going to be five years ago.

Interviewer: So he was working in the company right up until...

Respondent: Right up until he got sick, right.

Interviewer: Was he very busy at the end?

Respondent: I can't tell you that exactly.

Male Voice: He went to the office every day, though, right?

Respondent: But he was in his office every day. Every single day.

Interviewer: How old was he when he died?

[0:31:55]

Respondent: 81. 82 maybe. We had been married 61 years.

Interviewer: He wasn't real anxious to retire, apparently?

Respondent: Anxious?

Male Voice: Retirement was for sissies, believe me.

Respondent: That was a dirty word. He didn't know how to retire. Marshall didn't play cards. Marshall played some golf, and not well, poorly, but he loved it. He loved it, loved it. He had a foursome of golf buddies that he loved.

[0:32:28] But he didn't know how to retire. What would he do with himself?

Interviewer: Was he still selling right up until the end?

Respondent: By phone, absolutely.

Interviewer: Not in the volume, presumably, that he did years earlier.

Respondent: No, no.

Interviewer: What types of things would he have been selling?

Respondent: I knew you were going to ask me that. Marshall was selling funeral supplies. He had made contact with – how, don't ask me. I don't know. That's why I said he could sell anything to anybody at any time.

[0:33:01] And he met somebody who said to him, you really ought to sell – there's good money... And that's who Marshall was. He was not somebody who was trying to – if I were a rich man. He just loved what he did. And he didn't retire. He couldn't. Everybody else did, but he didn't.

Interviewer: Well, there isn't much of the garment industry left. I don't suppose he was selling anything to them anymore, was he?

Respondent: No.

[0:33:29] No, he was not. There was nobody to sell to in Kansas City. And at that point in time, he wasn't traveling on the road like he did in years past. That was something that was over.

Interviewer: He never sat around and wrung his hands about the demise of the garment industry?

Respondent: No. No, he did not. He felt very badly that it had kind of gone the way of all flesh, if you will, but as I said, I do believe it was the labor market that hurt the whole garment district here.

[0:34:03]

Interviewer: Did he keep in contact with any of the people in the industry, do you know?

Respondent: Sure, yes. Oh, he did. You know who he was very friendly with in the early years? Well, many years. Was Sam Kaplan, who had Kap-Pel Fabrics. That was a whole different part of his life. And that was related to the garment industry in its day, because Sam Kaplan had a thriving business in fabrics.

[0:34:31] And if Marshall needed something that he couldn't get his hands on quickly, he'd go to Sam Kaplan, and Sam Kaplan would help him out. They were very good friends.

Male Voice: They're finally shutting that store on the Plaza, the Kaplan's.

Respondent: Oh, the Kap-Pel? Oh, it's Kaplan's, not Kap-Pel?

Male Voice: Yeah, the retail store.

Respondent: They're closing it? There's nobody to keep it open, I bet.

Male Voice: Well, his son's probably retirement age now. He's my age, in his 60s.

[0:34:58] I was down there and bought some black velvet for some photographs I was taking.

Respondent: Cy Rudnick had a wonderful fabric place, but see, that wasn't Marshall's thing. That was personal, where somebody would go in the retail end of it and buy two yards of velvet, if you will.

Male Voice: Right, exactly.

[0:35:24]

Respondent: And that was not for Marshall. But when he needed a major amount of whatever he needed, he'd go to Sam Kaplan. And they were very, very good friends.

Interviewer: Your husband dealt in, what, train car loads of fabric?

Respondent: Whatever was needed. I was only thinking the other day, these cutting machines that came out of the Maimin Cutting Machine Company, they were one of a kind in the industry.

[0:35:59] Nobody else had them. So that was really a coup, having those, because if somebody came along and had to cut up a train load of fabric, you had to have – you couldn't use a scissor, god knows, so you had to have these wonderful machines. I don't know whatever happened to them. I think there's one in the archives. I think one was salvaged and is in the archives that Sibyl has put together.

[0:36:28] And they sold those machines, and they were very expensive. I don't know what that means in today's world, but they certainly were more expensive than a pair of scissors. And you would see them on flat tables and flat contraptions, and there would be Maimin Cutting Machines on all of those places.

[0:36:54]

Interviewer: Knowing that your husband was heavily involved in the garment industry in the fifties and sixties...

Respondent: And forties.

Interviewer: And forties. Did you attempt to buy clothes that were made in Kansas City? Was that something you thought about?

Respondent: Sure. Did. I remember going to Brand and Puritz, because they made great coats, and I remember buying coats on a Saturday.

[0:37:30] Who was Hyman Brand's son in law? Frances's husband? It's not coming. But anyway, he would take me through the whole factory and show me and say, pick out whatever you want.

Interviewer: Oh really? So you got special treatment?

Respondent: Oh yeah. And as my daughter was growing up, we'd go down there, and she would get special treatment down at Brand and Puritz.

[0:38:00]

Interviewer: Did you still have to buy the stuff?

Respondent: Well, sort of. Not big time.

Interviewer: Did you kind of get a kick out of the fact that your husband probably supplied the raw material.

Respondent: The fabric, that's right. I did. We used to laugh about that. But that was how it went.

Interviewer: Did he ever do any work with Nelly Don, the big dress company?

Respondent: Yes, my father in law did. My father in law, Burt Garry, sold fabric to Nelly Don.

[0:38:31] Because they were big. I forgot about them. And also Stern Slegman and Prins was a big customer of theirs.

Interviewer: I think they did coats, or maybe women's suits, or both.

Respondent: Suits, right. They were customers of both of them, Marshall and Burt. Right, forgot about them. There were so many garment people here. Think about it. My god.

[0:38:56] It was just fabulous. It was wonderful.

Interviewer: Do you think about that when you go down? Or do you go down to 8th and Broadway ever now and then?

Respondent: Every now and then. Sometimes if I'm driving to the airport and I go that way, I do think about that.

Interviewer: What do you think about it?

Respondent: I remember the smell of Folger's coffee down there, which is no longer there, which I miss. And so that was all part of it. That was all part of those buildings. Every one of those buildings had some kind of a...

[0:39:26] The [Tsar] family, the [Tsarlinskys], had a major manufacturing place down there. As I sit here and I think, I think of more people. Do I think about it when I go down? Absolutely. It was a very thriving area. My god. Trucks would come and go and people would come. And I'm sure they were paying them little or no money, but when all these people would go out for lunch, they would all be out on the street.

[0:40:02] There was a place called Tallman's Grill. You couldn't get into it. You couldn't get into it, am I right?

Male Voice: Right, we were talking with Mrs. Epstein the other day.

Interviewer: We just talked to a lady about Tallman Grill.

Respondent: Across the street. But that wasn't a manufacturing place.

Interviewer: It was a hardware store.

Respondent: It was a hardware store, and what a hardware store.

Interviewer: Well, it still is, actually.

Respondent: No, I mean, it was... But everybody went to Tallman's Grill for lunch. Couldn't get in the front door.

[0:40:28]

Interviewer: Well, do you feel sad about this?

Respondent: Of course.

Interviewer: Or do you figure this is the way life evolves?

Respondent: I think of that in both regards. I think this is the way life evolves. I think it's too bad that life evolves in that way, because there are some areas in the United States where whatever it is they were doing didn't disappear. It's true. But I mean, I know that my dad had a factory in New York.

[0:41:00] My dad was in the glass business, and they used to make glass specialties. And he must have had 30, 40, 50 people working for him at a time, particularly during the war. That's all gone. It's all gone. So there's a lot of change certainly all over the world, in how things have changed.

Interviewer: Do you think younger people around Kansas City have any conception of how Kansas City was once a major garment producer?

[0:41:33]

Respondent: None. Absolutely none. I would venture to say my own kids don't even know that. I really don't know. I can't say with any kind of confidence that my kids knew that – maybe a little, but not seriously.

Male Voice: Never went downtown to meet their daddy or their grandpa?

[0:42:00]

Respondent: Yeah. So, that was all part of their world, but it wasn't something that they retained. I mean, my kids are old today. They're all parents and they have children and grandchildren. But I don't think that's part of their – I'd have to ask them. I don't think it's part of their psyche today. I really don't.

Interviewer: When they were growing up, were you members of Beth Shalom?

Respondent: B'nai Jehudah.

[0:42:29]

Male Voice: And they did all of their Hebrew schools through that?

Respondent: All B'nai Jehudah. I started at Beth Shalom, and I was there for about two or three months, because my dad was very active in the synagogue in New York. And I was there maybe three or four times, and Marshall turned to me and he said, we don't belong. You don't understand a word that's going on here. And so we moved to B'nai Jehudah and stayed there until helped start Beth Torah.

[0:42:57]

Male Voice: Right.

Respondent: That's me.

Interviewer: Do you think more should be done to preserve the history of the garment industry in Kansas City?

Respondent: I think yes, I do. Because I think it was a major part of what – I don't know how much you've interviewed Betty Brand and that part of the family, but there are a lot of people that should be remembered for what they contributed to this city.

[0:43:29] I think it was something that this city should not forget. I mean, there was TWA at one point in time, and every outfit, every uniform, every one of them was made right here in River City, if you will. They were all made here.

[0:43:56] Coats were made here. They were exported to all parts of the United States. Things were done here. It was a thriving, exciting kind of an industry. And it's gone. And I think it's sad that there isn't any kind of acknowledgement that it happened here, and that young people like my children's ages... I'd have to ask my kids, actually. I've never done that, and I probably should. Must ask my son Paul. He would remember.

[0:44:29] And maybe Steph. I don't know, because she was young. She was the youngest. But I think it's very sad. Is there a plaque downtown?

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: I think there is, isn't there? That what's his name had something to do with?

Interviewer: Fried?

Respondent: Thanks.

Male Voice: Oh, Joellen.

Respondent: SuEllen.

Male Voice: SuEllen Harvey.

Interviewer: A number of people.

Male Voice: Harvey was really the guy behind the garment industry museum.

[0:45:01]

Respondent: Right. And whatever came of it?

Male Voice: I thought we had one, but nobody goes there.

Interviewer: Well, we're not going to discuss that with the tape rolling.

Male Voice: Oh, okay.

Interviewer: Actually, I think we've come to the end of the interview.

Male Voice: Okay, I'm going to stop tape then.

ADDENDUM:

Interviewer: Welcome to another interview for the Kansas City Garment Industry Project. Today is August 8, 2011.

[0:00:28] I'm John Dvorak, and I'm interviewing Eileen Garry, whose husband, Marshall, operated a company in Kansas City called B. Garry and Company. We interviewed Eileen several months ago, and this is an addendum to that interview. The videographer is Mark Titus. Eileen, you had mentioned earlier an important garment company in New York called Maimin. But you didn't elaborate on it, and we need to get some more information about it. What was the company?

[0:01:02]

Respondent: Well, I felt that the Maimin Company needed to be included in this project because what they had to offer to the garment industry here in Kansas City was major, namely that it was the Maimin Cutting Machine Company. They had created or invented, if you will, an object called a Maimin Cutting Machine, which was used in most of the factories because this machine was able to cut around patterns and make it much easier for those working in the factories.

[0:01:42] And my father in law, Burt Garry, and my husband, Marshall Garry, represented the Maimin Cutting Machine Company out of New York for years and years and years. And it brought to the garment industry a possibility of doing not only better work but much more precise work when they cut patterns to make the clothes.

[0:02:09] Just that simple. And I had left that out of the last interview and I felt badly about that because the Maimin Cutting Machine Company and the Maimin family in New York was a major portion of what was involved in the Garry Company.

[0:02:27]

Interviewer: Do you recall the history of the Maimin Company at all? Were they a long time company or did they spring up?

Respondent: I think that they were a long time company but had refined what they had created in the years that my father in law went to New York and represented them. I guess it was in the thirties, the forties. When the garment industry's ability to create all this wonderful work was at its height.

[0:03:00]

Interviewer: So you think he represented them maybe as far back as the late thirties?

Respondent: I do.

Interviewer: Certainly in the forties.

Respondent: Certainly in the forties. Absolutely.

Interviewer: I see. Did you ever hear from your father in law or your husband as to how the relationship came about?

Respondent: Well, you know, I think this was like a group of individuals that knew each other, one from the other from the other, and when my father in law would go to New York, he would seek out those people that would make his little business more efficient, more workable.

[0:03:35] And Maimin Cutting Machine Company was a big part of it. It was so important that when Marshall and I got married, all the Maimins were invited to our wedding.

Interviewer: Really?

Respondent: Mm-hm.

Interviewer: So you actually knew them personally?

Respondent: I met them, right.

Interviewer: Did they market their equipment all over the United States?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: It would have been a particularly important thing here in Kansas City because of all the companies here.

[0:04:02]

Respondent: I think most of the companies here in Kansas City who manufactured within the garment district had Maimin cutting machines on their floor.

Interviewer: Do you recall what the machine looked like and how it operated?

Respondent: Yes, I do, but I can't tell you. It was about yea big. It had a post in it that cut the patterns.

[0:04:29] And you would work it by hand. Well, it was an electric machine, which had electric power, but which made cutting the patterns and cutting the fabric that much easier than it was in years before that.

Interviewer: Do you know how they would have done it in years before that?

Respondent: By scissors, I guess.

Interviewer: Oh, so this was a step of automation for the industry.

Respondent: Right, right.

[0:04:58]

Interviewer: Was it considered top of the line, the Cadillac of its type?

Respondent: Yes. They used to talk about a Maimin Cutting Machine. They didn't talk about the cutting machine, they talked about the Maimin Cutting Machine, because it was unique unto itself for what it did.

Interviewer: And the Maimins invented it?

Respondent: That's right.

Interviewer: So how did that work, then, for your husband and your father in law? Did they sell those machines and sell parts for those machines?

[0:05:29]

Respondent: All that.

Interviewer: All over?

Respondent: Well, particularly here in the Kansas City area. I don't think they went outside the area. You know, this is the old story. This was their territory, and this is where they worked, and this is where they operated. But the Maimin Cutting Machine was a very important part of the industry. I'd venture to say that

most of the garment individuals in Kansas City who were manufacturers had Maimin Cutting Machines in their operation.

[0:06:05]

Interviewer: They would have many of them, I suppose?

Respondent: You know, I don't know that. I think they were quite expensive. Now, don't ask me how expensive, because I really don't know that, but I do know that they were expensive, and I do know that they didn't have 20 Maimin Cutting Machines in a factory. As I remember, if they had one or two, they had a lot.

[0:06:28] And the operators had to be taught how to use them, because it wasn't just using a pair of scissors. It was using a machine that had to be guided and had to be instructed in terms of how to use it. That I know.

Interviewer: Was the Maimin business a significant part of your husband and father in law's company?

Respondent: Yes. You know, in addition to all the other things they did. But they always talked about the Maimin Cutting Machine, so it must have been an integral part, an important part, of their business.

[0:07:02]

Interviewer: Do you know for what period of time it was important? All the way through the life of the industry?

Respondent: I would assume that it was through the life of the industry. That would be my gut feeling, that that's what it was. I was a youngster. Did I pay enough attention to that? Of course not. But they were important, because they talked about them all the time.

Interviewer: Did you ever see the Maimins in the years after your marriage?

[0:07:28]

Respondent: Yes. When we went to New York. Because you see, they used to go to New York. There was an apparel association — I'm sure you have that on record — in Kansas City, of all the manufacturers. Well, my father in law more almost than Marshall was involved in that. And he would go to New York, and they would always see the Maimins. They became very good friends. I'm telling you, they were invited to my wedding.

[0:07:56]

Interviewer: What do you remember about them? Were they nice people or just normal folks?

Respondent: They were just people. They were just nice guys who came. What's interesting is that they had a daughter. One of them had a daughter – I think her name was Patsy — I'm not sure of that — who dated Marshall. So there was a real relationship with – I think it was Patsy Maimin.

Interviewer: This was before you?

Respondent: Yep. It was before me.

Interviewer: That's great.

[0:08:28]

Respondent: But I wanted you to know that that particular piece of machinery within the garment district was a very important piece of historical significance because it made a difference in how they produced their garments.

Interviewer: Well, it sounds like it just helped them in terms of speed, efficiency, profits.

Respondent: I'm sure that was true.

Interviewer: Everything.

Respondent: Right.

[0:08:57] And after we left, I said to myself, you never even talked about the Maimins.

Interviewer: Any idea if there's any of those machines still around town?

Respondent: I have no clue. I thought I saw one at the archives at the Jewish Community Center, but I could be wrong. Through Brand and Puritz. I'm not sure of that, but it seems to me I remember seeing one. But more than that, I don't know. We ought to try and trace it.

[0:09:28]

Interviewer: We ought to have one of those machines on display someplace in town.

Respondent: Yes, we should.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you'd like to add about Maimin?

Respondent: That's it.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you'd like to add about your husband's company?

Respondent: No, I think that's it. I think we pretty well covered it the last time, and I think we did – as you said, we did a fairly good job. It was unique unto itself in those days, and today, it could never survive.

MVSC-GARMENT-Garry-Eileen-1

Interviewer: We're done.