

[0:00:29]

Male Voice: Are those the original patches for the NASA thing?

Steve: No, the original patches were all done with four inches, and these are all based on three-inch patches. Now, what this was was, years ago, we represented a company that did a number of the NASA patches, so they were authorized to send out this group, which at that point, was all of the launches that they had done.

[0:00:54] And it's just something I put on the wall years ago and kind of kept it there. It's interesting, because they were a very large emblem company, and I'm trying to think – it wasn't the lunar landing. It was one or two before that, and I'm not sure which one it was, but when they got authorization, they had almost every shop — they were getting authorized to do another patch and another patch. So what they did was just reduce them in scale.

Male Voice: So you represented this company? You didn't make these here yourself?

[0:01:27]

Steve: No. We are heavily involved in embroidery, but...

Male Voice: What questions did they ask you before?

Steve: Basically, what we did was kind of a happenstance conversation of what was going on when I entered the market, which was like in the early sixties and kind of the progression of the market from that point on.

[0:01:59] I also gave them some pointers and some information about what happened prior to my coming into the market, only because of the knowledge that was passed on to me. [Dory De Angelo enters]

Female Voice: I want to tell you that both of my grandfathers had a business in the city market. One of them had a stall.

[0:02:29] And my mother's father was named [Basil], and he had a bank and a drug store, and I don't know what all. This is all before my time, but I come down here and think of my grandfather.

Steve: That's right, it's old home week, huh?

Female Voice: Yes.

[setup]

[0:03:27]

Male Voice: So I just have a couple of quick questions. Are you the third generation?

Steve: I am the second generation. My son is in this business. He'll be third generation.

[setup, introduction]

[0:05:07]

Dory: Well, give me your name.

Steve: Steve Hammer.

Dory: And what is this business?

Steve: The Hammer Brothers has kind of evolved. Originally, it was a company that sold primarily to the apparel industry here in the Midwest, primarily in the Kansas City area.

[0:05:28] The business was started about 1937, 1938 by my father. He started off by representing a couple of companies out of New York that needed representation in this market area. And his brother came into the business in 1942, and then [unintelligible] – his brother was Harold Hammer. Then his brother in law, Lou [Suede] came into the business after World War II.

[0:05:59] And they steadily built a very nice business in the Kansas City area selling threads, linings, primarily catering to the coat industry, to the ladies' dress industry, maternity wear, and boys' wear here in the city.

Dory: Where was the first plant, factory? Was it here?

Steve: Well, we didn't have a factory initially.

[setup]

[0:07:29]

Dory: Give your name.

Steve: Steve Hammer.

Dory: Do you have a middle name?

Steve: Steven Jay Hammer.

Dory: Were you named after somebody, or did they just come up with that name?

Steve: They just came up with that name.

Dory: So your father founded the company.

Steve: Yes.

[0:07:57]

Dory: Where was it first located, do you know?

Steve: Actually, before he founded this business, he did work in the trade for a period of about six months working for another gentleman who had an office at 905 Broadway. He broke away from him because he'd been approached by some people in New York to represent them to work with them and sell their products here in the Kansas City area. At that time, he was still located at 905 Broadway, and then later moved to 311 West 8th Street.

[0:08:35] And then they moved to a building across the street at 312 West 8th Street. After that, in 1985, we moved the business to the current location here, 407 Grand.

Dory: When was this? When did your family first move to Kansas City?

Steve: Well, my father moved from Bridgeport, Connecticut.

[0:08:59] Prior to that, about six years before he was born, my grandfather relocated from Russia to the United States, and my father was born, as I said, in Bridgeport, Connecticut. My mother was from [Sir], Poland, which I don't believe is on the map anymore.

[0:09:26] Her parents moved here. She was at that time, I believe, one or two years old. So she grew up in America. The side of her family was in the bakery business. I'm sure you remember Cake Box Bakeries?

Dory: Oh gosh, yes.

Steve: That was my grandfather. That's my mother's father. Ben Pasternak and later his son Sam.

Dory: How did they get into this?

[0:09:55]

Steve: My father started actually working for somebody else, saw the opportunities, and some of the people that they had worked with in New York contacted him to come out on his own and work for them individually. And that was the beginning of the business. He worked for about four or five years in the Kansas City area for those people. Then while the war was going on, his brother had been working for a company called Brand and Puritz, a very large coat manufacturing house here in Kansas City.

[0:10:28] And he had to travel to Atchison, to a plant in Atchison, Kansas, and during the winter, it got a little bit rough and so he decided hey, I'd be better off in Kansas City. And at that time, my father asked him to come to Kansas City

and join him in the business. And when he joined him in the business, that was the very beginning of Hammer Brothers. About a year later, they incorporated, which was I think 1942 they incorporated.

[0:10:58]

Dory: Why do you think Kansas City became a great center for making clothes?

Steve: Probably more than any single reason was location, as weird as that may sound. There are a number of small towns out in the Midwest that were not being properly serviced by companies out of the east. It was more difficult for them to get goods. When you go back to the early days of this industry, a lot of them were dry goods manufacturers that expanded into manufacturing because they had everything available to them and they could get their hands on it, and a lot of the industry grew out of that process.

[0:11:45]

Dory: Where did they get the startup money? Did they get loans from banks or did the family just have a little nest egg?

Steve: Well, in the early days, I really can't tell you where that money came from, but there were some very prominent bankers in the Kansas City area that were very helpful to the garment industry. The Schultz family knew the industry, they knew the problems of the industry.

[0:12:10]

When I say that, the problems of the industry is that many, for instance, coat manufacturers, they had to build their product line for a period of approximately eight months before they could go to market. Well, that required a lot of capital, because they had to not only buy goods and make the goods, but then they had to hold them in stock and store them until it was time to ship them.

[0:12:31]

So it was an expensive process. Many bankers didn't understand the process and didn't want to get involved in it. As far as they were concerned, it wasn't turning their inventory fast enough. The Schulz family was, as I said, very instrumental in that.

Dory: How did you know that what you were making today would be sold for sure, say, six months from that time?

[0:12:54]

And were you or the rest of the manufacturers caught with merchandise that didn't sell?

Steve: That did happen, but I think basically, when you take a look at it, you saw certain fashion trends develop, primarily on the East Coast or even outside of the country. And Kansas City was basically replicating those styles. And

when you're eight months away from buying a coat, that's hard to do, but you saw what was going on in the previous year.

[0:13:25] So you copied what was big the previous year, and that kind of perpetuated itself.

Dory: Was the name always Hammer, or did the name change?

Steve: No, it was Hammer Brothers. As soon as my father's brother put it together, it became Hammer Brothers.

Dory: So they moved from on Broadway, and then where did they move from there?

Steve: They went over to 311 West 8th Street.

[0:14:01]

Dory: And then?

Steve: Then across the street to 312 West 8th Street. They weren't anxious to leave 311 West 8th, but Brand and Puritz had three of the floors and needed the fourth floor, so it was time for them to go.

Dory: How did they recruit your workers? Did you advertise? How did you figure out if you needed six seamstresses or whatever?

Steve: A lot of it was through the newspaper, strictly through the newspaper.

[0:14:28] And then again, a lot of it was word of mouth, because if you can imagine, at that time, there were a number of buildings in the garment area — which you could say that was a select area, probably, of six, eight blocks. And in that area, there was a lot of machines that were running all the time. And if one person came to work here, they knew five people in other plants that would be available as well. So a lot of times, it was just recruiting from within the ranks.

[0:14:56]

Dory: I assume in the early times, it wasn't unionized, but at some point, did you have to go into the union?

Steve: We did not have to go into the union. There were union shops in the city, and there were a lot of shops that got away without being involved in the union. The union still had a very, very strong prominence here in the Kansas City area.

Dory: Where did you get the supplies, like the cloth, and how did you get the supplies to make these things?

[0:15:24]

Steve: You mean where did the manufacturers get their supplies?

Dory: Yes.

Steve: New York was still a hub, and the New York industry had been established for many, many years before the Kansas City market even was thought of. But people here that knew that they had to get fabrics in order to sell it, whether it be to tailors or a small shop, they would go to New York to get these fabrics. And generally, as dry goods sellers, a lot of those fabrics kind of waned in time, because people wanted things that were a little bit more exciting, a little bit fresher, newer.

[0:16:02] Something different was in the market, and everybody wanted something that was different. So there became pilgrimages to the city of New York, and a lot of times, there were shows that were done in New York. Coat people went to the Outerwear Show, which was the National Outerwear Association. And they would go to that show. It was one week, six days, in the city of New York.

[0:16:26] It was really a magnificent show in those days. By comparison to what shows became during the fifties, sixties, and seventies, it was not much of a show, but in the meantime, provided them a very concise area to look at garments that other people were making to see the types of fabrics that they would be using in the future to deal directly with the fabric sellers, the woolen mills. They were all there.

Dory: Was it sometimes tense to be sure you got the material for the garments on time, that you were ready?

[0:17:02]

Steve: It was always a problem. A lot of companies worked very hard in order to have fabric come in at the right time. You mentioned the financing problem, and that's another part of it, because if you sit there and you have a number of vendors that are looking to be paid on a timely basis, you want to be sure the fabric got in, got made, and hopefully out the door as soon as possible.

[0:17:28] But as I mentioned, a lot of times, we were waiting a long time before the garments would be shipped.

Dory: When your grandfather started the business...

Steve: My father started the business.

Dory: Your father, okay. Was the Union Station built by the time, or were they still using the station in the North Bottoms?

Steve: The tunnel to the Bottoms was still open, I think, as late as the early fifties, so Union Station, I believe was built long before, about the time he got in the business, 1926, 1927.

[0:18:07] I'm not sure.

Dory: I'm not either. I'll look it up. But I wondered if the old Union Depot, it was called, which was the first big station – and it was kind of ratty, I guess. And that brought in not only – brought in and out, but not only the cattle could be sent out, and that really built the prosperity of a lot of Kansas City.

[0:18:33] And I'm sure somebody in your family was aware of that.

Steve: That could be. I'm not aware.

Dory: Okay. Well, how many employees did the first factory have?

Steve: Well, actually, when they first started the factory was just after World War II, so the industry had been established for a long time.

[0:18:58] It was a situation where there was a definite need and a lot of the dress manufacturers in the city, as well as the coat and suit people, were looking for accessory items that could be made of the same fabric that they were using in the garment. So a couple of the manufacturers said, you know, to my father and to Harold, his brother, that if they could put together something like that, it would be very helpful, because they wouldn't have to send the fabric all the way to New York, have it made and shipped back here.

[0:19:31] So that was kind of the impetus for it, and then when Lou Suede came back from the war, the factory really prospered. That's when a lot of the dress manufacturers here began to incorporate a belt into almost every garment they made, whether it was a belt or a collar trim or extraneous decorations that were put onto the garments. A lot of that they didn't have the equipment to do in their own plants, so they would send it to us to do.

[0:19:57]

Dory: So your company was really founded after the Depression in the thirties?

Steve: Yes.

Dory: So you didn't have that downtime.

Steve: That's correct.

Dory: Well, how did you get your workers? Well, we talked about that. Did you have a training period? Did you have to train them to your equipment or did they automatically know about it?

Steve: Well, most of the sewing operations – if somebody was sewing a dress or sewing a belt, it's basically the same thing, so the amount of education necessary to do something that is minimal.

[0:20:36] It's a majority of teaching them the guidance system and how to keep their hands away from the needle.

Dory: At the height of your business, how many employees did you have?

Steve: I don't recall the exact amount, but at one time, the plant, I believe, employed about 32 people.

[0:20:58]

Dory: How did you organize your salespeople? How did you find them? Were they just around, or did you have to see somebody in New York and get them to come out?

Steve: No, the original salesforce was my father and Harold, and they would go plant the plant throughout the city and work it on a daily basis, come back to the office, fill the orders. They had one or two people working for them at that time. When we started our manufacturing facility, we started with the newspaper.

[0:21:33] We brought in a couple of sewers. As a matter of fact, there was a gentleman after World War II that came here that was a refugee from the war, had been in a concentration camp. They wanted him in the worst way. His name was Dave [Frecker]. Very, very nice gentleman. And the factory was booming at that time, and they brought him in, and he recruited people through people more than anything else, but the newspaper, that was the only other alternative.

[0:22:03] The union was also helpful at a later point, because the union did all this with people, moving people from plant to plant.

Dory: Did you ever have just an individual woman who wanted, as you probably maybe do now, who needed maybe some certain collar or something? Did you ever sell to the individual?

Steve: At that time, no.

Dory: But you do now?

Steve: No. Well, we do sell... We'll leave that question out there.

[0:22:31] The problem with it is this. We sell to distributors, and not that we don't welcome the public, we do, but it's disruptive to our business. If you can imagine, if we're going to do cut pieces for an embroidery shop who wants

300,000 pieces, and somebody wants to come and buy 100 pieces, that just turns everything upside down. There's no way you can charge them enough for what you can sell them.

[0:23:01] We don't do things to encourage it, let's put it that way.

Dory: I forgot to ask you this before, but how can you calculate today what will sell in six months? I asked you that before, but I'm not sure I understood that.

Steve: Are you talking about from the design standpoint, or the products that we sell at Hammer Brothers?

Dory: Well, both I guess.

Steve: Okay, well, the reason I say that is because Hammer Brothers has changed.

[0:23:27] We no longer have a belt factory. We're no longer involved with the fashion accounts. There's no fashion accounts left, for the most part. There's a couple very, very small shops in town, but that's not our business. Our business has changed, and it's changed because we had the need to change. At one time, it was all apparel. Today, we do nothing in apparel. All of ours is really related to the embroidery side of the business and also to dry cleaners and tailor shops.

[0:23:57] So it's a much different business. Not sure that answered the question.

Dory: It's all right. How can you calculate how many pieces that you have to make? Do you just wait until the order comes in?

Steve: We have been very fortunate, because we've been able to maintain a workforce that's very flexible for us. That's number one. But number two, they have an amazing capacity to step up and do whatever is necessary. When we first got involved in doing the backings for embroidery, it was actually my son and myself and, like I said, we'd go out and sell them and we'd come back and cut them on a very small table.

[0:24:40] And today, we have very large tables that can accommodate large production runs. And as a normal rule, we have a certain number of customers that we know are pretty much going to buy certain amounts of that. When we have time, we cut ahead, but generally, we cut to order, and we can turn orders in about two or three days.

[0:24:59]

Dory: You said this was right after the Second World War, but have the different warfare things we've got involved with – that has no influence on your business?

Steve: Not really, no.

Dory: You didn't have to make the braid on the berets of the captains or something?

Steve: No.

[0:25:26]

Dory: What was downtown like, if you can remember, when this all started for you? What was downtown like?

Steve: Well, you know, I guess it was more or less in my blood all along, but when I first started working down here, I think that was the interesting part about it. It was an exciting place. It was exciting because of the personalities involved, it was exciting because you were dealing with people that I looked up to for years and years and all of a sudden, it was my opportunity to work with them.

[0:25:55] But in addition to that, there's an energy in a sewing room, and it's an exciting thing. And as a matter of fact, the last time we talked, one of the things that I mentioned was the fact that you could walk down the street during the summertime, with the open windows of the factories, and you could hear the humming of the sewing machines. And it was really a neat feeling.

Dory: And downtown Kansas City has so much entertainment too, all the movie theaters and bars and things. My father was a bartender in one of those.

[0:26:26] So do you remember after work, that you hung out somewhere?

Steve: Well, there were spots that were hangouts that existed. I think really, it was more the day traffic hangouts. One of the, I think, fondest memories I have is a place called Tallman's Bar and Grill, and there was no bar. It was strictly a grill. And Maury Talman was the owner of Tallman's, and most of the people on 8th Street or Central or Broadway, a lot of people would come in there for their lunch hour.

[0:27:03] And the lunch hour started about 11:30 and go to about 2:00. And you'd see anybody and everybody from the trade in there. It was quite an exciting place.

Dory: What happened when the decline really started, when they were getting clothes and so forth from overseas? When was that? Was that in the seventies?

Steve: Yes, actually in the late seventies.

[0:27:30] Prior to that, we saw some problems develop really because fashion changes affected it. Either fashion change or the types of garments. Ladies' dresses

really went through a tough period in the mid-seventies, and as a result, we started to lose some of the dress trade here at that point in time.

[0:27:56] But when the imports first started coming into the United States, I remember probably the oldest recollection I have of a gentleman named Abe Yeddis, who owned Pioneer Cap Company. And it was a very large cap company here in Kansas City, and Abe said to me, he said, Steve, you know something, the world's changing. And at that time, he was buying caps out of Japan. And it was kind of a wakeup call to me.

[0:28:30] Because up until that point, we had heard that a lot of people on the East Coast were starting to kind of get involved with imported garments or hats or whatever, but it was a situation where he was telling me directly, this is going to be my production in the future. And it was a loss for me, because it was a large account, number one. Number two, I think Abe was one of the guys that I really looked up to in the industry.

[0:28:58] And I knew that he was at the forefront of what was happening. And that had to be about 1976 when he told me that. It was something that stuck in my mind, and every time I talked to a customer, I'm like, are you involved in imports? Oh no, we're not getting involved in imports. Well, those that didn't get involved in the imports went very quickly.

[0:29:28] Some of the others had the opportunity to be comingling their product line with imported product line, and it helped them stave off going out of business for some time. But within the next 15, 20 years, it was all gone.

Dory: And that would also be true about the department stores. Or that decline started earlier than that.

Steve: Yeah.

Dory: And to see downtown sort of decay in many ways.

[0:29:59] I'm sure your feeling about that – probably me too – is, what's happening here? Tell me where you lived when you were young. What neighborhood?

Steve: We lived on 72nd and Highland, and I want to say about 1952, we moved to 74th and Cherry. And then in 1960, we moved to Kansas to Rienhardt Lane.

Dory: Did you go to high school?

Steve: My first two years were at Southwest High School, and my last two years were Shawnee Mission East.

Dory: Did you ever have any desire to go to college?

[0:30:56]

Steve: I went to UMKC for four years.

Dory: Me too. But I didn't go four years. I went two years. I was very interested in the theater and spent my time there and then went off to New York. Well, what was it like to be Jewish in Kansas City in those days? Was there some apartness, segregated in some sense? Or not?

[0:31:27]

Steve: I think what I went through in my early years was the idea that I had that being Jewish was being different. Now, whether that was passed on or acquired, I don't know, but it is something that until I probably got into college – not that I was standoffish because of it. I was aware of it.

[0:31:57] And during high school and then into college, I realized that I am who I am, whether I'm Jewish or whatever I am. And it also allowed me to be a little bit more observant about other people having the same type of issues. And I think that in today's world, prejudice is a terrible thing, just a terrible thing. It was then too.

[0:32:28]

Dory: Did you have places to go that you felt – I also acted at the Jewish Community Center Theater over there on Linwood, and I was envious, actually, of some of the Jewish people, because they all seemed to be bonded so well. And even though I'm Italian, I've never bonded with my background.

Steve: That's interesting, because the Jewish people used to think the Italians were the same type of bonders that the Jewish people were.

[0:32:56]

Dory: Well, I think some of them were. I think it was just my family maybe. But I can remember my uncle lived with us for a while. He was a baker, and when people tell me, didn't you have pizza when you were a kid?, I said no, my uncle worked for a Jewish bakery on Linwood, and we had bagels. And there's some identifying things you have in your life that make you aware of when you were very young, either deciding, as you said, we all have our friends, and we all have our little conclaves where we go when we're young.

[0:33:39]

Steve: Well, this leads to a little different issue, but kind of hand in hand. Going to New York and working in New York was a very Jewish thing. I can remember the first trip I went to New York was with my father, and he had yahrzeit for his father.

[0:34:00] And we worked all day long, and there was a garment industry synagogue where he went to say his prayers, his yahrzeit prayers, that night. And it was something that stuck with me my entire life.

Dory: It's like home away from home.

Steve: Yes, we are a small community, but we thrive everywhere.

Dory: So do you have children?

Steve: I have three boys.

Dory: Are they in the business?

Steve: My youngest son is in the business doing very, very well, teaching me so much I can't believe it.

[0:34:32]

Dory: What is his name?

Steve: Daniel.

Dory: Is he teaching you about computers and electronics?

Steve: He's teaching me about this business. He is. And I'm just amazed by him. He's a very bright young guy. He's taken to the business very well. When he came into the business, we had spent a couple years discussing it, and I had turned him down a number of times.

[0:34:56]

And the reason I turned him down was obviously because as the industry began to dissipate, there were certain things that we did in order to continue making a living. And one of the things that we did was we kept going from one industry to another. When the dress industry was gone, we didn't mess with it. There was nothing left to mess with. We spent more time with the coat industry. When that industry began to fail, a new industry kind of came up, which was promotional garments and headwear.

[0:35:27]

And we got involved in that, and then that began to decline in later years. We went into other areas. The amount of changes that we had made over the years is endemic. But when he wanted to come into the business, it was a situation where we did not really feel we were going to make it. We were doing everything that we could to try to stay in business and I didn't feel that it would be smart to have my son come into a business when there's so many other great opportunities out there.

[0:36:02]

He went to work for somebody else, and after about a year and a half, he came to me and said, dad, I know there's problems. And I can remember saying to him at that time, five of our top six accounts probably will not

survive. And he said, I don't care. We'll find a way to make things work. Now, a couple years prior to that, we have started in the backing business, which is supply to the embroidery trade.

[0:36:31] And it was moving along, but he came in and took hands on it, and he's built it into a very, very nice business. It's been fun.

Dory: How many years have you been here on Grand?

Steve: Since 1985, so we've been here 23 years.

Dory: And you've seen this area change a lot.

Steve: Oh my yes. When we came in here, most of the devastation that had occurred in the market was pretty much behind us.

[0:37:00] But it was almost desolate down here, and the building that we – this building. We had looked at a lot of buildings at a time and had all kinds of difficulties with every building we looked at. And this one had the electric, that had this whole floor space that we needed. We can easily segregate the factory that we had at that time from the office section. It worked out perfect for us. So we're glad that we made that decision.

[0:37:28]

Dory: Where do you go from here? Or you don't want to go from here?

Steve: No, just the opposite. We're building our business, we're looking at new things. We keep changing. At one time, when we went into the backing business, the backing business to us at that time was to supply a number of of the large either contract embroiders – in other words people that did embroidery for other people – or companies that were doing embroidery within their home business.

[0:37:57] In other words, somebody was a distributor of garments, for instance, Rawling Sporting Goods. And they needed to have supplies, so they put in their own embroidery shop. When they put in their own embroidery shop, we had supplies for them. So there were still a few manufacturers left. The athleticwear people were still pretty strong. And that helped us get into the business. But that has changed, and today, a big part of our business is dealing with the retail. Now, we don't deal with retail individuals, we sell to the distributors that sell to retail.

[0:38:30] So it's a different type of business, but we're also trying to change that. We're looking for new avenues, because when we started, we had no idea what the retail was even about. And we've been there, we've done that, and now we're looking for other channels as well.

Dory: What would you advise somebody who's going into a new business? Not necessarily the business you're in, but what hazards, or how do you prepare people for that?

[0:38:57] If somebody has a love to do something.

Steve: You're asking what I would give them as advice?

Dory: Yes.

Steve: Fall in love with what you do. It makes life a lot easier. When you wake up in the morning, you think, I'm going to work, and I'm going to do what I want to do. Try to be your own person.

Male Voice: Can I ask you a question? Is Daniel in the building? Could I get both of you in here? Is that a picture of your father?

[0:39:29]

Steve: That is my father.

Male Voice: I'd like to get the three of you together, your father and the two of you, as a round of photographs. [setup]

[0:40:11]

Male Voice: So this is Daniel. How old are you, Daniel?

Daniel: 36.

Male Voice: Come on in. I wanted to get you and your dad standing next to your grandfather's picture here. Would you do that for us?

Daniel: As long as there's no speaking involved. [taking picture]

Male Voice: So your dad says you saved this business.

[0:40:55]

Daniel: I don't know. I gave him someone to go to lunch with.

Male Voice: What do your other brothers do?

Daniel: Brian works for Yahoo, and the middle brother works for John Hancock, financial planning.

Male Voice: So Brian, is he in California?

Daniel: He's in Dallas.

Male Voice: And your other brother?

Daniel: Here in Kansas City.

Male Voice: It must have been a big thrill for you to have one of your sons join you in the business and to have a love for it as well.

[0:41:29]

Steve: Well, when we talk about love and enjoying what you're doing, I was not enjoying what I was doing at that point. We were fighting, we were plugging holes.

Male Voice: Which is why you wanted to discourage him from getting involved?

Steve: That's exactly why I wanted to discourage him. And when I finally gave into him, I kind of resigned myself to the fact of que sera sera, whatever will be will be. And fortunately, it took us about a year and a half, and by the end of that year and a half, we knew we had a business, and we knew we were on the right track.

[0:42:02]

Male Voice: My son came in to work with me, and it's been such a boon. I couldn't tell you how happy it makes me.

Steve: He brings so much. First of all, he's up to date on all this technology, things that I wouldn't even approach, he does and snaps his fingers and it's done. He's better organized.

[0:42:27]

Sibyl: An old guy like you is someone who has information that other people don't have, and now I understand, although I didn't hear everything you said, but now I understand why Harvey and all the others said that we should start here with you to get the layout of the garment industry.

[0:42:58] And you do have that amount of information that other people don't have.

Steve: There's a difference in my situation, and the difference is this. I was in a situation where I worked with all of the people, whereas they worked within their own corporate structures. And it did give me insight into people's personality, what they were doing within the corporations. Yeah, I did.

[0:43:31] I don't know that I would be the expert.

Sibyl: Well, that's a very good answer. Yes, very, very good answer. Dory, did you talk about the banks?

Dory: Well, a little bit, yes, we did.

Steve: And I didn't even mention People's Bank and the [Pax] influence. That's also involved.

Sibyl: Because the other interviews I've been involved in, the banking and bank support was critical.

[0:44:03]

Steve: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely critical.

Sibyl: Did we have any outside money? Like the railroads and the grain industries had a lot of Eastern money. Did the garment industry have that?

Steve: Not to my knowledge.

Sibyl: Not to mine either. That made a big difference.

[0:44:28] Okay, what else were you...

Dory: I just wanted to tell you, I have a saying — I give speeches, and at the end of the speech — always about Kansan history — I say, sit down with your elders, because when they die, we lose a library. And I was glad that I was able to tape my father who told me things I didn't want to know.

[0:44:55]

Steve: Let's go back a minute, because you said to me that he worked in a bakery on Linwood.

Dory: That was my uncle Joe.

Steve: And what bakery was that?

Dory: I don't know. I think there were two bakeries there.

Steve: Yes, there was, and one of them was the genesis of the Cake Box.

Dory: His last name was Basile. Joseph Basile. But I don't know. I never had pizza. He used to make these wonderful cinnamon rolls. I can [unintelligible], and you buy them in the store, and it's nothing like it. But I do remember, he used to bring his lunch pail back full of bagels.

[0:45:30]

Sibyl: I have one more thing. Dory, you were hoping that we could have a local repository where people could come in and read some of these life histories. Do you think you've got the kind of information?

Dory: Yes, but I have to weave it as a writer would do.

[0:46:00] Why don't you put it in the Jewish Community Center? Is that not available to everyone? Well, as I told you, I can talk to the people at the Kansas City Public Library and their Missouri Valley Room, which is the history. I'm sure they would put it in there.

Sibyl: No, but I'm wondering if you asked for the information that you would want a great grandchild to read or to know about or to go through.

[0:46:33] Do you feel that...

Dory: I feel that the library's the place.

Sibyl: No, but do you feel that Steve has provided you with that information?

Dory: Sure.

Sibyl: Do you feel you've shared the information you would want a couple generations down the road to know about?

Steve: I would think so, yeah.

[0:46:57] I think we've covered quite a bit of it. There's so much that I don't know that I wish I did know of how many pieces of the puzzle are missing. And like you said, losing a grandparent is like losing...

Dory: Well, again, the atmosphere in Kansas City, when you were young – where did you go to play when you were a kid? Or where did you go for the nightclubs or something that you attended or not?

[0:47:29]

Steve: Yeah, there was. As a matter of fact — well, I remember in the early days, my parents used to go down – and that was, I guess, in the early fifties – I think it was called Eddie's? And then there was the Drum Room, which the drum's still there from what I understand. But Eddie's was a real nice spot, and I remember they used to get dressed up to go to Eddie's, and that was big time. As far as when I was young, there used to be a number of jazz bars in the city.

[0:48:01] I used to go there for hours and hours and hours, not to drink, just to listen.

Dory: Was there an association of people in the garment industry that they belonged to? What was that called?

Steve: That was the Kansas City Garment Association.

Sibyl: I think it was Apparel Association.

Steve: Apparel Association, that was it.

Male Voice: What congregation did your family belong to?

Steve: We started off in Beth Shalom. For a while, they went to Ohev Shalom, but I ended up going back to Beth Shalom.

[0:48:39]

Sibyl: Did you get the papers I sent you over the internet?

Steve: Yes, I did. Haven't had a chance to look at much of it.

Sibyl: I know, but one of the things that I became aware of as I read all those essays is how many times those businesses moved. And you pointed out how many times your business moved.

[0:49:00] It was standard opportunity for most of those businesses, to move from one corner to the next corner to the next, as they grew.

Steve: Most of the time, it was because of growth. You needed more space. But the other thing about it is that if it wasn't just space, it was because they found a cheaper building. You know, whatever they could do to reduce cost.

[0:49:31] It was a very migrant group for the most part.

Sibyl: But in the other cities, the same thing was true. They moved their businesses often.

Steve: Mm-hm. Although when I stop and think about the big guys, Gay Gibson was in their location 20 years over on Grand. Nelly Don over on 18th Street was there for years, and then when they downsized the operation, went over to Swift, it was there. I think that was the only move that I'm aware of that they made.

[0:50:05]

Dory: Do you have any reason that so many got together around Broadway and 8th Street and 10th Street? There seemed to be more of a solid – you could call it the garment district, which we do today.

Steve: Probably streetcars. I would guess that was it. If you're in the garment industry, obviously sewers can be in diverse areas.

[0:50:33] And if you had a streetcar line that went right down the main street, four blocks away, from Main Street over to Broadway, basically, contained the garment industry.

Dory: What was their early pay?

Steve: I have no idea.

Dory: Paid by the hour or the week? What do you think?

Steve: Most of it was either piecework or hourly work. But piecework became predominant, because most of the employees wanted the strut their stuff, and they knew they could make more money doing it.

[0:51:05]

Dory: Well, I think I've covered all my questions. How old were you when your father first started?

[0:51:30]

Steve: I was not even a twinkle in his eye.

Dory: I see, you weren't there?

Steve: No. I was born in 1943, and he started in 1937.

Dory: What was his first name?

Steve: Bill. William.

Male Voice: And your mother was a Pasternak?

Steve: Yep.

[0:51:57]

Male Voice: There's a lady that I do some work for, she's a Pasternak, and she lives just off of Ward Parkway at Terrace.

Steve: Gail? Sure, that's my cousin.

Male Voice: Yeah. I go over and fix her TV every now and then when she has cable problems.

Steve: Gail Pasternak was Bagel and Bagel. Her father was Sam Pasternak, Ben was my grandfather. Sam was his son.

[0:52:28]

Sibyl: Oh, you were all connected?

Steve: Oh yes.

Male Voice: That was a great loss to Kansas City when the Cake Box business went out, because every boy in the world looked forward to his birthday cake from the Cake Box.

Steve: They did incredible stuff.

Sibyl: It's featured in the exhibit at the Jewish Community Center, the Cake Box.

Steve: Right now?

Sibyl: Mm-hm.

Steve: I'll have to go by there and see it.

[0:52:58]

Male Voice: You should.

Steve: Sam and Ben built a beautiful, beautiful birthday cake.

Male Voice: They did.

Sibyl: Okay, tales from the past, preserved for families. I told Steve it's becoming a big business.

Male Voice: Is that the New York Times article?

Sibyl: On the internet, there are all sorts of associations now about personal histories and where to train for them and so on. I think it's wonderful, because this generation really doesn't know what happened 30 years ago. [shot of photo of kids]

Dory: When I came in, before I even said who I was, I told him my two grandfathers...

[0:53:50] ...Basile. He was the Italian consul for western Missouri, and he had a bank. He had a drugstore and I think could hire people for the... Anyway, the depot at that time was in back of where the city market is today. And he would go down there and meet the immigrants and find them jobs. Of course, then they'd bank with him. But you know, I talk about this stuff all the time, and I wait in the line at Price Chopper, and I say, where did you live, and I tell them a story.

[0:54:27]

Steve: It is.

Male Voice: Is that a wrap?

Dory: I think that's pretty much of a wrap. We'll weave it around in the history of the whole garment industry.

Steve: Well, that's great. I appreciate what you're doing.

Dory: My niece told me, she and a bunch of other ladies came down here one time as a group and looked at things and bought things. She wasn't very explicit either, but this must have been a group of ladies.

[0:54:59] Did you do that at some time?

Steve: Yeah. Our business has changed. At one time, the area that is back there where you came in through the side door, we encouraged the retail trade. But as our business changed, we realized that it was just way too disruptive for us. And you can imagine, we'd go back there and we have huge orders that go out for 100,000, 300,000, whatever.

[0:55:31]

Dory: Do you see much of a change happening, or can happen, say, in the next 10, 15 years or whatever?

Steve: My guess is that there's going to be a certain sustainability to the embroidery business that we have. It has decreased in the last five years, but I think it's going to kind of level off. A certain portion of this business there's a need for, and that is because it gives you a timely production period.

[0:56:06] You don't have to wait for it to come in from China or whatever. And so I think that portion of the business will stay there. As far as we're concerned, like I said, we're still working and trying to find something new.