

BEN STERN TAPE

1 A I'm liberal but to a point. She worked four months;
2 and after two months there with my aunt and uncle, we
3 saved up enough money. We paid \$300 to get an apart-
4 ment on our own. We paid \$37.50 a month rent. After
5 four or five months my wife got pregnant; the doctor
6 told her not to have the child. He found a spon on
7 her lungs, and he pronounced that she had TB, and he
8 insisted that she should not have the child. There
9 was no question. My wife is all right; my children
10 are fine.

11 Q Oh, she had the baby anyway.

12 A Yes, he wanted to put her in a sanatorium which
13 wouldn't work. After that I worked six months on this
14 job. In six months, I was getting already a \$1.50 an
15 hour. That's how fast and hard I worked.

16 Q Yes.

17 A I will not forget that Thanksgiving, 1946. There were
18 two partners, a Jewish man and a Italian. Of course,
19 America was celebrating Thanksgiving. He asked me if
20 I want to work. I'll get double time. I said, "Sure
21 will." I got double pay. I mean, that's how work
22 was. That's all I knew is work. After six months, I
23 signed up in the carpentry union. And I went through
24 a test. I had to examine -- I had to have an exam if
25 I'm a carpenter. They asked me how to make a window.

1 I said, "All it takes is the wood and a hammer, and
2 you make it." I was accepted. A \$125 union initiation
3 fee plus so much a month. I worked for one boss five
4 and a half years. The first day on the job, he asked
5 the foreman during the day about my experience. The
6 foreman told him that I didn't know what a two-by-four
7 is or what a two-by-two is. And he walks up to me,
8 a Jewish man, I'm grateful to him. He said, "Ben,
9 you know you're not a carpenter." "Yes, I know, I
10 want to learn." He thought for a minute, he said,
11 "Okay, I'll start you up with 90 cents." From a \$1.50
12 which I gave up, I went back to 90 cents, and the scale
13 was \$2.10.

14 Within nine months, without ever asking
15 a raise, I had my scale. The gentile workers couldn't
16 believe that I'm getting the full pay. They always
17 thought that he's taking out on me. I worked for him
18 five and a half years. In 1952, I bought my brand,
19 new car, my second car, a brand, new one, a Chevy, and
20 my boss lent me a \$1,000 to pay it out \$50 a week. He
21 was great to me. I appreciate. He gave me a good
22 start.

23 After five and a half years, I decided
24 I'm going in business, and I went in the laundry busi-
25 ness.

1 Q Oh, you didn't do carpentry?

2 A I got out of carpentry. After my child was born, my
3 hands were always dirty from the carpentry work, so I
4 went down and washed the diapers in the basement, and
5 I loved my hands. They got clean, so I decided I'll
6 stay in the laundry business.

7 Q (Laughing.)

8 A And ever since I am in this business, I worked terri-
9 bly hard.

10 Q Let me see your hands now.

11 A My manicure is gone, but --

12 Q They're clean.

13 A Ah, I worked terribly hard. I worked sixteen hours a
14 day. Unfortunately, the one regret I have not being
15 able to see my children grow up, be more often with
16 them than I should have or I could have. I realized
17 you can't have both. I had my wife with the children
18 all the time. She never went back to work. She just
19 didn't go back to work, and I did pretty well. Hard
20 work paid off to me.

21 Q What's the name of your laundry? I'm not going to go
22 into competition with you.

23 A I don't know, I don't know, the way you're looking at
24 me, I'm afraid you might well.

25 Q And then you joined -- When did you move out to Skokie?

1 A Oh, I moved out in 1962. 1962 I moved out. No, ex-
2 cuse me, 1960.

3 Q So you don't know those days as well?

4 A I don't remember yesterday, but I rememger 40, 50
5 years back, just things.

6 Q Yeah, yeah.

7 A In 1960, I bought my second home in Skokie. The
8 neighbors started changing, and I wanted to be with
9 my friends. More friends all lived north side and
10 suburbs.

11 Q Yes.

12 A Moved out there and since then we stayed together.

13 Q Did you seek out other holocaust survivors or --

14 A What?

15 Q Did you seek out other holocaust survivors?

16 A Yah, we stick in -- my social life is revolved ninety-
17 five percent with holocaust survivors.

18 Q Still?

19 A Still is. It is -- They speak the same language that
20 learned. Eye contact, we understand without exchang-
21 in ing words. It is an expression of family. This is
22 the family.

23 Q These are people you can trust?

24 A I trust everyone. I have confidence. I find more
25 openness, more words. At time, we try to intermingle.

1 It wasn't easy. We were not accepted as equals. It
2 was always one step backwards for a greenhorn.

3 Q In Chicago?

4 A Yup.

5 Q Not New York?

6 A In Chicago, always one step back. Not that we cared,
7 because we did it ourselves. We didn't ask for help.
8 But at least that's how I feel. Maybe I'm wrong on
9 this point, maybe I'm wrong. I know the feeling of
10 most of our boys, at this -- There's a certain
11 separation, an invisible wall.

12 Q Because you shared something that nobody else had.

13 A They didn't want to get involved. They didn't want
14 to hear so much pain. It was too hard for their ears.
15 We were turned off. We weren't -- That's why I said
16 before, the first 25 years we didn't speak, because we
17 couldn't find a listening ear. It takes -- And just
18 to talk to the wall, you just as well keep it in you.
19 We, we been keeping the secret, living with it, chok-
20 ing ourself, and yet instead of just running wild,
21 the last -- I would say the last ten, fifteen years
22 that the holocaust survivors speaking out.

23 Q But you spoke with each other all the time?

24 A All the time. If we didn't speak, we'd dream about it.

25 So this matter has been very much alive with us all

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these years.

Q Yeah, you must rejoice in each other's good fortune.

A Yes, yes.

Q Help each other when you can?

A No problem, we getting along. Shalom.

(END OF TAPE.)