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Morris Tomasis

INTERVIEWER: This is a recording of the Oral History Program at the University of Delaware. We're interviewing Mister Mark Tomasis, and the interviewer is Myron Lazarus. Mr. Tomasis, when were you born in Romania?

MR. TOMASIS: June the fourteen, 1894.

INTERVIEWER: What city was that now?

MR. TOMASIS: Iasi. I A S I.

INTERVIEWER: How many years did you live in Iasi?

MR. TOMASIS: I lived there eighteen years (unintelligible) before I left. I was born in June, and I left in December. So, actually, I was eighteen and a half years when I left to come here.

INTERVIEWER: You had a good bit of your education there, of what little you had.

MR. TOMASIS: (Unintelligible) Well, I didn't have the education I would have because my father couldn't afford to give me a (unintelligible) education. (Unintelligible) a big family, and...

INTERVIEWER: How large was your family?

MR. TOMASIS: (Unintelligible) and my father was (unintelligible)...

INTERVIEWER: What did he do?

MR. TOMASIS: Well, he was...he used to work for somebody who manufactured his own (unintelligible). You know those heads? Those big (unintelligible) made out of, ah, made out of, what do you call it, they're like a (unintelligible)... He used to make them. A really good mechanic. But that doesn't mean that they give him big money. He was a good mechanic and receiving poor money. (unintelligible) And by the way, I was the oldest in the family. And in order to help the family, I had to at least make enough to, ah, feed...

INTERVIEWER: To feed you.

MR. TOMASIS: Right. To help my own self, and not (unintelligible) to him. Which, which they didn't pay a whole lot.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do?

MR. TOMASIS: I learned candle-making.

INTERVIEWER: As apprentice?

MR. TOMASIS: As apprentice, yes. I had an uncle who... He opened up a shop (unintelligible), and he was the one who brought me in (unintelligible) and learn the trade. He did, he did a good job, there was no question. But there was no money. The first year, I had to work free of charge. The second year, he promised me (unintelligible) eat and clothes. But instead of that eat and clothes (unintelligible) he had his own family, a bigger family, and he couldn't take in another child in the house. So he paid me three dollars a week. So, (unintelligible) he promised my father that within three years, I'll be an (unintelligible), about four years, (unintelligible). However, I worked for him four and a half years before (unintelligible) before I left. The last year, I made, in his place, almost as much as my father made. Almost. Even though I was a single boy. (unintelligible) Candlemaking... Candlemaking was a different class of working (unintelligible) and if my father had been working (unintelligible) he would (unintelligible). He would make big money. But, over there, he didn't, because he worked for somebody else. Somebody else made the money on him.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of a city was Iasi?

MR. TOMASIS: Oh, it's quite a loud city. A city... The city had, um, a hundred and twenty thousand population. And the space is, I would say, similar to Wilmington. And the fact that that city is laid out something similar to Wilmington. Not exactly (unintelligible). But anyway, (unintelligible) in my time, it was a downtown model of my own city. The electricity in the street, the electric street cars (unintelligible) before I left. And quite a number of years before I left that they had those street cars running. Almost most streets of the city, the stores, had quite an amount of stores (unintelligible), furniture stores, clothing stores, shoe stores, carpet, carpeting, (unintelligible), over here, you go into a store (unintelligible), over there, you go into a store (unintelligible).

INTERVIEWER: You were poor there, you say. How else did you find life in Romania? What was life like for you?

MR. TOMASIS: well, it's... To talk about, personally, I'll say that the very few years that I started making some money for my labor, well, naturally, I struggled to a certain extent, the same as the rest of the children (unintelligible) needed new clothes (unintelligible) once a year, maybe once in two years, if he can last that long (unintelligible) survive. But afterwards when I had my own money, naturally, I spent more and more money. (unintelligible) even though my people didn't want them, very much of my money, and they seemed to me to save as much as they can. Then when I left for this country, I had enough of my money to buy my ticket, my boat ticket, my train ticket and bring a few dollars to this country.

INTERVIEWER: You were pretty much on your own by then.

MR. TOMASIS: Yes. I even left a few dollars, a few dollars (unintelligible)I accumulated so much because I was a single boy, and I was making as much money as a married man. And I didn't spend it as much. And...

INTERVIEWER: (unintelligible) life enjoyable in Romania?

MR. TOMASIS: I tell you, being (unintelligible) it's a big city, it was, Iasi. I tell you what I mean. They have, in Iasi, they have a national theater. The theater is build by the government. Enormous place. Enormous place. They put up the nicest shows, the best shows that there was at that particular time. And the best actors. And not...too expensive. It yielded people a chance to see those shows. That way

the government helped it out. All other shows, where we had (unintelligible) used to come to town, used to stay for two or three months, the big circus. Not a three-ring circus, actually not that. But a good-size circus. And in my time, you had movies. Before that (unintelligible) it was 1912, or 1910, or maybe before that. Movies that came from France. But, it doesn't matter. It was in the Romanian language (unintelligible) sound pictures and had big theaters there where people, young people (unintelligible) people used to go in and see those shows. But a minimum, it wasn't too expensive. And people used to go and see it. The shows that they show (unintelligible) the way you see them here. Say the show start at two o'clock, and end at, say, four thirty. Then it would say start at seven o'clock or eight o'clock and end at say eleven thirty and so on. You couldn't go in at any old time at all; you had to come at the exact time (unintelligible).

INTERVIEWER: What was your Hebrew education like?

MR. TOMASIS: Well, Hebrew education is quite a, quite a big affair. Because first of all, people have got about sixty thousands Jews there in the city. It was (unintelligible). And they had quite a number of Hebrew schools. (Unintelligible) and the Hebrew school with about four hundred children. About ten to twelve teachers. And it was run, actually by, well, I don't know how to say it, it was run by a (unintelligible) donation (unintelligible) because the children couldn't afford to pay.

INTERVIEWER: (Unintelligible) by the government?

MR. TOMASIS: No, no, no, no, no, no. The government didn't give you a penny of it. It was financed this way, I would tell you, but you wouldn't believe it, but (unintelligible) my grandfather was involved and that's why I can say it. They used to go to the house, I mean, they did it years ago, not in my time, come into the house, and ask you, "Would you like to donate for the Hebrew school?" "Yes." "How many are you in the family?" "Well, eight in the family." "Would you donate eight or ten cents a week? A penny a person. A week." [10:04] So, they had collectors. They go into the house. Ten cents from you. Fifteen cents from theMR. TOMASIS: Three cents from there. Nine cents from some other place, until they collect. And let me tell you what they used to do with that money. First, they pay the teachers. (Unintelligible). I had a teacher, and he was alumni. He was a highest educated man in Hebrew. And he was given fifteen dollars a week, to compare to American money, and (unintelligible) five Romanian dollars for one American dollar. (Unintelligible) he got three dollars a week. If he was lucky, he would have had no children. If he had children, they would all die. I just want to tell you how little they were paying because they couldn't afford it. And I'll tell you what we used to do. We had a little money they used to collect. (unintelligible) children shoes, stockings, some of them needing a suit of clothes or a heavy overcoat or a winter hat (unintelligible) and this is only one...that I explained to you was in our neighborhood. But, see, the city was big. It was quite a big city, but they had other places where they had three hundred children. They had two hundred children. Our congregation alone had (unintelligible) a little over two hundred children. (unintelligible)

INTERVIEWER: How many years did you go to (unintelligible)?

MR. TOMASIS: To tell you the truth, I don't know myself because I must have been an infant when they put me in (unintelligible), see? I must have been three or four years old when they put me in. Naturally, I didn't learn a whole lot cause, I remember, I had an aunt; she was only two years older than I was. If I was four years old, she was six. And the girl...they don't send girls to Hebrew school the way they do here. A girl is (unintelligible). Now the boy... My grandfather or father wanted me to go as young as possible. We used to make that little girl go with me. But she didn't want to stay there; she wants to go

out and play. She used to hide herself and (unintelligible). But that's how young I started out. Yet, I couldn't go too long in Hebrew school because, and I'll explain to you why, when I become thirteen and a half, or thirteen and three quarter years old, I got out and started a trade.

INTERVIEWER: Did you go to a regular school also?

MR. TOMASIS: No, but I (unintelligible), but it's run by the city. By the Jews of the city. Not the city. The city government.

INTERVIEWER: But they taught you other things besides Hebrew.

MR. TOMASIS: Oh, yes. Yeah. I tell you, the Hebrew school, it was a big thing. It was not a little thing like you think, it was a big thing that, in my time, didn't even have their own building. But a little later on, they build a nice (unintelligible) around our neighborhood. You know, the building they had in my time, I'm telling you, was four hundred children. And they used to have just plain, private homes. Used to have just one section like this. While this house, this house had twelve rooms for school rooms. This house had three, and put in three teachers, and so on. It was a poor way of doing it. But, we went to Hebrew school from eight in the morning until eight in the evening (chuckles). That's right. In the shorter days, in the shorter days, around five o'clock, four thirty, they make (unintelligible) and my mother used to make me (unintelligible) and stay until eight o'clock. At eight o'clock, I used to come home with a lantern. (unintelligible) And not on the side streets safe. (unintelligible) electricity, but, where my mother and my father lived, there was no electricity there. So I had to go home with lantern. And the (unintelligible), let me tell you, in the winter month, not that it's bitter cold, when it's slushy and (unintelligible) up to your knees. One time, we lived out on the hill, you see, and there was a ditch straight down, so, one time, I was going home with the lantern and it was slippery, not slippery with ice, but slippery with (unintelligible) and slushy. So I just didn't make one step and I (unintelligible), it was dark, and I slipped right down to the ditch. When I come in, I was all muddy, full of black mud. My mother got scared that a (unintelligible) come in. She told them death was coming in to the house. Now, I mean to show you that I can describe to you a little more things than that. The living with some of the people. Well, the, uh, (unintelligible) others were more fortunate than others, maybe others didn't have as much as we did because we lived a little bit out on the outskirts because we always had two or three cows, you see. And maybe a goat. And maybe a few geese and a few chickens around the house. Well, that helped, you see. We sold the milk. We didn't use the milk from three cows. We sold (unintelligible) my mother helped to the table.

INTERVIEWER: Did you do any farming? A little bit of farming?

MR. TOMASIS: No. No, no. It was not that kind of house for farming. No, no. Not that kind of a house. So, the chickens laid eggs. The children had an egg. Oh, if you want to bake something, that's an egg you didn't have to buy. So, we were actually more fortunate (unintelligible) other people have to buy that. Have to buy a little bit of milk in the morning for their children.

INTERVIEWER: There was a large Jewish community there. Was there any discrimination against Jews?

MR. TOMASIS: Well, in Romania, there was a lot. (unintelligible) but I couldn't give you much of that because I was too young to be involved in that. All I know are the hours I turned then, and then work. I couldn't see anything because I didn't go no place. I couldn't afford the time. I used to start working at the summer months, like, in the long days. And the days are long, you see. In Romania, the days, at

three o'clock, it's almost daylight. So, I had to be at work at six o'clock in the morning. And I quit for the summer set. And the summer set never (unintelligible) I worked, actually, from six to nine. In the winter months, and actually (unintelligible), so I didn't start before seven thirty, eight o'clock, but I worked til nine. And the place where I worked didn't have electricity. We had to do everything by hand. See, all the candle work we did over there... Not only candle work, we did building work, too. In the summer months, we did building work. In the winter months, which they didn't do any building because it was too cold to build, that's the time we did candle work. But during the summer months, we did work for the building. They made windows and doors and trims and all that by hand. And they didn't have no electricity. However, we had the little Coleman lamps, and (unintelligible) had the Coleman lamps so he could see. (unintelligible) give you enough lights for front and back, well, you had the front for awhile, then the back for awhile, so you could see what you were doing. Now, I can give you quite a long book on that. But (unintelligible).

INTERVIEWER: Why did you actually come to this country?

MR. TOMASIS: Well, the reason is, first of all, I was a father's boy. A grandfather's boy. I didn't grow up with no other boys, and actually I was a home boy. Now, every boy, you see, had to go in the Army. In those days, you had to go in the Army when you get to the age of twenty, twenty-one. So, my father noted I can't go in the army. I never talked of going. I was always among the Jews, see, and I'd never been there (unintelligible). So my father noted another way that I wouldn't fit to go into the Army. What they do to me in the Army they got nothing coming out of the Army. If (unintelligible) then they do it out of spite. You know how they are. So anyway, I had an uncle here in Wilmington. That is, my father's sister lived here since 1900. And my grandmother, his mother, was also here. My grandmother came later. They came in the 1900s but then my grandmother must've come in 1907. Six months (unintelligible), a few years later. And I came here in 1913. **[20:05]** So I came direct to them right here in Wilmington. So, the reason, the reason, you wanted to know the reason why I left is because first going in the Army was definitely out. And number two, at that particular time there was talk in (unintelligible) of the Romanians going to war in Bulgaria. So, they would take me anyhow. And after waiting to become twenty-one, they would take all the boys over eighteen. So, I really had to rush. I couldn't stay too long. I decided to go to this country within two weeks.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you get the boat?

MR. TOMASIS: You see, being that I had my own money, I went... They had a big office, there. Quite a number of offices in Iasi, where the, uh, (unintelligible), oh, those days ended. You can go to a train and find fifty families leaving noontime. But anyway, they had offices where they fix you up. I went to a particular office, not that I know they had a family that were already in this country. And he already know what to do. He was in that office, he took me to that office, and he told them...

INTERVIEWER: This is in Romania?

MR. TOMASIS: Yeah, in Romania, yeah, in Iasi.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MR. TOMASIS: So, he took me to that office and he said, "Fix the boy up." With a (unintelligible). And fix him up with a ticket on the boat from Bourbon to Philadelphia. You know what it is...

INTERVIEWER: You had no trouble getting a passport or anything like that.

MR. TOMASIS: (unintelligible) I wouldn't have got no passport (unintelligible). I was eighteen and a half years old. And they would grab me in no time. You know, to put me into the social clothes. I had to, you know what they call them? (Unintelligible) You know, you steal the, uh, the, uh...

INTERVIEWER: Your way here.

MR. TOMASIS: You steal the, uh, you get yourself out of the country. Like the war, they say you steal the (unintelligible) somehow. And I didn't have no trouble getting that even though it's a big punishment if you do that. Because you have to have a passport. You know what a passport is in this country. If you want to go someplace, you need a passport. (unintelligible) It was the same way there. But I could get no passport if I would wait six years. They wouldn't let me... I was just at the time when I was supposed to go in the Army. So, what I had, that was (unintelligible) my father and another man lived right near the border. And the other man said, "Well, let the boy come over to my house. I'll take him." And he did. He know the guard, he know the soldiers, he had an (unintelligible) to go back and forth, back and forth, he had an (unintelligible), he had a girlfriend there on the other side. (Unintelligible) So, he took me to him. And in the morning he woke me up. Get up. Let's go. The train is leaving this and this that time, around six o'clock in the morning. (Unintelligible) train and soon we left the border city, tiny little city (unintelligible) by eleven o'clock, I was in Austria, right in Austria.

INTERVIEWER: And from there you went to Germany?

MR. TOMASIS: Eventually. I was in Austria for just a few hours, the train left for Germany, this was a Sunday, and Tuesday, at noon, I arrived at (unintelligible) for the boat. Tuesday at noon exact. Twelve o'clock. I mean, some people had to (unintelligible) I didn't even carry a valise. I had nothing with me. Because I couldn't take anything along with me. They would catch me immediately. I couldn't carry anything. The only thing I... This man arranged for me, you make a satchel, things you want taken on with you. And sent me back to the boat. I did that. From Iasi direct to Berlin. When I came to Berlin, I found my pack, my satchel. And the fact is, when they took us to the boat, the docks, they took the baggage with me. When I came to this country, I took the baggage with me.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of a boat was it?

MR. TOMASIS: Eh? Well, the boat was a little off (unintelligible). This man figured out for me not to stay in Berlin too long. Two days, he said, is enough for you. If you have to pay the hotel two days, see, that's enough. Why do you want to stay there longer? You be there exactly when the boat is leaving. Sure enough, I (unintelligible) and the boat's supposed to be there on time. And the boat did not show up. So they told us that something happened to that particular boat on the way. They had a fire or something, that boat couldn't go back. So they gave us another boat. Now, I don't know how big the other boat was. I think it might be just a little bit bigger than the (unintelligible), I'd imagine that's about what it was. But the other boat that I come to was not much larger. Well, maybe a few feet larger. There were only three hundred people on the boat altogether.

INTERVIEWER: A small, passenger boat, then.

MR. TOMASIS: It was a small boat.

INTERVIEWER: But it was a passenger boat.

MR. TOMASIS: Yes, a passenger boat.

INTERVIEWER: Not like a freighter.

MR. TOMASIS: No, no, no, no. (unintelligible) we had first, second, third class, and so on. And, well, naturally, I was third class. But (unintelligible) enjoyed it. Took us eighteen days exactly to cross. Exactly eighteen days to cross from Berlin to (unintelligible). Eighteen days. In fact, it was a month, exact a month on the way from Romania to Philadelphia. Exact a month. To the day.

INTERVIEWER: And then your family met you...

MR. TOMASIS: That's a long story there, too. To find out how green people are, I had an uncle here. But he was not a green man. He was already twelve years in this country. And he had...

INTERVIEWER: You had a grandmother here, didn't you?

MR. TOMASIS: A grandmother, too. But my uncle was waiting for me in Philadelphia to take me off of the boat. See, I wrote to him because I don't know where to go, and I had to go (unintelligible), so someone has to come. So he did come.

INTERVIEWER: You spoke Romanian and Yiddish?

MR. TOMASIS: Well, Yiddish, I did. Romanian (unintelligible). My uncle already talked English, see, he was already twelve years in this country and he was already (unintelligible). So he was waiting for me there. And he was waiting all day. He got there Saturday morning and was waiting for me until about five o'clock in the evening. He was waiting there and he could see the boat coming. And he asked the people to let him in to meet me. They won't let him in. So..

INTERVIEWER: You mean at the port...?

MR. TOMASIS: Yes. Right there on Vine Street in Philadelphia. So, I didn't know whether he was waiting or not waiting. So, I see people (unintelligible), I go with them. I didn't know what to do or where to go. So I finally see a little booth there, where people are buying tickets. So, I went to the (unintelligible) Wilmington Del. All right. So I give him a dollar. And I can swear that the man gave my five cent change. And he give me a ticket. I mean he sold me a ticket to Wilmington. A dollar those days to here, around thirty cents. (unintelligible). Ah, that bum. But anyway, I didn't even know where to go after that. So, I see people going downstairs, I was going downstairs, too. So finally, a wagon, a wagon with horses, come along, and (unintelligible) long, long wagon (unintelligible) and they put thirty-five people in it. And they took us, they kept on going and going. Finally, they got to the B&O, the B&O station in Philadelphia. I think it was on Twelfth. Twelfth and Market. And they put us on a train. It must have been around six o'clock. Not later than six thirty when we arrived at B&O station.

INTERVIEWER: Meanwhile, your uncle was in...

MR. TOMASIS: My uncle was there waiting for me, see, and after he found out that everybody's out of the boat, he went back. He thought maybe he'd catch me. He'd take a train and catch me at the

Wilmington... Oh, that's beside the point. Just listen to this. They put us in a train. It was a bitter cold day. Oh, it was bitter cold. They took us in the train, the train was nice and warm. [30:00] Plush seats! I was afraid to sit on the plush seat. Now, it's eight o'clock. There's nine o'clock. At ten o'clock. No train, train is not moving. Train is still standing. Finally, I think the train must have left around eleven o'clock at night and I didn't get to Wilmington at the B&O station until after twelve. (unintelligible) the boat arrived around five, but didn't get to Wilmington til after twelve. And let me tell you the story about how my uncle finds out that I'm at the B&O station. This is a long story to tell you. But he was there. And he was waiting for me. And the only one coming off of the station in Wilmington. The only one. He mentioned my name, and I told him that's me. So he grabbed me, and it was the last streetcar leaving from Delaware Avenue towards his house. He lived Thirteenth and Walnut. Not to his place. The streetcar didn't go to Thirteenth and Walnut. Streetcar left us all down on Tenth and Market, and we had to walk from there to Thirteenth and Walnut at twelve-thirty, one o'clock. And it was a bitter cold night. It was bitter cold. Well anyway, (unintelligible) if my uncle would wait for me at a B&O station, I would never go downstairs. I would never... To this day, I would never, I would walk away with the...

INTERVIEWER: Go back to the train?

MR. TOMASIS: I would walk away from the tracks right towards Philadelphia. Imagine where (unintelligible). I would have been killed. Because I wouldn't know where to go. They had a little light. Must have been a twenty-five watt lamp there on the station. I couldn't see no one. It was frightening there. Well, I wouldn't know to go downstairs because the train in (unintelligible). I didn't know there was an upstairs. (unintelligible) Even in Germany, the train left us off here flat on the ground. I didn't see no upstairs. So I wouldn't know where to go. If he wouldn't have met me there that night...

INTERVIEWER: How did he figure out that you were on the train?

MR. TOMASIS: Huh?

INTERVIEWER: How did your uncle figure out?

MR. TOMASIS: I tell you, the way he explained it to me, he come back here and my grandmother and my aunt both...

INTERVIEWER: After not seeing you in Philadelphia?

MR. TOMASIS: After that, they told him all green people are out. There's no use looking here for anyone. So he took the Pennsylvania station and he went back to the train station. He took the train and came back to Wilmington and he came home. He lived right there on Thirteenth and Walnut. So they said, "Where's the boy?" He said, "I missed him." (unintelligible) they didn't let me in. So he didn't know what to do. He called, he called here, he called there. The train with green people came through the station. Is the train supposed to come through here? Not that we know of. I mean, he called up the Pennsylvania train station so many times. So, he had a neighbor. And the neighbor was (unintelligible) told them that I'm coming and so on. He said, "Wait a minute. Let me ask you this. (unintelligible)" He called up the B&O station around ten, ten thirty. Eleven o'clock. He said, "Is there a train coming through the B&O station with green people on it?" They said, "Yes, it's to be expected. Train Two." He grabbed this poor fellow by the head going to Philadelphia. He was afraid to get a hot cup of coffee in such a bitter cold because he afraid he going to miss me. (unintelligible) off of the boat.

Well, what do you think of that? But anyway, he told me in Iasi he got there and stayed there and waited for my car. Yeah. He went to, oh, you should hear his story, I tell you. You could read a book and you wouldn't enjoy it as much as the way he used to tell the story the way he met me. So finally, I'm here.

INTERVIEWER: Did you live with him...?

MR. TOMASIS: Oh, yes, yes. I lived with him seven years before I was married. Seven years.

INTERVIEWER: Did you continue with your trade when you were here?

MR. TOMASIS: Eh?

INTERVIEWER: What did you do when you were here?

MR. TOMASIS: Yes, that's right. Now see, that's a little story (unintelligible) why everything's got a little story. See, I couldn't talk and I didn't have no tools of my own, and to go to work, I have to buy my own tools. And if I said, "Well, I have a few dollars" (unintelligible). In Europe, the boss give you tools. You don't buy tools in Europe, then you work for somebody who does give you tools. Or buy tools. But anyway, (unintelligible). The deal was in the building trade. He didn't do big work, but he used to do remodeling. You know, altering and so on. He, my uncle was very friendly with him, and he asked him if he would give me a job. Not so much to go on the buildings, but to do some work that he needs handling. For instance, the years he (unintelligible) house, and make a little store out of it. Well, you had to have the front way, the door, top window, side window. I used to order that in the mail. I couldn't get it right away. And besides, to make it to his order, pay a high price for it. Because he wanted it (unintelligible) so different. So, my uncle told him, he says, "If you need that kind of class of work, why not give it to the mill? Let the boy do it for you." I plugged my trade into all (unintelligible). So, he had a basement, and I worked for him. He tell him, "Let me give the green boy a trial for a week. And then I'll see about what he's worth." Sure enough, he bought me the material, give me a sketch of what he wants made. And I have it, he went away about his own business while I was in the basement. And when he came home he found almost all of (unintelligible) the small job (unintelligible) I worked for him for a week in his basement. So, after I started that week, it came to the uncle, (unintelligible) and his wife. You know, they were very friendly. He said, "Well, Jake," that was my uncle's name was Jake, see. And said, "The boy is all right. I'll give him fifteen cents an hour." So, I took fifteen cents an hour. Compared to Romanian money, that's an awful lot of money. I didn't make that much in Romania. Well, anyway, with fifteen cents an hour, I got my own apartment because it (unintelligible) street, and I lived on Walnut Street. So I had to go by street car to go back and forth, which was (unintelligible) dime, a nickel going and a nickel coming. So, for the week, I made out my four seventy five, five dollars a week. I gave my uncle three dollars a week for board, and two dollars was left to me for me and my (unintelligible). Because naturally, those days, those days, things were cheap. But not as cheap as you think cause you're a youngster, you don't know. If you want to buy yourself a suit of clothes, you go in the (unintelligible) those days, (unintelligible) because there was no one here in town. You know, you spend seventeen, eighteen dollars for a suit of clothes for a boy. I mean I had a decent suit. But how many weeks did I have to work to save eighteen dollars, there was only two dollars left, and I want to send a few dollars home, see. How many weeks do I have to work to buy myself a suit of clothes? Anyway, I work for him I believe about nine weeks. And my uncle said, "Now, that's no future for you. Fifteen cents an hour." Things were tough in those days, you know. He couldn't... No unions or things like that. No, he said, I tell you, I have a friend that works in pawn shop. And I'd like to talk to him, see if

he couldn't get in to pawn shop. They're paying better wages. And it's your trade. See, if you say you're a candle maker, and the (unintelligible) cars those days, those are wooden cars, see. So he (unintelligible) to get me a job. Sure enough, he said (unintelligible). He talked to the man, and the man said, "I can ask for a job for the boy. The boy left us a job." (Unintelligible) He'd like to ask for the job. But I tell you, I tell you how it (unintelligible) looked like. Those guys (unintelligible) no office, employment office. You'll see the foreman. You know the foreman? Go talk to the foreman. If he wants you, he'll give you a job. They want you, they'll give you a job. So, he said, I'll tell you how the foreman look like and what time he comes to work. You'll meet him, talk to him, and if he needs you, he'll give you a job. How am I going to go look for a job when I didn't even know where this job was? **[40:00]** Leave alone after a job, I couldn't put two English words together. I couldn't ask for a job. My uncle said, "Let me go with you." He could talk (unintelligible) English. Proudly went in the shop, showed how the foreman comes along, (unintelligible) told him, he says, the foreman says, "Why don't, you ask for the job for the boy?" And I was standing alongside of him. And by the way, I was might a little fella at that time. I'm not too big now, but at that time, I only weighed about a hundred and eighteen pounds, you see. So, he says, "My little boy asked for a job." He said, "Boy can't talk." He told me eight or nine weeks he's had in this country, so he can't talk. Can he talk German? Well, with German, he understands. And I can talk German. So, he talked to me in Ger... (unintelligible) I will match the best I can, you see, with him. Now all you need is tools. I didn't even have a toothpick to bring along with me. So anyway, the friend of my uncle's said, "I will give you a list of what to go and buy. And bring your tools." So my uncle went with me to the hardware store. He gets the list of what to buy. And I spent about fourteen dollars for tools. For candlemaking tools. And by the way, I still have the tools. Oh yeah.

INTERVIEWER: How long did you work for Romania?

MR. TOMASIS: Well, this is, this is, this is a story. I worked for the Pullman company (?) quite, quite a long time. A long time. In other words, don't think for a minute that I wasn't laid off. In those days, (unintelligible) twenty-five or thirty years ago, they used to have season work. When the lands are dry, come along, they got slack. The cars were on the road to (unintelligible) that didn't have no work in shops. And around Christmas, the same way. The people, they leave their cars there on the road there for Christmas. And they didn't shut down the shop, but the younger were laid off and the elders were kept on. So, being that I was the youngest, that's where (unintelligible) laid off, but fortunate I was foresmith, most of the time... See, there was a shop across the water from from the Pullman shop. The managing car of a fronting company. That was their name, you see. And they were building street cars. (unintelligible) cars for other countries. I worked there when they build cars for China, built cars for Australia. I worked there on those cars for (unintelligible). I worked several times for those people and they laid me off year after (unintelligible). So actually, I didn't have very much leisure time. I mean, (unintelligible), I did work most of the time. Until, until 1926. At which I was appointed (unintelligible). And a short time afterwards, I was appointed foreman. And since 1926, I worked... Well, I would say I worked since 1913 as far as they go, so, I went to work for the Pullman company in 1913, the thing was around (unintelligible) that time. So, but I say it was actually all the time that I spend with the Pullman company. But since 1926, til 1958 when they closed down the shop, I hadn't missed a day.

INTERVIEWER: How many years was that?

MR. TOMASIS: That's forty-five years. Forty-five years I worked for the Pullman company. And since 1926, that was thirty-three years (unintelligible) that I was (unintelligible).

INTERVIEWER: What year was that now that you left Pullman?

MR. TOMASIS: Fifty-eight cause when they closed down the shop.

INTERVIEWER: Fifty-eight.

MR. TOMASIS: Yeah. 1958. When they closed down the shop. (unintelligible) they closed down other shops. The Sixth Street shops. And the company accepts small shops. They're out of business now. Their equipment was sold to the railroads, and they're out of business.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do after fifty-eight?

MR. TOMASIS: Nothing.

INTERVIEWER: You retired?

MR. TOMASIS: That's right. In 1958, I, uh, (unintelligible).

INTERVIEWER: Did they pension you?

MR. TOMASIS: Yes, they did. They did. (unintelligible) pension, and they pensioned me off. And now, I'm a leisure man.

INTERVIEWER: Good.

MR. TOMASIS: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: You've earned it.

MR. TOMASIS: The last (unintelligible).

INTERVIEWER: Your wife... What year you said you met your wife?

MR. TOMASIS: I met (chuckles) I met my wife in 1919.

INTERVIEWER: She was a Wilmington girl...?

MR. TOMASIS: Ah, well, she is a New York girl. But she... I don't know what made her come to Wilmington, but she came (unintelligible) for me, I guess. I couldn't say why. (unintelligible) I'd never seen the people before in my life. I met her through a friend of theirs through another friend of theirs. They worked together. Their development worked with ours. He know me very well. So (unintelligible) to him, and then in 1919, in 1919, let me be correct, (unintelligible) the middle of the summer, I think it was, and (unintelligible) was my wedding. 1919.

INTERVIEWER: You met her that summer, then you...

MR. TOMASIS: Yes, yes (unintelligible) for five or six months. In 1919 and December the 21st (unintelligible).

INTERVIEWER: How many children did you have?

MR. TOMASIS: Well, in 1920, my son Ralph was born. Eh, you know Ralph?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MR. TOMASIS: Me oldest boy. Now my daughter, Mrs. Shutzum (phoentetic), was born. And a third son, Norman, Norman Tomasis, he was born in 1930. 1920, 1926, 1930. Three children. And eight grandchildren.

INTERVIEWER: Wonderful. Wonderful. What kind of, outside of working for the Pullman Company, what other things did you do? Are you active in the Jewish community? Or...

MR. TOMASIS: Yes. Yes.

INTERVIEWER: ...Wilmington life?

MR. TOMASIS: My younger, my younger days, I was quite active. But I mean, I don't mean that to go out and collect money or anything like that. I don't mean that. But I was active. I was secretary of the (unintelligible). Do you remember that little (unintelligible)?

INTERVIEWER: I've heard so much about it.

MR. TOMASIS: Yeah, well, I was secretary twenty-five years. So, I was very (unintelligible).

INTERVIEWER: What was the address now of this Temple? Where was this Temple?

MR. TOMASIS: Third and Shipley.

INTERVIEWER: Third and Shipley.

MR. TOMASIS: Yeah. Third and Shipley. So, I was secretary there twenty-five years. I was a member there since 1920 (unintelligible) in '57, they merged with the Avascholish (phonetic), so, I'm still with the Avascholish, and the Avascholish are not active because the work I was doing didn't go with that kind of a class of work. And the office... I did all of the office work in (unintelligible). All the books went through my hands. No one, no one else. All the ink, all the expense, all the records, all the minutes, everything...

INTERVIEWER: Were you paid for this?

MR. TOMASIS: Yes, yes, yes. They paid me a hundred and fifty dollars a year. (unintelligible) some of the books. When I turned the books over to the other (unintelligible), the treasurer didn't believe that it was all one man's work. But I did. All the mails go out through my hands. All of it. Which we met twice a month. And I used to send out mail twice a month. Regular. For twenty-five years. I done but miss it once. The fact was this: I was sick, uplaid and out in 1937. In the harvest. And that was pretty close to the holidays. All the wait for the holidays, all the letters and all the tickets and everything (unintelligible) my hands. Yeah. I was very active.

INTERVIEWER: But you're not active now in the Avaschovich, but you attend now.

MR. TOMASIS: Oh, I go to (unintelligible) seven days a week. And besides, I'm indirectly an assistant to the Cantor (phonetic). And I don't take it like that, that I'm an assistant. But on the holidays, see, I done, I done shakas (phonetic) in the beginning when they're done, say, before the main (unintelligible). And often times, if (unintelligible) not feeling well, they would ask me (unintelligible). I had that much, I have that much education to do that. When the Cantor, the Cantor was operated on, (unintelligible).

[50:03]

INTERVIEWER: Did you belong to any other organizations besides that?

MR. TOMASIS: The, uh, well, the, uh...

INTERVIEWER: Were you a member of the Union?

MR. TOMASIS: Eh?

INTERVIEWER: Were you a member of the Union at the Pullman Company?

MR. TOMASIS: Oh, yes. All of the... Union... All of the, uh... We had several unions during my time. Some unions were outside unions. Some unions were inside unions, company unions. Then a little later on, they got with the CIO unions. (unintelligible) And towards last, I say towards last, I'd say, I'd say, ten or twelve years before they closed down, we formed a Foreman Union. And all the foremen belonged. And had anything to do with the rank and file, see.

INTERVIEWER: This is still CIO, though.

MR. TOMASIS: Eh, Yeah. Oh, no, no. I tell you, we came... We came under our own.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

MR. TOMASIS: The Foreman Union. See, that's really what we called it. The union that only the foreman belongs. (unintelligible). The union was for a, what's it, local? And was from all the shops. We used to, we used to meet quite often. The delegates from others used to come here, and we used to send our delegates there. And we used to meet.

INTERVIEWER: Did you hold any office or anything?

MR. TOMASIS: Yes. I was secretary (unintelligible) union appointed me as secretary. (unintelligible) I kept it up when they formed the Foreman Union, I was secretary all the way through.

INTERVIEWER: How about CIO? Before they formed a union, you were secretary there, too?

MR. TOMASIS: No, no, (unintelligible) for CIO. (unintelligible) before, they had a company union. And the company union was so, the company helped, helped, it did, it did help. But, you know, the head of the union was more involved with the company. A little later on, you figure where to get more out of

him and that's to have a dependent union. So, it worked out all right. I mean, even though I... When we formed a Foreman Union, it was understood not to go on strikes. Not to do (unintelligible). If you wanted to get something out of the company, you invited the company officers, the company representatives. We appointed our representatives, and they just sit around a round table and discuss and get... You don't get all you have, but you get some. And we did it. The company was good on (unintelligible). I just want to tell you something that's neither here nor now. You know when they closed down the shops, (unintelligible). He used to come in the office and sit there and talk to me about...

INTERVIEWER: This is the head of the Pullman Company in Wilmington, you mean?

MR. TOMASIS: Yeah. I mean, the manager, the manager of this shop. He used to come in to... I had an office in shop. And, see, the shops... The main office was the main office, see, but every department had an, a, ah, a foreman. And the foreman had an office. And the office had an office girl (unintelligible). When I took over, we had fifty people. And you have to keep time for fifty people. So I sit down, I have to be able to manage (unintelligible) make out the time for all these people? And watch how they were working on them? Well, this one might work on this car, that works on the other car, that works on new work, and this one worked on old work and this one did repair work. It was a big business. So you had (unintelligible) clerks that used to do that work. We had to order a lot of stuff. (Unintelligible) stuff to order. That's all from our side, telephone the shops, see if they had the (unintelligible). Tools were (unintelligible) when they closed down, they took over till they had no more than a million dollars' worth of equipment. Just stuff that we used to use. You'd be surprised at what (unintelligible). And anyway, (unintelligible) paper and nails and glue and (unintelligible) and solder and files and bits and (unintelligible) and whatnot. It's a big business just to be a thousand dollars a week and with material that (unintelligible) carpenter store now. (Unintelligible) ought to have an office to do their work. So, in that office, the managers used to come in (unintelligible), see. (unintelligible). But anyway, the manager used to come in quite often, talk to me about the Bible and about this and about that and so on. So of course, with my poor language, I did all I could talk to him, and I got some kind of liking toward me. I went to five or six managers, not only one of them. In those forty-five years, you can imagine how many. But of course I was a foreman for five years. But I could talk to the manager and I was around thirty-two years. So, closed glasses and I was, I'll say "good-bye" to you, I hope I'll see you again. So (unintelligible) that I'll tell you this time (unintelligible). Some people like to talk on the bosses. I don't know anything about it. I mean I work my life to talk on the boss, the boss was no good. The boss hollered at him. The boss didn't treat him right and all that. (unintelligible.) I said I worked with this Pullman Company for forty-five years. I didn't make any, I didn't make a living out of anything else but the Pullman company. I raised a family. I sent the older boy to a college from the Pullman Company's money. I sent my daughter to college from the Pullman Company's money. I sent the youngest boy to college from the Pullman Company's money. And I have nothing to complain to the Pullman Company. If any others do, I'm not that guy. I tell you, if I were... I know if I were (unintelligible), and he can see a few years later, he passed through Wilmington, he called me up, and I invited him to come over. He said (unintelligible) I'm waiting for the next train to leave. He went from Wilmington to St. Louis. (Unintelligible) I'm saying this, now, don't forget how good is your... How good is your company? How good is your company? Now, see, now, in the cabin shop, when I was foreman... I'm not only the foreman for the cabin shop, I was foreman of the (unintelligible) department, the wood mill, and the glass department. The glass, see where the glass goes in the windows, you see the mirrors that goes in the cars and so on. I, we had the Russians, Polish, Italians, Greek, Ukrainians, Jews... I mean, that lots of people we had. And I had (unintelligible). I had to be friendly with them, and they were all friendly with me. To this day, ask my wife, if I go in town, if I'm on the other side of the street,

and a hail on the other... "Hello, Boss!" Right across the street. (laughter) Now, I mean, because, I treated them right. I treat them all right. You see, if I found out that his wife gave birth to a baby, I already made a big hit with him, you see, to know this. And make him feel good and so on. And if he was sick and didn't come in a day or two and just stayed quiet, how you feel, I hope you're better and so on. I was friendly with all. And there were some people who couldn't even talk. Some Polish people, they couldn't talk. Couldn't speak English very well. So, I was friendly with them. But, how they could speak good enough. Until this day.

INTERVIEWER: You lived in Wilmington a long, long time.

MR. TOMASIS: Yeah, I live in Wilmington since February the first, 1913.

INTERVIEWER: What, er, how did you see changes in Wilmington? (Unintelligible) in a long period of time? Do you like the changes that have come about in Wilmington? And what changes have you noticed?

MR. TOMASIS: Well, the fact is, the changes I, I, I noticed a big, big change in the last forty-five years. (Unintelligible) fifty-five years. Fifty-five year (unintelligible) Wilmington?

INTERVIEWER: You say you came here in...

MR. TOMASIS: In '13!

INTERVIEWER: 1913.

MR. TOMASIS: Well...

INTERVIEWER: It's 1969.

MR. TOMASIS: Eh?

INTERVIEWER: It's 1969.

MR. TOMASIS: Yeah. So, how many years?

INTERVIEWER: Roughly fifty years.

MR. TOMASIS: Fif...fifty?

INTERVIEWER: Roughly.

MR. TOMASIS: (unintelligible) No more than that?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MR. TOMASIS: I think I'm fifty-five years here. [1:00:00] Fifty-five years. And the last fifty... Just, just figure it out. (unintelligible) Take thirteen off, thirteen off sixty-nine.

INTERVIEWER: Fifty-six years.

MR. TOMASIS: That's right. (unintelligible) I'm talking forty-five years for the Pullman Company because I'm away from there eleven years already. (Unintelligible) Fifty-five, fifty-six years is right. I see such a change that it's not almost the same city. In business, and in the buildings itself, you see. Now, first of all, those days, at the poor man, if he didn't have a trade, he's got to make a living. Course, you didn't need a whole lot to make a living those days. For three or four hundred dollars, he can establish (unintelligible). My own uncle established himself a business. Back in the early days, he was a shoemaker. But he got so that he couldn't work anymore. He could see and so on, so he had something easier. So he made himself a little candy store, which he could have worked too much and his wife (unintelligible) had to have something easy. He owned his own, his own capital for three, three hundred and fifty dollars. So, he bought a little bit of goods (unintelligible) someone with some credit. He could maybe (unintelligible), showcase, and so on. And he's telling us to build. That poor fellow worked long, long hours. Open about five o'clock in the morning, he close probably around nine or ten o'clock at night. But him and his wife, they came to have made a living. If you call it a living. They didn't have a Cadillac or anything like that to go around. Now, just look the change. What do men do? I'm not talking about the (unintelligible) the dollar's not what it used to be in the days. I'm not talking about that. But, how, how can a man like that make his living? But he's in that condition nowadays when one should (unintelligible). And that there is one of the changes. And I tell you, this as I'm talking about little, I'll talk to you about big. I remember the A&P and the American stores. They had big stores (unintelligible) in Wilmington. They had a lot of stores before the, before these markets. Now, let me tell you about those markets. Maybe you're too, maybe you're too young to remember, they had, they had big stores. The American stores, A&P stores, and with other company stores. It's a poor little thing there alongside the, alongside these, these, uh, big, big markets. Well, it was, it was nothing alongside. But the (unintelligible) and big business. So they died out. They died out. I, I would never thought that the American stores would ever come back to life again. Because they had (unintelligible) stores in Wilmington, and where there was an American store, there was an A&P store alongside of it. There was an American on this corner, and an A&P on the other corner. You see? (Unintelligible) both the business, but, it didn't work out. Now, the little fella, the little fella lost out alongside (unintelligible) at even that time. But, the little fella was still better off than he is today because they had regular hours. You say, you open your business at say eight o'clock in the morning, five o'clock was closed. Now...

INTERVIEWER: Even a small store?

MR. TOMASIS: That's not what I mean. I'm talking about the management at the A&P stores. So the little **[interruption in tape]** the new farmer building. It was only a small section. A small section of the front building. And now (unintelligible) leave alone the other section.

INTERVIEWER: What social changes (unintelligible) did you see in Delaware? You talked about, you know, how building, have more buildings, have larger buildings, but, what changes in the terms of people did you notice? What changes in the terms of the Jewish Community did you see?

MR. TOMASIS: Well, I tell you... The Federation, the Federation of (unintelligible) is one of the biggest things I've ever seen, which we didn't have at that time. At that time, and let me tell you how it was at that time, we had, oh, I know I forget names. They had a charity institution, and that was one person. His name was Harry Gordon (phonetic) (unintelligible) for your time. That poor fellow used to try to help people. Not out of his pocket, but I don't know where the money came from. He was not a wealthy man, but he was a charitable man. He got the money someplace. At the time he came to

Wilmington, he didn't have no place to stay. For some reason, he found a house and put him in and help him out. And the fact is, during the summer months, he used to (unintelligible) the poor children from the Hebrew school (unintelligible) private homes. He used to take them out on picnics. This was...this was a charity institution in Wilmington. One...one man institution.

INTERVIEWER: (unintelligible)

MR. TOMASIS: Now, now the change in this and what they're collecting now (unintelligible) for the expense of the community but they get enough money to (unintelligible). Where would you have... Where would you have an institution like that? Where did you have an institution like that at that time?

INTERVIEWER: Of course there's more money now.

MR. TOMASIS: Eh? Yes, well, in comparison (unintelligible) brings a family who came from the other side here, and into the place (unintelligible) they pay a hundred and twenty-five dollars a month. I'll give you an example. Say there comes a family who came from the other side, you only paid fifteen dollars a month then. (unintelligible) fifteen dollars. There was...there was no organization to take down fifteen dollars and pay for them until he started working. That's, that's what I'm talking about. I'm not talking up to (unintelligible). 'Cause the expenses are bigger. The expense of, of living cost is so high alongside what it was at that time. That, that revelation, that revelation is... Well, I'll tell you, it's one of the biggest things that they could ever think of to have in their community. The biggest. And then the (unintelligible). Can you imagine (unintelligible) they had a center here in my time. You know where it was? You know where (unintelligible) store is? It's upstairs for the center there.

INTERVIEWER: You mean (unintelligible) shoe store...

MR. TOMASIS: ...Shoe store on King Street.

INTERVIEWER: On King Street.

MR. TOMASIS: Yeah. You know that there's an upstairs there? And that, that was, that was the center. For years he (unintelligible). He used to bring in the Times, a Jewish show, or something that (unintelligible). No activity at all when the Jews started building this, this center here I believe in (unintelligible). The greatest in the country. Which it was, you know. In the very beginning when the (unintelligible), and there was activities going on there, seven days a week. Six days. I mean six days. (unintelligible) Something's going on all the time. And people used to go there, too. Well, naturally, it quieted down. Now they're building (unintelligible), I don't have to tell you what they're putting up now.

INTERVIEWER: On the Concord Pike.

MR. TOMASIS: Yeah. So, the change in my time to the last fifty-five, fifty-six year, the change here in Wilmington... It's not the same Wilmington at all. Either way, you take (unintelligible). Do you know, do you know (unintelligible) used to be at Ninth and Washington? Look what they have today. See? Do you know, do you know where the (unintelligible) used to be at Eighteenth and Washington? Look what they have today. Well, even the, even the... (unintelligible). No comparison at all. But certainly they had a nice (unintelligible) that crashed around a beautiful building. You ever been there? The...

INTERVIEWER: The new one, you mean.

MR. TOMASIS: No, the old, I'm talking about the old one down on Ninth. Beautiful building, the old one, but there's no comparison to what they have today. Now that state department (unintelligible). No comparison. And (unintelligible) the Hebrew School. **[1:10:00]** Hebrew schools, in my time, you know what Hebrew schools were? Here in Wilmington? Even my older boy didn't have that much (unintelligible). He had to go out, and get (unintelligible) to come into the house and teach (unintelligible) which was next to nothing. But a little later on, the other (unintelligible) petitioned (unintelligible) and made a few rooms and (unintelligible). So, I don't know how many children they had, (unintelligible), maybe a hundred and ten, twenty-five children in my time. And the (unintelligible) maybe two hundred children and (unintelligible) have any children or not if they have any Hebrew schools. I don't know (unintelligible) Hebrew school or not (unintelligible). What they had was upstairs...

INTERVIEWER: Upstairs, yes.

MR. TOMASIS: And so they had some of these children, and another two hundred children. Well, look, look what they have today. The Veshulons (phonetic) got, what, four, four or five hundred children? The (unintelligible) got two hundred and fifty children. And the (unintelligible) got around three or four hundred children. They had a lot of children there.

[End 1:11:21]