

## **Leo Finklestein**

### **Tape I,**

[1 to 401] I asked him to "tell" his story, not read it - but he read anyway and gave me a copy - enclosed.

[402] He discusses the Depression and joining the Lions Club in 1930 on the second floor of the S&W (he was the 17th member). He attended a stag party in the Sky Club on Beaucatcher. [Robert Bunn, Albertine Maxwell]

[444] His father came to Asheville in 1903 and he was born on Asheland Ave. in 1905. He attended grammar school and sold 5-cent newspapers.

[480] His father gave him a job in his pawn shop for 50 cents a week - out of this he was to save 25 cents. Because of the serial movie on Saturday, he did not work Saturday morning.

[485] Smaller loans were made during the Depression but the same 80% of items were redeemed. Anything that had value and was portable was handled. Bunn got a suitcase for Mabel (see Bunn tape). [Mabel Wolfe, Robert Bunn]

[511] He knew most of his customers and made about 100 loans a day - 50% black and 50% white. The most reliable were the prostitutes. The customers had no credit and couldn't borrow from the bank. They needed cash for doctor bills, to buy drugs, and to eat. His father gave loans on practically nothing. He gave \$5.00 with no collateral to a man who bought a portable stove and chestnuts which he roasted. The man later opened a restaurant with two sections - one black, one white. [Harry Chippin]

[565] He cashed payroll checks (\$40-50,000 in a week). Later he had to charge \$25 per check. [Mayor Ottis Green]

[611] He had money in the American National Bank and, when he got a tip that the bank was going to close, he told his sister to withdraw all but \$100. She did as asked but came home with a cashier's check - which was worthless. [Rosa Finkelstein]

[2/1] He tells about suicides due to the bank failure. [Mayor Roberts]

[2/10] With the bank failure the city had no money. Everyone had to pay taxes over again. A teacher had saved \$30,000 for retirement, and lost it all. [Mrs. Stanton]

[2/24] The Depression didn't affect his business. He held 800 winter coats (pawned for \$5-\$8) during the summer. To combat moths, moth balls were put in the pockets, they were dry cleaned at 50 cents each and sprayed with DDT. When winter returned they were claimed or sold.

[2/69] He was in charge of the Jewish Aid Society. Gave a 50 cent meal ticked to Peterson's on the Square and helped them leave town. There were no shelters.

[2/125] The Jewish Aid Society, later the Federated Charity, was run by women. A drive was put on every year. He tells of a man who refused to give more than \$5.00 and was induced to donate \$500.00! [Segfred, Levitt, Sternberg]

[2/150] 1933 was the bottom of the Depression. The W.P.A. was instituted.

[2/192] When the price of gold went from \$20.67 an ounce to \$35 and, by law, all gold was to be turned in, Robert Bunn went into the country to buy. (He had a car which he bought from real estate sales - the only real estate man to keep his money - see his tape). He then went to work in the store. Later took up appraising and handling antiques. [Herman Schlender, Robert Bunn]

[2/236] His son graduated from the University of Texas, taught computer courses at the air force academy and is now a speech writer. [Leo Finkelstein Jr.]

[2/265] He outfits the first Asheville baseball team from the clothing side of his store.

[2/285] He sold decorations for the Rhododendron Festival to the city hall. It took 10 years to get his \$1,000 investment back.

[2/317] He hired June Bassett when he lost his job at Merrill Lynch, leaving him in charge of the store when he went to the South Pacific during WWII. It was hard to buy merchandise during the war but June doubled the value. He bought 1/2 interest and when Leo returned (June was age 68) he bought the rest. June died but his brother runs the store now. [June Bassett, Charles Bassett]

[2/350] He describes the first store 23 S. Main (now Biltmore Ave.) and the store on the square. [Mr. Lockran]

[2/362] There were stills in the Madison county hills during prohibition and the government men wouldn't go up there for they were guarded by shot guns. The sheriff's department confiscated all the "good stuff" and his father was presented with a bottle of corn whiskey at Christmas. One could buy liquor in any road house. A lady came to his shop to pawn something - she was drunk, offered him a drink and dropped dead - (not the "good stuff").

[2/401] Two men tried to commit suicide in his office. One man did when he went to Havana on a Lions' Convention. A patient from Oteen tried to buy a gun and when he learned he needed a permit he went out, bought bullets and brought back an envelope. While Bassett was opening the envelope he took the gun and shot himself in the chest. The envelope contained a note telling where to send his body. [June Bassett, Herbert Schiftan]

[2/458] Through the B'nai B'rith he brought a refugee to Asheville and paid the required \$13 a week. Schiftan slept at the YMCA for \$5 a week. He wanted to enlist and fight Germany but had trouble with his eyes. He now lives at 109 Lakeshore Dr. (in a house Leo built for his mother), which he bought. [Herbert Schiftan]

[2/509] He said Weir was the best city manager Asheville ever had. Whenever there was trouble he always went himself to investigate. He furnished the labor for the road needed for the Jewish cemetery. [Weldon Weir]

[2/533] He was in the Asheville High class of 1922 with Harry. They principal called him into his office and said he was wasting tax payer's money - to go out and get a job. He went to a military school in Georgia to get a diploma. Weir arranged to have an honorary high school diploma given to him and the Lions Club band played "In My Merry Oldsmobile" at the celebration. (This is not quite like the story enclosed - a bit of "corrected history"!) [Harry Blomberg, Weldon Weir]

## Tape 2

[II/1/1] Leo played the piano in the Lions Club band which called itself the Sanctimonious Seven or the Unholy Six (see tape on Hoyle for photo). The group played for dinners and accepted donations. Over \$1,000 was given to the club. He was president of Lions one year. Two lion cubs were given to the zoo. He joined the club in 1930 and still goes to every meeting. [Fritz Albertson, Jack Cole, Father Ralph Neagle, James "Red" Hoyle]

[II/1/47] He belongs to both Synagogues, was president of one and vice president of the other. He tells about Religious school on South Liberty street and the story about a cold church (see write up) and family ceremonials at home.

[II/1/145] He was the first treasurer for the Jewish Community Center on Charlotte (this was once an open air school. see Katharine Shepard tape) (see notice re destruction enclosed) [Julius Levitch, Katharine Shepard]

[II/1/177] Across the street from the Jewish center was the Nazi organization where Liberation Weekly was published. Pelley sold unregistered stock, was found guilty and sent to jail (see enclosure). [William Dudley Pelley, R.R. Williams, Alvin Kurtus, Julius Levitch, Bill Runsfeld, Sheriff Laurence C. Brown}

[II/1/224] When he graduated from high school he inspected watches for the railroad. Railroad workers' watches could not vary over 30 seconds a week. They were purchased from his store. There is only one person in the city who can work with wind-up watches today. (His shop is on the corner of College and Lexington). He also carries other goods (I think he acts as a pawn broker but he may simply carry second hand items). The inspector before Leo is mentioned. [Neuberg, Clay Hogan]

[II/1/307] He describes Weir as being "fine and helpful." He didn't have time to be active in politics. [Weldon Weir]

[II/1/326] When he retired he started writing and giving reports to groups. He always made his presentations light and amusing. His wife is an invalid and he takes care of her in the afternoon. She has help in the mornings.

[II/2/1] His only activity is to attend the Asheville Lions Club on Wednesday. Reading has become a problem.

[II/2/23] He mentions Westall's death and the tracks for streetcars that were sold for steel. [Henry Westall, Sternberg]

[II/2/33] He used to take a car from the square to Biltmore and fish in the Swannanoa.

[II/2/41] The Riverside Park with its penny arcade, fireworks, canoes and deep-sea diver is described. The Asheville Power and Light ran an open air street car and rides cost 5 cents each way.

[II/2/56] He attended camp in Brevard and canoed on the French Broad to Arden. He left his lunch behind and ate the bacon and eggs with the rest - despite the Jewish rules.

[II/2/69] Kosher food and orthodox cooking was family tradition until his father died. [Rabbi Elias Fox, Chandler]

[II/2/97] He and his wife have health problems [both were very cheerful].

[II/2/105] The Chairman of the Lions Club is encouraging his writing and there is a contest to see who can write the most. He started keeping notes when an Air Force typing teacher gave him a notebook. [John Heatherly]

[II/2/158] He and nine others organized a Shrine Club in Asheville. It is not the Buncombe County Shrine Club. He describes the degrees. [J. Y. Jordan, Wat Boyd]

[II/2/220] He used to go on rides with police officers and investigated a house in Arden where a "suspicious character" was living. At the time, news of the Lindberg baby kidnapping had begun to permeate American consciousness. Finkelstein was riding with his police friend Frank Hagan when they saw a suspicious car with a New York license plate parked in a neighborhood driveway. They peered in and saw a rough looking man reading the NY Times. With the Lindberg baby scare, they feared the worst and immediately called back for reinforcements. Cars phones were just installed. Of course, the man turned out to be a friend of the family and was only house-sitting. There was no connection between the man and the Lindberg kidnapping. Later, Finkelstein discusses the "drug problem." He had never heard of drugs in the city. (He retired in 1973 at age 68). [Frank Hagan, Lindberg baby]

[II/2/267] He gave items pertaining to WWII for a display in Park Place.