

**Transcript of Interview with Larry Buntman**  
**Small Town Jewish History Project**  
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**Rauh Jewish Archives**  
**Library and Archives Division**  
**Senator John Heinz History Center**  
**Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania**  
**1212 Smallman Street**  
**Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15222**

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Transcribers Notes:

Unclear words will be marked [unclear].

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Transcription:

**Eric Lidji:** Today is July 13, 2015. This is the Small Town Oral History Project. I'm Eric Lidji, and I'm talking to Larry Buntman, and we are in the Westinghouse Room of the Library and Archives at the Heinz History Center. So why don't you begin by telling me when you were born.

**Larry Buntman:** I was born in New Castle, Pennsylvania, in 1958. At Jameson Hospital.

EL: At Jameson Hospital.

LB: And I was born in the hallway because they said my mom had plenty of time and I was delivered in the hallway instead of a delivery room

EL: Because she didn't have plenty of time?

LB: No, she didn't. She kept telling them she didn't, but they said, "Oh, honey, you have plenty of time," but she, it was lunchtime, and I popped out and I was ready for lunch.

EL: Were your parents from New Castle?

LB: Yes, both of them.

EL: They were born there?

LB: Yeah they were both born there.

EL: So your grandparents emigrated.

LB: Yes, my grandparents emigrated.

EL: Do you know where they came from?

LB: I believe they come from somewhere in Russia, but I don't know the exact town.

EL: Do you know why they came to New Castle specifically?

LB: It's just something that they picked to come here. They didn't know each other, they got on the boat, they started talking and where they were going and they were both going the same place and you know shortly after they arrived there and that they started becoming a couple. And then they got married.

EL: So your grandparents met on the boat over to the United States.

LB: Yes.

EL: What were their names?

LB: Sarah and Alex Buntman.

EL: What was your, do you know your grandmother's maiden name by any chance?

LB: My grandma's maiden name was Levine.

EL: Oh okay. So they get married once they come to the United States.

LB: Right, yup.

EL: They end up in New Castle.

LB: Yes.

EL: What was his, what was the profession?

LB: He was a shoemaker from 1905 to 1975.

EL: Wow. Where was his store, on Long Avenue?

LB: On Long Avenue, yes.

EL: What was it called?

LB: Buntman's Shoe Repair.

EL: Do you remember the store?

LB: Yes, I do. I was there. My grandfather was a very unique person. He was a ballroom dancer and he could speak seven languages fluently.

EL: Wow.

LB: Which was very impressive. I remember his talking to people and thinking what is he saying?

EL: And he made the shoes as well, or...?

LB: He made them, repaired them, yeah. And if you didn't have enough money, he would repair 'em free or he'd barter with them and they'd bring him in fresh produce or whatever they had to have their shoes repaired.

EL: Wow. Even into the seventies, or had it changed then?

LB: Well, no, even into the seventies he still repaired shoes for people that couldn't afford to buy new shoes and stuff. He worked right up until he was ninety-six years old.

EL: Wow, wow. Was he, he was with Tifereth Israel? Was he a member?

LB: Yes, mhm.

EL: Was he involved?

LB: Yes he was involved, he was, they couldn't find a rabbi for a while so he took that place for a rabbi for about five years. He was a rabbi at the synagogue.

EL: Wow, so he was very scholarly.

LB: Very scholarly, like I said he could speak seven languages fluently. Very fluently.

EL: That's very interesting.

LB: Yup.

EL: So he was the, kind of the de facto rabbi for...

LB: Yeah, and I learned a little bit of Hebrew from him and my grandma and mother and stuff, so...

EL: Wow. How many kids did they have?

LB: They had seven kids. My dad had seven kids.

EL: So you're one of seven.

LB: I'm one of seven, I'm the middle child, yeah.

EL: What's your father's name?

LB: Isaac Buntman.

EL: And he grew up in New Castle, obviously.

LB: He grew up in New Castle, yup.

EL: Do you know anything about what it was like then for him growing up there?

LB: Uh, it was kinda hard growing up being Jewish. I mean, you know, a lot of the neighbors treated him pretty good and stuff. My father never drove a car, he always

drove a motorcycle, never had a car. So if we went somewhere we were on the back of his motorcycle.

EL: That was just his personality?

LB: Uh, he just didn't like cars. That's what I do for a living, is cars. And all my brothers have motorcycles, but I don't. I mean that's literally what I do. I own a Ford company, just selling Ford Torino parts.

EL: Huh.

LB: Which I've had a long run, I took two Super Ford Nationals, Best of Show, I had my car in a movie called *Kingpin*, with Woody Harrelson, in 1997 and I was also interviewed by Jay Leno.

EL: Huh. On the *Tonight Show*?

LB: Yup.

EL: Wow. We'll get to that in a minute. So your father grew up on the Southside of town?

LB: Southside, yup.

EL: And I'm guessing you grew up on the Northside.

LB: I grew up on the Upper Eastside.

EL: So that was when the Jews started moving.

LB: Yeah, I mean there wasn't that many Jews over where we lived, we were the only Jews up that way.

EL: Okay, most were in Neshannock.

LB: Neshannock, North Hills, yeah.

EL: And so your father, what was his, did he go to college?

LB: Uh, no, he didn't go to college.

EL: He just went straight to work.

LB: No, he graduated, and then he went into the military and served and he was two days prior to Pearl Harbor getting bombed, his platoon left and went to Midway. And then my other two uncles, they were in World War II. One got shot eighteen times with a machine

gun in the back and lived, and he owned the Army and Navy store in New Castle probably for twenty-five years. And my other uncle, he reenlisted after serving his term then three weeks later his platoon was in a trench, and they threwed a, there was a hand grenade in there, he jumped on the grenade and got killed.

EL: Wow.

LB: So then there was a fourth brother, they didn't let him go because the military wouldn't let all the sons go from one family.

EL: And the rest were girls, the other three?

LB: The rest were girls, yeah.

EL: So your father was in Midway, was he part of that whole group in the Pacific that was having to kind of hold back the...

LB: Yes, mhm. He was the Fifth Infantry. And I have a lot of pictures of that, too.

EL: Was he in the...

LB: Postcards, pictures.

EL: Yeah, you do.

LB: Yes. I told her that I could bring them.

EL: Was he in, what was that battle, Corregidor?

LB: Corregidor.

EL: Was he in that battle?

LB: Yes.

EL: Wow.

LB: And I actually went over in 2012, over to Hawaii to see Pearl Harbor and different things [unclear] and stuff.

EL: That's really interesting. So he comes back from the war and then what does he do?

LB: He got a job as a laborer for a while, he worked at Coney Island, downtown New Castle, then he worked at Winn United.

EL: Which is what?

LB: An industrial plant and he retired from there, from Winn United.

EL: And so, okay we've sort of caught, well, let's talk about your mother a little bit, how did they meet?

LB: My mom and dad, they actually met at the New Castle bus station. My mom was standing out in front, and he drove up with his motorcycle and they met. And their first date was to Mill Creek Park in Youngstown. And they went over there and got real lost and stuff, and they got back, that was their first date that they had.

EL: First adventure.

LB: Yeah. Mhm.

EL: What was her name?

LB: My mom's name's Nettie Alice.

EL: And she's from New Castle too?

LB: Yes, mhm.

EL: Do you know anything about her side of the family?

LB: Yes. Her side of the family, they were farmers.

EL: Really?

LB: Three generations prior to her, they were farmers, and her mother herself was still a farmer.

EL: In the United States?

LB: Yeah, mhm. Up in Union Township, which is New Castle, it's a borough of New Castle. They owned a 500-acre farm there.

EL: What did they grow?

LB: They grew corn, wheat, barley, they raised cows and pigs and stuff. My great-grandfather took produce from here in New Castle, went to Fort Ligonier. And people come from Philadelphia to Fort Ligonier and he'd bring stuff from there, Fort Ligonier, back from Philadelphia to New Castle. He'd do that once a month, he'd make that drive. I guess it took a couple days. And my grandma, she was an extremely strong woman, I do have pictures of her. She won the turkey shoot sixteen years in a row, and she was one of the best arm wrestlers, called it Indian wrestling back then. She used to hook up

these big horses, I forget, like six of them, looked like Clydesdale horses but they were real big horses and she had such big arms she could actually shake your hand and put you to the ground. I mean she was a very strong woman. She actually lifted the back end of a car up and changed the tire when my uncle pulled the tire off. Very extremely strong woman.

EL: What was, how do you spell the name, the last name?

LB: Which name?

EL: Of your mother's family.

LB: My mother's family was L-A-N-L-A-N-G, Lanlangs.

EL: Huh, wow.

LB: And they were farmers and stuff.

EL: That's very interesting. So we've got up to you now a little bit.

LB: Okay.

EL: What was, you grew up on the northeast side you said.

LB: I grew up in the Upper Eastside, it's like going toward to Cascade Park. A little better neighborhood than the Lower Eastside. Especially now.

EL: And you said there were seven kids.

LB: Seven kids, yup.

EL: And what number were you in there?

LB: Uh let's see... I guess I was number four.

EL: So right in the middle.

LB: Yeah I was the middle child, yeah.

EL: Was there, how observant was the family?

LB: Pretty observant.

EL: Really?

LB: Yeah.

EL: Like what kinds of things, like did you guys go to the synagogue every week or...

LB: Uh, well we all went to Sunday school for a while and stuff. And I'd say down to the last two, they really didn't go too much, but I went to Sunday school. My older brothers did, and my sister did, my younger brother did, so it was a lot of, to go there it was kind of expensive for all of us to go there.

EL: Was the family kosher?

LB: Uhm, semi-kosher. My grandfather? Absolutely kosher, never turned the light on, walked to the synagogue on Saturday, absolutely never worked on a Saturday even though people wanted their shoes done, because that's my day off, he says you want to come on your church day on Sunday, you come on your church day and then he said all these other religions and I'm looking at him like you mean there's more? He goes, oh yeah, there's all kind of religions. And I didn't even realize that and he was telling me and stuff. And the nice thing is like when we had a seder, he'd put different matzah and he'd hide it and if you'd find the matzah you would get like, you would get coins, like old coins and stuff, and I collected them coins and kept them. Never too much paper money but I collected all kinds of coins. And like one coin was worth a real lot of money once, and I did sell it to help my business.

EL: These are coins from around the world?

LB: Uh no, they were U.S. coins, but they were like 1800, 1850, 1870, like real old coins from his shoe shop. You know you would get coins if you'd come and help him, he would give you a coin or something.

EL: Did he just collect them?

LB: Well back then it was like they weren't really old.

EL: Oh.

LB: In a way it'd be like collecting something from 1950 now maybe, it doesn't sound old.

EL: He just happened to have them around.

LB: Right, I mean you're talking like forty-five years later you know, so that's like a hundred year span. So I collected all them coins, and my brother and sisters spent all theirs, but I collected them and never, I'd shine 'em up and look at them and stuff, I just kept 'em because it was part of him, and it was nice of him to give me that.

EL: So you were going to Tifereth as well?

LB: Yes.

EL: What was it like back then?

LB: It was harder back then than it was for my daughter, I mean there's a lot of people who didn't like Jews.

EL: You felt that?

LB: Well I was taught that, I mean when you'd go to school they'd say that's, that's the Jew boy, that's the guy, that's the boy that wants to take Christmas away from us, you know? That's the person who gets more gifts than we do when we have Christmas, they're like two different things and they're the same you know.

EL: Yeah.

LB: So yeah, I did have a hard time through school, yeah. I got into sports and stuff so that kind of took things away, and I got friends from all different schools so that helped me with my path. Plus I was into cars, I loved cars since I was seven years old. When I was nine years old, my best friend lived behind me on the next street; his father was a mechanic, and he showed me how to rebuild starters and carburetors and alternators and stuff, and at twelve years old I was doing that and making a living.

EL: Huh. Was there a car culture in New Castle? Was there a lot of it?

LB: No there was just one little boy who was seven who was a car nut and that was me.

EL: Wasn't there a famous car guy from New Castle? Bob...

LB: Yeah, there was another motorcycle guy whose name was Bob Boyd, he was into Harleys and different [unclear] bikes and stuff, yeah. But I always liked cars and I don't know why, just always like cars since I was seven, you know, and I was old enough at thirteen to buy my first car, and when I was sixteen I owned four, when I was twenty-seven years old I owned fifty-five [unclear] cars and fifteen nice drivers and right now today I own thirty-four show cars.

EL: Wow. Where do you keep them?

LB: I bought the old [unclear] and Copper lumberyard, it's ninety by a hundred, in Mount Jackson, which is just outside of New Castle, it's in Lawrence County. And I have a bunch of other garages, you know, so, I like cars.

EL: What was the synagogue like, this was the new synagogue that you grew up in?

LB: Yes. Mhm, they built it the same year I was born. So yeah.

EL: What was it, was it the same that it looks like now?

LB: Uhm, yes and no. There was so many people there, like when you went to the main sanctuary, they'd open up them big sliding doors and put chairs that'd go all the way back. So it was just like every Sabbath was like the high holidays are now, like you know seventy-five to a hundred people would come, well that would be normal to come on a Saturday like that.

EL: And then how many on the high holidays?

LB: Just about everybody, that was a member there, well over a thousand. That's why they made them sliding doors and they'd put chairs all the way back into the place, up to that stage in the social hall.

EL: That's really interesting.

LB: Set up all them chairs, that's why they had so many chairs there. I know they can fit a little over a thousand people because I had a play there, a fundraiser play, and I had, oh I think a thousand and five people show up.

EL: Wow.

LB: Yeah.

EL: Were there a lot of kids?

LB: Oh yeah, there was a lot of kids there, yes. A lot of families, a lot of kids. There was a lot of kids until about maybe like about seven years ago, and they started dwindling away to like five or six kids.

EL: It was that recently though?

LB: Yeah, mhm. Yeah, cause right when I, I started with my daughter when she was five, because that's when I started. And that's when that Rabbi Shore just started, and he stayed there eight years and was my daughter's teacher. You know, I stayed there every Sunday, and I helped in the Sunday school and Sunday projects and fundraisers. And was actually the vice-president there and the house chair there, which I sat on the board of directors, so...

EL: So you started at five, you said.

LB: I started at five, my daughter started at five, yeah.

EL: And who was the rabbi when you were there?

LB: I can't remember his name, I'm sorry.

EL: That's okay. Were there any rabbis that were particularly meaningful to you?

LB: Rabbi Shore.

EL: Yeah.

LB: Because he's the one taught me to read out of the torah itself without vowels, usually only a rabbi does that. It took me nine months to learn eighty-five words. My daughter knows fifteen hundred words. So and she could actually do a morning service by herself which is above and beyond what you have to do to be bar mitzvahed. Usually you just read your portion out of the Chumash and stuff, a few blessings and prayers, and she had that all down pat when she was about eight.

EL: Wow.

LB: So she was ready at eight to be bar mitzvahed. She said, "When can I get bar mitzvahed?" I said, "We'll do it at twelve." Because actually you're supposed to, you can either do it at twelve or thirteen for a girl, but a boy you have to be thirteen.

EL: What kind of, when you had yours, what kind of festivities were associated with it? Was it a big event?

LB: Yeah, it was a big event. People from the synagogue all come and stuff you know, it was a big event. They all were all big events. Some...

EL: Yeah, continue.

LB: Some were real elaborate, they had like weddings there, I remember going to weddings. Actually, the rabbi that was there teaching me to read, Rabbi Shore, he actually got married in there.

EL: Really?

LB: Another rabbi, yeah. So I got to see different weddings come in and stuff and I mean, he really helped me a lot on how to read Hebrew. I mean he was a very good rabbi, he was a cantor, I mean he knew all kinds of stuff that other rabbis didn't know. He was like, how do you say, a rabbi of, he'd always go by the book you know, just he was more in the reality of the people and the world, instead of just like cut and dry, this is what it is, you gotta do it this way, you know?

EL: Yeah.

LB: I mean he did it both ways, don't get me wrong, but he would do both ways, I'd put it that way. You felt at ease with him and stuff.

EL: And this is when you were younger or when you were older?

LB: Uhm, well, that was like ten years ago, so I was a little younger I guess. And I was just glad that I could read that out of the, out of the torah. And then he also helped me do my dad's yahrzeit all in Hebrew out of the torah, so I actually got to read twice with no vowels, and usually only a scholar can do that like a rabbi and stuff.

EL: Yeah.

LB: Because it's very hard to read something without a vowel, without any words making it say something.

EL: Right.

LB: And you can't remember, and that's what people think, you remember 'em, I never remember 'em, that's how I was taught, you look at it, you read it.

EL: Yeah.

LB: And people, when they go up to say a blessing over it, like you say seven blessings, seven people go up, and when we're doing it on a Saturday service, you can tell who ever has memorized it, you can tell who's reading it, and you also can tell who's not reading it in Hebrew because it's totally different wording when you're saying it.

EL: Yeah.

LB: You can tell right off this person's not reading Hebrew. I actually can read it in Hebrew ten times better than I can in the English.

EL: Huh.

LB: And that's the way he taught my daughter. You read it that way you're never going to have to worry about reading words, you're never gonna forget, you're never gonna skip anything, you're not gonna make no mistakes cause you're looking at reading it, you're not just saying it from memory. Because when you're sayin' it from memory then you look down like, uh oh, where am I at? I read the words so I know the word before, I can just go real quick and read that word and no one will know I messed up. You know.

EL: You had mentioned a play, were there a lot of social events at the synagogue?

LB: Yeah. I was also the fundraiser committee guy. So I had many positions there. We had a play with Rabbi Shore because he actually did plays on Broadway. We had a play-

EL: Wait, he was an actor?

LB: Yeah, he was an actor. He played at the Playhouse in New Castle, too. I think he was in about four or five plays. Four, for sure, I can remember. So we had a play there about Purim and stuff, and dressed up and stuff and actually I have pictures of that if she would be interested in that.

EL: Definitely.

LB: I just thought of that, I just seen the pictures so I know I have them. And we raised \$1,950 with that play.

EL: Wow, and you said 1,005 people showed up?

LB: Yup, and then we also had other fundraisers, we had, my daughter auctioned off a steel pedal car, and I bought the tickets. We raised five hundred and five dollars, and then we had a car detail, which we raised I think six hundred and some dollars. And then we had a gas card that we raised five hundred dollars. We had like five different fundraisers and we raised \$3,500.

EL: Wow, that's really interesting.

LB: And then another thing, my daughter's been in the paper, at twelve years old, twelve times. I told Susan that. And I have all the pictures and the paper on a big board that I had laminated and that. But she said to bring a certain picture in, it's about, like in 1944 all the people come back from the war that died. They made plaques, like stones in the ground for each war veteran, not where they're buried, but up on a hill just for them in particular. Well all the stones all wore off, you couldn't even see names, it was just like a plain stone. So, we took some of the fundraiser money and other people donated and we got a really nice big stone and they put everyone's name on it and my one uncle was on there that got killed in World War II saving his platoon, like I told you. And on one side of it at the unveiling was me, my brother, Harry, and my daughter, Gwendolyn. And on the other side of the stone was a man's brother that died in that war, and he was there for the first unveiling, and now he was there for the second. And they did put that on the front page of the newspaper and that's one of the ones my daughter was in. She also, three different times for a fundraiser, two times for, we did these things at nursing homes and stuff and then she won a Dr. Seuss thing in the whole school, she got to deliver books and do something. For Light-Up Night downtown once because it was snowing and raining and other kids were there, and for Girl Scouts once. And she grewed a pumpkin from one year to the next, it was you know, she painted it and it lasted the whole year for my birthday, it's the day before Halloween, and a news reporter heard her say that or something while she was at the school, and he come and he put it on the front page with the pumpkin and her sittin' on the porch. And there's a couple other things. Like I had [unclear] cars downtown once for a show and they took me and her picture and put it on the front page. And then when I was trying to have a kid, my wife couldn't have a baby, so they had this one cleansing thing they do, procedure, his name was Dr. Brown and he guaranteed ninety days after you'd be pregnant. The day before ninety days she got pregnant, so they come and interviewed us at our house and took a picture of me holding

the baby and my wife in the rocking chair and stuff. And then she had her picture in the paper from the doctor for all that, too, at one time and different times. She's been in there twelve times at twelve years old so...

EL: About the synagogue, so when did the attendance start to decline?

LB: I'd say about ten years ago. It just seemed like a lot of people starting dying off. Some moved away, you know, just like other families and kids didn't come back to the synagogue, so I'd say ten years ago. A lot of people were pretty old, and they started passing away.

EL: Yeah.

LB: It's kind of sad, but...

EL: Were you involved in the merger at all?

LB: No, not really, no. I mean I was there, but I wasn't really involved with it, no. I got involved real big time in the synagogue about ten years ago.

EL: Because of your daughter.

LB: Uhm, well prior to that, even prior to that I guess because of my father. He was getting sick and you know, I've always been involved in certain times. One time they had a lady rabbi, and I didn't care too much for her, and it was a little disorganized and stuff, but you know. I've been there since five, off and on. More involved, not involved. When I say not involved, I went to service, I'm talking about involved like being a vice-president, a house chairman. I was, what do they call that? President before the vice-president, like I was number one, then I'm number two, then the president would be number one. So I worked my way up the ladder. I could have been the president, but I chose not to.

EL: How come?

LB: Because I had a teenage daughter, and I take care of my mother.

EL: Yeah.

LB: I'm her caretaker and I run a business. I mean just being a vice-president is enough. It's just like being the president, if he's not there I do what he can't do, I'm his replacement.

EL: So how, tell me how you started your business.

LB: I started my business, I actually what I did, I worked different jobs. I started working when I was Frenkel's Supper Club. And then he showed me how to be a meat

cutter and a chef, so at the age of fifteen I was a chef and a meat cutter, and at sixteen I went to a place called Trojoes [?] which was a very high-class restaurant in New Castle, very elegant, upper class. And I was a chef there, and I was a meat cutter. And then I drove cars back and forth from the auction in Pittsburgh here, on Pennsylvania and Butler Avenue where they come together, they had a car lot there and I'd fix them, at the age of sixteen. And then what I did after that, I went to school at Trades, after I graduated high school, New Castle High School, I went to school at Trades. And I got hired out of there. Out of sixty-three people, they went down to three people. And it was Bob Mayberry's [unclear] Sharon, Pennsylvania, Hermitage. And it used to be called, now it's called Mel Grata's. So I got chosen out of them last three people, I was one of the three. And they kept saying, "Well we're gonna hire you with one stipulation." And I kept saying, "Well what is the stipulation?" And it took them an hour to tell me. They said, "Well, for a little while you have to shave your beard completely off." I said, "What?" So I did agree to that, and I kept it off for about eleven months, and I kept growing it a little and taking it off. And the owner said, "Did you run a shortage on razor blades?" And I said, "Yep, just ran out." And I never shaved it since then, until just recently I shaved this. So that was in February in 1980 that I did that. And I just shaved this like about nine months ago.

EL: So you had a big beard or...

LB: I always had a beard about your size.

EL: Okay, so a little trimmed beard.

LB: A little trimmed beard, and I never, never decided to trim it. My daughter asked me to do this, and I looked at her and said, "What?" So I did do it because I loved her and she asked me to.

EL: Why did you like the beard in the first place?

LB: I don't know, I just liked the beard. I don't know why, people have always asked me that. I don't know, you don't even feel like you have it. I don't know, do you feel you have a beard?

EL: No, I didn't know if it had something to do with religion.

LB: No, people have asked me that. Maybe, but I have just always like the beard.

EL: Just personal taste.

LB: I mean I was like, I think, I was almost thirteen years old, and a friend was gonna go out on dates and stuff and he goes, "You're too young." He was like fifteen. And I said, "I can look older." He goes, "How're you gonna look older?" I said, "I'll take my sister's eye shadow and put it on my mustache." He goes, "You ain't got a mustache!" I

said, "Yeah I do, I did it once." And I did that and we went out and I looked older than him. And they thought I was older than him. It's funny.

EL: So tell me about this car lot at Penn and Butler in the city that you were telling about.

LB: Yeah, it was...

EL: At Doughboy Square? Where the little statue is?

LB: Uh, right across the street like almost right there, the car lots actually still there, it's actually a car lot, too. It's called Clyde's Automotive.

EL: Yeah, it's still there.

LB: Yeah so me and my brother, Steve, worked there. We brought cars back and forth from the auction. If it would break down I got an extra fifty bucks if I got it in without calling a tow truck.

EL: Huh.

LB: And plus I fixed it, so yeah. So I was always into cars, at sixteen I knew what I was doing more than a fifty year old. I started working on them when I was just a boy, seven, eight years old. And you know I knew how to repair stuff. Cars were kind of simple back then compared to now, I mean you have to be pretty good now to work on them.

EL: So you were working at this place in Hermitage, when did you start?

LB: I worked there from 1980 to October of 1985. And that's when Mel Grata took over. They laid me off. They had twenty-one mechanics and they laid eleven mechanics off, and I was one of the eleven. I worked there for five and a half years, never a day late, never called off sick. So I started my own business. I still worked on cars, but then I started a muscle car business for '68 to '71 Torinos, Cyclones, and Cobras.

EL: So this is restoring?

LB: I restored them, and I bought parts, I started manufacturing parts and stuff.

EL: You made them yourself?

LB: Yup. Made 'em myself. Farmed some out to make and stuff with molds and stuff.

EL: Yeah.

LB: Both, yup.

EL: And is that still the business that you have?

LB: Yup, still doing the same thing. Everyone kept asking me when I started selling cars, “What are you gonna do in a year or two, you gonna do something else?” I said, “Well I plan on retiring.” They all laughed at me, except my dad and my brother, they said, “Eh, he’s a pretty good salesman, he can sell stuff.” You know, just give people what they want, and then they’ll buy the other stuff that they don’t want. Most people try to sell them junk and keep the good stuff for later, I do the opposite. It’s just like when you start talking to someone, and you’re mad at them, you don’t want to offend them cause as soon as you offend them they’re gonna close up and be mad at you and not want to do anything. I make the person happy first. Which, you know, these guys are calling me because these are their dream cars, it’s something that they’ve wanted for all their life, or for a short while, or in between or something, you know. They had one when they were a kid, their father had one, grandfather, uncle might have had one, brother might have had one, you know and stuff.

EL: And you’re selling way beyond New Castle, I’m guessing.

LB: I sell around the world.

EL: Yeah.

LB: I’ve sold to twelve different countries in my time, yup. I’ve sold just about every state, and I’ve been in every state in the United States except Alaska. I’ve been in four different states a hundred times.

EL: Wow.

LB: I’ve even been to Hawaii. Haven’t been to Alaska yet, and I’ve been in eleven different countries.

EL: Huh. How did you meet your wife?

LB: Uhm, I actually met her at Papan’s Restaurant. She was driving an old muscle car and she couldn’t get it started, and I went over and helped her to start it.

EL: Did you get married at the synagogue?

LB: Uh no, actually I got married in Las Vegas. I went to Las Vegas, and I had the reception here.

EL: Huh. So then your daughter is born, was it always...

LB: She was born here in New Castle.

EL: Was it always important to you that she be a part of the synagogue, it sounds like...

LB: Well, well I had all this, we had these problems where she got inseminated and all this other stuff and nothing worked and everyone gave up except me, I kept hoping for four years and praying. Well my mom seen this doctor on TV, his name was Dr. Brown and he was gonna come to New York City from L.A., and he had a cleansing procedure that he guaranteed anyone would get pregnant within ninety days. And he just found this out accidentally by cleansing a woman for certain reasons and they would all get pregnant, so he decided that he would try doing this and it worked, and I tried doing it and it worked, I didn't, my wife did, and it worked and then she was born and it was like a miracle so I decided that she should be part of the synagogue. And she was, her road, from what I had was like, I wouldn't say mine was a nightmare, but it was sad. Her road was really good, all her teachers were really interested in it. They actually brought some of the different games we play for different holidays in for show and tell in kindergarten, first, second, third grade. And then like sixth grade they made her do a report on Egypt, she knew everything, she aced it, she knew more than the teacher, that's what the teacher said. Just from studying Hebrew and stuff. She's always, you know, she's always proud of her heritage, and her teachers and stuff were really good.

EL: Why do you think it's been, in the bigger pictures, why do you think it was easier for her? Do you think people's opinions have changed? Or people...

LB: I think all opinions of all religions, all races have changed because we've all interacted and stuff, it's a completely different world that we live in. Because a lot of people, like, I don't know if you want to know that, it's like you know, a lot of people say you're prejudice if you don't like colored people. And I'm for colored people and I'm not prejudiced, but you know if you do bad things, you could be white, Jewish, Christian, whatever, but you know a lot of people you keep hearing about, I know they call them black now, but my mind says colored because in my day it was colored. So you know I had a discussion with one and listened to me and stuff and cause I went to school and I was a wrestler and there was a guy named Bruce Clarke and he was NFL football player later and he was like three times my size and I could pin him in less than thirty seconds. You know we lifted weights, and he kept getting mad, "How're you doing that?" So I said, "You know it took an act of a president to free, George, I mean Abraham Lincoln to free slaves." And he said, "Yup, that's right." And I said, "I'm glad that happened." I said, "Do you realize it took an act of God to free Jewish people? So where are we at here?"

EL: Yeah.

LB: And that just popped in my mind one day, and this is recent. And I had never thought of that like that, you know, it just popped into my mind because everyone seems to pull that racist card. I never do that. I usually don't even mention I'm Jewish, it's you know, it's my business you know.

EL: Yeah. So in the past couple years was there a feeling that things had to change at the synagogue, that there were just-

LB: It's been changing for probably a good twelve years, I'd say. It's been changing, you know, people don't like change though. I mean I'm the one that changed a lot of things there and shook things up and made things happen.

EL: What kinds of things?

LB: Like, like different things for Sunday school. Just different outlooks on different things. I mean people were just set in their old ways and stuff, you know. Go to other synagogues and do other activities at other synagogues, have them come to our synagogue and do activities, have fundraisers, and just you know, just different things. Just like with the cemetery, I have people, well at my cemetery, there's two different cemeteries, but everyone's saying well what do you care about the other cemetery that so and so, well I do because they're fellow Jews, I don't want them, you know, maybe no one has any more family left here so I'm speaking for people that can't be heard. I kind of was a new guy and the younger guys, say me and Sam Bernstine, and he changed things just like I did. Just like I, work needed to be done in the synagogue, they slacked off from doing the parking lot and interior, different stuff, so I just kept bringing it up, let's spend money where we should spend some money and get things fixed and make it look nice and proud of where we're at.

EL: And your daughter was the last bat, bar, bat mitzvah?

LB: Bar mitzvah, yeah. From the Sunday school class, yes.

EL: And there's no one else behind her coming up through?

LB: There was another girl that did get bar mitzvahed, but not from the Sunday school class. The Sunday school class was all over after my daughter that was it.

EL: Huh. Was there, was, were people aware of that at the time?

LB: Oh yeah. I actually helped, it's actually my niece.

EL: No I mean, when your daughter was having her bar mitzvah, were they, did people know at the back of their minds that this was the last one?

LB: Yeah, yeah. Mhm, yeah because that was the end of the Sunday school class basically.

EL: Sort of bittersweet.

LB: Yeah.

EL: What do you think the future of the congregation will be?

LB: I think, oh it all depends, I don't know. I mean there's just so many, I mean most people just want to come for high holidays, and I hate to say that, I mean I realize that's in all religions. I've talked to other people thinking, oh a lot of people come for you know, Christmas and Easter and for other holidays in different cultures, and it's no different in any of them, they're all the same. Even when my dad went there they were called the holiday Jews. But it's true, it's even now.

EL: Yeah.

LB: But back in the day I went there, like the holiday was every Sabbath. And then to see maybe ten, twenty people at a time or even five or six people for a service, this is sad. Because you need nine people to do certain prayers, you know.

EL: Right.

LB: But yeah, it just you know, like I said there's only so many families left and they're, like a lot of them are really old. I mean me and Sam are like the youngest ones there. You know I'm probably the youngest one there. Sam's almost going to be sixty.

EL: All right, well thank you very much!

END OF INTERVIEW