10-21-2003

Eugene Bahniuk interview, 21 October 2003

Subject: Eugene Bahniuk
Interviewer: Nick Gustin
Gates Mills, Ohio
21 October 2003

Nick Gustin: Could you please state you name and spell it for me.

Eugene Bahniuk: My name is Eugene Bahniuk and yes I could spell it for you. [Laughs] E-u-g-e-n-e B-a-h-n-i-u-k.

NG: What are you first childhood memories of Tremont.

EB: First childhood memories. Starting school

NG: Starting school.

NG: Were you born in Tremont

EB: No I was actually born in Wherton, West Virginia. I came to Cleveland, and ah, entered first grade, and in Cleveland. In Tremont.

NG: In Tremont school.

EB: In Tremont School. YA.

NG: ah ya go a head

EB: I attended Tremont for a year or two and then I, ah, attended Buerher through, ah, the time I went to Lincoln and I attended Lincoln until the time I graduated.

NG: Um what were the neighborhoods like when you were growing up?

EB: A, It was a very nice neighborhood I thought. It was an exciting neighborhood for me. Ah we had a variety of people living there, er a variety of nationalities and history and ah, ah, financial needs. And ah, ah it ah was near downtown, which was a good place. And ah, the school, Ah, I didn't realize it then, but the schools were excellent. I liked the schools they were good we had great teachers. I appreciated that, but I hadn't realized how well they prepared us. Ah, there were a lot of places. I never was bored there. There's always something to do, regardless of the season. Ah, to me it was home.

NG: Um, What did you do, um, where did you go with your friends in elementary school?

EB: Well, let's start in the beginning. OK? Uh, in the beginning when I was around 6 years old,

My world was rather small. I lived on west 11th street, uh, right across from the park there. And,

uh, my world included the house on west 11th, a porch and the house in front of us, I'd sit on that porch and watch people. A little bit, across the street at night, the kids would get together and play various games; Tag, uh, Rover, Rover Let Somebody Else Come Over, whatever. Uh, underneath the spotlight we'd do that, like at this time of the year would be great. And then the other part of my world was uh, the school. It started at home and ended at the door at the school. And then back home again. Uh, that was a world, uh there was the main entertainment for me was the interaction with the other kids. As I grew older that broadened. I remember one of the places we would hang out was Lincoln Park in the summertime. In the center of the park was a wading pool. And that was fun. And that was just a few hundred feet away from home. Uh, in the winter time, there was the end of west 11th, the southern end, for me anyway, it ended at the hill going down to the flats, and, uh, we'd sled ride there. That took care of winter. [Let me just look in my notes here]. Don't want to miss anything. Oh, when I was in second grade, we moved to west 14th street near Buerher. I attended Buerher, and what we did and the world was a little wider now. Buerher School went down into the flats, down west 14th, down to the railroad tracks, and, uh, at first, again sled riding was down Holmden hill, a tremendous hill for sled riding, cars couldn't get up in the winter time. Part of the reason for that was they wetted the streets from the fire hydrants and it made good sledding. But not many people that lived on Holmden Hill had cars anyway. I think they still had outhouses on Holmden at that time. Uh, there I got to know more kids. We used to play at Buerher Elementary in the summertime. They had help there, like college kids and maybe it was a government program of some sort. I'm not sure it was WPA, but that similar thing. These young kids would come and they would be monitors, they'd set up equipment, uh, organize games, but when I first started going there, that was always one of my outs, Buerher. I'd go play in the sandbox, and the swings, and the teeter-totters, or something, or I'd climb around the gymnastic equipment. As we grew older, or even at that age we'd play marbles a lot, we had tops, where we'd spin a top, yo-yos, a game with a paddle with a ball on it, with a string, and we'd see who could get the most hits.

Saturdays, the movie house, the Garden Theater, had a matinee thing where the cost was a dime. Occasionally I'd get enough money to go to that. Uh, Going down into the flats was fun. There were the marshes. It had pollywogs, minnows, snakes, but I didn't see to many of those. We'd always catch these things and kept them 'til they died, or you'd bring them into school and let them set in a jar. Uh, we'd fly kites off of the end of west 14th street. There was a trolley line and a concrete abutment for the streetcars. It was a nice place to fly kites because they'd go right over the valley and had a nice breeze from the lake, out in that direction. It was a great kite-flying place. Uh, a lot of fun was playing cops and robbers, there were a lot of mounds and when you got shot, you would roll down the mounds and things like that. So, so, You might take a friend with you and you might just walk down there and be somebody could play around with or talk to learn about him or her. Not many people but the kids where often there, nobody cam by and bothered them. Ah um, swimming, we did swimming, but at the brook side zoo. AH and there was some day of the week I think Monday morning. Were you going for free? And ah we walk all the way up to the zoo that was a two or three mile walk. It was not a big deal at that time to us. And ah. Go swim. Ah in that playground was we were getting older we just to have pick up games of ah, ah baseball somebody came up with a bat and someone else with the ball. And we had a game. And

Who ever showed up would play. Ah we played ah, ah let's see. Ah I will back of from that. Oh

ya I talk about the games I played. But the girls at that time would play hopscotch, and ah jacks or jump rope. And I don't know ah the, the boys didn't cross over to the girl's games and the girls didn't cross over to boy's games. But as then as you got a little bite older we a got the point were we got a pair of roller skates. And ah grate roller skating, ah at that time almost all side walks in that area were ah sandstone and that was great. As to compared to concert. And to skate on cement. Hated to skate on cement but sandstone was great. And that sort of increase you area because you can travel a lot farther. Ah and then after to skates, we had those skates were you sort of strapped them on and then the clamp for there toes. And ah, if they had roller bearings they were grate skates. But then as you got older we got bicycles, and that even increased the area even grater. And ah we used to go; it was a lot fun. Driving around with other guys, with a bicycle and we go here there you'd explore places you had never been before. But what were more houses like where you were living. But they were different. They where in a different part of the world, so you sort of expanded your awareness of that. Alleys were one of my favorite places to go. Ah few vestiges of alleys left anymore. Every time I see one I go through touch of Na nostalgia. That is was I see one down in the Tremont area when I go down. You know what to look for and you see them, but ah they were at that time severs areas for people bring their rubbish or car or so on. But at night we. They were disserted places and you, its a sort of kind of place where now I think of a lot of neighborhoods you would be afraid to let your kids go, but nobody seemed to concerned ah about any kinds of kids a roaming around or a ah being harmed in any why. Or tempted there were some guy's we all stay away from. Who sort of tuff, tuff guy's and ah they had reputation. To tell the truth I never saw them hurt anybody. But the, but little five, six, ten year olds they look very menacing. And I think that they were probably as good hearted as anybody else. But they, they just there appearance, they didn't we didn't really, really, worried about being harmed by them. Ah, it ah, ahhh boy,

NG: What was that like. Would you say your, your best friends were like? How many were there. And how many ended up.

EB: Well I had several best friends. OK it depended Ah, what occasion was. Like ah, going down into the, the, playing in the flats, Ah, one of my best friends was Amo Vevalo, Ah, Italian kid, the only Italian kid I knew. And ah, we would we, he just lived a couple houses down from us and I go out with him. But the only thing I ever did with Amo was go to the flats. [Laughs] That's all. Then, then ah, ah, but sort of my best all round friend the most common one lived on Holmden, George Switz. And ah, we, we, my time with him, we went to school together we had some classes together ah, but I see him on the evening and weekends often because his parents Knew my parents and in fact its a cause they knew each other, that I got to know George Switz. George Switz I still have lunch with a once a month on the west side, a University Inn.
Ah, another best friend ah, it was Hal Roth, his was what maybe you might call an intellectual best friend, I mean he is a guy I would share my reading interest with, in and so on. Ah we sort of thought along similar signs ah lines and we had about the same kind of interest.
And Hal was part, also one the guy's I meet with. He and George Switz and, and the third guy ah Sam Stratis, who live ah, over on Scranton road. His father had a bakery there. Now he was not

My best friend was he was friend, and the time. And I still meet with him. So the four of us get together and, and meet once a month. Ah, even to this day ah, ah, the so, you know it just varied

what the occasion was. [Laughs] Ah, I had a group of best friends you might say. And when I got to high school we ah. John Shea. One of the guy's I haven't seen in years, took the initiative and gathered guy's together who interest in high Y. And we formed a alpha High Y chapter, Lincoln, and we meet on Franklin Avenue at the Y there. Ah. And THAT was a GREAT learning experience. It really was. Ah we, we, sort of form this because thought it would be good, sort like to have our own Mafia or what ever. But, ah, we were fortunate in that ah. The YMCA has if you wanted to have a High Y you had to have a sponsor, and we had a sponsor. A former ah graduate from ah, Lincoln High, Ted Kapplish. His folks had a dairy on Holmden. And ah, he was ah, a personal director at the Ryan Foundry in town. It used to be Cleveland had a lot Foundries. But he was personal director and once a week or whenever met, Ted would come down and meet with us at the Y, and he tough us a lot about inter you know parliamentary procedure. There about planning things, going places, ah organizing, and he taught us about the, sort us the, need to ah, look out side your own circle, to other people, ah, and because of that for instance we had invited in our club, one of the guy's ah, that considered sort of strange by a lot of people, and ah, he was, was strange. Ah but, we considered one of our own and I think largely that was because Ted said "you got to do those kind of things." Ah, we as a group we would go swimming places, we go down and swim off the brake wall down on the lake. A is of course when we were seventeen and eighteen and to do that. We'd also swim out at the Berea Quarry. It was a great place. It was sort of isolated. There was no wading, it was very deep, you were either fully immersed of you were dry or on dry land. The first thing we would do, when we get to the area, uh, we'd buy a case of refreshments, beer or pop, or whatever we could get, and we would tie it to a rope and lower it down into the quarry because after you penetrated the top four or five inches which were nice and warm, the rest of it was cold, and so any beverages you had got really nice and cool in the summertime. We, uh, developed some skills, and forming parties, inviting girls, and things like that. Uh, strange activities for us but, uh, that was another group, that was a group of best friends. And, uh, we still are close when we get to meet. George wasn't a member of it, he was a member of another high Y, uh, but Hal Roth was a member of that. I was the first president of that chapter. Uh, John Shea perhaps should have been because he organized it, but somehow, I don't remember why, I ended up as president. Uh, another thing, another one of our activities, I used to love to watch the steam engines in the wintertime. They are just spectacular, with the billowings and so on. But, also a favorite place was walking downtown, cause even though it was a couple miles away, Higbee's, and Halle's and May Company were just festive places at Christmas time, and it was just a lot of fun to walk. The streets were so crowded with people, uh, all kinds of merriment and holiday spirit. It was a fun place to be. That was another place we would go.

Uh, all during that period, uh, from about the third grade on, one of my favorite places to go to for recreation or just needed something to do, was the library on Scranton and Clark. I just read there. I'd go there and get one book after another and read and read. I'd start out in the elementary, or second grade division or something and pretty soon I read all the books there were of interest and they gave me special permission to go up to adult level and I got introduced to H. G. Wells, and World War I, uh, pilots, and the Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea, and oh,

I don't know, it was just a great place to go and read. And I'd read the magazines. That library is still there and uh, it looks the same/ anyway, from the outside.

NG: What was, uh, do you remember your high school, your first date and where did you go?

EB: Uh, I wasn't much on dating, no, but I had a girlfriend. We liked each other. We, uh, what was her name? uh, I can't think of it right now. But she was a nice girl; she was just as shy and uncomfortable around boys as I was around girls. But we knew we should have boys and girls and we'd get together once in a while. Uh, Uh, I remember the first time I went to a prom. Uh, it wasn't my prom, I was in the 11th grade at the time, but an 11th grade girl who was in my chemistry class asked me to go. I thought that [telephone rings]. [Tape paused]. Geez, I got to rent a tuxedo that's 5 bucks. And buy a corsage that will probably cost $3. Uh, but the girl was persistent and I went, under protest. But she got to go and I got to go. Then to my own, uh, graduation or class ball, I took the girlfriend. And I'll be darned if I can think of her name right now. Actually, I saw her more at the Pilgrim Church. We used to hang out there. That got started while I think I was in school, having a place for kids to go to. I don't remember how many nights per week, probably once or twice during the week. They opened up one room, sort of set it up as, like a nightclub. Of course you can only get soft drinks and stuff, and the girls would sit on one side and the guys on the other. Some of our guys, Al was a great dancer and he'd always be dancing and the girls all loved to dance with him. Every once in a while I'd get up the courage and go and ask somebody to dance. And, uh, we always liked to hang around there. That was a great place, a great crowd and so on. Uh, I'm really bothered by my favorite girlfriend. She sent me a picture of herself, when I was in the military. [Telephone rings] Tape paused].
Okay. Let see I still can't remember her name. [Laugh]

NG: How did you get to the prom?

EB: Oh, I drove. I was lucky. Uh, I was one of the few guys in the class who could drive. And the reason for that was, it was war time, and gas was very limited, if you only had what was called an A card, uh, you got only a few gallons a week that you could use. And if you worked in industry. Uh, in defense industry of some sort, you got a C card, which might get you 5 or 6 gallons a week, so that you could get to work. If you drove trucks for a living, you got a T (card) thing and get more gas. Uh, most people didn't drive because gas was so short, if they had to go someplace and needed a car, uh, having high school kids like that using the car was not likely to happen. But, (smiling) my dad owned a gas station. [Laugh] and that was not an issue. I got to drive a lot. [Laugh] I can still remember when I would come into Lincoln (high school) driving the car, I'd just drive right up to the curb and park it, and walk in. There was no big parking lot; nobody else was parking out there because cars were moving around. But I did get to do that, so, we always had several cars in the family. Although we didn't drive excessively, or really abuse it, I just didn't have that limitation. Uh, in fact, I taught a lot of my school friends how to drive because I drove first, because I had one available, and as they came and the situation made sense, they'd ask me to help and teach them to drive. We probably had driver's education then, but I can't say for sure. I do know that I taught a lot of them to drive. There's a great place out in Parma, Parma Heights area, to learn to drive and I would take them out there. The reason it was, there were a lot of streets, all marked off, all paved, and all covered, several acres, which was to be a housing development. But it started in about '29 or something like that I imagine and that

went bankrupt so it was not developed for all those years, but it was there. The streets had been put in and so it was a great place to teach. You could teach them all the various maneuvers under various conditions. That area, my folks built a house out there and moved to Parma Heights, on Parma Park Boulevard. So I lived there with them for a few years.

NG: Like, when was that, what year?

EB: Well, I graduated and when in the Army, uh, in 1944, November, late fall, sometime in the fall. That was, I was in the Army for two years. Most of the kids, at that time, you couldn't enlist in the military. But once you turned 18 you'd be in the military, you'd be drafted. And so if you didn't finish high school by 18, too bad, you went in. That's the way it was. So, a lot of the kids, some of them, didn't even finish high school because they didn't want to bother to drop back a little bit, might've needed another two or three hours, and didn't bother to get it. But, I went to summer school and got enough credits that I could graduate in that time. Uh, and sure enough, when I turned 18, that was it, I was in. The reason you couldn't join was that, at first when the war broke out, uh, well, before Pearl Harbor, or the early years there, you could join the service. And, uh, it came out to be an unbalance, because very few people picked the infantry, but that's where all the killing was going on, and they needed the replacements. Uh, people were trying to find the safest places to enlist in, and the way you thwarted that was to treat everybody the same, drafted them all. But during that period was when my folks moved out to the Parma Heights area. And so I lived out there when I went to school.

NG: Then you commuted from Parma to Tremont?

EB: No. When I was going to Tremont, I lived on west 11th. My folks moved out to Parma when I was in the military already. So, they had that house there. And that was just in the beginning. During the war, very few houses were built. Unless you had some special hardship case. So as the war was winding down, materials were released and my folks were able to build a house. They were one of the first built on that street.

NG: What was your first job? At the gas station or was it someplace else?

EB: Oh, yes, when I turned 12 I pumped gas for the next 14 years [Laugh]. Yea, uh, at first I tried to get a job as a caddy and didn't have much success at that. And I had a job trying to shine shoes, and that didn't quite work out. That was the time my folks, my mom was very perceptive, she says, "where are you going?" and I said to shine shoes, and she said, "oh, you want to work?"
Yea. She let my dad know, and before you know I was out there pumping. I worked there generally; one of the times was early Sunday morning. My dad would always open the gas station and by noon you'd get only one or two customers, but he felt he was obligated to have that gas station open on Sunday because there was at least somebody who needed gas. My charge was mainly to clean up all the tools and everything that was scattered all around, and clean up the floors, and get the place ready for next week. And, uh, I earned $5 a week for all the hours I put in. I worked daily, and I worked all day Saturday and Sundays. Sunday morning generally. My dad would sleep in and come in around noon. But that was my job. My dad

expected me to sort of take over the business, but I had other things in mind.

NG: What other jobs? When you came back from the military, what did you end up doing?

EB: I went to Case. I pumped gas for a few months until the semester started [smile] but, uh, uh, I went to Case for 4 years and then got my degree in mechanical engineering. My first industrial job I worked for New York Air Brake Company in Watertown, New York and then I did that for about 4 years then I came back to this area. I realized by that time in my career I needed more education. I hadn't appreciated college as much as I did afterwards. The courses that I thought were useless, I found out to be very important. Where they were drudges to study, they were music to know I had those skills, professionally. And, uh, I realized I had to enhance them and that's why I went back for graduate degrees. It was always hard to get in that discipline to study, but I always found it necessary.

NG: Would you say that your experiences at Lincoln High School helped advanced that what you learned in high school helped in college, helped you along?

EB: Oh, yeah, absolutely. I was extremely well prepared and I didn't know it. I didn't know it at the time. We had excellent teachers, I knew that, I mean people they were teaching difficult subjects, mathematics and so on, physics, and chemistry. But they were people who were very good and who promptly, well; in fact they didn't opt to be teachers. They got prepared in higher level things and had prepared to go in industry and work. But, in the Depression they didn't have that privilege. There was very little industry, they weren't hiring anybody. So because of their good preparation they got sopped up as teachers, and then stayed. By the time the Depression was over, they had already passed the time where they could be hired. They were exceptional people. They really prepared us well. Uh, I thought, I always had sort of an inferior feeling about what I was learning at Lincoln. This is do to, you know, talk among kids. They'd say, "I'm going to West Tech, that's a much better school and it was local". Whether it was a better school, I'm not sure. They had good teachers. I don't know if they were significantly different from ours. Or the kids that went to parochial schools, they were bragging how much better and after a while I didn't have anything that countered that. My folks didn't have an education. They were born in the Ukraine and they went to school for 1st and 2nd grade. Once you learned enough to read and write your name and a little bit of arithmetic, you went out in the fields and worked. And so they didn't have that, and they couldn't guide me or tell me much about the schools. The only thing they were certain of was the education was good, and you better learn. And don't tell me what the teacher did to you, I guess I'll smack you even harder [laugh] if you get out of line. So I would grow up with great respect for teachers. Teachers were always put on a pedestal. They were special people. You went there and you learned. They were excellent. And so when I went to college, no matter what school I compared my preparation with, and so on, whether there was the elite schools and private schools, or foreign schools, or even graduates of other colleges, I found that I was always as well prepared as anybody, anywhere. Lincoln High School was not a handicap that I thought it would be. I thought that I'd have to work a little bit harder, maybe I was good, and I came in scared, so I worked hard cause I didn't want to drop out. Uh, I was a good idea to work hard, but I really didn't have to do that cause of the school I went to, it was more of a mental problem I had.

Lincoln High School was really an outstanding school. I was really well prepared. In all my basic courses, where my friends were struggling, I was well prepared.

NG: Do you remember your favorite subject?

EB: Favorite subject? Favorite subject? I think my least favorite subject I remember was Latin. We had to take for college prep a language and I wish I had chosen differently than Latin. I just, it turned out to be a good choice because it helped me in English that's what it really helped me in. I was much stronger in English because of Latin. I regret not having another language now, because there are times when I was traveling a lot in Europe. It would have been good if I knew French or German, either one of those two. It would have been very handy. Uh, but I didn't elect to do that, and uh, although I did benefit from the education, I wish I would have had something like that. I was embarrassed when I traveled in other countries, and people speaking 4 or 5 different languages. I was embarrassed about that.

NG: Did you have a favorite teacher or someone you related well with?

EB: Ah I was just thinking I ahh for a minute there that the lady. But on of my favorite teachers, tough advanced math. And ah in fact two teachers that tough advanced math. Were ah were ah, I think very. were people that good role models. Ah I thought that they were very good. All the teachers had a sense of, ah, ah, a nice bearring. They all came across as people that you respected, and ah, the kids respected them. Ah let me. Perhaps one of my favorite teachers was ah, Sabitosh, Mr. Sabitosh. He used to live on West 25th and Denison area. He is a guy; ah that works his way through college. Ah boxing. He was tough. Ah what did he teach? He taught a science course. An introduction to sciences course. Science kind of thing. And ah he was a real activist. He played a big role in getting the national park here in town, the Cuyahoga Valley. Ah, Mr. Sabitosh. And he, he was always teaching us a lot about life and ah, politics and, ah unfairness, And ah. And ah, various that that he brought us outside and beyond the class room. He really ah, I really admired him. AH but ah, I think again that lady teacher taught advanced math she was tough and a very difficult subject, to a, ah group that not really into math, ah, ah an advanced algebra. But she taught it very well. And ah, difficult subject. Difficult to ah, to people not in that area, or in that way of thinking. And she, she did ok so I, so she would probably be my favorite, that I can think of right now. And I had an English teacher I liked. It was my homeroom teacher and I can't think of her name. All of those names have sort of disappeared for me.

NG: And what on during a school day. In between your classes.

EB: Well Ah. They ah, I had ah, well we had study hall. That's were I got all my studying done. And I never studied at home. I got it done; I get into study hall and wouldn't fool around or anything. That was a place were I worked to get and clear my evening to do what I wanted. Ah if you had. There were a lot of special activities, and things and you could get excused from study and to participate in that. And I also got excused from study hall I had sort of a posh job. At the time the concept of having speakers in classrooms and ah, where they could a, you could talk to them from our little studio with microphones or, or you could turn to WCLV I think it was, the,

the, education station and send it to various rooms was a new one, this is advanced technology to have something like speakers in all the rooms and switches where you could determine what rooms got it, and so on. But for some reason on of the guides, teachers, who was responsible of setting it up asked me if I would want to be an operator and so I did. And that excused me from that study hall. There wasn't ah, wasn't ah, much freedom, ah to move about. If you weren't in class you were in study hall. That was about it. And they had hall guards who a demanded passes and so on and so fourth. So you really didn't move about unless you had an excuse to.

After school of course we had sports and practice and things like that in and various activities. People played in the band and so on. But there wasn't much free time.

NG: What was the big sport of the school?

EB: Well I think football was we're city champions for several years. We played our championship game in the Cleveland Stadium. Which holds eighty thousand people and those things were full I mean was not. there, there must have been, I don't know how full but they were full. There at least forty thousand people that were many attending a championship high school game at that time. As there was attending a Cleveland Browns game at that time on Sundays. Of course basketball once football was over, basketball followed a lot. We had a track team Ah; ah they were not as intense crowds watching the athletics the races and the runners and so on. Basketball had good turnouts and we had a lot of good players. We didn't have a swimming pool. We didn't even have, all thought we had a football team we didn't have a field, a football field were we'd practiced but we had no home games. Cause we had, but where we practice was down in the dumps there, or on the flats underneath Clark bridge and it was not a prepared surface it was a former dumping ground that had been leveled off to a certain extent, some what. And that's where we practiced. And we had a good team and won because we had Frazer as coach. And he was excellent and two because we had a lot a guys who were a. Probably because of the neighborhoods they grew up in and they worked, they had to do and we were quite strong. And they were very dedicated to football to.

NG: What was the trends like, the styles of the time.

EG: Well the one [smirk on his face] the big one of course that you remember was the zoot suiters. A Steve Markivitch, I still remember Steve, he was the head zoot suiter. He had chain and big floppy pants and a tied down on the ankle and the chain that hung down on the ground. Like that and he [laughs] he was almost a clown I mean compared, But that was the thing. Ahhhh... those zoot suits. There a couple of other guys that were a, that had them also that was the thing that I remember. When I was, of course in elementary school, the thing that I always looked forward to was, uh, high top boots, especially the ones that had a little knife in that pocket on the side, you know on the calf. Slip a knife in there, that was, that was the thing to have. Uh, a lot of the guys wore knickers that came down to here (point to knees) and wore socks. I shouldn't say a lot, but some of the guys did. You dressed rather formally compared to dress now. I think I probably wore a tie everyday to school, I sort of remember that. I can't say for sure, but I'm almost positive. Of course the teachers wore suits and ties, white shirts. They set the example, and we lived by it. The girl's hair generally came down to here (points to top of shoulder) and curled up. Their skirts were relatively short, compared to today, well I shouldn't

say compared to today, but compared to about that time. Most women would not be showing their knees, but girls would be showing their knees. That's about all I can remember. I never was a fashion person. Whenever I needed a new hat or something, I always took George Switz with me downtown. He picked them out, because I didn't have, I still don't have any feeling for clothes.

NG: When you and your friends were old enough, what kind of bars did you go to or places of interest?

EB: Bars, rarely. The times that I was in a bar in high school was, George Switz's family owned a bar. Reed, was a West Tech person, a friend of mine, his folks had a bar and sometimes we might be in there. But, generally, uh, I sometimes, my dad belonged to a club, a Ukrainian Labor Club and they had a bar, but I was there quite a bit. I didn't drink. I don't know that I had any alcohol at all in high school my friends, some of my friends, George and Alex, did drink alcohol. And I thought that was terrible. I just thought that was terrible, and they thought I was, that I would not drink with them was not a positive thing. Some of the kid did, and it was a big thing at your last dance, to get drunk or had alcohol or whiskey at the parties. But just a few. Some of the guys made a big deal of smoking cigars, now that they were through with high school. And, uh, I think its sort of a ritual that still goes on. You're finally independent.

NG: When did you end up getting married?

EB: I got married four years after college, 1954.

NG: Is she from around here?

EB: She was the next door neighbor. [Lady enters the room; we're still recording]. I was really retarded when it came to dating.

NG: Your next door neighbor was who you married, was she the same person you took to the prom?

EB: Oh, no. I didn't meet her until I was out of the military. I can't think of her name. I lost track of her once I went into the army. I wrote quite a bit, but that slowly died away.

NG: Your wife, did she live next door in Tremont or Parma?

EB: In Parma. The nearest thing to a girl I hung out with was Irene Dulan on west 14th. Her family lived on the first floor and we lived on the third floor walkup. And, uh, the Dulans were the landlords. Irene was sort of a tomboy and so, uh, lots of times she would be one of the persons I would walk with to go swimming at Brookside Park. I can remember asking her to go a number of times. Uh, but that was strictly a platonic relationship. I was blind to a lot of things that were related to sex, and sexuality at that time. Completely. Like my brother born 10 years after I was, so I was about 10 or 11 years old and my mom was pregnant. I can remember some ladies asking me what would I like to have a sister or a brother. Why are they asking me a

question like that? What do they know about me getting a brother or sister? I was completely oblivious to that, that whole process. It just amazes me now, how dumb I was [laugh]. But, in that era there were a lot of things you didn't talk about, kids didn't talk about, parents didn't talk about, the sexuality or stuff like that. You learned it on the streets, which we did. And, uh, very little talk in school on that subject. I remember, we went on a field trip down to the Health Museum, uh, maybe in the sixth grade at the time, and we went there, oh I don't know what we learned, but as we were walking from one room to another room, there was a series of cross sections of a pregnant woman, showing the development of a child. And uh, boy that is something interesting. I stood there looking at this, and the whole class went by and I'm still standing there looking at that, and the teacher came by [laugh], and said, "You're not suppose to be watching that." Fascinating. I know the guys, a lot of them, we were very curious about such things. Sometimes we'd get some pictures of things like that. Boy, is this really true or is this some kind of put on. [laugh].

NG: Talk about your house. You said it was a three-story walk up. Were the houses in the area like that too?

EB: Well, It was, that house, at one time 14th street had nice homes, mansions, actually. Those mansions lasted through to the war. This house was one of those. Houses on both sides of us were those. They were houses of people who were well to do at the time, and they were built as single family houses. This house, uh, the third floor was the ballroom. What they did, these people did, of course, by the time our landlords bought the house, there, it wasn't in that class of a neighborhood anymore. So they divided it up, and the kitchen and so on, and so that was an apartment and my folks could afford that. And uh, that's what we moved into. It was awfully hot in the summer. Ice got half-inch thick on the windows in the wintertime. But the house itself was from a wealthy time. That house, the vestiges of an old valley were in the back of it. And, that went into the stables of the house. Uh, the house next door was also ornate, with three floors; a three-story building also had some very nice stables. But, uh, they were converted into garages and the alleyway shut off and so on. But there some very, very affluent houses there. Sort of another Euclid Avenue, a great place to live if you worked downtown, it was so convenient.

NG: How much time did you spend downtown?

EB: Oh, I spent a lot of time downtown, especially around Christmas time. That was a nice trip. When I was younger, I spent most of my time hanging around the toy departments of Higbee's and Halle's. Their toy departments were pretty nice places. Uh, some pretty exotic toys. Also, the radio stations had studios in the Terminal Tower, and I'd go up to the studio and watch some of the people broadcasting. But, uh, I had a thought, uh, oh, well; maybe it'll come to me.

NG: How far of a walk was that?

EB: I'd say about 3 miles. I'd walk over the bridge, the West 14th Street Bridge, which exists now where there is the bridge just south of the Lorain-Carnegie Bridge, interstate I-71. You can still see the pilings and all from the original bridge, viaduct. It was called the Viaduct Bridge, I

believe. And that was a flimsy old thing. And as you walked across, the sidewalk was planks, and as you walked across, there were cracks, and you could see the river down below. Always sort of scary. Cause you'd say, oh, gee, all this board has to go and I'm through. But they finally condemned that bridge. Couldn't even take automobile traffic. First they prevented the streetcars from going over it. The streetcars used to go straight downtown. Then it got too decrepit for that, they had the streetcars divert to Abbey, go across Abbey and then down west 25th and through the tunnel underneath the Detroit-Superior Bridge. That was so fun. I enjoyed always getting the window at the back of the trolley. You could see the river all underneath. But a lot of streetcar traffic was diverted through that tunnel. That was easy, it was a dime. Rarely, did I pay a dime for a streetcar because that was quite a bit. In the wintertime you'd try to hang on, try to sneak on. If you were successful, it was only because the conductor looked the other way. A more sure thing was to hang on the back of the streetcar. Grab on the bars across the windows. There was sort of like a little sloping place, maybe 4 or 5 inches sticking out of the back of the streetcar. And if you had tennis shoes or something with a little bit of friction on it, you could grab on, get on that little step and not slide off. That was a frequent way of traveling.

NG: Your brother, one brother.

EB: Yah I had one brother. And another brother, he had died, when we were living in West Virginia at the time, and I was about five and a we were sort of in a rural area and a farmers kept loaded guns, there for chasing people out the fields and one kid not knowing the gun was loaded, let it go off and killed my brother. So that's when I was six and move to Cleveland cause my mom was morning much. Actually when been at Cleveland before that, that is my folks have been. They moved to West Virginia I was born there. And came, back to Cleveland.

NG: So your parents knew a little bite about Cleveland.

EB: Oh yah, the thing that attracted them, that's where they actually met. My parents didn't know each other when they came over, they where both about fifteen and a they came by themselves, to different reasons, not with a family. Not knowing the language, not knowing anything, about what job might be available and so on. They came. And my mom went to work in a New York State in on Lake Ontario a small town Allsweko New York. She came to work as a maid, she work there for about year. My farther, came to this country and went to work in a coal mine, in Scranton Pennsylvania. And they both didn't like their circumstances. And they both migrated to Cleveland. And while in Cleveland they both belong to this club, the Ukrainian Club, and that's where they met. And they got married here so and they knew a little about Cleveland and, it was because there was a Ukrainian Community that was a support group, A just like a various, there was various support groups for immigrants now. JCC for instance are an excellent support group for the Jewish immigrants.

NG: Did you speak Ukrainian, too?

EB: A, a little yes. A little, but my brother, my older brother, when he starts school didn't speak English. They decided to try to learn English and they started speaking it in the family. So I didn't get the Education in Ukrainian that my brother did. And all though I, I, I, understood

much was going on I was slow in a talking rather, talking in Ukrainian cause I really didn't need it. I could always answer in English. I did go to Ukrainian school for several years. Learned the alphabet, learned the numbers, just like my folks had. A, I a was obligated to learn the folk dances, the singing and all that. I had to participate in all that. I did all that reluctantly. But your parents said you must do it, so we did. And my buddies, like George Switz and Alex Reed and all, they were both Ukrainians. That's why I knew um. And they were they too. The three of us, they were called the Three Musketeers. We were all about the same age. We were involved in every thing. Mainly because our parents were involved in everything [laughs] And ah that's the reason why they came back to Cleveland. And when my dad came. What he had to do in the depression he lost his job in, in West Virginia and he left me and mother there and for a month, He came to Cleveland, try to find some work a so on. And finally succeeded and coming up with a guy and formed a partnership and opened up a garage on West 14th there, near Clark. And [coughs] once he did that, we came back. And lived in that area. Again this Ukrainian support group.

NG: Um ah, for my last set of questions. What do you different in Tremont now? Then when you were growing up there.

EB: Oh the store where I bought my first pencil box is a now well-known restaurant. And right across the street from it was a favorite apothecary, a pharmaceutical, some really unusual. Had a lady pharmacist and a man pharmacist, and there where always dressed in starched clothes and very formal or nice people but that's the kind of places you could buy, what is it the suckers, the leaches things like that and they had a conventional medicine. But the place was spotless. That that's still got the name there or pharmacist on the building but a its a entirely different ah, ah, situation. The grocery store, one of the grocery stories we dealt with was, uh, a Ukraine. His grocery store was on west 11th, right across the street from St. Vladimir's Church, which was a Ukrainian church. And they had their store on the first floor of their home. They had great big windows. He was a butcher, and so on, and that's building is still there but it looks like an ordinary house. They took out the big paned windows. Uh, there used to be a number of gas stations that aren't there anymore. Uh, as far as, in a lot of ways there is no change, just the different people and different faces. The streets are much the same. Uh, it's as neat and clean as I remember it. The people are taking care of it; it's not run down. You don't see junk cars around, or anything, or papers blowing around. I don't know, maybe I'm blind to them. But, the churches were a big center activity for all the religions, all the religions. All that seems to have diminished. You don't see the people, the main bodies of people have moved out to Parma, Parma Heights. So the religious economics of supporting those have moved out. My dad got a lot of business from a lot of the churches, selling them gas and stuff. There is a Red Star Packing, meat place. It was always a fun thing to see. These guys were driving old, vintage trucks, what looked like 1920's design. And these guys were always spotless. They were out on the road and yet their coats were just right, and they were buttoned just right. And they would watch me like a hawk when I'd be putting gasoline in their truck. Why, I couldn't get a drop on those trucks. They watched. They would do it themselves. I think a couple times they did take the pump themselves. Normally, at that time, no body waited on themselves. When I worked in the gas station, when a car turned into the driveway, you were out there to greet him at the pump. And offer to fill his tires, to check his oil, and you always washed his windows. You didn't ask

him if he wanted his windows washed, you washed them. And, uh, that was an entirely different kind of era. Now, there's hardly a gas station in that area. I think on Clark there is, a Standard Oil station. But, uh, those are the things that change. I see some houses boarded up that weren't boarded up. The other thing that's different, you know I was maybe 12 years old before I ever went to a restaurant. You didn't eat in restaurants, for heaven sake, that costs too much money. We always ate at home. But my mom got ill, and my dad took me to a restaurant. There was only one or two. There was one right around Tremont school and another west 25th that we went to on occasion. But they weren't as common as you see now. Especially, you know, the restaurants, you wouldn't find the class of cooking that exists there today. They had excellent food. The "Grumpies" is a relatively non-descript building, that's relatively small, probably some sort of shop at one time, they had the excellent cuisine. It's worthy of their quality. At that time, when I went there, you'd have meat and potatoes, kinds of meals, that's what you'd have. Very good and reasonable and entirely different kind of philosophy. There were a lot of smaller, that business increased, but the other support industries, the shoe store, the furniture stores, there used to be quite a big one, furniture store in that area. Those are gone. I think now the big attraction is for people to move there and get one of these older houses and gut it, and make it more modern on the inside. I'm impressed with some of the houses, with nice views of the bluffs from up above. That is quite different, a different personality, different kind of people. Not as many kids. There seems to me there used to be a lot of kids around, but there aren't as many. It's maybe more professionals.

NG: When you were growing up there, did everybody know everybody?

EB: Well, uh, sort. You didn't know everybody but you knew a lot. You spoke to all the people. We knew all the people that lived around us. There were children's families, there were some lady spinsters, or there were several families in the building. At Halloween time, you just went around to all these places and so on. You knew the people in the high school, there were a lot there. The teachers knew a lot because there would be a generation, the teachers would say, "I taught you brother, before him I taught your other brother, and before him I taught your older sister" and so on. And the teachers had an interaction with the mothers, and families. I didn't think everybody knew everybody, but you felt you were under watchful eyes. You didn't stray far. The other thing that was interesting was doctors came to your home. Several times, I'd get ill and the doctor would be at my home. That was true even up through college. I got pneumonia and I was at home and he administered to me. He came out once a day, or whatever was required in Parma Heights, now. He'd drive out there. You don't see that anymore.

NG: What's on the land where the famous gas station was?
EB: The building is still there. Yea. Right on Starkweather, it's Wiley Avenue, right at the time of Scranton road and Wiley. It's a pretty decrepit old building now. It's been neglected for years. You can see the old garage doors there, but the gas island is gone. There was a building in the back where my dad used to start cars, and that's gone. They have a chain linked fence around there. The basic building is the same. The house next door is the same; they used to be friends of ours. Across the street on Scranton, was a body shop, that specialized in commercial vehicles. They were an industry that was bringing money in. I think there is still, catty-corner to my dad's gas station is a bar that my dad every once in a while would go over for a sandwich or

something like that. I think that's still open as a similar facility, if not the same. Across the street on Wiley was store, sort of like a family store, probably Middle Eastern, probably Syrian. A family ran that. I don't think that's there anymore, that's gone. Auburn Avenue used to have few industries there, and I think the main thing was Astro Awnings. I think that's gone now. Auburn and Scranton, there was a barbershop and various other stores. Those severed the local people and all of those are gone. Wal-Marts and all the others just started taking all our business.

NG: The families that lived there, did they, uh, own their own businesses or work elsewhere or a mix of both?

EB: Yea, it was. I think most of the people we knew worked in factories. Some like to have their own businesses and some earned enough money, they would buy a bar or something like that, or a restaurant. But that wasn't the common thing. Any of the stores that were there, were very low income There was no really big income producers there. Maybe that furniture store I was telling you about may have been. Up on Clark and west 25th there was a lot of industry. That was quite active. There were two movie theaters. The Aragon Ballroom, Marshall's Drug Store, Producer's Ice Cream, we used to go up there once in a while for ice cream cones. A bakery, they baked Wonder Bread right around that area. That was buzzing as far as economics is concerned. Now I don't think its that class, it looks a lot slower.

NG: Well, that's all I have.

EB: OK.

End of tape.