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# George Greenberg

## An Oral History

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The oral history of George Greenberg was taped at the WPEC Channel 12 studios in Mangoina Park, FL. Lise M. Steinhauer of History Speaks conducted the interview on behalf of the Historical Society of Palm Beach County. This interview was taped on January 20, 2006, and is part of an on-going oral history project of the Historical Society.

**G**eorge Greenberg (1915-2007), owner of Pioneer Linens, was born in Lake Worth. His Austrian father, Max Greenberg, founded Pioneer Hardware in 1912, providing settlers to the new town whatever they needed, including furniture. The 1928 hurricane removed the second floor of their home and destroyed the store, but in 1930, on his name alone, Max Greenberg reopened on Clematis Street. The business is still there, named Pioneer Linens since the 1950s.

Greenberg worked in his father's store from age 16 but took time for college and law school at the University of Florida, followed by the New York University School of Retailing. During World War II, Greenberg served in an army research unit in Virginia.

When he took over Pioneer Linens in 1957, Greenberg followed his father's progressive thinking. Unable to compete with national department stores, Greenberg changed the nature of the store to a specialty boutique and added a mail order catalog. Greenberg helped found the Downtown Development Authority (DDA); thirty years later, the DDA named him its first "Outstanding Downtown Business Leader of the Year." George was also affectionately known as the "Mayor of Clematis Street" for his championing of the business district. Nationally, Greenberg received a lifetime achievement award from the Home Products Association.

During the 1980s and '90s, Greenberg took Pioneer Linens to the highest-end market and brought his daughter, Penny Murphy, into the business, with her son, Allen, preparing to follow. The addition of a website was consistent with Greenberg's progressiveness. For his focus on providing impeccable service, he has been called "a retailing relic, an anachronism in a self-service world."



George Greenberg, the “Mayor of Clematis Street,” 2006.  
Courtesy George Greenberg.

LISE STEINHAUER: When and where were you born?

GEORGE GREENBERG: I was born in Lake Worth, Florida, on May 29, 1915.

STEINHAUER: Tell me about your family.

GREENBERG: My grandfather [mother's father] came to the United States from Vienna in 1870. He settled in Newark, New Jersey. He was a tailor by trade and he did fine clothes for women. One of his clientele was one of the more wealthy ladies on Fifth Avenue, New York, and she liked his work so much that when she went to Newport, Rhode Island, in the summertime, why, she had him go up there with her and he took his two daughters with him. And then later in 1902, she went to St. Augustine, Florida, for a couple of months in the wintertime and she also asked him to come down there. So eventually he moved his family there. My mother was born also in Vienna and she met my father in Newark, New Jersey, where the family had lived.

My father had come over in 1904. He worked in a hardware store. Eventually, he started his own store.

STEINHAUER: Did he come from Vienna also?

GREENBERG: From that area. When my mother's father went down to St. Augustine—he finally decided to take his family down there—so they settled in Daytona Beach and they persuaded my father to sell a hardware store that he had started in Newark and move down to Daytona also. My father worked in a hardware store there in Daytona Beach for a short time, and then in 1912 he heard about the new town of Lake Worth, Florida, starting. He thought that was an opportunity so he came down to Lake Worth in 1912.

STEINHAUER: You didn't have any siblings? No brothers or sisters?

GREENBERG: I had a sister that was born much later, much later.

STEINHAUER: Okay. Did your father serve in World War I?

GREENBERG: No, he did not.

STEINHAUER: Where was your childhood home when your father moved here?

GREENBERG: Well, I was born on North "M" Street in Lake Worth, which is a half a block north of Lake Avenue. I gather that's where he lived at the time.

STEINHAUER: Is the house still there?

GREENBERG: No, the Municipal Library is there now in that

same location.

STEINHAUER: Oh, okay.

GREENBERG: My mother—you asked me about the war. My mother had a brother that had signed up for the Army. He was in the Marines in South Carolina. The story that I was told was that he got a telegram that his younger brother had died. So he

got on the train to come down and as he told me, he said—this was in the flu epidemic of 1918—that the coffins were all lined up at the railroad station there in Washington, DC, and that when he came down here, he went to visit his younger brother who had caught the flu. And then my mother came also to where they were, and the next day, he said, his younger brother

and my mother both died. So I was three years old when my mother died.

STEINHAUER: Oh, my goodness.

GREENBERG: This is in the flu epidemic of 1918.

STEINHAUER: So your father raised you alone?

GREENBERG: No, my father remarried within about a year and a half and my stepmother raised me.

STEINHAUER: What was your mother's name?

GREENBERG: Her name was Rose Kalb, K-a-l-b.

STEINHAUER: What was your stepmother's name?

GREENBERG: Elsie, E-l-s-i-e, Landau, L-a-n-d-a-u.

STEINHAUER: And your father was Max?

GREENBERG: My father's name was Max, yeah.

STEINHAUER: What do you remember about Lake Worth when you were growing up?

GREENBERG: Well, some of my earliest recall, we really didn't have toys in those days, store-bought toys, so to speak, so some of the little things I recall. It's like when a heavy rain, to go out where the gutter was and make little sailboats with the heavy stream of the water after the rain.

STEINHAUER: What did you make the sailboat with?

GREENBERG: I don't remember, little twigs or things like that, make-believe. And we also used to take spools of thread and tie a rubber band and a little matchstick and make a little car out of it. And, of course, we also used to take newspaper and window shade sticks and make kites in those days. And also in those days, boys carried knives, pocketknives. We used to have a game of mumbletypeg where you'd take the knife off your nose and if it hit a certain point in the sand, you got

a point, or you'd do it off your chin or your forehead. It was quite a little game. And then we played marbles.

STEINHAUER: Who were your friends? Who did you play your games with?

GREENBERG: Well, the kids that I started school with. In those days there was no kindergarten so I started the first grade. The story they told me was that by the time my parents got home, I had already left school and was home before them. [laughs] So I didn't care for school too much.

STEINHAUER: What school did you go to?

GREENBERG: It was only one school in Lake Worth at that time. It's where the present museum is, downtown Lake Worth. There was twelve rooms in the building and as I recall, it was first grade through twelfth.

STEINHAUER: Do you recall the name of the school?

GREENBERG: Just Lake Worth Public School. Yeah, yeah.

STEINHAUER: Do you recall any of your neighbors?

GREENBERG: Yes, there was a Mr. Sampson, who had the first radio in town, I recall that. And Mr. Sampson had started—he had the first hardware store in Lake Worth and when my father came in [1912], he started a little lumberyard, but then [probably shortly thereafter] he took over Mr. Simpson's hardware store and he changed the name to Pioneer Hardware. That was in 1912.

STEINHAUER: Where was the store located?

GREENBERG: The store was located on South Dixie a half a block south of Lake Avenue.

STEINHAUER: Did you participate in any water activities—boating or fishing—when you were growing up?

GREENBERG: Uh, we used to go to the beach all the time when I was growing up. It was—uh—you know, Saturday afternoon we'd go to the movies to see Tom Mix cowboy movies, and there again another story was that they had to come get me out of there, I stayed so long. [laughs]

STEINHAUER: Was the theater on Lake Avenue?

GREENBERG: Yes, it was the Oakley Theater. Mr. Oakley started the theater and it was very popular, of course. And then, of course, I read Tom Swift and Horatio Alger books that the boys in those days read.

STEINHAUER: So you didn't like school but you liked to read.

GREENBERG: Yeah. The lady across the street from my father's store had the Illinois Grocery and I remember she sort of—I learned how to spell "Illinois," she'd give me a stick of candy. Some of the things you remember.

STEINHAUER: Do you remember her name?

GREENBERG: Mrs. Schmidt. And then, of course, in those days there was a bakery and a pharmacy and a doctor's office, a dentist's office, and it just seemed like we knew everybody in town in those days.

STEINHAUER: Did you stay—

GREENBERG: I collected stamps. There were a lot of immigrants from Europe in those early days, especially Scandinavia, Germany, Czechoslovakia. Those people used to save stamps for me so I could go to their homes and they would get letters from the old country.

STEINHAUER: Do you still have your stamp collection?

GREENBERG: Yes, I still have it.

STEINHAUER: In Lake Worth, did you feel—

GREENBERG: I joined the Boy Scouts and I remember

one of the—the shoemaker there taught me some leatherwork for my Boy Scouting [merit badge]. I earned my twenty-one merit badges to become an Eagle Scout.

In those days you could build a fire on the beach any time you wanted to for a [marshmallow] roast or a hot dog roast on the beach. One night two of my friends and myself stayed up all night charting a meteor shower, a Perseid meteor shower. As I recall, we counted about 900 meteors, or falling stars as they're called, that night. We charted them, we sent [the charts] to the National Meteor Society, we got a special award. It was written up in the *Lake Worth Leader*, the local paper.



Max Greenberg. Courtesy George Greenberg.



Elsie Landau Greenberg & George. Courtesy George Greenberg.

STEINHAUER: How old were you then?

GREENBERG: I was about fourteen, I'd say. Uh-huh.

STEINHAUER: Who were your friends in high school? Were they any different than when you were younger? Do you remember your classmates?

GREENBERG: They're pretty much the same ones. Bob Clark and Bruce Barton.

STEINHAUER: Any girls?

GREENBERG: Any girls? Yes, there was Betty Jane Menoher, who I'm still seeing occasionally. Yeah. She came down here from Kansas when she—in the third grade and she lived not too far from my house so [I] used to visit with her on the way home from school.

I remember one time, it was raining so hard my leather shoes got wet. She put them in the oven and that was the end of those shoes. [laughs] And then I used to help her decorate the Christmas tree in those days. Didn't have Christmas lights but you took—made little paper rings and put them around the tree and picked up berries from the fields around.

STEINHAUER: Did you have dances in high school?

GREENBERG: No.

STEINHAUER: No? What do you remember about the 1920s?

GREENBERG: Uh, some of the things that come to mind, I remember when originally we only had the Florida East Coast or FEC Railroad that Mr. Flagler built, and then during that period, the Seaboard Railroad came through with another track, a railroad track west of the FEC, gave us an alternate track, and I remember the day that it came through. The president of the railroad was standing at the rear of the [last] car [of the train] and everybody in town was out there to greet him.

STEINHAUER: Do you remember the Royal Poinciana Hotel?

GREENBERG: Yes, I recall the hotel, yes.

STEINHAUER: What do you remember?

GREENBERG: I remember that we used to go over there like on Sunday and promenade along the waterfront there. There was a shop called "Ask Mr. Foster" which was—I think it was a souvenir shop or something. I remember that. And I remember the Afromobiles at that time and the people just promenading around. I remember the big porches of the Royal Poinciana Hotel and the rocking chairs, that sort of thing.

STEINHAUER: Do you know about how old you were when it burned down? [It did not burn down; it was demolished in 1936, when Greenberg was 21]

GREENBERG: Yes, I was [pauses] eleven years old, ten or eleven. [GG was ten in 1925; this is a recollection of the 1925 burning of The Breakers Hotel]

STEINHAUER: Did you go to watch the fire?

GREENBERG: I was very disappointed. My parents wouldn't take me to see it. They went to see it but they left me in Lake Worth.

STEINHAUER: It must have burned a long time. It was a big hotel?

GREENBERG: I don't recall. No, I was unhappy. [laughs]

STEINHAUER: Did you ever ride the train?

GREENBERG: Well, there was a little horse cart between the Breakers and the Poinciana Hotel that took people back and forth between the two hotels. I think it was a donkey cart that they had.

As far as the train, I recall that my parents took me over to Palm Beach on the way—when we were going to New York City. They put me in a Pullman car that was on a track over there near the Poinciana Hotel and they went to the Bradley's Casino and then they came back about midnight. And I remember the jostling and jostling of the engine hooking up with this car and then taking us across the railroad bridge to West Palm Beach on the way to New York City.

STEINHAUER: Did you travel much when you were growing up?

GREENBERG: My parents used to go to New York on a

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*My father worked in a hardware store In those days you could build a fire on the beach any time you wanted to for a [marshmallow] roast or a hot dog roast on the beach. One night two of my friends and myself stayed up all night charting a meteor shower, a Perseid meteor shower. As I recall, we counted about 900 meteors, or falling stars as they're called, that night. We charted them, we sent [the charts] to the National Meteor Society, we got a special award. It was written up in the Lake Worth Leader, the local paper.*

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regular basis, every summer, yeah.

STEINHAUER: Do you remember the presence of gambling or—well, you remember Bradley's Casino.

GREENBERG: No, I don't remember anything. I was too young for that. No.

STEINHAUER: Tell us about the beginning of Temple Beth Israel.

GREENBERG: My earliest recall is that we went to the High Holy Day services at a school on North Flagler, it was the North Grade School, I believe it was called. And we had services there. And I remember a hurricane was coming and somehow or other in the middle of service, they abandoned it and everybody went home. Then, thereafter, this building was put up on Broward Avenue, this little building. It was the first building for Temple Israel.

And there was no rabbi in those days except they had what they called an "itinerant rabbi" who traveled around the state because there were a lot of small Jewish settlements around the state at that time. When I was thirteen years old, my family had one of those itinerant rabbis come in and teach me a few things to prepare me for a bar mitzvah. So I was the first bar mitzvah at Temple Israel. Then thereafter, as I was in high school and into first or second year in college, I suppose, they still didn't have a rabbi. Different members of the congregation would lead the service and on occasion, they had me do that. Most of the members were foreign-born and I was one of the first [children] to have a college education. And then a little later on, we did have a rabbi and he taught me a little bit more, mostly history, Jewish history. So he had me conduct, when I was in college or maybe shortly after I got out of college, he had me conduct Sunday School there for some of the younger kids. Mostly it was more of a social gathering on Friday night for services. And then, of course, again on High Holy Days, some of the services go on all day long. The kids my age—we were in high school, I suppose, at that time—we used to go off and listen to the World Series down at the—there was a barbecue stand on the Dixie there that had a radio. We used to

go listen to the radio there.

STEINHAUER: Who else was part of the early Jewish community?

GREENBERG: Well, there was the Sirkin family. Another family called the Schrebniks. There was a Gruner family. Uh, a Goldman family. That's all I can—

STEINHAUER: Did you ever feel discriminated against because of your religion?

GREENBERG: Not really. I was the only Jewish child in Lake Worth schools pretty well up until middle of high school. And no, they treated me like everybody else. I had no problem. I participated in all the Christmas music and everything, which I always enjoyed. Yeah.

STEINHAUER: Did your family participate in the Seder and other Jewish rituals?

GREENBERG: No.

STEINHAUER: No? You didn't do those things at home?

GREENBERG: No, my father felt that he had come to America, he wanted to be as American as he could. That's why this temple was formed. Of course it was the only temple, the only one. But it was very reform; all the service was in English, almost no Hebrew, and no—none of the things they do today.

STEINHAUER: Tell me about the beginnings of your family business.

GREENBERG: Well, as I mentioned, my father first started the lumberyard, then he bought Mr. Sampson's [sic] hardware store in 1912. My father was very progressive and by 19—that was—by 1920, he had built a new building on Lake Avenue. Started his—moved his hardware store there. At that time it was considered a very modern store. He sold all the things that a new—in a new town that was getting started, he sold dynamite to blow up old tree stumps where they were clearing land. He sold all the screen ware and glass and all the builders' supplies, nails, and he also sold fishing tackle, fishing rods. He sold bamboo rods [laughs] for fishing. He sold guns,

ammunition. He sold paint. And he had done very well and so he got ambitious and he bought the property next to his hardware store and built another building and that building was for furniture, 'cause as the town was growing at that time, there seemed to be a need to—not only for just the bare house but to furnish it. So he started putting in dressers and beds, sofas, and that sort of thing. And eventually he got into iceboxes, stoves, that sort of thing, and he changed the name from Pioneer Hardware Company to Pioneer Hardware and Furniture.

STEINHAUER: Where did he buy his inventory?

GREENBERG: There was a place in Louisville, Kentucky, called Belknap Hardware. I knew that was one of his main resources. That's the only one that I recall. And then as he got into furniture, I know he went to Grand Rapids, [Michigan], to buy furniture. That was the furniture mart. Then he went to the furniture mart in Chicago.

STEINHAUER: The products came down by train?

GREENBERG: Yes, everything came down by train in those days. There was an embargo—he also built a big furniture warehouse [alongside of] the railroad track. He was moving along pretty good. And then in 1928, we had the hurricane and, unfortunately, there was no insurance and everything was completely demolished, everything. We had lived in a two-story home at that time with three bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs and after the hurricane, there was no second floor. It was completely wiped off.

STEINHAUER: Was that the house on "M" Street?

GREENBERG: No, no, this was a new house that he had built.

STEINHAUER: Where?

GREENBERG: This was on Lakeside Drive, 401 North Lakeside Drive. That house is still there. It was restored, yeah.

STEINHAUER: Do you remember—can you recall going through the hurricane?

GREENBERG: Yes. My father was home with [my mother, sister, and me] and then during the lull—at that time we didn't realize that there was such a thing as a lull between the first half and the second half, so he left home and went to the store and I was home with my mother and our roof was leaking at home. So we were upstairs with a pail and a mop trying to mop the water up and I happened to look up and I noticed that the whole ceiling of the room had lifted and there was light around. So I got my mother and—I was eleven years old at that time and I had a sister born a year before, she was one year old. So we went downstairs, we hid under the kitchen table, and that's where we were during the second half of the hurricane. We kept hearing crash after crash while we were down there; we thought that was the end. But after it subsided, we went outside. We could see that there was no second floor.

STEINHAUER: Did you stay in that house?

GREENBERG: My father got an apartment temporarily after the hurricane.

STEINHAUER: Did your father move the business?

GREENBERG: Yeah, well also it had—in 1926, two years before the hurricane, was the stock market crash, and of course, the economy had gone down pretty bad after that and so business had suffered. And between that and the hurricane—and Lake Worth had not developed the way he thought it was going to be. Boynton, Delray, Boca Raton had not developed. There was nothing up at the north end except Jupiter Lighthouse, so he decided to move to West Palm Beach.

And things were pretty bad, that was 1930, the Depression had really set in. And he realized that he couldn't be selling furniture at that time. People didn't have the money. So he got into what they call soft goods, selling curtains and bedspreads and that sort of thing. How he did it, I don't know, but apparently he had a good name in the market and he was able to get merchandise to sell.

And I remember that my mother had accumulated quite a collection of fine records—who was it, Caruso? Enrico Caruso records—and that sort of thing. And I remember that she—to raise money, they took those records to the store and they sold them for ten cents a piece. Yeah. That was when things were down. But eventually my father recovered his business and prospered and established where we are now on Clematis Street.

STEINHAUER: Do you remember the Breakers fires?

GREENBERG: [Yes, see above]

STEINHAUER: No. Do you remember—

GREENBERG: I can tell you, though, I do remember that they had—this was after World War I—they were still selling what they called Liberty Bonds in those days and I had—I didn't, but my parents had just cashed it in and set up a savings account for me at the bank in Lake Worth. And then I remember the crowd of people in front when the bank closed. They were all out there hollering and they wanted their money and the bank was closed. They couldn't get anything.

STEINHAUER: Do you remember when you first moved to West Palm Beach? Did you actually move as a family or was it just the business that moved?

GREENBERG: The business moved first, and then eventually we moved our residence up there and I ended up going to Palm Beach High School. I graduated from Palm Beach High.

STEINHAUER: Where was your house?

GREENBERG: The house?

STEINHAUER: Where was it?

GREENBERG: On Barcelona Road, south end of West Palm Beach.

I would also mention to you that in Lake Worth, in the city park there, there was a big alligator pond. I forget the alligator's name but it was sort of a tourist spot. People came there and took their pictures with the alligator. They also had horseshoes there; I forget what you call it. They had rows and rows of horseshoe alleys, so to speak, and Lake Worth became famous in those days because they had the National Horseshoe Tournament. People came from all over the country.

STEINHAUER: Was that on the west side of the bridge?

GREENBERG: Oh yes, this was downtown [Lake Worth, at Dixie and Lake Avenue].

STEINHAUER: Was there a bridge?

GREENBERG: [Yes, across the lake, or Intracoastal Waterway, to the Lake Worth Casino and beach], right in the middle of town.

STEINHAUER: When was that bridge built?

GREENBERG: I don't know, but I know that in the—when I was very young, we used to take a boat to go over to the ocean beach. They had a bathhouse there, a big two-story wooden bathhouse. People would go over there and put on their bathing suits and go over Sunday and take picnics over there.

I mean, I remember one of the things, that as a kid my father asked me to deliver a foghorn to the bridge tender. I used to ride my bicycle to the beach every day.

STEINHAUER: So there was a bridge. You do remember a bridge.

GREENBERG: That was later, yeah. And also I remember the uh, again after World War I, there was a lot of veterans of that war living in Lake Worth, young men that had just got out of the service, and they were active in forming the American Legion. And the Armistice Day Parade was a big event every year.

We also had a Ku Klux Klan parade that I remember. All these men in their—covered in white sheets and their cars were covered with white sheets and it was sort of a scary thing for a young kid to see that.

STEINHAUER: Do you remember ever finding out who any of the Klan members were?

GREENBERG: I know my dad said he knew who they were.

STEINHAUER: He did?

GREENBERG: Yeah, he knew who they were. He recognized them all. [laughs] Of course, in those days it was a small town so everybody knew everybody else. They had what they called the Three I Club there; those were the people from Illinois, Iowa, and Indiana. Of course, basically Lake Worth was all Midwesterners. I mean, there was nobody from New York or New Jersey there in those days.

STEINHAUER: Except you.

GREENBERG: Huh?

STEINHAUER: Except you.

GREENBERG: [laughs] We didn't think of ourselves as coming from New York.

STEINHAUER: Right.

GREENBERG: Yeah.

STEINHAUER: You said there were Scandinavian people too?

GREENBERG: Yeah, as I recall the—uh—did I mention about the shoemaker?

STEINHAUER: Yes.

GREENBERG: Yeah. A lot of the people were Swedes and Danes [who had originally settled in the Midwest]. They were carpenters, painters, just building very small frame houses in those days.

My grandmother came down and she lived about four blocks from Lake Avenue. She had a chicken coop in the back and I remember she used to give us eggs all the time from her chickens.

And of course, in those days you also had the iceman. I remember there was a big card we used to put out and it had how many pounds of ice you wanted, twenty-five, fifty, or ten or fifteen. And every day you'd put that card out to tell the iceman how much ice you needed. It depended on how your ice had melted during the night. My job every morning was to take the drip pan under the icebox and empty it.

And we used to have—when I came home from school, I recall, there was a man that sold hot bread. He would go around. And so he came to deliver bread most every day about the time I'd get home from school. I could go through a loaf of hot bread pretty fast. [laughs]

STEINHAUER: Where did your mother buy food?

GREENBERG: Well, there was a man that came through with a vegetable wagon that sold vegetables. There was a man that came every week and brought chickens. And there was a market there, the Illinois Grocery Store. There was a butcher shop, I don't remember his name. The Wonder City Bakery. And I suppose she prepared a lot herself in those days.

STEINHAUER: Did you grow any vegetables or fruit of any kind at home?

GREENBERG: No, never grew anything then. One of the other things, I mentioned about the icebox.

We also had a kerosene stove and a man used to deliver kerosene periodically. And we also used kerosene for a heater when it was real cold.

And of course, there was no washing machines in those days. I know that in the back of our house, back in the back yard, way back, we had—as I recall, it was like three big stones, and on top of the stones was a washtub. And you built

a fire underneath the washtub and boiled the clothes in the washtub. That was a weekly ritual. And then, of course, you had clothesline with clothespins to hang the clothes. You had a washboard to rub the dirt out. And of course, we had no air conditioning in those days so we did perspire quite a bit, so— [laughs]

And we had a lot of mosquitoes in those days too. Sometimes the screen wire would just be filled, almost black, with mosquitoes after a heavy rain or something. We had frogs croaking out there in the ponds because there was no drainage in those days. It was a little different.

STEINHAUER: Did you have other chores that you did besides emptying the drainage?

GREENBERG: I used to mow the lawn. Yeah, eventually we did have a lawn. On Saturday, my mother had me polish the dining room table [laughs], I remember that. I also polished some of the furniture.

STEINHAUER: When the business moved up to Clematis Street, what were some of the other businesses that were around in those days?

GREENBERG: Well, we had three five-and-ten-cent stores. We had Woolworth, Kress, and McCrory's, and they were all actually five-and-ten-cent stores. They sold things for five cents, ten cents; eventually, they got up to a dollar. All three of them, I believe, had lunch counters and you could have lunch there. You'd get a sandwich for ten cents and you'd get a drink for a nickel. You'd get a piece of pie for ten cents. They always had good pies.

And then there was a Liggett Drug Store, a Walgreen Drug Store and a Prather Drug Store, and another drug store.

There were a lot of lady's apparel stores, shoe stores, men's shoe stores, lady's shoe stores. It was a very thriving area at that time because as I said, there was nothing else in Palm Beach County. There were no stores anywhere. There was a lumberyard or so in Boynton or Delray and maybe a [feed store]—what do you call it, supplies for cattle, that sort of thing. But there really was no business anywhere else.

STEINHAUER: A lot of the businesses you mentioned were chains, national businesses.

GREENBERG: They came in in the late thirties and early forties.

STEINHAUER: What about the businesses that were owned by local people?

GREENBERG: There were quite a few of those; yes, there were. Again, the same type of stores, wearing apparel, lady's apparel, men's apparel, shoes.

STEINHAUER: Do you remember names?

GREENBERG: I know Mr. Gruner had a store. Sirkins had a store. Meyers Luggage came in in the twenties. [pauses] There were jewelry stores.

STEINHAUER: How about Harris Brothers?

GREENBERG: Harris Men's, the oldest men's shop, was there.

STEINHAUER: Was Anthony's on Clematis?

GREENBERG: Anthony's came in, yeah, they were there.

STEINHAUER: Did you help out in the family business?

GREENBERG: Yeah, when I went to Palm Beach High School, after school was out I'd walk to Clematis to the store and I worked until closing time and then went home with my father for dinner. And then when I was in college, one summer, I know my father had gone to New York and left me there. Of course, it was a very small business in those days but he left me to take care of it. We only had two employees, one man who was a salesman and another man who did the stock work. Then I went to—I had two years of business administration at the University of Florida and at the end of the two years, the university had announced that to get into law school after that, you'd have to have three years of pre-law, so I took advantage of the fact that I could get in with only two years. So I did go to law school.

STEINHAUER: Was there a particular reason that you thought that would be a good idea, to be a lawyer?

GREENBERG: Did I what?

STEINHAUER: Did you think you would be a lawyer?

GREENBERG: No. No, I had no intention of being a lawyer. But I thought it would be a good background certainly to learn that. After two and a half years of law school, I stayed out in the fall semester to work with my dad. That was when I really got into the business. Then after I graduated from law school, I went to the NYU School of Retailing and took some post-graduate work there. Then after that, I worked full-time at the store.

STEINHAUER: Do you remember making the decision that you were going to go into the business?

GREENBERG: No, it was just something that I grew up with.

STEINHAUER: You always knew you would?

GREENBERG: Yes, I think so. In fact, I know so. Yeah, yeah.

STEINHAUER: What was it like here during World War II?

GREENBERG: I went into the service a month after Pearl Harbor. I was away for four years, so I really wasn't here during World War II.

I had been placed into a research unit. When I was drafted and was being inducted, there was a train coming up from Miami, and all along the way they picked up fellows going into the Army, so I got on in West Palm Beach. We eventually ended up at Camp Blanding, Florida, up between Gainesville and Jacksonville. It was a temporary Army camp that was set up. And that was called an induction center. Out of over

a hundred on the train, every day they would tell you where they were going to send you. And out of the hundred, all of them left except me. I was the only one there. So I couldn't figure out what was going on. So eventually after three or four weeks, they sent me up to Camp Lee, Virginia, and I found out what it was, that they had—out of the hundred, none of them had finished college. I was the only one that had that education. And they were forming this research unit up at Camp Lee, Virginia, and they were looking for people that had the education that could work on the project, so they placed me there and I was there for four years.

STEINHAUER: What kind of research did you do?

GREENBERG: [laughs] Uh, our first project was based on the fact that in those days, there was carry-over that if there were 300 men in an Army company, the food that was being dispensed was for 300 men. But our study showed that there were never 300 men in the mess hall to eat. Some of them were in the infirmary sick, some were out on furlough, some of them ate in the PX, some of them ate in town, whatever. So this food kept coming into the mess halls day after day and it ended up in the garbage cans. So we measured the waste. They took my picture measuring a garbage can and put it in *Life* magazine.

STEINHAUER: Really!

GREENBERG: Yeah, that was my claim to fame. [laughs] Anyway, we measured it in dollars and so on and we went to Washington, D.C., and we made a presentation to the Quartermaster General and from then on, they reduced the rations. So we had an article in *The Saturday Evening Post* that we had saved them \$50,000,000 and this was back in the forties when \$50,000,000 was astronomical. [laughs] And we also worked on other projects. The German submarines were knocking out the boats that were bringing in coffee from Brazil or rubber from the East Indies so we developed this synthetic coffee called "Nescafé."

STEINHAUER: Really?

GREENBERG: Yeah. And also the neoprene synthetic rubber instead of leather for shoes. And we had quite a few other projects.

STEINHAUER: There must have been a lot of scientists. Were there scientists in your research group?

GREENBERG: No, just some brainy fellas. [laughs] I was very fortunate to be in with that group.

STEINHAUER: Did you stay friends with any of them?

GREENBERG: Oh, I still maintain, yeah. I got a letter from one of them last week, from his wife, yeah.

STEINHAUER: That's great.

GREENBERG: Yeah. One of them went on to do TV research on commercials and he used to have quite a name for himself.

STEINHAUER: So you came home. Did you or your father

have any doubts that you could fill his shoes in the business?

GREENBERG: I don't think—we always worked great together. He was a wonderful instructor. I learned everything from him. He was—I never appreciated what a great man he was, how forward he was in his thinking all the time, how progressive he was and—he was always remodeling, putting in new fixtures, new lighting, and he was always putting [up] a new façade on the front. He was always moving.

STEINHAUER: When was it that he left the business?

GREENBERG: That my father left the business? [pauses] Probably when he was about sixty-five.

STEINHAUER: Was that in the fifties? Late fifties, maybe?

GREENBERG: [pauses] Yeah.

STEINHAUER: Tell us about the changes that you've seen in downtown West Palm Beach.

GREENBERG: Well, as I mentioned earlier, it was a very thriving area at that time. We had J.C. Penney's store, we had a Montgomery Ward, we had Sears, and the first sign of erosion was when Sears built a store out on South Dixie [Highway]. They left downtown. And then the next one was Burdines, when the [Palm Beach] mall was built out on Palm Beach Lakes Boulevard. That was really—the greatest blow of the time was when Burdines moved out. And then eventually, Belks had a store, they had left.

STEINHAUER: What time period was that? Sixties?

GREENBERG: I would say the sixties, yeah, late sixties, probably. But, uh, we did several things. We repaved the street, repaved the sidewalk, and we had music on the street at one time. We had park-and-shop programs, tried to provide free parking, and the meters were taken down and then the meters were put back. We went through quite a few things over the years.

STEINHAUER: Tell me about how the Downtown Development Authority came about.

GREENBERG: [pauses] Well, we had a Downtown Merchants Association that was affiliated with the Chamber of Commerce and the need seemed to be that to really turn things around downtown, we needed to raise some money. So I was able to prevail upon five or six of our downtown principals; I got them together. And I had heard about this development authority being authorized in the state of Florida, so we went around and got over 50 percent of the property owners in the downtown to agree to pay a one-mil tax on ourselves and we developed the DDA. We got the head of the First Federal, George Preston at that time, to become the chairman. And I developed ulcers at the time [laughs] and I had to drop out of everything. I wasn't feeling good.

STEINHAUER: Because of the stress? [repeats]

GREENBERG: Yeah, yeah. But that's how the DDA got

started.

STEINHAUER: Was there a time when you felt that the store might close?

GREENBERG: No. No, never, never. No, we had built up a very loyal following and with very few exceptions, year after year our business always grew. As I say, my father was very progressive and I followed in his footsteps.

STEINHAUER: How did you adjust to the changes around you?

GREENBERG: We used to have a parking lot behind our store, a big empty lot there. And we had a very attractive rear entrance with awning and flowers and everything, so people came in our back door. And then somebody bought that property and decided to put a building there. It was at that time that the Florida Power & Light had a two-story building across from Pioneer [on Clematis Street]. That was their office in Palm Beach County. They had to move their office because Florida Power & Light had expanded. So they abandoned that building and it was demolished and turned over to the Chamber of Commerce and turned into a little mini park, it was just 50 x 150. So it was a mini park there for a couple of years and as I said, when I found out that we were losing our parking lot in the rear, I checked and at that time, the shareholders had asked Florida Power & Light to give up this park that they were only getting a dollar a year from. So I jumped in and bought the property at that time and I turned it from a park into a parking lot, which is what we have now. So that saved our business over the years.

STEINHAUER: Are there any other big changes that you made?

GREENBERG: Not really.

STEINHAUER: Tell me what's in the journal that's called "Prominent Customers." What's in there?

GREENBERG: Well, we had the—the Duke and Duchess of Windsor came here one time. As I recall, they took an apartment over at, I believe it was 100 Worth Avenue, it's on South Ocean Boulevard there. They called for pillows; they wanted a dozen down pillows. And we sent them over. But they had a reputation that they never paid their bills, so we sent them COD [laughs] and they paid for them.

We also had—Diana and Charles [Princess and Prince of Wales] came here one time. They were out in Wellington. They had been invited out there. They were going to have a cottage that had been turned over to them and they called us, Pioneer, to come out there and take a look at the cottage. And we ended up that we supplied all the linens—the sheets, the towels—for the royal couple, so we were quite honored with that.

STEINHAUER: Do you get personally involved when there are special customers or celebrities or special orders?

GREENBERG: Uh, well, yeah, I was involved, I mean—one

of things I recall that I was very proud of, we have a lot of retired executives come to Palm Beach. And there was two executives from General Motors, both of them had either been president or chairman. And I remember they both happened to meet in our store. They were sitting around chatting while their wives were shopping. And we also had Edsel Ford register, when he was going to get married, in our bridal registry. And we had Jack Nicklaus' son in our bridal registry, and others.

STEINHAUER: Any presidents?

GREENBERG: Uh, we were very privileged in many cases when people were having—for example, last week or so, President Bush was here to a dinner in Palm Beach. A lady who was the hostess of that dinner was in our store the week before buying some table linens. So we felt that President Bush had dinner on our linens, which he did have. [laughs] So that's happened many times over the years, different presidents visiting in homes that we had sold them the linens. And we also had this occasion with the Big Eight meeting in Sea Island, Georgia, last year, and we were invited to provide the linens where all these prime ministers from all these countries were sleeping. So we were quite honored for that. Also Laura Bush gave a tea party and she had asked the hostess where the linens came from so she wanted linens from Pioneer for her luncheon. So we were quite honored by that.

STEINHAUER: Tell me about your wife.

GREENBERG: My wife? Lois was her name. She came from Chicago. She was born in Chicago. Her parents had moved to Ft. Lauderdale and through a relative, I met her down there and we dated for about six months and got married. We had a son and a daughter.

STEINHAUER: What was Lois' name before she was married?

GREENBERG: H-o-r-b-e-r-g, Horberg.

STEINHAUER: And your children's names?

GREENBERG: George, Jr. and Penny.

STEINHAUER: And what are they doing?

GREENBERG: Pardon?

STEINHAUER: Tell me about them.

GREENBERG: That's a long story.

STEINHAUER: What do they do?

GREENBERG: Uh, my daughter went to Stephens College in Missouri. She also went to college up in Boston. I don't remember the name of the school up there. She became a kindergarten teacher. She opened the first kindergarten in Wellington. Then she sold that kindergarten and went to work at St. Ann's Catholic—St. Ann's School. She was helping the principal there and she was mostly doing fundraising for St. Ann's, doing very well, and mostly P.R. work, really.

So I invited her to come and work in the store with me. So she's been with me about ten years now and she's doing very well. She has three children and now one of her children, the son, Allen, Jr., is now working with me. So he's the fourth generation.

STEINHAUER: What's their last name?

GREENBERG: Murphy.

STEINHAUER: How much time do you spend in the store these days?

GREENBERG: Too much. [laughs] I'm there from eight-thirty usually till about six.

STEINHAUER: Okay. How do you stay so vital at your age? What keeps you young?

GREENBERG: Well, I think that the real true reason is that I'm fortunate to have good genes. I don't think I can take credit. I've always lived a—do what you're supposed to do. I do play tennis three times a week. The last—I had a little trouble with one of my legs couple of years ago so I went for physical therapy, got involved with the gym so now I continue with the gym three times a week.

STEINHAUER: Do you still run staff meetings six days a week?

GREENBERG: Uh, I turned that over to my daughter.

STEINHAUER: You have a reputation for customer service. What is the philosophy that you instilled in your staff?

GREENBERG: [pauses] I would say that [pauses] my father always maintained a high quality of linens or whatever he was selling, even fine hardware and fine furniture from Grand Rapids. So he attracted a more affluent clientele and those people are used to good service, so service was always something that was just sort of basic. And of course, my job was to instill this in our organization, so that's why I initiated having meetings every morning with notebooks on selling psychology and proper do's and don'ts while you're waiting on a customer. And also, the probably more important thing, with new merchandise arriving all the time, is to familiarize the staff with what came in yesterday so that they have a full knowledge of what they're selling.

STEINHAUER: Tell me about the Pioneer Ladies that work for you?

GREENBERG: Well, uh, the day before yesterday one of them said it was thirty-two years ago that she had started.

STEINHAUER: How old are most of them?

GREENBERG: I don't know.

STEINHAUER: In 1987, I read that you sold high-end sheets but also sheets that cost \$5.99. Do you still cater to all price ranges or have you become more specialized?

GREENBERG: Well, now they're up to \$1,000 [laughs] or

\$1,050 for a set of sheets. We still have some moderate price, yes, but we abandoned the very low end. Yeah.

STEINHAUER: We only have a few minutes left. Is there anything you'd like to talk about that we haven't already covered?

GREENBERG: [pauses] No. I just might mention about my Boy Scout days and camping out on Lake Osborne and swimming in the lake there, that sort of thing. I think I've covered quite a bit.

STEINHAUER: Do you want to tell me about how you've used pajama parties over the years?

GREENBERG: Oh, that was my daughter's idea. Since we sold bedding, it was a natural. People—we've done it for very many different organizations—Arthritis [Foundation] and Alzheimer's, Race for the Cure, so on.

STEINHAUER: Have you ever worn pajamas on Clematis Street?

GREENBERG: Yes, yes. It was in the *Palm Beach Post*. They took a picture of me in my pajamas with a robe.

STEINHAUER: Well, I really thank you for talking with me today. I've really enjoyed it very much.

GREENBERG: I'm sorry I kind of got off the subject here and there.

STEINHAUER: No, you were great. We really enjoyed listening to your memories. Thank you very much.

GREENBERG: Thank you. It was fun.

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