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### Oral History Interview: James A. Tweel

James A. Tweel

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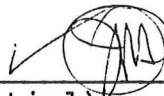
HUNTINGTON, WEST VIRGINIA 25701

ORAL HISTORY

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Tape 1  
Jim's Steak  
& Spaghetti  
House

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DATE 5-16-84

James A. Tweel  
(Signature - Interviewee)

920 Fifth Avenue  
(Address)  
Huntington, WV 25701

DATE 5-16-84

Robert Sawrey  
(Signature - Witness)

Tweel, James A.  
5-16-84

WEST VIRGINIA BUSINESS HISTORY

WVBH.11

AN ORAL INTERVIEW WITH: JAMES A. "JIM" TWEEL  
OWNER, JIM'S STEAK & SPAGHETTI

CONDUCTED BY: ROBERT D. SAWREY, PH.D.

DATE OF INTERVIEW: MAY 16, 1984

TRANSCRIBED BY: JACKIE DINGESS

TYPED BY: GINA KEHALI KATES

Bob: Today is May 16th, 1984. I'll be interviewing Jim Tweel of Jim's Steak and Spaghetti House at that restaurant, 920-5th Avenue, in Huntington. This is Bob Sawrey. Alright, there we go. When I was here in November, Jim, you discussed very briefly the fact that your parents came here from Lebanon. Would you elaborate a little bit on those circumstances? Why they came to Huntington, who they were, what they did, when they got here?

Jim: My parents were Simon and Regina Tweel, and came here to Huntington in 1900. My father had a brother in New York City, who advised him to come to Huntington because of this area back peddling was quick and reasonable way of making a living. They would put packs on their backs, or linens and what have you, and go around the countryside and sell their wares. My father also had a brother, another brother, who was here, and there were several other Lebanese in the community which gave them support. And eventually, my father went into what is known as the confectionery business. This is the old wire back ice cream chair and the ice cream and confections and tobacco and that sort of thing. And fruits...we used to go to the so-called fruit store to buy fruit. You didn't go to the grocery store, you went to the fruit store to buy your fruit. And that's how he got started, and just gradually made his way and raised a family.

Bob: These Lebanese, did they live together in a group... (a ghetto?) no, I'm hoping not a ghetto but an enclave maybe, would be a better word. In Huntington, or were they dispersed throughout? Did they rely on each other?

Jim: Yes, the reliance was quite heavy on each other because of the language barrier plus the fact that the support from each other. All the social activity was done within the Lebanese community; there was no outside activity to speak of, contrary to what exists today for instance. All the social affairs, the weddings the baptisms, the parties, etc., whatever there were, was all done within the Lebanese community.

Bob: Was this a Christian Lebanese community? (yes) There were never any kind of religious problem, all the Lebanese who came here were Christians?

Jim: Orthodox was the basic faith of 99% of the Lebanese that immigrated.

Bob: It was basically a working class group?

Jim: Yes. Oh, very basically, it came from a little village. I'll give you the name, although it doesn't mean much to you, it's called Kfeir. K-f-e-i-r, Kfeir, in the county of Hosbeiya, which is of course in Lebanon. And the village lived, let me say, 1500 people and their existence was farming. They raised their own cattle and vegetables and they just existed. There's nothing in the community that would warrant any labor.

Bob: And so when they came here, did some of them work on the railroad or something like common labor, or were they all middling and middling peddlers types?

Jim: Peddlers.

Bob: When they peddled, I'm assuming they went out of town, did they go by horse?

Jim: I really can't answer that. How they traveled, hitch-hiking, maybe, by bus, by walking.

Bob: When you said that after a period of time your father opened his store, do you know if that would have been before World War I or....?

Jim: Oh, yes, before World War I. In fact, my father had a store on 9th street between 5th and 6th avenue in 1911, but he had a store before that up on 3rd avenue and 20th street. And still the same type of store, a confectionery.

Bob: Did he have a name? Obviously he had a name, excuse me. Let me try that again. What did he call his store?

Jim: He called it Simon's.

Bob: On both operations?

Jim: Yes.

Bob: How long was that in business?

Jim: Well, it went from Simon Tweel to my brother-in-law, Sid Tweel, to my brother, Leonard Tweel. It stayed in existence 'till about four years ago, when it was sold out of the family.

Bob: Uh-huh. You can tell I'm new here. Did it stay the same basic kind of business all through that period?

Jim: Yes.

Bob: Okay. Can you tell me a few things about your mother?

Jim: Mom was a saint. I say that advisedly because I'm the youngest in the family, usually referred to me as the baby of the family. The typical middle eastern mother. Matriarchal, loving, kind, compassionate, hard working, diligent (inaudible)...I don't know what else to say about Mom. She was just a dear lady, and never had a wrinkle on her face. She died at 78 and she still looked like a saint.

Bob: When would that have been?

Jim: 1960.

Bob: 1960, was your father still living then?

Jim: Oh, no. Pop died, we called him Pop. I don't know what you called yours, probably dad. Pop died in 1924. I was eight years old. He'd been ill for 4 years. He had what was known back then as pernicious anemia, which there was no cure for. And he was ill for 4 years and was in Johns Hopkins a couple of times, and depleted what resources we had. We had a piece of property, a home. We lost that. It was rough the-, but at my age, when you're young like that, you don't realize the real difficulty the older folks are going through. I used to sell papers on the corner of the library when I was six years old for two cents a piece. Does this mean anything to you?

Bob: Yes, this is very good. I was going to ask you where your childhood home was and how that all transpired.

Jim: I was born two blocks from my business, Jim's here, over on 8th street and 8th avenue. There's a police garage there now.

Bob: And that was 1926?

Jim: 1915, I was born.

Bob: Okay. And you were the youngest of how many children?

Jim: Nine children, but three were born over in Lebanon died. Six living in this country.

Bob: And how many of those are still....

Jim: Three of them.

Bob: Are you all located...

Jim: In Huntington.

Bob: All here.

Jim: Hazel, who is 78, Phillip, who is 73, and me, 68, will be 69 in August.

Bob: In August, okay. Let's run through a little bit what happens.

Jim: I don't want to talk too much. Now, you tell me if I uh...

Bob: No, no, you're doing just fine; don't worry. I can be as [inaudible]...as I have to be and I hope I won't be at all, really. You're doing really well. (huh) Were you able to continue in school after your father died?

Jim: Oh, yes, I...I went through high school. I uh, I went first to Oley, which is torn down now. That was on 5th avenue and 13th

street.

Bob: Excuse me one second. Oley was the official name of the school? (Oley School) Oley School (yes). Was that how that spelled?

Jim: O-l-e-y.

Bob: That was named for some gentleman? (yes, a man named after a man) Oh, okay. That was like an elementary school?

Jim: Yes. (okay) Then we moved uh, down near Cammack school and from the third grade through the 9th grade I went to Cammack, and then Huntington High School, graduated from high school in 1932. Two years ago we had our 50th reunion. Which was gang busters-- great time. I hope you live as long and can celebrate your 50th high school reunion and see how old everybody else has gotten except you! [laughter]

Bob: Well, I tell you, we had, for whatever reasons, my class voted to have a 10 year reunion and forget all about a 5 year reunion. Which was okay. I mean, most of my classmates stick around reasonably close to home an...and was only strange ducks like me that go wandering off. We went back at the 10 year junction and had a marvelous time.

Jim: I didn't get to college. Did I interrupt you?

Bob: Yeah, let me just finish. I haven't seen most of those people since and we voted to have a 20 year reunion, which is two years off, yet, I'm just dying for it to get here.

Jim: That's great! (I'm looking forward to it, I'm sorry, go ahead) Don't miss it. Well, I was saying I didn't get to college. This was 1932. The depth of the depression. Again, when you're at the age, you uh, find it tough but you don't quite realize the significance unless you're older. I thought I wanted to be a doctor. I...I've always been kind of a...a health nut. I believe in good food, and good, good health habits. But no, no college uh, just work, survive, hustle to eat. That was the name of the game back then. And I hope uh, we never see anything like it again. But be that as it may, we uh, we all worked and made our way. We could not uh, go to my mother and say, "Mom, I need a quarter". We just...we had to make it. If we wanted it, we had to make it. I don't regret it. It taught me the value of a lot of things, money included. And so I just uh, appreciate where I am today.

Bob: Could you be a little bit more specific about how you were making it?

Jim: I worked. When I was younger, I sold papers. As I mentioned before, they were two cents then, then they went to three, then a nickel uh, and then after they went to a nickel, I uh, got old enough to where I could clerk. So, I clerked in uh, different

stores in town. And uh, I think I got up to \$8.00 a week. That was my top.

Bob: And that was clerking in what type of store or was it...?

Jim: In a confectionery store (oh, I see, working for...), one time.

Bob: Oh, okay. So um, your father had countrymen competitors or...?

Jim: Yes, oh, yes, that was the big business that was the main business that the Lebanese went into after they did their back peddling, was confectionery.

Bob: Maybe I misjudged uh, the American people. But it seems to me like, that would be the kind of business that...that regular people could cut out of their budget very easily. And that something like a depression woulda really hurt that type of business.

Jim: Well, certainly, business was not great. But there were uh, people always wanted a coke, which was a nickel or they wanted a nickel cigar or they wanted ten cent pack of cigarettes or they wanted an apple or an orange or they just wanted to come in and sit and visit. This was a great meeting place, the confectionery store.

Bob: So, then it was sort of like a snack bar as well as a candy store.

Jim: That's right. (okay) Candy, everybody wanted a nickel bar of candy.

Bob: And so even though it, those are the kinds of things that we might avoid if they don't have any money, they found a way?

Jim: They always found a way to fi...find a nickel, or a dime.

Bob: It almost sounds like the movies, which thrived right through the depression when you'd think that people couldn't afford to go to movies, (that's right, that's right), okay. So, you got up to eight dollars a week there, (uh-huh), and what happened from that point?

Jim: Well, then I went to work for my cousin, who had a store called "The Artlinen Shop" down on 9th street between 3rd and 4th avenue. And I started there uh, I started in at 11 dollars a week, this was back in 1935. And in 1937 the flood came and we survived that. Oh, incidently, in 1935, I started courting. We called it courting. I started courting Sally Rahall from Beckley, West Virginia. [cough] And I worked and communicated, visited Sally in Beckley and kept courting and let's see, the Artlinen Shop went through the flood, survived that. Back on the job. Now, it's



1938, Sally's becoming restless. We've been courting for three years. One day she said, "Jim, either do or get off the pot!"

Bob: [laughing] Is that she really said or is that just what she meant? (no, that's what she said). [laughing] That's what she said, okay.

Jim: She is this type of person (okay), she says what she thinks. So I got off the pot! I was making 18 a week and I couldn't get married on that, keep a wife. So this...let me show you. See this middle area here, this is three rooms, this is a room, that's a room over there, and this is a room. This was a Kennedy Dairy store, born out of the depression. Big ice cream cones for a nickel, and milk shakes, for a dime, so big you could barely finish one. And it was for sale and I bought it; \$1,555. I still have the bill of sale. Wasn't nothing here hardly. The ice cream company owned the ice cream cabinets. Incidentally, \$1,555 is in contrast to \$23,000 I paid just to air-condition the kitchen.

Bob: Obviously you borrowed that money.

Jim: What, (the 1500), yes, I borrowed it from my brothers, Ernie, and Leonard. (oh, okay, so...) They had a store over on 10th street.

Bob: You didn't get a commercial loan or anything like that? (no) How long did it take to pay that off?

Jim: I don't remember exactly uh, Bob, probably...let me say they were very generous and uh, even though times were still tough at that particular time of year. They didn't press me uh, I think I paid it back in a year. There's no interest (okay). So I started, June the 9th, 1938, that was my first day here. And we just uh, started working. I did and uh, January the 29th, 1939, I got married. (to Sally, I hope) To Sally, yes, (okay). Now, we went through Cincinnati on our honeymoon and we be gone, gonna be gone for a week, but we came back in 4 days. We stayed at the Netherland Plaza; we was gonna kind of live it up. We stayed at the Netherland Plaza. We were gonna stay a week, had to come back in four days, broke! [laughter] Spent the first night over in the Fredrick Hotel, \$4 a night. She and I both worked together. We worked long hours. We were open from 7 in the morning to 2 or 2:30 the following morning, and we were here a lot of those hours. then our first child came along, 1940, and of course, she had to stay home, take care of the child, and all...I was here at the store. Then the war came along.

Bob: Could we back up for just a second there (uh-huh). You were selling ice cream and soda's and sh...shakes and that type of thing?

Jim: Our menu consisted of milk shakes, sodas, sundies, cakes, a 10 cent hamburger, a 10 cent chicken salad sandwich, and coffee and pie, that was it.

Bob: Okay. And did this Kennedy Dairy people supply you with ice cream (ice cream), 'cause you never had made ice cream, (no, no, no home-made ice cream). Okay. And take for example, the chicken salad, who created the recipe for that? I mean, fairly common item, but none the less--somebody must have been responsible for the way that it was made.

Jim: Well, it was just uh, an ordinary chicken salad uh, mixed with uh, there was no special formula okay, for that.

Bob: Did you have...

Jim: As opposed to our spaghetti sauce, for instance, which is a pretty special formula.

Bob: Where did you get the chicken? You know, like I'm assuming at some places they have like a chicken dinner one day and if they don't sell all the chicken dinners, they got the chicken to make chicken salad with. But you wouldn't have had that kind of situation.

Jim: No, no. No, we'd buy the chickens and boil 'em, and take the meat, and make the chicken salad (oh, okay), no leftovers (no leftovers). [laughter] No, no. (alright)

Bob: Okay, go ahead, you're ready to start World War II.

Jim: Well, the war came along and there were factories established downtown one up on the next block here, and one over on 10th street, and the workers uh, needed places to eat. And so we started developing a restaurant, restaurant food, steak and gravy, little plate lunches--they were 35 cents. This is about 1940-41. And as uh, the need was there, why, we added a little more to the menu. Then in 1944 this room emptied out over here. There was a Blue Cross office there and they moved away.

Bob: Let me interrupt here just for a second to make sure we get on the topic what we're talking about. When we were talking about the Kennedy Dairy, we were talking about the middle portion of the current restaurant (right), and the room we are talking about now is the one just east (east), of there (yes), okay.

Jim: So, there was an old gentleman came by one night. His name was uh, Robert Elmore, and it was about 12:30 and he said uh, Jim, I want...he spoke in broken...he says uh, I want to start for your spaghetti house. He was out of work; he worked for a place called John's. So I said uh, I was going uh, I didn't have anything. So nothing from nothing leaves nothing, so I said, okay, okay, Bob, so we opened up that uh, side over there July the 15th, 1944. Hotter than blazes, no air conditioning. And we took in 15 dollars that first day.

Bob: Were they operated out of like the same kitchen (no), or were they separate businesses?

Jim: Separate, separate (okay). Two separate kitchens, two separate uh, cooks, and everything was separate. Eventually, we put an archway through and then eventually in 1948, we opened up the two sides.

Bob: Now, was that one over there called Jim's Spaghetti House, and this one was still something else?

Jim: That was called the spaghetti house and this was still uh, Jim's, Jim's uh, well no, we changed it from Jim's Dairy Bar, it was originally Jim's Dairy Bar to Jim's Grill (okay). Then when we opened up the two we called it Jim's Grill and Spaghetti House.

Bob: And you were the owner and operator but the other fellow really, ran the other one for you?

Jim: No, I ran both of 'em, but he uh, he was a cook, (he was just a cook? okay), had a brother-in-law of mine, Sally's brother Seeb, his name was Seeb. Seeb Rahall. He watched it for me.

Bob: Okay. How do you spell Seeb?

Jim: Yes, Robert L. Moore was the originator of the spaghetti formula. Now we've taken it through the years and enhanced it. You know, you find out you need a little something here, you need a...but basically, it's uh, it's the same basic formula.

Bob: Okay. so you had the businesses that were virtually similar, in terms of product going at the same time. Did you have problems with war time rationing?

Jim: Very much. I used to get in the car every morning and I have went as far as 20 miles from here to get maybe 3 or 4 lbs. of meat or some bananas, for our banana pie or we sold a lot of cigarettes then or pick up some cigarettes somewhere on sale, bring in and sell 'em for a few cents more. And in the meantime, I had to be careful of gasoline because gasoline was rationed, too. So it was quite different, I think.

Bob: Did this, both restaurants stay open extended hours throughout the war?

Jim: Yes, mmm-hmm. (and...) Now the spaghetti house didn't open...they didn't open at seven because there was nothing to serve. Opened at 11:00.

Bob: Okay. Now you mentioned the pie. I've heard all kinds of wonderful things about your pie. Uh...

Jim: Well, we first had a lady named Mrs. Chinn, and uh, she was the first pie baker and we developed a reputation from her and then when she left, Bunny Gray is his name. Uh, his name was Conkling Gray, incidently. He started, let me backtrack a little bit, back in 1938 when I started he was going to, he's a black man by the

way. He was going to Douglas High, which was the Black high school out here, I don't think you know about it. And he was looking for a summer job and uh, I didn't have anything that had to be done. And he went to the service, went to the Navy. And attained Chief Steward in the Navy, came out in '45. And has been here ever since, and he picked up where Miss Chinn left off and he's well, he's, you might say he kinda runs Jim's now. He's our general manager and uh, oversees everything, the pies and the sauces and the hiring and the firing.

Bob: Did you get any negative responses from the community for hiring him or for having him work here?

Jim: Back when the uh, when uh, the supreme court decided that they were going to integrate the country, I'm sure we uh, we had, we had a couple of incidents here, but nothing major. Because uh, he'd been here and was doing such a good job and the people liked him. There was really no major incidents here. I'm sure there was talk. There always is, you know, a lot of talk, but you never hear. But nothing had been in consequence.

Bob: Did you serve Black customers? (oh, yes) Always (mmm-hmm). No, you must have been fairly unique in that.

Jim: Well, we uh, we tried to be liberal and uh, I'm a uh, in a minority and consequently have a little more compassion in that area uh, I feel that, anyway.

Bob: And, and as far as you know you, I don't want to put words in your mouth. In the '40's and '50's that...that may have 'caused you some white customers. But not enough to matter a great deal.

Jim: Probably, I didn't know if it did.

Bob: Okay. I was talking with one other gentleman about uh, a job corps project and how that led to integrating some of the public facilities.

Jim: It was down here in the old Governor Cabell hotel, the job corps.

Bob: Yes. And I'm not sure...

END OF SIDE 1

Jim: The present office, that was their policy and uh, that's the way they did it.

Bob: Uh, let's talk a little bit about the business end of running a restaurant. When you added an item to the menu, how...how do you go about pricing that so that everything's covered?

Jim: Well, there's a formula in food service. I don't know the formula that the fast food people have today, but back then the

formula was that your food should cost you 40 cents of a dollar, 40%. For instance, if you bought a dollar meal that oughta cost me 40 cents, (for the, for the food), yes, that's a 40% food cost so to speak. (okay) Now, on today's market that has to change some. Not a whole lot, 'cause it can't and maintain a volume of business. But other costs have uh, risen so much, rent, utilities, labor, supplies, insurance, etc. Everything raised so much that you couldn't uh, if you operate on a 40% food cost you're just in a little hot water.

Bob: So, is it m...more like 30 today, (no), or lower, lower than that even.

Jim: The fast foods yes, the fast food chains they're the money makers today. You might think you're getting a bargain but uh, their food cost, so I'm told, runs anywhere from 25 to 30%. That's what I'm told; I don't know ac...uh, don't quote me on that, although I am quoted on this uh, [laughing].

Bob: W...what is your food cost then?

Jim: Uh, prefer not to...

Bob: Okay, okay. Uh, but is that the basic way that you, let's say over the years, have you tried to be both competitive and make a living is by sticking close to that 40%?

Jim: Well, let me, Bob, let me tell you my theory, operating a restaurant when you come in here and sit down and order a meal, and when you get up to leave and go up there to the register and pay. I want you to feel like you had a good meal and we served to you well, and you paid a fair price for it. Now, if I over priced that, you may not say anything. But when you get outside you're gonna say, mmmh, I think I paid too much for that spaghetti dinner. The only...the only comment we hear and we don't hear all comments is that, boy, I had too much to eat, I'm too full [laughs]. We want to give a person a dollar for a dollar. And I uh, I couldn't do it any other way.

Bob: Does that ever conflict?

Jim: We're family oriented here, we're a family restaurant. If you bring your wife and four kids in here for an evening meal, you only have so much to spend. See, our people, we have billionaires that come in here, but our...the big bulk of our people earn from 12 to 20,000 dollars a year. They can't afford a whole lot, again we get wealthy people in here, and we're glad to have 'em; we need 'em. But our, our big trade are folks who earn that amount of money.

Bob: And so your...you try continually to gear your menu toward a moderate price range.

Jim: Have to. We have to or...(have you ever...). Or uh, lose a lot of our traffic. Plus the fact uh, have no alcohol and uh, that creates more of a family trait.

Bob: Okay. When let's talk I guess, a little bit about your customers. I'm assuming that lunches have always been a major portion of your business. Is that fair to say? More than dinners?

Jim: Well, we always have a...I developed a theory of my own. I don't know how true it is, but it's just something I tickle my fancy with. We pay our bills up to five o'clock and the traffic after 5 o'clock is uh, money that if I make any that's part of my profit. Now we do a good dinner traffic, good dinner trade, we do a good lunch, and uh, good dinner trade. My business is good.

Bob: Now, the business or the lunches are...are I would guess, working people, who o have an hour off for lunch and come from wherever they come from.

Jim: Not entirely. We get a lot of shoppers that come downtown or people who are going to the doctor, the dentist, the insurance man, the real estate, to the bank. Then on the other hand we get a lot of uh, lawyers, we get a lot of uh, clerks from the stores over town. We get just a general hodge-podge of people. You come in here on any day, any lunch day and see lawyers, doctors, uh, clerks, professionals, real estate people, insurance people, a combination of people I would say.

Bob: And it has pretty much been that way all along, for you? I mean, from the '40's through today, has there been much of a shift in clientele?

Jim: More so in the last 20 years.

Bob: Before that it was more of a blue-collar restaurant?

Jim: Mmm...I wouldn't say blue no, uh, it's kind of hard to distinguish. Uh, I always distinguished the blue from the white, as the blue is more of a factory worker. I don't know whether that's right or wrong, but that's been when I was growing up that was uh, we referred to blue-collar people as a factory worker but uh, no, we've always...we've always had a pretty good cross-cut of people. (oh, okay) We've seemed in the last 20 years to get more professional people, if that's what you want to know.

Bob: Well, I was wondering how it shifted because, obviously the base of Huntington's economic system is shifting and those people you have described as factory blue-collar workers, are either one, not working or two, working quite a distance from here. So, that it's not totally logical to assume that they would come all the way down here. There were more of them closer 20 or 30 years ago. Uh, I don't know...maybe they're brown baggers anyway, or maybe they have cafeterias.

Jim: All I can tell you, Bob, is...is now we get uh, we get a cross-cut of the population.

Bob: Okay, what kind of people come in for dinner?

Jim: Families uh, women who are working, and on their way home, single women or what have you uh, plus we do a big carry-out business, incidently; spaghetti primarily, people will stop by on their way home and pick up enough spaghetti for their family and take it home and uh, it's ready to eat and they uh, serve the salad and that's it. That's a big business for us, carry-out. Uh....

Bob: Is that basically an evening business?

Jim: Yes, (okay). Anything from 4 o'clock on through 6 or 6:30, is our big carry-out time. Now at lunch we do our big carry-out business for the workers int he offices and so forth.

Bob: Okay. How much of a difference has it made for you that they built an interstate highway? From a stake in this street right out here is a federal highway. I'm assuming once there was a whole lot more intercity or interstate traffic on that road that...

Jim: I would never know, Bob, how much the I-64 meant to my traffic. I do know that, excuse me, when the mall came into being, that for a few months we noticed a little down turn in our volume. And I'm certain even today after a couple of years that they've been open that uh, there's a certain amount of traffic that we don't get. But it's hard to tell. For instance, we do know that on Monday night, Monday night is shoppers night; the stores are open. Monday nights we used to have a pretty good store full, and now we just have an average Monday night, because of the mall. But still it's very difficult to tell how much traffic you've lost from highways from malls, shopping centers, etc. We've got to make a better mouse trap.

Bob: Th...that's what I was getting at in general.

Jim: We lost a lot of businesses downtown (yes), I guess you know that.

Bob: Right. But your business has generally been an even or upward slope, consistently over the years (yes), and whatever.

Jim: And uh, so much of that is attributed to the fact that you raise the price here and there. Such as the...the menu price is not the same as it was ten years ago.

Bob: And whatever factors may have caused business to decline there were other factors that compensated for the, so would...

Jim: Well, downtown we have no factors that contribute, that can contribute to our increased value. Because there is nothing new downtown, we're hoping, eventually, that the super block will get

developed and uh, another hotel uh, some businesses will be generated, and the uh, along the 4th and 3rd avenue areas which will increase traffic downtown and interests. There's just uh, nothing in the downtown area now that uh, can help us where our traffic's concerned here. We uh, just like I say, we just have to keep uh, our service, our quality, our friendliness, and our price and ambiance, as high as possible. We strive all the time, to better ourselves.

Bob: How important a role has advertising played in your business? Either paid advertising or word of mouth?

Jim: Uh, I...I always look at uh, different, I call it clever. For instance, the first time I think I ran an ad of any significance, there was a song out called "The Shrimp Boats are Coming!" You don't remember it? (no, sir) [laughing] Let me give you a hint when that was. There's Phyllis, Phyllis, did you hear (oh, yes, I can even sing it to you). Well, anyway, we had shrimp then; we don't have shrimp today. By the way, we're still on, aren't' we? That's Phyllis. Phyllis has been here for...how many years, Phyllis? (37) Thirty-seven years. Phyllis, this is Bob. (We're doing a little profile on Jim's) If you hear me make a mistake, you chime in, will you? [laughing] Anyway, we had shrimp and it was a big item with us. And there was a song out called [singing]..."The shrimp boats are coming, da ta da ta da", something like that. So, I uh, I ran an ad in the paper. I said, "The Shrimp Boats are Here!", and just put our signature. Then I had some little, what do you call them, little sheets that they passed out? Flyers, flyers, I had a couple thousand of those printed up and had some boys stand down on the corner of 4th avenue and 9th street and pass 'em out. Said, "The Shrimp Boats are Here!", and just put our signature. That was probably the first uh, advertising that I uh, can remember that was of a consequence. Then, when all the [inaudible]...about Red Lobster recently (oh, okay). I don't know whether you saw an ad in the paper, ya know, I said I ran a little ad in the paper, I said uh, "Lobsters are turning green with envy because of our famous Icelandic fish." See, fish is a big item with us.

Bob: I missed that. I am sorry. [laughing] How'd you fix your shrimp?

Jim: We had shrimp cocktail and we deep-fried 'em. We had the best in town, at least that's what people said.

Bob: Did you buy, was the shrimp uh, fresh and you dipped it in your own batter?

Jim: Oh, yes. Yeah, everything here was custom built. See, you can buy shrimp already breaded and drop it in the batter, but uh, that wasn't us. We bought the very top brand of shrimp. That's why we cut out shrimp, got so expensive, this particular shrimp that we had. So, we decided...I got too high on the menu. See, we have to be careful that we don't put too many expensive items on



our menu or we scare away our traffic. We want people to know they can come in here with 4 or 5 dollars and have an evening meal and be satisfied.

Bob: Let's talk a little bit, we've got 10 minutes or so left on here, uh, about your people. I don't mean that to sound like you own them, but the people who have worked for you over the years uh, both in terms of a group, expanding group or contracting group with business, and maybe a little bit about specific individuals, who have contributed?

Jim: Well, we mentioned uh, Bunny Gray; again his name is Conkling. He has been with me all these years, with the exception of his Navy stint. And he's a very capable, industrious, loyal, faithful person, and who is quote "in charge." He does the hiring, the firing, and the overseeing of all the cooking...and just is uh, in charge, generally. If I should happen to leave now and go away for awhile ah, I have no qualms as Jim's is now running and running well. Uh, Phyllis, Phyllis back here has been here now going on 37 years. And she is another loyal, faithful, honest, industrious person. She has been operating at will since uh, 1948, making sandwiches and then she doubles uh, on cashiering and whatever there is to be done, she can do it. Then we have Betty Jo, who has been here the same amount of time; she's part-time now, cashier.

Bob: Could you have both of those ladies last names?

Jim: Phyllis is Elkins. Betty Jo is Kinler. She has obligations at home now; she has a big family. But she's been here the same number of years that Phyllis has been here. They came just months apart. Then, there's Martha, Martha is uh, a waitress that has been here the longest. She's been here 27 or 28 years. Her name is Martha Baker. Her husband is Magistrate Bob Baker. Then uh, there is uh, Sharon Price. Sharon's been here 20 years. Now, we go on down the line to Lilly, ten, Lilly Bowles, 10 years, Betty Perry, 8, so forth.

Bob: When you started, it was you and your wife and then, (had a couple more people working), and then Mr. Gray joined you. (yeah) About how many people would you have had on a payroll say, down the 2nd World War? (15) And that (no), was (no), like two full shifts?

Jim: No. I'm sorry, no, no. No...what am I thinking? Twenty-five (okay), 'cause we're open from 7 in the morning to 2 o'clock the next morning.

Bob: Okay. Was that two shifts? (mm-hmm) Okay. And did business then slacken slightly as the war ended, so that you went to, like today, somewhere along the line...let me, okay, I'm not making sense here. Somewhere along the line you've had a fairly severe cut back in number of hours of operation.

Jim: We started about oh, I'd say, 10-12 years ago or so, started

cutting back hours and naturally uh, the volume lessened, the volume of business, but then as prices increased, why, it uh, kinda levels itself. But the amount of employees, uh, naturally as we lessened our hours and went to...from eleven o'clock in the morning 'til 9 in the evening, and by the way, we started closing on Sunday back in 1945. Before then, we were open 7 days a week.

Bob: Do you hire young folks? High school aged kids for anything, are you basically...?

Jim: Part-time, we have part-time employees who go to uh, high school or Marshall University.

Bob: Okay. Uh, because the reason I ask that was you're open 10 hours; obviously that's some place between 1 and 2 shifts. (mmm-hmm) And you, I would assume, clearly need people who would come in at 4 and work until 9 or come in at 5.

Jim: We have several part-time employees now. (okay) We've always found that part-time employees have a tendency to help you over, what we call humps. Maybe you need 'em for a special occasion or some lady's off sick or something (mmm-hmm), they're always valuable, good part-time employees.

Bob: And your full-time people, do they tend to come in the morning and work 'til just before dinner?

Jim: Well, it kinda breaks up. We have 1, 2, 3 who come in at uh, 8:30 then at 11:00 a full crew comes on 'cause they're ready for lunch, then some go off in the afternoon, but the split shift go off at 2:00, come back at 5:00 and work 'til closing at 9:00, then it takes an hour to clean up.

Bob: Oh, so you had some people who are working full-time split shift (oh, yes), okay, but your basic...

Jim: They come in at 11 and work 'til 2, back at 5, and work 'til closing.

Bob: Okay. Your kitchen help, the ones who must come in fairly early to get ready for lunch uh...

Jim: Generally, they work straight through.

Bob: And then do they leave 4 or 5'ish or something? (oh, yes, mmm-hmm). Do you have something like a night manager or is Mr. Gray (Mr. Gray's it), responsible?

Jim: He's it all day.

Bob: Okay. Um...obviously, labor cost have increased a great deal (quite a bit), you must have been able to get pretty solid people for 75 cents an hour during the 2nd World War.

Jim: Quite a bit. Labor cost is extremely high now, because if you've got good people and you want to keep 'em you have to pay 'em and pay 'em well. And I do that now. It diminishes my income, but I'm at the stage of the game now where I would prefer to keep Jim's running at a high peak, a high level of uh, whatever achievement, rather than uh, try to keep new help on or different help. I think I pay my people well.

Bob: Okay. What uh, the part-time people are they basically, have they traditionally been around minimum wage? Obviously, you can't go below that.

Jim: No, we don't feel like we can hire anyone at minimum wage and get good employees. We uh, we don't consider minimum wage. It's alright but uh, all of our employees are paid above minimum.

Bob: Then does the world know that? In the sense of bringing you good people? Do you have an on-going policy of we take job applications? Or how does the world get a job at Jim's?

Jim: Generally, word of mouth brings good people. When you get a good organization and you get an employee who isn't good, it's just like an ad, a bad ad from a bridge, it just, it kinda weeds itself out. [background noises]

Bob: And so people...(word of mouth)...fall out...(word of mouth)...and people come in.

Jim: People don't know if they come here and apply for, first of all, if they don't qualify, we don't uh, hire them. But let's say they uh, they're interviewed and they're hired uh, if they don't measure up immediately, why you know it and uh, they just, they just weed themselves out.

Bob: Is turnover a problem? (not too bad here. I think we had probably, less than anybody). Okay. Uhm...I don't know if you've mentioned purchasing or picking up this western section of the store yet.

Jim: It was in 1962. That was uh, a real estate office. A gentleman named Bob Fleshman and uh, he moved out and I thought, well, by gosh, I just think I will take that thing and remodel it. And this is in 1962, we backed the truck up and emptied out all the old furnishings, and got all new, just like we see it now. Although, we do some redecorating from time to time. But that side there, called it Jim's Steak and Spaghetti House, used to be Jim's Grill, and Spaghetti House. Now it's Jim's Steak and Spaghetti House.

Bob: Which clearly implies that you have--Steak.

Jim: Uh-hmm. But, that's not our uh, fish is our second item. Spaghetti is number one; that's our biggest seller, but fish is the second item, second seller, second biggest seller.

Bob: What happened to Mr. Elmore?

Jim: He died. He retired after so many years and uh, and he passed away a few years ago.

Bob: He was with you from the time he started with you until he ceased work (mmm-hmm). Oh, okay. We've got just a couple of minutes here. Could you describe how your role evolved or changed from, I'm assuming that in the beginning that you did everything. I mean, you washed dishes or you cooked or you waited on customers, and you took the check uh, (yes, sir). It's not that way today (no), uh, how...how did that...I don't mean to suggest your contribution is less. Obviously, owning something is a major contribution. But certain other tasks have fallen by the wayside (mmm-hmm), as other people have picked up for you.

Jim: Well, the first, I think the first big changed was way back in 1948. I went to the hospital for a little minor surgery, most of that time I had an apron on, always put an apron on. I worked the grill. I made the sandwiches. And came out of the hospital, and was recuperating and came back to work and Phyllis, now Phyllis was on the grill. And I quote, "Never did put the apron back on!" So, that was the first time that uh, the first instance that I can remember that there was a change in uh, my quote "behavior", or work, call it whatever you like. Then as time went by, we added uh, cashiers, I moved from the grill to cashiering. And then we hired cashiers, and that lessened. And then Mr. Gray, of course, as time went on, took over the responsibility of interviewing help, of the hiring and firing and that relieved me of that. Today my duties are in uh, just coming in and overseeing, going to the bank, making some decisions, generally making sure that the ambiance of Jim's remains at a high level. Naturally, some people always like to see the owners....

END OF INTERVIEW

**JIM'S STEAK & SPAGHETTI HOUSE**

**TAPE 1**

**AN INTERVIEW WITH: James A. Tweel**

**CONDUCTED BY: Robert D. Sawrey**

**May 16, 1984**

**TRANSCRIBED BY: Jacqueline Dingess**

**TYPED BY: Sally M. Keaton**

RS: Today is May 16, 1984. I will be interviewing Jim Tweel of Jim's Steak & Spaghetti House at <sup>that restaurant</sup> 925 5th Avenue in Huntington, Ah, I will be inter-  
~~viewing at the Steak House.~~ <sup>And</sup> This is Bob Sawrey. <sup>Alright there we go.</sup> When I was here in November, <sup>Jim</sup> and you discussed very briefly <sup>the fact that</sup> your parents <sup>came here</sup> coming from Lebanon. <sup>Could you elaborate a little bit on those circumstances,</sup> why they came to Huntington, who they were, what they did when they got here?

JT: My parents were Simon and <sup>Regina</sup> ~~Virginia~~ Tweel, <sup>And</sup> ~~they~~ came <sup>here</sup> to Huntington in 1900. My father had a brother <sup>in</sup> from New York City, ah, who advised him to come to Huntington because in this area back peddling was a quick and reasonable way of making a living. They would put, ah, packs on their back of linens and what have you and go around the countryside <sup>and, ah,</sup> ~~sell~~ <sup>sell</sup> their wares. <sup>Ah,</sup> My father also had ~~another~~ brother, another brother who was here and several other Lebanonese in the community which gave them support. Eventually my father went into ~~the~~ what is known as the confectionary business. This is the old wire back ice cream chair and the ice cream and confections and tobacco's and that sort of thing and fruits. He used to go to the "fruit store" and by fruit. he didn't go to <sup>the</sup> ~~the~~ grocery store. He went to the fruit store to by fruit and, ah, that's how he got started, ah, ~~and~~ and, ah, gradually made his way, ~~to~~ <sup>a</sup> raised ~~the~~ family.

RS: These Lebanonese, did they live together? In, ah, ~~as a group,~~ <sup>in a group kinda sit</sup> ~~(A ghetto?)~~ <sup>maybe,</sup> No, I'm hoping not a ghetto but an ~~enclave~~ <sup>enclave</sup> would be a better word in Huntington or were they dispersed throughout; <sup>did they</sup> ~~do~~ rely on each other?

JT: Yes the <sup>reliance</sup> ~~reliance~~ was quite heavily <sup>Bob</sup> on each other ~~but~~ because of the language barrier, ah, plus the fact that they need <sup>that</sup> support <sup>from</sup> on each other. All the social activity was done within the Lebanonese Community, there was no outside activity to speak of ~~on the~~ <sup>to</sup> contrary of what ~~it~~ <sup>exists</sup> is today. And all, ah, the social affairs, <sup>the</sup> ~~and~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~weddings,~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~Baptist party~~ <sup>the Baptist, the parties,</sup> ~~was~~ <sup>etcetera,</sup> ~~was~~ <sup>whatever - there was,</sup> all done within the Lebanonese Community.

RS: Was this a christian Lebanese Community? (Yes, ah huh) There was never any kind of religious problem, ~~all~~ all of the Lebanese that came here were christians?

JT: ~~Orthodox~~ <sup>Maronite</sup> was the basic faith (ok, okay) of 99% of the Lebanese.