Charles Goldfus Narrator

Rhoda G. Lewin Interviewer

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Charles Goldfus -CG Rhoda Lewin -RL

CG: I was born in North Minneapolis on October 1, 1897. We lived on Lyndale Place, which is near Sixth Avenue North and Lyndale, a red brick - what you would call now an apartment house. And then we moved next door to my uncle Nathan Lowenthal, who had a wholesale and retail department store. My father worked for him and we moved into a little house next door to his store. Then, later, we moved upstairs over the store. I remember distinctly that when I was probably eight or nine or ten years old, I was helping my uncle with running errands, selling easy things that were light, like handkerchiefs, socks, meeting most of the old settlers in north Minneapolis, some from south Minneapolis and northeast, Central Avenue. And the most interesting people I would meet would be what you call "wagon peddlers" from the small towns and even as far away as North and South Dakota that would come to Lowenthal's store and buy their weekly or monthly supplies. Evidently I did well in meeting these people, because some of them would come back and would want me to wait on them. Mr. Lowenthal had two sons. The older was Archie, the younger was Max. Archie was the bookkeeper, and he and I got along just fine. He called me "Prince Charles." [Laughing] Max was busy with getting an education. He graduated North High School. And while I'm talking about North High School, he in later years wrote a book that did so well that there were two or three editions printed. The title of the book is "The Investor Pays." He dedicated that book to his English teacher at North High School, a woman by the name of Webster. The book was all about the officers and directors of the Chicago Milwaukee Railroad defrauding the common stock holders of about 455 million dollars from the year 1909 to the year 1925. In later years Max had guts enough to publish a book titled "The Federal Bureau of Investigation." That was, I think, around 1955. After that was published, he was called by Walter Winchell and other national commentators a "pinko," and he was called before the Joe McCarthy Senate investigation of Reds, Communists, and so forth, and I think that he had so much evidence that Joe McCarthy was a scoundrel that Joe McCarthy dropped him like a hot potato! But Walter Winchell and others, I remember clearly. I noticed an article in later years by the San Diego paper -- we evidently were living in La Jolla then—and it was an editorial that criticized Max. I mailed the editorial to my brother Hy, who was then living at 4912 Clinton South, and it happened that Max was visiting Hymie, and Hymie wrote me that after Max read that, he jumped with glee

[chuckles], because that was another crazy editorial that had no justification whatsoever, no truth to it. All his life, he was a fighter for the underdog. He was my idol.

RL: What started him on his research on the railroad? Was he a reporter, or did he work there?

CG: I think that one of the things that started him on that is an experience that he went through here in Minneapolis. Ben Lifson built some apartment buildings on Lagoon [Avenue]. I think they were the first apartment buildings built there. He took money from mostly his Jewish friends from north Minneapolis, and Lowenthals, who by that time had accumulated a fairly good sum because their wholesale and retail dry goods store was becoming greater all the time, they invested a considerable amount of money with Ben Lifson. And when they let Max know -- I think Max was in the law business for himself, or with Robert Szold, who was related to Henrietta [Szold, founder of Hadassah]... I forget whether he was a brother or a cousin, and whether Max was with his law firm at that time or not -- he came to Minneapolis to try to save some of his parents' money. But Ben's empire collapsed, and I'm quite sure the Lowenthals lost considerable money. And Max, I think that's what helped start him in being a critic of these financiers. He was what you would now call a trustbuster. I think he was the first Jewish fellow to work for Cadwallader, Wickersham and [unclear name].

RL: Was that a local firm?

CG: No, that was one of the largest law firms in New York.

RL: When you worked in the store, were you, so to speak, bilingual? You spoke English, and you spoke Yiddish, I'm sure, when those peddlers came in?

CG: Yes. I went to Talmud Torah. My teacher, one of them, was Leo Frisch's father. [Leo became] the American Jewish World publisher. I remember him with a little beard. Another teacher was Moishe Lowenthal, who had a crippled leg. He walked with a cane. I think that was Nathan Lowenthal's brother or cousin. Nathan I think was the first president of the Kenesseth Israel synagogue, the charter president, and my father was a charter member. That is where the Talmud Torah was and that was where I became Bar Mitzvah.

RL: You mean Talmud Torah was at the Kenesseth Israel building?

CG: It was a building next to the synagogue. I remember the synagogue, I don't know if it was the first building, it was on North Fourth street, not far from where we lived. And next door to us was Noodleman's scrap paper company. And one day there was a fire at Noodleman's. This Noodleman is Bob Noodleman's parent, and Lawrence and Babe. And the firemen had to work like the devil to keep our house from burning.

One incident that stands out, I still remember like it happened yesterday. A boy rolling a hoop—they used sticks to roll a hoop—on Fifth Street and Sixth Avenue, where the streetcar turned, and there was a horse-drawn fire engine coming along, and this little boy, he probably was eight, nine, ten years old, my age, I saw him hit and killed by these horses.

Another thing I happen to think of is Bofferding's grocery store. It was very popular, with ice cream and drawbags. I think at that time a drawbag was a penny, maybe two pennies, and had some candy in it. And the ice cream cones, I think we paid two or three cents for. And I remember Meyer Bank, he had a travel agency. This is Charley Bank's father, the former alderman. And his brother Albert Bank was superintendent of schools. And then I remember Sachs bakery. And there was Old Man Dalkin, a "blacker," a tinsmith. He was a stately looking man. I was very friendly with his sons, Ted Dalkin and Al Dalkin. Al had an inventive mind. When a young boy, he came up with some kind of an arrangement to make a Ford car start easier in the wintertime, and he brought the diagrams to Butler Brothers and they told him that they were not interested. And Al, in later years, after he moved to Chicago, told me that Butler Brothers used that. He saw it in their catalog! Then in Chicago he started being a technician's technician, working on vending machines. He did real well. Al [chuckles] was the only Jewish wild game hunter that I ever met. He had a lot of "chutzpah" and he would go all over the world hunting game. He belonged to a club and he got a lot of publicity throughout the nation on what he did. And talking about sports, a lot of the fellows would go up fishing at Lake Mille Lacs. The winds would cause heavy waves there, and some of my friends one day were out on the lake and I remember one of them drowning. I think Al Dalkin was with that group when they had that accident.

Another experience of my youth: I joined a Boy Scout troop. The headquarters was on 20th Avenue North, upstairs, and it was endowed by Caroline Crosby. She was active in Boy Scout work there as well as many other charities. This Caroline Crosby was part of the Washburn-Crosby families that are now General Mills. I remember distinctly, probably once or twice each summer, she would have picnics out to their estate at Lake Minnetonka. And one of those picnics I attended, I sat on the front seat with the chauffeur in this big limousine, and the windshield was up, and the wind coming through, and I was so excited, especially when I saw that speedometer hit 60 miles an hour! Another Boy Scout incident was we would have our summer camp at Amery, Wisconsin. It was a beautiful lake. We built a wooden raft and we were out in the lake. It tipped, and I and two other Scouts saved a Gross boy. His father was president of the German American bank, or some bank, on Washington and Plymouth, or 20th. And our scout-master, Mr. Richardson, who also influenced me in my later life, a very dedicated person, he wrote to the Scout headquarters and got bronze lifesaving medals for us. And just recently, this came to the forefront, this lifesaving medal. A couple years ago I got a letter from a Mr. Cramer in Baltimore. The letter first went to Donald Goldfus, the son of a cousin of mine, Alex, who passed away when Donald was only about four or five years old. This Mr. Cramer, who was an attorney for the government in Baltimore, wrote that he looked up the Goldfus name in the Minneapolis phone book when he was in Washington at the Boy

Scout headquarters doing research on early Boy Scout troops and came across my name... that a Charles Goldfus won this medal. I have a copy of the letter. This letter asked Donald if he could help Mr. Cramer locate Charles Goldfus, and he wrote the reason why, he's doing research, and so forth. And Donald just wrote a little note at the bottom of that letter, that "Charles Goldfus lives in Palm Springs but I do not have his street address," and returned the letter to Mr. Cramer. Cramer sent me that letter and I wrote Donald a "thank you" note for sending Cramer my "city address" in Palm Springs. And he wrote me again and said that he remembered me living in La Jolla where his aunt, who is now Florence Scheffner, brought him on a trip to California. He also wrote that he remembers when he was a Hennepin Avenue street urchin, stopping in my store, Charles Wine and Imports, 523 Hennepin, Liquor License Number One, to borrow some streetcar tokens, and he still owes me money for those streetcar tokens! To collect that money, that's why I'm here! [laughing].

RL: What was the building up on 20th Street North, where the Boy Scouts met? 20th seems quite a distance from where you were living.

CG: I can't remember the name, but I'm quite sure it was there, beyond Plymouth. [Note: Plymouth Ave. is the same as 13th -- seven blocks from 20th, which would be West Broadway or beyond, depending on the cross street.] Plymouth then was fairly well built up. [Sighs] I think every contemporary of mine around here will remember Brochin's Delicatessen. He had kosher sausages and all the kosher things that I remember. On Pesach he had those cones of sugar that you would have to granulate by using a muddler. I still have my parents' bronze muddler. I remember Brochin moving to Plymouth Avenue from Sixth Avenue.

RL: You mentioned Liquor License Number One...

CG: Let me tell you about that. It's interesting. All my friends get a big kick out of that story. Sylvia's brother [Sylvia is Charles Goldfus's wife] was Art Jacobs. People who are our contemporaries all know her uncle Isaac Jacobs' Furniture Co. in St. Paul. The late Sam Jacobs was Sylvia's cousin. He worked in the store with his father. He was a fine violinist and was in the St. Paul Symphony. Sylvia's father was Ben Jacobs. He was a buyer of bankrupt stocks (i.e. merchandise). He would travel through small towns where these stores were for sale by the receiver in bankruptcy, and he would live in these towns and get rid of the stock. He was very intelligent, but he never learned to write or read English.

Coming back to Liquor License Number One. Sylvia's brother Art Jacobs, A.N. Jacobs, was interested in politics. He published the State News, the Farmer-Laborite newspaper. I think it was a weekly. He was part of what they called the "Big Three," friends of Governor Floyd B. Olson, the Farmer-Laborite. Harris was the second of the "Big Three." When liquor became legal, Art asked me if I would like to go in the liquor business and I said I would, but in the bottle goods phase, not the saloon end of it. Not the on-sale, but the off-sale. I remember distinctly telling my mother that I was considering going into the

liquor business, and she said, "Oh, no, not a Goldfus!" [Laughter] Well, a couple of weeks after Art Jacobs said he could get me a liquor license, I went up to his office and said, "Art, if you're so sure I can get a liquor license, how about getting me Liquor License Number One." He said, "Give a guy an inch, and he wants a foot." And I said, "Art, someone's going to get Liquor License Number One. It might as well be your brother-in-law." So he said, "Go up and introduce yourself to Fred Ossanna." Which I did. Ossanna's office was in what was then called the Rand Tower. Now I notice that it is the J.M. Dain brokerage house tower. Well, I told Ossanna who I was, and asked if there was anything I can do for him to help him organize the liquor sales for the state of Minnesota. He said, "Yes, I will give you the names of people that applied for licenses." -- I think it was only the people that applied for off-sale licenses -- "Try and sell them memberships to the Liquor Dealers Association, and also the monthly magazine." I think the whole thing amounted to about \$52.

In a couple of weeks I finished my job and I went up to Ossanna and told him and he asked me what I wanted for my time. I said, "Nothing, except that I would like to get Liquor License Number One." He had his own phone, connected to the liquor commissioner—I forget the fellow's name, the original commissioner—and he said to him, "Do you have a request for an off-sale license from a Charles Goldfus?" The liquor commissioner said "Yes." And Fred said, "Give him Liquor License Number One." And that was that. I used it for public relations and advertising. I think it helped me considerably, because it appealed to my prospective customers by telling them that now that liquor is legal, I imagine you would like to do business with a man that was never in the liquor business. Most of my competitors were former bootleggers who were in business all those years, but I was starting from scratch. Sylvia was in the store with me constantly. She took care of the inside while I was outside pounding the pavement, getting customers. Mostly I tried to get all the charge accounts I could. I didn't want to depend on street trade. I wanted to develop a delivery business.

One of my first calls was Minneapolis-Honeywell. One of the first persons I met was a woman, a private secretary of Mr. Sweatt, Sr. This woman in later years when we bought a lot in LaJolla happened to be our across-the-street neighbor! She was married to a Bill Jones, who was a great guy for mechanics. He was just uncanny! He had a regular mechanical shop in his garage – but that's more modern. I'll go back to the earlier days. The woman at Minneapolis-Honeywell sent me to Willard Huff, who was secretarytreasurer, I think, at that time, and I used the same approach. I said that now that liquor is legal -- I'm sure that he had been buying liquor from bootleggers -- how about buying from a man who was never in the business. I think that immediately sold him on my store, because he said, "Yes, you will have our business account, and I also want you to meet Mr. Sweatt." This was the younger Sweatt, Charlie Sweatt, one of the two sons. The older was Harold Sweatt. So one of my first calls, at Honeywell, turned out to be one of my best accounts. Through them, I was introduced to the members of the Minneapolis Club. I circularized the membership and got a lot of business from those members. They helped me put in certain brands, especially wines, because they were accustomed to good wines. I remember one, Hartley Sherry. There was a Mr. Taylor, a member of the Minneapolis

Club, that I did a good business with in that particular brand of sherry because he told me about it, and he liked it.

What impressed me was how loyal people are to certain brands. I'd always been a student of sales, what makes people buy things, and I decided that I would try to develop my own brands of scotch, and so forth. But when I told the jobbers what my plans were, they ridiculed me. They said that I would just ruin my store, that you have to sell brands that people ask for, advertised brands. I told them I understood that, but just the other day, walking by Walgreen's Drug Store, to see whatever became of our old Charles Wine and Imports, I told Joel [Goldfus's son] that Walgreen's merchandising of their private brands helped convince me that, handled correctly, I could develop my own brands.

Our store was on the ground floor of the Plymouth Building at 523 Hennepin. Our next door neighbor was Goodman Jewelry, who had a curbstone clock advertising his jewelry store. The reason he had a curbstone clock was because Thorpe Brothers would not allow any of the stores in the Plymouth Building, on the Hennepin side or on the Sixth Street side, to suspend a sign over the sidewalk. So for quite a while I was wracking my brain to think of something to attract people going by on Hennepin Avenue by car or streetcar, or walking, and I came up with the idea of -- not a clock -- but a curbstone thermometer! I'd never seen it, but I got the idea that maybe that would work.

O.B. McClintock Co. manufactured the clocks and thermometers on bank buildings and other sorts of buildings. The engineer at O.B. McClintock was a friend of mine, Cliff Schweizel, who before he went with McClintock was with the Sterling Electric Co., and years ago, before this, I used to do business with them. So I called Cliff at his office and asked him if he ever heard of a curbstone thermometer. He said, "No, but it sounds like a good idea." He had his artist, or his sales department, make up a couple of sketches and bring them over to me, and a couple of weeks later this fellow comes in with some beautiful sketches of these thermometers, about 12, 13 feet high. I picked out one of them and I got in touch with the Seagram representative and asked him if he would be interested in putting a Seagram Crown on top of this sign, showing Seven Crown Seagram's. He said yes, and I gave him a price. The price I gave him was enough to cover my cost for the thermometer!

A year or so later, Sylvia and I were getting on the train in Chicago to come home. We were at the railroad station and we noticed a Chicago Tribune with a picture of our thermometer on the front page, showing 31 below zero in Minneapolis! The United Press or Associated Press man evidently went over to Bridge Square and picked up an elderly man with a long, white beard, and this man is rubbing his hands, looking at my thermometer where it shows 31 below zero.

RL: What year was that?

CG: That happened about 1935 or 1936. I opened the store, I think, in February, 1934. I was the only bottled goods liquor store in Minneapolis for three or four days, and

naturally the shelves were cleared in a few hours and I was selling out of cartons on the floor! But that business still did not equal the Christmas business, with all our charge accounts.

Another interesting experience also turned out to be very remunerative. I liked, as I said previously, the idea of having my own brands, and I told Mr. Bill Hardin, who was in the wholesale liquor business and probably part owner of the Colonial Warehouse, a very fine, high-grade gentleman, that if ever a scotch bottler comes in to try to sell him some scotch bottled in Scotland, I would be interested in having him send that Scotsman, or a representative of that distillery, into my store, because I would like to get a private brand of scotch bottled in Scotland. Some time later, a man by the name of Harrison is traveling throughout the United States -- his office was in Toronto -- representing Heppern Ross Distillery. Their international brand was Red Hackle; it wasn't known much in the United States. He was traveling with a motor home. I told him what I was interested in and he said, "Did you decide on what kind of a label?" I said, "No." And he said, "Well, let me get my label book out." We were looking through all kinds of labels, and it was during the time the King was in love with Wally Simpson, and I thought, well, Wally Simpson is the king's favorite girl friend, and I said to Mr. Harrison, "Could I, or could you, register for me in the trademark department in Washington the label 'King's Favorite'?" And he said,"Oh, that sounds good. If you want that we'll contact Washington, and if it's approved we'll use it. How many cases would you want?" I said, "Oh, probably a hundred." And he says, "Well, how about Red Hackle?" I said, "Well, you can send me ten cases." [Laughing] He was disappointed, because his main interest was selling Red Hackle, but he was a nice fellow and we got along fine. And sure enough, I got a letter from Glasgow that King's Favorite was okay. That, I think, helped me considerably, especially during the price wars. I remember clearly when my competitors would put up blackboards, and competing against each other they would put on the blackboard a popular scotch like Black and White, or White Horse, at such-and-such a low price. Their next door or across the street competitor would price it a few pennies less, and that went on until they were practically giving the stuff away.

Well, I had already gotten a lot of good customers, my steady charge-account customers and some people off the street, buying King's Favorite and liking it. I was constantly getting repeats, and I told Mr. Hardin that if he gets any orders from other dealers, I didn't mind selling it if they were out-of-town dealers. And I said you may get some orders from local bars because some of my good customers asked why they cannot buy King's Favorite at the Minneapolis Club or the Nicollet Hotel or Radisson Hotel, and I said I don't know why you can't, all you have to do is keep on asking and I'm sure they'll have it. I was very friendly with the bartenders at the Minneapolis Club – I would give them special discounts when they would come in the store, same as with the Nicollet Hotel —and the maitre d' at the Nicollet was a very close friend of ours. He was a Frenchman, Jewish, married to a red-headed Jewish girl from St. Paul. And [laughter] soon the Minneapolis Club and the Nicollet Hotel ordered King's Favorite from Mr. Hardin.

In later years, I think the Colonial Warehouse gave up their liquor license, so I had Minter Brothers, who had an importing license. They started out in the candy business, Hymie and his brother, with cartons of Hershey bars, going to factories, warehouses, where there were a number of employees, selling Hershey candy bars. They finally opened up a wholesale candy business and then they got an importer's liquor license, and they cleared my King's Favorite Scotch for me. Morris Minter did not participate in the candy business; Morris got into selling clothing. Morris had a beautiful voice, and so did Hymie Minter. I think they got into a group that called themselves the Newsboys Quartet, and they sang professionally.

About that time next to the West Hotel was the Unique Theatre. When we were little kids we got into the movie theatre for ten cents, and that was a regular place of entertainment every Saturday for us kids.

RL: What business were you in before you were in the liquor business?

CG: I was a manufacturer's representative. I represented the Segal Lock and Hardware Company. They manufactured burglar-proof locks. If a firm was using those locks, I think the insurance companies would reduce their premiums. There were five Segal brothers in New York and one of them was a policeman, and that's how they came to invent the Segal burglar-proof lock. I sold them to, for instance, Gardner Hardware and Janney Semple Hill and Farwell Ozmun Kirk, and Marshall Wells up in Duluth. And then one of the Segal brothers invented the first one-piece double-edge razor. The blade had a hole in it, so that the piece of the razor that would cap the blade on tight, the blade slipped under that cap, and when you twisted the razor knob it clamped down. So they manufactured those. But before that, they started manufacturing razor blades, and I remember selling Gamble Skogmo, the Gamble stores, when they had their offices and warehouse not far from Northern Pump in northeast Minneapolis. I sold their purchasing agent, George Anderson, their private brand. They called it Tenstrike Razor Blades, and they did a tremendous business for me. Farwell Ozmun Kirk also sold a tremendous amount of blades for me. Segal Blade and Razor Co. was sold to Gillette, and that's about the time I started the liquor store.

RL: Did you go to North High School?

CG: Yes. But in 1917 I quit a couple of weeks before graduation because I wanted to get in the navy in the First World War. And I got my diploma because I joined the navy! A fellow by the name of Jackie Schwartz, who ran a cigar store next to the Andrews Hotel, was a former prizefighter, and he was made boxing instructor at Dunwoody Naval Training School. He had the sailors lined up, giving them instructions on the one-two punch. I had a little experience -- my older brother Hy and I used to box a lot at the YMCA -- and Schwartz evidently recognized that I had some experience. There was a sailor a couple of positions away from me that was having trouble in executing the instructions, and Schwartz called me over and said, "Hey, Mac, will you help that fellow with his exercises?" And from that time on, I was an assistant boxing instructor!

Shortly after that, there was a drive to sell War Bonds, and the Navy put on a show in the St. Paul Auditorium. The Minneapolis Auditorium wasn't as large as the St. Paul one at that time. And they asked if I would put on a three-round exhibition with another sailor. I'm very happy to do it, and I'm sitting in the ring waiting for my opponent and in crawls under the ropes a fellow that looked about 10 pounds heavier than I, and he had a cauliflower ear! We start sparring, and he hit me a terrific blow, and I got my arm behind his neck and pulled his ear to my mouth and I said, "Hey, Mac, I'm no pro. Let's take it easy." He said, "Okay, buddy." Well, I think that saved my life! [Laughter]

RL: That was your first and last professional fight?

CG: Well, it wasn't a professional fight, it was an exhibition, only three rounds. But that convinced me that professional boxing is legalized murder [laughter] and if I had anything to do with making laws, I would prohibit professional boxing as it is now. I've seen too many punch-drunk retired boxers walking on their heels in front of my liquor store.

RL: Where did your parents come from?

CG: Both of my parents were from Lithuania. I think it was Kovno Gobernia. I think that Lowenthals were from that area, too. My mother was related to Mrs. Lowenthal, Tante Lowenthal, Max's mother, Nathan Lowenthal's wife, who was very active in every kind of Jewish charity. They were very "frumm," very orthodox, and when they would go to New York on buying trips once or twice a year, she would take her own cooking utensils; that's how frumm she was. Her husband wasn't so frumm. The store would be closed on Shabbas, but he would go outside the back of the store and smoke his cigars.

The store was the center for the important Jews of not only the North Side but the South Side. The Lowenthals were good friends of Mr. Rose, of the Ohio Picture Frame Co., and a Salkin – not Salkin and Linoff, but the other Salkin – and I knew the sons. And I remember Salit, of Mankato, and Ben Moses, Felix's father. My parents became good friends of Moses'. I don't recall the names of others right now, but there were a great number of important Jews that gathered around Lowenthal Wholesale and Retail Dry Goods.

RL: Would they come in to sit and talk?

CG: They would talk about community affairs. I remember distinctly a Dr. Kistler -- I think the Kistler Block was named after Dr. Kistler -- and I forget his first name, but he was our doctor, and I think he removed my tonsils. He was very, very popular among the Jewish people, and my Tante Lowenthal and Uncle Lowenthal, I don't know how many patients they would send to Dr. Kistler. There was a Dr. Gordon, too, that was in Minneapolis.

RL: Was that the Dr. George Gordon from the Talmud Torah?

CG: I'm not sure. I remember Dr. George Gordon from the Talmud Torah but now I don't recall that it was the same person.

[Pause to rest. During pause, informal conversation turns again to liquor business.]

For some reason or other, the liquor authorities held up, I don't recall whether it was 100 or 200 cases of King's Favorite. This was very serious, because Christmas was coming. I think the importer at that time was Minter Brothers, and the Minter Brothers' selling their customers quantities of imported merchandise at real low prices was naturally resented by the other wholesalers. So when Minter Brothers tried to clear this large amount of scotch for me, the liquor commissioner told them it was being held up. I forget what reason, but when Hy or Sammy Minter called me, I was shocked. I immediately called George Leonard, because he was a customer of mine, and Max Lowenthal's closest friend. I told him what my trouble was, and he said, "I'll make an appointment with the liquor commissioner, and let you know. I'll want you to pick me up and drive me over to St. Paul, to the liquor commissioner's office." It was on either University or Snelling Avenue at the time. I was very, very, very, very tactful, because he was a very influential attorney politically at that time. We got into the liquor commissioner's office, and he had me wait, but I overheard the conversation. I don't know how long George Leonard and the liquor commissioner were talking about everything except my problem! I overheard "Farmer-Laborite" -- most of the conversation I think was about politics -- and I was getting nervous as could be, and finally I heard George say, "Well, what are we gonna do about my friend?" And the liquor commissioner said, "What do you mean? We're gonna release it, of course." It was just that simple, and I thank my lucky stars for George Leonard.

RL: You were in the liquor business, then, for how long?

CG: I sold the two businesses within a month after I decided to move to California.

RL: You said "two businesses?"

CG: Yes, the food catering company . . .

RL: What food catering company?

CG: [Laughter] Oh. Dorset Hansen. As I said, I was very close with the maitre d' and the head bartender at the Minneapolis Club. They had an opportunity to buy out Dorset Hansen Catering Co., organized in Minneapolis in 1884. At the time LeRoy and the bartender -- I forget the bartender's name -- told me that Dorset Hansen was for sale, Dorset Hansen was operating out of a frame house; I think it was on Bryant Avenue South. They asked if I would loan them some money to buy out Dorset Hansen. I said it sounds interesting, but I would rather become a third partner. They thought that was okay, but they said that one of the first things we have to do is buy a building; we certainly can't

operate out of that frame house to do business with customers like Minneapolis Club members, and so forth. So I looked around for a vacant property, and I noticed that 2212 Hennepin was empty. I learned that that was owned by Frank Griswold, who used it during the war for making screw machine products for various armaments. He had seven plants at the time, and I think most of them were being used for the military, although I'm not sure.

RL: Now was this in the 1940s?

CG: Yes. And every time I tried to get hold of Mr. Griswold, his secretary said, "He is not interested in selling 2212 Hennepin." But one day I see a little news item in the paper where a Mr. Bliss, a former partner of Mr. Griswold, is suing him for \$250,000 for undivided profits. So as soon as I read that I called Mr. Griswold. I told his secretary to tell Mr. Griswold that Mr. Goldfus, the man that sold his house at 2207 Penn to Mr. Bliss, would like to talk to him about 2212 Hennepin. Griswold got on the phone instantly, and I told him I'd like to come over and see him. And he said, "Fine. Come over any time you like. Name a time when you want to come over." And I said, "Well, I'll come over in an hour or so, is that okay?" "Fine," he says, "fine." Well, it just happened that when we had had an ad in the paper to sell our house, which was between Gottlieb's drugstore and Lake of the Isles Blvd. across the street from George Robitshek's house, I think the first person to look at our house was a Mr. Bliss. The house in 1937 cost us \$10,000, and Sylvia and I were talking about the price we should quote. We'd lived in it for five years, and I said well, how about \$11,000? It was a four bedroom house, and I think two and a half or three and a half baths, and a full basement with a gas furnace, and we had two wonderful contractors, the builders that we subcontracted, just great people. They were Swedish, and they did a beautiful job for us. I had a punching bag stand in the basement – Harry Goldie used to come over and punch the bag with me, and we had a great time -- and we had a rumpus room, an amusement room, down there, and a fireplace. Mr. Bliss had said, "Do you mind if I bring over a partner of mine to look at this house?" I said, "Sure, it's all right with me." And the next day he brings over a man by the name of Mr. Griswold, and Griswold quickly says "Fine! \$11,000 is okay!" So Bliss bought the house...lived in a four-bedroom house for \$11,000!" [Laughing]

Well, coming back to Frank Griswold, I had no experience in buying anything to do with commercial property. Morris Engler -- he was married to a Moses girl, so we knew the Moses family real well, as I mentioned earlier -- Morris was with Thorpe Brothers. So I called Morris immediately, and I said, "Morris, do you want to come with me to meet Frank Griswold?" And he said, "My gosh, I've been trying to get to Griswold for I don't know how many years, and I never ever was able to talk to him." I said, "Jump in a cab, pick me up in front of the store, and you'll have an opportunity to meet Mr. Griswold." In the cab [Laughing], my first question to Morris was, "What can you sell 2212 Hennepin for... Frank's building?" He said, "I don't think I'd have any trouble getting about \$80,000 for it." I said, "Fine. If I offer Griswold \$60,000, it would be a good buy?" He said, "Yes." We get into Griswold's office. I introduce Engler to Mr. Griswold, but Morris was just an unknown person to Griswold, and he didn't pay a bit of attention to poor Morris, ignored

him completely. The price of \$60,000 came up between me and Griswold, and the parting shot, with Morris Engler listening, was Griswold telling me that his attorney is Ben Deinard, and when Griswold was ready to sell the building Mr. Deinard will call me. So we left. It happened that at that time we were living at the Belmont Hotel and Ben's mother was in the Belmont. I was telling Ben to "do your best to get Griswold to sell the building," and in the meantime, I got very friendly with Mr.Griswold. He had the fastest speedboat on Lake Minnetonka, and he was prohibited from entering any races there. He took me and Hymie and anybody that wanted to for a ride on the speedboat. He had a cattle farm outside of Minneapolis, I forgot where, and he was winning cattle prizes all over the United States and Canada. He had six Cadillacs at the time. He was a motorcycle enthusiast. And we became great friends. He would have company parties. He didn't drink, but our catering company, working out of the frame house, waiting for the building, made up beautiful decorated hams with pineapple on it, and cherries in the center of the pineapple, and so forth, that LeRoy designed, and I would send things like that to his company parties. So I was Griswold's buddy, calling him by his first name, him calling my wife Sylvia and me, Charlie. And one day Ben calls me. Go over to see Frank, he's ready to sell the building. I get over there to his office and he says, "You know, Charlie, I spent a lot of money. I've made a lot of improvements on that building." And he started enumerating, with a pencil, telling me about a 25-year-guarantee roof and so forth. I said, "Frank, I know you're fair, I'm sure you're going to be very fair. Whatever you want to charge me, I'm expecting you to be fair with me." And he finally said, "How is \$55,000?" And I said, "Oh, Frank, do you mind if I use your phone? I want to call Sylvia, and give her the good news." He said, "Charlie, don't call her yet." Then after a bit he said, "Go ahead and call Sylvia now. Tell her the building cost you \$52,500." [Laughing]

RL: And you were ready to offer him \$60,000! Now you were telling me you sold your liquor store to...

CG: I sold my liquor store to Walter Reidel, who had our insurance. I told him that I didn't like the catering business, I wanted to get out of it. And he said, "Gee, Charlie, it's so profitable." He was keeping the records of the employees, and so forth, for insurance. And I said, "Yes, but you have to be crazy to be in the food business of any kind. You have to be either born in it, or crazy." Then I saw that he was really anxious to buy it, so I used a reverse salesmanship. He had access to the books and he saw how profitable it was, so he bought it, he and Walt... I forget the name.

RL: And then the Katzes...

CG: Yes, Harry and Morrie Katz bought my liquor store. Both of those firms lasted only about a year. Sammy Smilow was attorney for Morrie and Harry, and of course he was my good long-time friend, and attorney. Sammy and I both felt that the boys would do well. I agreed to stay with them after the deal was made for two weeks, to take Harry around to all my best accounts. I was hopeful, but it didn't work out. The catering company, it didn't affect me, but the liquor store did. I wanted that License Number One perpetuated, and it just didn't turn out. I felt badly for Harry and Morrie.

RL: What happened?

CG: Morrie went to work with Sammy Snyder, who they sold the liquor store to. Mostly they hadn't hung onto my good accounts, and Morrie nursed back as many of those accounts as he could to Snyder's. I don't know what percentage Snyder was able to salvage. I just lost interest in it, as I said. It was a sad experience.

RL: What year was this?

CG: This was in 1947. A month after we sold out, we were on our way to California. Everything we owned was in the trunk of our car.

RL: So you retired when you were 50?

CG: Yes, I was 50 years old. And very, very glad to get out of these severe Minnesota winters. For years in Minneapolis, I would catch cold in November or December, and I couldn't get rid of it until spring. The time we left for a vacation in 1937, I felt miserable... it was about March, I think...and we started on our first trip to California. Fortunately, we were ahead of a snowstorm. The car radio would tell us the last town we passed through was just having a snowstorm. We come to Tucson, Arizona, and the entrance to Tucson is up on a high altitude, and Tucson is a low altitude. We saw Tucson from a distance, and it was all green! A Shangri-La! We checked into the Sage and Sand Motel as soon as we could. It was around six o'clock in the evening, still light. I remember it like it just happened yesterday. My head felt like a balloon. I just felt miserable, and glad to get to bed as quickly as I could. I think seven o'clock I hit the hay, and in the morning, early, I wake up and the pillow is all wet. My sinus drained out and I really couldn't believe it! I thought that Sylvia awakened me by pouring some water on me! But it soothed my sinuses, and I felt like I was 15 years old again! That helped sell me on being away from those damn severe winters! We continued into Los Angeles where my sister was living, and Sylvia's relatives, many of them. Ella Orenstein was already there and her son Sylvan, the insurance man, and of course many, many others. After we were in Los Angeles about two weeks, I said to Sylvia [almost begins to cry, sniffles, clears throat], "We'll go back to Minneapolis when our vacation is up" -- which was another couple of weeks or so -- "and we'll work our danged heads off to make enough money to retire and live in California." That happened just ten years later. We had Griswold's building, and we thought we could live comfortably. I think that move, leaving in 1947, lengthened my life. I doubt very much that I would be alive today, with my sinus trouble, if I hadn't left Minnesota.

RL: Tell me about how you met Sylvia, and about your courtship.

CG: I knew Pearl Malkin. We had met through parties with a group of friends of mine... Sammy Shapiro, Nat Gainsley, Steve Broude, Benny Pink, Joe Kates, and others I will think of later. Several of our group who were members of the Hedonian Club were

invited to a party at Pearl Malkin's home at White Bear Lake, and Pearl [laughing], God bless her, invited these Minneapolis fellows and her St. Paul girl friends. And that is where I met Sylvia.

RL: And was it love at first sight?

CG: Yes. I know it was 1927, and in 1927 I would have to be around 30 years old. And I knew as soon as I saw Sylvia that I was going to marry her. We were married in 1929, and Sylvia always says, "What took you so long?" [Laughter]

RL: What was your courtship like? Where did you go on dates?

CG: Sylvia was working for a political lawyer in St. Paul. She got the job through Sammy Libman's wife, Ruth Libman; she was a Zimmerman girl from St. Paul. Ruth was this attorney's secretary, and she was leaving, and told Sylvia that this job was available. And that is what Sylvia was doing when I met her. I used to drive over to her office, and long before it was time to quit, I was there waiting for her. And her wonderful boss -- I forget his name, it'll come to me later -- he would feel sorry for me, and he'd tell Sylvia she could leave early.

RL: People didn't get married so young in those days, did they. I mean now you were 30, and Sylvia must have been about 27 or 28.

CG: Yes, Sylvia's two years younger than I am. I'm 80 and she's 78. We would go canoeing on Lake Phalen. I would drive over to St. Paul, and sometimes we would stay there, sometimes I would bring her to Minneapolis. We had a lot of parties, like hayrides, and a gang of us would go out to Spring Park with most of the fellows, who were not married. We would have great times. My brother Hy married Ethel Butwin, Jack Butwin's sister. They're both gone now.

RL: What was the Hedonian Club?

CG: Hedonian Club? It was just a fun club.

RL: You just established it yourselves?

CG: Yes, and we had a great time. We were a great gang of fellows. Sammy Shapiro was a member, and we would go on parties. And I remember we would have a New Year's Eve party at Glenwood Park. They had a clubhouse there. We had a rule that we worked out, that when a member would get married, the club would buy them a vacuum cleaner. [Laughing]

RL: I should ask you where the name "Hedonian" came from, just for the record.

CG: Well, the Hedonians, they were good time people!

RL: Right! Can we backtrack a bit? You said that Meyer Bank had a travel agency.

CG: Yes, he sold tickets.

RL: To where?

CG: Europe. Foreign countries.

RL: You mean a lot of people were going to Europe even in those days? Or was it that people who were already here would buy tickets from him to bring others in?

CG: Both ways.

RL: So then he had a thriving ticket business, a travel agency. There was a lot of anti-Semitism, they say, in Minneapolis in the 1930s. Did that affect you . . .

CG: Right! You're absolutely right! And there was a story, there was a belief among the Jews in Minneapolis and other cities that were interested in B'nai B'rith's work of fighting anti-Semitism, that Minneapolis, for a number of years -- I think it was publicized in some national magazine -- that Minneapolis had the reputation of being the most anti-Semitic city in the nation. One day I'm having lunch at Snyder's Pool Hall on Sixth Street. I'm sitting alone, and in comes Lou Gross, lumbering with his flat feet, a very determined, sad, mean expression on his face. As soon as I saw him I said, "Lou, what's bothering you? Come on, sit down." He said, "Charley, you won't believe this. I don't know what controlled my anger. I could have murdered the fellow I was just talking to." I said, "What's this all about?" "I just came from George K. Belden's office, and he denied that he is the main guy with the Automobile Club keeping Jews from becoming members. I sat up on his desk, and I called him every name under the sun. And I finally left his office. I could have killed that guy!" [Goldfus laughs] That's Lou Gross for you!

RL: I was asking about the Depression . . .

CG: Well, this has to do with the Depression. Max Lowenthal and his good friend and one-time partner in the law firm, Robert Szold, had a fellow who was manufacturing raincoats in New York by the name of Harris. They formed a private fund, a stock brokerage fund. A small group of people would organize and put in so much money a month, or a week, and invest it in the market. Mr. Lowenthal asked us if we would want to invest some money in the market through this organization of his. We had \$7,000 available at that time, and we gave it to him. It was just before the 1929 crash! Naturally these bright, intelligent young men lost everything, along with these great international bankers in the United States. But a few years later, we received a check from Max for our \$7,000! So when I tell my friends that Max, all my life, has been my idol, this is one of the many reasons.

RL: Are there any other liquor store experiences to tell about?

CG: Well, one stands out very clearly in my mind, and it's this. I was more or less the official liquor store for the stockbrokers in Minneapolis, mostly through a fellow by the name of Jimmy Powell who was with Harris Upham. Then he was transferred to Harris Upham in San Francisco, and when we lived in San Francisco I renewed my acquaintanceship there. Another good friend of mine that dropped a tremendous amount of business into my store was Kermit Sorum, with Allison Williams. Allison Williams was mostly a municipal bond house but Kermie was very popular among the Twin City investment companies. He was at one time elected president of the bond traders association. Between Kermie and Jimmy Powell, I got a tremendous amount of business, not only for the liquor store, but for the catering company, too. One day Kermie brought into my store a man by the name of Paul Spink. He was with a brokerage house in Chicago. He was a specialist in an over-the-counter stock called Merchants Distilling. They made neutral spirits used in Southern Comfort. He would come to the Twin Cities to brief investment people on Merchants Distilling, and he would have luncheons and various parties, and he would order liquor from me and ask me if I would care to help him keep his meetings under control, not allowing his audience, his guests, to imbibe too heavily. I said I would be very glad to, if he would buy liquor from me by the case! Mitch Heim, who was upstairs over me in the Plymouth Building, seemed to, through Kermie Sorum, get interested in investing in Merchants Distilling. Mr. Paul Spink -- I'll get ahead of the story, but this is important -- ran that stock from a dollar a share to 28 dollars and a fraction! Mitch Heim bought a considerable amount through Kermie Sorum. Kermie, and I think Jimmy Powell also, were responsible for quite a number of Merchants Distilling stock owners in the Twin Cities. When the stock was around 28, Sylvia and I took a train down to Evanston to see the Golden Gophers play Northwestern. Spink would always tell me that when I would come to Chicago, to be sure to call him up. This is on a Monday, after the football game. I called him and invited him for lunch in a restaurant near his brokerage house. We had ordered cocktails, and ordered the lunch, and before the lunch was served Paul got a phone call, and he came back to our table and said, "I'm terribly sorry, you will have to excuse me. I just had 20,000 shares of stock dumped into my lap." As soon as he left, I started thinking that possibly this could be 20,000 shares of Merchants Distilling. He was the main person that promoted that stock, the only one. He was a friend of the president of Merchants Distilling, a man by the name of Davis. I said to Sylvia, I think I'll call Kermie, and tell him to sell our 200 shares of Merchants Distilling. I had bought 200 shares – I wanted to get into the swim and be popular with the rest of the stockholders in the Twin Cities, and I was sure that Paul Spink would be very happy -- so I ordered 200 shares from Kermie, when the stock was around \$12. When I got Kermie on the phone and I told him to sell my 200 shares of Merchants Distilling, his first question was, "What's up? What's happening in Chicago?" I says, "Oh, nothing. Nothing at all. I need some money, I'll need some cash, because we're buying a lot of equipment for our catering company." And he was satisfied with that answer. I got back to the table and I told Sylvia of my conversation, and I explained to her that I would have ruined Paul Spink. That stock, when I called Kermie, was at the top, 28 and a fraction. I don't know how long it took to go down to one or two dollars again, but I could

not double cross Paul Spink. If I'd have told Kermie, Kermie himself, if he had some of the stock, would have sold immediately, Jimmy Powell would have sold immediately, Mitch Heim would have sold immediately. The Twin Cities had a hell of a lot of that stock! But I couldn't do it. Mitch Heim was a friend of mine, but I still couldn't do it.

RL: Yes, that was a hard decision to make.

CG: Yes. Another thing that I think was interesting... Kermie Sorum, as I mentioned, was very popular, and was such a fine, honorable person. One day he told me about a bond that he was very much interested in. He was working with a St. Louis brokerage house on Portland Electric Power bonds. The utility, a streetcar company I think it was, was in bankruptcy and being reorganized, and he seemed to know exactly what this bond settlement would be. I had so much confidence in Kermie that we bought several of the bonds. It turned out very, very profitable, just as he predicted. I think that and the Merchants Distilling were about the only business I ever gave Kermie.

RL: What would you have done if you could have lived your life differently? Would you have been a lawyer, or gone to college?

CG: No. No, I don't think I would have wanted it any other way. I told you I joined the Navy two weeks before graduating high school. I was a Machinist's Mate in the Navy, where they put me in the University of Minnesota. [Laughing] I learned better English, I didn't learn better grammar. [Laughing] But as I said, I am very fortunate in my living the life that I have lived, and meeting all the wonderful friends I have.

I have another interesting story for you. One of our first customers was a couple by the name of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Badzin. He was in the wholesale paper business. He was very well known, I think socially popular in Minneapolis. We were getting fairly well acquainted, and one day they're in our store and they tell me that they do not drink alcoholic beverages, and the reason for that is that his original wholesale paper business was lost, he went bankrupt, because he became an alcoholic. So now he says, "Mr. Charles, I am working with Alcoholics Anonymous, and I would appreciate your help." I said, "Well, I know exactly what I can do. You won't have to tell me. If I see any of my customers that are over-indulging, I'm going to call you." He says, "That's exactly what I was going to say to you." Well, I was losing customers here and there, but my morals just wouldn't let me stop from calling Harry Badzin.

RL: And then he would call on them?

CG: Oh yes. We worked together for several years, I think. I'm sure it was 1934 when he first came in the store. He built his business back up again, and became very successful, very popular. Another incident of over-indulging... A fellow by the name of Chet Lyford was the manager in charge of the gas instrument department of Minneapolis-Honeywell. One day he called me and said he's having some trouble in his house, and he wouldn't dare talk to any other liquor dealer in town but me about this trouble, he knows he can

rely on me, and so forth... very complimentary. And he tells me, "Next time, please, next time my wife gives you an order, would you please, before you send it out, call me in my office or wherever you can get me?" And that was enough for me to know what was happening. It was like the Harry Badzin situation.

RL: You said your mother didn't want you to go into the liquor business. Did she ever know that you were doing these things? That you were doing good, in addition to . . .

CG: Oh, yes. Certainly. She was very happy. She knew that Sylvia was working with me all the time, and Sylvia and I didn't even have any liquor in the house until about four or five months after we opened the store. We were embarrassed. People wondered what the hell, the guy's in the liquor business, and he doesn't have any liquor at home. [Laughing]

RL: Was your father a businessman, too?

CG: My father, I think I mentioned, worked for my uncle in the wholesale and retail dry goods store, and he was a trusted employee. He had the keys for the store, and my aunt rked too h. ...ore money. I h and uncle relied on him for everything that was important. My poor father, he died of cancer at the age of fifty-seven. I feel that he worked too hard, and that is why I decided to retire at the age of fifty, and to hell with more money. I have just enough money to live on, and that's it.

[End of interview]