

FIELD NOTES - Donald Colongeli

Interviewee: Donald Colongeli

Interviewer: Alex Gerstle, Kortnee Gilmore, Matthew Henry

Date: September 25, 2017

Location: SUNY Cortland History Department office, Cortland, New York

Length: 52:53

The Interviewee: Donald Colongeli has lived in Cortland his entire life. His parents came separately on boats from Italy, met and got married, and had several children, including Donald. He grew up on the east side of Cortland, New York and has been an active member in the community his entire life. Donald grew up selling newspapers and shining shoes until he was old enough to work at the Triangle Shoe Store in downtown Cortland. In his late adolescence and early adulthood he began a construction and roofing partnership with some friends. In his early adulthood, Donald joined the military and served for 14 years, but never saw combat. Upon returning, Donald had several businesses throughout Cortland, but one he was most well-known for was his food supply service that shipped cross country and internationally and benefitted local business and larger corporations. Donald has been active in almost every community organization including the Elks, Legion, Lions Club, and even the Boy Scouts. Donald also has many political affiliations and has even run for office in Cortland. Donald recalled when he was younger and working at the Triangle Shoe store on main street Cortland, selling a pair of shoes to Chester Wickwire. He remembered how instead of just throwing the old shoes out, he kept them and said that they still had a lot of miles left in them. He also remembered a neighbor who miraculously survived being almost cut in half by one of the cranes operated within the factory. Donald also recalls stories his wife told him from her childhood, having to visit the factory nurse because they couldn't afford a private doctor, and meeting at the strikes at the end of her road.

The Interviewers: Alex Gerstle, Kortnee Gilmore, and Matt Henry are all students at SUNY Cortland participating in an Introduction to Public History Class, History 280. They are all part of the History Education major, and are at varying years in their degrees. This interview is part of the 1890 House exhibit expansion project for the fall of 2017.

Description of the Interview: The interview took place in the History Department office space in Old Main on SUNY Cortland Campus in Cortland, New York. The space comfortably fit the interviewee and the three interviewers with little interruption. One interviewer, Matt Henry, sat on the end of the table, while Don Colongeli sat on the other. Alex Gristle and Kortnee Gilmore sat on the sides of the table facing Don. The interview lasted nearly an hour with Don giving a history of his childhood, growing up in Cortland, and memories on the Wickwire Factory. The interview was briefly interrupted when a professor entered her office and later left the office, but it had no effect on the interviewing process.

Note on Recording: Recorded on three devices, two recorders and one cell phone. Only two minor interruptions.

ABSTRACT - Donald Colongeli

Interviewee: Donald A. Colongeli

Interviewer: Kortnee Gilmore, Alex Gerstle, Matthew Henry

Date: September 25, 2017

Location: SUNY Cortland History Department, Cortland, New York

Length: 52:53

Mr. Donald Colongeli has lived in Cortland for all of his life. He is the child of two Italian immigrants. His father arrived in the United States when he was 17 and his mother came when she was 16. Mr. Colongeli also has 3 brothers, two of the have unfortunately passed on, but all of them, including Donald, served in combat. Mr. Colongeli was scheduled to go to both Korea and Vietnam during their respective conflicts, but never saw combat, for which he is thankful. Mr. Colongeli is married and has three children, Jim, Susan and Don. He has owned several businesses in the Cortland area during the time of the Wickwire factory, but he is mostly proud of his food supply service which shipped foods and ingredients both across the country and internationally. Mr. Colongeli also ran for public office in Cortland at one time. His wife's father worked at the Wickwire factory and his wife recalls hearing stories of the factory and some of the incidents that happened there, including a time when a man was pressed in-between one of the cranes. Mr. Colongeli had an interaction with Chester Wickwire at one point in his life when he sold him a pair of shoes. He recalls how large the Wickwire factory was and how it employed many people in the Cortland area. He also recalls all of the various nationalities that were in the area during his childhood, including families from Italy, Russia and Poland. Mr. Colongeli also recalls stories that his wife told him about how her father would bring home fellow coworkers from the Wickwire factory for dinner and homemade wine. The city of Cortland remains a very important element to Mr. Colongeli and he remains optimistic that the city will one day return to the way it was before.

TRANSCRIPT – DONALD COLONGELI

Interviewee: Donald Colongeli

Interviewers: Kortnee Gilmore, Alex Gristle, Matthew Henry

Interview Date: September 25, 2017

Location: Cortland, New York

Length: 1 audio file, 00:52:53

Kortnee Gilmore: Its September 25th 2017, its 5:16 pm we're going to start the interview.
Okay?

Matt Henry: So Don (Donald Colongeli) tell me about your parents, your family, or your childhood here in Cortland.

Don Colongeli: Well, you see my name, I'm of Italian descent I'm first born Italian in this country. My parents came from Italy, my father came when he was 17, and then a few years later World War I broke out and he wasn't a citizen yet, and they said to him, you go to Europe and France and fight and if you survive and come back we'll make you a citizen. That's the way I heard the story and I'm stuck with it. Um, he did he survived, he came back and they made him a citizen after he was there a year and a half in the trenches doing whatever he was doing. My mother also came from the same country, near where my dad came from, they never knew each other but she came on a ship of her own when she was 16. And um, if you're familiar with the Green Arch Restaurant in Cortland on Elm Street, my aunt started that (Frances Dincenzo). And she sent for my mother, who come from the same village, and I don't know how much in depth you want me to go, but the name of her village was Fetezano Provence De Rome and my father came from Carpineto Province de Rome, but they never knew each other until they got here and then when they got here somehow my mother to be and my dad to be were mated or brought together by Mrs. Dincenzo. So they got married and so the rest is history, we all grew up I have

three brothers 2 have passed on, and I think 1 still survives in Ithaca, we all were in, I was in about 14 years, I saw no combat thank god, I was scheduled to go to Korea, I was scheduled to go to Vietnam, I never made it, again I'm happy. But they went and they served in the worst possible situations you can imagine. My one brother fought all the way from North Africa, Sicily, all the way through Italy, and survived luckily. My other two brothers served in the Navy. I grew up in Cortland, worked at different jobs here, but eventually when I grew up I'm one of those guys that can't take orders, so I started my own business, which has been several now, but I stayed in one for a long time. And I was a licensed broker for the state of New York, I sold real estate for a while, what else, stocks, bonds, different things of that nature, annuities. 1970, I've been in a lot, some guy says to me, I've been in "I think you've belonged to every service organization going: the moose, the elks, the lions, the Rotary." I was president of the one rotary club. I was president of every club I ever belonged to except one, and that was the noon rotary club. By chance or by luck, I achieved the position of district governor. I had 50 some clubs with me, under my command, my control. Lions clubs and ladies clubs, and it's just been one thing after another. 1970, I started my business, as Charlie Poss every time he saw me he'd say, "There he is" and I would say "Who Charlie?" and he would say "Purveyor of fine foods" and the name stuck, that's what I've always said Purveyor of fine foods. And from 1969/70, right there, right up to present, I've provided exotic, if you watch the food show Zimmer on television if you get the chance, all the food he handles, that's what I used to do. And if you go into Wegmans, you can almost buy everything that I used to sell, through Wegmans today because it's all become popular and it's easily obtainable. But when I came in, the chefs they would call me, "Hey Don, I need this, this, and this," I'd say okay and I'd get it and send it to them. Don't ask me how I got it, but I got it okay. But anyway that's what I did, and right up to the present time, and like I say

I'm married, I have three children: Jim, Susan, and Don. Jim's in business for himself, he travels all over the world. Susan is a local real estate broker, and she was chairmen on the legislature for a while. Don is a criminal defense attorney down in Hilton Head, South Carolina. He has three children, his oldest has autism, but Rocco, they seem to be getting along okay, with him. Like I said three children, Rocco, Emily, and Lucah. So, you know that plus my relatives, most of them have gone and passed on, and uh currently we just take each day at a time and enjoy and do what we have to do. And I enjoy doing this, I'm glad that you folks are looking into history of Cortland, its past. I'm very, I was very disappointed, oh well I won't put it in there. But, I hate to see things tore down that are historical. We've had enough of that in Cortland, and I don't think that should be allowed to continue, but that's not up to me.

KG: So you said that you had some various businesses around Cortland, what were some of your other businesses?

DC: Oh, I've done many things in Cortland, I've been a roofer. When I was a little kid I used to sell newspapers in the local bar, I used to shine shoes, go into local bars, and I hate to say it they used to chew tobacco and spit on you but they give you 5 cents after you shined their shoes. I used to deliver papers, scouting, I was in scouting and cub scouting then I became the leader and Cub Scout leader. Painting. An awful lot of things, I just can't remember them all. I became a notary. I didn't put it all down. If I thought not to waste your time, I would have had it all aligned. It's just too many things to remember to go into.

Alex Gerstle: Now you said you were in scouting, did you ever make it to Eagle or?

DC: Eagle Scout?

AG: Yeah.

DC: I never made it but I honored a lot of Eagle Scouts. We had a lot of young boys that grew up and became very good. I used to be involved in the Cortland one. My own troop was St Anthony's. We used to have a Cub Scout troop at Pomeroy School which is no longer there. That was sponsored, I think, by St Anthony's church, but I'm not sure. But that, scouting Lou Palmetier, was the leader of scouting in Syracuse. He was a radio announcer, a big wig with radio stations years ago. And I used to be involved with him with the scouting sometimes Syracuse but mostly in Cortland. In fact someone Facebooked me a picture the other day, someone had happened to go across it and I was in it, I don't even remember it. It shows the priest of the church, the Eagle Scouts and different scouts, and I don't even remember it, I had black hair I was a young guy.

MH: So tell me what you remember about the Wickwire factory.

DC: Well the Wickwire factory of course, the closest I got to it, was that my wife's father worked there. My relationship with that part of it, which I said to your professor,

KG: Faulkenbury

DC: Yeah, I worked at the Triangle shoe store, I have a picture of the store here. Triangle shoe store, and Vic Green was the manager. I was quite young but I was working there, I don't know how I could work there but I did. One day this old gentleman came in and sat down to buy a pair of shoes, and I didn't know who he was. No one seemed to get excited, but I went over and waited on him, and what eventually happened is, I tried some shoes on him until he picked a pair that he liked. Of course I came from a very poor neighborhood, not to complain, I'm just saying to paint the picture correctly. He had a pair of shoes on, so when I got done I said, "Do you want me to wrap these up and you can take them with you, or should I throw them away?" And he said "Oh no sonny," he said, "these got a lot of miles in them yet." And I said, "By god, it's got a

hole in the sole the size of a half dollar” and he said “Oh no, I can put a patch in there,” that’s not verbatim but that’s about what he said. And he wrapped them up he took them with him and wore his new shoes out. That was Charlie Wickwire (corrects himself) Chester Wickwire, the guy who built the 1890 House. To my recollection that’s what happened, and that’s where that came in. But then my wife of course lived right there on the corner, right by the Melody land the Wickwires, her dad and all her uncles worked there. That was a big family, the family. (Lists multiple names) all the Berardis worked there, and she was just telling me before I left (here’s a picture of ... indistinguishable) she just told me when I left that she remembers that little girl when they had that strike, down where the Melody Land is on the corner, she said down on the end they used to have a fire, and they’d all meet there and cook potatoes, roast them on a fire. That’s what she remembers about that. Then she said as a little girl, because her father worked there, they had a practicing nurse that worked for Wickwire, and my wife remembers it because she always had that big white outfit on that the nurses had those days. And whenever the kids got sick, the Wickwires allowed the members, the employee’s families to go up and see the nurse and get medical help, so she remembered that. What else was there, I remember the building. Everything that went on there, the old building across the street that they tore down, the main building caught on fire. And I just read here that they had a fatality at Wickwires, and I never heard that until I just read it today in this article.

I know at one time, a close neighbor of mine father worked there, and he worked in the crane and one day he got caught between the crane and the beam and it almost cut him in half. It come close, and they rushed him to the hospital, and lucky the man survived. It just crushed him, I don’t know how he survived but he did. But years later, he used to live right across from me, or his daughter did and he used to go cut the grass for them and he was a worker of Wickwires.

This has to do, it's all part of Wickwires. He cut his toe off with the lawn mower and I rushed him to the hospital they sewed it back on and he went back to work. So between getting crushed with a crane and losing his toe, he had a hard time. But Wickwires was an up and going factory, I always tried to think, I don't remember if it's true or not I'm using what I think is right. You could never buy Wickwire nails and wire screen in Cortland. It's like the Martin Windows, you can't buy your windows in Cortland from them. You could buy them from a dealer. But you couldn't buy nails or anything from anybody in Cortland from Wickwires in those days, they shipped everything out. It was a tough job for men to work there. It was tough, dirty, tough, hot. Out in the front lawn of South Main Street, was a huge, I think Don Ferris could talk to you more than that, he's with another group. Where the water and where they cleaned the wire and its steaming all the time. I used to walk by there, it scared me I'd say "By god if you fell in there you'd never come out." But it was a big factory, a lot of men made their living there. I don't think my dad ever worked there, if he did it wasn't very long. He helped, to the best of my knowledge, he helped when they repaired the steps in front of the 1890 House in the 1930's or sometime. He helped repair them, worked on that there, cause in those days you used to work for a buck a day if you were lucky. You get by with your family and buy what you need. Course in those days, a nickel, a dime would go a long way because you didn't need a lot of money in those days, but you didn't have a lot of money. If I could have what I have today then, I would be a multi-millionaire. But the factory did bring a lot of employment to Cortland. They were business people but I think they were as fair as they could be. And I was very good friends with one of their, Brad Wickwire which is a nephew, in fact I have a set of clubs he gave me one day he didn't want anymore. I used to run a gas station in Cortland, that's another business I had, had two gas stations, a Secondi Mobile and a Saint Claire. The Saint Claire was brand new I opened

it on the corner of Pomeroy and Elm where the Green Arch is, now it's a repair shop. But when I had it, when it was first opened, Maryn Auss came down, Mike Dichenzo, John Dichenzo, my aunt, we cut the ribbon and opened a brand new gas station, Sinclair gas station. That had about 6 employees at the time, a lot of those people would hang out at the green arch. The Wickwires was a big business, I didn't live down on that end so I'm not as privy to a lot of things there that I can talk about, I just know it was there, active and a lot of people worked there and made their living there.

KG: Did your wife's father ever tell you any stories about when he worked in the factory?

DC: No, most of those guys were tight lipped. In my opinion, they wouldn't say anything because if it got back to the wrong people, like today you have to be careful. We can say what we feel maybe but you have to be careful how you say it. But they more or less did their work, raised their families, and did what they did. But I don't remember Peter ever saying anything about Wickwires or his conditions there, his job, I never even knew what his job is there. It could've been pulling wire, making nails, making screen cloth. Almost anything, I'm not sure. But like my wife could tell a lot of stories, probably because her dad would come home for supper that night, and I'm sure like most of us he unloaded at night. Tells things like they were whether he was happy with or unhappy with. He worked there, his brothers worked there, his cousins worked there, his nephews. It was a big family. But there was a lot of people from down there. But I never knew it, but Don Ferris, lived there too and his family I guess worked there but I'm not sure about that either. But he's going to be interviewed by another group, one of your groups. He has a lot more extensive knowledge, than I do. I only really have a direct relationship with Wickwires when I sold him those shoes. I had never known it except when this came up it

reminded me of it and I just said well maybe it's something worth talking about. But it did point out the frugality of a man who was worth in those days thousands and thousands of dollars. He still kept those old shoes, he said he'd still have a lot of miles in them, and wear them I'll take them home. I think he said you could put something in them, newspaper or something, in the old days it used to be a joke I mean, but that's what happened. But there's, I don't know if I showed you, this is the Triangle Shoe Store (shows picture of store) on Main Street where that all happened.

KG: Did a lot of workers come into the store to buy shoes?

DC: You know, I don't remember, a lot of different people came in. A lot of Ladies and men and we took families with kids. I know we had, at that time what we called an X-ray machine I don't know if you've heard of it or not. I saw one the other day on American Pickers, it was an X-ray machine that you put your feet in, and you looked down and you could tell what size shoe you took and give you your measurements. They finally outlawed it because they said it'd give you cancer, the X-ray type of whatever it was, would maybe give you some bad effects. But people came in just to do that, it was an advertising trick or deal. Other than that it was a general shoe store in those days when people were able to afford shoes came up and bought them. A lot of people made their own. What's funny about that was one of my brother in laws, opened a shoe repair shop in Cortland, and his son is running it today still yet. Rocky's shoe repair on Central Ave or Clinton Ave or somewhere. Other than that, unless you have other specific questions to jog my memory I think I've pretty much covered a lot of it.

MH: Did any of your other businesses throughout Cortland serve any of the workers? Do you recall any of the workers coming in any of the businesses that you operated?

DC: When I was doing local work business with other guys I was involved with, it was putting roofs on, painting, rebuilding cellars, construction type work in those days. I think I put the only shale roof on a house in Cortland, I'm not sure of that, but I know I don't want to do it again, that was years ago. When I opened my, when I did insurance and real estate yes, I used to go out and call in local people to buy life insurance, or when I was in real estate, real estate. But once I went into my food business, all of my business was done, mostly 100 percent was done out of town. Maybe, out of 100 percent, maybe 10/15 percent was done here because they didn't have restaurants here. I'm not knocking them, they were all good restaurants but they didn't have the caliber chefs that they had in Rochester, New York. I mean, I shipped all over the world, I shipped to Alaska, I shipped to Aruba, I used to get on the phone with the Marriott Corporation, who had hotels all over the country, and their chefs would call me and I'd ship them stuff. Down in Florida, Saratoga Springs, Putnam, which is a world renowned, they were my customers for 30 years. Cornell, I sold them tons of food, Cortland State I sold them a couple of truckloads of tomatoes I think, in tin cans once. But most of it was out of town, I don't want to make it sound like it's anything but what it was. Top shelf foods and things like that. Items you could never get in those days, it was a far cry from when I was growing up and what would come from the garden. But it's been very interesting, I'll tell you, to see the transition from one to another to another, but I still have customers coming to me today for products. I try to help them out and get it to them, but most of the people that I have dealt with, like in Cortland all the restaurants are closed, there are different people owning them more now. There more, I think they're more for drinking and carousing and having a good time, than having a good dish or good food, top, what do you call them, fine foods. But it's strange, I used to have food shows, I'd go to food shows where I'd put up my booth in Boston, New York City, Java Center, just the tip of the iceberg. I

mean I've just been one thing after the other. My youngest son keeps saying "Dad when are you going to settle down you've been all over the place" a lot of guys have but yes I've been around for a little nobody in Cortland on the East side of Cortland, always called the other side of the tracks, got out there out in the world, so have other men and women that pulled themselves up and went out and did things. It's good to see you guys doing this today, maybe you care maybe you don't but it's good that you're doing it, it's interesting that this information is being archived and looked at.

KG: Definitely. Going back to when you were growing up you said your parents came over from Italy, was there a lot of different nationalities in the town, and was there, do you remember any sort of segregation in the town?

DC: Here? When I grew up, for that reason, all I knew was the Italian group of people here. I'm sure there were Russians, Polish people, I know there were some on Pine Street where my wife was born and grew up, she went to Owego Street school which is now an apartment house, I went to Pomeroy which is an apartment house. And I hated to see, I was on the school board for three years tried to make a dent but I didn't. No, it was mostly our relatives and different groups of Italians, because when you get like my wife's family, Berardis, my god they had 12-13 children, maybe 10 or 12 but they had a lot of children, there were a lot of those people around. So I mean, just to say you know, I knew other people in my community, but they were mostly of my ethnic group.

MH: You mentioned a few minutes ago some restaurants that aren't here anymore, can you recall what life was like in Cortland after the Wickwire factory closed?

DC: I have to be very honest with you, I can't really say because that wasn't an important part of my life. Wickwires was not something that I depended on. I knew it was there and I knew

it was important but not to me, it was important to all the people that worked there and the effect it had in Cortland. Like that strike, I didn't know they had a strike, I didn't pay any attention to it, I had a lot of trouble just keeping alive and earning a living because we came from a very poor family. I'm not putting that out to be, I say that because it's true, so a lot of my efforts went toward surviving and getting by and doing things. I was so poor, that I used to have a car with no battery in it, so us guys 6 or 8 of us and a couple would get in it and push it up and down the drive way just to say we were riding in the car. Things like that, we rode our bicycles and when we got enough money we put a battery in the car and drove it. There'd always be a bunch of us guys that hung out together, close friends all from different families, Italian families but all good friends. But most of them most of their parents owned the grocery stores, (lists family names) then there's one called, Canes grocery store. But all these places have gone. I mean Cortland has changed so much since I've grown up, I go by places now and I say something like by god something was there, when did that leave. I didn't even know it was gone because I'd be out trying to make my living and pay attention to what I'm doing. I used to drive 50,000 miles a year, and I'd be in Burlington, Vermont, and the next day I'd be driving to Buffalo to call on somebody or someone called and needed to see me. Or I had stuff in my car I could take. I started in my cellar, built the garage, started there then built a warehouse, so little by little climbed up. But other than that in Cortland, there wasn't much. I could tell you things that wouldn't be nice to say on your recording, but I won't do it. It's a, I've been through a lot of mayors, I've been through a lot of different governing bodies. But as far as Wickwire is concerned, I always thought they were a great company that provided a lot of jobs for a lot of men that could support their families. I was surprised they closed. Because instead of going into a bullet making business or something because they were making nails, they had the rods. I was

just surprised they finally closed but after the big fire that wiped them out and they didn't want to proceed any further. And that's not up to me to reflect on why or didn't do what they did, but there's still some Wickwires in Cortland. Cathy Wickwire but she married a Wickwire. But like I said, it was a good company that provided a lot of jobs, a lot of people depended on it. I can't remember if they had any insurance for the men that worked there, but probably Don Ferris would know about it. Other than that, I just have to say it was part of my life and growing up in Cortland and it was interesting. But I never really had anything to do with it, I never worked there, I never had anything to do with it. My dad finally ended up working at the old Crescent Corset as a cutter for women's garments by hand before they got the machines. I remember my dad's arm used to be, because they cut through 15 or 16 layers of undergarment cloth, that hard stuff for women. He worked there for 30 or 35 years, Peter Perardi worked at Wickwires 30 or 35 years too. And those days guys got a job somewhere they stayed, they were loyal to the people they got a job with and stayed. As long as the business was there and they didn't get in trouble. But it was interesting. I always got quite upset when they told my dad if you go to France and didn't get killed you can come back they'd make him a citizen. What a choice huh, spent a year and a half in France fighting and whatever he did and luckily he came back. His brother lived here, on Pomeroy Street and he was waiting for him to come back, I wasn't born yet. He died of the flu the influenza outbreak in those days. His name was Germano, he's buried here in the local cemetery. And I can't, I don't know how come my dad never went to Wickwires. But maybe in the back of my mind, like I'm thinking, but if I say it I'll sound foolish so I'm not going to say it. He never worked there to my knowledge but if he did it was for a very short time so I don't know.

MH: As far as the community is concerned, was there a noticeable difference when they closed, did a lot of local businesses and mom and pop shops close, were there a lot of people out of work?

DC: Oh yeah, you know I can't be, I should've looked it up I'm not sure how many worked there at the time, I don't know how many were there, but they were all out of jobs and immediately shut off their income. What do you do, there's nothing else to work at here. There was Smith Corona at that time, there was Brockway Motors, there was a lot of smaller business but they were all gone, and they didn't last long. There was Brewers forging shop, and Brewers, a lot of people lost their jobs, lost their income and I don't know how they made out. My father in law by the time they closed, was just getting out of there retiring or shortly after. But all his relatives got stuck when they closed, without a job. They used to be walking the streets, I'd see the guys, I knew them, and they'd be walking the streets because they had nothing to do. Trying to find something to get by on.

AG: How did the factory closing affect your businesses personally? Any affect at all?

DC: No no, because it didn't have any affect in what I was doing. I had my mind made up in what I was doing and the different ventures I was into, had nothing to do with It.

AG: Were people coming trying to get work from you, to like get back their steady income? Or was it just business as usual?

DC: What's that?

AG: Were people trying to come to you trying to ask for a job after the factory closed down?

DC: Oh no we were a different type of operation. We had a group of us, other guys like me. And I had an old '29 Chrysler, we used to put shingles on the fenders and go do roofing all

that stuff in those days. This is way back in the 1930's late 1930's early 1940's, I mean I went in the service, I enlisted in 1945, ran away from home and enlisted, but it was before that. We would look for jobs to do, okay nobody came to us for a job because we were a close knit group, we didn't trust nobody else. You have a little guy grown from the East side.

KG: Can you recall any stories that your wife may told you from her childhood growing up near the factory?

DC: Yeah well like I said, she remembers her dad coming home and a lot of times he would bring other members of the factory, Wickwires to his house for lunch. Sometimes he would bring the boss and fill him up with wine because he made homemade wine. It was good it was in the cellar. I mean, all those people down there made their own wine. He used to bring them home, she remembers them down there cooking the potatoes and she went with her dad one day, her mother was doing something that day, and watched them cook and had some potatoes. I talked about the nurse, how they went to the nurse if they got sick because they had no money or a doctor to go to so Wickwire would let them go see the nurse, and help them get whatever they needed. In those days, Melody Land, the place next door, I hate to mention one without the other, Ivan's, they were a hot spot. A group would go to Ivan's from Wickwires and a group would go to Melody Land. The same group wouldn't go to each one, they stick to their own. I imagine it's because at Ivan's there were a mixed group of people and Melody Land were all the Italian. That's my opinion, I think that's the way it was. She used to be in the thick of it, she said she just remembers the Wickwires were an ongoing thing because her father worked there, it was a part of her life. I don't know if she ever went in the factory, she didn't say anything like that. I said to her why don't you come, you could tell them more than me, because she grew up right there.

MH: What's important to you about Cortland? Currently, in the past what's important to you?

DC: Well I think Cortland is like so many communities and cities it's size across the country. I've got such an informal and formal education all of my life. I've been in areas I probably shouldn't have been to hear and see what I've seen. And I've been in areas where I've seen things that have been done. I just think Cortland, I can't, Cortland to me, there's a lot left to be desired of its current condition and situation. We've allowed, I can't think of the word, the integrity of the city to become less involved or less important or cohesive. I think, like anyone, I think there's a lot of things that can be done, but without sitting right there and responding to each one as it's brought up I wouldn't have an answer. Across the board I think those that are in city government are doing the best they can, but I think that the rhetoric, the experience and the history keeps repeating itself and the city goes nowhere, except down. But I mean you have a city that was incorporated in 1900 and it's had 23,000 people or 20,000 people. They say we have that now but I doubt it if you go around and look at the empty houses. But that basis of the group of those 20+ thousand people has disintegrated from the people who worked the Wickwires and upheld the things that went on in the city with their involvement money wise and doing things. We have enough do-gooders in the city now, that's for sure, but you always think there's something better that can be done. I think in some areas I think there can be, Cortland isn't a bad city to come and raise your children in, but in the past 10, 20 years it's gone downhill, I really do. I don't like people coming into the city and enjoying the long time hard work of people that built the city to enjoy it without paying their dues. I don't know where you guys come from or what you were involved in, but I never left. Well why'd I stay, well I could go anywhere and I don't think it would be much different. But we got a bad reputation around the

country, we're the top ten in the country just being the way we are. I haven't seen any statistics lately, but I don't know that it's changed much, probably not but I would hope so. When you have a city where the mayor is mayor for three, four, five terms to the point where people don't even put up a candidate, I mean that's crazy to me. Certainly one person can't make a difference, you got to have several opinions, we all have to agree on something or one of us disagree and the other three might agree. But you have that going on, that shouldn't be happening, you should have a candidate running against them, and that's not happening. I just thought many years ago, going through all the regimes that had run Cortland, and I'll put it that way, control groups. I thought that once those old timers, which I'm one now, but I thought at one time when all those old timers passed on, a new group of people would manifest themselves into a way of doing something in a plus way, at least somehow but it's never happened. It seems like your Uncle John or your cousin Tony or his sister's aunt got pulled into office and it still stays the same and it doesn't change you still have the mindset. You understand what I'm saying? And it doesn't seem like it's going to change. If you're asking me, that's what some of the bumps are, I've run for office several times and never made it. I don't say it, I'm not ashamed of it. I ran, I should've gotten in, but because of a strong political group in my area, it never happened. One time in fifty years, they finally put the opposite party in and now he's got a contender and might get him out. But in fifty years they never changed representation and that's because clans, little groups, strong political goings on that went on. So there's a lot of things you can't control, so why try? I take that back, you got to try but you don't, you got to hope for best results. So.

KG: Are there other questions?

MH: No

KG: Was there any other stories or memories you could recall from, during the factory times or anything else?

DC: During Wickwires?

KG: Mhm, did you ever hear any stories like when you delivered newspapers in the bars were there always workers in the bars?

DC: Yeah, they were from all over, they were from not just the Wickwires. If I recall correctly, in my mind the people who worked the Wickwires were a group of people who didn't go out much, didn't go anywhere. It was the people who worked in the other businesses in Cortland, the other factories. No I wouldn't know who the guy was that I was shining his shoes, in the Arcade Restaurant on Central Ave. I know I would just shine his shoes, he'd give me a nickel and kick me out of there saying I was too young to be in there. I just have to say the Wickwires was that it was a heck of a business. Some people say, this is only hearsay that they got that invention or that process from England or somebody had brought it over here and they manipulated it somehow so they ended up with it, so I put it nicely. They ended up with the business, doing the wires, the process, they got ahold of it and took off with it. And I'm not sure there were any other companies in the United States that was like that I don't know if there was, they did a heck of a business. I think they did a lot for the war, I think they were still open then, see I can't remember when that fire happened and when they burned. I don't remember. But it's, I'm connected Mr. Wickwire buying a pair of shoes, and I'm connected because my wife grew up with that with her dad and her uncles everybody working there, going through that process and time period.

MH: Is there any other questions you guys have before we wrap up? (Collective no) So Don, before we turn off the audio recorders is there anything else you want to talk about?

DC: No, I'm glad you invited me here, I'm very happy that you, I'm not happy that I can't give you more information but if you want I'll talk to my wife and get it to you, but I'm happy to see you guys are taking this information down this history and compiling it together and collating it and putting it all together. Keeping it for historical, down the road if someone wants to read about it or see the pictures or whatever it is. Of course today you can google it and you can pull up a lot of stuff on the computer. I'm self-taught but I run the computer pretty good, I like it. But I tried to pull information on the Wickwires before I came but that's where I saw the article, I never heard of it, where the guy was almost cut in half, oh no, the guy that was killed there. There was a gentleman that got killed. There was an elevator, they had an elevator, they had stuff on it, this guy evidently jumped on it and broke the control arm that regulates the elevator, it fell twenty feet to the floor, there were three men on it and hey had their names if you Google it you'll see it. And the one guy, the doctor treated him and he didn't survive but the other two did, so that happened. It didn't say anything else about Wickwire that I thought was outstanding, but I never knew that so between Capollo, Mr. Capallo, getting injured like he did I didn't know this guy died there on the elevator. So, there's probably a lot more on there if you Google it up and read about it. Unless I can give you some more, I don't know what else I could tell you except I enjoyed it, and I hope you have

KG: Yeah we really appreciate all the information you've shared with us. We're excited.

DC: I think most of it's about me, but I didn't want myself being on there but I thank you for the interview.

KG: Thank you for giving us the opportunity, we really appreciate it.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Kortnee Gilmore on October 20, 2017 and November 7, 2017

Transcript edited by Kortnee Gilmore on November 7, 2017