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Tremont Oral History Project  
Interview: Joseph Vargo  
Parma, Ohio  
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Patricia Haller: Good Afternoon, my name is Patricia Ann Haller. I'm with the Cleveland State University Tremont Oral History Project and today is Monday, Lets see Monday

Joseph Vargo: October 20<sup>th</sup>!

Haller: October 20, 2003. Today I'm at the home of Joe Vargo, a former Tremont resident and we're going to start the interview.

PH: Mr. Vargo, can you tell us something about your yearly childhood in Tremont?

JV: Okay, I was born in Cleveland, but not in the Tremont area. But those were Depression years and um, my parents had lost their home. My parents had come from Europe and they, we lost the home that we had lived in at that time. They lived with us on Dennison. And we had to move to Pennsylvania for a year, and we came back to Tremont area in about nineteen, 1934 when I was about four years old, three or four years old, and ah, lived there for a number of years there on Willey Avenue. And then later on we moved out a little bit, just a couple of blocks up on Scranton Road there and then we moved over to Sadie, what was a street called Sadie Avenue. It's no longer there because of the innerbelt has um, eaten it up a little bit. It's between, It was close to Clark Avenue, but not right by Clark. And um, little by little, we began moving away from the area, but I went to school all the way through high school there in the Tremont area.

PH: Okay, I like to ask a question. What nationality were, um your parents? And what religion did they practice? What church did they go to?

JV: My parents were both Slovak, and they came from Slovakia and um it was called Czechoslovakia at that time, and, um we're Byzantine Catholic. My mother came over by herself when she was fourteen years old; traveled across Europe and came to the United States. So um, I was the first generation, what ever you call it after that.

PH: What church did they go to?

JV: They went to Holy Ghost Byzantine Catholic Church over on the corner of Kenilworth and West 14<sup>th</sup>.

PH: Is that still standing today?

JV: Yes, it is.

PH: What were your parents' names?

JV: My father's name was Joseph, and my mother's name was Mary.

PH: Okay, did your parents speak any foreign language in the house?

JV: Well, Slovak – yes. They spoke Slovak quite a bit. Although both of them did pick up English pretty well, pretty quickly there, and um we children kept encouraging them to speak the English and so they always could speak always pretty good afterwards.

PH: What um, special customs did they observe from their Slovak culture?

JV: Well um they, they of course became Americanized when they came over here. But they I know at one time, my mother was like in a play at the church there. She had her old outfit on from east Czechoslovakia. They, she used to live, they lived in the hills what you used to call the peasants there in the mountains, the Carpathian Mountains in Czechoslovakia there, and um I, I saw here in that, that outfit there at that time.

PH: Can you describe your parent's home in Tremont?

JV: The first place we moved in was like an apartment six house on Lilley Avenue. It was a, a house, a large house that had about four suites to it and we lived about um – oh about 200 yards above where the kennels are at now that time on Willey. Then we moved later on. We moved up on Scranton Road, a upstairs. It was a little bit bigger, we had more rooms there, and um then we moved on Sadie which was the, which was the -- a whole house at that time. We were renting at that time, but then after that we moved out of the area. We move on Fulton Road by St. Rocco's where we owned, bought our first home.

PH: What time period was this? You know all this moving around?

JV: Started out, like I said, I, we moved there when I was about three or four. So that would be 1933 or 1934. I was born in 1930 and, um we lived there, there, there. I can remember till about six or seven. I remember that I already went to Scranton Road about two years. Then we went to Sadie and lived at Sadie Avenue for about, oh seven, six or seven years, till, till we moved out of the area. Like I said I kept going back kept going back to the school and everything else.

PH: Did we get the name of the grade school you went to?

JV: No, I went to Scranton Elementary School.

PH: Okay, What special memories do you have about your childhood as you grew up in Tremont?

JV: Ah... I have a lot of memories. An um, ah, I'm one of those that remembers the past quite a bit, but see, but oh, ah.....What did we do? We, we, I remember when we were first young and we were first starting, we go to the elementary school and play around the neighborhood there by Fairmount Fat Creamery, and then later on um ah. Most of my childhood was to go just wandering around. We used to just play on the streets in those days. Oh, go to Scranton Playground once in a while. But, there wasn't too much to do there. We—just in those days you usually played in the streets, or went down by the Flats on Castle Avenue and so on.

PH: Were there any swimming pools or other fun place to go?

JV: When I was really young when, when between, between three to six years old. There was Lincoln Park on Kenilworth um, oh, West 14<sup>th</sup> Street there between Kenilworth and Starkweather. Is what they call Lincoln Park and that's still there. But in the middle of it there was a large like wading pool and it was probably about thirty to forty feet across even more than that in diameter; and um I remember us going in there walking in the water there and a lot of kids. Parents would bring their children there to in that are. Then, above on the street away was what they called the Lincoln Bathhouse. I lot of us use to go there for like showers and things. I mostly at that time when I was younger, I just was walking around. It wasn't till later on that I got a, we moved away that I got a bike and used to travel even back there at that time.

PH: What were the Depression years like in Tremont?

JV: Ugh, it's for us it just seemed like that's the way we had to live. And, we just, we had, we knew nothing else. And so, we knew times were tuff, very difficult. My father was out of work for about a year, and a half. My mother was working nights at downtown in a Hotel Cleveland, and had to go downtown, often times um, we three kids would be home alone, ah by ourselves, and um we took care of ourselves a lot, ah. It was expected in those days. Um, we know that there were times when my mother, my parents felt bad because they didn't, couldn't buy all the food they wanted to. We did all kind of, we use to go to the West Side Market and shop there. Ah, and ah, and you had to go down, walk down the hill, and up the stairs, up and walk over there, and walk back. I use to help to carry some of the bags there. Ah, but ah, it just wasn't the situation where we..... That was the way things were.

JV: And like my father said at that time, he said, 'You know you got to have a college education to get a job nowadays.' Ah, and so, that stuck with us. So, two of us made it to college afterwards.

PH: What did your father do for a living before he got laid off?

JV: Ah, before I don't know what the other job was. I was too young then. But right after that, he finally got a job working at Tinnerman Products. He was working machineries, factories. And then he worked in another factory later on.

PH: Do you have any special memories of Lempko Hall?

JV: Oh, Yes.

PH: Or Merrick House?

JV: Yes, Both of them, both are in the same area. Lempko Hall was the hall where all the weddings from our church were held, and um, all the big celebrations. And I still have a memory. You bring back a memory of, of being there during the intermission and running and sliding across the floor and us standing around the zither. They be playing the old, using the old zither and play some of the old Slovak music there.

PH: Could you spell the name of that instrument?

JV: The zither – There was a z-i-t-h-e-r. I believed that's what they called it, and, ah they -- It was like, like gypsy music and all you played with the long sticks and use to like a xylophone, play it almost like a xylophone there. Ah, but, ah Lempko Hall was very well known and of course Merrick Hall or later on that's where there a lot kids used to play basketball there, and did many activities there at Merrick Hall.

PH: Were girls included in the activities at Merrick Hall?

JV: I'm not sure. I think they were, but we. I was with the guys, we were playing basketball and football. We were mostly, I was with. I was interested in sports, a lot athletics, and the guys I was mostly with were mostly athletes and all. So we, we didn't really realize that. We didn't see. We do know the girls. We had some great gals in our class who were basketball players everything else and all. What we're good, ah good friends, even to this day.

PH: Do you remember any special proverbs or local stories from you earlier years?

JV: Um – Nothing that comes immediately to mind. I mean, ah. I just know a lot of stories, a lot of things that use to happen. Watching the changing neighborhood from when were children. Watching everything being on horses and having, ah. They use to have water bins in different kinds of corners where horses could drink water from and all. And streetcars running up and down Scranton Road, to moving over to changing over to buses and [chuckle] later on though. But the, just the neighborhood changing as we went along just um. We just saw, we grew up in a time there were so many changes in our history.

PH: Do you remember when they changed from the horses with the water trough to the streetcars?

JV: Yeah, probably about when I was five or six because we didn't see it anymore after that. And but there still was horse drawn carriages for milk and um what they use to call the Paper Rex Man. Used to come around when I was living on Sadie Avenue. I remember those coming around. So we use to see them around. But, not the, not as much as when I was really young. But they began doing away with the poles for tying up the horses and the so on. But I also remember way back at that time going outside and seeing one of my first air planes, a two winger, and you could see it, a plane that's coming across the sky and go in the house and get a drink of water and come back, it'd still be there. That's how slow they moved. Those were the first things we saw.

PH: What year can you assign to that?

JV: Oh, again – 1934, 1935?

PH: When did you first start dating in Tremont?

JV: Ah we had moved like I said to, finally moved to Fulton Road, and I was going to, to Thomas Jefferson Junior High at that time. And uh, I started dating about that time. When I just, just when I went to Junior High at about, oh probably let's see '42.

PH: Where did Tremont teenagers go when they were dating?

JV: Oh, we went to, I was into roller skating a lot. But ah, when I was at school, but when I was dating back at later on, when was in senior high school and dating some of the girls from Lincoln. Ah, we could go, we go to the movies go there once in a while maybe downtown for a, a big movie, usually to the Garden Show, ah to the Marble Show, to ah Jennings and ah, we'd go to the sports games. We went to the football and basketball. Earlier I said we were into sports a lot. And then afterwards we were really very fortunate. We were just talking about that. Which we had better than the kids of today have. We had a canteen over at Pilgrim Church. And um, we'd used to go over there on weekends on Saturdays, after the games and go down to the canteen, and we could dance down there and, and just ah, enjoy ourselves. It was really a nice clean area in all, Ah it, it as I just said we had a place to go to stay out of trouble or anything else now. Where as the kids don't have something like that nowadays.

PH: What was the name of the roller skating rink where you use to skate at?

JV: Rollerade

PH: Was that the Dennison Rollerade?

JV: Right, where the stock yards are at now. I used to walk all the way up there, and walk back and all in a week. Did a lot of roller skating there. Then later on, I used to go out to Puritas Springs for roller skating out there.

PH: Did you used to like to circle waltz?

JV: Yes, I was considered one of the best!

PH: Oh, that's good.

JV: [Chuckle] I did, did lot of the dancing and even some of the racing. I did, I did a lot of skating.

PH: Where and how did you meet your spouse?

JV: Oh that was after I was home, out of college you know. Ah, ah – that's interesting. I went to one, a wedding reception at Ceska Sin Sokol on Clark Avenue, and I talked to couple of people and girls there and I said, 'You know nothings going on here, I'm going to see my friends over at Sachsenheims. That was our place, one of the places where we'd like to go dance. So I went over to Sachsenheims to go dancing and a I go there it was ... the lights were down low, the guys were standing there. The music just started up, polka. I said, "I didn't come here to talk, I came here to dance'. And I looked around and I saw in the corner, this one of the gal with a real pretty fluffy dress and long hair and I couldn't even see here face. So well I'm going to dance. So, I asked her to dance. It wasn't until we got out, that I got, that I got to see her. And um, we just danced and danced quite a bit and went out to the veranda, and we were talking out there, the whole evening and took her home, took her home later that night. Found out that she lived a block away from me.

PH: What was the name of the college that you went to, and what did you major in?

JV: I went to Ohio Wesleyan in Delaware, Ohio, where I got my regular degree, my B.A. Then I went to Case Western Reserve, Western Reserve where I got my Master's at Western Reserve. I graduated in '48, went to Ohio Wesleyan in 48'. I graduated from Ohio Wesleyan in '52. Then I did my graduate work in Cleveland when I, I taught, coached one year in Tiffin, Ohio. And I took a job in teaching elementary physical education. And um, I was going to do that just for a year, and I end up staying there. But then, I did my master's. I got my master's from Western Reserve in about '57.

PH: Where did you buy your first home? Was it in Tremont?

JV: No, our first, we bought our first home. We'd already had moved out. We were in Old Brooklyn off of Ridge Road by Biddulph there. Ah, we had bought a small house there, and its after we, we lived in an apartment when we first got married. Then, we moved, we bought our first house over there.

PH: Why did you not buy a house in Tremont?

JV: We were always, it seemed like, we were, were always trying to move up and out and away from as our jobs got, uh, as we got jobs began that. Our, the economy got better even those were the war years. Remember, after the war everything you know pretty boomed, pretty much and all. And um we're just always trying, always you know trying to better ourselves, we by getting a good neighborhood and a good place, we're just trying to as many as others. Almost everyone I knew, all kept moving, slowing drifting out a little bit towards, closer and closer to Parma, out and further even.

PH: Did you have other classmates or friends whom moved to Parma?

JV: Oh yeah, uh, uh, I in fact, my, my oldest friend just called me this morning. We were friends. We played together when we were four years old, and went to school together when I first went to kindergarten, uh at, at Scranton, and um my other, um close friend from high school lives in ah Broadview Heights. Ah, another one lives in Brookpark. They're all over the area. They all moved out. Ah as we all began to get our jobs and, and, and, and make things better for our family. Things were you know tuff, the houses were small, most lot of us we were renting there. We were always looking to try to you know buy and upgrade ourselves a little bit.

PH: Can you tell me something about the history of crime in Tremont – um its reputation?

JV: When we were you know very young in all. We, we knew there was some going on. I remember we heard a lot about the Torso Killer. It was the one thing that all kids – oh, were hearing -- 'We got to watch out for the Torso Killer'. An um, there would be a lot of dilapidated houses and we worried about there would be a lot of transients in some of the dilapidated houses. And, and um they talked on the corner of our street that someone had been found in there. Actually, not too much in all. I guess ah, ah, we kind of felt that we were you know tuff kids in those days in all. We really were, we, we really weren't. And ah, we had groups together, an which you would obviously call a gang. It wasn't like you talk of gangs today, where you went out about. It was just social groups where kids got together and played together and had fun together, but no we had a very uh, especially later on on, especially later on. Later on when I got to be eleven or twelve you know the crime, the crime was. We lived on Fulton Road there. You just didn't worry about it. Um. I was interested in ah, just as an example . . . . My father and I used to go see a hockey games, and he had to work, there was a championship game for the Barron's, and I was twelve years old. He gave me money to take a streetcar downtown and take another street car to 30<sup>th</sup> and Euclid Avenue to go to the Arena to watch a game all by myself and came home and might go back to Public Square at 10:30 and come home. Thought nothing of it in those days. I can imagine a kid twelve year old, doing that today?

PH: No!

JV: [Chuckle] Ha, Ha, Ha.

PH: Can you tell me something about the mom and pop businesses in Tremont that are no longer there?

JV: Oh, there were you had a a a mom and pop grocery store almost within two to three blocks of almost of almost any place you were at. Ah, and when we were on Willey Avenue you had ah, a deli in the up at the corner and next to it was the Auburn Bakery which was quite famous right at that time, and then we were reading about it afterwards. But they finally moved away from there. But that was considered some, one of the best bakeries in town. And ah, that was the only two stores on the corner there. There were a lot of little stores up on ah Scranton Road. The mom and pop grocery store we lived on was some where on Scranton Road, just beyond Scranton School where Scranton School is at now. And I forget what street that's on. But, that's where we used to go. They even in our neighborhood [cough]. I don't remember the names, though of those, those so long ago. Oh, but that's like I say, I remember going over the and um getting the food and all. They, they used to send the, the kids used to go do the shopping a lot of times for the parents, because we were. They were worried is they trying to get their jobs and all. And so, ah we took a lot upon ourselves by going there.

PH: Were there any ladies who owned businesses there?

JV: Mmmm. Not that I can remember at that time. Ah, they um, they had some hair dressing saloons around, but that was about the only thing that I can remember. Um, no, mostly with, with the guys. One of my friends, his father was a barber, had a barber shop on Scranton Road there. Um, ah, and that was over by Auburn. I think was his name. His name was Shantry, the Shantry. I just luckily, the name comes back to mind. And his, his the, the, boy, one boy and I were friends and his sister graduated from high school with me to. But I used to go see them a lot in those days.

PH: Was Bosak Dairy part of Tremont?

JV: Ah, that was more by Fulton Road. Ah, Bosak Dairy was a where I lived later on. I lived on Hyde Avenue and I went to school with Chuck Bosak. Ah, the um, the I don't know. I guess I don't if he was involved with it then. But, we were, we went to. I had transferred over in sixth grade because we moved. So I had to transfer over to Sackett Elementary school. So for that the, at the middle of Sackett sixth grade then. I know Chuck Bosak was um, ah from Bosak Dairy there. And um, he was in my class.

PH: Where did your family and friends, ah shop for food and clothes. Do you have any names?

JV: Yeah, well. We used to go down to the ah, market place quite a bit ah on um West 25<sup>th</sup> Street, and we'd have to take walk all the way up Willey Avenue, and come back up the hill. There was another short cut that, ah walked over. We did most of the shopping I think, all of the shopping there. Oh for clothes of course, we'd go downtown to May Company and Higbee's. Um, mainly May Company was the, the one that they went to. You

could take a streetcar downtown, and ah, um go shopping there and that place, and take it back and watch it struggle the hill, Scranton Road Hill.

PH: What about Fries and Schuele's?

JV: About what?

PH: I believe that there was a store near West Side Market.

JV: Fries and Schuele's, oh yeah! Ah. It was pronounced a little differently – 'Freeze and Shooley'. I, I know that my parents used to go there. Ah, I don't. But, but that's again, that was probably when I was about five or six years old. So, I don't remember that as much, ah that, where they shopped. And I Like I said. That would be around 1935-1936. But we used to have to like I said, we, we did mot of our food and even some clothes shopping of course, we had a lot of dime stores in those days, and you could get stuff in Woolworth and Kresge dime stores down over there again, ah back around the same time. Those were, you got quite a bit of stuff in, in those stores.

PH: Okay, that was on Euclid Avenue?

JV: Oh, I'm talking about the first ones were on West 25<sup>th</sup> Street. Then later on we went downtown. Then we sent to the great big Kresge's there right next to May Company. Yeah, and that was later on. In fact my sisters worked there for a while.

PH: Okay, when women worked, what did they do? Where did they work?

JV: Well, well in the first years it was very difficult because of again of the Depression, and of course everybody was out of work. And the only work my mother could find at that time was working at Hotel Cleveland, ah in the ah, kitchen. And it was an evening job and until she was able to quit working later on and um but my sister, oldest sister, the one who took care of us as children, she was about eight or nine when we were. I have to laugh about that nowadays. The three of us were nine, eight and five, and we lived, we were home alone almost every evening and never though anything about it in those days. And it, it was nothing else you could do. The parents had to go out. They had to get jobs and so on. And um, we had close family any hows. But, ah she worked um, at the in dime stores, and in different places in all. And my sister was in fact one of the first ones to go to college out of Lincoln High School, cause girls weren't supposed to go to school in those days.

PH: Where was the Cleveland Hotel located at?

JV: Same place now. That's right at the Terminal Building there. Ah, right next to the Terminal Tower there. You know at the, that's hotel. It was called Hotel Cleveland. It's called Stouffer, I think or something like that now. It's some else, but it's, the same hotel is there. They haven't torn it down. They just upgraded it.

PH: Did your parents take you downtown for Christmas?

JV: Oh, Yes! That, that was the big treat every year, to go downtown and go to the May Company and walk around and watch the, the um, the um, the, all the animated trains and dolls and everything else in the window on the corner of Prospect and Euclid. And the new Higbee's had it to. And they made the movie [A Christmas Story] later on. It was interesting that they made the movie, but they featured Higbee's at that time, but though I remember by May Company was the bigger one at that time. Then we go up on the sixth floor or something like that at May Company, and that was you know *just* Toyland in those days. They walk around and see all the toys, but in those days if you got one thing for Christmas you were lucky. And [chuckle] it's so different nowadays with kids – the things we get. At Higbees um ah, there was a little escalator there that you went up the thing and just like they showed in the movie [A Christmas Story] that you could slide down. Then there was a, further out there was a place [Halle's] where Mr. Jingaling I guess was at. I always thought that was later on. I was getting older by that time. So he [Mr. Jingaling] was after, after my really early years, you know. But that, that was, those were great years.

PH: Did Tremont residents have gardens? What did they grow? Did they can fresh fruit and vegetables?

JV: Ah, my parents did some canning, ah of um pickles, and ah tomatoes, I believe. We didn't have so much of a garden. I think . . . . I, I, I, maybe we did have a garden on Sadie Avenue. Cause that's when we had our own for the first time that we had a yard. The other places were just apartments. And then we moved to Hyde Avenue, ah then I did have a garden then. For then in fact that was for during the war years at that time of nineteen oh –

JV: 1941 when the war began, and um we all had from the schools. We had what the called the victory gardens, and ah they would sell you a garden that you had, may be six tomato plants and couple of green peppers and so on you would had to put it out, you had. Some one would come and look at your gardens, and so forth. It got me into the habit to this day. I still have, I have a pretty good sized garden in the back yard yet. So they, they I guess, it got ingrained in me at that time.

PH: Did women have children at home, or in the hospital, what do you know?

JV: Ah, oh, they – both. I think that occasionally sometime, still had once or twice in the home, but then they began going to the hospital at that time. And I'm, I was born, I was born I guess in the hospital, was almost born at home. But she was able to at that time. Like I said at that time, there was just before we lost the house there, before the Depression really hit. That was 1930.

PH: Okay, what hospital was in the local Tremont area, that people went to?

JV: Well the only hospital, well there was another hospital, but we always went to City Hospital. Ah, what they call, ah Metropolitan. I believe now called on Scranton Road. almost, almost intersects with 25<sup>th</sup> almost there by on, by Trowbridge. But there was another one on West 14<sup>th</sup>, Charity Hospital, but we never, I think no *not* Charity, but ah oh great. What is the name of that [Grace Hospital]? I forget the name exactly. But we never really went to that, to that hospital. We did a lot of other things on West 14<sup>th</sup> Street. Cause, they even had a movie house there on West 14<sup>th</sup> -- just before you went up on the way today, just as you are going up the ramp. There was an old movie [house] called the Jennings Theatre there during our childhood. We used to go to that show.

PH: Ah, the families that you grew up in – politically were they Democrat or Republican? Did anybody show an interest in – in politics?

JV: Ah, they were basically Democrat. Does, like I said, there as the. . . . the um years, right After the, the Depression, and um. The President of course was Roosevelt, and he was our hero and for everyone in those days there. Ah, they just thought, and everyone just thought, how much of what a great president he was, and um my father never really got too much involved in politics. I have done a little but more [chuckle]. I do things now. Do you want me to tell about what I'm. I, I'm volunteer now with ARP. And I because of my background in teaching, I've done some lobby work. When I was a State President of Ohio Federation of Teachers, and then um, the, the later on I did, did some work with ARP. And part of my duties then as Assistant State Coordinator, vote on federal legislation, was to go to

JV: Washington about at least once a year, and lobby for Congress on issues that health care that, that ARP was concerned about.

PH: What political groups or activities were community members involved in?

JV: Oh, they used to have when we were real young, ah what a club, what they called Sokols Club -- Ceska Sin Sokol's Club. And I was in that, just when I was very young what ever. Again about five years old about – 1935, '36. And um, as we moved away we weren't no longer there. My, my father was still involved with a Slovak Club, and I forget what the name of that was. But oh, but it was just a social club that they got together, and and um [cough}. But um, my mother no, she wasn't involved in any of that -- of course church activities.

PH: What church activities were you involved in when you were in Tremont?

JV: In Tremont, not so much when I was that young. Um, I wasn't involved, just whenever they would have a dance at the Lemko Hall or some um. We did take a class downstairs at the church at, at Holy Ghost [Byzantine Catholic Church], and um Slovak, Old Byzantine language, and we had sort of a church school there. I went to that for a while over at with some of my friends um, but as it didn't we move further away. And we didn't get so much involved at that time. They didn't have quite that church activities like they do today's.

PH: When did the Tremont neighborhood start to change?

JV: Ah, I believe more almost after I graduated from high school. I graduated in '48 and I don't think I really saw much change there till around, oh when I came back from college about '52, somewhere around that time. Around that area that it began to change little by little. And we um ah, of course during the next couple of years very quickly things changed, um there quite. They weren't building in, in those days, and replacing places as they are today. They're just fixing up. Just like I said, most of us kept drifting away from there, and other people moved into the neighborhood.

PH: So it looks like people did not rebuy into the community?

JV: Not too many, no, ah, in fact. I know there one, or two did. I remember hearing about a couple, ah, that would buy a house and renovate the. But no, almost all everyone because rebuilding and replacing wasn't, wasn't the thing in those days. It was easier to go, just to go buy a smaller house. Like our first house we bought on, on, on Hyde Avenue. We bought it for \$3,500 in those days. And ah, even those salaries were no more than that, ah that was still a lot easier, easier than to get a house when you were young as to oppose to nowadays when you got, get, get anything got to be over, over a \$100,000. So you got to be making it. The salaries haven't I don't think kept this pace as much as houses have.

PH: So it was a matter of economics versus gangs and crimes and arson.

JV: Oh yeah, no, we had no, we had no concern about gangs and crime. Ah, we loved the area, we loved the friends we kept going back there all the time for all our week. We, we never stopped going to Holy Ghost [Byzantine Catholic Church] until, we lived until I was grown way later on when we've moved further out and they built another church at S. Mary's and then, then Holy Spirit. Ah, but ah till this day we still go back down there. So that still was never the problem. It was always was strictly economic, and since we were doing better and everything else we always kept trying to better ourselves.

PH: Okay, what suburbs did your friends move to, or some of your neighbors?

JV: Broadview Heights, Brook Park, ah Parma of course. Um, um, all over the west side even us [clock chimes] most of us were in the closer suburbs and some of their children are moving even further out now. But, it just seems to be like a progression there. But even in my neighborhood, my neighbor next door, his father went to Lincoln – ah he found, found out. Later on, right after me, but before they closed the old Lincoln High, then, then they closed the Old Lincoln High at around, oh, oh, I got the years somewhere, but um and they, they had Lincoln built the new school called they combined Lincoln West. They call it Lincoln West now.

PH: How did the freeway change the Tremont community?

JV: Ah, quite a bit I imagine that um. As I said, the whole area, the whole street that I lived on was just dug out. And ah, there the, the freeway runs through there now where Sadie

Avenue was now. And it runs behind, ah, the drug store. There was a big drug store on West 14<sup>th</sup>. It's still there I think on Starkweather and, and so on. Pilgrim Church remained, but the freeway runs right behind it. And our church is there. It's there. But the freeways some of the, of the vibrations, everybody had to shore up everything there and all. But that's when when, the freeway went in. That's when the area became I think much more desolate at that time. Especially our church was always pretty well attended, until that time. Then it got too hard to get to and ah, even though they still have it opened to this day. There's only a very few people there, who ever go there. Older people that go from the old days, and we there like once or twice a year just to see it. Cause it's a beautiful old church. The freeway really did open it up for everyone to start really moving away and all, and, and a lot of homes were, were taken away at that time.

PH: Okay, what can you tell me about the history of Jennings Avenue. I understand that at one time it rivaled Euclid Avenue and Franklin Avenue as far as prestigious families and homes.

JV: That was West 14<sup>th</sup> more than anything else. That's West 14<sup>th</sup> Street was the, even to this day you can see some of the huge homes that are there. That was the um, the West Side Millionaires Row. Ah that.

[End of Side A]

[Start of Side B]

PH: Can you continue to tell me the story about the historic West 14<sup>th</sup> Street?

JV: Yes, um, as I was starting to say that the West 14<sup>th</sup> Street that we knew that had at one time been known as the Millionaires Row of the West Side as opposed to the one on Euclid Avenue. Ah, by the time we were there in the '30's already. Things had already run down a little bit that even there. Those times, those houses were such huge places. I had couple of friends that lived in some of them. Um but they, they were just huge. If you looked at them – really beautiful homes construction wise and all. That they view of it ugh, [cough], excuse me. But um and we'd, we'd just talk about it as we walked up and down the street there Ah, when we, we'd go downtown and we, we, we went out to any of in the on streetcars. When we went out to on Euclid Beach we see the, the big houses on Euclid Avenue, and of course that was the, the real first Millionaires, the real Millionaires Row where Rockefeller and some of the others lived in. I forgot of course, I didn't know that in those days. But we saw those places when we were young. They turned into ah museums now most of them.

PH: How did West 14<sup>th</sup> compare to Franklin Avenue and the Millionaires Row on Euclid Avenue?

JV: Well, the Millionaires Row always became much more commercialized, ah where we were at, it was much more a residential area. Millionaires Row and Euclid Avenue was much closer to downtown and so you had all the different businesses and things that

developed over there. Where as we were at, there was a residential area and we had, ah the, the bigger houses there. Franklin Avenue, was just, had some homes there was nothing that could compare with, I don't think with Fourteenth Street. It, that was strictly residential over, over where the, the YMCA was at, and ah, things over there on Franklin, but um. There was some small stores that we used to go to on a. There was a big drugstore like on the corner of, the front on Starkweather and West 14<sup>th</sup>. There was a big popular place where we use to always go to and otherwise we would have to go to on West 25<sup>th</sup> Street.

PH: What about some of the famous families that use to live on West 14<sup>th</sup> Street?

JV: I can't think about any of them off hand, ugh, we didn't know any of at that time. We were too young I guess to know what the famous families were. Ah, just of my friends [laugh], can't help you on that one.

PH: Are your children active in any of the organizations in Tremont or on the west side ?

JV: No. They're all ah both of my daughters are. My, my one lives out in Strongsville. She's very active with the church, and the neighborhood and with the garden club and so on. She has quite a I good size family. My other daughter is a un a case management worker for Cuyahoga County Board of Retard, Retardation and so she is involved all over the city of. Well, the whole west side in visiting families and, um people with difficulties and so on, and helping them with their problems. [cough]

PH: Have you've ever gone back to Tremont to enjoy some of the new restaurants or businesses?

JV: Yeah, occasionally, we go to University Inn, ah there which is right above, the um, ah right by the freeway there, and right about the Flats. And um we did go to one good restaurant that was around Euclid, about um Lincoln Park. Ah, I forget the name of the place, it was just on the back side of mmm – off just you'd have to go up Kenilworth, then past Lincoln Park. It would be, was the restaurant back there, but after that no.

PH: Have your friends and you, and your family every gone to any of the um art shows?

JV: Um, no only, only there with whatever we had in the church. I don't know of any of the no. The art show in fact, no the art shows that we've gone to mostly been outside with downtown we either go to the museum, art museum or ah in fact my son had his own little gallery in downtown. Then, then, my wife just had a painting in a this weekend. Ha, ha in some place, but no, I can't remember any in, in the, the Lincoln area.

PH: Okay, I'm talking about the, ah current art shows or art walk shows in Tremont.

JV: Oh, yeah. No, no we, I haven't had the chance to get there for anything of that at this time year that, nothing else. [cough]

PH: Can you tell me anything about the old Cleveland College and why some of the streets are name Professor?

JV: Yes, they um, there was a college there. Ah for a number of years – early, early years of Cleveland. That's why they, they named College Avenue, Professor Avenue, and so on. We, we always wondered about that when we read little. Then we found out later on when we go to school that, that there had been a college there. They, I've know have written some stories about it since that time. But that was, ah was known as a college area and of course that the Tremont area was always known as the, the area of churches. There was so many churches that we had around there ah, that were pretty well, known in all big cathedrals, and it was so quite an area. Almost every where you looked, there was another church and all. And, but the College, Professor ah um we used to walk and go down those streets all the time.

PH: Can you tell me anything about Tremont's Civil War Connection?

JV: I know that they, I heard about that they, they actually had stored some ah like a horses maybe, maybe in Lincoln Park. I, I heard stories about that. But I, I never of course that was way before so I even though I'm big into the Civil War, I never really followed up on how much Cleveland got in there. I know, but they were. There was an armory somewhere, where ah some came there, there. So I guess it did have its connection during the Civil War there to.

PH: Do you have any closing comments?

JV: No. Just that the, we still get together with some things. I, I started tell you about the from my high school we got. They developed a, a program called the Old Sports Guys who played ah, first of all football there all the other sports and began meeting every two years. And we've been meeting now for 44, 42 years and ah we'll be still be meeting the last two times. We met; we had over 400 guys that ah came from Lincoln High. Just, just, just the men alone. Ah, cause they of just started off in sports. They still get together in all and so We all still have a lot of memories of the old days of Lincoln High.

PH: What would you like to see for the future of Tremont?

JV: To continue doing what they are doing now. They're, they're you know renovating some the areas, bringing in more businesses. Ah I know some, I heard about some of the other new restaurants there, that are very good. Ah even though over by there by West 25<sup>th</sup> Street by what they called old by Old Cleveland there, Old Town. They got some places there, ah just, just renovating the place and bringing it up to date, because it was a, was a wonderful area and we had some wonderful memories of our childhoods there.

PH: Can you tell me more about your high school?

JV: Lincoln High was ah, oh, one of the smaller schools in the city of Cleveland. Ah, by the time I got to Lincoln, ah, ah, as I said, that I was, I, we had, we had our class. We

had many people who use to say afterwards they, they, the kids in our class was one of the friendliest classes, schools they's ever went to. I had one kid from a parochial school, I won't mention which one, a pretty well known one that used to skip school to come over and spend some time to visit with us all and all over there. My wife who went to St. Michael's on Scranton Road there, later on to school. Ah, ah, she said that our class is, our reunions are, are the friendliest that you can imagine though. That we still to this day. We had one small reunion this year. Our fifty second reunion and um, and um we kept, we kept our friendship ah. You made friendships in those days, you kept them for a long time. The uh, just to stay you know ah. I hope that they can get much more information about the Tremont area because its very interesting reading about it. AH what went on, it brings back so memories of when we were kids and going downtown and back and forth and all the things we used to do. Ah there were many things, had things that were sad that happened there, but there were also many great things. And times began getting better in those days and so. We lived through some interesting days.

PH: Okay, thank you very much Joe Vargo for participating in the Oral History of Tremont for Cleveland State University. [pause]

PH: Mr Vargo is there any more stories that you would like to share about the history of Tremont and the folklore?

JV: Id did hear one story. I, I never investigated to find out how accurate it is, and so on. There was a house near Fairfield and Tenth, near University Inn. Its, its, it's a large building almost, I don't know if it's a house or not that was used to hid slaves that were escaping form the south and either going to Canada or to the north here. But ah they, they actually used to move them through there. Ah, I know that it's, it's somewhere, somewhere. I heard about that. I don't know the details of it in all or how accurate it is. But I, someone else, also pointed out the building to me. It's in that area. It's um. So that would be something real interesting I know. I think that they had written about it, but I'm not sure. I don't know how accurate that is. But I guess that's what folklore is like.

PH: Okay um, has anybody pointed this house out to you?

JV: Yes, someone pointed it out to me at one time. And uh, they said: 'That's the building the were talking about'. But again, ah it, I think my wife also had thought. I think, I think when she was taking a trip one time with Lolly the Trolley. I think uh, the, those individuals that take you on the trips, they know a lot of the background and the folklore and the history and all. I think he mentioned that as he, as they were cause they were going to stop off at University Inn which is right there, right above there the, the, the Cuyahoga there ah to eat. That, um that's what was happening there. So that's some, that's where I heard it all first of all. Then I, then I had someone else mentioning it to me. So again that's, that's what I heard was the case there.

PH: So the people who operate Lolly the Trolley have information about this Underground Railroad stop?

JV: Well the one that the, they say, they have different people that run the town, that do the tours and if you get one that really has a lot of background. And but this was like I said, this was probably oh about six or seven years ago. So, I don't know if, if you know if they've, they still follow up on that. That, that's where she heard it from first of all. Whether, if they know more about it, I don't know.

PH: Okay, thank you once again for participating in the Oral History of Tremont Project for Cleveland State University. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW