

Jim Economou

In 1926, the Economou family introduced Tulsa to what became a local tradition—Coney Island Hot Weiners.

Jim Economou Transcription

Chapter 01 - 0:59

Introduction

Announcer: Ask anyone in the Coney business what's the most important part of making a great Coney. The answer is always the same. It's the chili. In the 1920s, when the popularity of Nathan's Famous hot dog stand in Coney Island, New York began to spread, a smattering of hot dog restaurants popped up in other cities across the United States.

Greek immigrant Christ Economou opened his first Coney Island restaurant in 1919 in McKeesport, Pennsylvania. Economou's hot dogs were smaller than normal, served on a steamed bun and topped with Greek style chili and chopped onions.

In 1926, Economou came to Tulsa and opened the Coney Island 5-Cent Weiner Shop in the heart of downtown Tulsa. Now, Coneys have become so much a part of the fabric of Tulsa that former Tulsans can't make a trip to the city without stopping off for a little taste of home.

The son of Christ Economou, Jim, tells the story of this Tulsa food mainstay on VoicesofOklahoma.com

Chapter 02 - 5:50

Economou Family

John Erling: Today's date is March 7th, 2011. My name is JE. Jim, state your full name, please.

Jim Economou: James Economou.

JE: Your date of birth and your present age.

JEc: I'm eighty. Date of birth; it was April 22, 1930.

JE: We're recording this at 68th and Memorial in the One Memorial Building, which happens to be on the fourth floor and tell us why we're here.

JEc: My son has an office here. He's at present an attorney. He also does wills and other types of law.

JE: His name is?

JEc: Chris.

JE: Chris Economou. Tell us where you were born, Jim.

JEc: Here in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

JE: In what hospital?

JEc: St. John's hospital, the old one.

JE: Give us your mother's name, maiden name and where she was from.

JEc: Her name was Sofia Antone or Antonou. She was born in Greece about twenty miles south of Rendina, Greece. Rendina, Greece is a part of Greece that was virtually unknown up until the 1800s. On the maps, it would probably have been considered as...We call it Agripha, which means unexplored. There were no roads there. There was nothing there. That's where she's from.

JE: What do you know about her upbringing, living in that area.

JEc: Well, her father was an agrarian, so was my father. They were able scratch out a living on the side of a mountain, sell whatever they were able to grow.

JE: Describe your mother, her personality. What was she like?

JEc: She was a very kind person, a little bit on the authoritative side. I did what she wanted to do except on a certain occasion. We got along pretty well. She was a very fine person, had food for us all the time. She was a person that stayed at the house and raised the children.

JE: Then, your father's name.

JEc: Christ Economou or Christos Economou. He came to the United States February 24th of 1911.

JE: Let me ask you about his name, because as we see that here in the United States, it would be pronounced Christ.

JEc: Christ, correct.

JE: Talk to us about that.

JEc: Well, he should've changed it. But unfortunately, when you come into this country, and you've said your name to the person that was in charge, whatever he heard, he would write down. If it sounded like Christ, he would put a "t" on it. The person that was taking down the information, he had heard Christ with an "h." That's the reason we were having so much trouble trying to figure out where was Chris or Christ anywhere, or Christos. If you looked under "H," Hristos, you were able to find it. This is the way they heard it. This is the way they wrote it down and he was stuck with that particular spelling from then on. People heard the word, Economou and they would say Ekonomo with a "k". That's the way they heard it. They wrote it down and it stayed.

JE: Was that at Ellis Island?

JEc: Ellis Island. He had some problems there, too.

JE: Problems there, too?

JEc: Absolutely.

JE: Like what?

JEc: Well, he was virtually blind. He was afraid that he was not going to get in. But fortunately, when they looked at him well, they didn't find any disease of the eye or anything else. He was legally blind, but that was as far as it went. They allowed him to come into the country.

JE: They probably didn't know that his sight was that bad, did they?

JEc: Oh, yes.

JE: Oh, they did know?

JEc: Yes, he had the proverbial coke bottle glasses.

JE: He was able to see well enough to maneuver.

JEc: Oh yeah, to move around.

JE: He came from Greece in what year?

JEc: 1911.

JE: He knew your mother in Greece?

JEc: No. What happened was, he decided that it was time for him to get married. He was about 39.

JE: He was living here in the United States?

JEc: Yeah, living here in the United States and making some money. You never ask a lady to marry you unless you had money to be able to buy a house and take care of her and so on, so forth. What he did was he wrote or phoned or whatever it was, back to his brother, and said, "Can you find me a good woman, a good wife?" He looked around and he found Sofia Antone. He said, "I found the perfect girl for you." They agreed and they wanted marriage. He decided to leave here. He had \$2,000 in his back pocket.

JE: A lot of money in...

JEc: A lot of money back then. He went back to the country. He met her. They decided to get married right away. They did and once they had everything arranged, they had a...I don't know how you would say it; like a horse train. About twenty or thirty people got on a horse and went from her village all the way to my dad's village. Then, they had the marriage ceremony.

JE: What was the age difference?

JEc: Considerable. I think it was maybe eighteen years.

JE: Really?

JEc: Yes.

JE: He was thirty-nine years old.

JEc: Thirty-nine. She was about twenty, twenty-one, something like that, yes.

JE: Did they ever talk about as soon as they laid eyes on each other, it was love at first sight?

JEc: Not necessarily. I don't think that was ever mentioned, but it was a commitment.

JE: She felt compelled?

JEc: No. I don't think so. It could've been a washout at any time. Anyway, she wanted to leave the country and go with my father and she decided this is a great opportunity to get married and have a good family.

JE: In the new country. How long did the marriage...?

JEc: He died in '73. They got married in '28.

JE: Forty-five years they were married.

JEc: Forty-five years. She died in '91.

JE: How old was she when she died?

JEc: Ninety-one, I believe.

JE: Wow, and she never remarried.

JEc: No, oh, no. No thought of that.

Chapter 03 - 5:42

Intro to Wieners

John Erling: Where was the first place that your father lived in America?

Jim Economou: Possibly in New York City. He was offered a job there on the railroad, so he stayed there for a while. They offered him seventy-five cents a day. He was told also not to take a job like that, but to make sure that he got at least a dollar a day. He got that. He was sent from New York City all the way back to Montana and Minnesota and all these places on the railroad. He did that type of work for quite a while.

JE: What kind of work was it?

JEc: It was driving spikes.

JE: So they were laying the railroad...

JEc: And he had biceps that you could not believe.

JE: ...and he was the driver of spikes?

JEc: Driving spikes. There was a problem there. One time they had sent him to get ice to melt it and become water for the people that were working there on the railroad. He drank some of that water and he said like two days he was in and out of what he called a coma. After he was finally awake and knew what happened, he just said, I quit. He did that with two or three other jobs too.

He got a job at a meat packing firm. He was supposed to get the cuts and put them in boxes. OSHA was not involved yet. This was way back. They were not very careful about

how they cut the meat. One day he was looking at all the meats coming down the runway there and he saw a hand. He said he got out of there; I don't know even if he was able to collect his money, but he said this is it.

He also got another job; I think this one was Schlitz.

JE: Schlitz beer?

JEc: Schlitz beer. He enjoyed it very much, but apparently he also learned to leave there. He went to two or three other places. Sheboygan he considered his hometown.

JE: Sheboygan, Wisconsin?

JEc: Sheboygan, Wisconsin. He considered that his hometown for some reason. They accepted him as the chanter of the church because he knew very well the order and the progression and whatever was required of a chanter, so they were very fortunate in getting him.

JE: Apparently then in Sheboygan, Wisconsin there must have been a number of Greeks living there?

JEc: Oh, yeah. Chicago was, I think, considered as the third largest Greek city as far as Greeks were concerned; Athens, Thessalonica and Chicago. There were a lot of Greeks that immigrated to that area.

JE: Somewhere along the line here all these jobs, it's not working for him at all?

JEc: No. Apparently, at some point two of his friends from the village entered the picture.

JE: The village, meaning...

JEc: From Retina, Greece.

JE: Where he's from?

JEc: Yeah. They said, we found something. It's in the food business and we think it's going to be great. It's like a finger food type situation where you didn't need a plate. You didn't need the napkin. You just grabbed it and that was the end of it. So, he decided I'll go and see, and they did. They liked the operation. The wieners were pre-cooked, of course, at the factory. The bread and everything else was fresh. All you had to do was steam the buns, put the wiener in and the mustard on top and you were in business.

JE: You heated the wiener too?

JEc: Yes. The wiener also was fully cooked, like I said, from the factory; smoked in the smokehouse. In fact, I would say that wieners coming out of the smokehouse, that's their peak of goodness. If you had a wiener from there, you probably would not eat wieners again.

JE: About what year is this that he's getting introduced to this food business?

JEc: This would have been about 1919.

JE: Where was that that his friends from the village said let's look at this?

JEc: The first store that they were able to open was in McKeesport, Pennsylvania.

JE: Is that where they were introduced to the concept?

JEc: They may have gone to New York and actually saw it.

JE: This idea of putting...

JEc: Apparently, it appealed all three of them. They said we're going to do this. We're going to take this concept, get the chairs, do this and do that. They were able to get a store ready in a few days, work it for six months, and the three thousand dollars that they put into the store. They would take that out after six months and sell it with an additional three thousand dollars coming in as profit. In other words, they'd spend three thousand, sell it for six thousand in six months, so they were doubling their money in six months.

JE: So each one put in a thousand dollars...

JEc: Yeah.

JE: ...which was a lot of money in 1919.

JEc: A lot of money in those days. Absolutely.

JE: Your father must have been a good saver then?

JEc: Well, he had nothing. He didn't buy anything. He didn't own a car. He couldn't see to drive a car. Life was quite simple.

JE: Saved a thousand dollars and it changed his life and family's life forever, basically.

JEc: That's quite true.

JE: They started the first store then in McKeesport, Pennsylvania.

JEc: Pennsylvania.

JE: They operated that for six months?

JEc: Yes. In the meantime, one of those people would leave and scout out other locations, maybe in different cities and maybe in the same city. Sometimes we had a couple of them in the same city.

JE: Did they go beyond Pennsylvania right away?

JEc: Oh, yeah. They were anxious to move around and open as many stores as possible. The idea was not to have a franchise, but to have stores that were ready to be sold. That was the sole idea of the Coney Island at that point.

JE: Then they probably went back to Wisconsin and built a store in Wisconsin?

JEc: I'm sure that they were all over Wisconsin, Montana, Washington. They came down to California. From California, they jumped over to Texas.

Chapter 04 - 3:49

Coney Island

John Erling: Was it called Coney Island then, from the beginning?

Jim Economou: Yes. In order to get a copyright on it, they were also calling it, Coney Island Hot Wieners. But in order to get the copyright, you had to misspell the word wieners.

Instead of W-I-E, as it should have been, they were spelling it W-E-I. So in the end, I was not very happy, I guess.

JE: I'm sure. When they saw this concept, it was more than just a hot dog in the bun then, wasn't it? Was the chili and all added at that point.

JEc: No, the chili came later.

JE: At first, they were just basically selling hot dogs.

JEc: Selling hot dogs. The coney came into the picture much later. When I say coney, I mean, with chili.

JE: They were called, coney islanders?

JEc: Not Coney Islanders, Coney Island. Coney islander came much later. We tried to copyright the word "coney island," and it was very difficult. There was a company that was selling ice cream, and coney. It had something to do with coney isle, or coney ice land, or something. It was too close. They wouldn't give us permission to copyright it. At some point, we were able to take the word coney islander. I think we had to pay these other people something. They said, OK, go ahead, as long as it didn't bother us. We were able to get a copyright on coney islander, but we always kept the word coney island, for the downtown store. Coney Island Hot Weiners, misspelled.

JE: The whole idea of a hot dog in a bun, didn't that start way back... Was it the World's Fair, or something, that comes to mind?

JEc: Yes. It was about 1890's. It was not a new idea, at all.

JE: No.

JEc: In fact, it was a very good idea.

JE: Right.

JEc: Here again, you had something you could hold in your hands. You didn't have to have any utensils. You were able to just take the sandwich, and walk. I think it was the Chicago World's Fair, I believe. I think that's where it started.

JE: Did it have any relation to Coney Island, in New York?

JEc: That's where they saw the original concept.

JE: They saw it put into production, in McKeesport, Pennsylvania. That's where they saw it, actually.

JEc: That's good. That's great.

JE: The idea goes back to Coney Island in New York.

JEc: That's right. The idea was not original.

JE: Then, where did the idea of the chili enter the picture?

JEc: The recipe and everything else started, as I understand it, in Texas, because people were, apparently, very hot about good chili. He came up with a nice recipe, which he later changed slightly, here and there. By the time I had knowledge of the recipe, it was pretty

well set. The only thing is, once I decided to change it slightly, which is a big mistake, on my part. People were used to less salt, than what they were used to, in the old days. In the old days, you could eat a lot of salt, and apparently, it didn't bother you.

Anyway, I changed to less salt, and one day I decided, let's go ahead and I'll try the original recipe, with the full amount of salt. At that point, I'd never heard such hollering from my customers. Fortunately, my customers are such that they'll holler. They won't say, "Something's changed. I'm not coming back." They don't do that. They hollered, "Is this going to change?"

I said, "Absolutely, it's going to change."

JE: Why did you feel the need to add more salt?

JEc: To get back to the original. The problem was, people were used to salt, in the old days, and they required it. Also, when it came to keeping chili, let's say a day or two or something that was a great preservative. There's nothing like salt, but today's tastes require less salt.

Chapter 05 - 2:31

Adding Chili

John Erling: Let's go back to adding the chili, because that was not a concept they'd seen someplace else. Was that your father who thought "Well, if we put chili on this hot dog that will make it even more appealing"?

Jim Economou: Apparently, they had seen the way other people were doing it down there. They were not the first ones to have the chili down there on a bun. Apparently, they felt that this was the next good move, and they would attract the people there. Apparently, he was able to come up with some sort of a recipe that the people liked.

JE: He created his own recipe.

JEc: Apparently. There was no such thing as going through the net and finding chili recipes and coming in and say "Well, this belongs here and that belongs there, and we'll have this and this and this." How are you going to do that with 60 pounds of meat and so and so forth? It doesn't work out.

JE: He had to do a fair amount of experimenting then.

JEc: Apparently, but then you pretty well would have had to have this particular spice in this particular spice. I think that they were able to come up with a good recipe almost from the first. Not the one that we know but a good one.

JE: It's changed over the years?

JEc: It changed there. By the time it came here to Tulsa it's been static, no problems whatsoever.

JE: To be clear, when they opened up it was just first a hot dog and a bun.

JEc: And mustard. They're may have been something else. I don't know. Apparently, not tomato paste or a mixture having anything with tomatoes. That would never have gone over with my father.

JE: Why?

JEc: Ketchup, for instance, has too much of a chilling taste. Once you put ketchup on something it doesn't make any difference how bad it is or how good it is; you will only taste the ketchup.

JE: It's not an enhancer.

JEc: No, it says you're eating a ketchup dog.

JE: So that's why he felt about tomatoes.

JEc: In fact, we still use the same reasoning today. A wiener from the standpoint of spices should be bland. The bun should be a type that can accept steam. In other words, if you tear open a bun you notice there may be little holes in there. Are they small holes, larger? The larger the hole, the better. These are all things that come into being. We pay very much attention to the way the bun is made, to the blandness of the wiener, just the right amount of mustard. But the chili must predominate. If it's not that, then you don't have a Coney Island Hot Weiner's Coney.

Chapter 06 - 4:40

Coney Island in Tulsa

John Erling: Track 2 is then how your father is getting to Tulsa.

Jim Economou: Well, they had opened 2 stores, I believe it was in Dallas. They were both in the downtown area, but one was almost right next to the Adolphus Hotel, about a block away from that. They felt that it was time to sell. One of the person that wanted to buy it, his first name was James. If you are familiar with James Coney Islands in Houston right now, he bought it out. He was working for Cain's Coffee at the time. He said, "I'd like to have a business of my own." He bought them out.

They immediately wanted to go to either Oklahoma City, or to Tulsa. He left there, tried to find a place here in Tulsa, and established himself. He found a bank, found the money, found a place that he could open up. That was 311 South Boulder, and was able to negotiate an opening for January of '26.

JE: He came here and opened up in 1926.

JEc: Yeah.

JE: You remember the bank that he used when he first came?

JEc: Yeah, Exchange National Bank, which is Bank Oklahoma.

JE: He came to town with some money in his pockets.

JEc: Oh yeah.

JE: Because he had been working this now for several years.

JEc: That's right.

JE: Opening, selling, opening selling, so he was probably considered, I don't know if it was wealthy or not, but he had some money.

JEc: He did. That was one of the reasons he phoned his brother to find a good woman.

JE: Now his two friends, they didn't come with him to Tulsa?

JEc: Not immediately, but they came later. At that time they also said, "Well, will you look for some other places?" My Dad said, "Nope. I'm staying put right here. This is the end. I like the church that we have here in Tulsa." He decided he was going to stay right here. No more movements for him.

JE: What did they do?

JEc: They decided as long as that was the end of the Coney trips, that they were going to stay here and help him also. Both decided eventually to leave. After two or three years, one went back to Greece, and the other one left I think it was about 1936. They both stayed for quite a while.

JE: That was nice. Your father probably could have done this on his own.

JEc: Absolutely.

JE: But he allowed them to come because they'd helped him all the three.

JEc: They'd helped him too.

JE: He opens where the Tulsa World is now, and 311 South Boulder. Is it Coney Island or Coney Islander that I should be saying?

JEc: Coney Island.

JE: It is Coney Island. Again the Coney Islander, that belongs to somebody else, are you...

JEc: Well, when we made the new stores, at that time we had seven. We decided instead of calling it Coney Island, that we needed to have some sort of a copyright on the name, so we decided, "Let's play around with the words, see if we can't find some good way of doing it," and we happened to find islander. Now, I think that was also a team from New England, there was The Islanders or something, I forgot what they were ... We thought this would probably clench it. Of course we had some problems after that, but we were able to get the copyright.

JE: So, you could be known as Coney Islander.

JEc: Islander, that's right. Later on I sold the six.

JE: But it's known as Coney Island as he opened up at 311 South Boulder.

JEc: Correct.

JE: How much did a Coney Island cost at that time?

JEc: Coney Island, up to 1942 was 5 cents a piece.

JE: What did he have in a 5 cent Coney Island? A penny or two? How much was he making on each?

JEc: That's a good question. I don't know. I would say possibly making at least 1 or 2 cents.

JE: Was it a success as soon as he opened his doors?

JEc: They started off very well.

JE: It was a success to begin with.

JEc: It was a success, but they're also opening at the time of the Depression. He was telling me that certain times of the day for instance, they would go back to the kitchen and play cards. Business was that bad.

JE: In 1929.

JEc: He remembers '30. Now he does not remember '29 because he was in Greece starting with '28. When he came back to this country, we're in the middle of a depression, and he didn't know what the word depression meant. It didn't make any sense to him. Finally, they were able to tell him, "There's no business. We're having problems here. People are just not spending. People don't have anything to spend." That was his first identification with the word "depression."

JE: He'd gone back to Greece to meet his bride.

JEc: That's right.

JE: That's why he was back there.

JEc: That's right.

JE: Then he came back here in '30, and that's when he confronts the Depression.

Chapter 07 - 2:56

Food-Moves-Work

John Erling: I'm thinking about you. By the time you were six or seven, you had eaten a ton of Coney Islands.

Jim Economou: No, I would eat one whenever I was able to get a chance to, but that was about it. I didn't eat that many.

JE: Well what did you eat at home?

JEc: My mother always cooked at the house. Maybe we were able to get a piece of lamb or something if we were lucky enough, and she would cut it up into small pieces like a stew. She would go out and actually pick dandelions and other things, and bring them in and cook them. People were really hurting.

JE: But there was no bringing home Coney Islands to serve at home.

JEc: No, no, no.

JE: Completely separate.

JEc: If you wanted Coney Islands, you'd have to walk to Third and Boulder.

JE: That was probably a real treat for you to do that.

JEc: Well, I always enjoyed going there. In fact, I said, “Can I work here on Saturdays,” and he said, “Yeah.” Starting about the age of nine, I would be there, and I’d earn enough money just to go to the show. By that time, I would go to the Realta that had a double feature, maybe get some popcorn. We’re talking about 10 cents, 15 cents, 20 cents, at the most. There’s a number of people that come in and said, “You know, I had a quarter, I had 35 cents.” It would cost me a nickel on the bus to go to the show, have a Coney, have a drink, and go back. This is not uncommon. It was very common. I’ve heard that from a number of people, in fact some people come in and said, “My grandfather brought me at the old store, and now I’m bringing my children, my grandchildren.”

JE: Remember when you were nine years old, what the first job was that you had in the store?

JEc: I think it was picking up dishes. That would mean that I couldn’t get into too much trouble. My Dad had his office in the back. He had a desk that he had all the information on, but it always looked like it was mixed up. One day, I decided I’m going to fix everything perfect. I have all these invoices here, all this information here, those papers over here, and I was very proud of it. My Dad came in, he said, “Oh no, I can’t find anything!” When it was a mess, he could find everything. I truly enjoyed working there. In fact, later on when I was able to make Cones and so on so forth, my Dad would say, “Well, we now have to go home for a little bit so I can rest.”

I couldn’t understand why he would want to go home and rest when there was such a wonderful way of living just working, and taking care of people, and making sandwiches, and so on so forth. I couldn’t understand that, but anyway, we’d leave. We’d walk, go back home, then later on we’d come back and work till about 11 or 12 o’clock at night, on Saturdays it was 1.

JE: You really put in a long time, 9, 10, 11 years old.

JEc: Yeah, and I didn’t even know that I was...

JE: It wasn’t work to you.

JEc: It wasn’t work at all. It is now.

Chapter 08 - 4:48

Depression - Dust Bowl

John Erling: How did that work through those years of depression? Did he talk about that? Did people come in asking for food, wanting free food?

Jim Economou: My, goodness, yes. I don’t know how many people he was feeding all the time. Whatever he was making...They weren’t making that much, but he was getting, and the others were giving food to people. It’s amazing that you mention that, because people

coming into the store, years later, and saying, "You did this for us. You fed us then." They would say, "I'd like to pay you." That was great.

JE: Yeah.

JEc: It was wonderful. It was wonderful that he was able to afford to do that. Believe me, from what I heard, it was very, very difficult for him.

JE: But because he'd been successful in business before he came to Tulsa, that apparently sustained him through those tough years. I'm sure he was dipping into his reserve to make this happen.

JEc: There was no great reserves. It was just enough, but they were able to buy things, and instead of having them delivered, they would go out and actually carry them back to the store, and save a little money there.

JE: I wonder if there were suppliers at that time?

JEc: The true suppliers had their own problems. In fact, just even lately, we don't have any real suppliers here in Tulsa. Everything's moved to Oklahoma City, and if I need something, they'll deliver it here. If I call early in the morning, I can have it late in the afternoon here in Tulsa.

But he would know where to go get them. For instance, our wieners were made by Swift, under the viaduct in downtown Tulsa. They had a special meat operation there. You talk about fantastic wieners. This person was just...He would have made any German sausage maker proud. They would go there, and they would walk the two or three blocks, bring back the wieners, and...On bread or whatever the company was at that particular time would deliver so many dozens per day.

The other stuff, they could usually get that from grocery stores or whatever. Spend as little money as possible, and get as much product as needed for that day. In other words, we're talking day to day, instead of I'm getting enough here to last me a week, like we do now, or last me a month.

JE: 1930 was a big year for your father, because that was the year you came to be.

JEc: That's right. The first child.

JE: You had siblings?

JEc: Yes, two sisters. One came in '33. The other one in '43. The first one was Popi, and the youngest sister is Georgia.

JE: And Georgia is still with you.

JEc: Yes, at the downtown store.

JE: Downtown store, right. Here he is in the Depression in 1930, struggling, and he has a newborn child, so it was kind of tough for him probably.

JEc: It was tough for everybody. For instance, I remember as a very young child, how were we going to be cool for that day. My dad apparently had bought a large wash basin or

something. Every day this person would bring in fifty pounds of ice. They would deliver it right to the house with a horse drawn carriage. Bring it in. Put it in that tub, and then have a fan blowing from the other side off of the ice, hitting me and my mother to make sure that we were cooled off for the day.

JE: Where were you living at that time?

JEc: 214 West Eighth, very close to Eighth and Denver. I, also, remember going to school, '36, '37.

JE: Your first school was?

JEc: Holy Family, just a block away from us. Every time we'd go out to play, and there's no telling how much dust was coming into our mouths and through our noses and into the lungs. We'd come back, sit in the classroom, and we'd take ten minutes just to clean off the desks. The windows were open. They had to be open. You're talking about temperatures of a hundred. No air conditioning, plus we were at the schools. Whenever I'd go downtown or something, I'd have to wear a bandana across my face like the old time criminals, in order to keep the dust away.

It was real hot, and you'd sweat black sweat from the dust. Not very nice years.

JE: Dust bowl.

JEc: Dust bowl. Very horrible-horrible time.

JE: This is when people were leaving the state of Oklahoma. Those of you in the city, fortunate enough that you were able to have a business, instead of living off the land, so that's what sustained you and your family to be able to survive those dust bowl days.

JEc: It was very tough going, beginning to end.

Chapter 09 - 0:58

December 7, 1941

John Erling: By the time 1941 arrives, you're eleven years old. Do you remember December 7, 1941 and the announcement of Pear Harbor?

Jim Economou: Yes, I had heard it in church. They said that they had bombed Pearl Harbor. To me, the words, Pearl Harbor, didn't mean anything. I said, "Where in the world is that? What does that have to do with us?" Had they said Hawaii, I would've understood immediately, but it was during that day, later on, that I was in the know, but not before that.

JE: Do you remember any adults talking or people who were nervous?

JEc: Well, I noticed the next day, two or three of our people said, "Be sure and find somebody, because I'm going to the Army."

JE: People working in the store?

JEc: Two, right off. They said, "We're leaving."

JE: All of a sudden you were losing some very good people.

JEc: Immediately. They were ready to go and they said, "We'll stay until you're able to find somebody." Back in those days, you could find people who'll anxious to do work.

Chapter 10 - 2:25

Downtown Tulsa

John Erling: What are your remembrances of downtown Tulsa, other stores that you might remember?

Jim Economou: Oh, my goodness, great stores. Brown-Duncan's, Seidenbach's, Streets, Sears, downtown. I used to go all the time. When the malls finally opened up after the second world war, that caused severe problems for the downtown area. People were not coming downtown.

Why should they come downtown when they can be in the mall, protected from the elements and have virtually the same buying opportunities as they would have downtown? They wouldn't have to walk and they wouldn't have to pay and park and so forth.

JE: That came along about...

JEc: Right after the war. I would say about '47, '48, somewhere in through there.

JE: Yeah.

JEc: We had problems.

JE: The business of Coney's had a problem. You were losing them to the mall areas.

JEc: Yes, the right.

JE: South.

JEc: That's right.

JE: That was another struggle.

JEc: Another struggle and one that we eventually fell into and we said we're going to open up stores in these areas. That's when we started to move out. One of the people that I was a partner with said, "this is the time to do something like this." He was able to raise the money. Two of us put in our time and expertise. We were able to open up additional six or seven stores more.

JE: They were friends of yours?

JEc: Yeah, one was Michael Moscus. He was with IBM. The other one was Chuck Kingsley. All 3 of us were responsible for the newer stores.

JE: They hadn't worked the store?

JEc: Chuck had worked at the downtown store for a little bit. Later, he was in charge of the new stores, opening and staffing.

JE: You know, Tulsa, oil boomtown in the 30's and all. It was a vibrant, downtown area, wasn't it?

JEc: Very much alive.

JE: So, was your store then in those days.

JEc: Oh, yeah, yeah. I was sorry to see the oil industry leave. We had some problems, like I said, but this is life and you get used to it. You say, "I'm going to survive," and go from there. Whatever it takes, we'll do it.

JE: That's when you then decided you needed to spread out into the community and take the business...

JEc: We had to.

JE: You came out here. You had a store at 71st and Memorial. It's still there.

JEc: It's still there. We had one across the street from TU on 11th Street. We had one at Admiral and Memorial, a number of stores.

Chapter 11 - 4:30

Price Controls

John Erling: When we see Coneys being sold, they're not using the name Coney Island, are they? Because you see the concept of Coneys being sold in other stores?

Jim Economou: Yes, there is. There's 20 some odd stores here in Tulsa. Saturated.

JE: They're presenting it as either Coneys- They're not calling them Coney Island or Coney Islanders?

JEc: No. They can't. One company did. We sent them a nice letter asking them to stop, cease and desist. They did.

JE: They may just say Coneys, and they can do that?

JEc: Yeah. Apparently, the word Coney is not a copyrightable word. Virtually, no store uses the word Coney Island. They may say somebody's first name Coney Island. There's 2 or 3 stores that use a name in front of the words Coney Island. They can do that.

JE: In 1946, then, when the Tulsa World expanded, the store moved?

JEc: Yes. We had to move.

JE: It moved to...?

JEc: 108 West 4th. That used to be a barber shop, and apparently the person had sleeping quarters in the back. We were able to get that particular location. Apparently, he didn't want the lease anymore. Everybody was happy about it. We went in there and we did everything, new flooring, new drains, electrical, everything. We were able to open up in a couple of months. We opened in December of that year.

JE: Of '46?

JEc: Of '46. Yeah. When we opened, we opened at 10 cents.

JE: In the new location?

JEc: New location. From 8 cents, we went to 10 cents.

JE: Did that cause...?

JEc: Not really. The only problem we had was during the war when we were at 5 cents. Finally, he was able to get OK from the OPA. They would tell you what kind of prices that you could do and what you couldn't do. This was retail, having to do with the customer directly. Retail customers came under the OPA. The wholesalers could raise prices, but we couldn't raise prices. Finally, we were able to go from 5 cents to 6 cents, and that was when the proverbial fan got into the picture. How can you go to 6 cents? How can you go one penny? That's a 20% rise, which is very true, unfortunately. One cent is still one cent. That was the only real problem we had, that one penny. The next time, we went to 7 cents; virtually nobody said anything.

JE: Did the government control retail costs?

JEc: Oh, they controlled everything. We were trying to get sugar, for instance, you had problems getting sugar. You had problems getting meat. It got to the point for...We had what we call a 6-inch Coney, which maybe was about 6-inches. Had them cut it down to 5-inch Cones and make the wieners from a 5-inch wiener to a 4-inch wiener. Everything was downsized in order to keep a price within the guidelines of the government, and the government didn't say anything.

He could have done a trick, which other people were doing, but he didn't want to even think about it. Once you were an established store, you had to go through them even for a penny or 2 pennies or whatever it was that you wanted to raise the price of the Cones. He could have sold the store to someone and then re-buy the store a week later and establish new prices. The OPA didn't care. They would say okay, you started with a new store. A lot of people did that. A lot of people did that.

JE: Why weren't they concerned about the price setting of a new store?

JEc: New stores came under different rules. You could price it any way you wanted. You could even out-price it to the point where nobody would come into the store. They didn't care.

JE: Your father chose not to go that route?

JEc: Nope. He didn't. Once he finished with that store and moved to the other one on 4th Street, then he was able to get to the 10 cents that he needed.

JE: During the war years?

JEc: During the war years.

JE: They were controlling prices?

JEc: They were controlling prices and continuing to control prices even afterwards because they didn't want inflation. Inflation to them was ... and today is a bad word.

JE: When he did move to West 4th Street, then he could establish his own prices?

JEc: That's right.

JE: Then increase perhaps down through the years and he was never under any...?

JEc: As far as I remember, there were nothing that would have prevented him from raising prices.

Chapter 12 - 3:47

School Desks

John Erling: You have school desks in your present store here.

Jim Economou: That's right. We've always had it.

JE: Did your father use school desks?

JEc: Yes.

JE: From the beginning?

JEc: From the very beginning. The reason being he never wanted a table. For instance, he had a small table with four chairs. One person sits at that table, that's the end of the other three chairs. You can't use them. One person is sitting at the table. I can't go and say, may I join you. It just doesn't quite work out. He had what he would consider his customer's own space. He had his table. He had his chair. This particular area was all his. Nobody would bother him. Nobody would say can I use your table because the table didn't amount to more than one foot by one foot.

JE: Did the idea of using school desks start with your father here in Tulsa, or had they used that concept back—

JEc: Before. In fact, now that you mention it, I was at the original store in Houston, the James Coney Island, and they were using chairs similar to what we were using. But their table, instead of being squared like ours are, was more round and a little bit bigger. Apparently, the concept always remained the same. We've said it before, "You could have a bank manager sitting right next to somebody that's working out on the streets. It didn't make any difference." You had yours. He has his.

JE: In your present location now at West Fourth Street you are the only one who is kind of remaining true to the spirit including using your school desks because in the other locations nobody uses school desks.

JEc: That's right. They didn't see it that way. They felt that by having tables you would encourage bigger crowds, which I can understand. But it didn't make much sense to me. Anyway, that's the way they wanted it.

JE: That was a point of discussion then whether we're going to use school desks or use normal booths and that type of thing when you expanded to the six stores?

JEc: Yeah. Also trying to find these type of desks and chairs was very difficult. You could not find a manufacturer. We tried to find somebody here in Tulsa that would do it. He took measurements. I believe that the cost of making that chair was astronomical. It wasn't worth it.

JE: These school desks that you're presently using do they go way, way back?

JEc: Oh, yeah.

JE: To even your father's original store?

JEc: We have seven chairs that go back to the original, up against the wall there. Those chairs were probably old even then. My dad never bought anything brand new. The reason he didn't buy anything brand new was because he figured if you could find something that was used and good, why spend money buying it brand new. Everything that we had in there was used at some point. Even the grill was used, and it's still in fantastic shape. The only thing new that he had bought was the newer blond chairs, not the ones up against the wall but the others around. Those are newer. When they come into being was about 1945 after the war. He bought a whole bunch of them. For some reason or other, the other chairs he got rid of. Why, I don't know.

JE: He took a lot of those new ones then to the new location at 108 West Fourth Street?

JEc: All of them.

JE: But you still have seven desks that go back to his original store.

JEc: Original...and they were probably old. We had two fans that I still have that probably are more than a hundred years old, probably built right around the...in fact the names of the fans are century, so it must have been 1900 or right in through there. We still have those, and we were unable to put them into the new store for some reason or another.

Chapter 13 - 2:46

Celebrities

JE: Down through the years and as a young person, do you remember celebrities or names of people that would come in, oil people, or the Skellys, or anybody that you...

JEc: No, I remember the Skelly building was right down the corner from us, exactly Fourth and Boulder. Mr. Skelly would come in on occasions. The only thing he would buy was chili. Nothing else. No Coneys, chili only. He loved it.

JE: What kind of a person was Bill Skelly as a customer?

JEc: He looked intent as he was eating chili. I remember that. When he did something, he was right on that particular problem. He sat very close to the door. Back in those days, of course, like I said, we did not have air conditioning. We had fans. Even in a hundred,

hundred and five, hundred and ten, any movement of air seems to help, no matter how hot it is.

We had a number of people...Mrs. Bush came to the store once.

JE: That would be President H.W.?

JEc: Forty-one.

JE: Forty-one. Wife, Barbara?

JEc: Barbara came in to the store accompanied by two Oklahoma Highway Patrolmen. They must have been each nine or ten feet tall. They were big. They were sitting down, drinking coffee and so on and so forth. I remember that very distinctly.

JE: When I think about your father coming from the old country and doing what he did to survive, when did he die?

JEc: October '73.

JE: I don't know how to ask this question, but when he died, he must have been well off, wealthy, somewhere? He had accumulated a fair amount of money?

JEc: No. He was well off as far as he was concerned. As I remember, I had gone through some of his old IRS papers. The most he ever made was seventeen thousand.

JE: In a year?

JEc: In a year. That was closer to the end. It was almost a tragedy I guess. Some people make that much in a month.

JE: Was that because business had gone down?

JEc: No. It's just how much he was charging for the Coneys. He never wanted to charge too much for the Coneys, because that would set up the opportunity for somebody else to come in and say, "He's way over charging," and take the business away from him. He never wanted that.

Consequently, whatever he had, it was okay for him.

JE: And it provided a comfortable life for his family?

JEc: Yeah. The only problem I had was even when we're talking about food, the only thing I hated was walking into the house and smelling boiled broccoli, and I knew I was in for it. One time she said, "Aren't you going to eat the boiled broccoli," and I said, "No." There was screaming. It was a sensation that I don't want to repeat again.

Chapter 14 - 3:51

From Education to Coney's

John Erling: When did you then come in and as an adult take over the business?

Jim Economou: Let's see, we got married in '55, went immediately to the army, and then in '57 and '57, I was in Oklahoma City teaching. 1958 through '61, I taught three years here in Tulsa.

JE: Which school?

JEc: Cleveland, Grover Cleveland. At that time, one of the people that was working there, the manager, decided to open up his own places. I presume you may have heard of him, Jim Saconis, on 21st and Harvard. I said, "It would be a great opportunity for me." He said, "But you're teaching." I said, "That's alright considering the fact that I never made \$300 take-home pay."

JE: \$300 a what?

JEc: A month.

JE: Teaching?

JEc: Teaching.

JE: At Cleveland?

JEc: At Cleveland.

JE: Was that a junior high?

JEc: Junior high.

JE: Ninth graders, you were teaching?

JEc: Ninth, eighth and seventh.

JE: Then you decided to take over the business.

JEc: In a manner of speaking, I mean, my dad was still the owner but I would be the manager.

JE: You were both teaching and working the store there for a while?

JEc: No. Once I quit teaching, I was able to start in full-time there at the store. In the meantime, during the summers and so on and so forth, I would work at the stores.

JE: Again, you actually came into the business in '61?

JEc: 1961 as a manager, yes.

JE: When did you become the?

JEc: '73.

JE: When he passed away?

JEc: Passed away.

JE: You were able to increase your monthly.

JEc: It was like the difference between light and dark. It was that much. I could afford a car. I could afford gasoline. It was quite something.

JE: Were you enjoying that? I mean, this is something you enjoyed when you said you were nine years old, couldn't understand why your father went home to take a rest.

JEc: Absolutely.

JE: Did you still have that buzz for the business?

JEc: Yes, yes, yes. But eventually by the time I got to be sixty, seventy, that particular thing started to wear off. I was looking forward to going home and resting.

JE: The years were good to you and what challenges did you have then upon your father's passing from '73 on? Did you face some challenges to the business as severe as, say, his were?

JEc: I don't believe it was anything as severe as that. We did have some sort of downturns. Other stores were opening up, not Coney Islands, but we were all fighting for the same food dollar. Something like 17 different stores at that particular time that were close to us, a block or two blocks away from us. A number of restaurants and we came up with some specials which worked.

In fact, one of them still works. We had a beer special for half price if you buy two Coneys or something. If you bought three Coneys, you would get a large drink free. That has continued. In fact, people expect it. One time we stopped it. If you were to look at a graph how fast a line can fall, it was drastic and we decided to re-introduce the special which has worked very well for us and we're very happy with it, and people are very happy with it also.

JE: Then, at the same time here, within your business group, you have the other stores going too, don't you?

JEc: Well, up until I think it was 1990 that I sold.

JE: Did you own the other six stores? Not outright, did you?

JEc: No, it was with the other three.

JE: Right.

JEc: In the meantime, Mike sold, there was a problem there and he died very suddenly. He had a problem with his pancreas. Anyway, he sold and Chuck and I took over. When I finally sold, I sold to Chuck. It was a one-way deal. I was not to buy him out but he was to buy me out, and he did. From there, I was able to do other things. Finally moved to a better location.

JE: That year when he bought you out?

JEc: 1990.

Chapter 15 - 3:18

Recipe

John Erling: Does it make you feel good to know that this business that you have is so part of the spirit of Tulsa, so embedded in the very fiber of our community, that when you name iconic businesses, Coney Island is right there.

Jim Economou: Makes me feel very good. The reason that we have kept up for 85 years is due to fantastic customer base. I think the people in Tulsa have really looked out for us, helped us to survive. We've been written up in the newspaper I don't know how many times. The

mayor came to the birthday party and gave us a proclamation. We have that right over the cash register, so we're very proud of that.

We have been looking out for the people, and they've been looking out for us. So, it's a good combination.

JE: The recipe that you use in that down store is not duplicated in any other Coney store in Tulsa. Is that true?

JEc: True, up to a point. Basically, the same, but there's one group of spices that we call sweet spices. One of them would be, let's say, cinnamon, and then two or three others. Apparently, they didn't find that to be any great importance so that exact formula is slightly different. It's correct up to the point where you commit to the sweet spices. Nutmegs, so on and so forth—those are out. I don't know why.

JE: You mean in the other...

JEc: In the other places.

JE: And you've kept to that.

JEc: Oh, yes. Those are very strong spices. You put that in through the chiles and you have a very special taste to it. In fact, even after you finish you notice them. Spices are just not what people think as being hot. That's not it. It's the total flavor; that's what's so important.

JE: Again, the recipe you're using, you've stuck to the basics.

JEc: That's right.

JE: The other stores could if they wanted to, of the six.

JEc: Yes, but apparently at one time it was costing a lot to get those particular spices made separately. That's why they didn't use them and apparently people didn't notice it or something. They said as long as people are not hollering about it, let's keep it like it is.

JE: Is your recipe put together in your store or is it put together off premise?

JEc: It's put together in Texas. We used to be in Maryland. Before that we were in Illinois. Other companies were doing it. In other words, we'd have an agreement that they can't reveal what amounts they're using, very strong agreements. This particular one is out of San Antonio, Texas. They do everything for us, the mixing and everything else. Plus, they're using all the correct spices, the sweet spices also included in that.

JE: Not to belabor the point, but the Jim's Coney Island are not privy to your recipe at all.

JEc: Well, Jim worked there. He had seen generally what we were doing, but as being exact, no.

JE: Because you have a patent on it.

JEc: We don't have a patent on that. What have an agreement with the people that are making the spices, but not a patent. In fact, you don't want to have that patent.

JE: Why don't you want to have that patent?

JEc: Because that would become public knowledge?

JE: So it's a secret recipe that will remain...

JEc: Secret.

JE: Secret.

JEc: Yes.

Chapter 16 - 1:51

Family Owned

JE: What happens to your store when you pass on?

JEc: Well, my granddaughter is interested.

JE: How old is she now?

JEc: Twenty-one. She's talking special classes at TCC and doing quite well. She feels that she could work and of course my helping her and getting to the business and everything else, that would do some good.

JE: That would make you feel good that it remains in the family.

JEc: Oh yeah, that it remains in the family. Not only that but the true owners after I'm gone would be my two sons, Chris and Anthony.

JE: Right now Chris is here...

JEc: He's here, right.

JE: ...in this building where we are but he's an investment lawyer, and Anthony is what?

JEc: An ophthalmologist. He's also very interested in the store. In other words, they would be like the owners and my granddaughter would be running it on a day-to-day basis. There would be strong people at the tiller, so it wouldn't go off base. Everything would stay pretty well where it's going now.

JE: Your brother-in-law works there with you there on the line in your present store.

JEc: That's correct.

JE: What's his name?

JEc: Costa Tsilekas.

JE: He's been with you for many years?

JEc: I would say almost forty, almost forty years.

JE: He's worked for you, working the counter everyday.

JEc: And mixing the chili and doing a number of odd jobs. Everybody knows exactly what they're supposed to be doing and they do it.

JE: Any other relatives working in the line?

JEc: Georgia.

JE: Is your...

JEc: My sister.

JE: Is your sister.

JEc: Now my granddaughter is also working there two days a week.

JE: Her name is?

JEc: Caitlin. Also the two grandsons very much interested in it but they have their own businesses. One is in the movie industry, not as an actor. It looks like he's going to be in the production company. The other one is an attorney. He will be giving his finals in about another month or so. He's finished there and he has a job in Houston.

Chapter 17 - 7:18

Jim, the Musician

John Erling: Let's just quickly say that before you got into the Coney business full time, you went to central high school, and you went to college at TU? A lot of people probably don't know that you are musical. You started playing which instrument?

Jim Economou: Well, I was started on violin. Probably about the age of four. I'd been at this for some time. We were very fortunate to have Tusca Berger Kramer. I don't know if you've heard of her, Doctor Kramer. She was once also a principal conductor of the symphony before it became the Philharmonic. Well, that came into being in 1948, at which time she was able to be the first chair violinist. There was a time when H. Arthur Brown started the orchestra here.

JE: You played in the Tulsa Philharmonic, the viola.

JEc: Viola from 1948 from the very first concert. I was there from '48 to '65. In the meantime, we had two other great conductors. Vladimir Goldschmen from St. Louis. Mark Artouri was also there.

JE: You were an accomplished musician into college?

JEc: Well, yes, I also had a Hef Scholarship by playing in the orchestra at school. For the year, for 16, 17 hours I think it was paying \$150. That's what I was doing while I was teaching also. I was with the opera orchestra. I was with the ballet orchestra. I was with the Philharmonic. I was with groups that would play for institutions that had to do with older people. It was a number of things that we did. Plus, I was working at the store. In other words, four or five jobs, plus teaching.

JE: At Cleveland...

JEc: At Cleveland Junior College.

JE: You were teaching instruments then?

JEc: Oh, yeah. I had my degree in instrumental music.

JE: You also took some time out and you went and enlisted in the army.

JEc: Yes, I went in as a corporal with five years, which was the equivalent of a sergeant. Finally, I did leave as a sergeant.

JE: In '50...

JEc: July of '55.

JE: Why did you go in in '55? We weren't in any...

JEc: Well no, but I had just gotten out of school, and just wanted to have a good opportunity.

Because I had also heard that the army had a great symphony orchestra of its own, which is unbelievable to some people today. These people were from conservatories, from the Universities. We had at that time three doctorates for music. We had an exceptional group of people there, and we still meet on occasions.

JE: You played with the army symphony.

JEc: It was called the Seventh Army Symphony Orchestra.

JE: Seventh Army Symphony Orchestra, for a couple of years?

JEc: 18 months. 150 concerts.

JE: You were stationed...

JEc: Stuttgart, but when you say stationed, that was really just a temporary thing. We were constantly moving around. Constantly.

JE: Representing our country.

JEc: To show them that there's a little bit different view of the American soldier than what you had seen previously.

JE: You played throughout Germany?

JEc: East Germany, Holland, we played France twice. We went to Greece.

JE: To go back to Greece for you had to be a special feeling.

JEc: That was really fantastic, because I also was a translator. Then all of a sudden when I got over there, I thought I spoke very good Greek, which I did, but when it came to very specific words, I had to do some looking up. For instance, the word "truck." I had never used the word truck in conversation, so my Greek became even better.

JE: When you went back with the Seventh Army Symphony to Greece, did you come anywhere near the villages where your parents came from?

JEc: No, but I did go.

JE: To their villages.

JEc: Absolutely. We went as far as Thessaloniki. There was a cousin there that I took a train and visited. We were also housed at the American Agricultural Institution. It was very interesting because they had bought the worst possible land that they could find to show the people no matter what you buy, if you know how to use it and you know how to take care of it, you're going to grow a great crop. That's exactly what they did, and there was a lot of people from Greece always attending that. We were very happy to be there. Then we did Patras, we had a concert there. We had a concert in the port city of Athens, which is Piraeus. Also in Athens twice. We moved around and we had a great time also.

JE: The book was written about that experience. I saw where there was a gentleman who was a conductor, his name was Bill Adler.

JEc: Yes. They decided to make a symphony orchestra, but the problem is they didn't have anybody to really head it up, and to really pick out the people that were needed. The quality of people that they needed. They found Mr. Adler, and he was instrumental in going around to, I hate to use the word "raid," all the bands and get all the best players, but he did. Then they also started to audition people from these conservatories and Universities in the United States. I did an audition in Arkansas with one of the band directors. He said, "OK," but the true audition was in Stuttgart.

I was pretty lucky to get in, because at that particular moment there were 10 violas, which is a massive amount of violas, and 2 of us coming in. I didn't have any music. He had just finished playing Bach's second one for viola, and I said, "Can I use your music?" I did the same thing. Apparently, somebody had said to them, "Listen. We're losing two or three people in about another month. We better keep them." They kept us.

JE: I brought up Bill Adler's name because he was Jewish. In Germany, he had to leave that country, and then for him to come back as a musician heading up this orchestra in Germany, I'm sure all of you felt the strong significance of that.

JEc: One of the big things that we were supposed to do is show the Germany public a good side of the United States. Not only that, but we were able to have continually our concerts were free. I'm going to use the word "sold out." Sold out concerts everywhere, except one concert. There was only sixteen people there. What happened was, the Russians came into Hungary. That day, nobody showed up except sixteen. There was a little bit of discussion. "Should we play the concert? Should we not play the concert? There's only sixteen people out there? What should we do?" It finally came down to somebody saying, "For the sake of the sixteen, let's play the concert," and we played.

JE: Weren't some of your concerts so overflowing that people would stand outside?

JEc: Stand outside, stand in the aisles.

JE: One concert they stood outside and it began to rain, and they stayed anyway despite the rain, just to hear...

JEc: Just to hear the concert.

JE: ...The United States Seventh Army Symphony.

JEc: Yup. Yeah, it was quite exciting.

JE: You were very fortunate to have that experience.

JEc: And to have it at that time.

JE: Yeah, and you're obviously very accomplished.

Chapter 18 - 2:21**Tulsa Institution**

John Erling: You have school desks in your present store here.

Jim Economou: That's right. We've always had it.

JE: We didn't mention your wife and her name.

JEc: Becky.

JE: Her name is Becky. When did you meet her?

JEc: Met her at the end of '53. I think it was Christmas of '53. We got married in June of '55.

JE: And where did you meet her?

JEc: We had a church get together, a picnic. We saw each other then.

JE: To this very day she is with you.

JEc: Yes, oh yes. Yes.

JE: And you've been married how many years?

JEc: Well, it would be '56 coming up.

JE: Well, you've lived a very good life all because...

JEc: (laughing) All because of a good woman.

JE: A good woman, but overall because of this little thing that I'm beginning to hunger for right now, a coney.

JEc: Coney has been good to us, and I hope we've been very good to the public and to Tulsa. Occasionally we have thought, well, we could have dropped the coney and retired, and we just can't, we still can't do it. We feel like we're part of Tulsa and if we were to retire entirely it would be a disservice. And I don't know why I think that but...

JE: It would be a gap there. There's no question.

JEc: There, there's...it would be different.

JE: Not long ago a friend of mine said...They were showing somebody new to Tulsa. They were showing him all the sights, and one of the things they had to do is take him to your downtown store to show him and have them experience the coney.

JEc: It's strange that you were mentioning that because just last Friday we had a group from Vietnam, lawyers from Vietnam, come to the store, say "Well, we were told to come here." (laughing) Had this whole bunch of them. We took pictures and we will have it on our Facebook here shortly. You know, it's nice to have people that direct others because it's one place that you have not visited. Go downtown.

JE: And here you just mentioned the social media Facebook. You have a Facebook for the store.

JEc: Absolutely.

JE: And so those things have changed and come new but the coney has...

JEc: Has...

JE: ...always remained the same.

JEc: ...remained pretty well the same, yes.

JE: Well Jim, thank you so much for this time. And now this story can be heard forever and ever and ever because of the internet. If you were to put a big bow on all of this, what would it be?

JEc: It's great to be living in Tulsa. This was a godsend.

JE: Very good. Thank you, Jim.

JEc: Thank you so much.

Chapter 19 - 0:33

Conclusion

Announcer: (music) This oral history presentation is made possible through the support of our generous foundation funders. We encourage you to join them by making your donation, which will allow us to record future stories.

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