

**VOICES OF THE CAPE FEAR  
INTERVIEW WITH BENJAMIN D. SCHWARTZ**

**JULY 21, 1995**

**INTRODUCTION**

**This is Sam Bissette, the date is July the 20th at three o'clock in the afternoon and I'm at the home of Bennie Schwartz at 205 Forest Hills Drive. I'm going to talk with Bennie a little while this afternoon and see if I can get him to tell me about some of his experiences in life in Wilmington, a little about him, a little about politics, a little about several things and so we'll see if we can do that now and maybe have something that would be worthwhile to include in a group along with other people that have been a part of making Wilmington and New Hanover County.**

INTERVIEWER: Bennie, I want to see if we can start at the beginning. The beginning of course for most of us is where we were born and were you born in Wilmington? Start me off there.

SCHWARTZ: I was not born in Wilmington. I was born in Poland, a little small village in Poland and my parents found that living was very hard. So my father said as soon as he could, that he was going to the United States. He was going to apply for entrance into the United States. A week after I was born, you had circumcision in our religion, so my father waited until the 8th day after I was born and told us good-bye and he left for the United States. I did not see my father until four and a half years later when he sent for the two of us to come over here. My mother and I were very excited about it. I remember leaving Poland and I couldn't understand why all her relatives were crying because they knew they would never see us again. Anyway, we arrived in Wilmington. I would like to tell you how I got to Wilmington. My father when he first came to the United States, like other immigrants, he stayed in New York City and became a pressman in a factory pressing men's pants. He didn't much like that work and one day, something happened to him. The bossman asked him to teach his nephew his work and my father started doing it and everybody told him, "Louis, don't do that." Thinking he's going to give his nephew your job and that's exactly what happened, so the other workers that knew Unions had their own club and said, "We're going to blow the whistle and we're going out on a strike." My father said, "No you are all married men." He says, "I'm single over here," and he says, "I'll leave, just don't call a strike." So he went downstairs and in those days, about every corner of New York had a stand that sold newspapers and magazines and so forth. He knew this man, my father was a man that got along with people. He said, "Listen, if you're goin' to leave New York where would you go?" He said, "Well, I'll tell you," he said, "I have a cousin that moved to Winston, North Carolina." Then, Winston and Salem were separate towns. He said, "He's working for R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company and you can make a living there." My father didn't have much to do, he went to his room picked up his little bag and packed up and went to the railroad station. When he got to the station, he asked for a ticket to Winston, but they made a mistake and gave him a ticket to Wilmington and that's how we got to Wilmington.

INTERVIEWER: (laughs) An interesting story. When were you born?

SCHWARTZ: January 17, 1909 and I was about 4-1/2 years old when I reached Wilmington.

INTERVIEWER: Uh huh, so you got your Wilmington start as a very young child.

SCHWARTZ: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me a little about school days and things on up through high school days and whatever.

SCHWARTZ: I went to, my father came here and very shortly opened his own business on North Fourth Street and we lived over the store and I at the age of 5-1/2, I went to Cornelius Harnett School. At that time this was a white neighborhood and mostly composed of shops and employees for the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad. We had a nice crowd of boys, but they were all pretty tough and I was such a little fellow, they picked on me and I learned how to take it.

INTERVIEWER: That wasn't by any change one of the Brooklyn gangs was it?

SCHWARTZ: That was the Brooklyn gang. People like Ernest Alford, who all turned out to be my friends, but at recess time they loved to get ahold of me and say, "Bennie, talk Jew talk. Talk Jew talk." Well I was cursing with any curse words I knew, but they didn't know that, but I enjoyed the school and stayed there until sixth grade. From there, ...

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever tangle with any of the Dry Ponders?

SCHWARTZ: Yeah, the Dry Ponders, we would go over there to play baseball and we wanted to go to Robert Strange and they used come and play at our ball park, but they wouldn't let us cross Market Street. They'd rock us. As soon as we got to Market Street they'd say, "You go back to Brooklyn, we don't want you." This wasn't just me, this was the whole gang.

INTERVIEWER: (laughter) Where did you go to grammar school?

SCHWARTZ: I beg your pardon?

INTERVIEWER: Where did you go to grammar school?

SCHWARTZ: Well in sixth grade I went to the \_\_\_\_\_ School here in Brooklyn on Bladen Street and the eighth grade I went to Hemingway. I skipped the seventh grade, but that's a little story to tell some other time and went to Hemingway and from there I went to New Hanover High School and that was 1921. My class was the first class to enter New Hanover High School.

INTERVIEWER: You mean the new high school?

SCHWARTZ: The new high school.

INTERVIEWER: I see. Well I didn't know when that was built.

SCHWARTZ: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: It was built the year I was born as a matter of fact.

SCHWARTZ: 1921.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, but then you went on to high school. Did you have a total of eleven grades in those days?

SCHWARTZ: Twelve grades.

INTERVIEWER: Twelve grades.

SCHWARTZ: I went there until '25 and then I went to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

and I was just 16.

INTERVIEWER: Did you stay four years at UNC?

SCHWARTZ: Yeah and Chapel Hill was a new world to me because I had never been out of Wilmington and never had been alone.

INTERVIEWER: Well let's go back to those school days for just a minute. Did you behave yourself?

SCHWARTZ: Yeah, I was a good boy believe it or not and a good student.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I had somebody in here not long ago to say, "Well except for getting expelled twice, yes." (laughs)

SCHWARTZ: No, I did very well. I got in my trouble after I left high school.

INTERVIEWER: Well how about college? How did things go in college?

SCHWARTZ: That was a new world. I never had been out of Wilmington for more than two or three days anywhere and I got to Chapel Hill with nobody there to tell me what to do and what not to do and I slipped up then and I took my first drink of corn whiskey. I chased around and I tell you right now, my grades just fell way down low. My father...

INTERVIEWER: How did your father like that?

SCHWARTZ: He could understand why my grades were so bad. I said, "Father, it's hard up here." I said, "This is a university, it's very hard." I finally convinced him, but I graduated, but I wasn't the A student that I was here.

INTERVIEWER: You didn't excel with any honors then.

SCHWARTZ: No, I learned a lot of things.

INTERVIEWER: You are out of school now. Let's see, if you born in 1909, you came out about age 20?

SCHWARTZ: Yeah, I came out in '29 and that was....

INTERVIEWER: That was after Black Friday and ...

SCHWARTZ: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: ...and that was pretty hard times then wasn't it?

SCHWARTZ: Yeah, I'd applied at a lot of places. I got my BS in Commerce, then that was the School of Business and I applied for a lot of jobs and I finally found, \_\_\_\_\_ told me that I could come up two months in the summer vacation time and they'd try me out and see how I do. That was in Richmond.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

SCHWARTZ: And I went there for about a month and I stayed in the Y and I forgot what I was making, but it was just barely enough, not enough to even pay...I guess I got eighteen dollars a week something

like that. My father came and asked me what I was doing and how I was gettin' along and what I was making and he said, "Come on back." He says, "I'll give you twenty dollars a week and room and board." I was so glad to get back home.

INTERVIEWER: I guess you were. What did he do? He put you in his business?

SCHWARTZ: Yeah, I worked in his furniture store for about two years and then, this was depression time, people were failing all over. C.R. Swenson had a small chain, had a furniture store on Market Street between Front and Water and that place went bankrupt and my father went to the bankruptcy sale and he bought the business and all assets around forty-five hundred to five thousand dollars. He put me in there and he said, "Now listen, I got three other sons, if you go to work here, you are going to be paying me back. I let you pay me back in ten years time." Then I'll save this money for one of the other boys. Then I got in there and things got tough. I'd accumulate two or three thousand dollars to pay him back and things got real tough and I had to borrow it back. Eventually, I paid every dime back and this is what he instilled in me, that don't expect anything for nothing. Pay it back.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. All right. Now let's change to something else for just a minute. How did Sylvia show up on the scene.

SCHWARTZ: Okay. Well Sylvia was born and raised in Cleveland, Ohio and at that time around 1930, William Block met Sylvia's mother who was a widow and William Block met her at some resort and they married and the understanding was that Sylvia and her sister Hilda would like to live in Wilmington and she was not going to live away from her children. So, they came down here and I was Sylvia's first date. The Block family had a party for her at Wrightsville Beach and they invited me to come on down there and as soon as I saw her, I said, "I'm gonna try to get this girl." And I was her first date and I stuck with her the whole time and then finally, in 1931 we married.

INTERVIEWER: 1931. Okay, how many children do you have?

SCHWARTZ: We have two children, a boy and a girl. Mel and Maxine. One was born in '33 and the other was born in '35, just two years apart.

INTERVIEWER: All right. Well we got grounded a little bit there in your background and family and so forth. You came into Wilmington right at the beginning of the years that were called, those early '30s, the Big Depression and so forth. Do you remember any facts, circumstances, stories about that, that might be significant?

SCHWARTZ: Well, a lot of circumstances. Money was very, very hard to come by and I'll never forget we had routes and I had a route selling furniture between Wilmington and South Port and I came back one afternoon about three o'clock and \_\_\_\_\_ said, "I'm glad you're here, the bank called and said you were five dollars overdrawn." I didn't have but three dollars, so I didn't do anything. I had collected about seven dollars that day, so I gave him five dollars to go pay the Wilmington Savings and Trust Company so I wouldn't be overdrawn. In those days, Boseman, I don't know what his position was...

INTERVIEWER: Bill Boseman.

SCHWARTZ: Bill Boseman, he was a ...

INTERVIEWER: Cashier.

SCHWARTZ: Cashier. He handled the money. He let you go, if he called you up and you were

overdrawn, he'd say, "Well listen, be here by Friday." This would be a Monday and he'd give you three or four days to catch up.

INTERVIEWER: I knew Bill and that sounds exactly like him. He was a very understanding person.

SCHWARTZ: That's right because things were very, very tight in business. I never will forget about the third day I was in business and Raymond Christman who was the head of the Internal Revenue Service came over. Everybody knew each other back then.

INTERVIEWER: I lived in his house for a while when I was a single man.

SCHWARTZ: So he called up my father one day and he says, "Louis, I want to tell you something, I'm very proud of Bennie. He paid forty-two dollars and eighty cents worth of income taxes and I just think its wonderful."

INTERVIEWER: (laughs) Let's go along just a little now, we are talking about the '30s and go on into the 40s and World War II. During the World War II period, the first part of the 40s do you remember anything in there or anything connected with your family or whatever that had any effect on you that you'd like to recount.

SCHWARTZ: Well, these were wartimes and there were brothers, Nathan, William, Joe and myself and all three of them were in the service. Joe and Bill were Naval Officers and Nathan was a sergeant, I think, in the Army. They never did draft me. I never was drafted and so one day, I went to the draft board and I said look mister, all my friends and all my family have gone on and I want to be drafted. Here I was a man with two children and I was worried about that and so sure enough next month, they sent to Fort Bragg. They sent me around to Fort Bragg at that time with over 40 leftovers or something all went to Fort Bragg and came to me, they examined me and told me that we will keep you in mind. "We're not going to let you go this time," he says, "You're too heavy." "We'll have to look for you in another draft." In the meantime, they didn't give me 4F, they just told me to hold everything. In the meantime, the law changed. If you were the father of a child and my age was 40-something, I don't remember, I was exempt. So, I got home and I thought the kids would be proud to have me, but the oldest one said, "Well how come you aren't in the army?" I said, "I was too fat." He said, "My goodness." He said, "It's too late, you should have gone on a diet before you were drafted." It was disappointing, but at that time, our house was open house to all the Jewish soldiers and we had Camp Davis and each and every weekend soldiers had open house.

INTERVIEWER: All right. Now tell me about your church and how you came to be in the church you are in and a little about that would be interesting.

SCHWARTZ: Well, the Temple of Israel, when my father came to Wilmington, the Temple of Israel was already here. These people were already Americanized. They came in the 1860s, 1870s and '80s and like that and my father came in 1909, so we weren't welcome. They didn't come out and say we're glad to have you here, join us. If he walked in, he didn't feel like he was at home. So, there were about fourteen or fifteen others just like him. So they organized their own little synagogue and they worshiped in the, some of them had wives and were married and they worshiped in different homes. And finally, I'd say in about 1914, they got together and they bought a lot on Walnut Street between 3rd and 4th, right now, you could walk over had a parking lot. So they built a small little synagogue collecting fifty cents and dollar pieces like that and that's how...

INTERVIEWER: And that later became the synagogue that it's on 26th street?

SCHWARTZ: Yeah, that became the Israel Synagogue on 26th and I think our membership was much larger then.

INTERVIEWER: You have a different cemetery too don't you?

SCHWARTZ: Oh yeah. Well that's something that was way back. In any Jewish community the first thing when they organize a community, the first thing that they bought was a lot to bury their dead. We had the cemetery before we had the synagogue.

INTERVIEWER: I see. And the cemetery is at 17th and?

SCHWARTZ: It's 16th and ...

INTERVIEWER: Princess Street.

SCHWARTZ: Yeah, Princess Street.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. How did you develop the interest in politics that you obviously have?

SCHWARTZ: Well, I used to be interested in candidates who were running for office. I used to help 'em. I couldn't do much about finance, but I would work for 'em. One day, Henry Bost--I think his specialty was selling novelties and stuff like that for people who ran for office... He met me on Princess Street and said, "We need a good candidate for City Council." I said, "Henry, who do you want me to talk to?" He said, "We want you." I said, "Henry, you're out of your mind. I've never thought of that." He said, "Well come on." He went in and paid my filing fee. I came home and I said, "Sylvia, I got something to tell you." I said, "I'm running for City Council." She said, "I don't believe it."

INTERVIEWER: Did she like it?

SCHWARTZ: No not especially, but Sylvia never did discourage me. Anything I had a mind to do, she'd go along with me.

INTERVIEWER: Sounds like Henry Bost made your mind up on this one.

SCHWARTZ: Henry Bost did and it was done. Henry and a bunch of fellows used to meet at a restaurant right across from City Hall. I can't think of the name of it and they'd meet, the lawyers would meet there about every day.

INTERVIEWER: White Front Grill?

SCHWARTZ: White Front Grill and that's where they met and my name came up. "Bennie Schwartz might be a good Councilman." So, Henry said, "I'm goin' to see him." And he met me and paid my filing fee.

INTERVIEWER: All right. Then, then did you get elected?

SCHWARTZ: I had no problem. At that time, the blacks had a good candidate and in the primary, she ran first and I ran second. In the runoff, I won. I ran on the Democratic ticket. Luther Cromartie was running for office then and I can't remember all of the names, but I made the ticket then and ...

INTERVIEWER: Who was mayor? Was Red Allsbrook Alford mayor along then or was that another

time?

SCHWARTZ: Luther Cromartie.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, I see. Okay.

SCHWARTZ: Yeah, I followed Luther Cromartie.

INTERVIEWER: All right now. How did you get to be something other than a City Councilman? I know you got a little more than that.

SCHWARTZ: Well, I got City Council that time were elected by the Council. The mayor was elected by the Council and Luther's term was up and he nominated me for mayor and this is quite a nice story. You have to have a majority vote, five people, but as it happened, John Symmes was on City Council and he wanted to be mayor. Herbert Brand wanted to be mayor and then, council couldn't decide. They could not get a quorum at all. So, finally it narrowed down to Bennie Schwartz and John Symmes and neither one of us wanted to budge. I said, "John, I tell you what I'll do," I said, "Let's, let's quit this and when I get back in the council room I'm going to make a suggestion that from now on, the mayor will be elected at large. This is no way to elect the mayor." That's exactly what happened.

INTERVIEWER: You mean let the people elect the mayor.

SCHWARTZ: And I went back there and there were only five people and I said, "The first thing I want to do is have mayor elected at large and the Council extended to seven." You know when you have a vote, seven is better than having little five.

INTERVIEWER: Well who became mayor that time between you and Symmes?

SCHWARTZ: I became mayor.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

SCHWARTZ: And Symmes followed me.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

SCHWARTZ: And after that, I got the bug. I want to tell you about the whole time I went through what we had with the riots and problems with school problems and all that, a lot problems and a lot of trouble. I went through that and I organized the Good Neighbor Council. In fact, I got a commendation from the Governor. I brought blacks and whites together and sat around a table and told'em, "Let's talk." I got a lot of good publicity out that and I said, "I tell you what I'll do, I think I'm gonna run for State House." Then, I had to get permission from Sylvia, "Sylvia would you like to live in Raleigh?" She said, "If you want to live in Raleigh, I'll live in Raleigh." So, I ran for the House and had the ticket there. I ran and was elected to the House three times and then, I ran for the senate. I'm thinkin' I'm gettin' older now and if I've got something I want to do, I better do it now. So, I ran for the senate and ran against Joe Fox.

INTERVIEWER: You're talking about Sailor Boy Joe.

SCHWARTZ: Sailor Joe. He ran against me and he gave me a very tough race, but I beat him.

INTERVIEWER: Did you do any stumping out in Brunswick and Pender Counties?

SCHWARTZ: Yeah, a lot of it. The funniest thing happened out in Pender County. The race was never mentioned anytime I ever ran. Over in Pender County, Joe went to one house and said, "You don't have much choice," he said, "I'm a Catholic and Schwartz is a Jew, so you vote for me." So this black man who was a very good friend of mine called me and told me the whole story. I said, "What did you do?" He said, "I told him I was goin' to vote for the Jew."

INTERVIEWER: (laughs) That's a pretty good story. Then, tell me you went a little further along the line. You went and you got into the senate.

SCHWARTZ: Yeah, I got into the senate and it was a completely different story. I enjoyed the senate very, very much, but unfortunately in the first year I was in the senate, I took Sylvia to Israel. We both went to Israel and Sylvia had a stroke in Israel and we stayed there in the hospital for six weeks and I came home. I said, "Sylvia, you don't want to go back to Raleigh do you?" She said, "No, I would rather not." So, I did not run for reelection.

INTERVIEWER: That's quite an education I understand to get in the House and the Senate both.

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SCHWARTZ: You see the House doesn't mind introducing bills, but we are the ones in the Senate who cut the bills. We cut the trash out and just get down to the nitty gritty, so I guess we cut out two thirds of the bills we passed.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have any happenings in the Senate that you think would be interesting to recount to anyone happening to be listening to this tape in the future?

SCHWARTZ: Well there a lot. First thing, this is a very interesting story too. People who seize are mostly men and women who are elected to the House or the Senate from small towns. After all, you have representation of each county, two in the house and one in the Senatorial district and when I got up there, I say two thirds of the people were from little small towns. I had been Mayor and I knew all the Mayors from the big cities, but I didn't know people in little small towns and they were the majority, so we got there and we were the only Jewish people...

INTERVIEWER: Some of them could be real wheels too.

SCHWARTZ: Of all of'em, I got to be very friendly with Kent Rawls who is still a wheel down there, but we came up there and the people knew we were Jewish and they were a little afraid of us. They know we don't eat things that other people do, so after about six months, Sylvia, God bless her, she can make friends much quicker than I can and she got to be very friendly with all the wives who always went out together and we got so close to that crowd, Sylvia still talks to them and corresponds with most of her friends. We would go into a restaurant and they would say, "Sylvia, you can't eat that, its got pork in it." So we had a lot of good friendships all the way through. The ERA was the biggest subject that came up. Equal Rights Amendment.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

SCHWARTZ: And I studied it and studied it and I decided that we had enough regulations that this shouldn't be a national affair, it should be a state affair. Even my daughter called me up and gave me hell for voting against the ERA. My vote changed the vote in the house.

INTERVIEWER: That's interesting. That business about one vote or another. One of these times I'm gonna tell you my story when we get together, but not on tape. You got involved in the University out here for a time. Tell me a little about that.

SCHWARTZ: Well, the University, Wilmington College was being organized and its first vote count was very good and we and the county, took five cents of their tax dollars to start Wilmington College and later on, we voted another five cents which we never used and then they decided they wanted to have a Board, a Wilmington Board and the City Council appointed two, the county appointed two, the Governor appointed two, the Board of Education appointment two and that's the way we were elected. As it happened, I wasn't the first choice for the city. The city appointed a young man, \_\_\_\_\_ who was an architect, but Dr. Hoggard wanted me. He did all the work on Wilmington College and he Dr. Hoggard did a little snooping around and he found out this man didn't live in the city limits and so he had his name taken off of the list and then I was second on the list, so they appointed me to the Board.

INTERVIEWER: That was while it was still Wilmington College.

SCHWARTZ: That's right. We had Wilbur Dozier, Dan Penton and I don't remember who all we had, but we had some very good members. Brad Tillery, Fred Graham. These are the original Board members.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

SCHWARTZ: And Dr. Hoggard was Chairman of the Board.

INTERVIEWER: Well did you follow along with this interest as the college went on into its new location and new buildings?

SCHWARTZ: No, I stopped when I went to Raleigh. I stayed eleven years I think it was that I stayed with Wilmington College. I was on the first Board and stayed with them eleven years as long as it stayed Wilmington College. When the transition came, I was going to Raleigh so I couldn't serve.

INTERVIEWER: Um hmm.

SCHWARTZ: But, when I served my twelve years in Raleigh I came back and served eight years more on the University of North Carolina in Wilmington and the last two years I was Chairman of the Board.

INTERVIEWER: Um hmm.

SCHWARTZ: I enjoyed my connection there.

INTERVIEWER: And we ended up with a building that's got your name on it I'm pleased to note.

SCHWARTZ: I'm very proud of that.

INTERVIEWER: Community service around Wilmington, there are so many organizations that people have been connected with, all of which have made a part or a contribution to the way Wilmington is, the kind of life with have here. What are some of the organizations in which you might have had an interest?

SCHWARTZ: Well, I started off early with the Chamber of Commerce. In fact, I was president elect before I went to Raleigh and I couldn't do both and I was a member of the original committee to start a Committee of a Hundred and I got appointed to a lot of places I was interested in. I was fortunate enough to, thanks to you, I was appointed a member of the Board of Director of People's Savings and Loan. That's another big thing in my life thanks to you. I really enjoyed the years I spent there.

INTERVIEWER: We enjoyed having you. You made a very significant contribution at that time.

SCHWARTZ: I just, I went around. People find out that you're interested and willing to work, not just to accept the job, you get asked to join organizations and I joined a number.

INTERVIEWER: One tries to find out who will work and who won't and the people who get asked to do things are the people who they know will perform. Let's get back to Sylvia just a minute. Sylvia has made significant contributions on her own and it seems like to me in connection with the University of North Carolina of Wilmington or Wilmington College that she was probably the guiding light behind the Friends to Library out up there.

SCHWARTZ: Well, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Am I right about that?

SCHWARTZ: You're right. I'll tell you what, I said, "Without Sylvia, I couldn't have gotten anywhere because Sylvia had the brains and the ability to help me in things I thought I wanted to do and she really was my right arm and the little I did accomplish I attribute to her." I had the willingness and the intent, but she had the background that I needed. Sylvia didn't stay quiet. During the war, she belonged to every woman's organization. She'd do service. They had all kinds of things going on down at the Post Office. She and John Brown's mother, they sat at that Post Office and were supposed to be watching up to seven to eight hours at a time. Not only that, at the Hebrew School and the synagogue every weekend entertaining soldiers and she was right there in the kitchen, right there working with all of'em. She was very active with all the various boards in town. Family Services, she was on that board for years and years and years. When Wilmington College started, they didn't have much of a library. They didn't have any books, so she and Eve Collins organized Friends of Wilmington College. Now the organization is thriving and it's named Friends of the University of North Carolina. It's the same organization that she started.

INTERVIEWER: Well its beyond Friends of the Library then. I had thought that maybe their scope was to the library alone.

SCHWARTZ: No, the main project was to help the library, but it was Friends of Wilmington College.

INTERVIEWER: I guess they never would have envisioned the library would have a quarter of a million book library out there.

SCHWARTZ: They were working real hard getting our folks to get accredited. That's what you have to do, but it is some building now.

INTERVIEWER: It is some building out there. The building now that is being built for the Science Building is going to be I understand, the second largest building on the campus. In fact, the addition is being made to the building that's adjacent to the library is underway now. I see a lot of steel out there.

SCHWARTZ: I think its the Chemistry and Science Building, I think they're going to call it. That's going to be the largest building on the campus.

INTERVIEWER: That's the one I was speaking of.

SCHWARTZ: Yeah. That's a beautiful building.

INTERVIEWER: That's right. Looking back, thinking back, anybody in any occupation has some interesting and in many instances, humorous things happened to you. In mine at the Savings and Loan, there are instances that I could give a bunch of and in your experience in the community and everything can you think of something that would either be significant or would be interesting that you might like to record for us?

SCHWARTZ: I can tell you a very interesting thing that happened to me when I was campaigning. I got out to Winter Park one evening campaigning and it was already late and there was nobody around to shake hands with, so finally I saw a little couple who came out. A nice small couple and I said, "How do you do?" "I'm Bennie Schwartz and I hope you're voting for me." And they looked right straight at me and they said, "We certainly did, we Baptists must stick together." (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: (laughs)

SCHWARTZ: And I told that to the Baptist Chronicle. Was that the Baptist Chronicle, a magazine they put out?

INTERVIEWER: There are several of them and I don't know which one.

SCHWARTZ: It's a statewide magazine and this man was head of it. I can't think of his name now.

INTERVIEWER: There was one in Raleigh that was very active, very controversial and I don't even remember his name now. That's in the past.

SCHWARTZ: Well anyway, he picked it up and he wrote that up and I got a lot of comments about that and these people were very serious and I found out later that there was a highway patrolman named Schwartz and he belonged to their church, so they...

INTERVIEWER: A case of mistaken identity.

SCHWARTZ: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember some of the things that we used to do and situations we'd get into out on the loan committees?

SCHWARTZ: Yeah, well...

INTERVIEWER: You go back into the time when the appraisals were made by the members of the board rotating.

SCHWARTZ: That's right. I remember plenty of times climbing under a house and... I was new at it, so the loan wasn't, the committee didn't want to loan quite as much as the man asked for. I said, "Don't worry." I said, "If he doesn't pay for it, I'll take it." So finally, Sam says, "Man, you gonna be owning a lot of houses. You better be careful what you say."

INTERVIEWER: I told you I'd make a list. (laughs)

SCHWARTZ: That's right. You said, "You better be very careful what you say." And I really enjoyed those meetings, very, very nice and after a while of course, we got so big, we didn't have to crawl under the houses.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I'm gonna remind you of something you may have forgotten, but you used to tell me whenever we had a loan application, you wanted to know what their occupation was and if it started with a P, why they weren't any good.

SCHWARTZ: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: And you would, I would say, "What do you mean P." "Oh I mean plumbers and paper hangers and preachers and stuff like that." (laughs)

SCHWARTZ: And also...

INTERVIEWER: (laughing) You said it jokingly, but I got to thinking about it and I said, "You know, there's too much connection with facts on that."

SCHWARTZ: The main thing was when I first went into the furniture business with my father, he said, "Don't ever give credit to anybody with three initials."

INTERVIEWER: And that was it?

SCHWARTZ: That's right. He said, "Don't give credit to a man with three initials." He said, "They won't pay." He had one man that stuck him for what he thought was a goodly sum with three initials that wouldn't pay him. I want to tell another little story about the Wilmington Savings and Trust Company. John Harden\_\_\_\_\_ was a trust officer there.

INTERVIEWER: A very serious man.

SCHWARTZ: And my father sent me down there to get a loan and he said, John Harden says, "Glad to know you and I'm glad you're working for your father." He said, "Did you bring a statement?" I said, "No, my father just told me to go down there and get a loan." So I came back and Pop said, "Did you get the loan?" I said, "No, they want a statement." He said, "Who'd you go to? Did you go to that man with the short pants, tight pants?" I said, "Yeah, I think he does have tight pants." Like John Harden wore. He said, "Don't ever go to a man with tight pants for a loan." He says, "You'll never get it". (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: (laughs) Well, Bennie this is your tape, but thinking about happenings that relate to the board and you on it and I don't think I told you all this one, but we had one of the banks in Wilmington send one of their new men into the Savings and Loan and they wanted to get a financial statement and a profit and loss statement in order to be sure that we could maintain a line of credit over a half a million dollars and I looked at him and told him, I said, "That's what you want?" He said, "Yep." I said, "Well," I said, "Tell you what you do, you go back and tell who ever sent you that I would like to have a statement on your bank including a profit and loss statement and the salaries of the officers, the same information you are asking us." I said, "Because we have a million dollar CD in your bank that we've lent your bank and you're asking us for that, to lend us a half a million dollars." I've never heard anymore about it.

SCHWARTZ: I don't blame you.

INTERVIEWER: That's a Savings and Loan story that I'm late telling it to you, but it happened. Anything else that you can think about that would have a... You are now what age?

SCHWARTZ: I am exactly 86.

INTERVIEWER: By exactly 86 do you have a birthday somewhere close?

SCHWARTZ: In January, but I'll tell you the truth, this is a funny thing. Whenever people ask me my age for the past year, I've tried to say 68. I think I'm reversing the numbers, but Sylvia would say, "What are you trying to do? People know how old you are." I said, "I don't know Sylvia, it just comes out accidentally." When people say, "How old are you?" I say, "68, no, no, 86."

INTERVIEWER: Most people say 69, 59, 39 or 49.

SCHWARTZ: But I tell you. I can tell you this, I've had a very good life. I'm very thankful and I've got a lot of friends in Wilmington like you and others and Wilmington has been good to me and I appreciate it.

INTERVIEWER: I think that's a good note on which we could end on. That Wilmington was good to you. I appreciate you sharing your time with me this afternoon and I hope that these tapes which the library tells me that they would like to have as an oral history of Wilmington, so I guess they'll end up in the North Carolina room according to what David Painter has said. Well we'll sign off there again.

SCHWARTZ: Okay.

INTERVIEWER: Thanks so much again.

SCHWARTZ: Thank you.

INTERVIEWER: I was glad to talk with you this afternoon.

SCHWARTZ: Thank you, I enjoyed it.