

## Stuart Bloch

### *The Genius of Mail Pouch*

Michael Nobel Kline: Yeah.

Stuart Bloch: In those days advertising would stay up for a month or so. Salesman would come by every six week or three months or whatever on the train. They'd come and leave something and then come back on his next trip and replace it with something else. There wasn't competition for space that there is now.

MNK: Would you just start by saying, "My name is Stuart."

SB: Ready?

MNK: Yeah.

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SB: My name is Stuart Bloch, and I've lived in Wheeling all my life.

MNK: And you were talking a minute ago about, about the advertising.

SB: At Bloch Brothers? What portion would you like me to talk about?

MNK: Well the, the--I guess we were talking about the Mail Pouch, the whole Mail Pouch idea of packaging tobacco originally.

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SB: The advertising--The company is most famous for its barn advertising which, and nobody can really pinpoint to when it started and who started it, but it was somewhere in the early, oh, 1910, '15, somewhere in there. And it was perceived that the space was available for a modest amount. We used to give the farmer a choice of subscriptions to *Collier's* and *Life* and whatever magazines

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they wanted to pick out. And we had a crew that went around and leased the space. And then they were followed by the painters. And Mail Pouch spread from this area here via the oil field workers because people from Titusville chewed Mail Pouch. And then they went to Oklahoma, and then they went to Texas. Then they went to Bakersfield. So we painted barns in California, except in California they were painted on the roofs because the roads were generally

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above the, above the barns. And so they painted the roofs out there instead of the sides. Crews would come around about every five years and, and repaint them. They'd send a picture back and they'd make a dot every foot up the side of the sign because they were paid by the square foot. So you had a quick way to make sure that you were paying for what you were getting. Simple technique. Then it--They all went on computer cards back in the, back in the '50s, I guess. So the whole thing was printed out for our guy who was in charge of painting it. Then about 1970--By 1965 Lady Bird Johnson decided there shouldn't be any

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signs along the highways. Called Highway Beautification Act. And it inadvertently caught Mail Pouch and Sea Rock City signs and other such--The Bermuda or the Berma Shave signs. So I prevailed upon Senator Randolph from West Virginia to insert in the Highway Act of 1974, '76 I guess it was, that any sign in place before the act began that related to Americana, such as Mail Pouch and Sea Rock City--So we got grandfathered. But unfortunately by then we lost about a third of the signs. And so I would guess now that we're down to the tri-state area of West Virginia, Pennsylvania and Ohio. And just last year

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the final sign painter retired. So they're no longer being painted anymore.

MNK: His name is?

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SB: Harley Warrick. He lives over here in Belmont, Ohio. And you can get his phone number from--Lois can get it for you ... at the office. And the other advertising thing that they did that was, was very clever--They were--They provided vouchers in the package; so it was very popular in those days to, to collect those vouchers. Like S & H Green Stamps used to have, you know, except we had our own Mail Pouch catalog back in the '20s. So that was sort of innovative, I think, in that--

MNK: Can you describe it a little bit, some of things?

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SB: Well, the items--I have some of them. I have a straight razor which has Mail Pouch advertising on it there. Fraternal pins, Masonic pins were very popular. And the--They ran the gamut from clothing to sporting goods to personal items. Razors to pins. And I've collected, you know, some of that stuff over the years.

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But the advertising that they used was effective and not real expensive, as the product wasn't very expensive.

MNK: Um hmm.

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SB: Used to sell for a nickel a package. When I went to work in 1959, I think it was up to, it was up to a quarter then. I thought that was pretty expensive. What's that, thirty, forty years ago. I guess now it's a dollar and a half or two dollars.

MNK: Always been about nip and tuck with a pack of cigarettes.

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SB: Yeah, I guess, I guess so.

MNK: I was thinking cigarettes were about a quarter in '59.

SB: Um hmm. Probably right. So the company is now doing very little advertising, I think, on, on its Mail Pouch brand. It has a special niche, has a special taste that is gradually--It's declining, I think, in, in its market share because the young chewer today wants something sweet. We always used to say you had to be a man to chew Mail Pouch. It was a little stronger than the other.

MNK: Um hmm.

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SB: But once you became a Mail Pouch chewer, you stayed one.

MNK: I knew a lot who did.

SB: Did you.

MNK: Um hmm. I chewed a lot of it myself.

SB: Oh, is that right?

MNK: Um hmm.

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SB: Well, you know what I mean then.

MNK: Yeah. I worked a lot with a power saw, and that's great when you're doing any kind of work like that. Can you talk a little bit about the, the Bloch family?

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SB: I just happened to think the, the one other thing about the advertising, which I didn't mention was the, was the artwork, you know, that's down there on the walls. And they hired a fellow named Rosen to paint those folklore stories that--Then they built the advertising around. There, there was a major--It was a triptych. The center was about three and a half feet by eighteen inches maybe. Then there were two side pieces. And they had a little explanation of

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what was happening. And then chew Mail Pouch. ... or chewing serves to steady nerves or whatever, whatever the line was. And the salesmen carry them around to the stores and rotate them. We use them in your store for months and come back and put it in my store. Then move that stuff down the road. So the artwork was used to get people's attention because it is rather striking the way they've taken all these old folk tales and turned them into those, those stories.

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So I, I put together an explanation in, on the back of the center piece of each one of those that you see down there. There's--You can pull down, I suppose Lois showed you, and pull down the plastic and get the actual story what's, what's going on. That was--I was very clever. So those three, those three items, the barns, the, the vouchers and that unusual use of folklore to get people's attention were three of the main advertising techniques over the '20s, '30s and

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'40s. Then went like everybody else did, a little newspaper and magazine and other things that--Even some radio. We sponsored the, the fishing and hunting club ... back in the '40s. But we've--They--I was the-- When I say 'we,' I was the advertising director for seven or eight years. So I was involved in that.

MNK: Um hmm. And was this, was this sort of home-grown advertising?

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SB: No, we had an agency in Pittsburgh and in New York.

MNK: Uh huh.

SB: We tried to get the best advertising advice we could get.

MNK: Which, which New York firm did you work with?

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SB: Hoyt. Hoyt Advertising. Then, then we used Wolrick and Leggler. And then we came back to Pittsburgh and used Falgron. Parkersburg. They had an office in, in Pittsburgh at the time.

MNK: Starting--When did you, did you start using that kind of professional advice?

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SB: Well, we had other products. You see, we had Kentucky Club and quite a diverse line of pipe tobaccos. And so we were doing that in the mid to late '50s and '60s.

MNK: Um hmm.

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SB: We ran something called the 'Name the Thoroughbred Contest,' which you may not have ever heard of. But the idea was to come up with a name that was selected to name the thoroughbred colt that we bought at the yearling sales in, in New York. What's the name of the racetrack. Saratoga Springs. And so then if you were selected, you won the horse. So you could race it or sell it. And it was quite successful. We had probably three quarters of a million entries. Had to send in a package of any of the Kentucky Club brands of tobacco. So, you know, it took a big-time agency to do all that. We ran ads in men sporting magazines. Basically it was a print media campaign, but it was, it was quite well known. But it was a pipe tobacco, not a, not a chewing tobacco, part of the business. And, and we had both in those days.

MNK: Who thought up the strategy to paint the barns, for example?

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SB: We haven't been able to pinpoint that specifically, so I give my grandfather credit.

MNK: Okay.

SB: But I can't prove that. But he was active then, and so we don't know. We don't know when it started nor whose idea, whose idea it was originally.

MNK: And the idea to, to do the catalog?

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SB: I don't know that either. I have no, no records that indicate whose idea that was.

MNK: And who commissioned the artwork?

SB: I don't know that either. The, the--

MNK: But those, those--

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SB: The company was founded in 1879. I've often thought, 'my god, if we saved everything for all those years, we wouldn't have had room to make the product.' But it's easy to look back and wish that you'd saved some of that stuff, you know.

MNK: Uh huh. But your hunch is that those were ideas that came from the family itself at that, at that time?

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SB: Well, I would think that it either came from my grandfather who was president then in the teens and, and twenties, or his, or his sales manager because they were the only people there that were involved in it. The rest of them were all manufacturers.

MNK: He didn't have any--He hadn't employed any New York--

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SB: No.

MNK: Firms?

SB: No, no not then.

MNK: Uh huh.

SB: So that was certainly a home-grown, home-grown idea.

MNK: Good one.

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SB: Yeah, sure was. And the, and the signs are still, you know, hold--The signs hold up for years. They're hard to paint over. You'll, you'll see some if you drive out the interstate where they were painted out during the Lady Bird Johnson years, and the Mail Pouch bleeds right, bleeds right back through. You can't keep a good, can't get a good sign down.

MNK: Could you, could you talk a little bit about the history of the family then, how they got started in this enterprise?

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SB: Well, my great grandfather and his brother were in the wholesale grocery business down here on Water Street. And then they got into the business of making stogies upstairs. And Wheeling was a big stogie center in those days, stogies and cigars. And the stogie manufacturing process is like cutting a dress out of a piece of cloth, you have the trimmings around the outside of the piece that wraps around. And they decided that they could flavor that and put a

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name on it. So they, they used the--They bagged the, the clippings, flavored it, called it West Virginia Mail Pouch. The idea being that the mail was delivered in town via the little cutters that went up and down the river. And whenever the mail boat came along, people would rush down there because the mail bag would come out. And that seemed to have a, a good connotation. So it started to, to sell. It was the original flavored loose leaf chewing tobacco in the country then. They were the first ones to do that. So then along came the flood of '84 or

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something and their grocery business suffered. But their chewing tobacco business was growing, so they gave up the wholesale grocery business and moved down there to Water Street to what was an old sugar mill and began to concentrate on growing the chewing tobacco business.

MNK: Do you remember the address?

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SB: Yeah, it was right there, 40th Street.

MNK: Where it is now?

SB: Where it is now. The buildings, the buildings north of 40th Street was the original building. Then they gradually took over that whole half block and then the block on the other side, half of that.

MNK: Did they construct that then for their own purposes or was that already there?

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SB: Well, the big building to the right of the office building which we call the stemery, which was where the leaf was brought in and the stem was taken off, they built that. That's a seven-story, seven-story building.

And a good many of the other buildings they built too. They started with the sugar mill, which was the initial building, and then spread out from there. So--I think they moved down there in the, oh, 1880s, something like that. Because the company was incorporated in 1879. So they celebrated their centennial sixteen years

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ago now. So that's basically the background. They, they stayed in, solely in the chewing tobacco business until the 1940s when they bought the Penn Tobacco Company. Then they bought some other small chewing tobacco companies and they bought another pipe tobacco company from St. Louis called The Peeper Tobacco Company. So they've had gradually increased the number of brands. But Mail Pouch was the only brand they sold up through, I think, the war. And

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anybody during the war who wrote to the company and said he couldn't get Mail Pouch while he was in the Army, Navy, Air Force, whatever, we'd send it to him no charge. And they remembered that when they came home. So it's--Mail Pouch has a very, you know, as I said, a loyal, loyal followers. That was good marketing, I think, too.

MNK: Boy, if there's an Americana product that you could think of, you know, it would--Mail Pouch would probably come to mind before just about anything else.

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SB: Oh, Coca-Cola is another one!

MNK: ...

SB: But it's a--Even--I think there was a restaurant in New York that wrote me back in the '60s and said they wanted to have a Mail Pouch sign painted in their restaurant. So we sent the painter over there, and they paid for it. But we found an old barn, took the barn down, erected it in his restaurant. It was The Sign of the Dove, I remember, the name of the restaurant. But it was important to

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this fellow to have that kind of Americana as part of his decor. And lots of people feel that way. Harley Warrick, the guy who paints the signs, gets calls from time to time. People who'll pay him to come paint one in their rec room or paint it on their barn or something like that. So there's still a lot of, a lot of sentimentality, I guess you might say, in the sign that kids grew up counting.

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Parents keep their kids quiet when they're traveling across country by 'see if you count the most Mail Pouch signs.' Including my parents, I guess! But there were more of them then than there are now. In those days that was kind of fun because they come around a corner and if you weren't paying attention you miss them. Now you can't miss them because there are not very many, and they're set up for you to see from a long distance.

MNK: What were the different generations of, of the Bloch family? Let's see, was it your grandfather that started it?

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SB: No, Sam, Sam and Aaron were the original founders. And, and then Aaron moved to New York and left the running of the business to Sam. And then his brother--I mean his son. He had four children, two sons, Jesse, which was my grandfather, and Harold, who also moved to New York. So the actual management of the company followed the line of Samuel and Jesse. Well,

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actually he, he was called Jess. His, his wife was Jessie, and he was Jess. So Sam, Jess, my father Tom, and, and then I ran it for a while until, until I left the company in 1979. They wanted me to move to New York. I decided, in conjunction with my family, that that wasn't the best thing for us. So I left the business. So that's the family history.

MNK: I can see why you wouldn't have wanted to move.

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SB: Well, we had four small children, and I can imagine that not working too well.

MNK: Uh huh. What, what are your, some of your childhood recollections of Wheeling? The neighborhood down here, did the people, for example, who, who worked at Bloch, did they, did they live within walking distance?

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SB: An awful lot of them did.

MNK: Can you talk about the neighborhood and the way it was set up?

SB: Well, you know, in those days we had generations of families working there. The Rose family, there were probably eight, eight or ten members of the Rose family that, that worked there. They all lived within one or two blocks of the place. And their children grew up playing around there. The fellow you want to talk to about that is Tommy Beale, whose name I gave you there. Other side--Some of the others that grew up--Tommy Beale grew up, worked there forty-seven years and lived in South Wheeling all his life. The Roses--There aren't

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many Roses. Well, there is a, this is one or two. But Tommy can give you a number of people like that that you can get a lot better, better information about the large number of people in South Wheeling who worked there. And I was--See, I didn't start there till '59, and a lot of the history you want is, is before that. I knew, I knew them because I'd go down visit from time to time. But I worked in the business starting when I was sixteen, but not here. We had a tobacco

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farm up in Connecticut and warehouses in Wisconsin and, and Pennsylvania where we would buy tobacco and, and cure it and store it until it was needed down here. So my summers were spent learning how to grow up away from home. I lived in the YMCA one summer and a buddy's home one summer. It's kind of a good way to learn the business and learn a little independence, but I didn't spend a lot of time working, working in

the factory.

MNK: You were, you were where in--

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SB: I was in--

MNK: Connecticut?

SB: Yes, in, in Connecticut and in Lancaster, Pennsylvania and in, in Edgerton, Wisconsin.

MNK: So you were--You got familiar with all three operations.

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SB: Yeah. And one other thing about the business down there is they did have the--Their tobacco workers union was Local Number Two. Local Number One went out of business somewhere in the early 1900s. So Local Number Two was the oldest tobacco workers union in the, in the country. And I think there was only one work stoppage during--There had been only one, I think, during the period of 1905, when the union was begun, and today. Which says a lot about the company's concern for its workers and ability to take care of them. I think we

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had one of the earliest pension plans in town. One of the earliest health programs. Some of those things you can get from the names of the guys I gave you.

MNK: Um hmm. That's, that's--It's fascinating to--So you mentioned that there was one stoppage though.

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SB: Yeah.

MNK: What, what--Which one was that?

SB: I think it was about 1948. I remember everybody being shocked by it! Didn't last very long. A couple days. And I don't remember what the--

MNK: Issues were.

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SB: Probably wages. I mean that's generally the thing that sends people out, sent people out in those days. But the wages that were paid down there weren't that, weren't that high. I mean you could make a lot more money per hour working in the coal mine or working at steel mill. But they worked fifty-two weeks a year. I mean there--The fringe benefits were good. So that--What you

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made of it. Sort of like one of those deals you made up for it--You made up for, made up for the lower wage in the steadiness of the job.

MNK: Um hmm.

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SB: And that's why you have so many people that have worked there forty years and more that are still, still around. We had a fellow the other day that's retired after fifty years. Don't find that anymore.

MNK: No.

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SB: Have to start pretty early to, to do that. You can start at sixteen and work till you're sixty-six, you got your fifty. And that doesn't happen as you know.

MNK: What were the working conditions like at Bloch then?

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SB: Well, I, I really--By the time I got there they were, it was very clean. I thought relatively mechanized operation. You know back when they had a thousand girls down there in the stemery hand stemming tobacco. Earl Summers will tell you more about that because he worked down there then. But those girls all worked at machines, and they were paid piecework. I imagine that was pretty tough work. I never, I never saw them; I just heard about them.

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So it was, it was highly labor intensive in the early days and then, and then--Well, we were always a, a leader in mechanization in the--By the time I started going through the factory, I was always amazed by the way those little packages would come around and get filled without being touched by a human hand, you know. That was back in the, in '40s. And so the, the labor--You know, what

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happened in the tobacco business has happened all over this valley is that you can produce more packages today with less people just like you can produce more coal with less people, like you can produce less steel, more steel with less people. And that's, that's part of our problem. Because, you know, Wheeling still thinks it's a town of sixty-five or seventy thousand people with all the--When you look around this town at the services that we have and the culture--I always don't--I don't like the word culture very much, but it sort of says it, I

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guess. I mean the--What you want--You can avail yourself of an awful lot here in Wheeling that is very surprising for a town of 35,000, you know. There's, there's nothing else like it in West Virginia. It's kind of like a place unto itself. But all that came because when we were double the size with the, with the steel and glass and coal and tobacco and what have you that produced all the jobs that were available in the '30s, '40s, '50s. A lot of those companies are still here, but, you know, they employ maybe a hundred people down there at Bloch Brothers now when there were two and three times that. And the steel companies make

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an awful lot of steel with a lot fewer people. They're still taking up the same space where their factory is, but the jobs aren't here anymore for that kind of work so you have fewer people. On one end you'd think you'd have fewer services, but we've got about every service in this town that, and maybe a few too many, that you would expect to see in a community a lot bigger than this, you know. From the symphony to the hospitals to the--

MNK: Parks.

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SB: To the parks to the, the, you know, the, all the things the United Way serves and, and Health Right and you can just keep going down the list of things that are here to help people. So it's a nice place to live. But

we need some more jobs.

MNK: How do you see that one playing out?

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SB: Well, there was, there was--Talking to Henry Marockie the other day, he was, I asked him about the computer program that's going on in the schools. You know, they started with computers in kindergarten and first grade. They're now up to sixth grade, and they're going right up with the kids all the way through grade school and on into high school. I think if we can hang on till this new generation of, of a new kind of worker becomes available, I think five, six, seven, eight years down the road that will be Gaston Caperton's probably greatest legacy is that he developed a new, a new talented workforce in West

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Virginia that will be attractive to people who are looking to move their businesses to a climate that doesn't cost them so much. And living in West Virginia is a, is a wonderful thing if you can find people who will work for you. The fact that our workmen's compensation drain has finally been staunched a little bit and the fact that maybe labor is not going to control our political environment. I see West Virginia prospering down the road from an entirely different direction than, than coal and timber and steel and that sort of thing. I

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think the service industries around this country are going to suddenly realize that West Virginia is centrally located. It has a workforce that will give you a full, honest day's pay. And it has the talent to operate the high-tech machinery that is going to be required. I'm optimistic.

MNK: Um hmm.

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SB: I don't know whether that's going to happen, but that's my current scenario.

MNK: So we're sort of--

SB: We're treading water right now.

MNK: Stumbling into the age of information, so to speak.

SB: Yeah, that's right.

MNK: I guess everybody's trying to react to that everywhere.

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SB: Well, it's a, it's a long-term process, but I think it has, it has the potential. In the meantime we're just treading water and trying to stay afloat, the way it looks to me.

MNK: What's your reading of all this activity with the National Heritage area effort, if we can call it that? What, what's your reading of it? What, what role do you see that it could play in, in the recovery of the city? That sort of thing.

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SB: Well, it, it looks like it's worth the effort that's being put into it. I think, you know, the fact that our Victorian heritage is of interest to people looks like it's another area that can be of value to the town from the tourist point of view. The national--Making Wheeling a national park I've always sort of thought was a nice idea, but I've been a little skeptical of it ever actually happening when you look at the price tag. If they can

bring it off and not interfere with the free enterprise system and the, the town can continue to function the way it is

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with, with the U. S. government sitting on our shoulders, great. I'm not so sure that that can happen, but--

MNK: What do you mean exactly, interfere with the free enterprise system?

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SB: I always get concerned when the government comes in and say they're going to make Wheeling a, in this case Wheeling a, a national park. That doesn't come for free. There are going to be limitations on the area that they chose to make into the park. What you can do in that area. Can you tear down your building. Can you have a new business there. They're talking about the heart of, a big piece of downtown Wheeling from, well, from 14th Street up to old town. And Williamsburg did it without the federal government. This is kind of an attempt to do it with the federal government, and I'm not sure how all that will

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finally play out. But there are enough steps along the way that I guess if people get dissatisfied they can say no, but fifteen million dollars is needed, I think, just to do the intermodal transportation center and a few other things down there. That's just a start. Just between you and me, I don't know how long Bob Byrd can continue to get, make things like that happen. But we'll see.

MNK: You said--Starting a little bit ago, you said that you had always been intrigued, I think you said, with the idea of Wheeling becoming a park. You'd always--

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SB: Oh, I'd never given--No, I didn't, I don't think I said that. I've been intrigued by the idea since it was--

MNK: Oh.

SB: Developed. Since ... and Cassidy went to work to, to develop the idea. I've followed it with interest. But I read the latest plan, and I see a lot of people's businesses and lives being affected by what the planners say should happen. And I don't know whether or not that can all be brought off or not, but--

MNK: Do you think Wheeling has a story to tell?

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SB: Yeah. Oh, I think Wheeling is a, as I said earlier in our conversation, a very unusual place. The fact that it is a little town that thinks it's a much bigger town with a lot of original architecture. I mean that's--Excuse me--That church across the street there is 150 years old, I think. There isn't a lot of that around this country anymore. When you, when you read the history of Wheeling back to the National Road and Fort Henry and Betty Zane on up to today, it's, like your friend at West Liberty says, it's a fascinating place. How you can turn that into

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a national park with enough to attract people to come here is a, remains to be seen. But it's not something I'm opposed to. I, I may be a little skeptical that the final product is going to happen, but I think we benefit every step of the way.

MNK: You think there's, the process that the city's going through then is useful?

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SB: Oh yeah. Yeah, I think that the, the center that they're doing down there on 14th Street, plus the intermodel--If they get that done, that will be a benefit to the Civic Center. There are lots of spin off benefits as they go along through the, through the process. Whether they eventually ever get to the end, I'll be watching with interest!

MNK: What about unearthing the story of Wheeling itself? Do you think there's value in that--

SB: Um hmm.

MNK: For, for people who live here?

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SB: Um hmm. I do. But I think what you're doing is fascinating.

MNK: Sure fascinates us.

SB: Really? That makes it better when, when you're fascinated by it. I think it will result in a better product by itself.

MNK: Tell me, tell me a bit more about the, the Bloch family. I, I was interested in your father's, your father told us that he loved golf and he loved to, he loved the social scene of, of Wheeling.

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SB: Yeah, I was surprised.

MNK: And--

SB: I was surprised to, to see that.

MNK: And then he--

SB: It was a very social town when he was younger fellow. I mean people came from all, all around apparently for the golf and for the--People from Pittsburgh and Columbus and Cincinnati and Charleston, I guess. But that was, that was before my time, but he, he was a great player and won the state championship in golf and had a lot of friends through golf. I, I didn't--By the time I came along, that wasn't, that wouldn't have been very high on, on my list as far as

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Wheeling was concerned. As I told you, I think Wheeling is a, is a fascinating place to live for its many, many assets, cultural and--The social side, I would say, is a lot different than it used to be in the '30s and '40s, you know, when, when all the bells were ringing and the whistles were blowing!

MNK: The bells ringing and whistles blowing?

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SB: Yeah. I was thinking of the social side, you know. I guess they had lots of parties and that sort of thing. But that was, that's something that I, I had any, any involvement with. I was--By the time I came back from college and the Air Force, why I was interested in, in the business aspect of the community and the, and became active in, in those kinds of--I was president of the symphony at one point because I felt it was an important, important asset. But you know, guys my age when they came back to town worked on the United Way and the YMCA or whatever, whatever interested, whatever interested them. I happened to

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be interested in the Y and its social service and physical activities and--I guess I was on a lot of things in those days. I can't even remember all of them but--And my wife is, is very active today and what she can do to, to help areas of interest to her. And there are a lot of devoted volunteers in this town, I think, that spend countless hours trying to improve the community because they love it.

MNK: Yeah, it seems like a really cohesive community to me in a lot of ways.

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SB: Well, there, there--What's interesting is there are more and more new people in town. You know, the old Wheeling families, there are very few of them left anymore. People very often are dragged kicking and screaming to Wheeling, and then you can't get them out. You know, the wife or I would want to go to Wheeling, West Virginia. And after they've been here a year or two--I've been surprised over and over again by people who, A) complain about having to leave, and B) come back here to retire. So, it says, it speaks well of the area, I think.

(529)

MNK: When we left for six weeks we were awful glad to get back. You're a good, you're a good talker, a good teller and I could probably keep you here the rest of the day, but let me, let me just--I know you have other things to do. I wanted to ask you though quickly about being a father in Wheeling as opposed to a, having grown up as a son. How did, how did things change between the time you were growing up as a child and, and--You raised how many children here?

SB: Four.

MNK: Four. How was it different from them than it was for you?

(539)

SB: Well, I never thought about that! My sisters and I, we all went away to school, to boarding school. We were, I don't know, thirteen, fourteen. And I think that was partly because the school system in West Virginia in the '40s and '50s wasn't any where near as good as it is now. And so our kids--Three out of four of them went away to school. And I'm not sure that if I were raising children today here in Wheeling that I wouldn't keep them here. Go to school in, in the school system; I think it's that good. They--Raising of our kids would

(558)

be like anybody else raising kids in the '60s and '70s versus the '30s and '40s, you got an entirely different atmosphere. You have a smaller town. You have more competition to get into college. I think probably Stephanie and I spent a lot more time with our kids than our parents did. I don't know why, but--Just a style, I guess, but we, we ski together, play golf together, take vacations together. I think today raising a family you need to do that to have the togetherness that it takes to survive in this competitive world. But I never really thought much about the difference. Dad was always busy, and I've

(579)

always been busy, you know, with our other affairs. But I think he, they did a good job with us, and I hope, I hope ours learned something from what we've been trying to tell them!

MNK: How about the amount of time they spend with their kids? Now is that more or less than--

(586)

SB: Well, we don't have any grandchildren yet. The oldest one is thirty-one. So we're not--I can't give you an answer to that one yet. They're, they're spread all over the place, you know. They're in Colorado and North Carolina, Charleston. So that's a chapter yet to be written.

MNK: All right. Carrie, do you have anything for--

Carrie Nobel Kline: Well, I was really interested in what you were saying in the beginning about, about this advertising history, which I think is so unique. One, one thing that we never really got straight was exactly how Mail Pouch became Mail Pouch, how it got its name.

(599)

MNK: Well, he talked about that. He says the mail bags were a point of focus and excitement for people.

(602)

SB: Yeah, so they decided that that would be a proper name for a consumer product. If they liked the mail pouch with mail in it, they would then identify with the Mail Pouch name in a bag with tobacco in it, which turned out to be correct.

CNK: And then getting more toward the present, you said that you ran the, the business from '59 to '79, something like that?

(611)

SB: No. No, no. I was advertising director from about--I started out as a salesman down in southern West Virginia then got married in 1959 and came back here. And then became involved with the advertising. Then I was the advertising manager in the early '60s. And then we sold the business in '68. And then I became president of the tobacco division of the new company, which included this operation. And so I was there running that till 1976 when it was sold again. And then I became an administrative executive vice president of the new company until '79. And then I left the tobacco business when they wanted me to move to New York.

CNK: Um hmm.

(630)

SB: So that's the chronological career in the tobacco business.

CNK: What sorts of decisions were made in, in advertising during your years with the company?

(636)

SB: Well, I think the, the biggest decision was to stop conducting that Name the Thoroughbred Contest because it was tremendously successful and, and it was beginning to, to lose some of its zip. And then we were always searching for different ways to advertise chewing tobacco. As a matter of fact, we started a premium program similar to the one I mentioned that was back in the '20s from a different vein. Also packaging was a, became a very important consideration because we figured the fresher you could make the product, the better it

(651)

would be received by the customer. And so we went to a foil, foil pouch, which is common today. But we were one of the, not the first, but one of the first to, to use that.

MNK: What year?

(656)

SB: I think that was in the, in the late--Must have been in the early '60s, late '50s that that happened. And then the same foil pouch was, was used, before I started, was used for pipe tobacco. First was used for pipe tobacco and then went to chewing tobacco. But we tried all different kinds of advertising for chewing tobacco. Newspaper, radio, some television. There wasn't anything that really was, that stood out insofar as the advertising, advertising went, other than keep working with what we found was fairly successful.

Chewing tobacco wasn't

(676)

exactly a high profile business for advertising, like cigarettes for instance, because you have such a small percentage of the population using the product. Even in areas of, of substantial use, you know, you waste a lot of your dollars advertising in the mass media for a product that's used by three or four percent of the audience. So it--

MNK: But you got it up on barns where ninety-eight percent of that audience sees it--

(688)

SB: That worked all right.

MNK: Every day.

SB: Yup. That worked all right. The advertising cost there was so inexpensive that the fact that eighty percent of the people going by a Mail Pouch barn didn't use it didn't make any difference because you were spending only a modest amount. Then you could afford to reach the twenty percent or whatever you were trying to reach.

CNK: Remember any of the radio ads, any great slogans?

MNK: Oh, yeah, slogans I wanted to ask you about.

(700)

SB: Well, we ran, we ran one for a while called 'bring back the spitter,' which I never was very proud of, but we did run, we did run that one! But 'treat yourself to the best' was always the, the best line that I thought we ever had for chewing tobacco. But--

MNK: Who's credited with that one?

(710)

SB: There's, there's no, there's no footnote on that. It's just there.

CNK: What else did they used to say?

SB: Well, I can't think of any, I can't think of any at the moment. You know there was 'chewing serves to steady nerves.' I always liked that one.

MNK: That was a Bloch Brothers' slogan?

(720)

SB: Yeah, that was one for Mail Pouch. If you turn that off for a minute, I'll look over there in that, in--

MNK: What did you say that one was?

(730)

SB: 'The standard of excellence' was another one we used for Mail Pouch. Obviously it was on their envelopes. I thought I had--

(side 2)

SB: ... catalogs that I told you about, but I don't, I don't see it. Here's a domino; what's it say.

MNK: Yeah.

(004)

SB: Mail Pouch Tobacco. And--I don't see any other--Oh, yeah, here they are. ... slogan, but ... some of the, some of the vouchers. There's a single voucher. And there's one for twenty-five. When you bought a carton you got twenty-five vouchers. And, and you were asking about some of the things that were available. My goodness, that type is so small I can't even read it. Have to get over here. Well, there's a, a scarf pin and a pipe and a pepper shaker and a watch fob and there's a mattress.

MNK: A mattress. How many did you have to get for the mattress?

(017)

SB: Well, 'acquire forty-seven hundred and fifty of them.' You'd be buying a lot of cartons that way. And then you get, here you get twenty-five, plus you get one in each package. So it mounts up. When you figure we sold, we make millions of those packages, you know, every year. Here's a rifle and a coffee mill. Here's a bed. Rifle was fifty-six hundred. The--Here's a table lamp for 875, shotgun for 5,000. So they covered things that they thought were interesting. Here's a ring, gentleman's ring, 'rolled gold plated with garnet set.'

MNK: How much is that?

(026)

SB: Three hundred and twenty-five. A silver plated clock for 750. A collar button for a gentleman's ..., gold plated, for only eighty.

MNK: Now was that warehouse here or did you sub that out?

(029)

SB: That was drop shipped, I'm sure. The selection was kind of interesting. I thought that was fun when I found that. I found that somewhere in my travels.

CNK: This is great.

SB: I don't think there's anything else in there.

MNK: What are those, the old bags?

(034)

SB: Well, there's--These are, these are some of the old bags here. These go back to the 1920s. This was a sample. That was a free sample package that we used to use. Sampling was, of course, a big, an important part of the marketing. Here are some of those cufflinks that I was describing to you. And here's your, here's your straight razor.

MNK: Oh, boy. Mail Pouch.

(042)

SB: Mint condition. I believe you could use that, you could use that tomorrow morning if you had the--

MNK: ... sounds. It even sounds sharp.

CNK: Yeah, it does!

MNK: That's great.

CNK: Sharp ... sound.

(046)

SB: Here's another 'unrivaled.' You were asking about advertising, here's another one. 'Unrivaled,' 'the standard of excellence.' That looks like about all that I'm going to come up with for the moment other than the famous baby card. I guess I got to show you that. You haven't seen a baby card, have you?

MNK: Uh uh.

CNK: Baby card.

(050)

SB: I thought I had--I got one old one here. But you see, he's just found his Mail Pouch.

MNK: Start them off young.

SB: And you might guess where his hand is. There are some more of those around here. I'll give you one if I, if I could find them. I, I had a collection. I know they're here somewhere. Our salesmen used to carry those things around, those baby cards, but I don't see them at the moment. They used to kind of soften up the retailer a little bit. You give them one of those baby cards, then sell them some Mail Pouch.

CNK: Well, what was that, what would that pitch had been like? You would have walked in and--

(060)

SB: 'Hi, I'm from, I'm from Mail Pouch Tobacco Company.' 'Oh, yeah.' 'I just wanted to give you my calling card.' So then you give them your calling card, and it's a little baby there in his diaper with his hand in his diaper. Then they get a big laugh out of that and you're now friends.

MNK: Ready to talk business.

(063)

SB: Right. Then it got down to the serious reason for why I'm coming to see you. So--I used to carry a few of those in my day myself!

MNK: Great.