

Morris Zuts

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Interviewer: Phyllis Boeddinghaus

Transcribers: Janena Benjamin and Laura Cabbage-Draper

Abstract: Morris Zuts (1905 – 2004) was born in Krynki, Poland and arrived in 1924. He opened Morris Store, a wholesale grocery, on Main Street in 1947.

P. Boeddinghaus: This oral history is done under the auspices of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society. Morris Zuts of Morris Stores is being interviewed by Phyllis Boeddinghaus on July 20, 1995.

Okay, we're on Morris.

Morris Zuts: **Okay.**

P. Boeddinghaus: And I have been trying to have you do this oral history and today's the day and I appreciate it very much that you take your time to do this for the Historical Society.

Morris Zuts: **My pleasure.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Let's start where you were born.

Morris Zuts: **I was born in Poland.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes.

Morris Zuts: **And I came here at twenty years old, in 1924.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Did you come alone?

Morris Zuts: **I came alone. They were very much restrict in those years and it was quite a job to get here. I was nine months on my way; I was in [Ginzburg] nine months and finally got here.**

P. Boeddinghaus: That's a long trip. Now what town was that again, you were nine months in....?

Morris Zuts: **Nine months. I came to America in 1924. I started in 1923. I was nine months on my way here. And I came to ... my mother had four brothers here. The uncle in Plainfield, New Jersey, he took me off, he picked me up in New York in an [Ayaz?], that's a very famous organization that used to help immigrants. I was supposed to stay there overnight, had a first meal up there and then my uncle came about 11 o'clock and we took the train and we went to Plainfield.**

P. Boeddinghaus: That's interesting. Now what was that group that you mentioned; the group that helped you?

Morris Zuts: **My mother had four brothers here and that was one of the brothers, which helped me. He was single; he worked for a hospital, and he was an orderly and everybody liked him and he managed to – he's the one responsible for me to come here.**

P. Boeddinghaus: So there you were in Plainfield, New Jersey.

Morris Zuts: **I was there one week and from there I went to Hartford, Connecticut.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh, Connecticut.

Morris Zuts: **I had another uncle there, two uncles there. And he got me a job to work in a factory. They wanted to make me for a peddler; my uncle was a peddler. But I went out with them one day and I was shy, and I said to Uncle Mo, "I'm not going to be no peddler," and I got me a job. I worked about six months or more and was sliced – it was delayed, no work.**

P. Boeddinghaus: And what was that job, that first job you had?

Morris Zuts: **Pricing caps. Years ago, there was no such thing as unemployment insurance or anything, you just closed the factory up. And while I was there, I used to make \$12 a week. So I paid six dollars my board to my aunt for staying there and I sent five dollars home very week. It was 50 cents to send the five dollars and I had 50 cents left for myself.**

P. Boeddinghaus: And you sent that money home to Poland?

Morris Zuts: **Yes, I sent it to my mother who was there with six kids, there were seven was in the family, and I was the oldest.**

From there I went to - I decided I cannot go on without any work – I went to New Brunswick. We had in New Brunswick also relatives. I came to New Brunswick, and they want to make me in the wholesale food business.

P. Boeddinghaus: What kind of food?

Morris Zuts: **Wholesale food business.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Wholesale food, yes.

Morris Zuts: **And they wanted to make me for a peddler. And I didn't want to be no peddler. So they got me a job. I get all kinds of jobs, you know. Finally, I got a job to work in Newark for a butcher, delivering orders on a bicycle in wintertime. I worked there about a year. Then I came back, I came back to New Brunswick, and I couldn't find anything what I wanted to do. So one day I said to him, "I'm going to be a peddler." and I became a peddler.**

P. Boeddinghaus: You overcame your shyness?

Morris Zuts: **I bought a horse and wagon for \$125.**

P. Boeddinghaus: \$125?

Morris Zuts: **Yes. And my cousin, which he was also in business, went out the first day with me and I peddled. Of course you had to have a license in New Brunswick. And they got me locked up – I didn't have no license and I didn't have no \$65 to pay for a license. That was a lot of money years ago. But anyway, some of the politicians which they know – my relatives knew them – and they let me pay it out, in payments, and I became a peddler. And then I started to come to Metuchen, too, in the horse and wagon.**

P. Boeddinghaus: So what were you peddling; produce, vegetables and fruit that you got through your relatives in the wholesale?

Morris Zuts: **Produce, yes. Yes, and I used to go as far as Fords. Used to be a house where was my last stop, give the horse some water. And a pretty smart horse, I guess he was also a peddler before because if I stayed too long in one place, he'd go away to the next stop. Yeah, pretty smart.**

P. Boeddinghaus: I've heard that about milk wagons too. The horse knew the route.

Morris Zuts: **He was going home very nicely, coming here he was lazy. It took about a half hour or an hour or something to get home. And I peddled about two summers and one winter. Winter was bad. Then I saw a store in Metuchen, empty. Next-door was a butcher, Schwartz the butcher. And I got in there and I said to him, "You rent that store?" He said, "Yes." "How much rent do you want?" He said, "Sixty-five dollars a month."**

P. Boeddinghaus: Now what year was this, by this time it's like 19...?

Morris Zuts: **That would be 1928.**

P. Boeddinghaus: '28.

Morris Zuts: **And I rented that store.**

P. Boeddinghaus: And where was that located, over here on Main Street?

Morris Zuts: **424 Main Street.**

P. Boeddinghaus: 424 Main.

Morris Zuts: **You see where the tailor shop is now, before the tailor shop is a small store before that.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Yes.

Morris Zuts: **Well, it was before. You know where the shoe is?**

P.Boeddinghaus: Yes, Marmax Shoes used to be there.

Morris Zuts: **Next to the shoe store used to be a small store, which is still there, I think. What do they have in there now?**

P.Boeddinghaus: It might be a travel agent.

Morris Zuts: **Yes, that's where the first store was. And I was the first one to bring Metuchen a lot of new things. First, I got in and I brought Metuchen frozen food.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Frozen food.

Morris Zuts: **And they only give it to one. If you wanted to buy frozen food, you had to go all the way down to New Brunswick or Perth Amboy. One customer got it. We used to have everything; we used to have all kinds of meats, all kinds of chickens.**

P.Boeddinghaus: So you like *pioneered* in the frozen food distribution here in town?

Morris Zuts: **And I was the first one to build a freezer, a Frigidaire and a freezer. You walk into the Frigidaire and then they walk in the freezer. I could have kept about 200 cases – very unusual. I brought in Metuchen very famous lines, which I couldn't think of it now. One was a famous line in New York [unclear] and they gave it out to some stores, very famous. They used to... the father used to print a book. They used to specialize in all European things. And let's say you came from Germany or wherever you came from and the certain things they have up there, they would have that.**

P.Boeddinghaus: I know that's very meaningful to Europeans.

Morris Zuts: **Charles and Company.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Charles and Company?

Morris Zuts: **That's right.**

P.Boeddinghaus: To be able to get your native foods in America.

Morris Zuts: **Charles and Company. It was very famous years ago, very famous.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Yes.

Morris Zuts: **All the [unclear] used to do business there and they had a book printed every year and the men would come around and look up in the book whatever you wanted to order.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Like a catalog.

Morris Zuts: **A catalog, yeah. And that was very unusual. And then a short time after the daughters got in trouble with the union, you know, and they sold out. They send down to me a truckload of merchandise, groceries. I told them the building wasn't very strong. I thought the floor was going to go down. They gave me a special price; they gave me 10 per cent or 20 per cent off and I sold out. People knew about it in Metuchen, not everybody, but they know they were buying the best.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Is that what you called the California Market?

Morris Zuts: **That's right, yes.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Now how did you come up with that name?

Morris Zuts: **I don't know, I must have seen it someplace. I really don't know. I don't know.**

P.Boeddinghaus: So would the housewives call in their order and you would make it up and deliver?

Morris Zuts: **We would deliver, yes, or they would come to the store. The first Saturday I opened up here I took in \$100. That's a lot of money – that's more than a \$1000 today, much more.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Yes. And then were some of your relatives – your brothers working with you?

Morris Zuts: **Well, then I brought over my mother, my little mother came all by herself because the kids didn't have the quota to come here. But she did because I already became a citizen. That was 1930. And I find out the only one that could come here was my mother. It was very interesting, I wanted to bring them all over here and I asked one of the clergymen in town – what was his name - used to know everybody years ago – and he told me to see Mr. Hicks. Mr. Hicks also was a customer of ours and was in the law. And Mr. Hicks used to have an office in New Brunswick. He had two partners and also his father was there on Church Street in New Brunswick. And Mr. Hicks was very much interested. And he sent for my mother, which she came, but the kids couldn't come. He was a politician, and he used all kinds of power, but nothing worked. He put up for the kids – it was during the depression time – he put up for the kids \$6 a week for each child, to be paid every week in the bank. He wanted it to be in the bank to be paid for three years. And then three years more but that didn't work. We had letters written for us by congressmen, famous men. I used to read the letters. It was very nice of Mr. Hicks, but nothing. He worked about a year on it. Until one day he says to me, "Morris, there is only one more thing you can do, and I couldn't guarantee you that it's going to work. To go ahead and see them in person in Poland." It cost \$1000. \$1000. He went to Poland. He was there only one day and they gave him the visas, and they all came here, five came here at one time.**

P.Boeddinghaus: So your mother.....

Morris Zuts: **My mother was here already.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Oh, she came over already.

Morris Zuts: **My mother came the year before. We thought we were going to bring Mother over here so we would have more preference for the quota but that didn't work. It seems to me the people who used to work in the government in Europe they mind their own business, and they don't care what anybody writes them because we had people pulling for us who were very famous from New Jersey. He was a politician you see.**

Mr. Hicks, after they came here, we had put up in the bank a deposit for each child as I told you of \$6 a week. I said to him, “Mr. Hicks, how about we get straightened out. You don’t want to support the kids; they’re not going to bother anybody.” He said, “It’s all right with me if the bank will come along.” So we called the bank, a man by the name of Mr. Smith used to be vice president in Metuchen after the bank closed up. Mr. Smith said, “It’s okay. If Mr. Hicks wants it to close, we’ll do it.”

P.Boeddinghaus: How do you spell that name of the lawyer? Are you saying Weeks or Ricks?

Morris Zuts: Hicks – H I C

P.Boeddinghaus: Hicks, I see, Hicks.

Morris Zuts: He was a very nice man. He sent me a letter after the kids came here for a thousand dollars, a bill. And he said if he wouldn’t have any partners he would not send me any bill. But being he’s got partners he’s got to send me a bill. It took me years to pay it. Every Christmas I used to make up a nice basket of fruit and my sister, which she was here, she’s now here too – she used to deliver for me. At that time, he moved out to Highland Park, with some family trouble I guess. He lived in Highland Park. But he sent me a letter saying if he was in business for himself, he would not have sent me a bill. Isn’t that nice?

P.Boeddinghaus: Very nice. You see you don’t forget those nice things. So you got your family over here?

Morris Zuts: They were here because the kids went to school.

P.Boeddinghaus: Oh yes, they had to go to school.

Morris Zuts: Then they came down after school and they started then to help me. I was in business about possibly maybe fifteen or twenty years. Then one of my brothers, he was an artist growing up, he was a tailor he could do anything women’s things you know. He used to make women’s dresses and all that. He wanted to open a shop, a department store. And I said okay, “I’ll go along with you.” And I had a very good credit. So he went to New York and he got everything he went to get and rented the store across the street, that’s 413 Main Street; 413 - 414. And he bought a lot of things, and we couldn’t pay for them. He didn’t realize when you buy things you have to pay for them.

P.Boeddinghaus: That’s right.

Morris Zuts: And we got in trouble.

P.Boeddinghaus: I remember when you opened that; you’re talking about like along here on Main Street, I don’t know what the address is. I remember you had curtains and bedspreads.

Morris Zuts: 413 – 414 Main Street, right next to the store where we are now. It’s empty now.

P.Boeddinghaus: You had linens and you had household items, clothing and shoes.

Morris Zuts: **I said to my brothers, I said, “The only thing we can do now is make a sale, sell everything for half price so we get some money out of it,” which we did. I sent everybody whatever we owe anybody, a hundred dollars, a hundred and fifty dollars, so they know we are here, we are alive. And a lot of things at that time still were scarce after the war.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Oh yes. So that was in the late forties, after the war?

Morris Zuts: **Yes, 1947. People lined up to get it. I have pictures of it.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Oh, I see that in the window, yes.

Morris Zuts: **We kept on going and we paid our bills. But my brother, Herman, which he’s not here no more, he wanted a lot of more things which we couldn’t do. He wanted to open more stores. He didn’t realize whatever you do you got to pay for that. So he didn’t get along with us very well so he went away for himself and he left us. He left us. I think it was about – not too many years later.**

P.Boeddinghaus: And was he a tailor here in Metuchen, up Main Street?

Morris Zuts: **No. Well, he was a tailor. He knew everything. He knew how to make things and cut things. He was very smart, but he didn’t realize as far as whatever you do you got to pay for that. And if you haven’t got any money to pay for that you cannot do it.**

P.Boeddinghaus: And then you have to try to sell it and make a profit.

Morris Zuts: **That’s right. So he left us a few years later. I don’t remember how many years later.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Well, you always maintained your business and you had a lot of help, a lot of employees.

Morris Zuts: **We had as high as a hundred help.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Oh, wonderful.

Morris Zuts: **We used to line up sales.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Yes. You had fashion shows.

Morris Zuts: **Fashion shows. We also won a national award for selling [Leonard] lines. That was a big thing. Years ago [Leonard] lines used to give all [Leonard] to one customer in a small town. Just one store and nobody else could get it. And they took us to Waldorf Astoria, it was a big deal out of it.**

P.Boeddinghaus: And you were always active with things in town; like whatever was happening, like Miss Merry Christmas.

Morris Zuts: **We had a lot of things you know. I was most of the time here in the store to see people get waited on.**

P.Boeddinghaus: That old fashioned policy.

Morris Zuts: **We always had a good policy. If anybody bought something and didn't like it, bring it back, give them credit or cash, whatever. We didn't have any fights with anybody.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Right. Good. And can I ask you about your father? You were saying about your mother.

Morris Zuts: **My father died when he was 43 years old. He left the seven of us. The youngest one was one-year-old, one year. I was the oldest.**

P.Boeddinghaus: You were the oldest, so you had the responsibility.

Morris Zuts: **It was a very tough time. That was in Poland. That's why I came here, because I couldn't do much for them. So my uncle sent for me and while here maybe I would be able to help, which I did. I managed to bring them all here.**

P.Boeddinghaus: So you always stuck together as a family and worked together.

Morris Zuts: **More or less, yes.**

P.Boeddinghaus: I know. It's hard to work with family.

Morris Zuts: **My little mommy was quite a girl. Can you imagine leaving five kids home under age? The girl at that time, my sister at that time was maybe 15 or 16 years old. And to come here because he felt, you know Mr. Hicks felt, that with the mother over here they'd have more preference with the quota to come in here. That didn't work either until he went to Europe.**

P.Boeddinghaus: You had to try every avenue to get the rest of the family.

Morris Zuts: **He tried a lot of politicians who wrote letters for us and the same old letters and everything.**

P.Boeddinghaus: It finally worked. Well, I always enjoyed shopping in your department store. You always had very nice things. And I had read a story about how Mr. [Ziess?] had his shoe department.

Morris Zuts: **That's when I worked for a butcher. That's interesting. I worked for a butcher in Newark delivering orders on a bicycle.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Yes.

Morris Zuts: **I was marching across 15th Avenue and 17th Street, across the street, on the bicycle in the snow. And there he was on the other side with a bicycle too. When I was in Germany nine months I met a lot of people, I met hundreds of people and he was one of them. And he recognized me and I recognized him. We walked over to each other and since then we were very close**

together. Then after I got busy here with the small business and I didn't know what happened to him and for quite a little while I didn't hear from him. A salesman came to the store one day and I said to him, "Do you know anybody by the name of Mr. [Ziess?] in Newark?" He was from Newark, the salesman. He said, "Sure, he's my mother's butcher." So I called him and he came over that same day to the house and since then we were very close together. And he was very nice, he helped me a lot.

P.Boeddinghaus: That's a very interesting story how you met up after so many years.

Morris Zuts: He loaned me \$75,000. That's a lot of money. Like today maybe it's, God knows how much it is. I said to him, "George, you know I couldn't get that kind of loan in the bank. I'll pay you in ten years. I'll pay you 10 per cent." And I paid it and he died with maybe half a dozen payments left, which his children collected, and his wife. We were friends, very close friends all the time.

P.Boeddinghaus: That's an interesting story.

Morris Zuts: I saw so many people when I was in [Ginzburg]. We used to eat there – done by people without any pay. Let's say for a quarter or so you get a regular meal or whatever, bread and a dish of something. And if I would possibly be in New York, maybe I would meet more people. I met one man in Hartford, believe it or not.

P.Boeddinghaus: Where was this?

Morris Zuts: In Hartford, Connecticut. I was there only a short time as I said before, about half a year or so, and I was going to look in windows on Main Street, or whatever they call it up there, and I had to pass a track. And whenever you cross a track, you look on both sides to see if a train is not coming. There are those gates, you know. And a man looks at me and I look at him and he says to me, "Hello." I thought he was a black man. Actually, he wasn't shaved or anything. He recognized me and I recognized him. And we were also together for a little while and it was very successful. He came with his wife. And also I met him in [Ginzburg].

P.Boeddinghaus: What was that town in Connecticut?

Morris Zuts: That was Hartford, Connecticut.

P.Boeddinghaus: Hartford, Connecticut, yes.

Morris Zuts: That's how small this world is.

P.Boeddinghaus: Yes, that's a nice small world story.

Morris Zuts: Could you believe that? You meet somebody in Germany, and you come to this country and you meet people again.

P.Boeddinghaus: Yes, and we always talk about Mrs. Eby too. And she told me that story about how you played the opera in the store on Saturday afternoons.

Morris Zuts: I like music. I like records. I always loved music. I wish I would have been able to keep it up but I couldn't. I used to have a nice little voice. But I wouldn't sing for anybody. The only one at that time I would sing for myself. So when I was in Hartford, Connecticut, my aunt used to go away shopping on Saturday. And Saturday of course I didn't work; I worked only three days a week. So with nobody in the house, I used to sing. Cause I wouldn't sing for anybody. My aunt was very close to our neighbor next door. I can't just think of her name now. She says to my aunt one day, she says, "Mrs. Rosenstein, I'm surprised. You bought a Victrola and you didn't tell me anything about it?" You know a Victrola was a big thing years ago. She says, "No, I didn't buy no Victrola. You're mistaken." Another week goes by and the same thing over again. She tells her again. She says, "You know I bet [unclear] must be singing now. [unclear] I never sang for them. I was shy myself. That was in Hartford, Connecticut; I was there nine months.

P.Boeddinghaus: Hartford, Connecticut. So is that true – you played the opera in the store?

Morris Zuts: I used to like music. I still have a lot of music at home. Of course, nowadays the television came in they stopped everything. I have hundreds of recordings of all that but today we watch television.

P.Boeddinghaus: Right, but you used to listen to the music.

Morris Zuts: I used to listen to the music, and I used go to the opera.

P.Boeddinghaus: And had the music on in the store. She always remembered that; always tells me that story.

Morris Zuts: Mrs. Eby was a very nice, she is a very nice person.

P.Boeddinghaus: My husband took me to see her about a week ago, in the nursing home.

Morris Zuts: I know her daughters. She had two daughters, I think.

P.Boeddinghaus: Well, all her daughters passed away.

Morris Zuts: She had two or three?

P.Boeddinghaus: Three daughters and she's ninety-nine years old and she still writes. She writes prolifically; she writes about local things, about your store, about Robins Hall, about the old Hillside Inn, which was on Main Street.

Morris Zuts: When I came to Metuchen there was two butchers on Main Street.

P.Boeddinghaus: Yes. Do you remember who they were?

Morris Zuts: Mr. Schwartz – that's where I rented my little store, and the other one was Mr. Kohn.

P.Boeddinghaus: Oh, Roy Kohn?

Morris Zuts: Roy Kohn, yes. And of course there was about two A&P Stores, small ones.

P.Boeddinghaus: Yes, one was up South End, Metuchen.

Morris Zuts: And there was a National Store. What else? The Mutual Store – a lot of small stores.

P.Boeddinghaus: Do you remember the White Market, somebody told me about the White Market. I think it was here on Main and Hillside? No? Maybe before your time.

Morris Zuts: You’ve gone too far before my time.

P.Boeddinghaus: Well, it was a different system in those days that you would go to the butcher, and you would go to the grocery store, you would go to the produce.

Morris Zuts: It was a form of entertainment. People used entertain themselves. Sit down and talk to each other, tell stories with each other. Today it’s cold.

P.Boeddinghaus: Yes.

Morris Zuts: Buy everything ... pack it up in a bag ... take it out to the car.

P.Boeddinghaus: Yes, there was a certain amount of sociability in the shopping.

Morris Zuts: And if there was no money during the depression time, you came without money. You can’t say if you’re a customer who comes to the store all the time, he can’t say to you just because you haven’t got no money we’re not going to give it to you.

P.Boeddinghaus: So you had the book, the book, write it in the book?

Morris Zuts: We made out slips for that, yeah.

P.Boeddinghaus: Slips, yeah. Yes, I remember those days and then I remember too during the war when things were rationed. Were you ever involved with that, with the rationing? You opened up after the war?

Morris Zuts: No, I don’t remember that.

P.Boeddinghaus: We had like coupons for the meat and paper goods and sugar and staple items you had to give a coupon.

Morris Zuts: This was the Second World War?

P.Boeddinghaus: Yes.

Morris Zuts: Honestly, I don’t remember.

P.Boeddinghaus: I used to have to deal with it and help my mother with it. So you’ve seen a lot of changes on Main Street?

Morris Zuts: So you’re a Metuchenite?

P.Boeddinghaus: Well, I'm actually from New Brunswick. I'm from New Brunswick and lived in lots of places in New Brunswick and my father and his brothers were in the building business.

Morris Zuts: I came from Nelson Street.

P.Boeddinghaus: Oh yes.

Morris Zuts: Nelson Street. I was myself, after I was six months in Hartford, Connecticut, in a little house all the way down on Nelson Street. But years ago, they didn't tell you they haven't got no place for you. You came you know, slept in the kitchen, the house was only two or three rooms, and nobody ever asked any questions.

P.Boeddinghaus: But they all helped one another, took in the friends and relatives. Gave them a place to sleep and so forth.

Morris Zuts: That's right.

P.Boeddinghaus: That's interesting. Well, you've seen a lot of changes along Main Street.

Morris Zuts: The whole thing changed. It's not the same anymore. That's goes all over now.

P.Boeddinghaus: Right.

Morris Zuts: It's a new world. You cannot even walk over today and ask anybody if they need any help because they ask you. There is no such thing as help. They go themselves in the dressing rooms, there's no.... The whole thing changed now.

P.Boeddinghaus: So now, the next thing I want to ask you – what is your philosophy for your longevity?

Morris Zuts: I would say the most important I would say is get up in the morning and go someplace.

P.Boeddinghaus: Go each day and do something each day. Yes.

Morris Zuts: And of course, you know I think also not to be aggravated; not to have any fights with anybody.

P.Boeddinghaus: So how do you do that? What is your horoscope? When is your birthday, what month?

Morris Zuts: May, May 1st.

P.Boeddinghaus: Oh, May 1st, I think you're a Taurus. So not to be aggravated, that's very good, I'll have to tell my husband.

Morris Zuts: Of course, not to worry too much.

P.Boeddinghaus: Things are going to work out.

Morris Zuts: **And also never to lie.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Yes. That's interesting, to have a place to go everyday.

Morris Zuts: **And also I had a very good family. My brothers was very good and I was blessed a number of years I didn't actually do anything, just sit down and talk to people. Otherwise you know they took care of everything.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Yes, all worked together good. What – I interrupted you, what did you say?

Morris Zuts: **We worked together. I mean they helped a lot you know. They did most of the things you know as far as ... I didn't do anything physically.**

P.Boeddinghaus: You were the manager.

Morris Zuts: **We always had, when we had our store here, we had two men, two black men.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Oh, I remember them yes.

Morris Zuts: **One was killed; he was in his car going down someplace the other side of Newark. I went to his funeral.**

P.Boeddinghaus: I remember that. That was sad

Morris Zuts: **And the other one is still here, we usually go out for breakfast every morning.**

P.Boeddinghaus: That's good.

Morris Zuts: **We go to McDonald's.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Oh, you go to McDonald's?

Morris Zuts: **Yes, he likes it – I have my coffee there.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Yes and then what do you have, do you have the McMuffin, Egg McMuffin or the pancakes?

Morris Zuts: **He likes pancakes, yes. Sometimes we get four pancakes and he gives me one. I usually have breakfast home, that's my second breakfast.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Which one do you go to?

Morris Zuts: **I'm a very lucky guy. I've got a very good wife who takes good care of me. I was married late in life because I was obligated to a lot of things, you know, and I felt America was a different kind of life and you were responsible for your family, and I had a family.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Yes, being the oldest and you took care of your younger brothers and sisters.

Morris Zuts: I was very lucky to find the right one. Also, to my friend – also to my friend Mr. Zeiss.

P.Boeddinghaus: Oh yes, Mr. Zeiss.

Morris Zuts: Yes, he was a butcher of course years ago when you knew everybody and what everybody likes. And he would talk to you and you would tell him you got two sisters, maybe you got somebody you can suggest to somebody. And he was the one who introduced me to one of the sisters who used to be a customer of his and she had a sister in New York and that's how I got into the family.

P.Boeddinghaus: I see.

Morris Zuts: So I was very fortunate.

P.Boeddinghaus: So there were more connections there with Mr. Zeiss.

Morris Zuts: Oh yes, we were very close friends.

P.Boeddinghaus: So he was a matchmaker?

Morris Zuts: He was a matchmaker. He didn't get any money for it, but he was a matchmaker, that's right. That was very nice.

P.Boeddinghaus: And were you active in the Temple here in Metuchen?

Morris Zuts: No, I helped the Temple a lot of times. I was the first ones who have the first meeting. Mr. Kramer used to have a store in Metuchen, department store. He also was involved with the banking business and all kinds of loans and whatever and I think he took over a house on Highland Avenue.

P.Boeddinghaus: I remember that house, behind the Acme or whatever that was.

Morris Zuts: That's right, it was Mr. Wernik lived next to it. And he gave it to the Metuchen people. At the time there wasn't even a dozen people there. We had the first meeting there – Mr. Wernik, Mr. Tolberg, there were very few of us. And of course they sold the house and they built a place right in the back here. And they were very small at that time; today there are 500 members.

P.Boeddinghaus: It's beautiful up on Grove Avenue.

Morris Zuts: They have a new [unclear] twenty-five years ago. Any problems of course to change the whole thing, who wants to be bothered with it. You don't want to ride in a horse and wagon; you want to ride in a car. And of course, he wanted to do it there the same, saying and doing the same thing every man, which I suppose he couldn't do while the elder people were there. But most of the older people are gone. I was never active as far as that goes.

P.Boeddinghaus: Well, then were you and Mr. Kramer in competition?

Morris Zuts: **In a way, yes. At that time already his son was running it. I never had any problems.**

P.Boeddinghaus: No, because that's good to have competition I think. And he had dry goods; he sold more sewing and notions and patterns.

Morris Zuts: **Then he sold to Mr. Kahn.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Yes, yes.

Morris Zuts: **Mr. Kahn came when I opened up the store. Mr. Kahn came with a few more members of the town, like five or ten, Mr. [Freeman?], and they liked the store, but they said I wouldn't last long. I would be there maybe a half a year to a year or something like that – or three months, and then I'd be out of business. That's what they predicted. They were wrong.**

P.Boeddinghaus: I had read his history just lately that he had started with Sears Roebuck and worked for Sears Roebuck for a long time before he opened up his own.

Morris Zuts: **He was a manager there.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Yes.

Morris Zuts: **He's the one took over Kramer's. Seems to me Kramer did not get along very well with his, Mr. Kramer with his son. I don't know if that's the story.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Was that the son who was postmaster in Metuchen?

Morris Zuts: **Then also he was working for a store in Plainfield I think before.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Maybe Tepper's or...?

Morris Zuts: **No, the other one. I was never too close with him, Mr. Kahn. We talked to each other but that's all.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Well, Metuchen had a lot of nice stores and services. The merchants would deliver, and everybody was very compatible.

Morris Zuts: **People would come out to the store, Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Malone, and they would go out and buy things for you. You told them what you liked, you know. If they bought things for you they would call you and tell you they have it for you, something which you would like, you know. You weren't obligated to buy it, but they would get it for you.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Very personalized. Do you remember the Grosses that were I business up in the Clara Barton section, Nathan Gross?

Morris Zuts: **What kind of business?**

P.Boeddinghaus: They were wholesale groceries and they would deliver into Metuchen, they had feed and coal.

Morris Zuts: **Must have been before my time.**

P.Boeddinghaus: No, that must have been before your time because as you say you were here in the '30s and '40s; they were probably here before that.

So now how do you feel about your retirement, do you feel it's time?

Morris Zuts: **Well, I feel both ways – good and bad.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Yes.

Morris Zuts: **Good because I'm not doing anything special right now, but I have a place to come every morning. I work a little bit around the store. I like to come in. But what I'm going to do, I don't know. I go away in the wintertime for a couple months. I'd like to find something else. I can't stay home all the time and sleep.**

P.Boeddinghaus: I know that's the way my husband feels too. He likes to have a place to go everyday and we're in business about the same time as you are.

Morris Zuts: **You're young people.**

P.Boeddinghaus: We opened in 1948.

Morris Zuts: **What business?**

P.Boeddinghaus: Jack's Flower Shop on South Main Street.

Morris Zuts: **Oh, I'm getting to the stage where I don't remember too well.**

P.Boeddinghaus: You see we started business when we were very young. We were only in our twenties, so we were in business forty-seven years.

Morris Zuts: **The same as we are.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Yes, the same.

Morris Zuts: **Are we longer than you are?**

P.Boeddinghaus: I think you're a little longer. I think. July of '48.

Morris Zuts: **The flower shop on the corner here, what was his name? Where the bank is now?**

P.Boeddinghaus: Yes, that's called *Inspirations*.

Morris Zuts: **I used to bring in for Christmas, Christmas trees. And he got mad because we sold Christmas trees and he sold Christmas trees. So he took in oranges. I'll never forget it. He took in oranges. If I can sell Christmas trees, he can sell oranges. What was his name?**

P.Boeddinghaus: I'm trying to think who that was down there. It escapes me too. It starts with a B.

Morris Zuts: **He had a building business.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Yes, a building business.

Morris Zuts: He would build a house, go all over Middlesex, he would build a house many times.

P.Boeddinghaus: I can't think of it. He's not been well lately. I hear he's been very sick.

Morris Zuts: I haven't seen him come for a long time.

P.Boeddinghaus: Yes, and his wife worked in the business with him.

Morris Zuts: They were in the flower business for years and he didn't like the idea that I sold Christmas trees.

P.Boeddinghaus: We sold Christmas trees years ago but that's very hard to stand out in the cold and turn the Christmas tree. And the housewife likes a perfect tree – and what is a perfect Christmas tree? It's in your imagination.

Morris Zuts: What happens to Christmas trees now?

P.Boeddinghaus: Oh yes, they're sold by flower shops and certain places open up just for that season. Like Hank Bruno in Metuchen, and the Y has been selling Christmas trees and the charities....

Morris Zuts: They have stands outside day and night, 24 hours a day, with nobody watching them, I guess.

P.Boeddinghaus: Well, they have gotten so expensive. I can't believe the price of a Christmas tree. I would never pay \$75 for a Christmas tree but there are people who will do that and who like doing that. They keep up that tradition.

Morris Zuts: At one time it was about two dollars, three dollars, five dollars, I guess.

P.Boeddinghaus: So is there anything else that you would like to have recorded for posterity. I think that's nice that you speak about your wife. What is her name again?

Morris Zuts: Cele.

P.Boeddinghaus: Cele, yes, I know Cele yes. And the wives of your brothers worked a lot too in the office.

Morris Zuts: I am very lucky. I have a good wife and I have good brothers.

P.Boeddinghaus: Now is Barbara your daughter?

Morris Zuts: Barbara was my brother's.

P.Boeddinghaus: She's your niece.

Morris Zuts: Barbara's father was the one actually that opened a tailor business; he was tailor, he did all women's things, he was a ladies man.

P.Boeddinghaus: That's a play on words!

Morris Zuts: **But he was not a businessman. Something was missing. I don't know, he was in business for himself a long time, but he didn't do too well.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Well, there are some people that have that business acumen that they come up to it and some people just don't understand it.

Morris Zuts: **And then he got a job working in a big company, they have a lot of stores now. I can't think of the name now. But as I said, I was lucky enough to have brothers that were very nice to me, and I was nice to them. And I think the best thing in life that I did is to bring them all here. That was a big, big thing. You can't even describe it; you can't even imagine it. If it wouldn't be for Mr. Hicks, the lawyer, they'd be all killed. There is nobody in our town left.**

P.Boeddinghaus: No? What was your town called in Poland?

Morris Zuts: **It was called *Krynki*. *Krynki*. We had a tailor worked for us here. He was a very unusual man. He was retired and lived in a place in South Plainfield. His name was Miller. He talked with an accent like a European but actually he was born in America. What actually happened was his father and mother went for a visit in Europe, whatever, in Poland, and the war must have broken out and he was grown up there and became a tailor there. Anyway, after this war he finds out he's got two brothers in there. His father got married again, I suppose his wife died, and he had two brothers in there. One of the brothers was a big one; he was in charge of education, and he came here to visit him. He didn't see much of him. All the colleges called on him all around to speak to him. It was during the Cold War and as far as the education and colleges they were friendly but not with the Cold War ...**

And he went to visit one or two in Poland one time, and I asked him, "Miller, did you visit our town?" He said, "Yes." His brother must have fixed him up with an automobile and he came back with pictures. "I have pictures to show you" he said. The synagogue, the temple, the walls are there. That was the temple. The four synagogues are all gone. Half of the town is burned down. There is no Jewish people in there. It's sad.

As I said if it wouldn't be for my uncle to bring me here and if it wouldn't be me with Mr. Hicks to help to bring the rest of the family, we'd all be dead. You see my father died as a young man and left seven of us.

P.Boeddinghaus: Did your father have TB? Sometimes ...

Morris Zuts: **My father used to cough a lot. Also he used to smoke. He died of a stroke.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Did you ever smoke?

Morris Zuts: **I did. I gave it up. Otherwise, I wouldn't be here.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Smoking is passé now. [recording stops and starts again]

Morris Zuts: **...customers in business ... different relationship, it was not the same as it is today.**

P.Boeddinghaus: No, that's what we say too, we used to know all our customer's names and addresses and where they lived. There has been a big turnover. We really don't know many of our customers anymore.

So do you have anything else to say on the tape? I found this very interesting.

Morris Zuts: **If you ask me, but I don't know what else to tell you.**

P.Boeddinghaus: But you feel you had good years here on Main Street?

Morris Zuts: **We're very lucky, we're living in a country that is the best in the world. There's nothing like it.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Have you traveled back to Europe

Morris Zuts: **Never. I did go to Israel three times. If they would stop fighting and killing one another, they'd be alright. People don't realize that life is short. Instead of making good things, they make things to kill. They spend millions of dollars on it. They also fight in the name of God. If you are enjoying whatever you enjoy while you believe in any religion you believe in, that's your job. But if you are not religious that's also you. One thing we should know, we're here for a visit. Before we turn around, we're gone. Who are we to change this world? We couldn't change this world. It would be nice if the people realized, and they stopped killing one another. It's very sad. And nowadays they have better ammunition then they had years ago.**

P.Boeddinghaus: Yes, lethal.

Morris Zuts: **There's a possibility they could destroy every world now and everyone. They could send down missiles for thousands and thousands. They didn't have that before.**

P.Boeddinghaus: But you don't worry about that.

Morris Zuts: **I don't worry, my days are important later on. But I worry about everybody else. I don't like to see that but there is nothing I can do about it. If they were all like me there would be no wars.**

P.Boeddinghaus: I wonder what it all means.

I really thank very much for sharing your pleasant memories with the Historical Society. This will go into the Archives at the Metuchen Library for posterity and in the future perhaps some other people will listen to it. And I could give you a copy if you like.

Morris Zuts: **You're very nice.**

P.Boeddinghaus: I'll be sure you get you a copy, okay?

P.Boeddinghaus:

This is a postscript to the Morris Zuts oral history. The store sold out to the bare walls, display cases, display counters and all of their merchandise, and the store closed on November 1, 1995, and it's a very sad time in the business section of Metuchen that Morris Stores is no longer.

The building is being renovated and there will be many smaller shops in that space. And there is someone working on the project right now. There are various trucks in the back parking lot and working inside renovating the building that once had been Morris Stores.

- End -