SHOE WORKERS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
LEWISTON-AUBURN, MAINE

David Quinn **SWOH #045**
(*Interviewer: Andrea L'Hommedieu*) April 20, 2010

Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview for the Shoe Workers Oral History Project at Museum L-A, the date is April 20th, 2010, and I am with David Quinn at Acorn Shoe in Lewiston, Maine, and this is Andrea L'Hommedieu. David, could you start just by giving me your full name.

David Quinn: David Kieran Quinn.

AL: And where and when were you born?

DQ: I was born May 26th, 1948, was born in Springfield, Massachusetts, grew up in Bristol, Connecticut.

AL: And Bristol, Connecticut, what was that like at the time you were growing up in the fifties and sixties?

DQ: We lived in a fabulous neighborhood and I had great friends growing up, went to Jennings grade school, and then Eastern High, off to University of Connecticut in Storrs, graduated from there with a degree in business, and moved to Maine as a lifestyle move. Back then a lot of us moved around, our choices weren't so much economic, we just moved to places we thought would be great places to do the next thing, so came to Maine.

AL: Why Maine?

DQ: Oh, Maine was the ocean. I wanted to head north, in New England, and Maine had the ocean side of it, which was attractive to me. I had some family from New Hampshire, so we skipped over New Hampshire and shot up into Maine, and just started up living up here. I came up as a teaching tennis pro and got work doing that pretty much right away, and I did some factory work too, second shift, in a mill up in Augusta.

AL: Now, what mill in Augusta.

DQ: Herb Miller owned the mill, it was right on the dam, it was the – what was the name of that mill, I can't think of the name of the mill. But I'd worked in factories, in high school I worked factory work. When I turned sixteen I worked making coils to dimmer

units in a factory in Bristol, Connecticut. And I did some other factory work, but I worked a lot of jobs. You know, as a kid you had a lot of jobs, paper routes and different stuff.

AL: What did your parents do for work?

DQ: My father was an independent sales rep, working in the cosmetic trade, doing the New York City, Boston, Providence, Rhode Island, Waterbury, Connecticut, working with suppliers to the cosmetic trade and matching them up with buyers for the stuff that they made, and as an independent rep he drove Volkswagens and was gone, was home about three nights a week, stayed on the road.

AL: And did you have brothers and sisters?

DQ: I have two brothers and three sisters.

AL: So fairly big family.

DQ: Yeah, I have a twin brother who lives in York, Maine, Peter, and I have an older sister Carol who lives in Burlington, Connecticut, and then it's Ed, Ed lives in Littleton, Colorado, along with my sister Pat who lives with her husband also in the same area, and my sister Florence lives in New Jersey, soon to be in Connecticut. She works in New York City.

AL: Wow, so spread out in three different places really. So tell me, you came to Maine and you did some factory work, and you said you did tennis?

DQ: I was a teaching tennis pro. If you wanted to learn how to play tennis, you could find me somewhere, I was either at Capital Tennis in Augusta, when I started this business that's where I was, and I worked also right here in Lewiston, at the indoor complex. That's closed I think, yeah, it is closed, it's on Westminster. Frank, let's see, what was the name of the family that owned that. I can't remember.

AL: So tennis was something you did through high school?

DQ: Yeah, did that, one of my jobs was a caretaker of two clay courts in Bristol, so I cleaned the courts up, that was when I was fourteen and fifteen, I'd clean the courts and then I'd start playing tennis on them, as soon as I cleaned them.

AL: So tell me, how did you get into the shoe industry, and about what year was it?

DQ: Well, that's a fun story. I made holiday gifts every year for family and friends. When I got to, in 1973, approaching the Christmas holiday, a lady friend came up with the idea of a slipper sock and I latched right on to it, because I grew up wearing them as a kid, all of us did. And so I thought, it seemed like something simple I could throw

together, I looked around to see if I could find some that were on the market and it was difficult, so I thought all right, I'll just get some leather and some socks and I'll figure out how to wrap a leather around the sock.

Well I called, well I knew all the shoe shops here, because at this time I'm playing tennis with some people that owned shoe shops and worked in the shoe shops, so I called the Gardiner Shoe, I think it was in the old Pepperell Building, and some gentleman says, you need some lasts, which I didn't know what those were but he said come on over, I went over and we, I talked about the project, I said I had about twenty people and I described it. He said, well, we can do it. I said, we don't need ever size, so he gave me about three or four lasts to cover the sizes of the people. And I thought okay, so I used that to face the bottom of the foot, but I needed a way to wrap the leather. So I bought some plywood that was about 3/4" thick, and I cut the shape of the sole, I traced the sole onto the, drew the sole onto the plywood, took a jigsaw and cut that shape out, pulled that sole shaped piece of wood right out of the plywood and I had this hole, and I sanded the edges of the hole and I sanded the edges of this plywood, and I wet the leather and I cut the leather to be an inch and a half larger than the hole all the way around, and I took the leather, wet it, put it over the hole, took the piece that I cut out of the hole, put it on top and slammed it back into the hole and jammed the leather so it had sidewalls. Let it dry for a day, and I knocked out the wooden piece and I had, the leather was completely formed, it had sidewalls completely formed, so, a little wrinkly, but it got the job done. That's one right there, that's an example of it. In that gilded slipper sock. I can actually show one, I've got some in the back room.

And I went to a cobbler who had a grasshopper, which is a machine used in the shoe shops to do repair work, and he stitched – I cemented the sides onto the, I put the sock on the last and then put cement on the sides of the leather and cemented it to the sock, to hold it in place, gave it to a, I went to a shoe repair shop, the guy had, as I said, the grasshopper, and then he stitched the twenty pairs, twenty-two pairs actually – for me, one single row of stitching around it with the grasshopper, and that was my holiday gifts, and people loved them. They got them, seemed to wear them a lot, and I went into, I put my marketing business cap on and started doing research on the market for slipper socks, and couldn't find too many out there for sale anymore.

So, I needed some history on it, I called, I found there was an association of, a hosiery association in North Carolina, Association of Hosiery Manufacturers, and I called them up and the gentleman on the phone actually was the guy who ran the whole association, and he had history on slipper sock production from 1948 to 1955, and it was like the Wigwams and the Ripons and different people who made these things, and they sold for a dollar ninety-eight, primarily in department stores, and they were stitched by hand at home, from a lot of women who were working during the war, and then husbands came home, they started to have families and they still wanted some work, and these sock companies would deliver the socks and the bottoms and people would hand stitch them on, with yarn, and those are the slipper socks we wore as kids,

growing up. We'd get home from school at night and my mom would say, go put your slipper socks on, get your shoes off, put your – or if you were running around barefoot, put your slipper socks on. And where we all had to go to get them, at least I did, was at the, I had to make my bed every morning, which I did, and when I came home at night my slipper socks were, I had kicked them off in the middle of the night and they were down, so I'd have to reach way down under the covers to get my socks out, and then later that night I'd kick them off again, and the next day, to retrieve them, I'd have to go through the same process.

So I got the figures on how many of these things were produced from '48 to '55, and it was huge. So I decided it was going to be all north of the Mason-Dixon Line, so I took population statistics, I found out the number of them, I said okay, I'm going to use children and women, I'm going to just say that's who only wore them. And I got the population for, rough children/women population for those years, and it was just about a pair of slipper socks for every person, that's how huge the – so I figured people would know what they are, and who certainly recognized that, if I can get mine made into something, a version that will be, it'll be one of the nicest ones, and would they remember them fondly, that's what I needed to know, would they remember them the way I do, and want to own a pair themselves.

So to start the business, in 1975, oh actually, here it is, I've got my notes, 1974, in September through November of 1974 I brought the idea to Ted Johanson at Falcon Shoe – Ted was a fabulous tennis player.

AL: Oh, he was?

DQ: Yes, he was, and he and I played doubles a lot, we had a great doubles foursome, and we played singles and stuff. And in conversation I mentioned to him that I had this idea, the lipper sock idea, and he said, well let's have lunch and play some tennis, I'll show you my factory. It was a Friday. So that's what we did, we came over here to this building and went to the fifth floor, he showed me his entire factory, gave me the tour, and he showed me why the slipper sock wouldn't fit in his factory, it wouldn't consume enough of all the different departments, things that he did. And I could easily see it. And then he turned to me and he said, why don't you make them? And I said, yeah, I said, sure. And he said, why don't you come in Monday, I have Camille Goupil, who's my superintendent, and Camille is approaching retirement, but he's available and he can work with you.

So I came in on Monday, and Camille and I, over a period of a bunch of weeks, made prototypes and (*unintelligible*), and then I took the idea down to L.L. Bean, just cold, the item, walked into the old L.L. Bean, the buy offices were still where the retail is right now -

AL: Okay, in Freeport?

DQ: In Freeport. I walked up to the desk and I said, held the item up, and I said, who would be the buyer for this item. The lady looks up, sees the item, walks off, some guy comes up, he looks at and he goes, hmm, that's not me, just a minute. So he goes, another big guy comes up, doesn't look at me at all, just looks down at what I have in my hand and he said, where were you three months ago, I could have sold five thousand pair of those. And that wasn't Mert Greenleaf, but Mert was the L.L. Bean guy, that was – I'll think of his name. Great guy. Yeah, he ended up at Land's End, too, working for Land's End. He lives in Pownal, Maine.

AL: So they interested.

DQ: So then I actually got a job I was looking for, it was the teaching job in Augusta, tennis, so I did that for the next year, but when the year was over, after the year ended I called Ted back and mentioned that I was really interested in diving into this, had percolated the idea for a year. And though I loved teaching the tennis, and I still putz with it once in a while, taught my daughter how to play last summer, it was fun.

But anyway, I called Ted and we did the same routine again one year later, but we'd been playing tennis all year, off and on, here and there, he'd come up to Capital Tennis, and he said sure, start – we had lunch, played some tennis, and he said, took me back to the factory, said what can I do for you, and I said, well I'd just like to be able to call, because I'd met a lot of his people in his factory, if I needed some information I knew who knows about the machinery, I know who knows about threads, I know who knows about leathers and the buyer for leathers, so if I could tap into that, and he said yeah, that's okay, you can do that. And he said, you'll probably need some leather and I've got some I think you could probably start using if you want, and it's in the back room and, he says, and if you want to cut it on my machines, second shift, that's okay too, and if you need some space up in my storage area in the back corner, you can move some stuff out, and he shows me where that is. It's up in the back corner of this building, on the river, on the sixth floor on the far corner, it's this great view of the foam traveling down the river every day, big pile of foam we had on the river from all the pollution back then.

AL: So that's where you started.

DQ: So that's how it started. And I didn't get a Bean order in that year that I was in the business. You'll love this story, the year that I was in the business I was doing the tennis, at the Capital Tennis, Bean went to Reykjavik, Iceland, and found the socks made from the wool of the Icelandic sheep, with some pretty patterns that they knitted into the socks, and found local people to do the same routine, the historical routine of stitching a bottom onto the upper. So they were all set, so I needed something else to replace that. And I did all my cash flows and everything and I realized I needed, in order to survive for a year, just doing this business, and to break even by the end of the

year, and after deciding what prices I could collect for a pair, which I think was six dollars and thirty-five cents, I would need a five thousand pair order. And I'm at a bar in Augusta, sitting with a vacuum cleaner salesman who says that – Hoover vacuum cleaners he was selling door-to-door – and he says, oh yeah, I'm from Seattle and there's a company out there called Eddie Bauer that is way better than Bean, he's partial.

So I gave them a call and I asked for, somebody said, you need to talk to the new products manager when you're trying to, you know, so I said, I want the new products manager. And a gentleman named Cam Siegler (*sounds like*) answers the phone and I describe to him the item I've got. And now I've cleaned it up, it's not the, now I've got a real legitimate, it was the one I showed L.L. Bean when they said where were you three months ago. Now it's got a bottom with a separate sidewall stitched to it, and there's a layer of thick foam between the leather, all leather bottom and the rag wool sock, it's a fabulous rag wool sock that's eighty-five percent wool and thirty percent nylon with two percent lycra spandex so it's got some nice stretch to it.

So I pitch him this product and he says, well, we're interested, I said well, I'll send you a sample, I said, would you like to see one, I can send you a sample, and he says yes, I would. So I sent him a sample, and then I provided for the time for this and two weeks went by, and I gave him a call, I says, this is David Quinn, I sent you the sample, did you get it, he said yeah. I said, what do you think, he says we like it, we think we'd like to put it in the catalogue, and I said oh great. And now my office is in a little A-frame in Lovejoy Shores, up in Fayette, that's where I'm living, I'm renting up there while I'm teaching tennis in Augusta. I said, how many pair do you think you can sell? He says, five thousand pair. So I didn't say anything, I just said, well, accept. Well, we need an order pretty quick to get started on this. He says, all right, and soon I get an order for twenty-five hundred pair. Which is my go-sign. They end up buying four thousand, nine hundred and ninety-seven pair or something, three pair short of five thousand. I went out on the road and sold an additional five hundred pair.

My first retail account – oh, that's another great story. This is before I even got the Eddie Bauer account, I had picked up my first retail account, but that was in January of 1976, and I'd made about a hundred and thirty-three pair, a hundred and thirty-five pair of the product. And this head of the stitching room at Falcon Shoe, fabulous lady, stitched them all for me, she went around twice, fabulous stitching, beautifully done, and I went to Cheshire Hill Mall in Massachusetts, Chestnut Hill Mall, upper end mall where they were having a craft show in January where you'd set up between all the stores and things. And I'm setting up, got my hundred thirty-three, thirty-five pair, which I'd packed into my Saab '99, an old, those old bullet shaped Saabs, and I'm unpacking and I'm watching these other people unpack their stuff and we're all going to show our wares and see if we can make some business.

And these two nurses go by, they're on their way to work with their coffees and they

see, and they each buy a pair, before I even set up. And I'm looking around, nobody else has sold anything to anybody, I'm saying, this is awesome, boy, I'm off and running. Well, I don't sell another pair for two days. And I pack up and load the car up and head back up and I think, well, I'm just going to stop in the Kittery Trading Post. So I cold-call the Kittery Trading Post, I walk in, I grab a, with a pair of my slipper socks in one hand and I go over to their sock rack and I grab a Wigwam, the Wigwam sock that they're selling, which is the same sock I've got, I used for my slipper sock, and I ask who'd be the buyer for this, same routine, who'd be the buyer for this item. And Nancy Caligliari (*sounds like*) shows up, and later John Reardon, show up, and they look at the item I have and they say, yeah, we could sell that. And my price is, again, at six dollars and thirty-five cents a pair. I say, well, how many would you like, I say, I've got a hundred and thirty-five pair in my car, and they said, well, we'll take them all.

So I have, my receipt pad is, I bought it at Hannaford's, right, where they have their pencil and paper area they have the little receipt pad where you flip out the carbon and you flip down the little thing and you write and you get three copies, a carboned receipt pad. And I made a little order, I brought the slippers in, they're all over the floor, customers are walking around me, I'm trying to get the count right with the sizes, and they're fine with all that, and I give them my little receipt, I give them thirty days to pay. And I get home, and within two days I get a check for all hundred and thirty-five pair, and they paid me for more than I invoiced, two or three pair, and they said, you didn't count right. And I was shocked, they paid me early and they paid me more, they'd counted, they didn't take anything from me. I was shocked. And that kind of, I have to say, that kind of assistance, you know, people showed up and just lined up to help, I got it over and over again, I got it from Ted, I got it from suppliers, I got it from Wigwam when I got into business with them and people out there, and obviously Kittery Trading Post, and it was just great. Young energy and people could see that there's something going on and just wanted to help.

AL: So did they become someone you continuously supplied to?

DQ: We still sell, we've never stopped selling Kittery Trading Post, to this day. And they're one of our major accounts. Now Eddie Bauer, that's the most interesting story because we actually stopped selling them, by choice, and I have the year written on this thing somewhere, because their business, they lost it, they zigged off in another direction very different from like a L.L. Bean, who was their primary competitor. L.L. Bean stayed true to their roots, even to this day they're still outdoorsy, very outdoors, very wilderness, very fishing and hunting. And Eddie Bauer went more department store women's fashion, and they missed what people wanted in their business. They got up to two hundred and fifty stores. Anyway, I grew with them, I grew, as fast as I could grow the business I grew with these people, with Eastern Mountain Sports and L.L. Bean, and I did some private label for these people, so their name on the item was same item, over there, had Acorn on it, and over at Eddie Bauer might have Eddie Bauer on it, and if they needed a lot more and I couldn't make them fast enough I'd

send them the Acorn brand and they'd ship you the Acorn brand or the Eddie Bauer brand.

And Eddie Bauer remained my largest account for twenty years, which the amazing thing about that is, I got the name from a vacuum cleaner salesman in a bar. So then I go out and I get, we get up seven hundred and fifty accounts. At about seven hundred and fifty accounts we end up on the space shuttle, the slipper socks, and then within a year we're at fifteen hundred accounts and we put on reps. And then we grow to twenty-two hundred, twenty-four hundred accounts, which have sixty-six hundred stores or seven thousand stores, we're doing trade shows, we do the shoe show in, it was in Las Vegas, but we're doing the shoe show in New York City twice a year, and also the apparel show in New York City, the sporting goods show in New York City. Our reps are doing local shows, and we were advertising, we were the longest continuous advertiser in the outdoor retailer magazine, probably still hold the record for the longest, fifteen years of advertising. We cold-called, we wrote names down at shows, we'd turn to your booth and be hanging out with you for three days, so okay, who should I be selling this stuff to. So we keep getting names, we call people.

We grew the business and grew the business and grew the business, you'd think we'd find a bigger account than the one I got from that vacuum cleaner salesman at the bar. We didn't, we didn't until '94, '95, '96, somewhere in there, which is twenty years later. We started the business in April first of 1976.

AL: And have you always exclusively done the slipper sock?

DQ: Oh, no, we started making sheepskin items, the next thing we started to do was sheepskin items. My first sheepskin item was, I call my Oewe, and – the sheepskin item also has a funny story. Jim Jennings was the buyer for L.L. Bean, I was sitting, pitching one of the slipper socks and coming up with the orders and just doing a routine with them, we had Little People slipper socks and different colors and things. And he plops this, his sock on the table, which is called a fisherman sock. It's made out of sheepskin. It's just a simple sheepskin sock. Lobstermen were putting them in the Bean boots to keep their feet warm out on the boats and stuff. So I came back to the factory, we pulled this sock on a last and wrapped our bottom around it, and reworked the pattern and put a cuff on it, and we had our Oewe, we called it, O-E-W-E, which got picked up right away by all our private label people and by our accounts. And so we're instantly in the sheepskin slipper business.

And then I need another item to marry up with that – am I getting my timing wrong on that, let me just check. I may have started my toasters first. Oh, toasters were first, toasters were '82, 1982, I started the toasters, probably with Eddie Bauer first.

AL: And what are toasters?

DQ: A toaster is a sheepskin, a sheepskin slip-in, you just slide your foot into it. It had a huge bottom on it with a big vamp, they were like mittens for your feet. Again, we put the Acorn padding inside it, Acorn foam, give it that huge comfort, and put a suede bottom on the outside. Now the item though, the item I picked up in a craft show, I was in, it was the fall of, probably the fall of '81 or '82, probably fall of '82, and they aspen trees were changing, they had this nice yellow color. And I was with a girlfriend and we drove out of Denver and went up into the mountains, just as a road trip, and then we heard there was a beerfest going on Snowmass, so after we did the Aspen, drove up from the town of Aspen, and actually we saw the Muppets with John Denver, and met John Denver, we pulled the car over and we said, can we watch you guys filming. They'd built a little mining camp into the side of the hill, on a little trail up the mountain, the ski area of Aspen, and there was all the Muppets and John Denver, and he comes over to the car and says, sure, you guys can watch this stuff.

But then we go up to Snowmass, in Snowmass there's these, crafts booths are set up. And there's one table with only one item on it, there are all these toasters, what I end up calling my toaster. And they were called Easy Sliders, so I nab a pair, bring them home, take them apart, change the patterns, clean it up, put a suede bottom on it, which they didn't have, and between my suede and his bottom I put my foam and stitched the whole thing together, have a toaster. (*Unintelligible*). So, again Jim Jennings comes into the picture, so I'm way along with this item, I'm going to put this item, we're going to start selling this item, and I'm way along, I'm months into working with this thing, I get a call from Jim Jennings. It's about five-thirty in the evening, I'm still in my – my factory's in the basement here, way down in the basement, and I'm using, because we have no windows down there, it's just a cellar, that's where I got cheap space, fifty cents a square foot. I had to move shoe lasts, bags and bags of shoe lasts, Bostonian shoe lasts were stored down there, just an acre of them, and we would just push them further away from us and just keep taking more space from the bags. And Bob Roy, the owner, he's a great guy, fifty cents a square foot.

So we were cutting down there. We weren't stitching yet, but eventually we ended up stitching, the whole production line is down there. We used home stitchers to make everything, just delivered product to the stitchers. We didn't work a full year, the stitchers, and they didn't care, it was fine. We would take three or four months off, and then we'd start loading up again, we'd start the season all over again. And if the business got bigger, we'd just start a month earlier. So we'd just add a month at a time, and eventually, we're year-round going at it.

So Jim Jennings calls me and he says, I've got a guy here, he's got an item, it looks like something more for you than for us down here at Bean, so do you want to see him. I said, sure, send him up. Bob McCabry (*sounds like*), Bob comes up, finds my, I talk him, very hard to find us in this building, and he finds us, I'm by myself, everyone else has gone home, and he pulls out the toaster, he pulls out the Easy Slider, the one thing, I bought one pair, so I say – here's the interesting part about it – I showed him I'm

working on it. His chin dropped. He said, how'd you find those? I said, I found them at Snowmass, at the craft show. He said, you did? I said, yes, I bought them myself there. So he said, well a friend of mine said I'll sell a few of those for you, that's the only time those ever left his shop and ended up on a table at any craft show ever, and I showed up, bought a pair, and he shows up in my factory. Oh, my gosh, small world stuff, you know, this is small world stuff. And he says he's got a patent, and he's also showed them to Wolverine, their slipper division.

So attorneys are going to get involved and all this stuff and I call an attorney and talked a little bit, and I can see that he hasn't got much legs to stand on, that I could probably win this thing, and I look at how much it would cost and I think, oh my gosh, I'd rather have him, Bob collect all the money than the attorneys, in attorneys' fees. So I wrote up a deal with him, figuring, you know, for a seven year period, so much per pair, and that's what we did, we kind of made a deal, and he collected probably twenty-five thousand, which I figured, which is really close to what I'd end up paying for attorneys to try to win this case. But I paid it out over a seven year period to Bob. Bob would call me – because Bob was a hippie guy, he was still caught back in the sixties somewhere and he was out in the woods in the Aspen area, building a house on an area part that was not zoned for homes being built and he's working on this thing for a bunch of years, I think he was living in a bus, probably had graffiti written all over it, and he'd call me every year, hey Dave, it's me, Bob, I sure could use some money, you got your figuring out yet so you can send me a check. Yeah, I'll get right on it, and we would figure it out, send him a check, and he never questioned. He's had the right to come and check out our numbers and sit down and go through our books and everything, but we never cheated him and he never asked, and I've always felt good about that.

So then we got our first other item, a toaster, that's what put us in the sheepskin business, and that's how it tripped the trigger for – now it's all coming back – that's how it tripped a trigger for Jim Jennings to then do the next thing and say, well why don't you put a bottom on this fishermen's sheepskin sock. And then Jim Jennings went back to Land's End, in Madison, Wisconsin, where he was from. Or actually it was Sears, I'm sorry, he was from Sears in Chicago, I think, he went back to Sears. So that's my, then we started making sheepskin items, and then we started, when polar fleece started to become huge, it was used in skiing first, became this huge item in skiing. I can't think of the company that cranked that up, but boy, they sure cranked it up. And then we got into that, made our polar pairs, especially when the printed material hit, when the printed material, polar fleece fabrics printed were fabulous. And we're still the number one in prints, in fleece, in socks. We do them in socks, just socks. So yeah.

AL: And so you've been right here in Lewiston the whole time.

DQ: Yeah, I started, and I had that little office up in Fayette, then I moved to Central Avenue in Lewiston and had my office in Central Avenue and was working in this building for a few years, up in that space Ted gave me. And then I moved into the

basement space, still kept my office, my cave down in the basement where I was moving those lasts, and then I started acquiring my own machines instead of using Ted's, I was using Ted's machines late at night. And I had to stretch on Ted's machines, I had to get some orders out. I was doing the work myself. I didn't stitch, but I did everything else, and I had a few young guys who were working with me, you know, they were high school kids, they were great, Dana and Mark, Dana Deschenes and Mark Poulin. And they'd come racing in and we'd work when we had to. Up in the corner we'd cement, and then at night I'd come in and cut the leather and I'd skive it, the edges of it, and after the leather was, I'd pound it after the stitching was done on the straps, I'd pound that out and cut the foam and just get everything ready to start working.

And I worked forty hours straight. I was falling asleep on the skiving machine. Forty hours straight, non stop, no sleep, at one stretch. Falcon ran three shifts so Falcon ran all night, so I could work, I could start working on the machinery at four in the afternoon, and I was still working the machinery at six thirty in the morning, and then I'd work all day cementing and making the stuff and processing orders or whatever I was doing at that time, and make deliveries to the stitchers and bring the stuff back. Yeah, so just pure work. It was great.

AL: And while your business was growing, you were probably at that time seeing the bigger shoe shops reducing?

DQ: There were nineteen, yes, yes, I say that the shoe industry probably started declining after the recession, it probably started during the thirties. And just slowly drifting backwards, down, but after WWII there was new life in this area. This building itself, Bob Roy started renting space in this building in 1964 I think. It was a textile that folded, and the textile industry was the first to really hightail it. You know, there was not a lot of jobs, and so the shoe industry, there were nineteen shoe factories in this building, shoe related. When I first started, nineteen shoe related factories in this building when I first started in '76. And you could run three shifts, people were hungry, there was high unemployment.

And I could get everything I needed in this community. I could get patterns graded right up the street, in walking distance, I could get leathers, findings, all the parts needed to make shoes were right here in this community. I was vertical, it had it all. And then it just, but it was marginal, it was tough, it was tough that business. And as employment rates, as people became more employed, it became harder to run a third shift, because people worked those shifts because they were hungry, that's where the job was, it was third shift. And after that the job was second shift. And then later the second shift – and shoe shop work is not the most desirable work. It's tough work, it's hand work, and people shifted and left and went to – our employment rate got down three and half percent, three percent. There was choice out there, you could choose to or choose not to. And Walmarts and Bath Iron Works and other industries, Home Depot and Lowe's

picked up the service industries, just picked up all these people, great workers. And they've done well, hopefully, most of them, hopefully they've all done well, finding new work.

AL: What do you think makes your company successful amidst all the closings of the shoe shops and the decline.

DQ: Oh, we went to China to get all our parts, in 1999. The summer of 1999, in June, when we, because we're so seasonal in the slipper business, we're like, taking a python, we've got this big bulge that occurs and we have to find workers, stitchers, and beef up, and there was nobody available in the summer of '99, it was all dried up, gone. It was the end. We had a relief, we were somewhat relieved when Sam Smith closed down Supreme Slipper and I think he laid off five hundred stitchers. Maybe I'm exaggerating, you probably have that in your history records, and I think that was, that provided a pool that gave us a false sense of security for a little bit longer. But as soon as that – and meanwhile the unemployment rate is, the economy's improving, the unemployment rate is going down, and there's so many ways to work and people have so much choice. And you know, we thrived as an industry when there was always somebody ready to sit down at that machine. This person didn't want to do it, someone else would.

And now in China we see, that's when we first went to China, by the way, that's what was over there, clearly there's just people hungry for work. And they'd sit at that machine, and if that person didn't do it, it would be the next person. It's happening all over again. And now in the areas of China that we're in, we see the shoe industry workers, again, it's tough work. It's tough over there, it's tough anywhere. And they're bringing in more automatics over there. The automatics are machines that take some of the workers' work away from them, they automatically reset the needle and needle positioning, and there's, hydraulics are footless, and then there's computerized stitching, simple Brother machines that do pattern stitching for you, and you just put the item in and push a button and it stitches, then you pull it out. As opposed to actually doing the hand stitching yourself.

But it's still cutting and lasting, there's still muscle work in this industry, and it's repetitious, over and over. So when you get a Samsung, the electronic people entering your community in the China area we're in, and they'll employ twenty thousand people in one factory stretch, it's mind boggling. I stood on one floor in a factory, in China, I said, okay, so how many people are working here. Eighteen hundred. One thousand, eight hundred. And I panned 180 degrees and I'm thinking at the same time how many companies in the state of Maine have that many employees. I think there was only one at the time. MBNA might have been it. There wasn't Walmart back then, but Walmart now would be one of the big ones. In the whole state. In one room, eighteen hundred, one floor.

And then I drive past the Samsung, you just keep driving. Driving, driving, driving, driving, and it's a town, twenty thousand workers are working there. And that's where people want to go, it's clean, it's easy, and it's more of a future it seems. But China will be making shoes for a long time, it'll take a long time before, because there's still a lot of people willing to sit down at our machines and get the job done.

End of Side A
Side B

AL: We are now on Side B. And so what other things would you add to your experiences over the years?

DQ: Well, one of the things that saved us in this area, working for us to last as long as we did, was the fact that we had a brand, we had control of our brand. We had a brand. If you were in a, as suppliers, cements and tapes and threads and findings, those businesses were gone, were going, going gone, there wasn't enough – as the houses that were makeup houses kept going out of business, and finally as China started to ramp up, there was this big sucking sound when they started taking all the footwear, and it just had an inevitable – and if you're the governor, it's not, the future isn't finding more ways to save this industry, the future is finding more ways to bring in Samsungs and big places, people like that. And it had an inevitability about it, there was not enough, maybe the total shoe shop jobs in the country were two hundred thousand? I don't know, I'm just throwing, I'm being loosey-goosey, but that's not a lot of votes. There are other industries with a lot more political power than ours. And as Ted said to me once, we have to trade something. We have to buy something from someone, import-export has to be a balance of trade. And one of the first things he said this government's going to let go is footwear, to be made somewhere else, and we can buy the shoes from them and they can get our dollars and buy stuff from us, technology and other services. And certainly that's what's happened, and it's happened in the textile industry as well.

AL: Is there anything that you want to add that I haven't asked you about?

DQ: That's a dangerous question. Obviously, we haven't gotten much past 1982, and that's a long time ago so I would have a lot more stories, but I think you can only handle so much.

AL: Would you like to tell me a couple more stories, because I'd love it.

DQ: Well I have one, the one that I alluded to briefly was the space shuttle.

AL: Yes, tell me that story.

DQ: That was 1982, it was the third launch of the space shuttle, and it was Hartsfield

and Mattingly were the two astronauts. And I was working with a friend of mine, John Shapiro, and John's father Jack Shapiro had the shoe shop out in Auburn, the Etonic, they were making Etonic shoes. And so John says, hey, my dad says he saw the slippers, your slipper socks on the space shuttle. I said, what? Yeah, they're up there on the space shuttle. So I tuned into the news, and it's eleven at night and there was nothing about the space shuttle, but I got up early and I flipped the news on the next morning, and there's the footage, the media footage on what's going on up in the space shuttle, and there's this guy strapped to a bungee cord down onto a treadmill, and he's running, working out. The camera pans down, the other astronaut pans the camera right down onto his feet, and there's my slipper socks, he's wearing them, jogging on this treadmill on this space shuttle. And I just hit the lottery. I'm thinking, where can I get a better PR lift to my business than being endorsed by the NASA Space Program. At the Olympics, but that's every four years, and this is every –

So what happens, anyway, to make my long stories short, to this day, that's what they do, they wear the slipper socks. To this day. I say every mission. I've never been able to find, if I can get enough pictures, enough information on a mission, I've never been able to find one where the slipper socks show up, they have lockers and they keep them, if you're an astronaut and you open your locker, you'll probably have a pair of slipper socks in there. And I've seen them in their sleeping quarters, I've seen them bundgeed to the sides of the wall in the cabins on the space shuttle. I've talked to some of the astronauts, I've gone down, I saw liftoff. This is our PR shot, that's me.

There's a picture, I'm showing Andrea a picture of myself, and I went to Drapeau's Costume Shop here in Lewiston, I got that space outfit from Drapeau's. We started in the morning with a public relations piece that we were sending out, and it was put together for us by Joshua Greene, who was my brother's boyfriend from New York City, and my sister was just entering PR work herself, was in a PR firm, and Joshua was just returned from an ashram in Paris, he was a Hari Krishna, and Joshua – a great guy, Joshua – and he had this, we were going to mail out these PR packets that he put together to all the press, a whole big press mailing, media mailing. And in the morning we looked at this thing, we said, we need a picture. So we started, and we used, Dianne in the packing room was an artist, I said, you get to make the space shuttle, which she did, and we got a piece of black sheet we put against the wall, we went to a local camera shop and we asked them if we could, they gave us a large format camera. We set it up on a tripod, and we set it facing that black curtain, and then we filled that curtain with the scene we wanted to shoot. We just kept building the scene in front of that camera, piece by piece, we kept adding the parts to it.

And then when we thought we were pretty ready we called our photographer, we didn't want to pay them money for him to spend eight hours doing what we knew we could do, set up our own shot, and those slipper socks in that picture, there's one, two, three, four, five slipper socks, and there's this big space shuttle in the background, and the space shuttle looks like it's 3-D, it looks round, because we airbrushed it, it's been

airbrushed, and I'm actually, what I'm doing with my hands is, I'm keeping the slippers from spinning. I'm sitting on a stool, and I'm leaning backwards –

AL: That's a great shot.

DQ: And the slippers are being held by black thread.

AL: But in the picture they look like they're floating in space.

DQ: Look like they're floating in space. I'll show you, in a minute here I'll show you the final shot, that's just the, I'm describing to Andrea a picture on the wall. And that's Mark Poulin, I told you, Mark and Dana that stitched with me, and there's the big full blown shot of it. There's the scene, you can clearly see the scene. Yeah, we had a few beers, and it's about, we're looking at, it's about ten o'clock at night by the time we finally got the shot with the photographer. But the photographer took it back and he worked the negative, he actually worked the negative finally and put stars and a moon into the picture, and that's the shot I'll show you in a second. Fun stuff.

So that, we had no reps. When the space shuttle, when this event occurred, we had no sales reps. We did everything ourselves, we'd grown the business to seven hundred and fifty accounts by just networking, by going to trade shows, by running phone work, phone work, and as I said, we had these little ads that we ran consistently, and we grew the business that way. And that was commendable, to get that many accounts put together.

And then when this thing hit, I called the owner of Wigwam Mills and asked him if I could invite all his reps – and that's where we bought our socks from, the rag sock – I asked him if I could invite as many of his reps, the reps I, you know, if I could choose his reps to carry my line, to carry the slipper socks, and he said sure. So I instantly threw the switch on sales reps and doubled the amount of accounts in here to fifteen hundred. My business took off. And then the next year it grew fifty percent, I started working with, Dana was the one who hung in there with me, we started on I think September 21st and worked until December 22nd, taking Thanksgiving Day off, and working, he was punching the clock at ninety hours a week, and I was working way longer than that. Just pure work. Just work. I'd have a few beers and some pizza and work, that was it, that was all. There was no Saturday, Sunday, Monday, everything floating from one day to the next, just pure work, chasing business.

AL: Now, did you have a family at home yet?

DQ: No, I was single.

AL: You were still single.

DQ: Yeah, single. I was single, worked, I was free. And I was away from family, my family was in southern Maine or Connecticut or away. I had a great rack of friends in the area, so I was free, completely untethered, so my first thing was the business, you know, that was number one.

AL: And it continued to grow, continues to.

DQ: Yeah, it just continued, right to this day, and the brand is, today, the brand has never been stronger than it is today, as we speak, the Acorn brand. And the crew I have here working with me is cracker jack, fabulous people, yeah, it's great.

AL: Are there any other stories that you'd like to add today?

DQ: Well, Andrea, let's see.

AL: And if you have lots of stories, I can always come back again, if that would be easier. I want to be sure I get as much of your history as you like.

DQ: We're all set, we're all set.

AL: But when you feel you've covered it -

DQ: I wouldn't have been, you know, I have to say Ted Johansson, I would never have had this run. You know, this was, this business, having my own business was a dream come true, you know, it was, I lunged at it.

AL: Great, thank you.

DQ: You're welcome.

End of Interview
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