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Date: Interview recorded in 2010 about events between 1957-1974

Description: Interview with Swans Islander Sonny Sprague about his family's market

Interview with Sonny Sprague about his family's market between 1957-1974

My name is Sonny Sprague. Mom and Dad bought the store in, I think, '57, from Irene. It was Harbor Cash Market, had it for seventeen years, maybe. You could get anything basically you wanted there. You could get rat cheese, you could get oranges, you could get anything, a line of meats. You could get yesterday's newspaper today. Store'd open about ten o'clock in the morning, supposedly close at seven at night but there was always someone settin' around on a soda box in the corner and talking, you know, there was a lot of that. Crowd would gather some, and it kinda was part of the community. You went to the store and got your groceries and sometimes maybe sat down and talked.

But like I said, there was everything there, and most of the time it was pretty good quality stuff. Except it was a day late, being from the mainland. Dad would go for the day and come back loaded with freight in the station wagon. Dad was a good guy. He loved talking with people. I'll tell you a little story, I won't mention any names, but some local kids had been helping themselves to things in the store, a little bit. And Dad knew it. There was a guy lived up where Ed Schwabe lives now, his name was Burly Thompson. Burly was a diabetic and he came down just about every day and got his oranges and his candy bars and his food—real nice man, really quiet and really probably scared of his own shadow. But he's down there one day and—so dad sold the big round rat cheese, and he could come out right on the pound anywhere with this big knife, almost looked like he came from Mongolia with it. Well anyway, he goes over and here's this young guy put a tablet or two inside of his shirt. Dad went up, he went right behind him, grabbed him right by the neck and pulled him out and then grabbed him right by the ear. And he said, "I ought to cut your ear right off," but he let the kid go of course and the kid never came back for two months.

And then he looked around for Burly, well where's Burly. Burly's here with his oranges and candy bars and stuff. They were still there, but he never saw Burly for about four days (laughing). Burly thought that someone had been de-eared, but dad would never have done that. But anyway, that's a little story about the store.

Store life isn't much fun. Well, you're on your feet all day. You know when you say you close at seven you really don't. Dad set in the chair every day, there was a run on, how much milk do we need, you know how much bread, what about pastries, you know, everything. He would stay there all that night trying to call wholesalers to putting in orders so they'd come on the boat the next day. But one thing you did was, we were the ones that ate the bologna ends that no one would buy, we got the rotten strawberries, we ate, you know—that's how we lived, that's how we got by. There wasn't any money

to be made in a store, really. Probably a lot of families got a little bit extra in the bag once in a while, but having a hard time of it. But that's the story—Nelson Morse was the same way. Ah, when I was a kid growing up I remember Nelson's store, it was down by the shore. But you went in and here was your boxes of crackers up on these racks, and just the big knives and the rolls of bologna- you know, everything, molasses in a barrel. It was a good life. You know, we talk about the good old days. Well that was my good old days.