



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Mel Inman, Sr.

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TAPE 1/SIDE 1

DANTZIC: I'm Martha Stracener Dantzic and I'm here with Mel Inman of Market Poultry. And it's March 24, 2009. We're here at Coldwell Banker and I'm going to ask you a bunch of questions! So my first question for you is when did you first come to the Market and how did you end up having a business there?

INMAN: I first came to the Market, Martha, when I was in high school, I believe. Coming through the market—I don't know, had a friend that worked in the Market years ago—and just kind of passing through.

DANTZIC: So you were just growing up in the area and you just went to the Market as a customer.

INMAN: Kind of, well, not as a customer, but as an observer, I guess. And that was back in the late '60's, I believe.

DANTZIC: And so how did you end up having your business? Was there a Market Poultry before you?

INMAN: Well, there was not a Market Poultry, [but] always a poultry market. It was called La Poule La Pot, which in French means "the chicken in a pot." And the gentleman who had that was a French gentleman who was named Leon Becker, and he was a renowned Jewish-Frenchman, I guess—slash, Jewish-Frenchman—who owned that particular business entity in the Market. And he of course became ill, sick, eye problems, some other problems. He sold out his particular business to the Market manager who was Charlie Glasgow, the Glasgow guys, and then kind of turned over to him. Then he had a gentleman who worked for him whose name was Eugene Swinton. He worked for him for a few years and took over that particular business entity for a couple of years, had some misfortune, some bad mishaps, and of course it was turned over to his protégé, who happened to be a friend of mine. We went to school together, was a family friend. And his name was Elleman Queen.

DANTZIC: Elleman?

INMAN: Elleman Queen—ElleMAN, in fact, E-l-l-e-m-a-n. His name was Queen, and Elleman gave me a chance to come to work with him, and I worked with him for several years. He and I were "schoolmates," we were friends of a friend, so we worked together for a while. We both having families, he thought that it would be a good risk to have someone who had the same type of things in his life like he did. So he had me work with him when the other guys left, and then *he* had some mishaps, and I took over. And that was back in '76—'75, '76. And then afterwards ... I have just been going strong, and

weak, and strong, and weak, over and over again—until you become positively strong, and you get to the point where you can actually hold your own.

DANTZIC: So that was in '75 or '76 when you became the proprietor, when it became your business.

INMAN: Uh huh.

DANTZIC: How many kids do you have? I know you have Mel, but do you have others?

INMAN: I have two boys. I have Mel Jr., I have Juan, who is my younger son, by eight years younger. But I have a host of nephews and brothers-in-law, friends and family members, associates, that all kind of came in to work thereafter throughout the years.

DANTZIC: There's that picture of you guys on Barracks Row, you know out there by the Market, there's a picture of you and is it Juan or Mel in that photograph?

INMAN: That's Juan, that's my younger son. That was when he was a younger boy. He was always the clown of the family, but ... He might have done some of these things, but influenced by other people and things that, you know, he might not want to do this, and he fought against it. And, quite naturally, when you fight against it throughout your formative years, you ultimately don't stay with it when your time, when your number is called. You don't really look forward to the opportunity, you don't look at it *as* an opportunity to do what it is. [microphone discussion]

DANTZIC: So Mel's been your partner for how long?

INMAN: Ever since he got out of school. Mel's been out of school since, I believe about '90, '91.

DANTZIC: So that's a long time he's been there.

INMAN: Long time my son's been there.

DANTZIC: Like he's been there forever. And now Romel comes, and soon Raphael's ...

INMAN: Mel's 35. Let's count back years, 35, now Mel's been working ever since he got out of high school. Let's figure 20 years ... so he's been with me for better than 22, 23, 24 years.

DANTZIC: Wow, that's a long time. Keeps it a good tight family business.

INMAN: It does. You know what it does, it helps you learn a lot about your children that you might not have learned, about your sons, whatever. Of course, need to say that in this day and time, dads, parents,

need to know more about their children. Being so closely knit, we were able to learn a lot about each other, so we're pleased. We're happy.

DANTZIC: You all seem to be very successful, happy, lots of fun. So how has your business changed over the years?

INMAN: Well, over the years we've noticed a lot of things. We've noticed the difference in the area. From the '70's to the '80's, we had slow times—we used to have time to sit back and play chess! [laughter] Actually sit back and play chess. If I may say, drink beers, have fun. Not worry about doing anything. It was just a job just to come to, just some duty where you know a few people here, there, no big deal.

But the Market has changed. Then in the '80's, we had the not-so-family oriented community, people who were not into the real family thing. They were doing just the going to work. They were single. Going to work type thing, really wasn't into the real family thing. It was like folks, if they came over, they did. They didn't, they didn't come over.

But now Eastern Market has become one of the main draws for Capitol Hill. When the real estate agents bring folks over, it has become *the* spot to come. This is where you come, this Market. Do you not know that this is the place where everybody gathers? This is the community square. This is the city square. This is where we all congregate. If you have not seen your neighbors throughout the week, this is where you meet them. They will certainly be here some or another during the day or whatever, you know? And Saturday and Sunday seemingly are the main days. The Tuesday through Friday days are the days that the people come, the more serious shopper. For the more serious, let's say community shopper. For the shoppers who are out of the community, Saturday is a big day for them. They come to do serious things. They park three, four blocks away, to get their produce and their meats and things.

But the people who live in the neighborhood use this as a communal point. Tommy's, Eastern Market Lunch, my place, the hustle and bustle of the Eastern Market seems to be what people really *enjoy*. If you are going to spend your money, if you are going to come, "let me give it to" first of all, I guess "a family business, a small business. I pray that they care more than other people. Let's give our money to people who are very knowledgeable and willing to help us in areas that we are not so knowledgeable in— instructions on cooking, instructions on where it comes from, what it is, what it does." So, you know, it has created quite—I ain't going to say it created something that's other than conducive to the Eastern Market or to anything other than a shopping place—it is not an informational place, but people do learn a lot of things when they come to Eastern Market. It's like "Oh my God, I didn't know that! I want to thank you guys!"

DANTZIC: I know you guys have taught me a lot.

INMAN: Well, thank you, Martha, thank you!

DANTZIC: Always telling me how to cook different stuff, or how to cut different stuff, or that you cut stuff for me that I can't.

INMAN: We'll fix it up for you, yeah. Oh, you probably could, maybe you'd figure it out, but ...

DANTZIC: Have your suppliers changed over the years, and the products that your customers are looking for changed?

INMAN: Yes, but you change along with them. You go to the better. Cheaper is not better for me, for me it's not important. I've been offered from everybody from Perdue to some places like Mount Air to places like Tyson's about some of their big, high executive type salesmen who come out just like "this is an area, or a market, that we need to corner." And just like, "No, don't think so guys. We have higher standards. We've heard about some of your practices. We don't enjoy how people have boycotted it for years. And so we, no, don't particularly enjoy you guys."

We have gone through the smaller farmer, producer. Allen is one of them. He's one of our guys, down on the Eastern Shore. And he does the chicken—he is one of the foreleader, or forerunners, I guess you might say, in poultry production. He talks to people. He is the one who formulates these plans, these bills, these things that they talk about when they talk about the overall poultry industry.

DANTZIC: How poultry is cared for and that kind of thing?

INMAN: How it should be done. Now, he'd like not to give up everything to people but he is a foreleader in poultry production.

DANTZIC: Well that's interesting. You know, I know one time you told me "Oh, organics, why is that, nobody wants anything but organics!" When did that start to happen?

INMAN: Well, you know what, I'm not going to say nobody wants anything but organic, but I will say that organic has always been something that has been a request, idea of folks, and a lot of folks always wondering about organic. They say they want [it] but organic is *very* expensive. Organic is something that truthfully on the 24/7 spectrum, you cannot really do because it's so expensive. Fifteen dollars a bird, roughly—which is not bad. My guys are usually under that price, and I sell a fresh organic chicken every single week. But when you start talking about the feasibility of feeding a family maybe of four or five or six, you can't do it for every meal. Or you might as well eat steak. But then you forfeit health when you

do steak or maybe some other things. So chicken is the number one product of choice, meat of choice if you want to say—it's not a meat, but they say meat. We'll say meat, ok?

DANTZIC: See, I never knew that.

INMAN: You know, you do those kinds of things and you pray that folks will understand that you are giving the best. Now, my mom, who is probably, besides my wife, my biggest advocate, ok? Will, you know, come over and get chicken from me all the time. And no, I don't charge my mom for chicken.
[laughter]

DANTZIC: Well that is good of you, Mel!

INMAN: That's sweet of me!

DANTZIC: It is *so* sweet of you!

INMAN: Yeah. But she comes to get chicken, and I tell her, "Mom." Why does she want to get chicken over the weekend? And I said, "Mom, that is not little, let me give you this one." "Well, that is not big, what I'm looking for ... " What it was she was looking for ... But, anyway, I gave her a chicken. It was her first time out of 35 years that she's ever gotten a chicken from me that was organic! My wife and I went over to her house yesterday, just sit down and talked with her. Mom's 80 years old. She's a young gal. Reason I say it is because my Granny just passed this past spring, no this past it July, late July, and she was 103.

DANTZIC: Oh my goodness!

INMAN: Yeah, but everybody in my family leaves here very late nineties and over 100, and so that's on my Mom's side. But any case ... She had never tried one, and so she ate it and said, "Oh my God, I just want to tell you that the chicken was *wonderful!*" I said, "Mom, I knew it would be," but you know I've been trying to convince her to eat one of those things for years, since I could [get] them in about 20 years ago and she didn't want ... Closer to, Martha, maybe closer to around 15 years ago. I brought them in but she wouldn't buy them. She didn't want to.

DANTZIC: Alright, we're doing good. We've got plenty of tape.

INMAN: Good, good, good.

DANTZIC: That's sweet, you gave your mom a chicken.

INMAN: I gave her a chicken, and so she tried the organic chicken and she really enjoyed it. She said, “I couldn’t believe how quickly it cooked.” So she was surprised at how good the chicken was, but I knew it would be. Yeah, I knew it would be.

DANTZIC: Do you ever end up in a situation where you don’t sell all your food, that you have to throw it away?

INMAN: Oh, yes. But throw it away, no.

DANTZIC: What do you all do with it?

INMAN: Ahhh. We give to a lot of food banks. I give to neighborhood people. I give it to, if it be my church ... If it’s an extraordinarily large amount, I mean like hundreds of pounds, I will give it away. Needless to say, we couldn’t give away the food we lost in the fire, you know, back when we had the fire, because that was a condemned product, but we lost product that time. Really was not that bad, but you know you had to give it away, because the health department says it’s got to get out of here. “Okay, we understand, guys, we’re just saying, but ... ” Yes, I give product away to some of the area churches, community food bank ...

DANTZIC: So, but, your business is steady enough from week to week that you order, like you kind of know what you need, but you always end up with some kind of extras, I guess.

INMAN: You always know what you need. You always may have to order, you always help somebody sometimes because you know that’s your calling. I mean, that’s my calling. People always are looking for something. That way you may be short, you may not be able to pay your bills, but you give as you should because you know the better.

DANTZIC: Yeah. Well that’s really nice. Let me ask you this: what have you done to attract customers to your business?

INMAN: Hmmm.

DANTZIC: Well, I think you maybe kind of told me that, like you ...

INMAN: Well, I’ll tell you what we do. What I do to attract customers ... One of the things [is] I went and bought me a nice pork pie hat [laughter], put it on my head—just kidding you, girl. [laughter] I keep my face shaved, but you know, we do things like I attract folks with specials, we try to attract folks with customer service, attract folks with overall knowledge of the product. You have to have a knowledge of the product, you have to know what you’re talking about. You have to assure people that, when they talk

to you, they can look you right in the eye and say you, “This guy knows what he’s talking about. He’s confident in his product.” We do giveaways. People come to me, they want to know something—I give them samples, give them some of this, give them some of that, and tell them what to do and how to do it. And they are always overly amazed at what we know. I bring in, to attract customers, my young people to work in the business to show that it can be done by not just older guys, but younger people, that we give chances to young people too.

DANTZIC: I love all those young men that you have working for you.

INMAN: Thank you, dear. Thank you. You know, it’s a bit of a challenge sometimes, but you have to do what you’ve got to do. You have been delegated that duty to do certain things and that’s, again, one of your callings. You know that’s what you’re supposed to be doing, so you just do it. You work with them, I guess, to just be overall mannerable with people and courteous to people, respectful to especially my elders. Yeah, have to be ...

DANTZIC: Well, where do your customers come from?

INMAN: Uh uh uh. They come from everywhere—from Richmond to west of the city as far as Reston and beyond. As far north as Gaithersburg, as far west as down to Annapolis. There are a lot of markets around the city, but few who can offer folks maybe the product that we can give them, the knowledge of the product that we can give them. There are few who can maybe even offer the price that we give them.

DANTZIC: I think y’all’s prices are very reasonable. I don’t think they’re high.

INMAN: I try to get my son there, he finally hit me with some of that, “Daddy, today ...” It’s funny when you hear your children, all of a sudden, grasp the ideals that you have. My mom always told me that a fast nickel is better than a slow dime. And I tried to convey that to my son sometimes, that’s not always a concept that you use, but in lean times you have to institute that type of practice. And he like told me today he’s, like, “Dad, you know what I think? It’s better to have the business than not have it ...” And it’s like, “Oh, you don’t say!” [laughter] But it’s funny, you know, because you hear them taking on your character.

When does it become time for you to give it up—when they start to really take on your characteristics? When they start to pick up the things that you have been conveying to them ... You don’t leave abruptly, but you start to fade. You move out and let them do their thing. He can do this. He can do this. You know, I mean, it’s not that important. Are you really set? But you know, all that you don’t have in life after a while—65 and 75 years old, say—you ain’t going to get it! You ain’t going to get it. You just might as well leave it alone, let it go, enjoy that part of life that you have already reaped, and go on. So I’m praying

that he understands and he can make it. That he makes proud the legacy of the business that not his *Dad* made, but *he and his Dad* made together. And from there on out he can go on and, you know, do what he had to do to establish his own ...

DANTZIC: Well, you've done an incredible job with him. I mean, obviously, you know I'm a big fan of Mel. But are you saying that you are thinking that you might retire sooner than later? I can't imagine that you are close to stopping working!

INMAN: Not soon, maybe. I mean, you know, I must look a lot younger than I am. I'm 57 years old. It's not old—I don't feel feeble, don't feel feeble. You understand, going through a back operation back in December, having gone through, six years ago, a domestic thing that almost rendered me crippled in my hand and almost did ... have taught me that life is only as important as the people that you live it with. And so I enjoy life with my wife, and we have a wonderful time and do a lot of wonderful things so that I can get my finances in order so that I may not need much. I may not do much, but I can do some fun things. A whole lot of money and a whole lot of sadness or just squandering it doesn't do me a whole lot of good, so I'm excited that I might be able to retire, not from life but from *business*, and allow my son to do ... There are a lot of things I need to do at my church, a lot of things ... A lot of people who are in terrible need. I see a need for ministries, missions, and some other things, that I'm excited [about]. I just want to move on now and do some things that I figure will benefit myself and, I guess, God. So my wife and I are looking forward to doing some things that, you know, will benefit our souls.

DANTZIC: Well, that nice. But I don't want you to go too soon!

INMAN: I won't go too soon! [laughter] Martha, [it] will probably be well after I'm 65!

DANTZIC: I just can't imagine you stopping moving, but maybe you can come back some ...

INMAN: No, no, I won't stop moving, and if I do it will be to a lesser degree. To leave totally, no. But to a lesser degree will I be here. I'll do probably the weekends, probably just be to relieve my son so he won't have to do as much.

DANTZIC: So he can be with his kids and stuff. So the holidays, have they always been like that, Mel?

INMAN: Like what?

DANTZIC: Well, you know I was new to the neighborhood. I come to see you guys all the time and I was, like, you know, "Oh yeah, I'll get my Thanksgiving turkey!" And I had no idea that I'd be waiting four hours for my turkey!

INMAN: You didn't wait four hours! Martha, come on now! It felt like it ...

DANTZIC: I went two days at the crack of dawn and stood in line out in the cold, and I met some of the nicest people. This one man told me that he couldn't bring home *anybody's* turkey except for yours!

INMAN: You know what Martha ...

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1

TAPE 1/SIDE 2

DANTZIC: Okay, so you were saying that cold is relative to somebody that's from the coast like ...

INMAN: Yeah, like yourself, who is dealing with cold weather. You people up here ... but we are a very transitional area so I guess there are a lot of folks who would convey the same meaning that you would about this area and this region. But you know I have always been busy like that, but the whole thing is to make a "big production." I have not made a big production, but you know you kind of bite off more than you can chew. My son used to tell me "you can't handle this! You can't do all of that!" You can, kind of, "if they come," what does my boy say, Kevin Costner, "If you build it, they will come." So I built this great magnificent production of turkeys on the holidays and, guess what! They come!

DANTZIC: [laughs] I know!

INMAN: They come! So I'm very pleased with how folks come to the Eastern Market and how they never forget me. And so, you know, these are people who're 20, 25, 30 year long running customers and beyond. And because of your consistency, you do it because it builds your customer base throughout the year, you see. Because when people start thinking of special occasions, "Oh, you know what, I'm going to find this ..." "Well I met a guy over at Eastern Market, I know he can do that for you." "We're having a such-and-such." "Okay, well there ain't no question, we're going over to Eastern Market. Mel's going to get us some chicken and he's going to fix it up this way and do this and ..." When you do for *that* particular time of year, all other times of year all relate to you. Everybody comes to you because they know that you're going to give them what they want when they want it. The best choice or whatever. If you're fixing it for maybe ... "But when it's a special occasion, I want *the* best, I'll come to Mel." So that's what it is. You don't want a total ruin of your dinner [laughter], you come to Mel, you know?

DANTZIC: Has there been turf competition between the merchants at the market, or the market and the outside?

INMAN: I'll thank God for the overall, not complete, but the overall concerted effort to be able to resolve that, to keep it down to a bare minimum, that folks do not try to infringe upon each other, try to take somebody else's territory. We have not had much of a problem with that besides some eggs before from one of the farmers, some chickens years ago that another guy was bringing in, then he left—Mr., not Fowler, but it was another gentleman. But you know, besides a few people during the earlier formative years when we first started, I think that it has been cut down to a bare minimum. We all are in great understanding as to where ... which has made this market very successful.

DANTZIC: Did you all just do that informally with each other?

INMAN: Kind of. It was set and etched I guess in ... [section deleted at request of interviewee] It's about being honorable, and that's what we do. We will be honorable one to the other and you will *not* step on anybody's toes and bring in things like sausages and noodles and some sauces all—this kind of stuff. Don't do that, you know. The things I sell are poultry related. Everything's poultry—if I sell barbecue sauces, they are poultry-related. If I sell seasoning, they are poultry-related. We just don't do things. I won't sell half smokes. I won't sell this, I won't sell that, because Bill sells them right across from me. I won't sell rotisserie chicken—I could—but Jose Canales sells rotisserie chickens. It was his idea, he thought of it, he brought it in, why should I come in and try to sell what I call “a better?” Okay? To cut in on his stuff?

DANTZIC: Were there always two produce stands and two chicken stands?

INMAN: Always two produce, two chicken.

DANTZIC: Two meat?

INMAN: No. Three meats, it was at first. Always one lunch counter, one fish. Those were the ones who were able to really gather the biggest monopoly, if they wanted to. Tommy did.

DANTZIC: And that's the Glasgow family, right?

INMAN: That's the Glasgow family.

DANTZIC: So it's Tommy, and his brother across the way, and they're related to the Union Meat Company, right? And the bakery, isn't it?

INMAN: Union Meat company, right. And the bakery, right. It used to be more of them in there, baby. Oooh, baby it was something. It was something. [section deleted at request of interviewee]

DANTZIC: You mentioned the other day that the fire was an opportunity for people to move beyond some of the problems that have happened. I don't know if you are comfortable talking about that.

INMAN: I am.

DANTZIC: There were some challenges, and then the fire happened, and then things seem to have gotten better.

INMAN: Things *have* gotten better. As a whole, we have been able to talk things over more. The fire did bring us closer together. It helped us to talk to each other and know that we were, it sounds kind of corny, all in this thing together. But you know, truly we were. Because, you know what, you're in no better shape than I am. You may have better insurance than I did, you may have gathered more in the way of money that I did. But all in all we all are still rocking in the same boat. And it was a tough thing for a lot of people to have to come and say, "Oh my God, I'm sorry for what happened to you. I'm sorry for what happened to me. Whatever, we'll work together. We have to decide on things together." That was tough for a lot of us guys because a lot of us really weren't speaking.

DANTZIC: For years and years people weren't speaking?

INMAN: [section deleted at request of interviewee] We just got back to speaking to each other after the fire.

DANTZIC: It takes something like that to make the small stuff ...

INMAN: Uh huh—disappear.

DANTZIC: Big stuff becomes small.

INMAN: Yeah it does, baby. And so that's what we did. So I mean, it's like "It's alright!" But you know, I'm happy that we went there because you hate not to be there. I had to come to him, I can say be the bigger man. It took me years to try to do that but, you know, it makes no difference—you just do what you know you should be doing. So I had to do what I had to do. And I continued and continued, and finally we got ... I'm just happy that we are where we are now. Got nothing to do with the small stuff like you said, it's just where we are right now. You know, when you deal with 13 or 14 or 12 different heads of households, it's hard. Good God Almighty.

DANTZIC: I can imagine. It's so interesting how there are so many family crossovers, too.

INMAN: Yeah. Yeah.

DANTZIC: When the fire happened, how did you hear about it? Where were you?

INMAN: God, baby, that was something. Laying in the bed. I don't think I worked that Sunday—what was that, the last Sunday of the month?

DANTZIC: In April, right? Monday was May 1 or 2, right?

INMAN: Yes. I worked that last Sunday of the month. I went home, wife and I enjoyed the evening.

DANTZIC: It was “Friday” night.

INMAN: No, it was Sunday.

DANTZIC: Yeah, I know, but for you it was Friday night.

INMAN: Yeah. Went home, crashed out. Three o'clock in the morning, get this call on the phone. You know, you are always fearful of that stuff when you hear the phone call. And it's like the phone rang at 3:00, and I looked over, “Should I answer? Should I answer?” And I answered it. It was on my cell phone. I looked over, it said “Roy.” Roy called me, and he says to me, “The Market is all ablaze.” He says, “Mel. The Market is being engulfed in flames right now.” And it's like I'm waking up out of a dream. Three o'clock in the morning. “What do you mean?” He said, “It's being engulfed in flames. It's a fire. You need to come down here right now.”

I couldn't believe him. I said, “Where are you, Roy?” “I'm down here right now at the Market.” I said, “Okay, I'll be down in a few minutes.” So my wife and I got up, put our clothes on, just like firemen, stuck our clothes on, grabbed ... just brushed our teeth. A fireman never brushes his teeth, he just goes and does what he's got to do, but we did what we had to do, got up. My wife and I got in the car and I'll tell you truthfully, we got in the car, we started praising God going down the road. We were singing gospels and hymns and praying and just thanking God for what he had done, and if we never got back again it would be alright, and that if we didn't have a business, okay. But when he said “engulfed in flames,” you still could not fathom “engulfed in flames.” And when you came down and saw it ...

DANTZIC: You saw it burning.

INMAN: Just blazing! At three o'clock in the morning, it looked like daylight. Shooting out, you know, it was like “Oh my God.” They had water going everywhere. It was like “They can't save this thing, it's a mess.” And then to look at it at 5:00 when the flame went out and then to see it flame up again, it's like “Oh, God,” you're thinking about it. It was tough. That night, that day, was one of the longest days we'd

ever had, you know. But you know it was alright, I knew we were going to be okay, it would be taken care of, you know. And I had to console my wife, my son, customers.

DANTZIC: Oh God, yeah, customers ...

INMAN: Oh, man. They walked to the meeting crying and, you know, saying “Mel, what are we going to do?” It’s like, “We’ll do the best we can. We’ll see how it goes ... ” Then the mayor came out and he said, “This is what we’re going to do: we’re going to fix this place, we’re going to put it in place, and we’re going to make it work.” To have guys like—what’s the guy’s name? Our boy, our councilman?

DANTZIC: Tommy Wells

INMAN: Tommy Wells, and the executive kid, what’s his name? I know his name, forgive me, if it goes on tape, forgive me for not saying it. [ed: Dan Tangherlini] But he was great, and his living in this area really helped out a lot because they really emphasized the importance of the Eastern Market upon the constituents of this side of the city, you see what I’m saying. And what they meant to Fenty’s election, what they meant to the overall beautification of the city and itself because this is one of the prime areas. You can talk about Georgetown, but when you sit right on the cusp of the Capitol, it’s a different thing. You totally talk about the essence of Washington. You come in, this is it! Capitol Hill? Capitol Hill look like some other place in the city, God forbid? And every place should look like Capitol Hill, but unfortunately it doesn’t. But if Capitol Hill don’t look like that, it’s a bad thing.

DANTZIC: Well it’s why I moved there.

INMAN: Yeah, I know it did baby, I know it did! [laughs]

DANTZIC: So, did you open up outside?

INMAN: Yes, I did—uh, uh, uh.

DANTZIC: So you all had refrigeration trucks?

INMAN: Let me tell you how that story worked, and I talk about the goodness of God. I went to church and told my brothers at church about what I was going through, stood out in front of the church. Talked to my pastor about it, and he made me come in front of the church and explain what I was talking about and what had happened. The next day or two after the fire, and after I talked to my church family, one of my brothers came forth, he called me on the phone and told me, “Mel, I have a brother on my job who has a refrigerated trailer. He has one, two, three refrigerators in the trailer.” Three refrigerators! Coolers. And they were big standing—as big as these closet doors. And he says that he has that. He has a sink, hot

water heater. He's got all these amenities, hand sink, everything. He's got a generator on it and all this stuff. And it's like "Oh, my God."

And I looked at him and said, "How much do you want for it?" And he told me, he said he wanted ten thousand dollars. During this time, the Capitol Hill Community Foundation says that "We're going to fund you all money." "Well, do you know what truthfully, Gary Peterson? We don't want just funding, just money, a handout just to live off of it. We want to be able to make money, to be able to satisfy customers, to be able to make this thing work, to be a viable entity in this market row here while this market is down, to let our customers know that we still care about them." And what we did was, they told us, "Tell us what you need, we'll get it for you." We told them, they said okay. Talked to Nicky Cymrot and to Gary Peterson and ... [section deleted] Steve, Steve. God Almighty, and they say it's okay! And the next day, they say to write me out something. I say, "Do you need a receipt?" They say, "No, we don't need a receipt. We believe you." Come on now! I've been dealing with National Capitol Bank for 35 years! They *never* told me, "Mel, just come and see me. Just come up. I'll just give you ..." They said, "No, we don't need a receipt. We don't need anything else." I came in with all this stuff to justify the fact, and they said, "No, just come up. Is that what you need? Will that work?" I said yes. They wrote me a check out!

DANTZIC: That's amazing.

INMAN: Yes, it is amazing. Wrote me a check out and gave it to me and said, "Go buy your trailer. Is that enough?" It's like, "Are you willing to make it a go? You are the heart, or one of the hearts of Capitol Hill. One of the organs of Capitol Hill. If you are willing to work like that, then would you do it?" And they did it, and I was like, "Man!" They, like, *crushed* me when they did it. I was *crushed*, you know, totally crushed, I mean, it really was ... Because you think that people in this day and society would not, but this community ...

DANTZIC: That was the thing, it was so impressive to me. We were looking at houses and just made an offer on a house right around the time of the fire, and we were just so amazed at the community. So that's another one of the questions: so, obviously, that was a big response of the community. We're talking about customers, and then the city, well you mention all these things, the city responded really well and then the councilman and okay, so you've answered all the questions I don't need to ask you ...

INMAN: It's okay, go right ahead!

DANTZIC: Let me ask you this, did you lose any employees? Were you able to keep everybody on board?

INMAN: No, we lost a few employees and they went on to some more aspirant careers and we were happy for that.

DANTZIC: So it gave them an opportunity for change.

INMAN: Yes. And we were happy. Also, it allowed for us to hire some more people who were in need of employment, some chances in life, who had not so readily been afforded those chances. So we were excited about that.

DANTZIC: So how has business been since the fire? The same or better?

INMAN: It has been just as good, if not better. Still, as I talk to folks from day to day, they still don't know that we are up and running "Well, I thought the place was closed." It's not until the actual market and real—you know, the opening of the temporary market is not as big as that will be when we open up the regular market, and it will be crazy. It will be real, real, real big—you know, we *expect* it to be big, so we expect for more in the way of return, we expect for more in return for the city. They don't like my boy, but shame on them. Fenty is a good kid. He works hard and for this city, they can't stand change.

DANTZIC: I think he's doing a great job.

INMAN: Yeah, but they hate what he's doing. "He's doing all this kind of ..." Talking to my mom, I say "Mom, you all would be happy if that idiot Marion Barry was still here doing ya'll over like he did for so many years. You know, you got to understand, it's not like that no more, you can't just keep going over the same things." But they just don't understand it. The people of the city are so ... God, I feel bad for them, because they just don't understand. They really don't understand. I don't hate Marion Barry, but when he became mayor years ago, I left the city.

DANTZIC: Is that when you moved out of the city?

INMAN: Sure did, baby. Moved out in 1970. Walter Washington has just lost—well, not lost, but was out, lost to Marion Barry. And I left in '73. I was gone.

DANTZIC: You had some foresight about his abilities, huh?

INMAN: I don't know, baby, I mean, you know, I think he had ability. I just don't think he was a great leader.

DANTZIC: I can't believe he's still a councilman.

INMAN: I know. But who is he counciling? What's the area he's counciling?

DANTZIC: All the Anacostia river.

INMAN: Yeah, baby, you know what I'm saying. Ignorance—80 percent of the people that live there. I'll say, close to about 70 percent of the people that live there have no college degrees and no high learning.

DANTZIC: They don't want to leave their neighborhood.

INMAN: No, they don't, they stay there, so they don't know no better. So that's the way it goes.

DANTZIC: So what do you think else is going to happen in the second life of the Market? Are you going to do anything different with your business? You going to have more space? Less space?

INMAN: Hmm. More space, we're hoping. More parking, Martha, we pray.

DANTZIC: Yes, don't we all.

INMAN: As we are going through this thing now, we are praying that what we have more parking. In a way, it took the city a while to understand that we need the Hine parking lot. For two years almost we've gone through this whole thing and not until they shut down the street has someone come in and said, "Huh! Why don't we use Hine parking lot?" We've been talking about it for two years! Now, duh! What are we, March? We've got April, May, June—we got three months. They now just decided to do the Hine parking lot.

DANTZIC: I always wondered about that.

INMAN: Why wouldn't you use that? I don't understand it, for the life of me, why they wouldn't. But they now have and will use that, you know, as a supplement to our parking. But still, the city needs to consider what they do as far as supplementing parking here. How much of the Hine parking lot ... You got this as Hine's lot, and do you sell to whomever you sell to, this portion? Does the city keep this portion? Because, at a Metro stop, this could bring in huge revenue. You build it up as a garage, underground, whatever you do and it services also the Eastern Market subway. What is one of the most conducive subway stops in the Washington area to safety, to peacefulness, other than the Eastern Market? It's better than the RFK Stadium, it's better than a whole lot of subway stations around the city in this area. In this area, a garage type parking for the Eastern Market subway, for the Eastern Market itself, would be the best thing. So whether you sell it to that entrepreneur, that entity who wants to come in to buy up the Hine area, you sell them a portion up to the parking. City takes it over and you do the parking. It's more spaces they can do in revenue here than they can do any place around. They city doesn't *have* a parking garage. The city doesn't. They have maybe parking areas, where people have free parking, or

meter hangs maybe someplace else, but most of them are free. What's wrong with the city collecting revenue?

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

TAPE 2/SIDE 1

DANTZIC: So how did you feel about closing Seventh Street on Saturdays? Did they close the whole thing or just half of it?

INMAN: Well, you know half of it, which is from C Street back to Pennsylvania Avenue [ed: North Carolina Avenue]. Didn't make a whole lot of difference to me because they closed it anyway. It really wasn't a big thing to me. The pedestrian-friendly thing was kind of cool to me. I did kind of like that because I thought it was kind of dangerous the way cars were driving through there all the time, the way people were flying through there. We were setting ourselves up for a terrible catastrophe out front. So I didn't think it was safe. I just pray that again when they open back up Seventh Street—that part of Seventh Street—will be closed.

DANTZIC: For the weekends. So you think it's a good thing. Do you think that the outdoor vendors bring ... that you guys are mutually beneficial to each other's business? What's your feeling about what people come there for?

INMAN: Well, initially it was established as a food mart. Basically, that's what it was. That's what you did, basically. But who's to say that all that was out there in the early 1900's was just food? People sold food, but they sold other things in conjunction. My great grandma was a roadside-type vendor.

DANTZIC: Really? At Eastern Market?

INMAN: Not Eastern Market, but from up in Gaithersburg, Maryland, and everybody did things of that type of nature. They sold jellies, jams, food, crafts, whatever it was you just sold it. You had a brand for everything. Took regular paper bag and glued the label onto the bag and wrote on the label what it was. Regular paper bag, that's what you did. That was what you did.

But you know I think they bring a lot of flavor. It may not be much in the way ... business is relevant to what it is you are trying to convey. If you are trying to convey the homey type, market type atmosphere, then they bring spirit to the market so then you cannot dispel their importance. Sometimes my brothers in the Market, are like "Oh, no, we don't need this kind of ..." I'm like, "Dude, for real! If we were just food, which we were just years ago, on Saturdays or on other days, you guys really weren't doing that kind of business!" They weren't! You weren't here back in the '70's, '80's, and '90's like I was, when

they really weren't doing much. Saturdays weren't those kind of days. It was okay, but it wasn't that big. All of that draw, all of that hoopla, all of that pomp and circumstance, I guess you might say, has brought more to the Eastern Market than just the everyday grocery shopper. Because people shop in groups. So now if you come, you bring somebody who potentially might shop for food. Three or four of ya'll might not buy food, but the other one or two are here to buy food, along with other, quote-unquote, "junk" outside. It's a wonderful thing. I don't look at it that way. Some of my brothers look at it that way. "They're just taking up valuable spaces and doing this kind of ..."

DANTZIC: Getting in the way of parking ...

INMAN: You know, baby, in way of the food people out front I think they should not be. But in their own [respective] places and areas designated them, I think that it should be something that's truly allowed and something for me that's truly appreciated.

DANTZIC: Well that's good because I know it's a point ...

INMAN: It's a sore spot. I know for a lot of my brothers it's a terrible sore spot. They don't ... It's like, "Dudes, y'all got to understand that we have to adhere collectively to this whole process and this whole plan so that we all can prosper from it." Because otherwise, we all go down. They can make it bad for us. We don't want that. We want everybody to ... There are a lot of people who really support us. I hate to step on somebody's feet.

DANTZIC: It's interesting. I just learn more and more about the Market, but more just with this whole transition with who's going to end up managing it. I went to my first Eastern Market Advisory Council meeting just to go. One of my friends is an artist and she was going, and I volunteer with the project. I'm just learning so much because I thought everybody was happy, everybody got along, because I love it all and I have connections with people in the flea market and the artists and the farmers and obviously with all you guys inside.

INMAN: And hear some of the turmoil. You figured it was all one big ...

DANTZIC: Happy family. But it's just one big normally dysfunctional family.

INMAN: Man. Yes that's right. Yeah, like most families, that's right.

DANTZIC: Well, I think it's neat what they're talking about doing, though, is making it all one enterprise or fund so that all the revenues will be turned into the Market to support the Market.

INMAN: What we're talking about is a fair amount. What has happened is the arts and the farmers have not been given their fair share [of expenses to carry]. EM merchants have been given the greatest amount, the larger portion. Now grant you, we have been there all throughout the week, but there is a fair portion that should be given. And even in proportion to the time, we are there six days. If you did a six-to-one—it does not proportionately pan out even six to one. You see. So if you're talking about that, it's like "OK, can we just make it equal in that way, that it becomes equal to what we do, six to one." But it's not even close to it. And this is where the real problem is with the inside merchants, is the things that we pay for. We pay for the restroom facilities, the lights, the this, the that, the lights, electricity they use outside. They pay one set fee. "No, we're not mad that you guys are out there! But if we had to foot all of these other things then you guys need to put in your share!" And they're not doing it.

DANTZIC: I hope with new management it all gets worked out.

INMAN: Well, you know what, the city might have to manage the thing for a long time.

DANTZIC: Sounds like the city's doing a good job of managing it.

INMAN: They are doing a good job. You know why? We can get ahold of them! The management entity were hard to get ahold of. And everything they did was hard to get ahold to as far as the city was concerned. When you deal with people who are city employees, they have numbers, you can get directly through. "I need to talk to you about this that and the other." They get you straight through. But when you say you're an entity of such and such property management—for them to get through, it was pure hell. They never got through. Or they never got back to us. They never got answers.

DANTZIC: The old management that ended in December?

INMAN: Uh huh. You know what the funniest thing was Martha? After the fire, they never got back and showed their face again.

DANTZIC: The management?

INMAN: Never did. They never talked to us, never came back.

DANTZIC: No way.

INMAN: They never did.

DANTZIC: Even to the temporary building?

INMAN: No. One of the kids came back, but they guys who initially owned it ... One of the kids who owned it, his father, Bruce ... I forgot the name of the place, anyway.

DANTZIC: But it was the company that had the contract to do the management?

INMAN: Uh huh. It was so ugly, baby, they never came back. I was upset. Bill didn't think it was anything because he agreed to have them in there anyway, and he agreed that it was alright ... "But they didn't do this." "But they were away ..." I said, "How much the hell are they paying you?" Okay? Because you know for real it doesn't even make sense to me man. I'm not enjoying this one bit that they never came back, never talking, never apologized. They should have put the sprinkler system ... The sprinkler system that they should have had in there, they didn't put in there. The alarm system they never put in there. They should have put it in there. They faltered on that point. And the alarm system that was supposed to be put in there was never connected to the fire department or the alarm company.

DANTZIC: I've been wondering about that, if they were ever going to assign any responsibility?

INMAN: It was just that. And because the city let them get away with it, because the city let them get away with it ...

DANTZIC: The city allowed them not to do it, right?

INMAN: Or never followed up. The city was responsible. That was [their] management decision to bring those people in. They did not do it. And you let them get away with it and do a bad job. So guess who's really responsible? You want to know why we got the new building? Why we got all the new equipment? It's there, it is what it is. Okay? And you know what? Yeah, you better give us new equipment. You better give us some facilities. Because really, for what it would cost for you all to have to pay lawsuits for everybody in there, it would cost a phenomenal amount of money. It would have killed the city. Crushed them. And it would not have been Adrian Fenty's problem. That was not his problem. But you know what? He was willing to fix it. So they ought to leave my boy alone or to give him crap about what is going on because you know what? That was not his fault. It wasn't his fault. He did not have anything to do with that dumbness over there, that was a complete oversight with the OPM.

DANTZIC: Well, they just seem to have left it unattended or cared for so long it seemed like. When I found out how many different departments within the city managed ... the flea market's one thing, artists are another, Market 5 was another, the farmers were Department of Agriculture. It's like all these different things.

INMAN: And none of them, none of them really is really managed by any of them.

DANTZIC: It's like the wild west out there!

INMAN: Yes it is.

DANTZIC: Because I know Barry has been trying to figure out the artists, how long they've been there. That's another whole crazy set of stuff going on the outside.

INMAN: Barry Margeson?

DANTZIC: Yeah, Barry has to assign all the artists to different vending spots and they're doing it on seniority. And people had to prove how long they've been at the Market and there are people not telling the truth but, you know, it's like the wild west out there.

INMAN: There was a lady out there told ... I'm a long time Market person, I've been here for 15 years [unintelligible] [laughter].

DANTZIC: Let me ask you one more question, I think you might like this question. Has our boy Obama come to see you?

INMAN: No, he has not come to see us, but I do expect that he will be there. He is a community man. Just like what somebody told me, "I don't think it's a good idea that they went to the Jay Leno Tonight Show. You know what? I think he does too much, goes on too many interviews, he talks too much, he becomes the only talk show on TV." I say, "Guess what ya'll. You complain about the last President we had because he never talked to you guys. He never told you anything. Now you're angry because this boy talks too much, so you think, quote on quote. He doesn't talk too much, It's just that you're sick of hearing the truth. Just like everybody. You don't want to hear the truth. This is the truth. It's going to take a while. It's going to be ugly for a long time. Ya'll are going to hate me before you learn to like me. So you know it's okay. Let's work through this thing and we will get through it." Will he be to the Eastern Market? I suspect he will.

DANTZIC: I think he will.

INMAN: I know he will. I know him. He will be there. He will be there some time within the first week of the opening of Eastern Market.

DANTZIC: Oh, I bet you're right.

INMAN: He'll be there for the first week. It'll be at some unprescribed time but, good young man, I suspect he'll be there, he'll talk about community, he'll talk about Eastern Market, he'll talk about things

that the Capitol Hill community ... because after all, Capitol Hill was one of his biggest constituents in the election.

DANTZIC: He was 78 percent in the District alone, so I can imagine in our precinct ...

INMAN: Big. So, yeah, I expect he will be here. I do expect that. If you want me to call him out on that, "Mr. Obama, would you please come to the Eastern Market?"

DANTZIC: Well, I think that's a great way to end it! Thank you, Mel.

END OF INTERVIEW