

Pittsburgh Oral Histories
Pennsylvania Department
Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh



AFR

Interviewed by Barry Chad

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Branch

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And an article memorializing her son, Steve.

Interviewer's Note

Very involved in the community. Volunteerism's shining light. A volunteer with clerical skills—a clerical whiz—skills that she could bring to whatever she was asked to tackle. And, at one point in her work career, a real-life switchboard operator! Like Lily Tomlin on “Rowan & Martin’s Laugh-In.” Attending the Florence Utt Switchboard School in Downtown Pittsburgh. This was

only about 50 years ago. But, in terms of technology, a whole other world. No “phone trees” but a living, breathing person on the other end of the line.

Interview

bc: You heard about this project through RSVP [Retired & Senior Volunteer Program of Allegheny County].

AFR: Correct.

bc: What’s your involvement with that organization?

AFR: I’m a volunteer at RSVP. I do clerical things. When I started with them, I had a regular workstation. So I went to Interfaith Volunteer Caregivers every Friday, that was my day to go there, once a week, and I volunteered. They had data entry to do and I learned how to use a mouse. (I had never used a mouse; I had always worked where there was a mainframe, doing data entry.) So I never worked with a PC and a mouse. I did that; I’m still in touch with them. If they have mailings and things of that sort, I volunteer to come in and do that. And then I belong to what they called their Variety Club. That means they can get a call from some conference that’s coming to Pittsburgh and they need some volunteers to stuff some packets and things and so I like “variety.” I’ve done that.... My name is kind of “on call” and whenever they get various clerical kinds of things, I get a call. If it’s convenient and I can come, fine; if not, it’s not. The regular workstation where I was...they’ve moved from where they were; their needs have changed from a big office; they’re now part of Family Services. A lot of agencies have cut back on mailings: mailings are expensive. (I happen to like to do mailings. Because you go in, and you’ve got all this disassembled stuff and you put it together and...when you leave, you’ve got a finished product and you’ve helped the agency. You can see that you did something. And I like it. I don’t mind being in a room by myself and working. Occasionally there’s a group of people. So

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it can become a conversational kind of thing. Or, you sit and you listen while everybody else is commenting. I enjoy that.) But now they just have mailings a couple of times a year, just here and there. So, the woman who's in charge of the tiny office, she'll call me. And, if I can come down, fine. They've moved to East Liberty; they were in Bloomfield. RSVP has workstations everywhere: there's Kane Hospital.... Most of the people, I think, go, on a regular basis, to a certain place and that's where they volunteer. (They like that, [that regularity].) When I first started, I needed to know that every Friday this is where I was going. (At the start of retirement, you need to hold on to something.) My parents had also volunteered with RSVP. My dad used to work in the Post Office so they [my parents] always used to do mailings. So, I guess the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. That's how I got started with RSVP. And then they have a very nice luncheon for the volunteers in the Fall—that's just a bonus. The first time I went—I'd heard of [the banquets]; I'd never gone—and the agencies (they call them workstations) will nominate a “volunteer of the year.” And you know that you've been nominated. [When I went to register at the luncheon, I was looking for my name and] they said, Oh, your name's over here. [My name tag had a little blue ribbon like I was the winner at the County Fair. So we all had to sit at the nominees' table.] Because you were nominated, I think, you got in for free. Otherwise you pay five dollars for this lovely luncheon. (Last time Jack Bogut was the entertainment.) And I thought, Well, there's only that one agency that I was working with under RSVP: why would I be the Volunteer of the Year; I'm only doing clerical stuff. What's the big deal with that? That's not “people on people,” [working directly with people,] that's really good human interest, and really, I mean, that's a good volunteer. (Just give me paper and I'm happy.) I thought there was just going to be [the announcement of] the Volunteer of the Year and that's the end of it. But they save the Volunteer of the Year for the end. But I knew nothing. I was just going to the luncheon for the first time to see what it's all about. So, the first lady up they described [her] to the audience.... And there's about seven-, eight-hundred people in the audience at the Sheraton. Anyhow, they're talking, and the first person gets up and says this [award] is for such-and-such and there's big companies in Pittsburgh that are sponsors for each special [award]. [The first person to receive an award, the presenter of the award described what that lady] did at that agency; and then that person was called up. And I thought, Oh, that's the Volunteer of the Year. (And I'm ready to go start my lunch.) Then, Bob Fragasso from The Fragasso Group [Retirement Planning and Wealth Preservation Specialists] gets up. And I thought, What's he going to be talking about? Because hey!—they already [named somebody as Volunteer of the Year]. He starts to talk about this volunteer who does clerical stuff...and I'm thinking, Somebody else does [clerical stuff]; you're not the only one who does clerical. And the woman who was sitting next to me—she volunteers at a school; she works with the third-graders as a volunteer—so, when [Bob Fragasso's] talking, she looks over to me and she says, “I think he's talking about you! You told me you do that!” “Oh no,” [I said,] “somebody else is probably doing that.” And then, when he popped up with my name—I was dumbfounded! And then: you had to go up [in front of] all these people. And, at that first [luncheon I attended], I think there was an election coming up. So, Dan Onorato [currently

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Allegheny County Chief Executive] he was there. And they're going around shaking hands. (I didn't have a clue.) Also, the agency that sponsors you is invited to come. So, [the woman who I said runs the IVC—Interfaith Volunteer Caregivers—office] comes in and she has the new IVC Director with her. I think, Isn't that nice that they came to the luncheon and they sat at the table. She [the woman who runs the office] knew she had nominated me, but they don't know who's been selected until that day and the names are announced at the luncheon. So I got [the award] for Community Service. In Pittsburgh RSVP is sponsored by the American Red Cross. It's [also] across the country. I had an aunt who was in her 90s and she was volunteering at a hospital under the RSVP program out in California.

bc: You've worked with a mainframe computer. Obviously you've experience with computers.

AFR: Well, not really. All I did was enter; I never searched for anything. I just did data entry. That was at Joseph Horne Company. (I was reentering the job market after 23 years.) One of my jobs, back in the '50s was for a contractor in Oakland, and I used to go to the Webster Hall to eat my lunch. In the '90s I was working at the Webster Hall; and the place where I used to work on Winthrop Street was a little restaurant—everything topsy-turvy. I took typing in high school; I was good at typing; so the keyboard was no problem.

bc: [We talk briefly about AFR's two sons. One who attended the Allegheny campus of the Community College of Allegheny County [CCAC], studying Accounting, and who is deceased; another son, who briefly studied at the University of Pittsburgh, and then enlisted in the 82nd Airborne as a paratrooper—he was part of the Grenada invasion.]

AFR: [CCAC] had reentry for women they called Displaced Homemakers.

bc: You're a native Pittsburgher?

AFR: Yes, sir.

bc: Where were you born?

AFR: I was born at West Penn Hospital. Three months after the '36 flood. I was born in June; the flood was March. And, when I worked at Horne's there was the line on the Horne's building how high the water came up.

[My family] moved off the Hill and then we were living in East End and I stayed in East End all my life except for a short period of time when I lived in Squirrel Hill.

bc: Your family was originally from the Hill District, the Lower Hill?

AFR: Yes. My parents, of course, grew up on the Hill. My grandfather was one of the businessmen down there.

bc: What was your grandfather's business?

AFR: He had a grocery store right next to Benkovitz's on Centre Avenue. It was 1806 Centre Avenue. And my mother and her family, and then my grandfather brought his old mother from Poland over—they lived above the store at 1806 Centre Avenue. There were pictures of my grandfather's store on the inside. We

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lived on Devilliers, which is where the police station still is, but Devilliers Street is nothing but a grassy plot of nothing. Way back when, when [my grandfather] came to Pittsburgh, my grandfather had quite a few brothers. One ended up with a department store in Ambridge, PA. He had a brother who had a store up the street on Centre Avenue. It was a wallpaper store. And that brother lived in a house across from the Irene Kaufmann Settlement [today the Hill House Association]. My mother used to take me back to the Hill because there weren't babysitters in those days and my mother would go back to visit a ladyfriend, taking me with her. She would go back to visit—there was a drugstore and my mother would get her hair done on the second floor. So, I remember these places. (I think I have a photographic memory 'cause I close my eyes and still see pictures of a lot of stuff.)

bc: In our collection we have postcards of the Irene Kaufmann Settlement. These etchings that are represented on the postcards were done by a gentleman, Samuel Filner, sometime in the 1930s. He was from Vilnia, Lithuania. I put these postcards online and his family in Baltimore found them and came out here to actually see them and to get photographic copies of these postcards.

AFR: My father's father had a bakery. They did bread; they didn't do pastries.... [It was] on Logan Street. It was a door or two up from Logan and Fifth. And, in my time, I remember there was, I think, a Mayflower Bakery down on the corner of Fifth and Logan there. When I take the 71 [bus] into town, I kind of look up [and think to myself] Oh that must have been the doorway. My sister was five years older than I. She had the pictures; she cared about that stuff. I was too busy raising a family....

I also did a volunteer job at the Jewish Education Center, which used to be the St. Philomena's Church on Beechwood Boulevard in Squirrel Hill. There was a volunteer organization called the Jewish Volunteer Connection. I had been in a group that every once in a while would do what they would call a *mitzvah* project—a do-good kind of thing—so that's how I became aware that this agency existed. Well, when I was working, I didn't have time to do that, so when I retired, I called them. And, I said I've got clerical skills. That's where I got the Interfaith Volunteer Caregiver job originally. So, I needed something over the winter when I wouldn't be driving to Squirrel Hill. I needed something that was closer and I live in Stanton Heights and Interfaith Volunteer Caregivers on Liberty Avenue was close. (I had no excuse. You get on the bus; and when you get off, the hospital cleans the sidewalk; and they were across the street.) I was doing both of those things—[the Jewish Education Center and the Interfaith Volunteer Caregivers]. I started with them before it went to RSVP. [Anyway], the Jewish Education Center—the library—was a teacher resource library. The librarian-in-charge is an Israeli woman who is just charming. She would play all this Israeli music while I'd be there. Teachers would come in to get some information and stuff and videos.... And what I did there was—they got a grant: they were trying to update their library and have a computer barcode system for checkout. So, all the books—English, Hebrew—had to be cataloged. On every book now, I flip it open and, Oh I know what this book is about. [AFR is referring to the CIP information, that is, "Cataloging in Publication" data, provided by the publisher and the

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Library of Congress, that provides author, title, date information on the item.] [On little index cards I listed the CIP information.] Those were then sent on to New York. When they came back, I had to proof and make sure that the numbers and the titles on these little stickers that I was going to put on the book matched the labels that were already on the book and then remove those old labels and replace them with new, barcoded ones. I was there for three years when I first retired.

[The teachers could then check these out.] Sunday School teachers, rabbis, interesting people would come in. I would take some of the books out. Somebody had done a book of oral histories that you and I talked about—the National Council of Jewish Women [NCJW]. And I'm cataloging these books: Oh that looks interesting! Then I could take a book home and I could read it. And that's I how became aware of that book [by the NCJW] and all kinds of things. Also there were [a lot of books about] when the immigrants came to this country, a lot of books about the different cities—where they went, where they settled. So I would read and I thought, Now that makes sense; now I know why everybody kind of moved [to the same areas].... And my mother would say, [A person, a family] would move to areas where there were cousins, where your people were.... (I used to think, as a teenager, Isn't this dumb? "Can't we be somewhere where nobody knows you? You can't even misbehave!") And so then I became interested in this kind of stuff, and the history. And, of course, anybody that I would ask [about our family's history] is gone.... The store went bankrupt and we moved off the Hill when I was four....

bc: What was the family going through during the Depression and during the War?

AFR: Dad worked in the Post Office. My mother had a single sister who was going to Carnegie Tech [today Carnegie Mellon University]. She and my grandfather moved with us to East End and, the way I got the story was—when we moved to 601 Mellon Street—the only way we could move off the Hill (because my grandfather no longer had his business) was because my father had gotten a job with security working for the Post Office. So, you didn't need to be on the Hill anymore and people were moving away. We moved to this house on Mellon Street. My grandfather had the back bedroom. My aunt and my sister and I slept in one bedroom. My parents had the front bedroom. So the story was: without my grandfather helping with the rent, we never would have been able to move to East End. And then next door was my father's Aunt Molly in the other half of the double. And down the street and up the street: family and friends. Then my grandfather remarried and he lived on Negley Avenue. Everything was in walking distance. When he remarried, we couldn't afford to stay there [on Mellon Street]. So we moved to a second floor on North Sheridan Avenue behind the [Pittsburgh] Theological Seminary (which used to be the Lockhart estate) and it was the Lockhart estate when we moved there to the second floor [apartment]. [The lady whose house it was] a Jewish family: she'd make the *challah* bread on Friday night and the old sauerkraut in the basement. We lived on the second floor. My father was in his 30s, but he was drafted and he was in the Army. He served in

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the Philippines. He was a Master Sergeant. He may have gone into the Service in '43; he came out in '45. And there's a relative of mine who lives in Philly whose mother died when he was three and his mother was my father's sister. And my cousin Jeffrey says he's got this box of pictures. I said, Send me the pictures and I can probably identify who these people are. So he sent me a couple pictures; he is making copies of a couple at a time and then I write everything that I know about...who these people are in the picture.

bc: Did you have luck?

AFR: Oh yeah. He sent me eleven. Out of the eleven there were five I had never seen in my life. A lot of [them I could identify as] my father. My cousin had a very close relationship with my Dad. We always said—my sister and I would say, He's the son my father never had. But some of these pictures are when my Dad was in the Army. Those I had never seen. There was a picture of my Dad with his buddies—I don't know where it was! It looked like it was a desert somewhere!

bc: We get these kinds of pictures all the time, donated to the Pennsylvania Department's collection. It's a shame: all the information is lost. That's why it's very important to write this stuff down.

bc: So your father was in the Philippines. He saw action?

AFR: He was behind a desk. He was a Master Sergeant. So he was in charge of "misappropriating"—we need a couple of trucks! we need some food! we need some this! we need some that! My Dad was a very outgoing person. My Mom was kind of quiet. So my Dad—because he was there for the three years—he became friendly with a lot of Filipino families. And there was also a German couple who had left Austria—just in time. And [the German] had a business over there [in the Philippines]. He couldn't get parts for his trucks and things. So he would write down what was needed. (My mother may have been quiet but...my mother had great "investigative" qualities.) Dad would get the information from the Schwartzes [the German couple] about what kind of equipment they needed. (After all this time I still remember these names.) [Mr. Schwartz would write up this] list of what parts and things he needed. (And, of course, during the War it's hard to get all these parts. There, of course, [in the Philippines] he couldn't get them.) I think the business was some sort of auto parts...mechanic...machinery...maybe he was a tool and die maker.... I don't know 'cause I was a kid. But my mother would then check here in Pittsburgh and she would call and whatever; and she could locate what he needed and then they would ship it to him...and, I guess, the guy then paid the company.

bc: Did these Filipino friendships continue after the War?

AFR: We never saw them. The one family came, I think, to San Francisco. And my Dad kind of corresponded. But these people never passed through Pittsburgh. And the German couple never left the Philippines. My Dad was there when [General Douglas] MacArthur was there. But my Dad wasn't out shootin'; he was Master Sergeant; he was at the desk. (I guess I inherited [his love for] paperwork. My Dad used to do bookkeeping and things of that sort.)

bc: That's very interesting. You obviously are very comfortable doing clerical work.

AFR: That's what I'm good at.

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bc: You enjoy it.

AFR: Yeah. I like putting things in order.

bc: Where did you go to school?

AFR: I went to Peabody High School. It's in East End. It's across from the Theological Seminary. It's on North Highland Avenue. Before that I went to Dilworth School, which is around the corner on Stanton Avenue. (I think they call it Dilworth Academy now.) I went there for grade school. When we moved off the Hill, we moved directly to Mellon Street. Rogers School, which is a CAPA [Creative and Performing Arts] school now in East End on Colombo Street, I went there for kindergarten. And my sister went there. And then, when my grandfather remarried, we had to move away from there. My aunt got married so there was no way we could stay on Mellon Street. Then we moved to the second floor on North Sheridan Avenue and we rented there, which is what we had done at the other place, we had rented. I then went to Dilworth school, graduated and went to Peabody. And that was it.

bc: When you graduated from Peabody, did you go to work? What kind of work?

AFR: Yes, clerical. [She laughs.]

bc: Who did you work for?

AFR: I went to switchboard school. I wanted to be a receptionist.

bc: Switchboard? Like...

AFR: ...Lily Tomlin [Ernestine the Telephone Operator on "Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In" TV show]! You got it! I was in Zelenople and Harmony on a [Pittsburgh] OASIS tour the other day and there was this old switchboard in the corner and people were kind of ooh-ing and aah-ing, and I'm looking like, Okay.... That was what [switchboards] originally looked like, but, you know, in the '50s, it didn't look much different 'cause it was a smaller console model. A cousin had gone to switchboard school and I thought, I want to be a receptionist—maybe in a doctor's office or something, but I couldn't stand blood or the sight of that stuff. So anyhow I went to switchboard school—Florence Utt Switchboard School. It was in Downtown Pittsburgh. I went to switchboard school: I was going to be different. A lot of the kids went to college. I've got a little certificate at home. The course took three months. Then [the switchboard school] placed you. They placed me in an agency Downtown. (They either placed you or they referred you to this agency.) At this agency it was a one-woman office. She was going to go on vacation. She needed somebody to take care of the office. (There was no switchboard there.) So I took care of the office while she went away for a week. (It was in the Park Building.) I think I got paid \$37.50 and, I forget how much, but she took a percentage out of it or something. And then, from there I ended up with a job at Felix Half & Brother at 800 Penn Avenue; [they dealt in] wholesale floor covering. The place on 13th and Smallman was their warehouse. They sold flooring, Cosco stepstools, fiber rugs, regular rugs.... They sold it to...your little department stores in Canonsburg [Washington County]...and around the tri-state area. So this was wholesale. I was a relief switchboard operator, but I was inventory control. There was a phone, so, even though I went to switchboard school, Pat was the switchboard operator [and] when she would go on her break,

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they needed somebody to cover: you know, relief time. You have a phone at your desk and all these dealers from everywhere would call in and they wanted to place an order for 50 so-and-so rugs.... What do you have in stock? So, you'd go over and pull out the file drawer and it would have all the merchandise, inventory control and you'd flip it over say, Oh yes we have.... How many did you want? Okay. Then you would write up the order; then you would subtract it.... This was all manual stuff.

bc: This is absolutely fascinating. It's only about 50 years ago.

AFR: It's a whole other world.

bc: You were a "live" person. You know what it's like now when you call up someone. You get this "phone tree." You don't get a live person and you wind up leaving a message. Back then you had all of these retailers calling in and you're manually checking cards....

AFR: My desk was the Cosco desk and the Deltax Rugs. Deltax were summer, fiber porch rugs. That was at my desk. The women next to me, these two older ladies, they had the carpet and the "this-and-the-that" kind of stuff.... So, I went from [the days of being an operator like] Lily Tomlin to 1994 [when I stopped working at Horne's], went down to an agency in town and they said, There's this job at the Webster Hall building for a development company switchboard operator. Hey, lady, [I thought to myself], I haven't used a switchboard in...! So, I was "re-entrined" into using a modern switchboard.... [AFR talks a little bit about office politics and she says,] I tried to stay neutral; I'd pretend I was Switzerland.

I did still want to be a receptionist, but I wasn't being a receptionist. I thought [I'd get to] wear a nice white uniform. So, I was placed by the Elizabeth Kessler Employment Agency. There was a nose-and-throat doctor in Oakland. I went down to Gimbel's: I got the white shoes, I got the white uniform.... [As far as I was concerned,] I was just going to sit so nice up front. So, I got the white shoes, the white uniform and went off to work for the doctor. Not only did they want me to sit up front, I had to help out in the back. And, at the end of the day, there was this great big jug of sinuses that had been drained.... Needless to say, I also had to help drain sinuses, and I'm going, "Excuse me! I just want to sit out front and be nice and clean!" After that first day, I couldn't handle ginger ale. I decided: I don't think I can do this. So, I did it, I guess, another day and I was still helping out in the back. And, I mean, I'm not that kind of person. (My sister was a nurse for Montefiore [Hospital]. But she could handle the "goo.") So, I had a talk with [the doctor] and said: You know, this really isn't what I was thinking of as a receptionist. ([Eventually] my white uniform went to some kid for a Halloween costume. The shoes probably went to a re-sale shop.) [The doctor] was the "god" of ear-nose-and-throat. Tall, nicest, sweetest guy. The office staff—the girls were nice too. So, years later, my one son, my older son, needed tubes in his ears and we went to the best ear-nose-and-throat guy in the city. [And it was the same doctor that I had once briefly worked for.] He'd paid me for the three days that I'd been there and he was just a gentleman about it—he understood: no problem. A real sweetie-pie. [And so, when I came into his office years later] I thought: Oh, I hope he doesn't recognize me! After all these years! So, we go in the doctor's office; and I prayed he wouldn't remember me. So, we go in and, obviously, I

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have a different last name; but he's sittin' there and he's lookin' at me and he's lookin' at me. "You look a little familiar." When I told him the story, he did what you're doing: he sat there and he laughed. So, I went from ear-nose-and-throat to working for the general contractor who built a lot of schools in this city. It was a one-girl office.

bc: You raised your family and continued to work.

AFR: No, no, no, no, no; I couldn't. I was home for 23 years. Sewing maternity clothes and that kind of stuff [when my sons were born]. I was home 'til 1986. [When I rejoined the job market] I took a class in Oakmont at a Women's Day Out Program. [It was held] at Fifth and Maryland; it's a Methodist Church in Oakmont. During those years the synagogues and churches used to have a program that women could come to for exercise. They could come to learn about all kinds of topics. They could stay and have lunch. And, if they had kids in school, [the kids could take a bag lunch and stay in school] or they would bring the kids—a bus would go pick up the kids at the school, bring them; they could have a lunch. The kids would go back. The mothers would have their lunch and maybe a speaker would come in and talk. The women [in the program] were nice. They'd have a little social coffee thing first. Sometimes you'd learn how to make chocolate...and cooking...and cake decorating.... I went for the job market class—reentry into the job market. I also went for a self-defense class.

Then I started to look into resume writing. (Career Development in Squirrel Hill is the place that's still around.) Because the steel workers were out [due to the closing of the mills], there was all this big upheaval. They had grant money for displaced homemakers.... I went over to Goodwill: they had some classes. I took a Briggs-Meyer Test. And Career Development had job placement.

[Eventually] I went down to a temp agency, went to Kelly [Girl] because this lady said temp agencies are non-threatening ways to get back into the workforce: you're not paying any money; you're not locked in. If you like it—fine. If not, not. But you're getting some experience. She taught us to dress professionally—with a blazer.... I still have some of the blazers from my last job as a receptionist. I took the class and then I worked for Kelly Temporary Services. I worked at West Penn Hospital at the Information Desk. (There was a switchboard there.) The priests would check in. The rabbis would check in. It was right there in the front. And you would direct people. I also worked for Gateway Travel, Modern Curtain and Rug (now Weisshouse), the Registry in Squirrel Hill (a gift shop). (I saw the same people in Squirrel Hill that went for their travel tickets, came down to buy their carpet, and they would go to the Registry for their gifts.) So, I had these part-time jobs and my friends kept saying, You're crazy for all these little crummy part-time jobs. I said, Not a problem; I like variety. At the Registry, I liked waiting on those dear sweet little old people that would say, "I got this wedding invitation from a person I haven't seen in 50 years—it's their grandchild. I have to get something—something nice." I would spend the time with them. They, to me, were more interesting than the brides. Brides were coming in for their fancy china.

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I needed a job with security and benefits. So, while I was working at Gateway Travel, I went Downtown. I had my resume and stuff all done. I went Downtown. I started at the City-County Building and I worked my way down to Joseph Horne Company and I left resumes. I was only working part-time and all those part-time jobs didn't even add up to 30 hours-a-week. You know, it was eight hours here...that kind of thing.... I left my resume at all these different places and got a call from Horne's. The Human Resources Department called me. They had this buyer; she was the hosiery buyer. She needed a clerical. All the buyers had assistant buyers usually.

bc: I'm sure it's not like that anymore.

AFR: Forget it! The buyers were the first ones out at Horne's. So [the buyers] had a clerical. And the buyers sometimes had a couple departments. (She was the hosiery and the slippers.) She needed a clerical and the clerical is the one who did all the paperwork, did the reports and did all that stuff. I went down to Horne's—Cheryl [the buyer] was younger than my son—sweetest, nurturing young lady—[and I said,] Oh yeah I'd like to do this. (I don't think there was any computer.) [The job] was answering the phone and [doing] reports. The salary was good; it had all these benefits. They had a credit union. And, you'd go to Horne's, and all you saw were gray-haired ladies. So this really looked good.

Early on, when I was reentering the job market, I wanted to get some work-related experience without actually going to work. I was a volunteer at the Carnegie Museum at the Natural History gift shop where the kids come in with their nickels and dimes and they're shy a couple of pennies to buy stuff. So, I got some working experience, heard about a job in Fox Chapel at a gift store, the Inca shop. They sold things from Peru. The [owners] hired me because I had had experience in retail at the gift shop as a volunteer at the Museum. So I've also worked as a saleslady. But, there was a fire and it burned down.

bc: Let's conclude the interview with a very basic question: How has Pittsburgh changed in your lifetime?

AFR: I've seen accessibility for the handicapped. I've seen buses that have lifts. There're curb cuts. The biggest changes are for the disabled, changes that tickle me every time I see them. I was waiting for a bus one day and it was in the winter, coming home from work in Oakland, and, on Centre Avenue, it was snowy and this big guy—six foot—was in front of me and he was grumbling because a guy in a wheelchair was getting off the bus. I'm five-foot-two. I took him on. [She laughs.] I complement the bus drivers when people in wheelchairs have gotten on and off—their patience, their diplomacy. I've seen ACCESS come into being. [ACCESS is door-to-door, advance reservation, shared ride transportation provided throughout Port Authority's service area and serves primarily senior citizens and persons with disabilities.] When we needed a hydraulic lift for the family van for my son's wheelchair, there was a group called Magic Carpet. They were the beginnings of what ACCESS was. We bought a used hydraulic lift.

ACCESS: that's how my son went to Community College; it's also how he went to Reizenstein [Middle School] and also Pioneer Education Center. I saw the Board

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of Education with Reizenstein opening—this new school—that was geared for everybody. They didn't want my kid in a wheelchair in that school. There were ramps. I got a special delivery letter three days before school opened that they would admit him. I took on the Board of Education. I fought my little fires here and there for my son. [When my son died,] the gal at Community College who was part of Special Services—that was a new department [at the time]—she captured my son's spirit in an article [published] in a newspaper at Community College for the disabled students. Unbelievable. [He'd] called [Community College] that September and said that he couldn't come back to school—he had a few health problems.... He died in December of that year....

I've seen Downtown go from ladies, or even I myself, when I first worked—graduating high school in '54, and going to my first job in town—wearing shoes with little heels and wearing white gloves.... Hats, I really wasn't into, but you would see people going into town, women shopping...seeing how Fifth Avenue was so vibrant. You'd go to the movies. My mother, in her day, as a wife, when she was through cleaning and everything, she would give herself a day off. She'd go to town; she'd go to a movie matinee in town. My mother would go to classes over at the Y.

bc: You were keen on being a receptionist when you graduated from high school. What would you have done differently? Would you have gone on to College?

AFR: I didn't fight my father and I really didn't have the grades. The aunt, who moved off the Hill with us, was my favorite aunt. She was a registered dietician. She went with the Visiting Nurses in the Hill. That aunt went to Carnegie Tech. She sewed; I learned to sew from her. I wanted to follow in her footsteps. I wanted to be a dietician. I wanted to, but my father didn't encourage college.

[from the Newsletter of Community College of Allegheny County, Allegheny Campus, December 1984 / January 1985:]

Steve R.

Steve R., one of our students, died on Monday December 17th. He had just turned 21. It is unlikely that Steve will be remembered by more than close friends and family since he was, I think, incredibly shy. Some of his co-students might remember him as a quiet young man in a wheel chair who wore sweat suits.

I say that Steve will be remembered by a few but his story needs to be told that many may learn of his gallant soul and be uplifted.

Last year, I gave a presentation to members of the Muscular Dystrophy Association. Most of the attendees were middle aged adults who had contracted Muscular Dystrophy late in life. The type of Muscular Dystrophy they had was debilitating to a degree, but not life-threatening. Yet it was apparent that many of

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these people had given up. They were no longer really living and growing; they were just marking time.

In contrast, Steve had Duchene Muscular Dystrophy. It strikes its victims young and most do not live to adulthood. Steve came to Community College in the fall of 1982 already bearing the burden of the knowledge of his fate. He enrolled in a full schedule of classes and went to work. Despite his increasing fragility (he wore sweat suits to disguise his wasting frame and suffered from bouts of exhaustion) he disdained help of any kind. Until his last semester, he refused to take extended time testing and took his tests in the classroom. Steve attended classes for four semesters and earned good grades. Even the effort of writing notes and turning pages was an effort for him. For this reason, it must have taken him much longer to study. Despite his illness, he rarely, if ever missed a class.

How tempting it must have been for him just to close the books and watch television, instead of studying. How many times must he have asked himself, "Why am I doing all this? What good will it do?"

I was not there when Steve died. I do know that he lived well. He used his allotted time as fully and as well as he knew how. This was Steve's gift. I hope that by my telling you this story, he may be able to share his gift with us all.