

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

SOL STOLOWY

AUGUST 1, 1991

INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI

INTERVIEWED BY JIM WILLIAMS

ORAL HISTORY #1991-14

This transcript corresponds to audiotapes DAV-AR #4349-4350

HARRY S TRUMAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



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Sol Stolowy and Jim Williams reviewed the draft of this transcript. Their corrections were incorporated into this final transcript by Perky Beisel in summer 2000. A grant from Eastern National Park and Monument Association funded the transcription and final editing of this interview.

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ABSTRACT

Sol Stolowy (3 January 1908—15 November 1999), a Kansas City tailor, made several suits for Harry S Truman from the time Truman was president until his death. Truman was buried in a summer suit made by Stolowy shortly before Truman's death. Stolowy describes the process he used to custom fit Truman's suits, the decision process undertaken by the Trumans, and the resulting product. He also relates experiences with the Trumans at various social functions in the Kansas City Jewish community.

Persons mentioned: H. Roe Bartle, Arvid Owsley, Clarence Kelly, Hank Stram, Harry S Truman, Bess W. Truman, Charles De Gaulle, Charlie Hipsch, Eddie Jacobson, Richard M. Nixon, and Margaret Truman Daniel.

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH

SOL STOLOWY

HSTR INTERVIEW #1991-14

JIM WILLIAMS: I want to make sure I pronounce your name correctly, so could you .

..

SOL STOLOWY: Spell it out?

WILLIAMS: Could you just tell me how you pronounce your last name?

STOLOWY: I pronounce it Stolow.

WILLIAMS: Stolow, okay.

STOLOWY: Yes, there is a Y on the end of it and we don't use it.

WILLIAMS: Okay, I guess that's where I was confused. Well, this is an oral history interview with Sol Stolowy, and some of his family is here also, his two daughters and wife. We're in the CAVE. This is Jim Williams from the National Park Service doing the interview. Leslie Hagensen is running the recording equipment, and Museum Curator Carol Dage is here, also. It's the morning of August 1, 1991.

Well, first of all, I'd like to find out something about you before you became associated with the Trumans. Could you tell me where and when you were born?

STOLOWY: I was born 1908, January 3, in Poland.

WILLIAMS: In Poland?

STOLOWY: Yes. I came over here in 1927, December 27, 1927.

WILLIAMS: Did you come to Kansas City then?

STOLOWY: Yes. We stopped in New York—naturally, you had to get off there—and

then from there we came right to Kansas City.

WILLIAMS: Where did you enter in New York?

STOLOWY: In New York.

WILLIAMS: Was Ellis Island still running then?

STOLOWY: No, we just got off of the boat and we went out.

WILLIAMS: Why did you come to Kansas City?

STOLOWY: Well, my father was in Kansas City. He was a carpentry contractor in Kansas City, and he had a lot of family over here, too, some brothers here, and that's the reason we picked Kansas City.

WILLIAMS: How long had he been here in Kansas City?

STOLOWY: He'd been here about five years before; that would be in '22. He came to Kansas City in 1922.

WILLIAMS: What did you do for a living back then when you came to the United States?

STOLOWY: In the States?

WILLIAMS: Yes.

STOLOWY: He was building homes, repaired homes, building stores. That was his . . .

WILLIAMS: What did you do as a profession? What was your profession?

STOLOWY: My profession was tailoring. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: I need to get that on the tape. I already knew that but I needed to get that on the tape. So you have been a tailor all of your life?

STOLOWY: Since I was thirteen years old.

WILLIAMS: Where did you learn the profession?

STOLOWY: In Poland.

WILLIAMS: So where did you set up shop here in Kansas City?

STOLOWY: In Kansas City, I got the first job with the Kansas City Custom Garment Company.

WILLIAMS: Where were they located?

STOLOWY: It was located at Tenth and Central in Kansas City, Missouri.

WILLIAMS: How long did you work there?

STOLOWY: I worked there till 1952, as a foreman in the shop. In 1952 I bought the company.

WILLIAMS: How big was the operation there?

STOLOWY: Well, for Kansas City it was pretty big. We had as many as 120 people working there.

WILLIAMS: Oh, boy!

STOLOWY: And we made between 600 and 700 suits a week.

WILLIAMS: That's a lot of suits.

STOLOWY: That's right. We also made . . . later we went into the uniform business. I took it over in '52. When I bought the factory, we went into the uniform business. We made police uniforms, fire department, TWA, Braniff Airlines, all kind of uniforms.

WILLIAMS: You said you were making 600 or 700 suits a week. I don't suppose all of those were custom?

STOLOWY: All custom-made.

WILLIAMS: They were?

STOLOWY: Yes.

WILLIAMS: It seems like a lot.

STOLOWY: Yes, in that time, it was . . . we would send out samples to a lot of tailors, and they sold the suits. From these samples. They would measure the customer and sell the suit, then send it in to us to make it. We also did “made to measure” at our factory.

WILLIAMS: I see.

STOLOWY: See? And this was how everything was custom-made.

WILLIAMS: And you say you bought the company in 1952?

STOLOWY: That’s right.

WILLIAMS: Did it change names then? Did you change the name of the company?

STOLOWY: No, I kept the same thing like it was. It was well-known. The company was well-known and there was no reason to change it.

WILLIAMS: Do you still own the business?

STOLOWY: Well, I closed it up in 1980, or ’82 I closed it.

MRS. S.: Eighty-one.

STOLOWY: In 1981, I thought, I’d retire, but I couldn’t. [chuckling] I retired for one week. Then I went back to work, opened up a small little shop, and I’m still working in this small little shop.

WILLIAMS: Where is your shop now?

STOLOWY: It’s also on Tenth Street, 314 West Tenth Street.

WILLIAMS: So you’ve always worked downtown Kansas City?

STOLOWY: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Who were some of your customers through the years? Anybody I would know?

STOLOWY: Well, I don’t know if you know him H. Roe Bartle. Do you know Roe

Bartle?

WILLIAMS: Mayor Bartle?

STOLOWY: Yes.

WILLIAMS: He was a big fellow, wasn't he?

STOLOWY: And how! And another big fellow was the sheriff, [Arvid] Owsley. I don't think you know him.

WILLIAMS: No, the Jackson County Sheriff?

STOLOWY: Jackson County Sheriff. He was for years Jackson County Sheriff. He was just as big as Bartle, but shorter. We had a lot of customers in Kansas City. God, we used to have at least 5,000 or more customers from Kansas City. I still make suits for some of these same customers.

WILLIAMS: So you had measurements for that many people?

STOLOWY: Yes.

MRS. S.: What about Clarence Kelly?

STOLOWY: Yes, Clarence Kelly.

MRS. S.: Don't forget Hank Stram.

STOLOWY: Hank Stram.

MRS. S.: National figures.

STOLOWY: Yes, and that guy there. [pointing at a photo mural]

WILLIAMS: President Truman, of course.

STOLOWY: [chuckling] Yes.

WILLIAMS: I was going to get to that sooner or later. These suits that Kansas City Custom Garments would make, what kind of price range, or were these extra-fine or . . . ?

STOLOWY: Well, we had three different categories. We had a cheaper category, a middle-class, and then a real fine class. Well, when I started out, we sold a suit for \$14.85, made-to-order. And we made a pair of pants for \$3, made-to-order. [chuckling] Now I get \$135, it's the lowest priced pants I can make to order, and the lowest priced suit I've got is \$500.

WILLIAMS: So you had the whole price range of suits that you made?

STOLOWY: Oh, yes.

WILLIAMS: You just didn't deal in one type?

STOLOWY: Well, it depends on the material, what the material cost. And in addition to your material, you put in the kind of labor. If it's a cheaper material and it only costs \$200, you cannot put in \$500 in labor.

WILLIAMS: Did you know Mr. Truman before he became president?

STOLOWY: Oh, yes, yes.

WILLIAMS: How did you get to know him and start making suits for him?

STOLOWY: Well, a lot of times he used to come to our synagogue, and I got to know him from there, and then I knew him from around about town.

MRS. S.: How about the haberdashery?

STOLOWY: Yes. In fact, I bought all the fixtures when the Truman's haberdashery closed. [chuckling] And his partner opened up another store at Thirty-Ninth and Main, and then for some reason, they couldn't make it and they closed and I bought all their fixtures. And I've still got some of them, not many.

WILLIAMS: So display cases and things like that?

STOLOWY: Hmm?

WILLIAMS: Display cases?

STOLOWY: Yes, display cases, and I got a great big mirror. I had three of them. When I closed the original factory down, I sold some of them, and I kept one. I've still got one. A great big mirror, a three-way mirror.

WILLIAMS: Why would Mr. Truman be at your synagogue?

STOLOWY: He was invited there a lot of times. And he used to come. I remember one time when he was president and we had some kind of a gathering at the synagogue, both he and Mrs. Truman were invited. We were standing in line to greet these people, whoever the party was for.

MRS. S.: It was for Charlie Hipsch.

STOLOWY: Who?

MRS. S.: Charlie Hipsch.

STOLOWY: Oh, Charlie Hipsch, was it? And we were standing in the reception line and President Truman came along. I moved over. I wanted him to get in front. He said, "Oh, no, you stay there. I'll get in back of you." And they did.

WILLIAMS: So do you remember just when you first . . .

STOLOWY: Made the clothes?

WILLIAMS: Yes.

STOLOWY: Oh, I made the clothes, I would say, sometime . . . in the late forties.

WILLIAMS: And that's the first . . .

STOLOWY: And then he went to the capital in Washington . . . and I didn't see him for a while, and then every so often he would come in to the factory when he was already president. He used to come in, I used to see him quite often.

WILLIAMS: So he would come into your store?

STOLOWY: Yes. Once in a while he used to come in. If he would pass by, he used to come in and look around a bit.

WILLIAMS: Would he come in and buy . . . or get measured down at your shop?

STOLOWY: No, I always used to go out to his house. She, Mrs. Truman, used to call me and make a specific appointment and I used to go out to his house. I had to go at a certain time and date.

WILLIAMS: Do you know how you were selected to be a tailor for them, how they chose you out of all the tailors in Kansas City?

STOLOWY: Maybe because I knew him from before or . . . My place was well-known all around Missouri, Kansas, and Nebraska. We used to make uniforms for everybody as well as civilian clothes. Even today I get customers from Oklahoma.

WILLIAMS: From Oklahoma, huh?

STOLOWY: Yes. There's a couple who come in every so often, and I make clothes for both her and for him, in Oklahoma City. And I have a doctor who comes from Kirksville, Missouri. He would fly in, and I would measure him. I don't have to measure him anymore unless he gains or loses weight. He flies in for a fitting, and then I ship it to him.

WILLIAMS: So you would be called out to the Truman home to measure or . . .

STOLOWY: Yes. And I used to take out samples of fabric. You know, we've got some little swatches in little books. I used to take them with me. Naturally Mrs. Truman was there and she started picking what she liked. President Truman would say, "Now let me see what you picked."

WILLIAMS: So Mrs. Truman would call you to do this?

STOLOWY: Yes.

WILLIAMS: He didn't seem to handle that?

STOLOWY: I suppose they talked it over before, I don't know. [chuckling] But I'd go to Independence and measure him. I'd take the fabric chosen and measurements and when the suit was ready for a fitting—I'd call them and set an appointment. The same thing would happen when the garment was complete.

WILLIAMS: Did you ever go out to his office at the library, the Truman Library?

STOLOWY: Oh, yes, many times.

WILLIAMS: So you'd go to the home and the library.

STOLOWY: In fact, I was a charter member of the library. I became a member before the library was finished.

WILLIAMS: Okay. Were you in the home when he was president, or after he was president?

STOLOWY: I was in his home when he was president and afterwards. Both.

WILLIAMS: So both times. You started coming out when he was president?

STOLOWY: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Do you remember any particular occasion when he was president? Was it hard to get to him?

STOLOWY: Well, yes, I remember one time, you know, we were sitting in his home. After I got through measuring him we sat in his office. He'd say, "Sit down for a minute," so we'd sit down. And one time he made a remark about [Charles] De Gaulle. You know, the French president. And he called him something, you know. He used profanity. And Mrs. Truman said, "What

did you say?" And Mr. Truman said, "I mean it, everything that I said."

WILLIAMS: Which room would you be in, in the house? Where would you measure him?

STOLOWY: I was measuring him in the front room, and then later we used the bedroom. The dining room was converted to a bedroom, and we used to go in there and I fitted him there because he had to take his clothes off and try on the pants and all that.

WILLIAMS: So you were in the downstairs bedroom.

STOLOWY: Yes. In fact, I never went upstairs; it was always downstairs.

WILLIAMS: But most of the time you would have been in the big living room, the front room?

STOLOWY: Yes, the living room, and yes, the little office on the side, where all the books are.

WILLIAMS: So you would sometimes go in there?

STOLOWY: Yes. He used to sit down there all the time. I used to come in and we'd visit.

WILLIAMS: When was the last time you were out to make a suit?

STOLOWY: I was out the last time . . . The last time I was out, I made him a summer suit. I think it was the year he passed away. And he made a remark to me, he said, "Mr. Stolowy, would you like to make me a vest for this suit?" And Mrs. Truman said, "Why do you need a vest for a summer suit?" He said, "I'm going to wear it. Make me a vest." I said, "Okay."

WILLIAMS: What kind of suits would he buy? Which in the price range, I guess.

STOLOWY: I always used to give him the best material and the best workmanship for

the least price.

WILLIAMS: The lowest price? You didn't do that for everybody, though?

STOLOWY: No. You can't do it for everybody.

WILLIAMS: Did you make any other garments for him besides suits?

STOLOWY: Yes, I made him a cashmere coat, a light tan cashmere overcoat. I made him a dark herringbone topcoat, single-breasted.

WILLIAMS: What color was that summer suit you made?

STOLOWY: The summer suit was a real dark gray.

WILLIAMS: Do you remember any of the other patterns of the suits that you made?

STOLOWY: Yes, one was a plain navy, one of them had a little . . . like little herringbones, you know, those little, bitty . . . I made a lot of small patterns.

WILLIAMS: How many suits do you suppose you made for him through the years?

STOLOWY: Oh, I would say altogether maybe I made about eight or ten, something like that.

WILLIAMS: So how often would you come out, would you be called out to the home or his office to measure?

STOLOWY: Whenever he was in town. I never went down there unless they called me.

WILLIAMS: But he lived almost twenty years in his retirement, and if you made about eight suits, would you have been there . . .

STOLOWY: Oh, well, this was some of them about four suits probably then, and about four before, maybe more. I can't remember exactly. I used to have a stack of orders like that from him. I keep all of his orders during his life. When they pass away, then I have to discard it. I got a lot of them like that.

WILLIAMS: So you don't have those records anymore?

STOLOWY: No. I've got one little label. I don't know if I have it with me or not. Yes. I have one little label that I used to put on his coats, and I've still got that one.

WILLIAMS: Oh, it says, "Exclusively designed for Harry S. Truman."

STOLOWY: Yes.

WILLIAMS: So you would sew these in all of his suits?

STOLOWY: In his suits, yes.

WILLIAMS: Were there any other type of . . .

STOLOWY: Some of the early suits I didn't sew in the labels because labels weren't available. So, in the beginning, I didn't. Years ago, they didn't do that.

WILLIAMS: So what kind of labels? What would the labels say that you put in his suits?

STOLOWY: Well, they used to say "Kansas City Custom Garment." We had another one that used to say "M & J Tailoring." We had another one . . . We went by four different names, you know?

WILLIAMS: But it was the same company?

STOLOWY: The same company, yes.

WILLIAMS: So there were four possibilities?

STOLOWY: Four possibilities, yes.

WILLIAMS: What were the other two besides . . .

STOLOWY: The others, it was . . . Oh, see, here's one, M & J Tailoring. The other was . . . I can't recall it, doggone it. It's blank. I'll think of it. Another was Custom Craft.

WILLIAMS: Okay. That might just help us find . . .

STOLOWY: Hmm?

WILLIAMS: That might help us find more . . .

STOLOWY: The clothes? Yes.

WILLIAMS: Yes. I know we found a few, and we're going to look at those here in a little bit. So you might come out every year or two?

STOLOWY: Oh, about every two years, sometimes every year.

WILLIAMS: Would you always just make one suit, or would they order more than one?

STOLOWY: Oh, one.

WILLIAMS: Just one.

STOLOWY: One at a time.

WILLIAMS: And Mrs. Truman was the one who picked out the fabric?

STOLOWY: The material, yes.

WILLIAMS: He never got involved in that?

STOLOWY: No.

WILLIAMS: Hmm. How would you describe his taste or his appearance, as far as the way he dressed?

STOLOWY: Oh, he was wonderfully dressed. Oh, he didn't go in for high fashion clothes. They were just plain, plain clothes, double-breasted, and finally I convinced him to make single-breasted. I think I made him two or three single-breasted suits.

WILLIAMS: You had to convince him?

STOLOWY: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Why didn't he like single-breasted suits?

STOLOWY: For some reason, he didn't like it. He always liked wraparound clothes.

WILLIAMS: Did he ever talk about his days as a haberdasher to you?

STOLOWY: Oh, yes.

WILLIAMS: What would he say?

STOLOWY: Oh, yes. In fact, one time we talked about the business, that he's glad he got out of it, and he had a partner . . .

WILLIAMS: Eddie Jacobson?

STOLOWY: Eddie Jacobson. He bought Mr. Truman out, and afterwards moved from downtown. They moved to Thirty-Ninth and Main.

WILLIAMS: What was Mrs. Truman like to deal with?

STOLOWY: Oh, wonderful. She was the most wonderful woman you ever can imagine. You know, the first time she asked me my name. I don't know if she wrote it down or not, but she remembered it every time I came out to their home.

WILLIAMS: And was he pretty easy to get along with, Mr. Truman?

STOLOWY: Oh, terrific. He was the finest, finest person I ever met, you know.

WILLIAMS: So you would come out and she'd pick a swatch?

STOLOWY: Yes.

WILLIAMS: You'd go and make the rough suit?

STOLOWY: Yes.

WILLIAMS: And then you'd come back . . .

STOLOWY: And then he looked at it. He said, "I suppose I'll have to put up with it."

WILLIAMS: He would say, "I suppose I have to put up with it"?

STOLOWY: Yes. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: As if he didn't particularly agree?

STOLOWY: Like . . . Yes.

WILLIAMS: Do you think he was just kidding?

STOLOWY: The only time she made a comment is when he wanted a vest with a summer suit. “It’s a summer suit. Why do you need a vest for?”

WILLIAMS: Did you make a vest for him?

STOLOWY: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Even though she didn’t think it was necessary?

STOLOWY: Oh, yes. I always made what he wanted. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: So you’d bring the suit out and he’d have to try it on?

STOLOWY: Oh, I’d come in, measure him, and then try them on, and then deliver it.

WILLIAMS: So how long between the time you would come out and deliver the finished suit?

STOLOWY: Usually about . . . between two and three weeks.

WILLIAMS: How do you feel now about your experience with the Trumans?

STOLOWY: I’ll tell you, my experience with Mr. Truman . . . In fact, I told him one time, that only in the United States could this happen—I’m Jewish—and only in America could a Jewish boy from Poland grow up to make clothes for the President of the United States. This could never happen in any other country especially in Europe. And he says, “In the United States, *everything* can happen. I was a farm boy and I became president. *Anything* can happen.” So, as I told you, that was the biggest thrill in my life.

WILLIAMS: Did you ever have to deal with the Secret Service when you would come to the house?

STOLOWY: Oh, yes, I had to call first, and they already knew I’m coming out and they

would watch for me.

WILLIAMS: Would you come to the front door or the back door?

STOLOWY: The front door, and they opened the gate from inside. In fact, Mrs. Truman already knew I was coming. I told her the exact time. If I come there two or three minutes before, I waited outside till exactly when.

WILLIAMS: Well, I guess we can look at the things we found in the house now. I think Carol has those. Is there anything else you want to ask before?

CAROL DAGE: Should we bring the clothing in here?

WILLIAMS: It probably would be easier. [tape turned off] . . . which number, you can make sure . . .

DAGE: This is number 20571.

WILLIAMS: Okay. Does it look familiar?

STOLOWY: You betcha it looks familiar. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: And the label says "M & J Tailors," just like the . . .

STOLOWY: M & J Tailoring. [opening his jacket]

WILLIAMS: Just like the sport coat you have on.

STOLOWY: [chuckling] And at that time I didn't have this . . . the names yet. See, there was no names available. This was made in '70.

WILLIAMS: Do you remember making this one in particular?

STOLOWY: Yes.

WILLIAMS: It has a vest, a herringbone, kind of black . . .

STOLOWY: A herringbone stripe. But that wasn't the summer suit. He had another lighter weight suit, also with a vest.

WILLIAMS: Did Mrs. Truman seem to like one kind of pattern or one color?

STOLOWY: That's what I told him. You know, sometimes he asked, "Why don't you pick a light gray suit?"

WILLIAMS: He liked the darker colors?

STOLOWY: The darker colors.

WILLIAMS: This lining, I think Carol had mentioned to me that all of the suits have the same lining?

STOLOWY: No.

WILLIAMS: No?

STOLOWY: No, there are different linings. At different times we'd get different linings and we put in a different lining. I still have this lining right now in different colors . . . the same pattern, but different colors.

DAGE: Yes, that's one thing we had noticed was that it did seem . . . The suits that we found, it all had this type of lining. I think there might have been the variation in color, but . . .

STOLOWY: Yes, but this was a very expensive lining. It's still an expensive lining right now.

MRS. S.: He gave him the *best* for the lowest price.

SHIRLEY F. GOLLER: I trust you know they [unintelligible].

MRS. S.: Because they couldn't afford it. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: Nineteen seventy is the date. Okay? I feel like a fashion show, kind of.

GOLLER: Yes, this is great.

WILLIAMS: Do you remember anything in particular in 1970, when you made that? He was in his last few years. This is object 20567. It's an overcoat. M & J Tailors again.

STOLOWY: Yes. There's another one like that, supposed to be a light tan one. That's cashmere.

WILLIAMS: I wonder if there's a date in here also.

STOLOWY: It would be seventy . . .

WILLIAMS: It says 11/20/69.

STOLOWY: Sixty-nine. There was a later one, something like this here in a light tan.

WILLIAMS: So this is cashmere?

STOLOWY: Yes. The other one was cashmere, too.

WILLIAMS: So a coat like that wouldn't be cheap, even in 1969.

STOLOWY: No, it wasn't cheap then and it isn't cheap now. Now it would be about \$1,200.

WILLIAMS: Goodness. I'm looking at this label. Oh, it says "Genuine 100 percent cashmere." And you made a tan-colored one in the same style?

STOLOWY: Yes, just like that, too.

WILLIAMS: Do you remember this? This is object 20501. It's kind of a medium-blue. Okay, this one has the label that you showed me earlier, spelled out "Harry S. Truman."

STOLOWY: Seventy-one, see?

WILLIAMS: And it also has the M & J Tailors label.

STOLOWY: Yes. I had a hard time talking him into that, with the fancy pockets and this pocket here.

WILLIAMS: Did you always have the pocket square?

STOLOWY: Hmm?

WILLIAMS: Did you always have the pocket insert?

STOLOWY: He didn't care much for it, but I made it anyway. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: And the pants are a different color. Were these part of the ensemble?

STOLOWY: Yes, this went together. In fact, the lining inside is the same, see?

WILLIAMS: Okay. You had to convince him . . .

STOLOWY: Yes, to change styles.

WILLIAMS: Oh, this is object 20577. It's kind of a wool overcoat, or a wool sport coat.

STOLOWY: It's also mine. Yes.

WILLIAMS: It says "M & J Tailors" and it has the "H.T." monogram.

STOLOWY: Yes, '69.

WILLIAMS: Sixty-nine, okay.

STOLOWY: And there's the pants [that] went with it.

WILLIAMS: Did he like the dark . . .

STOLOWY: Always dark, yes.

WILLIAMS: It looks like a . . . What would you call that kind of fabric?

STOLOWY: It's also cashmere. This is cashmere.

WILLIAMS: Is that what they call houndstooth? The one we just saw?

STOLOWY: Yes.

WILLIAMS: This is 20521.

STOLOWY: I couldn't remember the name, Custom Craft.

WILLIAMS: Okay, Custom Craft Clothes?

STOLOWY: Yes.

WILLIAMS: And this is a three-piece.

STOLOWY: Yes, it's a three-piece suit.

WILLIAMS: It's the same kind of lining.

STOLOWY: The same lining, yes.

WILLIAMS: Did he always like the two pockets on the suits?

STOLOWY: Yes, he always wanted . . . In the vest, he wanted all the pockets you can put in.

WILLIAMS: There's four, actually, two on each side.

STOLOWY: Yes. That's a different pocket, too. See, the other one was a flap.

WILLIAMS: And did we get the date on this one?

STOLOWY: Yes, '72. I'm surprised it doesn't have his name. Yes, it does have his name.

WILLIAMS: So this wasn't long before he died. He was still getting suits made.

STOLOWY: This was made in '72 made.

WILLIAMS: I guess he didn't think he was . . . April 13. He said he was going to live to 100.

[End #4349; Begin #4340]

WILLIAMS: Okay, we're on a new tape with object 20569. It's the Custom Craft label.

STOLOWY: Yes.

WILLIAMS: It's a three-piece, sort of medium-gray.

STOLOWY: Three-piece, medium-gray, all hand-stitched. See the work here?

WILLIAMS: So you wouldn't use any machines on these?

STOLOWY: No, this is by hand. This was in '68.

DAGE: Would this suit have been worn in the summer or the wintertime?

STOLOWY: Well, this was more an all-year-round suit, you know? It wasn't for July and . . . June, July, and August.

MRS. S.: The detailing is very unusual. Those were his ideas to detail it.

WILLIAMS: So this has like cuffs on the . . .

STOLOWY: Cuffs, yes.

WILLIAMS: On the jacket sleeves.

MRS. S.: Details.

STOLOWY: Not very many were made like that.

WILLIAMS: So you would try to make little designs?

STOLOWY: A little bit, yes, and a little difference.

WILLIAMS: And did he seem to like that?

STOLOWY: Most people like it, sure. I've got a doctor who comes in and I make him clothes like that. On every garment I have to make something different in his sleeve.

WILLIAMS: And it has the same kind of lining, just a different color.

STOLOWY: Well, that's the best lining I could get for him. [chuckling]

MRS. S.: Did you want to tell them about the last suit that you made for him?

STOLOWY: Well . . .

MRS. S.: He was buried in the last suit.

STOLOWY: He was buried in the last suit I made him, I think.

WILLIAMS: It was probably a dark blue one.

STOLOWY: Yes, a dark suit.

WILLIAMS: Were you involved then in the funeral arrangements?

STOLOWY: No. No, but I was there. I went out to see him, you know.

WILLIAMS: Do you know who chose the suit?

STOLOWY: Hmm?

WILLIAMS: Did Mrs. Truman pick it, or do you know who made the decision on what

he would be buried in?

STOLOWY: I suppose she did.

WILLIAMS: But you knew that it was one of your suits?

STOLOWY: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Well, I think that's all we found.

GOLLER: Someplace Mother remembers receiving a letter from Mrs. Truman thanking Daddy—they—you know, Daddy for the suit that he was buried in, that he looked so handsome, he looked so nice.

MRS. S.: And how good he looked in the suit.

WILLIAMS: So she was aware of who had made the suit?

GOLLER: Definitely.

MRS. S.: Oh, who? Mrs. Truman? Sure, she was aware of it.

WILLIAMS: Did you ever have contact with the Trumans?

MRS. S.: Not directly, but indirectly. I'd go to these functions and we'd acknowledge each other. He was always given invitations whenever there was functions in town.

WILLIAMS: Your husband?

MRS. S.: In Kansas City, yes. And I was his date. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: So you would see Mr. Truman on other occasions than just visiting him?

STOLOWY: Yes, I used to see him once in a while, you know.

MRS. S.: Whenever there were functions in town.

STOLOWY: I was a busy man.

WILLIAMS: Well, it sounds like it with all those suits, 600 or 700.

STOLOWY: Yes, I had four floors to take care of. We had a cutting room and a separate

pants shop and a separate pressing shop, and separate coat shop, and then downstairs the sales room and the office, you know. It's a lot of work. A lot of work and a big payroll.

WILLIAMS: I understand your daughter came out to the house one time . . .

STOLOWY: Yes.

WILLIAMS: . . . and made something for the Trumans, also. Maybe we could get that on [the tape].

GOLLER: Daddy had told Mrs. Truman about a job that I had, which was a craft. While the kids were growing up, I had a little cottage industry in my home and I had a studio. And what I did is this . . . People would send me pictures of their homes and I would make a facsimile of their home on a handbag. Daddy told Mrs. Truman about that, and Mrs. Truman said she would like to have one of the Truman home in Independence. So I made one for her. And it ended up in the Truman Library. And I don't know if it was the lights or something, but she asked later that I please take it and give it a paint job because the white paint was, you know, fading. So I did. I did that for her, but I don't remember when. I do have a letter from her thanking me for it and saying that it will find a wonderful place in the Truman Library and she's enjoyed it so much. And I have that letter at home somewhere in my scrapbook.

WILLIAMS: So would you paint that on wood or . . . ?

GOLLER: Yes, it was a mahogany plywood, and I used brass bindings and a leather handle. It was in the shape of a house. They were all shaped exactly the same, but through dimension you could make it look like a two-story house

or a Victorian house or a ranch house or a tri-level house. And what she had given me was a postcard of the front of the house. So I couldn't do just the front of the house, so I had to go out and take pictures of all sides of the house so it would be accurate.

WILLIAMS: So that's why you were out taking pictures.

GOLLER: That's why I was out there taking pictures.

MRS. S.: It was on display. I saw it at the Truman Library on display, with her little card on it, that she gave it.

WILLIAMS: I suppose they have it . . .

MRS. S.: Well, they had a section just for gifts that Mrs. Truman received, and it was in the showcase.

STOLOWY: You know the piano that Mr. Nixon gave to Truman?

WILLIAMS: Yes.

STOLOWY: There was a little window down there, a showcase, and it's right there.

MRS. S.: In a showcase. But they rotate them.

STOLOWY: I don't know if it's still there.

WILLIAMS: Yes, they do.

MRS. S.: They rotate them.

WILLIAMS: Do you know about what time this was? Sixties, seventies?

GOLLER: Okay, just a minute, let me think. Fifteen, seventeen . . . about twenty years ago. It's got to be the early seventies [actually 1969].

WILLIAMS: Okay, and she called you back to have it touched up or something?

GOLLER: Yes, right, because it was fading.

WILLIAMS: So how did you get it back?

GOLLER: I think I went to the library and it was waiting for me, and then I took it back.

WILLIAMS: How did you deliver it to Mrs. Truman in the first place?

GOLLER: My father. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: So you took it with you?

STOLOWY: I took it out down there. When I went to Independence and I gave it to her, and she says, “Oh no, that’s too pretty to use it. That’s too pretty.” And she put it on the mantelpiece. Next time I saw it was in the Truman Library.

WILLIAMS: So it’s now a museum piece.

GOLLER: Yes. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: Well, they sure received a lot of gifts through the years. There’s some very interesting things up in the attic and everywhere, and the Truman Library has a lot of those things, too. The only person we haven’t heard from.
[chuckling]

LAUREL ROGOVEIN: I have nothing to say. I’m the driver.

WILLIAMS: You had no contact with the Trumans? Well, maybe we could call now and see if we could get some tickets for you. Do any of us have any other questions? Leslie does.

LESLIE HAGENSEN: Yes, I was wondering about President Truman’s neckties. Did you ever make any neckties for him, or any other . . .

STOLOWY: Any what?

HAGENSEN: Did you ever make any neckties or anything like that?

STOLOWY: No.

WILLIAMS: Just suits, trousers . . .

STOLOWY: Only suits, topcoats . . .

WILLIAMS: We have lots of other things . . .

MRS. S.: You ventured into ties. You didn't make them though.

STOLOWY: In fact, he's supposed to have one tuxedo, too.

WILLIAMS: A tuxedo? You made a tuxedo?

STOLOWY: Yes, a tuxedo. The last coat was a real fine cashmere tan topcoat, overcoat, just like the one they have, the other one they showed me here. I wonder if you've still got it there.

DAGE: I don't think we have it in our collection, but it may be in the Truman Library collection.

STOLOWY: Maybe the Truman Library or maybe the daughter took it for her husband, too. [chuckling]

WILLIAMS: The Truman Library, they like to have tuxedos and formal wear because they have exhibits about the inauguration and things like that.

STOLOWY: It could be, the tuxedo is over there.

WILLIAMS: And the summer suit, the last one you made, I guess we didn't find it.

STOLOWY: I think he was buried in that suit. He was dressed in that suit.

WILLIAMS: So it was a darker color?

STOLOWY: A dark color, yes, also with a vest. That was the last suit I made him.

WILLIAMS: Well, thanks a lot for coming out here. It was fun to talk to you.

STOLOWY: That's all right.

WILLIAMS: And show you the suits.

STOLOWY: Who's paying the bill for me, for my time? [laughter]

END OF INTERVIEW