

[0:00:00]

Interviewer 2: I would start. Let's do it.

Interviewer 1: You know, this light really sucks.

Interviewer 2: But if you look straight on, it doesn't. If you're straight on.

Interviewer 1: Oh, hello. Oh, God. I'm sorry.

Interviewer 1: See how pretty it is?

Interviewer 1: Yeah. It is gorgeous.

Interviewer 2: Okay. That's recording.

Interviewer 1: Very good. And I'm out of the picture, right?

[0:00:31]

Interviewer 2: Correct.

Alice: So I don't need to look at you?

Interviewer 1: Oh. You know, I think it would be good for you to look at the camera. Or you can go back and forth.

Interviewer 2: Okay. I can do both.

Alice: You'd be our little.

Alice: [Unintelligible] not have this whole thing down...

Interviewer 1: And straight on.

Alice: No. Side view.

Interviewer 1: Exactly.

Interviewer 2: Okay. So you want me in the middle? Is that where you want me?

Interviewer 1: You've got her faced front there.

Interviewer 2: Face front. Yes. Do you want to stand back here and ask her questions?

Interviewer 1: Yeah. I think so.

Interviewer 2: And then she can look at you.

[0:01:00]

Interviewer 1: Sure.

Interviewer 2: That works. Okay.

Interviewer 1: First of all, thank you so much for your time, for being here today. And we would like to ask you to introduce yourself to our audience.

Alice: I am Alice Nast Statland. And Nat Nast was my late husband, and he is the one who started down here a long time ago with manufacturing.

[0:01:30]

Nat was not native to Kansas City, but he came after college from a Macy's training course. They sent him to Kansas City to be district manager for Adam Hat Stores. He came to Kansas City in just loved it. So lived here, made friends, immersed himself into the community, and then he was called into service for World War II.

[0:02:00]

Interviewer 1: What year did he arrive in Kansas City?

Alice: In the late '30s, and was here until he went into service, 1941. Then we he got out of service in '46, he came to New York to see his parents, who had moved from Toledo, Ohio to New York. And that's when we met and decided to get married. And he said to me, "Where would you like to live?" And I said, "I don't know." And he said, "I'd like to go to Kansas City, because I want to start in business and I'd like to do it there."

[0:02:35]

"How do you feel about that?" And I said, "Fine." Major life decisions, but seemed very easy and natural. I didn't know it was quite so far from home. And we drove here, and I discovered it was very far. But I came to Kansas City with him. He started into business, and he had decided to go into the sport shirt business.

[0:03:03]

And he knew nothing about manufacturing. He knew everything about sales, but that didn't stop him. And he started a factory at 816 Central, a small factory. And he was there in that factory for a few years. I don't know how many. And one of the memories I have of that first factory was the day the feds came in and took the entire...

[0:03:35]

...iron, the girls who did all the pressing, the whole pressing department was taken out, because it turned out they were illegal aliens. But in those days, nobody thought to ask. People who came in for jobs were just assumed. So

he came home that night and he said, "They took everybody." So it was one of the little things that happened during those days.

[0:04:03]

And business was pitiful. And it was right after the war. And there was a market for everything, but he had a lot to learn about manufacturing. And so he manufactured some shirts. And then we go out on the road together and try and sell three dozen of this or four dozen of that. And if we did, that made expenses for the trip. So that was good.

[0:04:30]

So one day, within that first year, he was sitting at the Talman Grill, where he went every day for lunch, and somebody sitting next to him said, "Why don't you go into the bowling shirt business?" And Nat said, "What's the bowling shirt business?" And he said, "Well, you know, you make bowling shirts with teams." It was really a developing business where companies would have teams.

[0:05:03]

It would be part of the thing that would make it very community like within the company, to be on the bowling team. So Nat thought that was a great idea. And not knowing anything more than that about that business, then he did it with manufacturing. He started in the bowling shirt business. About that time, he then moved to someplace, 10<sup>th</sup> and Central. I'm not sure of the exact address.

[0:05:30]

And he was there for a number of years until he decided to move out to Bonner Springs, Kansas and build a building out there. Which is what he did.

Interviewer 2: Did he stay true to manufacturing bowling shirts the whole time?

Alice: Manufacturing of bowling shirts was very popular all through the '50s and '60s. And he built a very large business in that area, which was national. We went all over the country. And then either late in the '60s or early in the '70s...

[0:06:04]

...bowling shirts were a little more on the wane. It was no longer as much a company project as it had been. And so the business diversified and went into making caps. And he partnered with a number of manufacturers in the Kansas City area in that area. And then the business started making premium goods for the jackets.

[0:06:34]

Interviewer 1: At specialty?

Alice: At specialty. And the premium business then became very large, and expanded enormously. Early on in the time that he made the move to Bonner Springs, Vern Davidson came onboard as his vice president. The business was growing very rapidly.

[0:07:04]

Can we stop for a minute, or do I just back up?

Interviewer 2: Sure.

Alice: I'm trying to think of actually what happened.

Female 2: And we can edit it, too. Or you can stop it.

Interviewer 1: Okay. Where do you stop it?

Male 1: I wouldn't stop it.

Interviewer 1: Okay.

Alice: Then, in the early '70s, the business was bought by [Big's Food] Company, because it had gone on the American stock exchange, which had been kind of a really wonderful and exciting thing to go down.

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The first day that it came across the screen that Nat Nast was trading. And we went to New York.

Interviewer 2: Were you there for it?

Alice: Yeah. I was there for it, and it was a very exciting time. So then the business morphed into many other products for the premium business.

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And it still exists today under the name of American Identity. And my son Nelson Nast was with the company until a few years ago. He kind of went along with the whole progress.

Interviewer 2: That's what I was going to ask you. I know you have several children. And what parts did each one of them play, if any, from when they went into the workforce? And what kind of experience did they need to get involved in the business?

[0:08:33]

Alice: They didn't participate - Barbara, the eldest daughter, did have a summer job with Nat Nast when she was about 11 or 12 or 13. Someplace in there. But that was it. None of the other kids were involved with the Nat Nast Company in any way, except affectionately. But then, years later, Patty Nast, daughter number two...

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...who was always very creative and very talented in art and in business and an interesting combination, decided that after a career in interior design, in which she was very successful, and then, when she married and had children and needed to be out of New York City, because she was in New York City at that point, then she needed to be where there was a good school system, because her children were starting to grow.

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She moved to Connecticut and decided that she wanted to be in a business that didn't keep her business weekends, because of the children. She had gone into real estate and had done very well in that, but that was on call, day or night, any time, and different on family life. So she thought it would be a good idea to go into a business that had a product.

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And some close family member said, "Why don't you do something with Nat Nast shirts business, your husband is forever haunting the second-hand clothing stores for old Nat Nast shirts." And he had a collection of maybe 30 of them. And he would wear them every day over a t-shirt.

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And he was in television and filming things, and it was kind of his signature. He'd wear something that had Joe's Bar on the back, or something like that. And so, "Why don't you do something reinventing that?" Patty thought that was a really good idea, so while she was still in the real estate business, in her basement, she started doing designs and then walking the streets of New York looking for pieced goods houses that had to kind of mixed-blend fabric that draped...

[0:11:05]

...the way the old bowling shirts did. And she found it. And she found people who remembered her father, who had died some years back, and was excited to talk to her about bowling shirts and her father, who had made quite a name for himself not only as a business man but as a personality.

[0:11:30]

And so she went into business in her basement having hired a manufacturer in Manhattan to make the shirts. And she had samples made and was trying to develop that kind of business when Anheuser-Busch came to Nelson Nast at Swingster and said, "Nelson, we need some bowling shirts." And Nelson said, "We are not in the bowling shirt business anymore."

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He said, "But call my sister." So they called Patty, and Patty flew to St. Louis from New York, and flew to St. Louis with samples, and they loved what she had done. And they were her first big, major purchaser. And so that kind of gave her a foot in the door.

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And she was then in the bowling shirt business out of her basement, along with the manufacturer in Manhattan. That went on for a few years, and she decided she really didn't love this business as it was. What she really wanted to do was go into the luxury men's wear business, a complete line of clothing. So she called her sister, who was, at that time, president of Calvin Klein swimwear, and had built their whole swimwear line.

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And she said, "You have to resign and come with me." When they told me about this idea, that's asking the biggest leap of faith I ever heard. But indeed, she did, and they did, and it's now six years ago that they went into Nat Nast Luxury Originals, based on their father's original business but updated and far beyond just shirts.

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But they've done a really wonderful job, and it has been very interesting to watch how they've grown the business. And one of the nice things about it is that it was Patty's idea to use the family history, based on her hour, for everything about their marketing of the shirts.

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I fed her all the family pictures I could find of her father, of the father with the two girls. And then finally, having run out of that, with me, because they needed more and more material - now, this didn't go to the public. It went to the buyers. And there were story lines with everything about their father. Actually, they morphed him into cerograph. What can I tell you?

[0:14:32]

Interviewer 1: Telling us privilege.

Alice: And so that has continued to be this history of the family. And the family business has continued to be one of the primarily things about this line, and in fact, on all of the product, is a tag telling the story of Nat Nast and the bowling shirt industry and how they have reinvented it to become a contemporary line...

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...which includes not only shirts but pants and jackets and swimwear and leisure wear and knit goods and sweaters and golf shirts and all kinds of things. So that's where it is today, all based on what Nat had originally done.

Interviewer 2: Where are they located?

[0:15:29]

Alice: They are located, South Norwalk, Connecticut is their headquarters, and their manufacturing is done both in China and in Italy. A lot of their fine sport jackets -- because it is a luxury line -- are made in Italy, along with some of the pants are made in Italy and so on.

Interviewer 1: You and I had a discussion on some of the memorabilia. Is it all in the New York area or Connecticut with the girls?

[0:16:03]

I remember seeing, at Nelson's house, the clock, the fun Nat Nast clock.

Alice: Yes. An original clock. And that was from the garment industry downtown. The clock was there. He had a few of them made. They were also in Bonner Springs - they were in the factory. He's Nat and in the office. He's Nat and his class, yes, Nelson has one.

[0:16:29]

And Patty just showed me and original sample box from Nat Nast Bowling Shirts that the salesmen carried. It was a relatively small box fitted with, like, three shirts in it. And the original shirts were in this sample box, from very early on. This was in the 50s. And someone found it and put it on eBay to sell.

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And Patty found it on eBay and bought it. So things keep showing up. And of course, the original Nat Nast shirts still show up and are going for a great - two to three hundred dollars for a shirt.

Interviewer 1: Were they out of rayon? Were they out of wool? Were they out of cotton? What kind of fibers, at that point, because you were talking about the hang and drapability in the 50s...

[0:17:30]

...and being able to reinvent that look or hang appeal in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Alice: They did a kind of rayon blend. I've no idea what was in it at the time, but that's the one. But then they went into - they did cotton. They expanded the line and they did cotton and they did all kinds of things. They also did a really fine gabardine.

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And I thought it was gorgeous. And I was the one that said, "Oh, that's a winner." And that's the one that didn't sell at all. It was obviously that my taste was not the taste of the bowling shirt buyers. They love the ones that I thought were, "Hm." And the ones I thought that were really elegant, of course, they didn't - gabardine was hot to wear. They were really wearing them to bowl.

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In today's world, it's kind of the après-bowling thing that you wear this, because that look is a more elegant look. And of course, Patty had the great excitement of seeing the first year that they were in business, the shirts became very popular on television. The first one was - now I blank out.

[0:19:05]

Interviewer 1: Two and a Half Men?

Alice: No. Before that. Before that, there was - I'll get it. One of the cute things was that was at their first show, Budweiser Beer used, for the major football game, the...

Interviewer 1: Super Bowl.

Alice: The Super Bowl. They had in their ad for...

[0:19:31]

You know how big Budweiser ads are on - they used a Nat Nast shirt unbeknownst to the girls -- and they had just gone into business -- for their Budweiser ad. And they found it. Somebody found it. But that was kind of a wonderful highlight. And then television has taken over, and they're all over.

Interviewer 1: I'll tell you how I knew that the girls had made it. I take Women's Wear Daily and D&R.

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And on the front and back cover of D&R was a slick, and it was their advertisement. And then also, they were on a major piece of collateral for MAGIC, a men's apparel guild show in Las Vegas. And I got this and I said, "Wow, I know them."

Alice: The other thing that was wonderful was they were in People Magazine, written up in People. And I was in Mexico at the time.

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And Barbara called or Patty called and said, "Mom, they're going to call you and interview you. Is that okay?" And I said, "Sure. Fine." And she said, "They are going to want to ask your age." I said, "What do you mean?" And she said, "They have a rule that they will not print about anybody without revealing their age."

[0:21:04]

And I said, "You know I don't do that." And she said, "I know." So I said, "Patty, is it really important to you? Because if it is, I will very reluctantly." And she said, "No, Mom. Forget about it. Thank you very much." So they did the article without Mom in it.

Interviewer 1: Aw.

[0:21:28]

Don't say aw. It was fine with me.

Interviewer 1: What part did you play in the role - did you have a role in the business? A significant role? Not through design? Marketing?

Alice: Not through design. As I say, the only time I made a comment about what a good shirt I thought it was it was the wrong decision. So, no. I kept very much out of it. But as far as Patty and Barbara going into this business, I was not involved in it other than, "Great. Marvelous. What can I do?"

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And that was as far as it was.

Interviewer 1: That's wonderful. Now, Nelson has branched off, as well. Is he still doing a segment in this business?

Alice: I don't know how free I am to speak about what Nelson is doing, but Nelson is now a consultant and has a wonderful business going.

[0:22:29]

Interviewer 1: But has stayed in the apparel as specialty promotional corporate apparel?

Alice: Oh, absolutely. The thing is, Nelson learned the business from the bottom up. When he went to work, he went to work for Vern Davidson. And Vern started him in the cutting department, in the sewing machine department, knowing every phase of the business. So he brings an expertise to manufacturing that not many people have.

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And then, as we developed and ended in sales and promotion and all of that, he really had covered the full scale of the whole business enterprise. So he brings a great deal of information to what he does.

Interviewer 1: Companies today are not so willing to share, regardless if it's family or not, all of that experience, because the budgets just aren't there to be able to do it. You have to walk in and know what you're doing.

[0:23:31]

That was, I think, the beauty also of my age group, is that we were still able to have that generation that was willing to teach us. It's invaluable today.

Alice: Yes. He grew up in the company and learned all of that [unintelligible].

Interviewer 1: That's wonderful.

Interviewer 2: It still exists, though now through your daughters.

[0:24:01]

But does it still exist - what happened to the [Beatrice Foods]...

Alice: Oh. As many companies are, it was bought and sold a number of times, and then it was bought back privately again. But it was then sold again.

Interviewer 1: Is it public now again?

Alice: It is no longer public.

Interviewer 1: But it's privately owned by somebody here in Kansas City?

Alice: No. It's privately owned by a New York group.

[0:24:31]

Interviewer 1: And everything, the offices are still here, the buying and the selling offices are still here?

Alice: Yes. Are still here. Yes.

Interviewer 1: And do you recollect at all the size company it is today?

Alice: No. I would be guessing.

Interviewer 1: Employees? Volume wise?

Alice: No. I really don't know. I don't really know anything about the company now, because it's been long out of the family hands.

[0:25:02]

And so not directly related to us anymore.

Interviewer 1: And then we touched a little bit on the memorabilia, the pieces that are left. Do you still hold onto any of those historical documents or...

Interviewer 2: Treasures.

Interviewer 1: ...treasures?

Alice: No. I really don't. Patty has tracked down a number of things, shirts and material, things like that. But she has them in her New York office.

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Her, I should say, Connecticut office. So I don't know. Anything I would've had I would have turned over to her, because, as I said, she's so into the family history that memorabilia was very important to her. And she has kind of continued on that vein. She always was interested in retro, long before it became fashionable.

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And so the way she is doing her operation, she does a retro feel to a lot of it now, and has decorated her office in authentic 30s furniture and things like that.

Interviewer 1: Fabulous.

Alice: Some of which she imported from Europe, because they have really art deco things there that are wonderful. She's done an interesting job.

[0:26:30]

Interviewer 1: You have a proud background and proud future with your family and their business moving forward. And thank you very much for the interview today.

Alice: Oh, thank you. I enjoyed it.

Interviewer 1: Okay. [Unintelligible] cameras.

Female 1: Every night.

Female 2: Is he a nice boy?

Female 3: Yeah. He's really nice.

Interviewer 1: I'm sure you'd know. Just kidding.

Female 3: Your teeth are white, Megan.

Female 2: Did his friend go up...