I hereby give the tapes and transcriptions made of interviews recorded on June 5, 1989 to the Oral History Library of the Fashion Institute of Technology, for such uses and purposes as the Director of the Oral History Library shall determine.

MEMORIST

Andrew Vaccaro
Signed
Sept. 14, 1990
Date

INTERVIEWER

Signed
September 28, 1990
Date
Dear Ms. Felsher:

This letter will confirm my understanding and agreement with the Fashion Institute of Technology with respect to my participation in a series of interviews conducted by the College’s Oral History Research Program.

1. The interviews will be taped and a transcript made of the tapes. The tapes and transcript (collectively called the "Work") will be maintained by the College and made available by the College in accordance with College rules and general policies for research and other scholarly purposes.

2. I hereby grant, assign and transfer to the College all right, title and interest in the Work, including the literary rights and the copyright, except that I shall retain the right to copy, use and publish the Work in part or in full until the earlier of my death or ______.

3. This letter contains our entire and complete understanding.

Very truly yours,

[Signature]

Date Sept. 4 1990

ACCEPTED AND AGREED:
THE FASHION INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

[Signature]
ANDREW VACCARO

b. October 11, 1904
Casserta, Italy

Enterer, twister-in, loom fixer

Bornstein Textiles, floor sweeper, apprentice enterer
Henry Doherty Silk Co., enterer
Geoffrey Silk Co., foreman
Canova & Simone, enterer, twister-in
Kaulkstein & Co., enterer, twister-in
C. Cosentino Co. Inc., enterer, twister-in
Interview with Andrew Vaccaro for the Fashion Institute of Technology, conducted on June 5, 1989

Q: Mr. Vaccaro, how old are you?

AV: Eighty-four. I'll be eighty-five October the 11th.

Q: You were born in this country?

AV: I was born in Italy. My folks was on a visit to my aunts and uncles, and I was born in Italy and they came home. I was eight months old when they came to this country.

Q: You parents had been living in Paterson before you were born?

AV: Yes.

Q: They had come here from Italy some time before that?

AV: Yes. They used to make the trip yearly. All my mother's sisters and brothers were there.

Q: Do you now at what time your parents had come from Italy to the United States, how long ago?

AV: Well, I was born October the 11th. So, before they took me to this country, I was eight months old. It was on a visit that I was born.

Q: Did you have family members who were in the textile industry, Mr. Vaccaro?

AV: My oldest brother was in textile. You've got to consider, at one time, Paterson was known as the silk city of the world. They had between twenty-five and thirty thousand people, including the dye
houses and the textile mills. Where you're interviewing me right now, the five big buildings that you see, all that was here was the weaving plants, where they manufactured the goods to satisfy the customers the way they wanted it done and stuff like that.

Q: Your brother was older than you?

AV: Yes.

Q: He went to school for a while in Paterson?

AV: Yes. If he was living today, he'd be five years older than me, so he'd be eighty-nine. In Paterson, all the workers did was work in textile because, like I said, there was between twenty-five and thirty thousand workers. There were weavers, winders, quill winders, loom fixers.

Q: Do you know what age your brother was when he started working in textiles?

AV: Years ago, three, four, five, or six -- Families were big. So being that he was the oldest brother, he went to high school. He's the only one of my brothers or sisters that went to [high school]. I don't know whether it's because I couldn't make the grades, but my folks couldn't afford to send me to high school. So that's why I worked in a mill. Like I said, I started as a sweeper. I must have been sixteen years old.

Q: When you started?
AV: Yes.
Q: Before that, you had gone to school in Paterson?
AV: All I went to was the grammar schools. I didn't have the opportunity to go to high school. My brother quit high school to go work in textile.
Q: Were you going into the same plant as your brother?
AV: I don't know whether you want this on the record, but my mother and dad -- may their souls rest in peace -- I had a stepfather. In the summer months for three months, they used to go to Coney Island. At this particular time, in this building here, I was working. In order for me to learn the trade that I learned, I had to sign an agreement that I wouldn't quit them in two years. When the two years was up, I demanded I wanted more money. Every two months, they used to give me a dollar a week raise. It got up to twelve dollars. I had to promise them that I'd stay with them for two years. I couldn't walk out. In other words, I had a contract. They put it in black-and-white, but they never gave me one. So when my two years were up -- we didn't have no union or anything to fight for you -- I asked for a raise. They said, "We can't give you a raise. We'll agree that you're the best we had around and the fastest. We can't give you a raise because, if we give you a
raise, we've got to give the other ones a raise."

I said, "But what do I have to do with the other ones?"

They wouldn't give me a raise, and I quit.

Q: What mill was the one that you quit?
AV: Right downstairs here, the first floor. Is this the plant facing the senior citizens' apartments?

Q: I'm not familiar with Paterson, really.
AV: This is State Street. All right. So this is the plant where they dye house is, on the first floor. That's where I worked. That first floor, and then the two-story building that was next, that's where this firm was.

Q: What was the name of it?
AV: Bornstein Textile.

Q: After two years, you quit Bornstein.
AV: Yes. I figured with my ability, I should have been getting more than what they were giving me. The question you asked me, if I know how long it was -- My folks were at Coney Island. They used to go every year. They used to rent the rooms for three months, and we, the children, would go and see them weekends. My step-dad said to me, "When I come back and you ain't got a job, you better not be here." So that's why I took this job, sweeping the floor. Then, I was on my own. Then, I got a job in Passaic at Doherty Silk Mills. It's a
four-story building. I think it's on Main Avenue in Clifton. They had twelve hundred looms. I got a job there, entering [warp ends].

Q: You say you got a job, entering.

AV: Yes.

Q: Had you had previous experience?

AV: That's the trade I learned here. From a sweeper, I went to a bobbin boy. From a bobbin boy, I went to an entering. I did that for a little while. Like I said, we didn't have no union then. You were all on your own. If you figured your ability was worth more than the next party's, you had to fight for yourself. It's not that that's being selfish. I don't think that's being selfish, right?

Anyway, in our department, there was twenty-seven. I'd enter a job; a girl would hand in; she'd sit in back of me, get an end at a time; I'd put a hook -- Then, after I got through, another party would put the reed on. Do you know what that is?

Q: Yes. I just wonder if we could perhaps try and be a little more specific and back up just a little bit to get the process of the job — just how you did the job. When you were entering, you were entering the warp ends onto the loom.

AV: Yes. Well, they had frames. Over here, they do
it in a loom. I tried to tell them, "You people there, it takes them twice the amount of time it would take me because it's easier entering in a frame." When it's done, then you get it out of there and then you jack it in to the loom. This way here, in the loom, they've got to lean over the loom and the light -- But here, you sit down.

Q: If you're entering into a frame, you're able --

AV: The shafts, they call them. If you've got an eight shaft, you go from one to eight, and so forth.

Q: And that didn't require as much leaning over?

AV: No. I'd have a chair a little lower than this. My eyes would be with the same level as the hole in the heddle. You called it a "heddle," right?

Q: Yes.

AV: And then, I'd put a string through the eight because you could grab the right shaft at the right time. It's easier and quicker. So you'd go from one to eight or from one to six, whatever amount of shaft the piece of cloth that they were going to weave had to be. So I would one, two, three. Then, I'd ask my helper, "Make sure you always count. When we get to the end of the section, you've got to end with the last end towards me. If we end towards you, there's a mistake," which was very, very seldom. I can
never remember making maybe two or three mistakes in all the years I worked in textile.

I was gifted with it. That's what I'm saying. I was gifted with it, because people used to say to me, "You should be a magician. You've got fast fingers. Or play a piano. You should learn how to play the piano."

I said, "My folks couldn't afford it."

[chuckles]

Q: Was your assistant a young woman, usually a girl?

AV: Yes, a girl out of high school. Whoever I worked for, the girls wouldn't last long because they weren't fast enough for me. Understand? In other words, I give credit to the hander in for making me that fast, because I used to educate them, "You try and be there as I'm coming in with the hook. Don't wait until I get the hook in the heddle and then go and give me the end." I said, "You be coming down while I'm grabbing the next --" Then, if the girls were too slow for me, they used to change her. They'd break somebody else in.

Q: How did you learn to do the entering. Who taught you to do it?

AV: Well, the ones that was there before me. I sat next to him maybe for two days. They'd say, "You do as we're doing. You do as we tell you to do because, when you're on your own, if you find a
better way to do it, you work it your way." So my better way was I couldn't wait. I imagine a lot of girls didn't like to work with me because they probably figured I was a slave driver. I used to try and educate them, "Try and be there when I'm coming through."

They couldn't keep up with me, so maybe they used to talk to their superintendent and say, "We don't like to work with that fellow because he's working us to death."

Q: So it only took you a couple of days to pick up what the entering job consisted of.

AV: Yes. But he said, "If I'm teaching you, I want you to follow the way I'm doing. When you're on your own, you do it your way." So, when I was on my own, I put the strings through the heddles where they didn't have that. If I'm learning something, I can't say to you, "Why don't you try with the strings? You can grab the heddles. You've got to make sure you ain't going on the wrong shaft with the heddles. You could see it. The string's in there, right?" That's how I had to mix.

Most of the time, they'd come out of grammar school. In that time, you could go to work twenty hours a week when you went to grammar school.

So, when I started entering, the
superintendent came over to me and said, "Andy, why are you doing it that way?"

I said, "Because I think it's faster than the other way."

He said, "Well, you've got to show us if it's faster." Then he said, "You were right. You were right."

They'd wobble. You'd tie it on one end. You'd slice it through the needle that you make out of a heddle, and then tie it on the other end. Then, you'd tell your hander in, "Number one, the end would be towards you. Count as you're putting the ends in. Number two, would be towards me, the heddle. The odd heddle, one, three, five, seven, would have to be towards you. Two, four, six, eight, that's an eight shaft job, right? So you count one-two, three-four, five-six, seven-eight." When you came to the odd number and the end was towards me, that means you either gave me two ends or -- Because sometimes you used to grab three ends, and I used to see it coming in as you pull two out.

Q: How did you know in which order to put the warp threads through the heddles? Were you given instructions as to the plan for the pattern?

AV: Yes. The warpers used to have to put a ticket on a job. When I got a ticket, they'd have to put
how many ends in a section. Say, for a figure's sake, it's a six-thousand end job. When they're making it, they bank up the creel to make so many sections. Say it's four hundred per section. So, for six thousand ends, I would have to make -- What is it now? Multiply four hundred by -- How many would that give me? No, fifteen times four. That would be twenty. That's six thousand ends.

Also, each one of them sections, you used to make it, if it was a six shaft, that it would end on the six shaft. If it was an eight shaft, it would end on the eight. So if the warper couldn't make it that way, if the one section finished on number two shaft, the next one would finish on four, the next one would finish on six. When the section got done, that's the fourteen that they make the warp. If it's fifty inches, it would maybe be about this wide - if you wanted to ask me what's a section. You put one after another. The warper puts five hundred then on his card. The next one, it's a thousand. So he don't go over the six thousand ends, which they used to do occasionally. Sometimes, they used to make a section short. He wasn't making his calculations right.

Q: What would happen when that occurred?

AV: When that would happen, they would do the warp
right over. I used to say to the boss, the manufacturer, the big-shot -- When I was on the job, I had a sense of feeling, by looking at the warp, I'd be way over here, and then that's supposed to be straight. I used to go into the main office and say to Mr. Simone -- I worked for them for twenty-six years -- I says, "I'm not coming out right. When I get at the end on a two-beam job --" because, years ago, it used to be one-beam, two-beam, three-beam. It was all silk. I says, "This second beam isn't coming out. I'm going to be short. Because on the end, the two beams -- I'm already up this far, and I'm going back."

Sure enough. They used to give you a draft. He would make a draft for you. I had to read from that draft. So he said, "You do the job, Andy, the way the draft specifies."

I said, "Okay."

I come, the one beam would be two or three sections short. And I didn't have the nerve and brazen enough to say, "You're the boss. You see what happened? See?" So they'd have to throw the warp away and make a new one. That's what would happen.

Q: What about learning how to read the draft? Was that something you picked up, watching the other
people?

AV: Well, I'd have to have a piece -- If John Cosentino was here now, I could ask him for a piece of draft. Right? At Mr. [John] Cosentino's, we had them two-beam jobs. He'd give you that draft when the stripe -- See, it used to be all black lines. He'd put the crosses in for how it had to be in the harness. Then, at one stretch, you'd do just the plain beam. See, the second beam would be the satin. Satin is when a piece of cloth shines on the top. One shaft lifts up at a time. It ain't like the other shafts. They go four up and four down, four up and four down. Satin is silkier, like. So I used to have a draft.

Years ago, years back -- I'm going back in the 1920s, the 1930s -- they had two- or three-beam jobs, all silk. They had crepes. They had georgettes. The crepes were no color. You had the eight thousand ends. You dyed the yarn yellowish-like. The georgette would be the kind of stuff you'd have to put the end that's got the turn with the same end in the front that's got the turn. Because when you twist it, it won't twist; it won't roll in shape for you.

If you wanted to ask what I did after entering, then I went to putting the reeds on.
Q: How long did you spend entering before you went to putting the reeds on?

AV: Before I go any further, nobody liked me. I had more enemies than I had friends just because they said, "You're making it tough for us, Andy. We can't compete with you."

I said, "Well, I'm a conscientious worker." After I got enough courage, I used to say, "Who are you people to tell me what to do?"

Then, one day, the boss comes out and he says, "What's going on here," and this and that.

I said, "Everybody's giving me heck because they're trying to tell me, 'Cut down, cut down.' So what am I supposed to do, go and sit in the men's room until they kept up with me?"

I don't think many co-workers liked me for that one simple reason. But what they didn't know was that, on the long run, I was getting few pennies an hour more than them.

I didn't finish the conversation we were finishing. When I went to Doherty Silk Mills, with all the enterers and the hander ins, we walked out. After two weeks, we all lost our jobs. The enterers, we were asking for twenty-seven dollars and fifty cents a week. In them days, years ago -- I'm going way back now. I was, say, fifteen or sixteen, something like that.
I forgot what I was going to say.

Q: You were talking about going off the job for a couple of weeks.

AV: We all lost our jobs. We didn't have no union to back us up. So then, my father, my step-dad -- may his soul rest in peace -- he didn't like to see you out of work and given the envelope. My sister was just as bad. So he talked to a friend of his, weavers -- they used to weave there together -- and he said, "Will you teach my son how to twist?"

Before you can twist a job, you've got to enter it first. So, when you finished the job, you didn't enter it no more, you'd twist it. You'd get one end from this side and one from this, and you'd go like that. You'd have a little powder cup here next to you, you'd stick your thumb in once in a while. You put one end out from here and one from this side, from the top. The one on the top is from here, and the other one, you go up. You'd get one end, bring it down this way and, with the thumb and the finger, you twist it. I used to do maybe, sometimes, two thousand, five hundred ends an hour.

My father's friend said, "I'll teach your son." Of course, any time they show you how to do it, "You do it my way. Then, when you go, you're on your own and you do what's the better way for
you." And I did change.

One day, he comes up to me and he says, "Andrew, I'm going to lose my job if you don't cut down on your speed."

So, I said, "What do you want me to do? My fingers just --"

Anyway, I didn't like textile to start off with. My father said to me, "When we come back from Coney Island and you ain't got a job, you better not be home."

So I figured I was stuck with a job that I didn't like. I tried to be pretty good about it. I was faster than any twister that ever tried to compete with me. So I said, "I'll stick to it. I'll get a different job tomorrow." One year went by, two years went by, three years went by. When I retired in 1971, I was sixty-seven years old, and I still didn't get that job. [chuckles]

So, then, I learned how to twist. This same building used to be [Ordigan Myer?]. They were German. They wouldn't hire no other nationality. The weavers were all Italians, mostly - ninety percent. He sent for me. He says, "I hear you all lost your job. What happened to you?"

I said, "Well, we all wanted twenty-seven, fifty. I'll agree with you that nine out of ten of us wasn't worth twenty dollars." In other
words, I was talking against my co-workers. They all hated me.

But wait. Before I got this job, I worked at Geoffroy. I was working there before I got married. I got married in 1928. I've been married sixty-one years to the same woman. As a matter of fact, my sons are taking us out Sunday. The job only lasted six years. We still didn't have no union. The Italian people were thick-headed. They figured you take what the boss agreed to give to you because you never make up for lost time - never. You're not getting no two cents or three cents an hour raise.

That's when it was the general strike, in 1913. I don't know if you want to hear. In 1913, there was a big strike. All the textile mills were six months. I was about nine years old. I couldn't remember too much. But I remember when there used to be cops on horses to break up the crowds.

So this job in Geoffroy, he says, "We're moving to Honesdale. Talk it over with your wife. We'll move you, and you'll be the foreman of your department." The plant didn't last. It went bankrupt in six months. In other words, the management -- The cloth was coming off the looms not the specification of the customer. I don't
know how many thousands of yards came out.

So I lost that job. We used to work ten hours a day and five on Saturday. Until I became eighteen, I was only working twenty, thirty hours. Then [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt came through with the forty-hour plan. No ten hours, fifty-five hours a week. Work was forty hours a week, and you get the same pay that you got for the fifty. So I was getting a dollar an hour. I was getting fifty-five dollars a week. You got paid every two weeks. And that was more money than my dad was making. It was more money than my sister was making or my brothers were making, but I was foreman of the department. I was in charge of three people that worked there, and they were twice my age. They were always at my neck, "Why don't you get up? Why don't you get lost? We're going to lose our job because you --"

Meyer said, "What was you getting an hour?"

I said, "If you know that I was the fastest around town, you must know what I was getting. I was getting fifty-five dollars a week."

He said, "We can't pay you that. You might be worth it, but we've got four other twisters in here. The best we can do is twenty-seven, fifty." He says, "You was getting fifty-five dollars
because you were foreman."

Every day, the day before, the boss would give me a list of what had to be done. So I'd come to you and say, "You do this job." Right? But I used to have to do all the entering and put the reeds on. They did the twisting. So that job, Geoffroy's, like I said, went out of business. What was the name of the plant, again?

Q: Oridgan Myer?

AV: Yes. They didn't want to pay the price. So I didn't work for two years. In the long run, one of my brothers-in-law says to me, "Andy, you're making a mistake because you could live on twenty-seven, fifty a week and not wait until you went down to your last five hundred dollars in the bank, and then you had to take the job."

But I took a job with Canova & Simone's -- it's right around Dover Street here -- for thirty-three dollars a week, after I didn't work for two years because they didn't want to pay me what I thought I was worth. So I used to say to Mrs. Vaccaro, my better half -- we got paid every two weeks -- "When ever two weeks comes, you go to the bank and take what you need."

My brother-in-law gave me that advice when it was too late. After I was down to the last five hundred dollars, I had to forget my pride. But
then, I got a job. Mr. Simone wanted to interview me and he says, "You've got a lifetime job here if you're as fast as you are."

I said, "There's one thing I want you to know. I know the fellows you've got here. I know them very good. They're not going to like me. You make sure that they stay off my back. If you try to get rid of them because they're not producing as much as me, I don't want the job."

They only used to go fifteen hundred an hour. The poor guys, that's all they could do. I couldn't help it if my fingers kept saying, "Go ahead, Andy. Go to it. Go to it."

I'm not letting you people ask me any questions.

Q: So far, we don't need to. You're doing great.

AV: Oh, all right. Is there anything I forgot? But like I said, I worked all my life in the textile. Even when I retired, people wouldn't let me rest in peace. Mr. Cosentino called me up. He had my phone number because, during the war years, his dad used to call me to help because a lot of people got out of textile and worked in Wright's so they wouldn't be drafted. You know what I mean? A lot of textile workers worked at Wright's.

Q: What was Wright's?
AV: The airplane factory that was in Paterson here for years and moved out after forty-six years. They moved someplace else. They're not in business no more now.

Q: So people switched jobs during the war years to work for the airplane factory?

AV: I could have went, too. My brothers-in-law all quit. They all worked in textile. As a matter of fact, one of my brothers-in-law, he's living yet, I broke him on how to twist. He gave it up, he said, because he was becoming a nervous wreck.

Wright's called me for an interview. I went there and I said, "Look, I don't want to take up any of your time. I've got two children and a wife to support. What's the hourly rate going to be?"

He said, "You'll start with fifty cents an hour."

I says, "What? I'm getting eight-seventy and a half cents an hour now." This was in 1941, right after the war broke out. I said, "Not only that, if I take the job, I'll be taking a cut. I ain't gonna go from eighty-seven and a half cents an hour." Because when you got a raise years ago, you didn't get no ten or twenty dollars a week more, like now. The contract started one year. You got three cents an hour.
Of course, I was on negotiation committees. I was on the executive board. [Joseph] Canova was at that table of ten manufacturers. In the textile, there would be two weavers, two twisters, two winders, two quill winders, two warpers because we didn't want the manufacturers to come over and say, "Warpers ain't gonna get no raise," or "Winders ain't gonna get no raise." So they had two from each department. That's how we negotiated. Then, we started getting a two-year contract. After, there was always a three-year contract. We went at one stretch there for about twenty-five years without going on strike. I was on the executive board of the negotiation committee. My boss says to me, "What the heck are you doing here?"

I said, "The membership appointed me."

He said, "You're supposed to be on the job."

The lawyer used to be there and he'd say, "Now, Joe, behave, behave. How can he be on his job?"

He says, "Well, I've got to pay him for the time that he's here." He was one of them kind of manufacturers.

Q: I'm curious about how you were paid. You said you were paid by the hour.

AV: Yes.
Q: How many warps could you complete in a day? Could you complete a warp in a day?

AV: Let's see. When I said I loafed for two years, then I had to swallow my pride and work for thirty-three, I was working piece work maybe three months. It was on the fourth floor. This guy had a hundred and twenty crepe looms. He had two twisters at the time. I used to do two jobs to the other guy's one a day. There were six thousand at sixty-five cents a thousand. I worked piece work, not hourly work. I used to do a job, setting it up, twist it, pulling it over, and tying it, and then take it out of the frame. I used to do two a day. So twelve thousand ends times sixty-five, I was making good money. But I was doing that to help the other guy out, because he couldn't keep up. When he got behind, I said, "I won't work no hourly rate. I want piece work. It's going to cost you sixty-five cents a thousand." I used to average two thousand. One time, I did a three thousand, five hundred end job in an hour and fifteen minutes. It was artificial.

Q: It wasn't silk.

AV: Heavier stuff. Then, nylon came out. Like I said, pure silk, georgette. Then, Dacron, nylon. The silk was easy to twist. Cotton used to be the
toughest. Now, in upholstery, everything's cotton. You used to cut your finger with cotton. But I had a gadget. I'd strap it around here with a string. I'd sit this far away. I'd make the section four hundred ends in each second. You'd brush the top and bottom, and then you'd put a knot. You'd have two rods here and two there. Then, you make another section. You get it from the warp and you make the knots here an inch and a half over. Then, you grab it and twist it. You know what I mean? The two ends come together and it's got that tight level. You don't go back too far because then they'll go like this. It'll roll up on you. That's how it was.

The cotton, you'd used to have a thing you'd put the two sections in and there was two blades. I never used to use a cutter, but I used to cut my finger. I used to always have a tube of "New Skin."

Q: What's "New Skin"?

AV: It was a little thing. You'd go, put it in the crevice, and there would be new skin there. The end wouldn't go in and you'd feel the pain. It was like a rubber finger on there. But it wasn't a finger. You'd put it over the sore spot.

Q: You mentioned twisting and you also mentioned knotting.
AV: Yes. You see, I learned the trade from A to Z. I forgot to tell you. All the twisters just learned how to twist. So ninety-eight percent of the twisters just knew how to twist. They didn't know how to enter. They didn't know how to put the reeds on. They didn't know how to read the draft. They didn't figure out how many inches go in that reed per inch. If it's a sixty reed, two per dent, that's a hundred and twenty per inch. You had to figure that out. Like, when I put reeds, I put quite a few reeds on for a scroll. I didn't like the idea of what he did to me when I was in the hospital my last birthday for ten days. I went in the 11th of October and came out the 20th. He called me up, John. He wanted me to go and put a reed on. I said, "Well, you've got a lot of nerve. You're supposed to work on my terms. I just come out of the hospital. How are you going to live through it?"

So he said, "Can you send me somebody?"

So I sent a personal friend of mine. I showed him how to twist. He takes my job. Yes, I ran into him. He says, "No, I'm not working for him, Andy, because I'm getting more per reed than you were getting."

He was trying to tell me he got two dollars per wire. I charged setting it up and putting the
reed on, then setting it up for the weaver. I charged them ninety dollars. He was charging a hundred and twenty. So I don't know if they've still got him. I'm waiting for John to call me so I can tell him, "I don't like what you did to me."

Mr. Cosentino was trying to get me to come back.

I said, "John --" Am I on that? Can you erase this off? Do you want to take a look at this?

Q: About the reeds?

AV: Yes. Ninety-eight [percent] of the twisters didn't know how to put the reed on. So I learned the job, like I said before, from A to Z. In other words, I entered the job, I put the reed on, and then I'd twist on the machine.

I'll tell you about when I learned how to run the machine. I worked for Kaulkstein Silk Mills on Wood Street in Bunker Hill. His factory's bigger than this factory here.

Q: That's where you'd learned to use the machine?

AV: Yes. I was a floor man. I was a troubleshooter because they had a machine. Naturally, I used to set the jobs up for the machine. All they'd do is knot it, and I'd pull it over. You needed a cloth examiner. So I said, "What do I know about a cloth examiner? I've got a good job. I'm working for Mr. [ ] Baker." He sold the plant,
this business, to Boris Kroll. So I worked there for three years, and my brother-in-law was a loom fixer. See, on the new automatic looms now, they don't call you a "loom fixer." They call you a "technician."

So Kaulkstein sent for me and he says, "I got a job for you. Your brother-in-law tells me that you know your business from A to Z. I want a cloth examiner."

I said, "What do I know about --"

He said, "Can you tell when a shaft misses?" The shaft looms go up and down. If a certain pin falls out of the chain, that one shaft won't go up. So the weavers, all they do is pull the handle. They don't look at the cloth as you're weaving it. It weaves this way, goes around. You don't see the right side. Half of the stuff was coming back. The guy was going bankrupt. To make a figure like a bird in tie goods, like, there had to be so many picks in that inch. If the pick wheel was missing, the picture would come that big. It had to be like as big as a fly. Like the American flag, when you're weaving cloth like that.

So I said, "What would my duties be?"

He said, "You've got to examine the cloth at 7:30 in the morning. Then, you've got to put on a
piece of paper, the loom, if you find a mistake, how many yards you figure the mistake." I'd put an estimate. Sometimes we used to start at 6:30. When the third shift used to go off, he had sixty looms, an hour and a half to examine the cloth. I'd pull it out. Broken picks. The edges not working right. They're getting all wrinkled. So then, I'd have to put all that down, then give that to the foreman, which was Mr. [ ] Meyer. He was the manager of the shop. Then, I'd have to put smashes in, put a harness. With the Jacquard harness, you've got the hebble tied onto that. They'd wear out after a certain amount of times. You've got to put a new one in. You've got to make sure you put in the right hook. They got a machine.

[end of side one]

Kaulkstein, he's the boss, the big-shot. He called me in the office one day. He says, "Andy, you want to learn how to run the machine?"

I said, "Sure. I'd love to. But I don't want the girl and her husband to teach me. I want the people to come from the company to teach me," because I didn't like their system. They weren't teaching me the way I figure I'm going to -- I never told anybody that worked in my department or in my field, a twister, "Hey, you know, that isn't
right. That's wrong." So I said, "Sure. I'd like to."

I learned how to set up the job by watching them. I used to go back by the loom accidentally and I used to look, like these guys were looking over my shoulder to learn. I wanted to teach one. I said, "I want five hundred dollars and I'll teach two or three." They didn't want to pay me that. They wanted them to learn by themselves.

So I said, "Sure. I'd like to learn. But I don't want Grace [ ] and her husband to teach me. I want an instructor from the company to teach me."

He says, "Why?"

"Maybe they don't remember everything that you're supposed to know, right?" They didn't make it their business to keep it up in their mind or to ask questions.

So, to make a long story short, he says, "The job is yours if you can guarantee me a hundred percent."

The jobs I used to set up and pull up, they used to have ten, fifteen ends over. Here's what I used to do. I said, "The difference, Mr. Kaulkstein, is I go up on the loom and I put cross cards in, weave a pick at a time." So one shaft goes up like that. If you see a big opening like
this. Wait a while. If you see an opening like that, that means there's either an end broke or double. See, it's supposed to be like that, each shaft. Now, if you see one like this, you've got a broken one here and a double one here. Now, the machine don't stop for the double end. You're twisting one on to two. So you do that ten times in the warp, you've got twenty ends over. You understand? So I'd have to put hooks in the compass board, where the things go up and down, and put it through here and put them in. It looked like guitar strings all along.

So he says, "How are you going to eliminate that?"

I said, "Because they're going to lose a half an hour picking a new cross." They used to work piece work. They used to charge by the warp. I'm hourly paid. I said, "I'll twist the jobs for you a hundred percent right, forty dollars a warp." They wouldn't do that because I used to twist four or five jobs a day. I had two people help, setting them up for me. I'd knot them and they'd pull them over.

"Yes, that's right," he said.

Every job they did, there was maybe four ends over, maybe six ends over. Every once in a while, they'd do a better job. I said, "I guarantee you,
if the warper don't make a flat --' Sometimes, the warpers, they run the machine. They're walking around their frame and they don't look. An end breaks and they're running that. Right? So when they come to the two ends, they were twisting one end on to two. But see, the new machine they got would stop at a flat. If it came to where it was a double end, it would stop. All I had to do was figure whether that end belonged on the top or the bottom.

So I counted the warps. At one time, I went a hundred warps, two ends missing. How do you call it, where two flats. When the job's all done, you put different cards up and you check to see if you've got two ends in. When I was a cloth examiner, I could see there was double ends running for ten, fifteen, twenty yards.

So I learned how to run the machine. He said, "We've got two circles here: the red circle and the dark circle."

I said, "What's the circles?"

"You make the red circle here, you're in the good classified workers."

Plus, he started me with a hundred dollar Christmas bonus and a hundred, twenty-five. When I retired, I got up to a hundred and fifty because when I learned how to run the machine, we made a
Verbal, mouth-to-mouth agreement. It wasn't in black-and-white. I said, "Every six months, I want a raise. I don't want to wait till the next year." In a three-year contract, you get the raise once a year.

And he says, "All right. Every six months, we'll give you a raise if you make a perfect job."

He did that for about three times, so I figured I was worth more. I had found out that others were getting between five and six dollars. When I told him this, he said, "We'll look into the matter."

I said, "I want a dollar and twenty-five cents an hour more," I told him.

So he says, "I can't give you more than the technicians."

"What have I got to do with the technicians? I'm a twister."

Whatever the General Manager said went. He said, "I'll see. I'll talk to Mr. Kaulkstein."

One month went by. Two months went by. Three months went by. When October came around, I said, "Mr. Meyer, I'm giving you three months' notice. I'm retiring at the end of the year."

He said, "What do you want to do that for?"

I said, "You give me the raise and I won't retire."
He said, "You're good for ten years yet. You're an ambitious guy. You're a conscientious worker. One year will kill you. You retire, one year will kill you. You'll be like my father. You'll get sick of going to golf courses."

I said, "I don't play golf."

He said, "You'll get sick of playing cards."

I said, "I don't gamble."

I haven't got the nerve now. It's seventeen years since I left. I ain't got the nerve to go up and say, "You only gave me one year to live. I'm still going. How come?" Like I said, I'll be eighty-five in October.

So that's how I learned how to run the machine. The big-shot didn't call me in until the last day of the year. He says, "Why are you leaving, Andy?" The General Manager's right there, you know.

I says, "Didn't Mr. Meyer tell you why I'm leaving?" He got red as a beet, as true as I'm sitting here. He never told him. He never told him. But he could have, right?

At one time, when they was in the old plant, he says, "Well, when we go to the new plant, I ain't taking no lip from nobody." Evidently, that's why he didn't make me an offer. But if they had made me an offer --
I said, "You promised me every six months a raise. Now, you don't want to give me a dime."

He had three months' time to find out that there were knotters getting five and six dollars an hour and they were only paying me $4.85.

Q: I want to ask you about the difference between the knotting and twisting.

AV: I did a lot of sixteen thousand end jobs with Kaulkstein before they had the machine. I would average between two thousand and twenty-two hundred if I didn't get up to stretch my legs a little bit. I never goldbricked on the job. I didn't go and get lost for a hour or two. I used to do the job, just twisting it, in eight hours - sixteen thousand ends.

We had two counts there: eleven thousand, five hundred in twenty-five minutes, I used to knot it; and at sixteen thousand, two-beam job, fifty minutes.

Q: The machine knotted them?

AV: The machine does three hundred and sixty ends a minute.

Q: But it knotted, not twisted, them?

AV: No. They made the knot. On the machine here, you used the fishing line thread. They had the things on the top and bottom that would go like this, just the top - one beam this way and one beam like
this. One would go like that, see? And the thing would come and grab it. So you'd sit on a box where the machine, when you was using it -- and you'd sit there. When it stopped you'd get up. It was a flat. I had to make sure that I dropped an end on that beam and not the other beam. You understand? I used to put the cards on. That's why I used to make a perfect job. Because if an end was missing and you leave it open, if you do that for eight times -- One pick is one lift. Another pick is the second lift. If there was a double end, you could see it, an opening. Because soft silk had a tendency, when an end would break, it would get caught on the other end -- See, the drop wires. When an end breaks, it hits the electrode and knocks the loom off. Did you know that? So this would be going in the other end so that the drop wire is still on that. Whenever the end breaks, the drop wire sticks that much above the end. It hits the breaks and it goes down and automatically stops that machine, the loom.

Q: There are a couple of things I wanted to ask you a little more about, if I could. You worked with cotton being the most difficult?

AV: On your fingers.

Q: And silk being the easiest?

AV: Oh, yes. And artificial was easy.
Q: The artificials are rayon and nylon?

AV: You see, that was the first different yarn to come out - rayon. Then, you had to put dressing on it. That used to go to the dye house and they used to make it smooth. Otherwise, it would get all fuzzy.

Q: Once this was made smooth, then it was as easy to work with as the silk?

AV: Oh, yes. There wouldn't be no stickers or anything like that. Once in a while, when the weaver would have the yarn -- When they dye it, they burn it sometimes and the ends break a lot. So, sometimes, if you ever get in back of a weaver's loom and they have a piece of wax there, they'd rub the wax on the ends to reinforce it a little bit.

Q: What about working with wool? Did you work with wool?

AV: Let's see, I did a couple of jobs in the wool factories. They used to have the Botany Mills in Passaic. That used to break easier than cotton.

Q: Hard on your fingers?

AV: No.

Q: Would you attach it in a different way, if it were wool?

AV: Well, there were certain jobs. With cotton, the higher the runs -- Because cotton, if you twist
it a little, it's two-thread. Sixty, the finest.
You come down to fifty, thirty, you've got to make
a knot. The knotter can't knot it. I've done
some of them for [Teshon?]. Like I say, I helped
out a lot of the manufacturers because what the
machine couldn't do, I guess I was the only soft-
hearted guy that would say, "All right." I
couldn't say no. And they took advantage of me
plenty of times. I didn't want to work. I
retired. But before I retired, Mr. Kaulkstein
said to me, "You're good for ten years." I agree
with him. I'm still able to work now. Now, I
have a little problem with my heart. My wife used
to treat me like a baby all the time, anyway.
Now, I can't lift nothing, I can't do this. So
that's another reason why I quit this job. If
he'd give me this, "You work your way, if you want
to work three hours." One day, I'd set it up and
start the reed. Then, I'd come in the next day.
Because you don't get fifty, sixty reeds. These
looms are much faster. They wear out quicker.
But then, I had stuff in Canova's. They made a
rack for me. I used to rub stones because, to
have a reed fixed, sometimes the fat hook would
open the dents. When the weaver puts the hook in
a dent, the dent don't stretch that much, and it
leaves an opening. I used to have to fix them
dents when I was examining the cloth. On shaft jobs, the looms come off. You have a rack. I used to rub it with sandstone, then a rubber stone, and then a finish stone. Canova had me doing that. That wasn't part of my job, but he shoved it down my throat. They used to charge twenty dollars to fix a reed. All them openings, put them together again.

Q: They didn't pay you extra?
AV: No. They didn't like the idea -- Very seldom, I used to have a little time I'd walk around. As soon as I'd walk around, the weavers would beck me, "Andy, you want to help me with these few ends I've got broke?"

I says, "Well, look. I'll do it for you because if I do it for you, the majority of the other weavers are going to say, 'How come you'll do it for Mary and Josie, but you won't do it for me?'" So I says, "No hard feelings."

Q: A lot of the weavers were women?
AV: Yes. But this company don't believe in hiring the woman weavers.

Q: Some did and some didn't?
AV: I happen to know a weaver that worked for Cosentino's. The weaver told whoever she talked to that you're discriminating. I'd pick a woman weaver better than a man any time. They were
better weavers.

Q: Why weren't there women twisters?
AV: There was.
Q: There were?
AV: Yes. As a matter of fact, I pinched hit for --
The guy used to pick me up in Union City. He used
to pick me up with his car. I was living at 960
Madison Avenue. He'd drive me to the plant and
pick me up. I'd say, "How long do you want to
work?"

The shaft, you've got the same pattern on
more than one job. You don't enter them over.
You tie them up and save them for when you get
that job again. You used to twist the jobs and
always have three or four ready for when the
loom's finished the other job. It was silk, two
beams. He'd pick me up and he'd drive me home.
Then, he stopped picking me up and I used to take
the Manhattan bus. Then, I didn't like the idea
of standing on the corner at eleven o'clock at
night.

He had a woman weaver. I don't know who
contacted them to tell them where I lived or get
my phone number. So he says, "Joe Simone, your
boss, told me. But he said, 'He's an independent
guy. I don't think he'll--'" I could have been a
millionaire, but who wanted to work night and day?
Who wanted to work night and day?

Q: When did you actually work for the Cosentino's?

AV: You was there not so long ago, remember? I think you were there. Wasn't you at Cosentino's plant?

Q: No.

AV: How long did I work for Cosentino? Well, as soon as I retired. He called me up in January. He says, "Andy, I'm going to ask you to do me a favor, if you want to do it." During the war, like I said, a lot of textile workers quit because they hired women and men, the airplane factory. He says, "You used to help my dad. Would you help me? I hear you're going to retire."

I said, "Who told you I was going to retire? Where'd you get it from?"

He said, "That's why I want to see you. Will you help me out when I get stuck?"

I said, "Yes, [it has to be?]." So I worked for the father.

Q: During World War II, you worked for the father?

AV: The father, when he opened up the shop in 1930. He started with twenty-four looms, and I entered all them jobs. Me and my brother used to hand in. Then, I had to fire my brother because he wanted me to split the job with him. I said, "Entering is harder than handing in, and then who's going to put the reed on?" I'm putting the reed
right? So, then, I had to get a stranger. If the job was sixty dollars, he wanted thirty dollars for it. That's Mr. Cosentino, John's father. He was a strict boss.

Q: How long did you stay with him?
AV: All during the war years.
Q: You stayed with him from 1930 to --
AV: No, no. Canova & Simone's. They froze the wages during the war. Manufacturers were cheating on the hours. I know guys that were twisters. They were working forty hours. They were getting paid for fifty. That's why here the weavers get over a dollar more than any other weaver around, because he took care of his help. So, after the war, he wanted to cut them, but the union wouldn't let him. You know what I mean? So there was a lot of under-the-table stuff going on.

I worked for him all during the war, since 1930, when I was entering. When he had to build new harnesses, I entered forty-eight of them. I had my hander-in from Canova's helping me - two different handers-in, because there were four girls there. They all refused to hand in for me. "That guys a slave driver." I didn't think that I was hurting people in any way. It was just my ability that way.

Q: How many twisters-in did most mills have?
AV: Well, I think at Doherty Silk Company there was twenty-seven of us in the entering department. I never went through the building. I didn't go past that there other section. Canova's only had sixty-two looms. There was me and the night shift. Geoffroy Silk Company, where I was foreman, three twisters they had, and I used to do the entering. Like I said, ninety-eight percent of them didn't know how to enter. The fellow that I learned how to put the reeds on, he says, "It's all right. You can stay as long as you don't talk to me because I don't want nobody to talk to me when I'm putting the reed on because I count. If I get at the end of the reed and I've got a dent over, because the edge dents are bigger than the fine dents. If I get at the end of the reed --"

In other words, there's two thousand, four hundred dents. I start with an empty one, I've got to end with an empty one. Now, if I've got two over there, that means I have eight ends in one dent. See, most of the jacquards are four in a dent. A lot of people put reeds on like that. These people have got two of them putting the reed on - one in the back, handing the four ends to you. You grab the four ends and put them in a reed. I could put three reeds on while they're doing one.

Q: In other words, you worked by yourself in putting
the reeds on?

AV: No. Being that I know the whole trade, I could do that.

Q: But you had a helper?

AV: See, now, that's why I said to them, "I don't want to take no job away from nobody. I didn't do it when I was working steady and I'm not going to start in my old age. If you're taking work from somebody else because I'm going to save you money -- " You've got two people to put a reed on. One gets -- I don't know where he gets. If they start from the other side, on his left, he'll pick the four ends, hand them to them, and he's got the reed upright like this. I've got my reed laying this way, laying flat. When you're done, you're that way. See, the reed's in there and, as I go along, I could move the reed through the reed sticks. Like I say, I try and make a hundred and fifty dents for every section of twelve hundred ends. I've got a hundred and fifty dents twice. Now, I count a hundred and fifty. When I finish the second section, I keep on going from the one-fifty to three hundred. Now, if I've got three hundred and two ends, that means I skipped a dent or two dents. Like the reed, I leave an empty dent. If I've got two empty dents, that means I've got to cram dent. That's what you call it.
My reed knife grabbed eight ends instead of four.
With forty-three reeds -- Then, there's thirty reeds like this.

Cosentino's, I had all kinds of jobs. I used to have popsicle sticks for hooks.

I didn't answer your question: How long was I with -- I wasn't killing myself. So I was supposed to get the job with Cosentino after the war. You know what happened? The guy I broke into twisting, Sam Ballister, got the job because he wouldn't go back to Canova's. We worked together. He said, "Why should I work for you for seventy-five cents an hour? What are you paying Andy?"

He says, "Never mind Andy. You ain't as fast as Andy. You're not producing as much as Andy."

So he went over there and John's father gave him the job. A personal friend of mine, right? He only lasted two weeks.

I worked from 1930, whenever there was any entering. The fellow who used to ship out the pieces used to hand-in for the loom fixer. Then, the father stopped. Because I used to charge them a flat rate, nine dollars a thousand. If there's ninety-six hundred ends in -- I used to give the hander in $2.75 a thousand. I used to set the job up and put the reed on. To set the job up used to
take me two and a half -- They used to lift the beams up, now you've got the hoist. You put the beam in the loom, and then you get your cross, you put your rods, you raise the rods so your hand don't hit the bottom.

When Cosentino got the sixteen looms there from somebody else, automatics, I entered. So I've been working with them on and off from 1930 until now. When I heard he was getting out, selling, I quit on him. I said, "I hate to do it to you. I never got laid off in my lifetime, and I ain't going to let you be the first one."

Q: It's a great way to end.

AV: Twice, I've met him. I met him once. I was taking my daily walk. He must have just been coming in from New York, I guess. He was pulling on 21st Avenue and State Street. He stopped and we talked. He said, "How come you wouldn't enter the jacquards?" Cosentino's got an agreement he'll stay with them till I don't know how long, until he gets his customers. And I was supposed to do the entering. But they wouldn't fix the looms so as I wouldn't have to stretch so much. I wanted them, after the harness was built, to bring it forward. They wouldn't do it for me, so I only just put the reeds on. And he says, "You want me to talk to John?"
I said, "Well, in the first place, tell him, 'Andy don't like what you pulled on him. He was in the hospital and you had the nerve to figure that he was going to put a reed on for you two days after he come out of the hospital?"

Q: I'm a little confused. You were speaking to John Cosentino, and then you mentioned a second John.

AV: Charlie [Cosentino], his father was. Yes, his name was John Provane or something. I don't know.

Q: Is this somebody who works for Kroll?

AV: He's in charge, yes. He must be in charge of the weavers. Did I skip anything?

Q: No. Sometimes you referred to two different Johns, and we weren't clear as to who the second John was. Now we know, from Kroll.

AV: I have an agreement with him that anytime there was a reed -- But then I says, "You promised me that I wasn't taking nobody's job. You're not being honest with me. If you're going to treat me as if I'm the dirt under your feet, forget it."

He says, "Yes, but they take too long."

I said, "Well, I imagine they would. You asked me if I would teach them, sure I would teach them. You refused to give me five hundred dollars." But they'd have to learn for a week. If they don't learn by the week, it's up to them if they want to stop goldbricking.
Q: When you were working with assistants, it was up to you to decide how much to pay the assistants? At one point, you said, "I was giving him two dollars and seventy-five cents for a thousand."

AV: Well, the guy working in the dye house was only making -- I'm going back. I'm going back to this fellow who, in the neighborhood, I called him a friend of mine. The neighborhood's altogether different now than before the 1960s. Where I lived the last seven years before I moved into the senior citizens' apartments here was a hundred percent Italians. Now, it isn't that way no more.

He worked in a dye house. So I said, "Now, look. You want a flat rate or you want $2.75 a thousand? What do you want?"

He said, "I want to work piece work." He used to do the job in five and a half hours. So I gave him $2.75 per thousand.

Q: You worked with many different kinds of textiles, though. You must have worked with just about everything. You said you worked with the silk lining fabrics, which were very fine.

AV: John Cosentino's father was an eight-shaft job, double runners. I made the shaft harness up for him and everything. Double runners, because you have to have the heddles on the shaft that stretch. It can't come in the reed like this way.
Q: Straight ahead.

AV: In other words, on that heavy job, you couldn't have no more than twenty-seven hundred -- It was a ninety reed. Right? You had to make sure that it didn't stretch out, because everything's got to come in straight. You didn't have to come in this way. So you called it the "airspace" per inch on the reed sometimes. If you use heavier stuff, it takes up more than thirty dents, you've got to get a coarser reed. They used to make this silk lining for fur coats. As a matter of fact, when he moved out, the harness is laying there because who's going to pay all that money? A hundred percent silk? Today, I think it costs around sixty-five dollars a pound. To make a warp like certain accounts that John Cosentino had, you'd need about sixty pounds for a warp. Sure, silk used to be five, ten dollars.

Any more? Of course, I could tell you now so I wouldn't rush you, I'm missing my soap opera.

Q: Oh-oh!

AV: You didn't get that on there, did you?

End of Interview
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