

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH NIESON N. SHAK

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

G. KURT PIEHLER

and

RACHEL GESCHWIND

SCOTCH PLAINS, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

RACHEL GESCHWIND

G. Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Mr. Nieson N. Shak on April 3, 1997, with Kurt Piehler and ...

Rachel Geschwind: Rachel Geschwind.

KP: The interview is being conducted in Scotch Plains, New Jersey. I would like to begin by asking you about your parents. Your father went to college, which was quite a remarkable achievement ...

Nieson N. Shak: In those days.

KP: In those days.

NS: Right.

KP: Could you talk about your father's background and his family?

NS: My father and my mother were born here. Their parents were born in Europe. My father went to school during World War I and he majored in chemical engineering. He graduated in 1918 and, I think, got a job for a year, and then, was laid off and never worked again in engineering. He wanted to go back to dental school and my grandfather wouldn't support him. So, that was the end of the engineering. One interesting thing is, at one point, I took a course in analytic geometry, maybe, or descriptive geometry. ... I discussed it with my father and he said he remembers taking the course. ... The professor would stand out by the window and describe lines going through space and from towers through the roofs of buildings and you'd try to figure out where it goes through. ... He said he couldn't figure it out worth a damn. ... I took the course and [laughter] I couldn't figure out where the [lines went, either]. So, it was the same. ... One thing you should realize, I was very young. I was just sixteen when I entered school, chronologically. Socially, I was probably fourteen. So, I was very, very young and, as the years went by, most of the students were very young.

KP: I have noticed that in many of my interviews. A lot of school systems really pushed kids through. I know that the New York City School System pushed kids through. Bart Klion mentioned that.

NS: Right, yes.

KP: He and his brother were pushed through really fast.

NS: Yes. I remember, at one point, maybe 1944, ... I was president of the fraternity and we had thirty-five members and I was the oldest. ... Maybe, I was eighteen then. They were very young. It was a different world, at that time.

KP: You mentioned that your father was unable to really use his chemical engineering degree. What types of occupations did he work in?

NS: Well, you have to go back to that period of time. He was Jewish, and to get a job in engineering as a Jewish person was practically impossible. Now, that was 1918, 1919. I got a job with Johns Manville in 1946 and I transferred to industrial engineering in '49. I left there in 1950, okay, and the head of the department said he took a risk when he took me in and he never had "one of you" before and it worked out very well. He was really pleased and, when I left, the plant manager offered me a job as general foreman and I turned him down. So, until well into the '60s and '70s, this was a significant problem. I went for interviews at General Electric, Westinghouse, quite a few. They didn't want to know you.

KP: A number of alumni that I have interviewed have mentioned that.

NS: Yes. You have to understand, and you also understand that Rutgers was self-segregated. The Jewish fraternities were just that, Jewish fraternities. There was nobody non-Jewish and vice versa. The DUs, the Betas, ... we couldn't get into those houses [even] if you wanted to. ... It's an entirely different world than it was then. That's one of the reasons I doubled up. ... In fact, I was reviewing some of the courses I took. It was unbelievable. Right now, all I do is change a light bulb, yes, [laughter] and I was going to advanced AC [alternating current] machinery. I don't know how I took all that stuff. [laughter] I got through, but I'm darned if I know [how].

KP: Given the problems that your father had as an engineer; basically, he could not get a job as an engineer.

NS: Yes.

KP: Did he ever try to talk you out of going into engineering?

NS: I had no choice.

KP: Really?

NS: I entered Rutgers in '42. I was a business administration major. In '43, they killed everything but engineering, chemistry, math and science. So, I switched to mechanical engineering, brilliant, [laughter] until I took a course in kinematics, with gears and pulleys, and the gears go this way and the pulleys go this way. ... After about eight or nine of them, it goes in this direction and you have to figure out how many foot-pounds, based on what you put in. Well, I flunked that one and it was required for mechanical engineering, but not for electrical. [laughter] So, I switched to electrical and that's how I got through. I think, [for] one course, I took twenty-two credits, one term. So, I finished up June of '45. The only problem was, ... engineering economics was a required course and it wasn't given until September '45. So, I had to stay for the one course, from September, ... '45 to January '46. That's why I ended up staying four years there. So, I figured, "If I'm going to do this, I might as well minor." So, I minored in ... economics, coming out of my [senior] year. So, I finished up the engineering in February and the economics in the summer and I ended up with the two degrees. So, that made the difference. That's why I was there the ... four years, that one course. [laughter] Okay, if it hadn't been for the one course, I probably would have left and I would have been all of nineteen.

KP: You were on a very accelerated schedule.

NS: I went for four quarters a year.

KP: Yes.

NS: I had ... maybe six or eight weeks off after my first year. That was it.

KP: Before we started the interview, I mentioned that I was curious about your unique North/South Jersey experience. You spent your early childhood in Kearny, then, you moved to Vineland. What was living in those two towns like?

NS: Oh, quite different. Kearny was a town of Scotch [Scottish] and English, nice people. The Jewish population was very low. I don't think there were any blacks in town. It was strictly a blue-collar town. I used to hear the bagpipes every Sunday morning. So, because of that, we've been to Scotland quite often, [laughter] nice people. Then, my father went to work in a liquor store with my uncle, in Vineland. So, we moved to Vineland. Now, Vineland, at the time, was about a third Italian, a third Jewish and roughly a third Ukrainian, and the Jewish people were fairly self-segregated there. They all had cars. I didn't know what a car was. Plus, I was too young, anyway, but it was an entirely different type of existence. You've heard of Glenn Miller, all that? Well, we used to go down to Steel Pier [in Atlantic City] and see him, and Tommy Dorsey and all that, all the time.

KP: You were in high school.

NS: In high school, yes. ... That was, what? thirty-five miles away. In North Jersey, you wouldn't do that, but, down there, it was nothing. So, it was quite a different [life].

KP: Vineland was really surrounded by farms.

NS: Oh, it was rural, completely rural, yes. What it was, Baron de Hirsch founded a Jewish settlement, [in the] late 1800s, near there, Norma and Rosenhayn, and one part of my family ended up in that area. So, at one point, we had ... four uncles and we had a large family down there. They're all gone now and it was quite an area, rural, at the time. I remember swimming in the river, and that's some of the best swimming I ever had, fast-moving, cold water. I haven't been down there in a long time.

KP: Did your family stay in Vineland?

NS: My mother, yes, my father, yes. My father died pretty young and my mother stayed another twenty-five, thirty years, yes.

KP: You mentioned that, in Kearny, you were among only a handful of Jewish families. It sounds like you had a fairly positive relationship with the other groups, or were there problems with the other groups?

NS: ... Yes. First of all, we lived on a large block, so, let's assume that there's fifteen, twenty kids, and there was one other Jewish boy and myself. We played sandlot football, baseball and things. We were called everything under the sun. In sandlot football, I twisted ankles, poked eyes. I was fortunate; even though I was young, I was big for my age, and you learn to reciprocate in kind. When I was about eight or nine, a very large kid was bothering me and I took a brick one day and hit him in the head and he never bothered me again. Unfortunately, this was a way of life back then. The other Jewish boy on the block was a little milder and smaller and he took a beating.

KP: It sounds like you had your share of incidents.

NS: Oh, we had our share, but I even had it playing football for Vineland, against my own teammates, in scrimmages. I'd twist an ankle, hit them in the groin, poke them in the eyes, and then, they'd let me alone. ...

KP: Did you find that there was a difference between going to school in Kearny and going to school in Vineland?

NS: Oh, ... remember, again, I said I was very young.

KP: Yes.

NS: I was always two years behind every classmate. That's chronologically and, socially, I was four years behind. ... I was just a little boy in Kearny. In Vineland, you had to grow up somewhat faster. They were much older, bigger. Most of the farm boys worked for a couple of hours in the fields before they came to school, and particularly the football players. They were eighteen and nineteen and I was fifteen. ...

KP: You mentioned that you felt younger, socially, even when you got to Rutgers.

NS: Oh, I was, sure.

KP: How did that affect your participation in school activities? You mentioned playing football. Did you go to dances and other events?

NS: I lucked out. This is how I lucked out. Rutgers was very good to me. The school became small. It made a big difference. If nothing had happened, I would have been lost in the shuffle. So, I think quite a bit of Rutgers. It gave me an opportunity, which I never would have had at a larger school, and I was sort of forced into it, which was good.

KP: Someone told me once that alumni who were here during the war either really did not like the experience because the college was so small or they loved it because you could do everything you had ever dreamed of doing in college.

NS: I never dreamed of it. For me, it was phenomenal, okay. I went out for football and Dr. Norman Reitman rejected me, for a heart murmur, which I never knew about. So, after I got it confirmed, I became assistant manager of the 150-pound team. Then, the next year, I was assistant manager of the varsity team, and then, I became manager of the varsity team and I ended up president of the fraternity, a member of ... the student council, *Who's Who*, all kinds of stuff, which I never [would have imagined].

KP: In high school, you had not participated in those types of activities.

NS: No, I was too young. ... As I say, I became "the old-timer," for crying out loud. I was the senior person in a lot of these things.

KP: At eighteen.

NS: At eighteen, yes. I was a junior.

KP: You mentioned that Vineland was south of the Mason-Dixon Line in many ways. What differences did you notice between the north and the south?

NS: Just entirely different people, different circumstances, two entirely different types of people. I worked in the clothing factory there, a couple of summers. Girls gave me a hard time. They picked on me. I was harassed. [laughter] They were much older, but I got through it. They could have been five hundred miles away, instead of a hundred miles away. It was entirely different.

KP: For one thing, South Jersey was segregated, in terms of race. South Jersey schools tended to be segregated.

NS: Well, on the football team, ... well, we had two or three blacks.

KP: Perhaps the Vineland schools were not. I know that some school systems were.

NS: There weren't that many.

KP: Yes.

NS: There weren't that many. There was only two or three on the football team and maybe another couple. I don't think there was that many then. It's been [different] in recent years, but, back then, Bridgeton had a lot of field hands. That's where all the tomato crops were. I don't know, they may have had more.

KP: How did the Great Depression affect your family?

NS: Well, the Great Depression was a big destroyer. I'm a product of it. My father [was], who never could find useful work, really, his whole life. My aunt, my Aunt Jessie, [who] I'm particularly proud of, she and her husband owned a series of garages in Jersey City and, when

things were bad, they lost their garages and she pulled in the horns and lived very meagerly for a long time. Status was not that important and, when they finally were able to work their way out, they bought the garages back, and then, went into [the] machine shop [business] and ended up fine. [laughter] So, my former wife once said that I was miserly and my Aunt Jessie said, “No, he’s just thrifty,” [laughter] but we had no car. ... My mother owned a store and I remember running around, kiting checks, in order to have food for the weekend. So, it was a tough time.

KP: Your mother owned a store in Kearny.

NS: Yes.

KP: What type of store?

NS: A card and gift shop. It was a tough time. In fact, my cousin’s daughter was at Tulane [and] she was doing a paper on the Depression. ... She came up and interviewed her grandmother and I have the tape and she described what it was. At times, in my grandmother’s house, there must have been eight to fifteen people living there, in those days, and they’d stay for a year or two, and then, move out. My aunt even moved in with her for a year or two and moved out again. I was a young kid during all this, so, I only have the side effects. ... As I say, I went to school so young ... and I never went back home again, particularly, ... but you remember.

KP: How observant was your family, in terms of its religious practices? Did you keep a kosher household? Did you go to synagogue?

NS: Oh, sure, yes. Were we kosher? I don’t know; I don’t remember. I think so, because we had all kinds of different dishes.

KP: Yes.

NS: It was a pain in the neck, I remember. [laughter] Yes, I think we were. All right, I think we were. That was in Kearny; in Vineland, no.

KP: Not in Vineland.

NS: No, yes.

KP: You were still in high school when World War II broke out. Do you remember where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

NS: Yes, I was in Bridgeton, at a party. You always remember that, yes.

KP: How surprised were you?

NS: You have to remember who you were talking to, at that time, a fifteen-year-old kid. ... Well, my only thought was that it affected my brother.

KP: Your brother was older.

NS: A little older, yes.

KP: You just assumed that your brother would be going off to the war.

NS: Yes, ... which he did, yes.

KP: How did the war change your high school and Vineland in the year before you came to Rutgers?

NS: No effect.

KP: Really?

NS: Had no effect. ... It started December '41; we graduated in May '42. It had zero effect. I think maybe one person enlisted, or two people enlisted. ...

KP: Did your parents assume that you were going to go to college?

NS: No, I was lucky. I got a State Scholarship. Otherwise, ... I don't think I would have gone.

KP: The State Scholarship was crucial.

NS: Sure. I don't think I could have gone, yes.

KP: Had you thought of, or hoped for, other schools? Had you applied to other schools?

NS: ... Never even considered it.

KP: How did you hear about Rutgers and the State Scholarship?

NS: I think probably from the high school, yes, and, I remember, I had to come up to take an aptitude test, or one of those tests. I was lucky. So, it worked out.

KP: Before coming to Rutgers, how much had you traveled outside of the New York-New Jersey-Philadelphia area?

NS: You have to realize, back then, there was no such thing as travel.

KP: Yes. You really had not been west of Philadelphia.

NS: I only got to Philadelphia because we went to Vineland and, in order to get to Vineland from Jersey City, you had to go through Philadelphia. [laughter] ... Yes, one time, coming home, you had to change trains in Newark and I got on the wrong train, "First stop, Harrisburg." Luckily, they slowed down for a mail stop at North Philadelphia. So, I jumped off. ...

[laughter] No, things that moved so fast; I don't know if your generation has even any bearing. I have grandchildren that are seventeen and I don't know if ... it has any bearing. ... I used to be very active in a lot of organizations that I'm tapering back, because all my knowledge and skills, well, I can still deal in principles and philosophy and all that, but the circumstances have changed so [much] that I backed away. ...

KP: Which organizations did you belong to?

NS: Oh, I was president of the temple and I was active in financial organizations and the Jewish Federation and Jewish Family Service, all kinds of stuff. They called me for advice and help and, ... recently, I told them, "I don't really think I can [help]."

KP: Do you think there has been a generational shift?

NS: Well, I spent a lot of time in Cranford and I was president of the temple in Cranford, almost thirty years ago, okay. ... Again, Cranford is an entirely different community, different circumstances. Kids are different, you know.

RG: Is there anything in particular that you think is a telling difference?

NS: [The] world moves much faster. It requires a flexibility that wasn't as necessary. When I went to school, at Rutgers, all I needed was a degree to get gainful employment. I majored in hearts, bridge and poker. I got out by the skin of my teeth. You can't do that today. You can't do it in high school. I don't know, we used to play bridge, on par, I don't know, twelve hours a day. [laughter]

KP: When you came to Rutgers in 1942, you were living away from home for the first time.

NS: Yes. I went to camp one summer and, one summer, I lived at my grandmother's in Jersey City, but, yes, once you move away ...

KP: You felt as though that was a real break from living at home.

NS: Oh, yes, ... I never really went back.

KP: You entered Rutgers in September of 1942. Alumni from the Classes of 1942 and 1943 note how Rutgers changed in that period. You arrived on a campus where there were still a number of civilian students.

NS: Well, in '42, '42 to '43 was a normal year. I took normal courses. It wasn't until, I forget when the ASTP [Army Specialized Training Program] came, I'm not sure exactly what date that was, that it started to change radically. Plus, ... going through, I won't show you the grades, [laughter] but, ... by the summer of '43, I was still taking Spanish and accounting. So, it was still given.

KP: You entered school with the idea that you would become a business administration major.

NS: Yes, I was a business administration major.

KP: What type of career did you hope for? What would you ideally have liked to become? Did you have a sense of that when you started college?

NS: Oh, I was thinking of accounting, maybe, back then. Yes, it didn't start changing until January '44. I started Spanish. ... Well, I remember, there was a language element because German and French were required for the chemistry majors and they kept the chemistry majors in school also, pre-meds.

KP: Yes.

NS: So, we had the pre-meds, the engineers and I think that was it, and me and a few others.

KP: Your first year at Rutgers was somewhat normal. My students are always fascinated by chapel. I ask almost everyone about chapel and Dean Metzger. Often, the two are associated.

NS: Well, I had a lot to do with Earl Reed Silvers, who was a great guy. He was quite a guy, [who] I enjoyed. Dean Metzger, I knew just briefly. Chapel was required, if I remember, once a week, was [it]?

KP: Once a week, during the week, and on Sundays.

NS: During the week, yes. Well, I didn't go on Sunday, but I think during the week was required.

KP: What did you think of the chapel? Did you mind going?

NS: I think it was fairly non-denominational. I don't recall anything; plus, I think, in those years, I wouldn't have said boo anyway. As a young kid, it wouldn't have fazed me. So, no, I had no adverse feeling about that. In fact, there was a professor of theology, afterward; I forget his name. I took a course with him on, ... off the books, not a normal [course], comparative religions. It was very interesting, yes. He was very good.

RG: I noticed that you were a member of Hillel while you were at school.

NS: No.

RG: You were not? I am sorry.

NS: No.

RG: That must have been written down incorrectly.

NS: No. I was not, no. Some of them were. I remember, some time, I forget when it was, Rabbi [Julius] Funk was the head of Hillel, and then, he wanted to use our house and I think we turned him down, when he started out. I don't even recall, but that, I remember.

Charlotte Shak: Why did you turn him down?

NS: Who the heck knows, back then? ... This was before the Army kicked us out. We still had a going house, at that time. I don't recall the details, but that, I seem to recall.

RG: You said that there was segregation on campus.

NS: Self-segregation.

RG: Was there much animosity between the different groups of people?

NS: No, no.

RG: I assume that the football team was mixed.

NS: Bob Goldberger, Class of '45, he never said anything. No, I don't think there was any [strife]. It was more self-[segregation] in those days. ... I can't recall any anti-Semitism as anti-Semitism at all, yes.

RG: You were president of your fraternity.

NS: Right.

RG: How large of a role did that play in your life?

NS: Oh, big. ... Some time in early '44, we were down to two members and, I remember, the Class of '48 came in and we ended up with about thirty-five, forty members, and then, we rented the DU house and we took over the DU house and we had quite a time. That was a beautiful house, back then, and we built a large [fraternity]. ... As I said, I was the senior [brother], except for Dave Muss. He was older than I was. We were the only two left in school. He was a sanitary engineer, so, he stayed, but he got out in '45. I got out in '46. We had a good time, different than today, but it was a good time.

KP: For one of my assignments, my students have to read a semester's worth of the *Targum*. Particularly during your first full year, you were here when the old social calendar was still in place, the football games, the dances and so on. They may have been more modest affairs than in the pre-war period, but they were still there. My students are almost envious ...

RG: Very envious.

KP: ... Of the social world that students in your day created.

NS: Yes, but not me.

KP: Not you?

NS: Don't forget, first of all, as a freshman, I was two years younger than the girls, just to start. So, I met some very nice girls there, but I really ... wasn't that active and, of course, they were all [the way] across the town, in those days.

KP: You did not journey over to "the Coop," as NJC was called.

NS: Yes, yes, we did, somewhat, and, as I say, I met some very nice girls, but they were all older. [laughter] ...

KP: I get the sense that people kept disappearing during your time here. Men would be here for a semester, and then, they were gone.

NS: Oh, yes. It just [Editor's Note: Mr. Shak imitates time flying by quickly], you know. As I said, I woke up one day and I took courses with the Army. I think that maybe there was one of us, two of us, that's all.

KP: We also learned from the *Targum*, and I wondered if you remembered this, that when the ASTP descended on campus, it dwarfed the civilians.

NS: Well, you had, how many did you have, fifteen hundred?

KP: Yes.

NS: We were kicked out of the fraternity house. ... I was trying to remember; I spent '43 ... to part of '44 in the fraternity house. Then, I went to either Ford Hall and Winants or Winants and Ford Hall, and then, somehow, we ended up in the DU house, and then, a house on the street around the corner. I don't even know the name of it. We rented that one for a long time, where the Beta house is, across from the Beta house. ... I think maybe it's been torn down now. I took courses with them. I had no problem. Look, they were all, what, eighteen and nineteen? Some were very nice guys from all over.

KP: You did not feel as though they were intruding on Rutgers. They were not participating in any Rutgers traditions.

NS: No, it wasn't their role. They had an entirely different role. One thing I do recall, they either set up a lacrosse team or they used some of the ASTP players for lacrosse, and this is one thing I remember. There was one man there, I think he was in one of my classes, that had the most stamina I have ever seen. I was familiar with football and I watched the football team, but he could run back and forth across that field, down that field, for hours. No, I had no [resentment].

KP: Even after being kicked out of your fraternity house?

NS: Look, it was the war time. No, I had no problems with them at all. As I said, I took most of my classes with them. Some of the classes, I was saying to Charlotte the other day, what was this one? “UHF Circuits,” “Theory of Numbers,” “Communication Networks.” ... In fact, what it was, I majored in vacuum tubes, which, four years after I went out of school, I became a dinosaur anyway.

KP: Yes, the vacuum tubes. [laughter] I remember them as a child, in the 1960s, for television.

NS: [For] television, you’d still have them, but, other than that, [no]. ...

RG: Just to show you, I have no idea what they are.

KP: Yes, see.

NS: Oh, see, the new generation, you know. [laughter]

KP: Yes. I still vaguely remember them from the 1960s.

NS: Before they made these little chips, they had to make huge, glass-enclosed bulbs, diodes and triodes, for power generation, okay. They generated a tremendous amount of heat, they took up a tremendous amount of space and the chip today does what ten thousand of these things used to do, yes.

KP: How good was your Rutgers education, your engineering courses and the general courses? Do any of your professors stand out, either for better or worse?

NS: They were pretty good. You have to remember what kind of student I was. I was there to pass the time and to get through. I remember, Professor [James J.] Slade, [Jr.], was in math. Hey, look, yes, I took a course in [math]. I was amazed; I got a 1. ... You see, back then, the grades were reversed.

RG: It took me a few minutes to figure that out after reading the *Targum*.

NS: Yes, yes. See, Einstein had that same thing.

CS: You thought the music teacher was outstanding.

NS: The music [professor], yes, [Howard D.] Bones McKinney. I loved Bones McKinney, he was great, and then, [F. Austin] “Soup” Walter came on afterward, but Bones McKinney was great. I remember Professor Slade in engineering. ... There was quite a few. They were good. I was a lousy student, but they were good. ... You can’t even compare education in those days [to education today]. The education was entirely different. The chemistry majors had to get into med school. They memorized until they were blue in the face, okay. Whether they learned anything, I don’t know, but all they were ever doing was memorizing, continuously. That’s why I went wild when I finished up engineering. ... There were no electives. Every elective I had

was technical. So, I took music, history, English, psychology, when I broke free of all the technical stuff.

KP: If the war had not come along, you might have stayed a business administration major.

NS: Oh, I would have been an accountant, living in a small town somewhere off in Squantcom. [laughter] Yes, no, it was radical; for me, it was a radical change in life.

KP: The engineering major was an accident of war. It sounds like you are glad that you had the training.

NS: ... I figure I solved at least five thousand problems while I was at Rutgers. The training was excellent. The details, the technicals, was a disaster, but the training was excellent.

KP: The problem solving was helpful.

NS: Yes. One of my fortes is cutting through and defining the problem, which is half the battle. Most of the time, if you don't define the problem properly, you can't [solve it], and I think an awful lot is due to the engineering [training]. Incredibly, I started work in accounting, when I went to work, and, about four years later, I ended up in an electrical manufacturing company, in finance. ... We were designing products that worked, but we weren't making any money on it and the owner got me into the act and I ended up redesigning, okay, a lot of the stuff and became such a pest that they moved me into sales. I ended up director of marketing, because of the engineering aspect. So, even though I never used it directly ...

KP: It helped you a lot.

NS: It helped me a lot.

-----END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE-----

CS: ... I'll get one. I think it should be in the Rutgers library, really. [laughter]

KP: We actually collect documents for Special Collections that supplement the oral histories.

NS: I'll need two. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

NS: [The] training was invaluable, okay. The bridge, the poker and the hearts was good, too. [laughter]

KP: I absolutely enjoy your frank discussion of the hearts and so on. Some of the alumni really want to portray an image of all the students as studious and hardworking. However, I have seen too many references to snap courses. I am a little skeptical.

NS: There's some of them, ... we were all young kids and we'd be playing, and one of them would get so excited, he'd stand up on the chair and slam the cards down, [laughter] and this would go on for hours.

KP: What else did you do for fun at Rutgers? You mentioned cards, but what else did you do?

NS: It wasn't a fun time. This was not an easy time. Remember, I was taking, as I say, at one time, twenty-two credits, and goofing off. Engineering, you'd have five hours a week, plus, three hours of lab. ...

KP: It sounds like you spent a good amount of time on academics.

NS: Well, I also had to earn money. So, I worked in the Alumni Office. I taught physics lab for a couple of years. I was good in physics. That's what led me astray in engineering. [laughter]

KP: That is not an easy subject.

NS: No, physics is fine. [laughter] ... Engineering is applying it, which was a disaster.

KP: You really liked the theoretical work. You did well enough that they hired you to teach.

NS: Yes, help in a lab. Yes, it was fine. Yes, physics was not a problem. In fact, one of my best courses was hydraulics, or fluid mechanics, because I could see the blasted water moving, where[as] electrical circuits or thermal dynamics, heat power, I don't know what the hell's going on inside the damn boiler. [laughter]

CS: Why don't you tell them about the change [we saw] when we went to your class reunion, when there was nothing you could actually see or touch.

NS: Oh, oh, yes, okay. I took courses in AC machinery and, as I said, I was not the greatest. ... I don't know if you know where the old engineering building is?

KP: Yes.

NS: In the middle of the campus. ... I don't know what it is now, near the William statue. [Editor's Note: Mr. Shak is referring to the statue of William the Silent on Voorhees Mall on the Rutgers-New Brunswick College Avenue Campus.]

RG: That is Murray Hall.

NS: Okay, all right, the bottom floor was the AC machinery lab. We had big machinery, DC machinery, AC machinery. ... So, we go there one day and I'm supposed to wire up the board. Well, it was a DC generator and, in DC equipment, you have to get a capacitance in the circuit, otherwise, the motor will run away, and I forgot. So, we start it up and it starts going, and faster, and faster, and faster. [laughter] It was the summertime, luckily. The windows were open. I didn't know what to do. ... We jumped out the window. Luckily, the professor came by and

threw the circuit breakers, and then, knocked it down. Another time, in AC machinery, I wired something wrong. I throw the switch and molten copper comes down, [laughter] yes. Then, I took a course in route surveying and, the next thing I know, I end up back on my own tail. I'm supposed to be laying railroad track and, somehow, I got the curvature wrong. ... So, you had all kinds of screwball stuff in those days.

CS.: But, the lab wasn't the same as when you were there.

NS: Oh, all right. So, we went back to my reunion. So, I go over, across the river, "Let me see my old AC machinery." So, I walk in; no machinery. "Well, where's the thermo, boilers and the pumps and all everything else?" I go into the mechanical engineering building; nothing in there. We meet a man walking down the hall, fine. He's a graduate going for his doctorate in fluid mechanics. "Ah-ha," I says, "where's the water?" No water; they do everything by simulation.

KP: Do you think that is a good thing or a bad thing?

NS: [In] my experience, I don't think it's a good thing.

KP: Really? You think the practical approach is better.

NS: Somewhere, you have to [see it], because, when you go out on the job, the theory doesn't always work. ... So, you need both, obviously.

KP: Yes.

NS: But, you know, I asked ... Al Brady, [who] was a prior class, and I knew Al, we went to the reunion, I said, "What the hell did you do with the machinery?" He said, "To see a machine, you have to go to Newark." He says, "It's all at Newark, now. They don't have it down there."

KP: Interesting.

NS: Yes. So, they've done away with all of that.

KP: How did the war intrude on Rutgers? Did you feel as though you were missing out on the war by being at Rutgers, even though you could not serve because of your age and your heart murmur while you were here?

NS: Yes, I had no choice. I wasn't called up for the draft until September '44, all right.

KP: Did you know that you had a heart murmur?

NS: No, I didn't.

KP: The doctor never told you.

NS: I never knew.

KP: Yes.

NS: Oh, I knew. I knew in September '42, because he wouldn't let me play football, but, you know, I didn't know. I thought maybe I'd still get accepted in the service.

KP: Did you expect to go into the service?

NS: I did, yes. So, I didn't.

KP: Did you go for an induction physical?

NS: Oh, yes.

KP: Then, they said ...

NS: "No way." Yes, I had gone to some other doctors. Most of them said I had the murmur; someone said I didn't. It never particularly bothered me. This was fifty years ago. It finally bothered me. [laughter]

KP: It did eventually catch up with you, but not at that time.

NS: Yes, I was fortunate.

KP: Yes.

NS: Yes.

KP: When you reported for your induction physical, did you go to Fort Dix?

NS: Where the heck did we go? I think it was Fort Dix.

KP: You went off thinking that, despite your heart condition, you were just like everyone else.

NS: Could be, could be. Yes, I didn't know. It never bothered me. I didn't know how serious it was. All I knew was, it wouldn't let me play football. The other interesting thing is, I asked the doctor, "What would happen if it got worse?" and he said, "You'd die." You have to put yourself back in those times, when medicine; ... it's come a long way. So, one of my philosophies is, "Keep on living," and, as each year goes on, they come up with things that they can do that they couldn't do before.

KP: Medicine, in the early 1940s, really could not do very much for heart patients.

NS: No. So, I learned to pace myself, and I lived a life like that.

CS: He had a heart [operation], a valve replacement.

NS: Yes. Finally, it caught up with me.

CS: And double or triple bypass

NS: ... Bypass, yes, but the operation, by that time, was routine.

KP: I know. My stepfather had a similar operation.

NS: With a valve? ...

KP: Bypass and a valve, I think.

NS: Yes.

KP: Yes, it almost sounds like the exact same operation.

NS: Yes, it's amazing. I still ski and everything, but, as I say, so, [if] you live long enough, [technology will improve].

KP: Did you ever experience any animosity because you were not in uniform or were you just so young that it never came up?

NS: I was that young.

KP: People just assumed that you were too young, it sounds like.

NS: Oh, as to why I wasn't in service?

KP: Yes.

NS: Not really. It wasn't that long a time. You know, let's see, I was deferred [in] maybe September '44 and the war was over a year later. I had no [animosity exhibited towards me]. There weren't too many of us, anyway.

KP: It was a very small ...

NS: Yes, a very small group.

KP: You were a campus leader. You mentioned that you really liked Dean Silvers. Could you elaborate more on that? What made him stand out? Did you ever run into any problems that he solved, in terms of discipline or academics, problems with the fraternity house or with other fraternity members?

NS: Yes, nothing.

KP: Nothing.

NS: No. ... I'm trying to recall. There was nothing of any [note]. We were a small, close group. ... You see, because I was in-between, I knew the Class of '44 and '45 and I also knew the Classes of '47 and '48 and even '49, and some of '50. So, I knew an awful lot ...

KP: ... Of people.

NS: ... At different times. The Class of '48 was my same age. I was also pretty young, socially. ... I can be oblivious to a lot of things, if I don't [concentrate].

RG: Was there a lot of interaction with the women from the women's college?

NS: I think most of us had the same problem. I'm trying to think.

KP: One man I interviewed, who was here for part of the war, thought this was great. He could get dates with, as he put it, "Women I could never get a date with under normal circumstances." [laughter]

NS: Oh, I went out with a couple of girls. One of them, particularly, was very nice, but her boyfriend was overseas somewhere. ... The whole fraternity, when we had a fraternity party, I don't think there's more than four or five [women] from across the town. We were all young, so, the girls were much older.

KP: Yes, because they were not, for the most part, going off to war.

NS: And, well, they're older, socially, anyway, to begin with. As I say, we were all young kids.

RG: Was there a lot of drinking on campus?

NS: Drinking? We couldn't go to a bar. ... You couldn't even drink beer.

KP: Your fraternity house did not try to smuggle it in.

NS: You know, I don't even [think so]. ...

KP: Yes. It sounds like no one was old enough to purchase it.

RG: Right. Yes, we had no one. Who the hell could buy it? I don't know who.

CS: The girls; they were older. [laughter]

NS: No, drinking was not a problem. There was no drugs. ...

KP: Members of the pre-war classes have talked about drinking. One of my favorite stories is, the Dean came in and sat down on the couch where, underneath, they were hiding all the beer. [laughter]

NS: Well, that would also be in the non-Jewish [fraternities]. They may have done more, because they were older. The seniors were twenty-one, twenty-two. Then, it's a different story. We didn't have that.

KP: Yes.

NS: ... It also required money, [which] none of us, particularly, [had]. The one thing I do remember, well, a couple of things, I was in charge of the kitchen for awhile and I liked; what was it I liked? the fritters, corn fritters.

CS: The corn fritters.

NS: Yes. So, we'd have corn fritters at least twice a week, for lunch. I remember that. [laughter] ... Rutgers had a lot of fairly wealthy individuals. The fraternity, when I entered it, had a lot from Long Island, New York City. After that, I can't recall, maybe just a couple. Nobody was ...

KP: Wealthy.

NS: No.

KP: You mentioned a few jobs, such as the physics lab. What was your other job?

NS: Alumni Office, I worked [there] the whole time.

KP: What did you do?

NS: Well, okay, you have computers today. We used to have addressograph machines and addressograph plates and all kinds of stuff. ... We would send out fundraising letters and Willy Feller, in Jersey City, a friend of my Uncle Leo's, was a graduate of Rutgers and I put nasty notes of all kinds on his [laughter] fundraising letter or whatever. ... He would call up, raising Cain. So, we had a good time. Yes, I worked. It was on an hourly basis. I had, I don't know how many, ten hours a week, whatever it was.

KP: Was it a National Youth Administration job or just regular work?

NS: Just, just, I don't know, whatever; who knows?

KP: You have been very active with the Rutgers community. It sounds like you got your start with the Alumni Office very early.

NS: I did, yes. I think I worked there most of the time. It had to be two, three, four years.

KP: Did you ever have any dealings with President Clothier?

NS: No.

KP: No.

NS: No, no, he was off in [his circle]. ...

KP: Even though the campus was small.

NS: Small, he was off in [his circle]. ... Yes, I used to go into his store in Philadelphia, [Strawbridge & Clothier], once in a while, but, other than that, no. Dean Silvers, I had a lot to do with; I think he also helped me personally, on recommending things.

KP: I generally ask people who were in New Brunswick for a while about the impact of Camp Kilmer. Not only did you have the ASTP on campus, but you also had this huge camp across the river. Did you notice any impact on the area?

NS: It would be in town, and we didn't go into town that much. It was an entirely different [era]. It was a very small school, with very specialized students. As I say, at one point, it was strictly chemistry and engineering, and a few of the [other majors]. Well, Lowell Blankfort majored in [journalism]; well, he came a little later, see. Even though he graduated in '46, I think he came in '43 or '44, even.

RG: I had a difficult time finding information for some of these years, because there were no *Targums* and no yearbooks.

NS: That's right.

RG: Did sports maintain their importance on campus during those years?

NS: Sports? Yes, we had football the whole time. I had the dubious distinction of being the manager when we played Brooklyn College and lost.

RG: I read about that. [laughter]

NS: ... I remember, we had a game at Lafayette and my mother wanted to meet me in Philadelphia. So, I said, "Okay, I'll go from Easton and I'll get a train across the river, or something like that, and go to Philadelphia." So, we go to the game, and then, I think we lost, probably, and I ran outside and I jumped into a cab and [said], "Take me to the next town," and he went two blocks, crossed the bridge and stopped. That, I'll never forget. That was the next town and that's where the railroad was, two blocks away. I had no idea. [laughter]

KP: Yes, that is right.

NS: I had no idea. ... [laughter]

CS: Remember your class reunion, when you were asked to play on the football team?

NS: Oh, yes. This was very flattering. Last spring, early or last winter, I get a letter. It's addressed, "To Rutgers Football Letter Winners." I'm a letter winner, okay. [laughter]

CS: Which he never received.

NS: Which I never received. So, the letter says that I'm invited to participate and play in the alumni-varsity spring practice finale. I'm very flattered. They want to know my waist size, my head size, for the helmet, and all this, and then, attached to it is a little, one-page document, a waiver, you know.

CS: For the doctor.

NS: [laughter] But, I was very flattered. No, ... football was hard in those days, you know. It was a hard time. Again, they were young kids.

KP: Joseph Katz, I do not know if you know him.

NS: I vaguely recall.

KP: I think he played football for a semester. He looks back at it and says, "Under no other circumstances would I ever have been on a major college football team."

NS: Oh, that's right, yes, and [under] no others would I have been manager.

KP: The schedules were really reduced, because of transportation issues.

NS: Everything, yes. I remember, I spent a lot of time with, what was it, [George E.] Little, he was the, what, Director of Athletics, I think, at the time. Far as I know, he was a nice guy. I didn't know [of anything else].

KP: Having interviewed several football and other sports managers, there was a lot of responsibility given to the manager then. Nowadays, there would be a professional to do these things, like make the hotel reservations and so on. A student assistant might help, but they would not give these responsibilities to a student manager. Did you have those types of responsibilities as manager?

NS: We didn't stay over anywhere.

KP: Yes, I think the travel schedule was reduced.

NS: Yes, I don't recall.

KP: All of your trips were one day.

NS: Yes, I don't ever recall [staying over].

KP: How did the team get around?

NS: Bus.

KP: By bus. You still were able to get enough gas.

NS: Yes, yes. I don't recall how we ever [did it]. We never stayed over, no. It was a lot simpler, yes, a lot simpler. Yes, I remember the 150s. They were good. I liked those [games]. That was a good thing, because it enabled ... the little men to play. Today, it's impossible.

RG: Many alums talk about the rivalry between Princeton and Rutgers. I guess that might have been earlier, but did you notice that?

NS: ... No, it was earlier and later. There was no rivalry during those years. We had nothing ...

KP: ... To be rivals in. [laughter]

NS: Yes, neither of us, I don't think. I don't know how big a school they were at the time. They had the Navy.

KP: Yes.

NS: I don't think they were too much different than we were. Yes, I had no contact [with Princeton]. It was all pre-war and post-war, yes.

KP: You liked physics a lot. When you heard about the atomic bomb, did you have any sense of what it was, or were you as surprised as everyone else?

NS: I had no [idea]. ... Again, you have to put yourself into that era; no television. ... I don't recall getting a newspaper. I don't even know; did we have a radio?

CS: Radio, we had.

NS: Yes, but I don't know if we ...

KP: ... Had one in the fraternity.

NS: Yes. ... You were [living] a very isolated existence.

KP: The *Targum*, at the time, talked about Rutgers and that was it.

NS: The outside world; ... we were pretty self-engrossed. There wasn't much [else to do]. You had to study all weekend. You know, it was tough playing bridge all week. [laughter]

KP: After the war ended, Rutgers changed from a very small college, particularly after the ASTP pulled out ...

NS: Right.

KP: ... Into; well, by today's standards, it was still much smaller.

NS: It was still small.

KP: Yes.

NS: As I say, most of my classes, my non-ASTP classes, [had] six students, eight students. I remember, "Money and Banking," I think there were eight of us, six of us, "Public Finance," same thing. Later on, in '46, I took a course in international economic relations and that was bigger. That must have been about twenty. There's just no comparison. I don't know if you can put yourself into that period. It was that unique.

KP: In 1945 and 1946, you were starting to get the veterans back.

NS: Now, you're starting to get [them] back. We started getting some veterans back. Hank Alexander, a couple of the others, started coming back. They brought a lot of maturity, quite different.

KP: What was that like? You were, in a sense, the "big man on campus" on the smaller campus and, now, there are these veterans coming back.

NS: Really, no problem. In a way, we welcomed it. Also, I was on my way out. They were just coming in.

KP: Yes, because you finished in January of 1946.

NS: Well, yes, I was going through it. As I say, I ... completed engineering in the middle of '45. After that, it was just a question [of the other classes]. ... I had to take the one course and, after I take the one course, ... some of the stuff I took, I had to jam in a lot of economic courses in order to [graduate with the major]. ... It required five or six majors [courses], whatever it was. So, I had to jam all those in and I did all that. So, I was pretty busy with school and I went straight through. So, I finished up in September '46, but, I remember, I had 180 credits. You only needed 120 to [graduate]. ...

KP: That is a lot.

NS: Yes. I took a lot of stuff. They finally caught up with me, in fact, the last term, State Scholarship.

KP: Oh.

NS: Yes. “How many years [are] you going to go to school?” [laughter] I remember. So, I think I had to pay for the last term, which wasn’t much.

KP: You mentioned that the veterans who were coming back were much more mature. Did they ever tell you anything about the war?

NS: No. ... I think they associated more with themselves, more than [us]. We were just young kids to them. Yes, I was looking at this, [the *Scarlet Letter* yearbook], yes, here, the student council. You know, you had some of us young kids, and then, the rest; it was a big jump. The ones coming back were twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three, quite different, yes. So, really, there was no conflict. We were just two entirely different generations, different kinds of people.

KP: We have asked a lot of the GI Bill students, veterans, about the younger kids.

NS: Yes.

KP: It looks, on the surface, like you really were two very different groups.

NS: Well, we were. I remember my course in international economics, as I said, one of my last courses. I think I was the only one from the old [college] and all the others were returnees, and they ranged into the twenties and thirties.

KP: Was that a little bit intimidating? You were, all of a sudden, in class with men much older than you, or did you not notice?

NS: No. ... I’m the oblivious [student]. ... The one thing I do remember, very significantly, is the course in international economic relations. We spent quite a bit of time on the theory of fluctuating exchange rates and I had a lot of difficulty with it. Back then, we were on the gold standard. Everything was fixed. Currencies were held within narrow ranges. Now, 1971, twenty-five years later, I’m running a trading company and we go short to [the] British pound, I remember, at \$2.41-and-a-half, because it was kept in a range of \$2.38 to \$2.42, and we were trading precious metals and you get involved with exchange rates, all right. ... I went short, and then, of course, over the weekend, Nixon took us off the gold standard and, all of a sudden, the theory of fluctuating exchange rates [became important]. [laughter] Yes, I walked in Monday morning, we got out, I forget, at \$2.48 or \$2.47, cost a lot of money, and that was a practical lesson in [the theory].

KP: It finally made the theory useful. [laughter]

RG: In the one year of *Targums* I was able to find, which was your senior year, there was some discussion of coeducation. Were there any negative feelings towards that, or did people not think much about it on campus?

NS: Didn't even talk about it in those days. Look, NJC, [New Jersey College for Women], was a good school. ... You come from a different generation; [we] never even gave it a thought.

KP: Do you remember your initiation into your fraternity? What did you have to do?

CS: Are you allowed to divulge what you did? [laughter]

NS: ... Oh, that's right, I'm not allowed to, except our fraternity is out of existence. We had a good group. One of the members was a Mort Pelovitz, and he lived in Somerville, and he wanted to be a lawyer, but he played the bass, to earn money to go to school. ... Hazing does have some pluses. I'm sure the minuses are more than the pluses. It can be overdone, but we got very close together, because of all the group hazing, and, I remember, he was having trouble in Spanish. So, I helped him break into the Spanish House and steal the test, [laughter] [at] two o'clock in the morning. So, all right, he ended up playing with Louis Armstrong, around the world.

KP: Really?

NS: Yes.

KP: Wow.

NS: He was good and, when he finished, when he decided he was finished with music, he went to law school and he ended up in California, as a lawyer to musicians and all that, and then, he died, but it was a different kind of existence.

KP: Did you know of anyone from the earlier years who did not make it through the war? Do you have any memories of them, people from the fraternity house, from class, anyone who sticks out in your mind?

NS: Gene Rudamanski was in school with me in Kearny and he entered Rutgers. Unfortunately, he was on the *Indianapolis*. Other than that, the class was pretty fortunate. We only lost a couple. I remember, they're in the back [of the *Scarlet Letter* yearbook]. There was only a couple that we lost, if I recall. It's in here somewhere, but I think there was only three or four. We were fortunate.

KP: You did not have several friends or acquaintances that did not make it.

NS: No, no.

KP: Just your friend from Kearny?

NS: No. In fact, I was lucky, because, if I had been drafted, I would have ended up in the Bulge, [the Battle of the Bulge], at that time.

KP: Yes.

NS: You know, we were fortunate that way. No, we were lucky. There weren't that many of us.

KP: How often did you and your brother write to each other? Did you stay in contact with him?

NS: Write?

KP: Yes.

NS: What's that? [laughter] Yes, interesting, my father got his degree from NYU, when it was uptown. My brother was a chemistry major at St. Peter's College in Jersey City. He ended up in meteorology school at NYU, uptown, and graduated as a meteorologist. So, he served mainly in the South. Write? I don't think I ever wrote to him.

KP: He did not leave the States during war.

NS: No, it was after the war.

KP: He finally went.

NS: Yes.

KP: Your brother attended St. Peter's, which was then a very Catholic school.

NS: Oh, yes. He had a little problem. I think he graduated, what, in '39? Part of the graduation ceremony was kissing the Bishop's ring, which he refused to do, and it was a whole big fuss. They finally let him go to kiss the hand or something like that. Yes, that was a ...

KP: ... Part of the ceremony.

NS: Yes.

KP: Why St. Peter's?

NS: Money. He lived with my grandmother in Jersey City and went to St. Peter's.

KP: Did he get a scholarship?

NS: No, but tuition in those days was fifty dollars a term to one hundred dollars a term. It was a lot of money, but not relative to what it is today. Even the tuition at Rutgers wasn't that [bad]. I don't know, what was it, 350 [dollars], maybe? I don't know. I think the general fee was more than the tuition.

KP: Do you remember how you got your first job?

NS: Yes, I remember it. That was because I had both degrees. Yes, well, quite a few asked [about] my first name, “Where did it come from? What’s your family background? ... Where? Where?” but I was lucky. [At] Johns Manville, the finance manager there was interested in my background. ... So, I started off in cost accounting, which is factory accounting. ... It did work out. As I say, I’ve been everything, by the way, so, after a couple of years, I’m not the kind who likes to sit still, ... I transferred to industrial engineering and I worked in production engineering and all that. It was good experience. We made it a point, on Friday afternoons; it was a big plant at the time. We’d make [it] a point, on Friday afternoon, ... a couple of us would take off and just roam around the plant, [examining] stuff, innocent. You ever see floor tile, you know, tile, little squares, okay? Back then, in order to make it, you need scrap, all right, and there would be times when they would make nothing but good tile and they would have to take the good tile and run around and break it up, very interesting. ... Paper machinery, where you go into this huge building and there’s four men in the front and three men in the back and this massive amount of equipment [in-between]; you learned a lot.

KP: How did you like Johns Manville as a company?

NS: Oh, that was a long time ago.

KP: Yes.

NS: That was just a start. This is how I learned. I never took accounting, by the way, until after I graduated from Rutgers. I was going through this [night school]. ... I went to school three years at night, studying accounting, and then, five years at night, getting my master’s. So, I covered a lot of ground.

KP: It sounds like you were very busy.

NS: [Yes]. [laughter] ...

CS: Very motivated.

NS: Yes. I’ll never forget, in, in fact, my last year at graduate school, I went at night, I doubled up and I was director of marketing for a firm. ... We had an exhibition out in Los Angeles and San Diego and I had a big marketing final coming up and I went out with two suitcases, one with clothes and one with books. [laughter] ... I remember, I spent a lot of time [studying] out there.

KP: Since you had so many different jobs, which job, company or experience did you enjoy the most or was the most challenging?

NS: When I worked for the electrical machinery company, it was similar to Rutgers, in that it was a small company. There were both limits and advantages and disadvantages to small companies and big companies. ... It was the time of life, in my mid-twenties, and I was pretty productive and I learned a lot. As I say, I started off in finance and I ended up director of marketing. ... In the meantime, I spent a lot of time in production planning and a lot of time in legal administration, contract administration. So, I covered a lot of ground.

KP: It sounds like you liked the fact that, in a small company, you could do more things, whereas in a bigger company, you would never do so many things.

NS: No, you can't.

KP: Not until you went much higher up the chain.

NS: Yes, and even then you can't, because of politics.

KP: Yes.

NS: Marketing was the most interesting, but it's not my forte. I had to work very hard at it. I'm not the marketing type. I did it, and I did it well, but I'm not the [type]. ...

KP: You mentioned on your survey that you once ran for the board of education and lost.

NS: That was an experience, that was an experience. I have a deep amount of respect for the political process, particularly in the winter, [laughter] because board of education elections are, what?

KP: March, April.

NS: So, you go campaigning in February. I remember handing out flyers among two feet of snow. That was hard, that was hard. I was also naive. [laughter] I told them what I felt. Well, I came in fourth, anyway. They elected three. [laughter]

KP: You have stayed very active with alumni affairs.

NS: Not really, not really.

CS: Just helped support them.

NS: Yes, too many other things in life. Something has to give.

KP: Since you mentioned returning to campus for a reunion, do you think that anything of the Rutgers you went to still exists, or has Rutgers changed entirely?

NS: Oh, there's no [comparison]; the time is different. As I say, [as] you were coming out of the Depression, a college degree was an enormous step. Studying? You know, if you wanted to study, you studied; if you didn't, you didn't. It was an entirely different framework than it is today, the media, with television, all that changes [everything].

KP: You still work. You are still very active.

NS: Yes.

KP: When did you see that there was a real generational change, that, all of a sudden, this was a different world?

NS: All right, okay. This would be, let's see, the mid 1960s. [In the] mid 1960s, how old was I? my forties, I guess. I was vice-president of a chemical company and the international sales vice-president was retiring. His social life and his business life were identical. He was entertaining all over. I remember, what's that [restaurant], Barbetta's, in New York? ... The restaurant, twenty-nine dollars for a [entrée?]. Okay, well, he used to entertain there all the time. [laughter] We went there for lunch one time, walked in, sat down, opened the menu, closed it up and walked out. [laughter] He used to go there all the time, entertain, everything, until, all of a sudden, one day, he was sixty-five, bang, and I went into [see] him; he was crying. I spoke with him. He was lost. This was his life. So, I said, "This is ridiculous." At the time, I wanted to be president of a company. "This is crazy, you know. I'm going to spend sixty, seventy hours a week and knock your brains out?" So, I decided to try other things.

KP: You think that was one of the generational shifts.

NS: Well, I saw. I could see it coming, "What do I do when I'm sixty-five?"

KP: Yes.

NS: You know, I'm a financial executive, at that time, let's say; fine. Now, I'm age sixty-five. Now, what do I do, accounting? I was never the greatest accountant. So, I changed focus, switched to other areas. I became financial vice-president of another company, and then, backed into commodity trading, which I immediately saw was something that could be done at any time. So, that's what I did.

-----END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO-----

NS: ... I became financial vice-president of the Franklin Mint, ... outside of Philadelphia, and we were heavily involved in precious metals. ... After I joined them for a little while, I saw [that], "We'd better have an expert onboard." So, I retained an executive search firm to search the country for silver traders and, at the time, ... it turns out, there were five high-level silver traders and about twenty low-levels, nothing in-between, and the light bulbs lit up. ... After looking at it, I decided, "I might want to get into this." So, I proposed to the board that, "We set up our own trading company and I'll run it and I'll hire a couple of the lower levels. They'll teach me commodity trading and I'll teach them finance," and that's what we did. So, that worked. I ran a company for about four years, and then, decided to go out on my own. So, that's how I finally ended up, through all this training and all this schooling, but this is where the bridge and the hearts and the poker came in. [laughter]

KP: That is often what commodity trading is compared to.

NS: Yes. It's a game.

KP: How long have you been trading?

NS: Trading? I've been trading, full-time, now, twenty-one years. I'm the oldest, one of the oldest ones, down there. [laughter] Don't tell them how old I am; they don't know.

KP: Where do you trade?

NS: On the floor.

KP: You are one of the people who ...

NS: I don't yell and scream. They yell and scream. [laughter]

KP: If you do not mind me saying, you seem so cool, like someone who does not yell and scream.

NS: Oh, I can.

KP: Yes. [laughter]

NS: My son turned out to be a commodity trader. He was a good chess player and he ended up a great commodity trader and he can get quite physical. [laughter] ... It's a different world.

KP: Many of the people I have interviewed worked for only one company, maybe two. There was a general notion that you get out of college, get a job, stay with that company and move up the ranks of the hierarchy. Your career was very different.

NS: I found out early in life [that] I live in roughly three-year cycles. I'm a very slow starter. So, if I take a new job, the first year, maybe I accomplish ten to fifteen percent of what I want to do. The second year, I'll do seventy, seventy-five percent. By the third year, I'm down to very little. So, by the end of that third year, I'm ready to move on and that's what I did for a long time, quite a few times. I worked for a mining company and, every once in a while, "This is enough," and ... I went to the chairman, twice, and [I would] say, "Find me something else."

KP: It sounds like you are very well-suited for this era, where the notion is that you should move around and take different jobs.

NS: Well, yes. A friend of ours is a consultant. This is interesting. We're invited to his home. What happened was, I was with what was American Metal Climax, which became AMAX, which was taken over by Cyprus Mines. It's a very large mining company. I don't know; we had thirty thousand employees and mines all over the world. ... He was a consultant to one of the vice-presidents one time. So, he married a friend of Charlotte's. So, we went up to Boston to visit him and we were discussing things and I'm here, [I said], "Charlotte, I don't agree with him," and I'm telling Harry [that] I don't agree [with him] in this area of managerial control and personnel and organization and things. He leaves the room and I roam around his library and there's a whole shelf of books that he wrote on the subject, a whole shelf. [laughter] So, you

know, I apologized a little bit to him. He said, “No, no,” you know. He accepted the criticism for what it was. ... He was consulting to the Dean of International Management at Florida State and we were visiting him and he was getting him to change his whole MBA curricula. Most curricula, up until recently, were based on either a job in consulting or going to work for a large company, and he feels that, today, you must be an entrepreneur. He feels that the business schools should change radically. In my own way, I was way ahead of this. So, I did some radical things, I’ll tell you. When I was with the precious metals company, I took one look [at] what we were doing, we were selling at thirty-five times earnings and we had a screwball accounting system, and I said, “No way.” You know, you just can’t live with that. Ten cents becomes three dollars-and-fifty cents a share, on a quarterly basis. [laughter] The stock would be up and down like a yo-yo. You’ve got to be crazy. So, I installed radically different [systems] and they told me, later, that it ended up in a Harvard case study somewhere.

RG: That is great. [laughter]

NS: So, I’ve had a lot of education and, as I say, the engineering was very key. I got a lot out of it, even though I didn’t put that much into it.

KP: Yes.

NS: Yes.

KP: Most of your classmates, and men in the classes just before and after, have long since retired. You seem to still be going strong. How long do you plan to continue?

NS: Well, I’ve experimented. I try one week on, one week off, two weeks on, two weeks off, [laughter] three days a week. I need continuity. So, what I do [is], I take July, August, September, October off and I’ve been experimenting with four-day weeks, but, invariably, the day I take off, the world comes to an end. [laughter] So, I’m still experimenting, but to stop and play golf, ... that’s not my cup of tea. This is one of the reasons I went into this business twenty years ago.

KP: You could do it for as long as you wanted.

NS: Yes, yes, which I think is very important. As I say, I could see the big corporate types; if you have enough money, fine, you know, do what you want, but, still, what are you going to do? If you can get on a board or be a consultant, fine, but, if I want to work, I work. I do have the option. If I don’t want to work, I don’t work, and this is one of the reasons ... I went into this, stayed with it. Plus, it’s interesting. It’s a continuous challenge. As you’ll see in my book, I have to be challenged. In commodity trading, you’re always wrong. You are never right. So, it’s only a question of degree. If you buy something and it goes up, you should have bought more. [laughter]

KP: If you buy something and it goes down ...

NS: Okay, you shouldn't have bought it at all. So, you're never right. That's what I'm saying. So, it's a challenge.

KP: How did you feel about the Korean and Vietnam Wars? World War II is often viewed as the "good war."

NS: My feeling at that time, which worked out, was that China was the big danger and, if we could avoid China for enough time, we'd be okay, and we did. That Korea thing [the Korean War] was very dangerous. I was involved, at that time. ... We made equipment for aircraft and missiles and went to work one Monday morning and found colonels and majors sitting on the front lawn. One of the planes went down in Kansas City, and maybe it was our product and you had to be pretty damn sure [about everything]. We had rigid quality control and everything else. As I say, I was in charge of contract administration and [the military would say], "Oh, this has to be good to about minus ninety degrees, Fahrenheit." You know, nothing, [no problem], okay, but, then, the contract comes through and it says, "Minus ninety," and, once it's down in writing, now, you've got to make the damn thing, and it's hard. So, what was interesting is, I was in finance at that time and the Korean War ended and we lost half our backlog in two days. We had a thousand employees. The owner gave me two weeks to come up with a plan, so [that] we could operate. So, I set up a team and we did all kinds of analysis and the key was, we had an industrial engineering department of ten people and we studied it from every angle and some recommended we cut back to seven and some recommended we cut back to six. So, after the two weeks, we put all the plans together and I sat down with them. We started to go over them. We come to this department and I said, "Here's the situation. We can get by with either six or seven." He said, "What if we eliminate the department entirely?" "We could get by for a year or two, not for the long term." He said, "I don't give a damn about the long term. I've got to exist." "Whoosh," all ten went; that was a lesson at an early age. This was back in, what, '53? This was a lesson at an early age. So, what we did [was], we set up planning at five different levels and we choose one as the operating level, put the other four in a drawer, and, when circumstances changed, within two weeks, "Whoosh," out came the plan. Now, we did this long before it became fashionable, thirty years later, but ... I always remembered that. So, in your thinking, you have to approach it from many different angles. That was a lesson.

KP: I wish I had read your book before the interview, but, if you were going to advise a student like Rachel about the world, what would you say? [laughter]

NS: These are philosophies. As I say, you have philosophy, strategy, tactics. Tactics, I can't help you at all with. Strategies, I can help you a little with. Philosophy, yes, I can discuss philosophy, philosophy of life, philosophy of working; women philosophy, no. I'm not [good at that]. [laughter] She's good at that, Charlotte's good at that, and let me quickly run through [this]. What happened is, ... all right, Charlotte and I have been married ...

CS: It'll be nineteen years.

NS: ... Nineteen years. We have five children between us, and ten grandchildren. Each is quite different. Each presented different problems at different times, some of them repetitive, you know, from one and the other, and I finally said, "For crying out loud, let's put it down in

writing.” So, my first one is, “Don’t reinvent the wheel.” Now, very important, I went to a number of companies. I walk in; things have to be changed. “Don’t create something new.” Find out what the hell is going on in the rest of the world. Then, if nothing in the rest of the world will work, then, you create something, okay, but don’t waste your time creating something that’s already ...

CS: Been done and exists.

NS: ... Been done and exists. “Rabbit Stew;” the recipe for rabbit stew starts with, “Catch the rabbit.” ... In solving a problem area, first, define the problem; this, to me, is always the biggest [step]. ... One of the largest challenges I ever had was [as] president of the temple. With twenty-five or thirty Jewish trustees, you have twenty-five or thirty completely different opinions and different approaches and that was a challenge. ... As I say, you define the problem. Each one would get up and give the answer to something and, really, it was five different answers, five different recommendations, but it was for five different problems. It wasn’t for the same problem. So, that’s why I say, first thing, define a problem. Now, this one, “If it looks like a goat, smells like a goat and sounds like a goat, it’s a goat.” Too many times, we try to make out of something that which is perfectly obvious. Don’t try to; if he says, “I’m going to kill you,” and he pulls a knife and he wrote a book about it, treat it as serious. “Oh, he’ll never do that.” You know, okay, now, “An educated person,” this is very important, I had a lot of trouble hiring people, “[is] one who has the ability to think and knows enough to recognize when there might be a problem.” When things change radically, you have to be able to hire a person that can think, and, as I say, engineering training ... is very [rigid]. ... Pre-med was very rigid. There was no [give]. This is where the liberal arts [comes in]. So, I recommend it to my children, “Get a liberal arts education, if you can, and learn how to think. Then, you can do something.” I hired a member of Mensa. [laughter] He was an oddball. He was a screwball. He didn’t fit into the organization at all, but I would give him a problem that should take two days and he’d be back in an hour. It was such a pain in the neck keeping him busy that, eventually, it didn’t work out. He couldn’t associate with anybody else. I had to be the buffer, but he was good. So, “Security lies only within one’s self.” This is, you mentioned, [the idea of], “Go to work for a large company.” I saw this coming thirty-five years ago. I would never do it. Today, it was a disaster, with all the layoffs. Decisions, “Don’t back yourself into a corner;” that’s obvious.

CS: Don’t make one until you have to.

NS: Don’t make it until you have to. This is very important. For example, “What are we having for dinner tonight?” Well, it’s early yet. You know, we can decide later. [laughter] “If a decision is wrong, reverse it.” Now, see, in commodity trading, this is critical. You have to be able to sit there and say, “I’m wrong,” and it’s not easy. Now, when I became a commodity trader, I studied engineering, [where] I’d had to be ninety-nine percent right. Commodity trading, as I say, you’re never right. It took me three years to unlearn what I knew and come back up. At that time, the best commodity traders were the kids out of high school. In fact, I went to London one time and I went, “Gee, they had an awful lot of hotshot traders in [their twenties], twenty-three, twenty-four, and they weren’t here in this country.” Finally, it dawned on me, “They didn’t go to college, so, they already had six years [of] experience.” Here, our

people [go to college]. This is before the computers became an integral structure. That has changed things, because, now, with computers, you can do an awful lot that you couldn't do before, but our college students felt they knew too much to be a commodity trader. This is what happened. Now, with the computers, as I say, it's different. "Mistakes, you learn from them. People, don't expect people to act the way you would. Mountains, don't make out of molehills." ... We talked about my childhood; "Bully, don't appease." I found that out at an early age. You [Rachel] wouldn't remember, and you [Kurt] may not remember, when kids got into a disagreement, they would put a piece of wood on their shoulder and say, "Knock it off." Now, that was a sign that you were going to have a disagreement, [laughter] all right, and this is what used to happen. Well, you learn that, you know, then, I poke him a little, and then, he pokes me a little and I poke him a little harder and he pokes you a little harder, and you go through this routine until you're fighting. So, you learned at an early age that when he gives you that first little poke, you give him such a clout that it ends it right there, [laughter] and, invariably, it does. It may not be the most tactful thing or the most diplomatic, but, unfortunately, many times, it works, and we've seen what happens with appeasement. ...

CS: It took him years to compile this book, did a lot of research.

NS: My last one, very important, "Stay out of trouble with the Internal Revenue Service."

RG: I will remember that. [laughter]

NS: We had a very friendly agent, a very nice woman. Charlotte gave her coffee and we had a great time and everything and, about six months later, "By the way, this little item on your return... Um-hum, okay;" another three months go by, another thing. Another three months go by; it was a whole question of where my place of work was. I claimed my place of work was here, they claimed it was in New York City. By the time she got through with me, [laughter] my very nice ...

CS: Well, she was sorry she ever started. Remember, we had a whole shopping cart full of papers that we wheeled into the office?

NS: Oh, yes, then, yes, finally ...

CS: Because you saved everything.

NS: Yes, I figured, all the records, commodity trading records, I brought a whole cart in, but it's not worth the effort. [laughter] So, that I learned.

CS: Well, the two of you are welcome to have the book and, if you want one for Rutgers ...

RG: Thank you so much.

KP: Thank you.

NS: It was hard to write, because, as you see, I learned at Johns Manville; we had to write financial reports of one page. Now, I don't know, ... all right, as a history professor, how about giving that assignment, all right, a financial report on the year 1912, in one page? How long do you think it would take you?

RG: It would take me forever.

NS: Well, you could write a fifty-page report in three days. You could write a twelve-page report in maybe a week or two.

CS: You have to condense it.

NS: The one page was brutal, but it was good training.

KP: You mentioned that you were strongly influenced by the writings of Teddy Roosevelt.

NS: Yes, always.

KP: When did you encounter his writing?

NS: Early. ... When I was very young, I was a fast reader. I used to read two books a night. So, I went through his books. I don't know, have you ever read them?

KP: I have read some of his writings. I have read his accounts of the Spanish-American War.

NS: No, this is different. Let me just get it, because, to me, at a very young age, he was the epitome. [Editor's Note: Mr. Shak leaves the room.]

CS: He feels he influenced him tremendously. ... We have found that this book is very helpful to our children and grandchildren, because a problem comes up and they refer to the red book, and, at different times in your life, it would be apropos in different areas.

KP: Yes, I have seen this set in the library: *African Game Trails, A Book-Lover's Holidays in the Open, Outdoor of Pastimes of an American Hunter, Through the Brazilian Wilderness*.

CS: You've read all of them?

NS: Oh, many times.

KP: You have had these books a while. These are an early edition.

NS: Yes. Because of them, I've been to Africa a couple of times and I have not been to South America, all because of Theodore Roosevelt. If you read his Brazilian book, deadly; [laughter] it killed him.

KP: Yes.

NS: Deadly. So, you know, the jungle ...

KP: You have no desire ... [laughter]

NS: No way. It's amazing, the influence some of these things [have had]. ...

KP: My wife and I wanted to take a safari in Africa with the Bronx Zoo, because my wife works for the Bronx Zoo, but we just could not afford it. We said, "We just cannot do it this year."

NS: You have to force yourself.

KP: Yes.

NS: I went many years ago. I took all three of the children with me, and then, Charlotte and I went.

CS: Tenting safari.

NS: The tenting safari. She only had four panic attacks. [laughter]

CS: Do you want me to speak to your wife? [laughter]

NS: It is a great experience, but it's hard. The last time was, basically, Tanzania, but it's hard.

KP: You mention that your readings on animal behavior have been very influential. When did you notice this connection? When did you realize that it strongly influenced you?

NS: Bringing up children. Charlotte and I are quite different. One day, she had a little granddaughter and there was a little ladder and the granddaughter started to climb up the ladder. Charlotte ran to help her and I told her, "I would do it entirely different. I would stand at the bottom and catch her if she fell, [laughter] but I wouldn't help her up the ladder," and there's a big difference. ... Bears, at the age of two, they kick the cubs out. They have to be taught independence, if something happens to the parent. So, animal behavior is very important and I think ... not enough attention has been given to it. Some of it is rather drastic, you know, with the birds. If there's a lot of voles and things around, an owl will have seven or eight owlets. If food is scarce, they may not have any. Then, a lot of them, they lay eggs days apart and the older ones will kill off the younger ones, unless there's plenty of food around. Then, maybe they'll survive. So, there's a lot to be learned from animal behavior. ...

KP: We talked about your heart murmur, but you also had another hospital stay.

NS: This, okay, ... this was very important.

CS: (Endocarditis?)?

NS: No, this was way before. I think I was nineteen.

KP: It was 1947.

NS: No, [in] '47, I was twenty-one. I got a deep infection in my left leg. So, I had to go to the University of Pennsylvania Hospital in Philadelphia and they operated and they let it drain. Now, again, this is before all your antibiotics and everything else. They had some sulfur drugs at the time, but that's all. ... It took a month. So, in reality, I was the healthiest patient there, but I was next to the ward where the children with the brain tumors were, and that's why I never complained. When you see those [kids], you know, we're all pretty lucky. So, that was a lesson.

KP: You also mention that you were strongly influenced by your temple fundraising activities in the late 1950s.

NS: All right. ... All right, you talk [about] your modern generation and all; we built a new temple, so, I was part of the fundraising team. I didn't have any money, particularly, at the time and, I remember, I pledged, I don't know, X number of dollars over three years and it was a sacrifice and I went out fundraising and I bumped into all kinds, but, particularly, people that had two cars at the time, a nice house, carpeting, furniture. I didn't have half of that at the time and, when I asked about fundraising, they ... couldn't give anything. Some of them were [saying that] because they just didn't want to. A lot of them, appearance, had financed everything. They didn't have a penny. So, you really can't tell from people what's going on, unless you really dig into it, but what made it worthwhile were the people that made a minimum pledge and paid you five dollars a month over six years, or whatever it was. Those were the ones that made it all worthwhile. The deadbeats; I was president of the temple and some old-timers sent in a letter of resignation. So, I called them up, "You can't. I refuse." ... First of all, you find out, if you get ten letters of resignation, you don't really know why they're resigning, and at least half or more are [doing it because of] money, and they won't tell you that. ... We had a process [in] which I refused to let anybody drop out and, if they had any kind of problem, speak to the Rabbi, I didn't want to know about it, and, if he said, "No, they don't have to pay anything," fine. I don't want to know. I don't want to get involved with it. It's not my [business], and we had this old couple, had been members for a long time, and they refused to take charity. ... They refused to stay on.

KP: Even though they had been so loyal for years. You could almost view it as a bonus.

NS: Yes, they [were] really hurt, but there are people that are too proud. Now, I have a son up in Vermont and, periodically, during the winter, some people would die from lack of heat and they were too proud to ask for firewood or money for things. So, you run into all kinds.

KP: Religion is fairly important in your identity. You wrote, "My main guide as a philosophy is that I was born a Jew. I remain a Jew."

NS: Well, okay, I don't know, anybody Jewish here?

RG: I am.

NS: You're Jewish? All right.

KP: My wife is.

NS: Okay. I'm a *cohen*, all right. This has been handed down to me for, what? two hundred generations or more. It's not something I earned; it's a responsibility. So, I feel that an awful lot of people came before me and it's not within me to stop this thing. So, I passed it along to the kids and I hope that they'll pass it along to their kids. Nothing I earned, but it means I'm descended from Aaron. ... There's some tremendous sayings in here, [Mr. Shak's book]. One of the greatest was; who wrote *Tom Sawyer*?

KP: Mark Twain.

NS: His mother, very good, but I couldn't use them. I only use them in here; if you notice, I have a whole list of sayings. They are all related to my philosophies and statements. So, it's not meant to be all-inclusive.

KP: Yes.

NS: They're strictly related [to the topic], and a lot of them are quite pertinent. The one I put in for; oh, oh, okay, under page forty-eight, I quote this all the time, "In matters of principle, stand like a rock. In matters of taste, swing with the current," [laughter] but some of these were quite personal. ... Oh, okay, page forty-two, at the bottom, Charlotte and I are quite different in certain ways. I don't expect a lot from people and she expects a lot from people, so that that last statement was put in strictly for her. [laughter]

KP: "Some people are so sensitive, they feel snubbed if an epidemic overlooks them."
[laughter]

NS: [She says], "So-and-so didn't invite me to something." [I say], "Great." [laughter] "I wouldn't want to go anyway," you know, but there were two I couldn't find. One was by Confucius, "If you give a man a fish, a needy man a fish, you have to give him [one] every day of your life and, if you teach him to fish, that's it," but I couldn't find it in the blasted library, so, I couldn't quote it, and the other was by Eisenhower, which I couldn't find, which is extremely important. "Plans are nothing. Planning is everything," and I couldn't find it anywhere. ... This holds true in business, in life and everything else. At one point in my career, I was the budget director for the large mining company, working on all kinds of plans, and, as I mentioned before, in the industrial engineering aspect, the thinking process is what's important. What you put down on paper, things change so fast, but, if you went through the thinking process, you can make a decision in a short period of time. So, there's some good stuff in here. ... Finally, I was discussing all this with my kids and Charlotte's kids and all at one time ...

KP: They received your book fairly well.

NS: Oh, yes. Charlotte's son uses it all the time, keeps it in business. Yes, well, page seven, "Life is compromises, no free lunch." One of our kids is; ... there's no easy way in life.

RG: You said that your one son lived in Vermont.

NS: Right.

RG: Do your other children live close?

NS: One lives in Short Hills, one in Vermont and one south of San Francisco, and Charlotte has one in Washington, DC, and one up in Caldwell, so, not too bad. One son went to Amherst, which was a good school. Yes, so, we're working on his daughter. [laughter]

KP: None of your children went to Rutgers. Do you wish one of them would have gone or was it really up to them?

NS: They're completely different individuals. My oldest is a hell of a lot smarter, so, he ended up in Amherst. He's good. My second one is also very smart, but he wasn't motivated. ... He was quite different. At the age of fourteen, he sailed on a Norwegian training vessel, the *Christian Radic*, in the North Sea. ... Nobody spoke English. He was a tough kid. He sailed on a Danish freighter for two years and, finally, ... he came back and went to the University of Vermont and graduated Phi Beta Kappa, fine. [laughter] The third went one term to a school in Pennsylvania, decided, "This is not for me," and went [to the commodities exchange, was a] clerk on the floor until he was twenty-one, then, became a commodity trader, and he's a natural. So, he never went to school. Yes, I wouldn't recommend Rutgers *per se*. It all depends on the individual.

KP: Yes.

NS: My oldest was good. He went to Hampshire for a year. ...

KP: Yes.

NS: Okay. So, what happened was, it was Hampshire's second year. He was a junior at Amherst, finished up and they gave him a fellowship, because they had no upper class. So, they gave a fellowship to about sixteen kids from all over the country, to spend a year in Hampshire, to be there, live with the students, because there was only a freshman and a sophomore class. ... We went to the graduation. ... He had a choice of graduating from Hampshire or Amherst and he went back to Amherst, but we went to the graduation in Hampshire and, you'll love this one, they were dressed in togas, with bands and roses in their hair and bare feet, [laughter] a bunch of yo-yos, okay, until you saw their papers, what a crew, you know, brilliant. ...

KP: Yes.

NS: Yes, so, ... he came up with a drug that is now helping cystic fibrosis patients.

KP: It sounds like your children and grandchildren are giving you a lot of pleasure.

NS: Well, they're all different.

KP: Yes.

NS: They're all different, quite different. So, there's no such thing as approaching [them all the same way], and, in a great way, that's your contribution to life. I'm a commodity trader, which [means] I'm not adding much to the economy of the country. This had bothered me a lot. I'm not very productive from the country's point of view, but this is one of the factors of the tax laws. You [Rachel] wouldn't realize it, and you [Kurt] probably wouldn't, either, at one point, tax rates were seventy percent and you sit in work and, if you get an increase, salaries was limited to fifty percent, but it'd get dissipated pretty fast at high tax rates. So, I switched. I left one company to go [to] another because of stock options. I took a cut in salary, ... because of the stock options. Then, I went into consulting and non-salary income was taxed at seventy percent. I get up one day in September, and I worked pretty hard when I was consulting, and I looked and [I said], "I'm going to work the rest of the year for [nothing]." [laughter]

KP: I feel that way when I do my self-employment tax. Sometimes, when I make some consulting money, I say, "Why? I am losing half of it in taxes."

NS: Yes, and the rates aren't bad.

KP: Yes, I know.

NS: Try to visualize seventy percent.

KP: Yes.

NS: And I said, "This is no good." That's why I went into commodity trading, because, at the time, there were things you could do. Even now, it's limited to about thirty-three, thirty-four percent. So, it's workable, but that's what that is.

KP: You really believe in the value of a liberal arts education.

NS: Strongly, strongly. I'm very upset about the college environment today. I mean, to spend, what? a hundred, a hundred-and-twenty-five thousand for a liberal arts education is a tremendous outlay and, yet, all my experience is, you need a thinking person, really, very important, because, as I said, myself, big deal, I was an expert, supposedly, in vacuum tubes and, five years later ... [laughter]

KP: The vacuum tube is a museum piece.

NS: Yes. So, I feel very strongly in this area. So, if a person was suited for Rutgers, I'd say great, but, today, I don't know. I did not send my second child to college. I refused to do it. He had to go on his own.

KP: Is there anything we forgot to ask you about?

NS: I don't know. ... This was an extremely important time in my life.

KP: College?

NS: Yes, extremely, yes, very critical, and I'm very thankful.

KP: How do you envision your life unfolding if you had not gone to college?

NS: I'd be some yo-yo somewhere, I think.

KP: Really?

NS: Yes.

KP: Do you think it was as crucial for all of your other classmates?

NS: No, no. It was a unique [case], a combination of a very young person, socially very young, chronologically, [and the wartime circumstances]. I don't think I reached an equilibrium until maybe I was in my late twenties. It took me that long to catch up.

KP: Where you felt you were in sync with your age group.

NS: Yes. It took me a long time to catch up, yes. I can be quite oblivious. A person will walk into a room, walk out; Charlotte will say, "Did you see the jacket?" "What jacket?" "What color?" "You know, I don't know." My middle son, we'd be in the room with someone, he'd walk in the house, pass through the room and [go] upstairs and, ten minutes later, [he would say], "Boy, that was some outfit that woman was wearing." ...

-----END OF TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE-----

KP: This concludes an interview with Nieson N. Shak on April 3, 1997, at Scotch Plains, New Jersey. We thank both of you very much, for the interview and for your book.

NS: Thank you. See, here, here's my BA degree, okay, and here's my BS degree, and the spelling's different. [laughter]

KP: People would think you were two different people.

NS: ... What I finally did is, I got a legal document from my father, I had never been known as Nieson, I'd always used Ned, a legal document that all these people, "Ned Shak," "Ned N. Shak," "Nieson Shak," "Nieson Ned Shak," Nieson spelled three different ways, are all the same person, and this is not how it's spelled on my birth certificate. So, that was why. [laughter] ... I went through this and, as I say, I think I'm the only one that was there for the four years.

KP: Yes.

NS: Yes. I can't see anyone that was [also at Rutgers for four years during World War II].

KP: No.

NS: Yes.

KP: Your uniqueness will probably stand.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Jonathan Liepmann 2/14/06

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 6/26/06

Reviewed by Neison Shak 11/26/06