

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH NANCY SQUIRE CHRISTENSEN

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Nancy Squire Christensen on November 7, 2008, Monroe Village, in Monroe Township, New Jersey, with Shaun Illingworth and ...

Ellie MacPherson: ... Ellie MacPherson ...

SI: Nancy, thank you very much for having us here. Also, thank you for all the work you did on your late husband S. Robert Christensen's transcript. To begin, could you tell us where and when you were born?

NC: I was born on October 27, 1922, in Newark, New Jersey, in St. Barnabas Hospital, which now is in Short Hills, and I lived in Newark until I was married. So, I'm a real Newarker. Both [my] parents were born in Newark, and I don't know how far back you want me to go at this point.

SI: First, I just want you to say your parents' names, for the record.

NC: All right. My father was Fred Custer Squire and my mother was Florence Smith Squire, and they met in the North Reformed Church in Newark, which is still there, by Washington Park. It's the gothic cathedral. In fact, my great-grandmother, or maybe great, great-grandmother, was a founding member of that church. So, that's where they met, and they were married there, and then, I'm jumping around here.

SI: No, go ahead.

NC: I was married by the minister of North Reformed Church in Wood Lawn. [Editor's Note: Wood Lawn Mansion was the home of Colonel James Neilson and was given, at his death, to the Associate Alumnae of New Jersey College for Women. It currently houses the Eagleton Institute of Politics. Mr. and Mrs. Christensen were married by the Rev. Howard G. Hageman, who later served as the President of the New Brunswick Theological Seminary from 1973 to 1985.] So, we go back on that side. I don't know that much about my father's background. I should have asked more, but he died when I was eleven, but I do know a lot about my mother's side.

SI: Please, go ahead.

NC: And so, we can go back to John Wright, who lived [on what] must have been the border of Newark and East Orange, and there's a quote. He was a Scotsman who came over and bought property in 1776, and he then joined Washington's Army. Prior to joining, however, he had married Betsy Peck [maiden name], who was the daughter of a judge who lived in the neighborhood. So, when John Wright went off to war, Betsy was alone and Hessians were coming. She ran off to the mountains, and, when she came back, ... they had a flock of geese, but I should say, prior to that, the Hessians had come and ravaged the farm. The flock of geese was gone, but they left the gander, and the gander had a note and a bag of coins tied around his neck, which said, "Grandfather Wright, we bid you goodnight,/ It's time for us to wander;/ We've taken your geese, at a penny apiece,/ And left the pay with the gander," and then, I should say, eventually, that property was given to East Orange, and it's known as the Wright-Soverel Playground, [Soverel Park in East Orange]. ... We went from Betsy and John Wright's daughter,

Betsy, who married Willam Soverel from the next farm, Sally Soverel, their daughter, married John Smith, again, I think from the same area, and they had seven children, one of whom was another John Smith, but he went by John Wilbur Smith, and he was my grandfather, and so, then, my mother was Florence Smith and she married Fred Squire, and [I am] Nancy Squire. [laughter] That's where I am at this point. So, that's my background, and then, I went to school, elementary school, and I graduated from Barringer High School.

SI: Which section of Newark did you grow up in?

NC: Forest Hill.

SI: Okay.

NC: It's the north [section]. It's up near Belleville, and that's where I grew up, and I had no thoughts of going to college, because ... I had a widowed mother and we didn't have much money. It never occurred to me. I had no thoughts, but my homeroom teacher, also my English teacher, said, "You must go. You are college material and you must go," and I said, "I can't." She said, "Yes, you can." She was a Douglass graduate. So, she insisted that I fill out all the forms and everything, which I did, and I was accepted, but they wanted me to commute. ... Of course, it is an easy commute from Newark to New Brunswick, but I wrote a very impassioned letter saying that I was being raised by a widowed mother and a maiden aunt, which was true, and I felt that I should live on campus to broaden my horizons. [laughter] ... I did try for and get a State Scholarship. I had a college scholarship, and then, they also gave me a job as a waitress, which was wonderful, because all you did was go to the dining room a half-hour early, eat with your good friends, and then, you served your best friends. We had tables of eight, and your best friends would come rushing to get your table, and all you did was bring in the food. They had no choice, except milk, tea or coffee. If we had, and we always did have, soup, I brought the soup in, we brought the entrée in, brought the dessert in, took it all out. ... Well, then, you have to set up for the next day, but it was such a great job. It didn't take that much time, you were working with friends, and it provided room and board. I felt very fortunate.

SI: Can we take a quick break?

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Let me put this back on. During the break, you were talking about how much more formal dinner seems to have been back then, for the meal service.

NC: Oh, definitely. My feeling is that, today, ... it's mostly cafeteria. I was sitting in the waitresses' dining room, and all the leaders were waitresses, the presidents of everything, I mean, yes, dining was formal dining.

SI: Going back to growing up in Forest Hills, what was the neighborhood like?

NC: Forest Hill.

SI: Forest Hill, no "S." [laughter]

NC: [laughter] I don't know what to say.

SI: That is okay.

NC: Well, it was very friendly and everybody knew everybody else. My husband and I went back, oh, maybe twelve years ago, and ... nothing looked familiar at all. I mean, the whole neighborhood had changed completely, and, of course, Barringer High School has changed completely, too.

SI: Was it mostly single-family homes or middle-class families?

NC: A lot of two-family homes, yes, middle-class, two-family homes, where I was, and it wasn't far from a bus, ... because we didn't have a car, oh, and that's something I might mention. In the summer, I worked in a bank, the National Newark & Essex Bank in Newark. I worked there just about every summer, which was kind of fun. You went back and you knew everybody, but the proximity of transportation helped me to do that.

SI: What would you do?

NC: What did I do?

SI: Yes, at the bank.

NC: Well, initially, I was in what they called the transit department, and that was the department where they received cancelled checks, and ... there was bookkeeping there, too. ... Of course, this was all manual stuff; they would have their accounts, as I recall. ... You know, one bookkeeper would be all "A" and one all "B," or one "A" and "B," and then, they would get the checks and they would put it on the card, then, we put the checks through a machine that recorded all the checks, and, well, photographed them, really. So, if someone called and wanted to know about a check that was previous[ly processed], it could be looked up. ... Then, the last summer, I was a teller in the savings department, and that was interesting, too, because you met people and you had to prove to the penny. We stayed late looking for a penny! They didn't pay overtime, you know, ... but that was kind of fun.

SI: Was this in the summers when you were at NJC [New Jersey College for Women] or in high school?

NC: Oh, NJC. I didn't work in high school.

SI: Okay.

NC: ... Didn't work in high school. So, what else can I tell you?

SI: How did the Great Depression affect Newark and the Forest Hill section?

NC: I don't know that I was that much aware of it at the time. I was a little bit beyond. You know, I wasn't deep in the Depression. I was younger when, I guess, people were out of work, and I didn't witness that at all. I know that we had to be careful, but I would always think of that as being [the child of] a widowed mother living on X amount of money, and not [due to the] Depression as such.

SI: Do you remember people, I guess you would call them hobos, coming through, asking for meals?

NC: Oh, no, no, absolutely not. I never saw one, anywhere, even down in Newark, where I was, let's say, primarily on Broad Street. So, it may be out from there, but definitely not the neighborhood, and I didn't even see any ...

SI: Not in the city itself?

NC: Yes. They must have been there, but I wasn't aware of it.

SI: There was nothing like a "Hooverville" in any part of town.

NC: No. ... I really don't remember anything like that. Later on, there were housing projects.

SI: In the 1960s?

NC: Yes, for poor people, well, maybe the '50s, too, even, but not when I was [living there]. I would have been [there in the 1930s]. I graduated from high school in January '40. So, we're talking about the '30s, when I was living there in Newark.

EM: Did you graduate early from high school?

NC: In those days, they didn't go by a whole year, they went by semesters, pretty much, and where I got all mixed up was, when I was promoted in elementary school, ... a couple of times. I went from 4A, I think it goes 4A to 4B. I went from 4A to 5B, or something like that. I skipped a couple of times. So, it gave me the half year and I graduated in January, but, then, I worked in the bank from January [to September]. That's where I got my first job, and one thing I did do, and I've been forever thankful, while I was waiting to get a job, I went to vocational school and took a secretarial course. The only thing I gleaned from that was typing, but, because I went there, I've been able to type. Otherwise, with your college prep, I don't know what [you could do]; today, I think you can elect it, I'm not sure, but we couldn't. You either took a general course or you took college prep and I was in college prep. So, I went to that until I got the job and, as I was leaving, they called me in and ... they said, "You know, you really should finish this," and then, they said, "Oh, you're going to college? Great, good-bye." [laughter] They were so thrilled, that, you know, they wanted to be sure I wasn't just dropping out without having a full secretarial background, but the first job was in the National Newark & Essex Bank, starting in, maybe, the 1st of March, something like that, and then, I worked right up until September, and then, went back every summer. ...

SI: Was that a secretarial school or was it a WPA [Works Progress Administration] school?

NC: No, just a plain, old vocational school.

SI: Okay.

NC: What do you liken it to today? They have them today.

SI: Just like a business school.

NC: But, it also had other courses. I don't know for sure, but I have the feeling it could have had auto mechanics, or beauty parlor, or something like that, and I don't know just where [it was located]. The school was near Barringer. That's about all I remember.

SI: As a young woman in the 1930s, were you involved in many activities, like community or church activities?

NC: Not so much. I started Girl Scouts, but I didn't stay too long, and I wasn't too active in the church, because the church was down in the center of Newark. ... A lot of my friends went to a church [nearby], the Forest Hill Presbyterian Church, but I still went down to the Dutch Reformed church. So, I wasn't active in the community. I was active in high school, in different clubs, and, for half a year, I was vice-president of the class. [laughter] I think that was, ... maybe the first half of the senior year; I don't know, oh, and a funny thing, in those days, we voted for, ... well, of course, the best-looking, which my dear friend got, but, then, they voted for the one with the prettiest hair and the prettiest eyes, and all of that. I had the prettiest hair. [laughter] Would you believe that? Oh, dear, but we had a French club and a Latin club, all that kind of thing, and went to football games in high school, and the big [thing] of interest [was], Barringer-East Orange is the oldest high school football rivalry in the United States. So, then, I went to Douglass, which is Rutgers, and we have Rutgers and Princeton as the oldest college football rivalry. I wonder how many people could do that. [laughter] So, where are we now? Am I in college yet?

SI: In high school, what were your favorite subjects? What interested you academically?

NC: Probably English. Well, I seemed to like everything. ... I guess I never was thrilled with math, now that I think back in high school, because I really wasn't thrilled with it at Douglass. [laughter] I'm more liberal arts, rather than science.

SI: We have interviewed a number of Barringer alumni. They all talk about how wonderful the faculty was.

NC: Oh, yes, we had a great faculty. They were excellent.

SI: Do any of the teachers stand out? You talked about this Douglass alumna who helped you choose to go to college.

NC: Yes. She has since died. Well, I guess everybody's died, all the teachers that I had, but they were all very good.

SI: Do any of them stand out?

NC: Well, this particular one. ...

SI: Do you remember her name?

NC: Oh, sure. Her name was Etta Burke. Her maiden name was McHale, Etta McHale Burke, and she was the Class of '29.

SI: Wow.

NC: So, I owe her a lot, or I wouldn't have been in Douglass at all. I had a French teacher who was interesting, ... a woman, and she went to Paris every summer, and we had a very dour Latin teacher. [laughter] ... We had sororities.

EM: In high school?

NC: Well, there were only two. It wasn't a big thing. There were two sororities, and it was pretty much people from Forest Hill or from Roseville. What was it? Tau Beta Phi was one of them, and they had dances and we did things. I just thought of something very exciting that was [during] my high school time. Did you ever hear of Frank Dailey's Meadowbrook?

SI: Yes.

NC: ... It was in Cedar Grove, on Route 23, and he had all the Big Bands, and we had a group of maybe eight, four couples, but it was still a group. I mean, you went with this guy, but it was the group, and we went ... up there every time there was a new band. ... There was no cover charge, but there was a minimum of two-fifty, and that was a lot, and a Coke was a dollar and a quarter. So, we would make two Cokes last all night, [laughter] and, ... oh, we saw Frank Sinatra, Jimmy Dorsey, Tommy Dorsey, Larry Clinton, Benny Goodman; who else should I mention? Offhand, I can't think, but one exciting moment was when Bob Eberly, who sang with Jimmy Dorsey and was famous for *My Prayer*, dedicated that song "to Nancy," because it was my birthday and somebody sneaked up and told him. In fact, I have his picture with them, and me, Helen O'Connell, who sang with him, but that was fun. You know, we would go and dance all night. It was great.

SI: Would you go anywhere else to see the Big Bands, like into New York?

NC: We saw everybody there in Cedar Grove. Graduation night, we went to, I think it was the Hotel Edison, and Mal Hallett was playing that night, but we really didn't go into New York, because it was right up there in Cedar Grove. I don't even know if it was a half-hour, but they were very happy memories, and I don't think we saw Glenn Miller. Glenn Miller didn't come

around. [laughter] ... Consequently, I love all that music and it brings back all these memories. I'm glad I thought of that.

SI: After your father passed away, did your mother have to go back to work?

NC: No. She didn't go to work.

SI: Did you have to take any part-time jobs or anything to help out?

NC: No, no. We managed on what she had.

SI: Do you have any questions before we talk about NJC?

EM: Did you go to the movies often? Was that a thing that you did regularly?

NC: Oh, that's an interesting question. I wouldn't say regularly, but there was a period, I'm trying to think, ... that could have been sixth or seventh, eighth grade, when I don't remember going to movies regularly, except, at that point, it was ten cents, and we would see really good movies, but, then, there would be a serial that came on every week, like *Buck Rogers*. A friend and I used to go. One day, we went down to, there was a theater in Newark called the Little Theater, to see *Wuthering Heights* [a 1939 film], and we cried and cried, and that reminds me of another movie that I went to see, with a date, and we took the bus down to the movie and it was *Marie Antoinette* [a 1938 film]. ... I cried so hard that my date didn't want to bring me home on the bus and we went home in a taxi. [laughter] I still shed tears at movies, and reading books, and my daughter does the same thing, [laughter] but I think June, who was my best friend, and I didn't go every week, but we might have gone twice a month in that period.

EM: Did you ever go to any live theater?

NC: Some. Now, what? I can't even remember what it was. A couple of them, Eva Le Gallienne, [a Broadway actress], who was famous and I saw her, it was a big deal, but I have no idea what I saw. ... I also remember seeing something with Ed Wynn, [a famous comedian], and what he would say was, "Going into th-th-the woods," or something. He kept lisping, and I just remember him and lisping. It seems to me we saw something else. ... Oh, well, then, yes, this is still high school, the date who took me to the movies ... would take me, we went together for about five years, and we would go into New York every anniversary and we would go to the theater. That's when I really went to the theater, and then, we'd go dancing at the Waldorf, and, I mean, it was pretty nice.

EM: Five years.

NC: Yes, but, yes, three in high school, but, again, we were more in a group, but I did that. It was still in college, but I was in college and he was back in Newark. ...

SI: Were there fraternities as well as sororities at the high school?



NC: No.

SI: Just sororities, okay.

NC: Unless there was a secret one that I didn't know about.

SI: I was wondering if, say, one sorority only went out with guys from one group.

NC: Oh, no, nothing like that, but, then, I'm recalling something else, that I haven't thought of in ages. This young man was a cheerleader for Barringer; ... they only had male cheerleaders.

EM: Male cheerleaders?

NC: And so, he had a little in, and, therefore, my friend and I, at the Thanksgiving East Orange-Barringer game, marched in carrying the banner, [laughter] and so, that was fun, but that was just a one time thing.

SI: Again, from the other people we have interviewed who went to Barringer, I have heard it was a very diverse place, with people from a larger area of Newark than just Forest Hill.

NC: Oh, yes.

SI: There were different groups of people, recent immigrants, different religions. How did being exposed to more people affect you? Did all the groups get along well?

NC: Yes, I would say so. ... A lot of people went to Central High School, but, yet, maybe that was [due to the curriculum]; I'm not sure what they offered, but Barringer was general and college prep. Now, they took people from the Roseville section, but you have to remember that you had Westside and Weequahic and Southside and Eastside High School. We had a fair number of Italians, and I think that's true today, but I had a real good buddy who sat behind me, and his name was Charles Thomas, he was black. I mean, it was just fine. Everybody got along well.

SI: During the late 1930s, a lot was happening overseas, with Hitler taking over all these countries in Europe and the Japanese expanding in Asia. Was that talked about in school? Were you aware of it? Did you follow the news coming out of Europe or Asia?

NC: I don't seem to remember discussing that too much. We must have, however. We were aware of it, but that's about it, I think.

SI: Do you remember anybody talking about, particularly after the war started in 1939, in Europe, whether America should get more involved or that America should stay out of the war?

NC: Well, now, you're getting close to when I entered NJC, yes. So, it wasn't that much in high school. I'm sure we discussed it in history class, but it wasn't, you know, a big thing.

SI: Do you remember if there were any German-American *Bund* [an American pro-Nazi organization] activities in the Newark area?

NC: No. Well, I wasn't aware of [any], probably were, but I guess I led a sheltered life. [laughter]

SI: It sounds like you were very involved with your academics, the clubs and a really rich social world at Barringer High School.

NC: A rich world?

SI: Rich social world; not money rich.

NC: Okay, yes, let's determine that. [laughter]

SI: We talked a little bit about how you came to NJC and why you applied to NJC. Did you have to take a test to get into NJC? Did you visit the campus before you came to NJC?

NC: Oh, I'm sure, ... yes, I did visit it. I don't remember about the test. The test that I do remember is what you'd take for a State Scholarship. ... It seems to me they just used your high school records. It's not like the Regents in New York City. I don't remember that. I applied to Middlebury, of all places. I don't know why. I was crazy, because I couldn't afford to go, [laughter] and I really went to Douglass because I could afford it, with what they were willing to give me, yes.

EM: What was the test for the State Scholarship like? Was it essays?

NC: It was everything. I mean, oh, golly, you're asking me to go back so many years. I really can't remember. I just know it was English, it was math, it was stuff like, you know, "If the train is going so many miles an hour," all that sort of thing. I guess there was some French. What I seem to remember a little more of is the Graduate Record Exams that we took, ... [as] seniors at Douglass. So, I can't tell you too much about that test, but I just know we [took it]. I guess it was given at Barringer, because I had a friend who went to another school and she too took the test there, ... but they just handed out these papers and you did it, and it took all morning, as I recall.

SI: Was there a lot of pressure? I know that there was a pretty limited number of State Scholarships.

NC: Again, I don't know. I took the test and I got one. [laughter] So, that's all I know.

SI: What do you remember about your first few days on campus, coming in as a freshman?

NC: Well, what I remember is maybe the week before, when the waitresses had to go down to Cooper Hall, and they showed us how to carry a tray and how to set the table and how to get the food in the kitchen, and everybody's saying, "I can't do this. There's no way I can do this. I can't

carry this tray," [laughter] you know, that sort of thing. It was kind of panic, but we practiced, ... but that happened the week before, that we went down, or I went down. I had a good friend who was from Massachusetts, maybe she came down early to do that and stayed. I don't remember that, and I had met my roommate, who was from Irvington. We had met ahead of time to go to Bamberger's, which is [now] Macy's, of course, and pick out drapes and rugs and bedspreads. So, I had met her, and then, I lived on Gibbons, the first year, and those are little houses. ... There are four bedrooms on the second floor and two, which is a suite, really, on the third, and then, there's one room on the first floor, and so, you really become a family. You had a house chairman, who lived on the third floor, in the suite, and it was cold, walking from Gibbons, across that suspension bridge, to be at breakfast, on a winter morning, and be there at seven. It was quite a walk to Gibbons, but that was good.

SI: Did you have to wait on tables every day?

NC: Oh, absolutely, every day. We must have, because you had to get a sub, ... on a Saturday, if I was going to a football game and going to a fraternity party afterwards, I had to have a sub. ... There was a whole list of people you could ask to sub, and I forget what we paid them, a dollar and a quarter, something like that, and then, ... before a big dance at Rutgers, they would put up the waitress schedule and you would try to get there real early in the morning to get your name on the list, because only a certain number could get that time off, and then, you would have the time off. Otherwise, you had to pay for a sub.

SI: Wow. I did not know about the subs.

NC: Yes.

SI: It was an approved list of girls who could sub for you.

NC: Well, girls; there was always a list for a lot of things, people who needed self-help or ... who had applied [for work], it would be babysitting, in the community even, anyone who could sign up and say she was willing to baby-sit, and then, they would call you. Offhand, I can't think what the other things are, but maybe professors who needed help to do something.

SI: Was there any kind of freshman initiation?

NC: We had to wear, let's see, what did we have? We had green hats that had a big, green feather, and then, we had to wear a big sign with our name, and I have no idea where those pictures are, you know, my picture. They took a lot of them for the *Newark Evening News*. I don't think they moved with me. That's the sad part of moving here, when you downsize; you just can't keep all that.

SI: Okay.

NC: Maybe. I kept a big scrapbook, and I think I couldn't bear to throw it away and my daughter said she'd keep it, but it starts with, in the scrapbook, the letter of accepting me and announcing the scholarships, and then, the pictures of the freshmen. ... Oh, we were hobos.

That's what we were. Did we carry a stick? I think we had to carry a stick with a green handkerchief tied on the end, and you couldn't walk up Sacred Path, and you don't know what Sacred Path is ...

EM: I do not.

NC: ... Because you're Rutgers, but there's a path from Nichol Avenue to the administrative building, that goes this way, and it goes from, there's a big driveway, you could say, because they can drive trucks and everything up to the chapel, but, then, there's this walk, from the sidewalk close by, up to the administrative building. ... It is a shortcut, indeed, and a freshman could not walk up that walk, and then, at the end of the year, they had a Sacred Path ceremony, and then, everybody, oh, we had class dresses. We had a class dress, that you got your sophomore year, and it was either gray and maroon or yellow or gold and blue, and our class was the gold dress with a blue belt and it had your initials in blue. ... So, you got your dress and you wore your dress, and that was your first trip, a big "do," [laughter] to walk up the Sacred Path, and then, there was [the] Sacred Path ceremony, and, of course, the whole freshman year, you could not wear red. So, guess what? When you went home on vacation, that's what you wore. [laughter]

EM: Did you have a big sister?

NC: Yes, I did. I had a big sister, and she wore the alternating gear, she wore a blue dress with a gold belt, yellow gold-ish, ... belt. Yes, I'm trying to think; we didn't do an awful lot together, because I was busy, I mean. Instead of going with her to the tea, I had to be there and stand in the receiving line as president of the freshman class, I mean, that kind of thing. She was very nice, she was very helpful, but we didn't spend an awful lot of time together. I seemed to be jumping in head first. [laughter]

SI: Freshman year was one of the years you were president of your class, right?

NC: Yes.

SI: You told us this off the tape, but I was wondering if you could tell us again about the process of getting elected.

NC: Yes, I said I didn't know how they chose the names of candidates. It seemed to have come, possibly, from the dean's office, but there were maybe ten girls and they were the candidates, and then, the class met and we all had to speak, and then, they voted at some time, and that's how the election was held.

SI: Do you remember what you spoke about? [laughter]

NC: I'm sure I don't know. I guess I just said that I was very happy there and I would be very pleased to be their leader, and something like that, you know, the normal stuff that you would say.

SI: What kinds of activities would you do as the president of the class?

NC: Represent the class, [laughter] doing, as I said, at a tea, at a dance. My date and I would have to be in the receiving line with maybe the advisor of the class, sometimes the dean, or whatever. ... Frankly, I was thinking about it before you came, I really don't know all the [obligations]. Well, we had different activities, and then, I would ask someone to be the chair, and oversee, well, they would run it, but I can't be specific at this point, a long time ago. [laughter]

SI: There were not a lot of meetings where you were trying to get policies enacted.

NC: Yes, some like that. You know, you had the [class] representative. Junior year, I was the secretary of the government association. I'm thinking of input, that was input, but I'm sure we had someone from our class who served on the government board, you know, representing classes.

SI: What about the actual classes at NJC? Did you know what you wanted to study right away or did you take some time to find what you were interested in?

NC: It took me a long time, and then, I didn't really know. [laughter] So, when I graduated, I was well-educated, but not trained for anything specific. I knew I didn't want to be a teacher, so, I had not taken education courses, and so, I had everything. Yes, I had to do certain requirements, of course, the first two years. You have to have two years of a language and you have to have two years of math and creative writing. What were all those? well, anyway, English, definitely, and history, I guess we had history freshman year, too, possibly music appreciation, and I remember art appreciation junior year, but I took psych. I was an English major with a psychology minor, but I took the minimum, let's say, of psychology, and I had philosophy, political science, everything you can think of, I took, economics, and, of course, art.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Who was the dean? Which people did you have the most contact with in the administration?

NC: Well, Dean [Margaret] Corwin was the dean of the college, and then, we had Dean Leah Boddie, who was, I guess, the Dean of Activities. They were the two, and I met with them quite a bit. Because of my position, I would spend time with them, discussing whatever was going on, and Dean Corwin was a very sweet lady and Dean Boddie had a [Mrs. Christensen imitates] "Southern accent," [laughter] like that, and I remember, I mentioned my first roommate from Irvington. One year, she worked in the bank with me. So, the following year, that must have been after our freshman year, and sophomore year, we lived on Jameson. ... A lot of the girls at the bank wanted to come visit us, and, in Jameson C, there was a solarium. ... We had to get permission to use it, and we were just going to have maybe soda, cookies or something, ... but we had to get permission, and Dean Boddie said, "You must have a formal tea. These people are coming to see Douglass and you must treat them like, you know, ladies," and so, we had to have this big "do," just for these gals coming down from the ... bank.

SI: No, that is good. [laughter] That is one thing we want to know about, the society of college life at that time. I have heard about Dean Boddie and how she would be the enforcer of, say, social graces, I guess.

NC: Well, all right, this is it, this is it. [laughter]

SI: Were there other incidents that you remember with Dean Boddie?

NC: I didn't get involved, you know, in anything else, I guess, like that.

SI: This was the era when the administration acted in place of your parents. They exercised a lot more control over the students, much more so than today, certainly.

NC: Oh, yes. Well, you have to remember, too, I think part of it is, it was not to just educate you with academics, but with social graces. I think there was a lot of that, but there were some who weren't happy with it, but ... it was good. You're going to be a college graduate. You should be a lady. You should know how to be a lady.

SI: Would they have classes or lectures on etiquette?

NC: I don't really recall that, don't remember. No, you just knew, when you went to the teas, you wore a hat, you wore gloves. It was expected, and you did it.

EM: How much contact did you have with the boys over at Rutgers College?

NC: Well, the first thing we had was a freshman reception, and that was quite an experience, because they had busses and they loaded us on busses and took us over to the gym, and then, you went in. ... I guess you stood around until somebody came and asked you to dance, [laughter] but the one thing [was], I met somebody and he walked me home after this dance, and we walked all the way from the gym all the way to Gibbons. There were always blind dates, and, in the beginning, the men were there when I was there, and there were always blind dates. ... You were either one or you were trying to get one for your date, [who] had a friend who needed a date, [that] kind of thing. [laughter] ... Then, I met my husband on a blind date, and it was [through] a classmate of mine who was pinned to a fraternity brother of his, Phi Gamma Delta, and they called him "Big Chris," [S. Robert Christensen, her husband]. So, they said, "You have to meet Big Chris." So, we did, and what did we do? We went to the CI, the College Inn.

SI: Okay.

NC: Where is that? ... Is that, on what street? Well, it's near the Douglass Campus, and people would go there and they had a jukebox and danced and drank Coke, and he was on the crew and it wasn't long before he appeared with these great, big holes in his hands, you know, before you got calluses from the oars, but there was still this high school [boyfriend], and what happened? It was a date that summer that I broke with Chris to go to a high school thing, and so, that was the end. He went his way, I went mine.

SI: What year were you in when you first met your husband?

NC: I was a freshman, he was a junior. So, let's see, well, we dated other people along the way, but, then, my sophomore year was Pearl Harbor, and it was a Sunday and I was up in my room. I believe I was working on a paper and I finished. So, I went down to the common room, it was called calumet, I don't know if it is today, and everybody, you know, was talking about it. I didn't hear about it until I got down there, and so, it was really upsetting. Then, all of a sudden, there weren't many men around. A lot of men left, and they still got their degree, if they were seniors and left. I, of course, know of one who left in December, and he got his degree that June in absentia. So, then, there weren't as many blind dates after that. We played a lot of bridge and went to the movies. One classmate's father was a colonel at Camp Kilmer and he would arrange for; oh, we didn't go by bus, I don't know. He'd have some of us over there to dances, or something like that, and then, all of a sudden, there'd be excitement, because somebody's boyfriend was coming home on leave, and then, I have to say that my roommate was pinned and engaged, and ... he was going to be sent overseas. He was Rutgers, and they decided to get married and it was going to be [in] Tennessee. Whatever's out there, I don't know, because he was in the Navy, and I was to be the maid of honor. ... I got my dress, she had her dress, we were all set to go, and he was shipped out, before the wedding, but it's just another thing in life, that you learn that, sometimes, what seems like a tragedy in the beginning is often for the best. ... In this case, I felt it was, because she met someone else and has been married to him for sixty-five years, and I felt that he was the one for her. So, it was a tragedy, but, in a way, it was perhaps for the best. Who's up there watching over us? ...

SI: If you got married, you were not allowed to live on campus.

NC: Absolutely right. You could not live on campus. So, we had a couple of classmates who did get married and lived off campus.

SI: Did anybody get married in secret or not tell the administration?

NC: Probably, but I don't know; I mean, not the ones I knew. I didn't know anybody who did that. The ones I knew were married, and, let's see, one girl, I think she grew up in Highland Park, and so, she just stayed there, you know, with her parents and continued [at NJC]. Another one, I don't remember her name; ... I wrote down a couple of things one day. I was trying to think of [them for] this interview. We went over, every Monday night, to J&J [Johnson and Johnson], and wrapped bandages. ... At Christmas, they gave us a box of chocolates, [laughter] which was rather interesting, but, every once in awhile, something would happen. I was pinned to somebody else, who went overseas. ... My best friend from high school came down on a Sunday, maybe a weekend, but, anyway, on Sunday, we went out to dinner and we came back, he was standing on the porch, and that sort of thing was happening to people, where someone would appear out of nowhere, and the word was, and particularly from him, at that point, "Don't tell anybody." Well, they're going to know he's at Camp Kilmer, but, "Don't tell anybody what I am, what infantry, what division, what everything. ... A lot of people hang around, trying to get that information from college students," but, then, he went over. He was a first lieutenant, and he was killed in the Battle of the Bulge. There were a lot of people who appeared out of nowhere, you know, and, "Don't tell anybody, don't tell anybody; John's here."

SI: That was John Huntley; was that his name? Your husband mentioned him in his interview. [Editor's Note: First Lieutenant John R. Huntley, RC '42, served with the 137th Infantry Regiment, 35th Infantry Division, and was killed on July 12, 1944, during the liberation of France.]

NC: Oh, all right, yes. ... They were good buddies. They were both Phi Gams.

SI: Fraternity brothers?

NC: Yes, and then, it was when John was killed that Chris wrote to me, and then, I wrote to him, but he had been engaged, you know that because that was in his [interview], and he was up at Harvard, in the Business School, he ... became a disbursing officer. ... He became engaged to somebody up there; all the naval officers were invited to debutante balls and things, and they got engaged, but, then, when he got out on a battleship in the middle of the [Pacific], on the [USS] *Mississippi* [(BB-41)], in the middle of the Pacific, he began to think, and I guess she did, and they realized it wasn't the real thing. ... So, then, he started to write, and then, we wrote every day, and then, you know for sure, absolutely, this is the one, because you don't just go to the movies or do something else. You write your inner feelings and how you feel about everything and what you hope to do with your life, and, when he comes back, you know, this is the one.

SI: It was a real courtship through correspondence.

NC: Oh, absolutely, and you know; no, I won't say that, because he did it in his.

SI: You can say it.

NC: Well, I was just going to say that, as an officer, he had to read letters that the men were writing, and, by far, it was the men in the lower positions who wrote the best letters home. They really wrote good love letters to their wives and sweethearts, and some of the others, they just didn't write anything, just a waste, really.

SI: Among the women you knew at NJC, was there a lot of discussion over whether to wait until somebody came back from the war to get married, or to make sure they did get married before they went overseas? Was that ever discussed?

NC: I'm sure, I know it was, but I didn't get involved. Of course, my roommate, you know about [her case], but I'm thinking about some of the others. It seemed to be decided, somehow. They knew they would wait, but, then, like my roommate, it was rush and get married before they go, but I think most of my friends were waiting.

SI: Pearl Harbor happened in your sophomore year. Did you notice any changes on campus right away, like cutting back on things or rationing being introduced?

NC: We did have to bring our ration books to college, because you had a ration book then. We had to bring that and it had to be submitted to the dining room, but I don't recall any cutbacks,



say, in food or anything else. Life seemed to go on, except there weren't any men around.  
[laughter]

SI: I know the ASTP came to Rutgers and there were millions of men coming through Camp Kilmer. Were they a part of the scene at all?

NC: Well, they were; like I mentioned, we went over to some dances over there, but we ... always had a big Christmas dance. It was just a beautiful dance. ... Let's see, we had some girl in our house who had nobody, nobody, and we said, "She has to go." ... So, somehow, we worked it out, maybe through this colonel, we got her a date from Camp Kilmer, and it turned out so well. They had a really [great time]. He was thrilled, just thrilled to go, and, of course, she was, because she thought she would have to sit home, but people managed to get dates for that dance and I bet a lot of them came from Kilmer. Other than that, I mean, ... they weren't wandering around on the campus, for sure, and you wouldn't know an individual, ... so, you'd think they're somebody's man.

SI: Was there any negative view towards having all these young GIs around? Were you warned to be careful?

NC: I don't specifically remember, but I'm sure we must have been told to be careful when you walk in New Brunswick, but there never seemed to be any question or concern for the Douglass, NJC, Campus.

EM: What was downtown New Brunswick like during that time?

NC: Well, there was the Hotel Robert ...

SI: Treat?

NC: No, that's in Newark; well, anyway.

SI: Robert Williams?

NC: No. ... Isn't that awful? I can't think of it, but that was a very nice hotel, [the Roger Smith Hotel]. It was a place where you would go to dinner if you had a real nice date. ... I remember that about eight of us seniors went down there for dinner and we were having dinner when we heard about June 6th, the invasion, [the D-Day landings in Normandy, France, 1944]. The movie [theater] was nice. Halfway downtown, ... there was a deli. People would go down there. It wasn't unusual to walk from Douglass all the way over to Rutgers and back. [With the rationing of] gas, there weren't that many [cars] anyway. ... We went, as I recall, but not what you have today, those big hotels, and then, oh, I even got lost at reunion when they were building the Mason Gross Arts Center. I mean, the center of town was all torn up and one-way streets. [laughter] It's to the point where I wasn't sure where [I was]. I knew where I was really, but I couldn't take my route because of that, and I wonder now how much difference that makes in town.

SI: I think most people use the bus system.

NC: Oh, yes.

SI: Even in the time I have been there, Rutgers has just changed constantly. Was there much interaction with the College of Agriculture men, because they were physically a lot closer to NJC?

NC: Yes. Well, there's one girl here, Monroe Village, "girl," Douglass 1943 [graduate], and Moncrief is her name, Ruth Moncrief.

SI: Ruth Moncrief, yes.

NC: Yes. She participated in an oral history. Well, she married somebody from the Ag School. So, there was some interaction, ... you're talking dating, but I also had a friend who sat at my table in the dining room who was an ag major and she went over [there] to classes and she was the only girl. ... One morning, she came in, looking worn out, and she had sat up all night, watching the birth of a cow. ... She was eventually [employed by] the Agricultural Extension Service. There's one in every county, and she was up in Bergen. ... There were people dating, I know. I never dated anybody from there. ... I think I had friends come down, maybe when I was a freshman, and we walked over there to look at the cows. It was something to do, and the other thing was, we used to get milk from there and, in the spring, the milk at Douglass tasted like onions, because the cows were out and they were eating onions, [laughter] but that's my association with the Ag School.

SI: Were there any kind of Civil Defense activities? Did you have to have a blackout?

NC: ... I really don't remember that. A whole bunch of us went down to a house at Mantoloking. Talk about the sorority, it was that sorority, and they rented a big house on the beach. ... Every shade had to be down and there were guards walking up and down the beach, sailors with guns, rifles, almost like the Arlington Cemetery, walking up and down the beach. I remember that, but I don't remember pulling shades down or being really careful on campus.

SI: Did they have drills at Douglass?

NC: You know what? You should have interviewed me years ago, when I remembered all this. [laughter] Honestly, I don't think we had any. I don't know. I don't remember doing anything at this point.

EM: Were you there when Eleanor Roosevelt was on campus?

NC: Let me think. Eleanor Roosevelt, to me, is more remembered for Cranford, New Jersey, where she came to speak at our high school. ... My neighbor was the one who got her and we met her at the bus and took her to the high school. Now, as far as Rutgers, I don't remember if I was there when she was there. I don't remember.

SI: She came in by bus to Cranford?

NC: From New York. Yes, she did, and that would have been back in about 19--; who was in high school, which child? It would have been back in maybe '63, '4, '5, in there.

SI: Not when you were in ...

NC: I was on the PTA board. Oh, you thought it was...

SI: I thought it was when you were in high school.

NC: Oh, no, no. ... I was on the PTA board and she was the speaker for the PTA meeting. ... Well, it was more than that, of course. It was for the whole high school and Cranford community, but the PTA was responsible for bringing her.

SI: Would they have any Big Bands come to either campus?

NC: Not to Douglass. I don't remember who was at Rutgers. It wasn't anybody that I really remember outstanding. They were good bands, but I don't think it was Jimmy Dorsey or Tommy Dorsey, yes. [laughter]

SI: I know, also, there was a section of New Brunswick, down where the housing projects are now, down by the river, where there were a lot of jazz clubs and Big Bands that played there. Did you ever go down there?

NC: I didn't think there was anything down there. The Phi Gam house was right; whatever this street is.

SI: George?

NC: Oh, I don't think they're on George Street, are they? Were they? I have to say "were." Anyway, they were up on the hill, and they looked down to nothing but grass and everything, all the way down to the river. That means those big dorms there, Frelinghuysen or whatever, weren't there, because they could look down. ... Then, the University took over their house. Well, actually, it burned during the war. They leased it to somebody else and they had a fire there, and so, then, the University took over the property and the Phi Gams moved to a street running parallel, but in back. Where's the Beta House?

SI: Beta Theta Pi? It was either on Mine Street or Union.

NC: That sounds more familiar.

EM: Union is where the fraternities are now.

NC: Yes. That's where, I guess, they went. ... I certainly never went down there, New Brunswick. I don't remember anything about it.

SI: Did the military come on campus at all to recruit among the women at Douglass?

NC: Not that I was aware of. Here, I say definitely no; I shouldn't, because maybe they did.

SI: No, I am just asking if you remembered that.

NC: No, I don't.

SI: You graduated in 1944.

NC: Yes.

SI: You eventually went to work in IBM. Was that set up as you graduated or did you have to look for a job?

NC: IBM came to college. A lot of people came to college, and IBM came and they were looking for people like me; thank goodness. They wanted people ... who had a broad background, and so, I was hired by them. ... This was quite an experience, because we were sent to Binghamton, New York, for training and we stayed on the property of the Binghamton Country Club, and we had a "tent city." There were ninety-two and it was a wooden platform and the sides were screened, and then, there was canvas over the top, but I had a maple bed and a maple chest and a maple desk. I mean, this, it's not a [pup tent]; you stand up, it's a room, plenty of room, but there were all these tents, and then, we had our breakfast and dinner at the country club, and we could use, say, on weekends, ... their pool or tennis courts. ... I guess it was ninety-two from the US, but, then, there were maybe ten more from France and Canada that I remember, specifically. ... Every day, we went, by bus, into Endicott, to the plant, and that's where our classes were held, and the plant was very modern and it was air-conditioned. Across the street was a red brick building, with windows wide open. It's hot, in [the] summer, windows wide open. We're in the air-conditioning, those were people hanging out the windows. It was the Johnson Shoe factory. ... It was just two different eras, side-by-side, but we were up there for eight weeks and it was a fun time.

SI: What were they training you in?

NC: Well, we were being trained on the application of IBM machines, and it was the punched card method of accounting. You look like you don't know what I'm talking about now. [laughter] There was a card that big, and I don't [know exactly], seven inches, that was maybe three-and-a-half inches high, something like that, and there was a keypunch machine and the keypunch operator would receive material, let's say, shipping gallons of this, how many gallons of what to where, and you'd keypunch this in. ... Then, the cards could be sorted, and then, ... they would eventually be put into an accounting machine that would run big reports. We were learning accounts receivable, accounts payable, well, all kinds of applications. However, when you came back to the job, they expected you to know how to run the machines. Each [of us], we were called systems service reps, was assigned to a salesman. ... I had the Newark territory and we had the Ironbound Section, which they called Down Neck then. [Editor's Note: Newark's

Ironbound Section used to be called Down Neck because of the way the Passaic River formed a neck-like land form.] I don't think they do today, and we had some ... other areas of Newark and a couple of places in Bloomfield; I don't know why we had Bloomfield. He [the salesman] had the big companies and it was my job to go to take care of the little ones, and, specifically, in the Ironbound Section, ... one day, it might have been a small business, and then, all of a sudden, it was a big one. Well, if it was small, I would go in and ask to talk to the president, and I always got in, because women didn't do that at the time. ... We wore gloves and we wore hats and we had calling cards, and you were immediately accepted. ... Then, I should say that IBM had a service system. So, if you were a small company and you obviously couldn't afford the great, big accounting machine or a sorter, you could do the first part, that is punching the cards, and then, they could be sent to the IBM Service Bureau and they would do your reports. So, in a small business, that's what I would be selling. Then, if it's a big business, I'd ask for the office manager, but, one day, my salesman said, "The Bloomfield Bank is having trouble with their printing machine, their accounting machine. Would you please go up and see what's wrong?" I took the bus up Springfield Avenue with a book, a booklet, trying to see what could go wrong, and praying that I could do this thing, because ... I had no training. I didn't know how a big machine like that [worked], with different buttons and things to push, you know, any little button; it's like the computer. It worked out all right. Somehow, I found the right switch, but that was scary. ... Then, on the other hand, I had Vita-Var Paints, Conmar Zippers, as my accounts, and then, the Presbyterian Hospital, where I set up their accounting [system], at that point in time. ... I designed the card so that they could get all the information they wanted, and then, I was the specialist on the, I want to say whiskey, the liquor industry, I guess, on Frelinghuysen Avenue. There was Joseph Rheingold and Galsworthy and, I don't know, a whole bunch of them, and Dick would say, "Okay, Nancy, you're the liquor person, go down there." ... Again, you see, they ... would punch a card and they'd have it in a big tub and it would go in when the inventory came in, and then, ... when it was sold, it would be sorted out, and it would be used for reports. It was very interesting, but it was lonely, a little lonely, except when I did Conmar and Vita-Var. Then, I'd be working with people, but, when you're just out there on the road, going in and out and visiting people, it's nice, I mean, you don't have any big pressure, really. ... Well, we did have pressure, though, because there was one time I was asked to go call on somebody who was way out in nowhere, ... in Newark, East Newark, somewhere. ... I took a bus and, all of a sudden, the driver said, "This is the end of the line," and there was a building about a mile over there and I said, "Sorry, I'm going to ride back. I'm not going over there." ... My manager was a little upset, because I spent about an hour-and-a-half going nowhere. [laughter] Those are the things you remember, but it was fun, it was interesting, meeting different people, and so on. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: You started working for IBM in 1944 and worked for them for about two years.

NC: Yes, because I was married in 1946, [IBM] school that Summer of '44, and then, worked in Newark. ... Well, Chris came home in October and that was very exciting, because he was up at Samson Naval Base when he came back from the Pacific, and then, I went up to meet him. ... That was, as my granddaughter said, "Just like the movies, Grandma," because I went up by train and got off at Geneva, New York, which was where the Samson Naval Base is, and down a ways

on the train platform was this tall, handsome naval officer, and I ran and he ran. You know, it was wonderful, everything you dream about. ...

SI: How long had it been since you last saw him?

NC: Oh, well, ages, because it was the end of my freshman year. Yes, we're talking a long time.

SI: You never saw him when he was on leave.

NC: No. He was up at Harvard and I wasn't in the picture; he wasn't in mine, either. So, he was looking for a job, and then, he started with New Jersey Bell, as you know. ... Then, I had to leave IBM and we went up to Englewood, where he had his first job as the manager of the business office, but he didn't want me to work. That was an era where your wife didn't work. If she did, it looked like you couldn't support her, almost that. First of all, we couldn't find housing and we only had a place to live because of the Red Cross, and they found us two rooms. Let's see, it was a two-family house, and so, we had two rooms on the third floor and it was a bedroom and a living room. We had to share the kitchen and share the bathroom, on the second floor. Then, they sold the house and the only thing the Red Cross could give us was one room in a widow's home, with two children, whose husband was the first casualty, ... war casualty, in Englewood. We had a bedroom, and then, it was share the bathroom, share the kitchen, and we went home to my mother's on the weekends. [laughter] ... Then, we got the third floor of another house and that was a room with a pullout sofa, and it was supposed to be the kitchen, and the only stove we had was a hot plate. Everything we ate was boiled or fried, yes. We didn't have a car at the time, but he could walk to the office, and then, I just spent a lot of time in the library, and then, I did join the League of Women Voters. ... Once they found that I was free, had free time, that was my life at that point, very involved with the League of Women Voters. Then, we bought our first house in Fairlawn, and then, we started a family and had a son, and then, a daughter. ... In the meantime, where was he transferred to? He was made the manager of the Rahway business office and we looked at Westfield and we could only afford houses that looked like witches lived [there], you know, ugly houses. ... Then, a classmate of mine lived in Cranford and I said, "Well, let me look in Cranford. I'll have lunch with Barbara," [Barbara Hanson Miller, Class of 1944], and we found a house that day, a real nice house, one we could afford, nice neighborhood, within three very easy blocks, no traffic, to school, and we lived there for seven years. We moved there in '53 and we lived there until 1960, and then, we knew we wanted a bigger house. We had three bedrooms, but we wanted a bigger house. We could afford to wait and we just let the word out [that] we wanted a center-hall colonial, but whenever they would call and say, "We have a house," we'd say, "What street? I don't want to live there." Then, they'd tell me another one and I'd drive by and I'd say, "I don't like the house across the street." [laughter] So, for two years, it took two years, we found a nice, center-hall colonial, that one on the wall, and a perfect, perfect house, because you could walk to the railroad station, you could walk from kindergarten through two years of college, because we were not far from Union College, now Union County College, and it was near the high school, which was good, because my son played basketball and he'd come home at six o'clock (he'd be home in five minutes). So, that was wonderful, and that's the house I sold when I came here.

SI: Did you remain involved in civic activities, like the League of Women Voters?

NC: Yes, yes. When I first got there, my neighbor next-door said, "You have to join College Women's Club. You have to join the Floraphile Garden Club." [Editor's Note: Floraphile means "love of flowers."] I joined both and stayed in both for fifty-some years, until I came here, but College Club had a legislative committee and we investigated starting a League of Women Voters. ... So, we started off and I was chairman of the committee, what was our name, I don't know, the constitutional something or other committee, investigating whether or not we would start a League of Women Voters, and, anyway, we did and I was the first president. I was real busy with that, and then, I was in the College Women's Club, and then, I was in the Floraphile Garden Club, and so, eventually, of course, I ended up vice-president, president of the College Club, president of the Floraphile Garden Club. You know, everybody takes a turn, but that's how I kept busy. I did not work, ... oh, and then, I was on the board of the Visiting Home Health Services of Union County, for twenty-five years. That was a long time, and our job, basically, was to determine how much it would cost for a home health aide. At one point, we found MacDonal'd's was paying more than we were. That wasn't good, but, then, on the other end, you have to pay a decent wage to get someone to come work for you. So, we were always wrestling with those two things, but it certainly is a very worthwhile [cause], because people could stay home. Initially, it was started so that a mother could have help when she had a baby. I think doctors' wives started it, and then, it grew and there's one in every county in New Jersey. ... Well, Summit has something called SAGE, the Summit Association for Gerontological Endeavors, ... and they do what the home health aide does as one of their things. So, that's how I kept busy. ... It was wonderful, because we were able to stay in Cranford, and then, Chris could go either way. He did. He had jobs up in Montclair, he went to headquarters and worked in Newark, ... he was in charge of all public telephones from Woodbridge to Cape May, and he could go back and forth, and then, when he was loaned to AT&T, he could still drive up there. So, we didn't have to move and our children could go right through, kindergarten through high school.

SI: Your husband mentioned, in his interview, doing a lot of traveling; did you?

NC: Well, that was AT&T.

SI: Did you get to go with him?

NC: No, no. So, that's when; what did I do? I think I started taking aerobic dancing, started needlework. I would drive him to the Newark Airport, seven o'clock Monday morning, and then, he would come home Friday by taxi. He wasn't too happy with that. The job was interesting, but he didn't like living in a hotel and eating alone and all of that, and then, eventually, he did come back, but, then, he was deeply involved in the divestiture [of AT&T], and so, I did go down to Washington when he was there. ... That was fun, because I could tour Washington. You know, you've already done all the big things, but, now, you can do something down here. ... Once, there was a strike in New Jersey and I guess I went down and spent the weekend in Camden. He was driving a truck, collecting coins, and he couldn't come home.

SI: Is there anything else you would like to say about your life or your family?

NC: Oh, well, I'm so proud. I have two wonderful children. Our son, Scott, went to Colgate, graduated from Colgate, and he is "Mr. Colgate," if ever there was. [laughter] ... He has a big thing, you know, Colgate thing, and then, he sang with the Colgate Thirteen, which is like the Whiffenpoofs. [Editor's Note: Founded in 1942, the Colgate Thirteen is a Colgate undergraduate *a cappella* group. Yale's Whiffenpoofs are the world's oldest collegiate *a cappella* singing group.] ... Colgate was founded by thirteen Baptist ministers, that's where they get thirteen, and it functions apart from the university. They take care of everything themselves, their engagements and transportation and everything like that. ... He was very involved, which was kind of fun. He'd call and say, "Mom, Colgate's playing Princeton the week of October 10th and the Thirteen, therefore, is coming down and can you house twelve people?" So, I would call friends, you know, Barbara took two, somebody took three, somebody took two. [laughter] ... They would arrive Thursday night, we did it a couple of years, too, and then, in the morning, they sang at the high school. ... In the afternoon, they went to two junior highs, and then, at night, they sang at the Summit Canoe Brook Country Club. They have different programs for each one, and then, Saturday morning, they drove to Princeton, and then, the Thirteen would wander around and sing at the tailgating. ... It's such a wonderful experience, because you arrive ... and somebody says, "Well, you're going to stay with the Joneses." So, you spend the weekend with the Joneses and that's a good developing [tool]. ... Christmas, they went to Lake Placid and they had room, board and skiing and they sang at night in the Adirondack Room. ... Another Christmas, they went to New Hampshire, to (Midersil?), and they were singing waiters up there, and all wonderful experiences. ... He worked for Colgate when he graduated and he was in charge of the Tri-State Area, developing, I guess is the word, but, right now, he is chairman and president of the Glaucoma Foundation, which is in New York, and his big job is to raise money for research. ... Yesterday, he left for Atlanta, because there's a big meeting of ophthalmologists and he goes to those, and he was in Singapore last year and Hong Kong this year, and he does a lot of traveling, too. ... They have a big "do" in December. ... It used to be at the Plaza, now, I think it's at the Ritz, where they raise nine hundred thousand dollars, really. People like American Airlines'll give a gift of a flight to Paris and back, and stay for three days, and people bid on these things. He's happily married. He married a girl from Wellesley. The Thirteen sang up at Wellesley, and I guess it was Pam's roommate, ... sang with the Wellesley Widows, and she said, "We're going to entertain the Thirteen. You have to come," and that's how they met, and then, they had two children. [Referring to photographs displayed in her apartment] Peter is over here, on the right, and Susanne, who is next to him. Peter lives in Reston, Virginia. He works for the Department of the Interior. ... Susanne and her husband live in Long Island and that's their little girl, Zoe. Then, my daughter, Carol, went to Cedar Crest College, in Allentown, Pennsylvania. She wanted to go to a girls' college, ... but she wanted to be near men, of course, and so, you have Lafayette, Lehigh, Muhlenberg, and she married a great young man, Robert Schiller, Lafayette Class of '71, [she had an] excellent education and made good friends. ... She was a teacher and she has three children. The one on the left is Sally and she graduated from Gettysburg College. Oh, I didn't tell you, these two [Peter and Suzanne] graduated from Colgate. So, we say, "All our sweat went to Rutgers, but all our money went to Colgate." [laughter] Right now, Sally is living in Charlotte, North Carolina. She's married and her husband has a job with, he left Wachovia and he's with Raymond James, and then, Emily is the next one and Emily graduated from the Laboratory Institute of Merchandising, which is like FIT [Fashion Institute of Technology in New York], but it's merchandising, and it's a four-year college and she's in the fashion world. ... Let's see, she worked for Luca Luca, who is a designer



of women's high fashion clothes. ... Then, she just ran a fashion show for Calvin Klein; you know Fashion Week in New York? Then, the one in back ... is Rob and he went to Lafayette, Class of '06, because his father went to Lafayette, and he's out in San Diego, ... at Commonwealth Securities, in the financial world, too. So, he's happy out there at the moment. He's talking about going to graduate school. So, that's my family.

SI: Wonderful.

NC: ... What else do you need to know? Why am I at Monroe Village? [Editor's Note: Monroe Village is a continuing care facility in Monroe Township. Mrs. Christensen is in independent living.] Well, I'm here because I just didn't want to live in a great, big house, alone, anymore. I didn't want to have to worry about snow, grass. In Cranford, one might need to worry about flooding, because it's the "Venice of New Jersey," with the Rahway River. ... I made the decision at just the right time, because I sold my house before the real estate market went down. ... One reason I came here, too, is we had looked at it together, ... about ten years ago, just for information and education. Chris never would have come here. I mean, he [thought], "Would you want to walk down the long halls and eat dinner early?" He couldn't be cooped up, ... but we looked at several. I'm sure he did it for me, and I'm so thankful, because I knew all about them. ... A lot of people move close to their children, but I'm midway, because my son lives in Manhasset, Long Island, and my daughter lives out in Lebanon, Pennsylvania, which is near Hershey. So, it's two-and-a-half hours for her. You never know from Manhasset. He has made it in an hour, can be two hours, the Belt Parkway, Staten Island. I'm very happy here. If you want to, you just stay in your apartment and read, look at TV or use [the] computer, and there's always something going on. We have a beautiful pool, and I haven't found a lot of time to go, but I've been going for aquatic aerobics, but you can go any time. ... They have a fitness center. In the auditorium, they do have some exercises. When I first saw it, I was hysterical, these old people sitting on a chair, going like this, but it's unbelievable. I mean, you use every muscle in your body, your neck and back, and so on. So, I do that once in awhile, too. We have lectures and we have a terrific professor, [I] guess he's from Princeton, who's been talking about Presidents. It was FDR two weeks, before the war, and then, during the war, and so on, and Truman and Eisenhower. I don't think he did Nixon. He did Kennedy. He did Lindbergh, also. Then, they have a college lecture that's going on every Tuesday, on Shakespeare at this point, and we have a singer coming tomorrow night, we have movies in there. We have a greenhouse. ... They had a sale; I just worked on the sale for the greenhouse. I'm on the welcoming committee. ... I get a list of someone who has just arrived, and then, I go meet them and invite them to dinner and explain how things work. ... I'm on the library committee, and haven't done too much with that yet, and I did mention to you before that not only do we have a good library, [but also] the bookmobile comes from Monroe Township. ... What else do we have here? Oh, we have arts and crafts. I know people meet in the arts and crafts room and they do knitting and send sweaters all over, ... but there's always something to do and, if you feel lonely, you just walk outside. There's always somebody to talk to. ... So, I'm happy. There are times, sometimes, when I think, "What am I doing here?" ... Then, I know, I think of the house and I think, we lived there from 1960, so, it was a long time in that house, with lots of memories. Santa Claus even came there, [laughter] and Santa Claus came to Scott, who has [become a] grandfather. I don't feel that old until I realize my son's a grandfather. Then, I think, "Uh-oh."

SI: Just one more question; you have gone back to reunions at Douglass. Have you stayed involved?

NC: Yes. Well, the first year, first year out, I was president of my class, for five years [reunion], you know. ... I'm trying to think, I guess, oh, yes, I was on some committee, but I always go. I've been to every one. I go back. I don't stay, because Cranford [is so close]. This spring, I'll come home, but I always go Friday. Friday is all those who've been out fifty years, Vanguard. They have a special speaker and luncheon and they take your picture and all of that, and there's usually a dinner that night. I go back Saturday when everything happens in the chapel and they have a big brunch, under a tent.

SI: Do you have any other questions?

EM: Did you ever swim in the pool in Jameson?

NC: Yes.

EM: Did you?

NC: ... Yes, I did.

EM: The one that was under the dorms.

NC: I don't think I did it much. I might have once or twice, but no more, but I had a couple of friends who did, a lot. I mean, they had an aquatic ballet group: the Nereids. It wasn't for me at that time, too much else. [laughter]

SI: Was chapel required then?

NC: Yes, oh, yes. We had to go two days a week, Tuesday and Friday. ... Tuesday morning, it was religious. We sang hymns and the chaplain spoke, or maybe a visiting minister, and that definitely was mandatory, and then, Friday, it seemed to be shorter and it was secular. The waitresses didn't have to go, because it was a little different hour. Maybe that was only half an hour, I don't know. I just know that the timing was such that we had to be at the dining room to eat our lunch, to serve the others when they came from chapel. So, I didn't go Friday, but I went every Tuesday. To earn a little extra money, I was selling candy. ... You got a big box, and the time to really do it was just before chapel. You would stand in the hallway, at [the] recitation building, and people would come by and grab it, you know, and throw quarters in and it was empty, [laughter] and it was the easiest thing to do. I made enough money to buy my class ring and I made enough money to buy my class dress, selling that candy. I think I only did it for one year. I was living in Jameson and, one night, my roommate screamed, "What's that?" We had a mouse and we figured the candy brought the mouse. So, we were able to put a wastebasket on top of the mouse, and then, we called someone from maintenance and they got rid of it. ... Then, there were people who would come to my room, in Jameson, knowing that I had some candy, but you didn't sell an awful lot, but enough to do this much. I just did it that one year.

SI: Was there a curfew or a lot of rules?

NC: Oh, absolutely a curfew, eleven o'clock. That was it, eleven o'clock. Well, if there was a special dance at Rutgers or something, we could be late, oh, and you had to sign in and out, definitely. We had a book at the door, and so, you would sign your name and where you were going, and then, you signed when you came in. ... Did I mention that, senior year, you had a housemother, as it were, and then, you had a senior advisor for a group? and so, I did those. Talking about, "What do you do with your time?" I was those two things senior year.

SI: Would you have to give people advice? Would you help people with problems?

NC: Well, if you were a housemother, the whole house would come to the living room and you'd talk over if there were any problems, any new restrictions or regulations, or pass on the word, and a senior advisor might be more [involved in] helping someone, ... an individual, who maybe had a problem.

SI: What kind of problems would people have? Were they academic?

NC: Well, we could have a roommate problem, or, possibly, one with a professor, not too many, but, anyway, you were there. ... I keep thinking of something else I did. For psychology, I took child psychology and Dr. Small, who was head of ... the Botany Department, had a little girl, two-year-old. We had to observe a child for a semester, you had to write down everything they did. ... Some people had younger siblings and they took them, but I took Dr. Small's daughter, because they lived near the Douglass Campus. ... I could go over there and she would be outside and I'd kind of stand behind a tree or whatever and write down everything she did. I mean, you'd be there when she awakened from a nap or was taking a nap, and had this big thing to type. When I think of senior year, that's another thing I was doing, I was going over there, watching this child, [laughter] to see ... how she reacted with animals or with other children. ... That was interesting.

SI: What do you remember about the end of the war?

NC: It was very exciting, of course. Where was I? One place, I was down at the New Jersey shore. I don't know whether that was V-E Day. Well, it was just very exciting. I don't know that we did anything grand or anything. I was working for IBM. ...

SI: Thank you very much. We appreciate all of your time and we really enjoyed talking with you. We are very glad you decided to do this.

NC: You're welcome.

SI: If there is anything else you think of that you want to add to the transcript later, you can do that, but we recorded a lot of good information here.

NC: Well, I hope you did get the information that you were looking for.

SI: Yes, absolutely. Thank you very much.

NC: And I thought of many things that I haven't thought of for years. [laughter]

SI: That is always good.

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

Reviewed by Stephen Melton 11/4/09  
Reviewed by Katelynn Dickstein 11/4/09  
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 11/13/09  
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 11/18/09  
Reviewed by Nancy Squire Christensen 2/9/10