

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JEAN C. COMEFORO

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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APRIL 10, 1996

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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Mrs. Jean C. Comeforo on April 10, 1996 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and

Maria Mazzonne: Maria Mazzone

Melanie Cooper: and Melanie Cooper.

KP: And I guess I'd like to begin by asking you about your parents and how they met.

Jean Comeforo: How my parents met? Oh, right.

KP: If you know.

JC: Right, I do. They met at the shops, the Pennsylvania Railroad shops on the Meadowlands, it used to be out there, I never go across the Meadowlands I don't think of them. My mother was a good comptometer operator, and she was very agile with her fingers, didn't type, but could type, she did mostly the comptometer and that sort of thing, and ... I don't know what my father did there, but they met there. And my father, I remember one time came in and sat on her desk and said some, well, kind of fresh things I guess, and she answered him back, and he got mad and slammed the door and the glass all fell out of the door. It happened at the Meadowlands, that was their meeting. It was that kind of marriage too I think, all the way through. [laughter]

KP: Did both your mother and father come from railroad families?

JC: No, my mother's parents, my mother's father came over from Germany and got a job over in the United States, at the Waldorf-Astoria, he was a waiter, and once he had a job, then he had a place to live, and ... then my mother's mother came over here and they were married over here, so she left her family and came over and got married over here, ... and didn't see them again for a long, long time. She was a pastry cook at the Waldorf-Astoria, and he was a waiter there, and then when my mother was born, ... I get little bit mixed up, it was partly that she needed pasteurized milk and they told her then to go to the country, it would be better for her. And I don't know what that's got to do with pasteurized milk, but they went to Millburn, New Jersey, and he had a little cigar factory there. And then when he died, my grandmother tried to carry it on, but she couldn't put up with the inspectors coming to make sure, I guess she didn't know about the bribery for all that kind of stuff, she used to hide behind the curtain and she didn't know enough to bribe them probably. And so then it became a variety store, ice cream and candy, and they lived from quarter to quarter and the gas meter to keep the lights lit and ... that sort of thing in Millburn. They finally tore the house down, it's too bad. It was a Revolution Era house. I know right where it was on Millburn Avenue in Millburn. There's a little place in the curb where their supposed driveway was, but she didn't have a car.

KP: What's standing there now?

JC: It's a playground, ... the playground was here, and then this little place was cut out of the playground for her to ... live out her life in that house, and when they tore it down, they just made

the playground square. ... The school was right next door, my mother went to that from grammar school on through high school, and ... now it's some kind of a municipal building and the high school and the schools are ... bigger and out of town.

KP: How did your mother get the job at the railroad?

JC: That I don't ... know, ... I can't help you with that.

KP: After she got married, did she stay with the railroad?

JC: Oh, my father insisted that he maintain the household and that she should not go to work and my mother, that's another thing where my mother, you know it's that kind of marriage, she wanted to go to work. So what she did was do things at home, she ... was very artistic and so she taught painting on textiles at home in order to supplement the income, because they didn't have a whole lot when they were first married. But he would not--every time she talked about getting a job he would have a fit. She did get a job during the war, however and worked shift work at the Raritan Arsenal, and ... he wasn't very happy about that. But...

KP: It almost sounds like your mother used the war as an excuse to work.

JC: To work. She earned the money for our wedding when she worked at the Raritan Arsenal. She was supplementing the income and putting that aside to pay for our wedding. It didn't cost anything like 20,000 dollars it does now. [laughter]

KP: And your father, he stayed with Pennsylvania Railroad.

JC: No, ... they were married and he was with the railroad, and then a job came up at Public Service, ... he had gone to secretarial school while he was working on the railroad, and this job came up and he got the job. He went out when he had the flu and he got out of sickbed and he went and took the exam and everything else, and he passed. And he got the job as the assistant secretary to the president of Public Service Electric and Gas Company. When that Public Service, those big letters Public Service on the top of the Public Service building represented Santa Claus to me, because every good thing came from Public Service.

KP: And it was one of the leading corporations, it not only ran utilities, but also transportation.

JC: Right, transportation. He knew Mr. McCarter very, very well. ... Half of the time he was in the office taking dictation. Mr. McCarter would start talking the minute the door opened and he had better get down there and get it all down and don't say, "What did you say?" You didn't say that to Mr. McCarter. You didn't say that, you put it together as what you thought he said.

KP: And how long did he stay with PSE&G? Until McCarter retired?

JC: When Mr. McCarter retired, my father had no job, because when Mr. McCarter retired, whoever became CEO had his own crew. And so my father there was hanging in the wind, and

they made him a travelling auditor at the same salary he had when he was assistant secretary to the President. But it made a difference in his life, because he had to get out of bed and travel here and travel there, wherever the auditors were, whatever office they were auditing.

KP: You mentioned that PSE&G represented Santa Claus to you?

JC: Right.

KP: When did he get the job, how old were you? Do you remember?

JC: ... They went into the house when I was born, so I was very little, you know, two, three, something like that.

KP: But he made it enough, it sounds like you could live fairly comfortably.

JC: We were comfortable, we had one telephone, one car, one radio, one toaster, you know, and ... we were comfortable. We didn't know that we weren't well off, we were, I think, well off. We had everything we wanted, ... we went on simple vacations and everything, we had a good life.

KP: When did Mr. McCarter retire, when did your father's career shift?

JC: We were married. He must have been in his sixties.

KP: So it was later in his life?

JC: Oh yes. ... It was difficult for him to make the adjustment, really was, but he did it very well. ... And he loved people, and so he had a good time joking around with the auditors, he did very well.

KP: I have interviewed some people who worked for PSE&G, and it was a very interesting company. I'm trying to think of the term, but it was very powerful.

JC: Oh yes.

KP: And Mr. McCarter in particular was very powerful. What did your father say about Mr. McCarter? One thing you mentioned earlier is that he dictated and expected people to follow no matter what. Any other things your father would tell you about the company?

JC: Oh, my impression was of a company that cared for its employees, at least then it did, I don't know what it's like now, but it did then. As far as the little bit that I had connected with it, it was ... interesting, he didn't talk a lot about his work--most men don't--I think when they come home, they would just as soon take it off and leave it there and have a different life. But ... he did do some things. Mr. Vilet was the secretary, my father was assistant secretary, well Mr. Vilet was on vacation, and, of course, they had a lot of trouble ... down with the government with monopolies and PSE&G. I was horrified, I'd see these cartoons in the newspaper with Public

Service with big diamonds, big fat Public Service with diamond rings and everything, and that's not public service to me. So other people had other ideas about Public Service than what I had. ... So my father, Mr. McCarter said, "John do you think you can handle this thing in Washington?" "Yes I can," so a couple of times he went down by train, he thought he was so smart, he got a table in his bedroom and he had a typewriter and he did his work there. And then one time, he flew, and this was, I mean we knew what time the plane was going to take off, and so at that certain hour we went outside and sure enough a plane went over so we stood in front of our house and waved to him going by. Because flying was very, very unusual then, not many people did it, and this was so important, and he was the first one in our family to fly.

KP: And that was a fairly important job going to Washington.

JC: Oh yes. This was because a lot hung on it.

Jay E. Comeforo: It was a Congressional hearing actually.

JC: Yes it was, right.

Jay E. Comeforo: Now going back you said 1960.

JC: No, my father was 60 years old.

Jay E. Comeforo: Oh, okay, because it was before we were married.

JC: Right

KP: Your father also served in the military.

JC: Yes he was, he was in the military. He was drafted, and went over. The story that he tells is that he went up to his sergeant and said he didn't really want to kill anybody, he wasn't mad at them and he didn't want to kill anybody. So the sergeant said, "Would you shoot somebody to protect yourself?" And he said, "Yeah," he thought he would. So they gave him a gun and they sent him out on reconnaissance out in no-man's-land, so he actually went up and peeked over the trenches of the Germans and heard them talking and so forth. So that was what he did, instead of shooting somebody. ...

KP: He didn't understand enough German.

JC: Not to help them with their intelligence, I don't think.

KP: What else did he tell you about the war?

JC: Oh he did say, I heard him give a speech one time to Boy Scouts and he wanted to talk about being prepared, and he talked about the time when he was standing with a fellow nearby, a soldier friend, and a bomb went off, something came by missile, whatever, and the fellow got

killed. There he was wounded and bleeding to death, and my father didn't know how to help him. And he said this ... bothered him for the rest of his life so he ... wanted to be prepared with first aid and know how to help. I remember that story. And then he was wounded, but he didn't write home to tell his mother. ... What happened was that a certificate came in the mail to his mother, saying that her son had been wounded in the service of her country. ... Oh, bedlam broke loose in my grandmother's house when that happened, because he had said [nothing]. But he went to the hospital and when he recovered, and I don't know where he was wounded, he never did say. ... Then he worked in ... hospital and he typed and put on shows for the hospital, they became something for morale for the soldiers and they went around and put on. I have a ... xerox copy of the program and the whole thing of what he did.

KP: It sounds like military service was a positive experience for your father although he did have some bad memories.

JC: Right, right. He didn't talk about the bad ones, except to other veterans. Sometimes they'd get together and talk. But never when we were all around.

KP: Did he join the American Legion?

JC: Yes he did, I think. No, he didn't, no he really wasn't in the American Legion. The connection with the American Legion was that he went to Boy Scout troop meetings there. He was district commissioner, that's what I remember about him and the American Legion.

KP: So he was active in scouting.

JC: Yes he was. ... He was a good Boy Scout leader, he had a marvelous troop.

KP: In Metuchen?

JC: In Metuchen, ... Reformed Church. Yeah. One time they were looking for, all of a sudden ... one organ note was sounded through the whole building and they finally went in some of the boys had gone in there and put a pole down and held down the key on the organ.

MM: How did the Depression affect your family? Did you fall on any hard times?

JC: I remember my father getting off the train and somebody got off with him and said, "How do you like your cut in salary, John?" ... He was very upset about that. He didn't like it one single bit, but he took a cut in salary and we just tightened our belts, and as I say, as a child I wasn't aware of being deprived. ... Oh there were lots of things I would have liked to have had, my mother said, "If I had the money I would love to buy it for you, but we don't and that's it." And so you had to accept that, you know, if it was possible you could have it, but you couldn't. And it's a difference. I heard a ... young mother after we were both married and we were at the shore and ... he dropped his pail and it broke, a sand pail, and the mother said, "Oh stop crying. I'll get you another one." Well that wasn't possible, ... if I wasn't going to stop crying because I couldn't have one, I was just going to have to keep crying. 'Cause there just wasn't another one where that

one came from, that's all. Basically that's how it happened. That's how it affected us. My mother was frugal; we ate a lot of hamburger, hamburger and Franco-American spaghetti. We didn't eat high on the hog, but we had plenty ... of strawberry shortcake with whipped cream too. So you know I didn't feel deprived; we were fine.

Jay C. Comeforo: I notice that ... Jean made a mistake once. Your generation, mind you, ... is not able to understand the first law of economics being able to distinguish the difference between a need and a want. And you think they are synonymous, and they're surely not. But you were talking about for awhile, ... when we had all we wanted, she had all she needed. ...

JC: Okay.

Jay C. Comeforo: It just bothers me, there's a bank in our town that talk[s] borrow ... money for things you really want, it should be need. What's wrong with that. ... I'll go back to reading.

JC: Draw the curtain. [laughter] ...

MM: Your father was a Republican, I was just wondering how he felt about FDR and the New Deal and things like that. Do you remember anything like that?

JC: The New Deal, it had been through the Depression. I don't remember him grousing much about it now. Everybody was so hard up really that whatever it took to get us out was okay. The NRA, I remember that very well. That was supposed to help us get back, ... actually what helped us get back was the war. That's what made industry start and make more jobs, ... that brought prosperity, more than the NRA. The NRA may have or may not have. We'll never know because the war came along.

KP: It sounds like you remember the Blue Eagle fairly well.

JC: Oh yeah. I remember that all over.

KP: Do you remember the song that came along with the Blue Eagle. Someone sang it for me in one of my recent interviews.

JC: No I don't, I don't.

KP: You mentioned before the interview started about Roosevelt Park, which was a WPA project. What do you remember about the dedication of the park?

JC: Well, it was right along Route 1, which you couldn't do that now because of the traffic, but it was right along Route 1 and probably the stone is still there. It's probably about this high, no maybe ... that high, sort of like that and it has, I think it has a ceramic plaque on it and it has the date and that sort of thing. And there were officials there and a bunch of people came out, and my parents were interested in that sort of thing, so we all went out and stood around and they made speeches, and then we went out. ... Roosevelt Park was just beautiful and we used to go

and ... I remember one day my parents decided that we're going to have breakfast in Roosevelt Park. My father was all dressed up to go to work and my mother packed up the breakfast, and we went out and sat there and had breakfast. And we were just sitting in a nice sunny morning, and there was a beautiful drop of dew across the way that the sun shone on, it shone like a diamond. Then we drove my father to the train, he went to work, and we went back to what we were doing.

KP: It sounds like you have very distinct memories of your father leaving for the train in the morning and then coming back in the evening.

JC: Right, right. He was a commuter, he knew how to ... read the paper and fold it so it wouldn't get in anybody else's way. He had quite a trick at doing that.

JC (husband): He expected other people to do the same.

JC: Oh yes.

JC (husband): And that used to infuriate him when someone [wouldn't]. ... John was quite a man.

KP: You mentioned earlier your father had to defend PSE&G against charges of monopoly.

JC: He had to help Mr. McCarter defend.

KP: McCarter, yes. But what did he think of the whole charges? Because that became a ...

JC: Oh, they were outrageous. Of course. Public Service was a good company; there couldn't be anything wrong. Mr. McCarter came to our wedding; they knew each other that well.

KP: Oh really?

JC: Yeah.

KP: How often did you see Mr. McCarter growing up? He came to your wedding, were there any other occasions?

JC: I saw him that time, and then there was a time when my father had to deliver some papers to Mr. McCarter's house in Rumson, and we were all in the car, my mother, father, and I, and we were driving on this long winding driveway, tree lined driveway with seagulls flying. My, that was quite an experience to go and sit on their porch while my father and Mr. McCarter went in and did their business! And Mrs. McCarter entertained us on their porch.

KP: So it sounds like your father had a variety of assignments, he would take dictation but he would also...



JC: Oh yes. Oh, and then the annual meeting and the proxies, he had to get them all out and get them right, he had the lists. I remember him working on those. He was good with these computer machines, adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing. He would put these numbers click clack clack clack, ... and the thing would move along. And we used to go when my mother and I went shopping in Newark, we'd sit in the hall; they had hall girls in the hall, and you'd sit there and say who you wanted to see and then the hall girl would go tell them you were there, and they'd come out. ... Frequently if Mr. McCarter was away, and Mr. Vilet was away, the place was empty, ... we'd go in the office and you could look down on Military Park out the window and big thick rugs on the floors, ... quiet. It was nice. ...

MC: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

JC: No, only child.

MC: Only child.

JC: Only child.

MC: What was your schooling like?

JC: ... My mother was quite ambitious for me, and so I shouldn't go to the Edgar School ... where everyone else in the neighborhood went, I should go to the Washington School over here. So boy, did I have to walk far to get to the Washington School every day. Edgar School wasn't so far, but Washington School was far away. And that was a good school though, a very good school, and then when we--in 6th grade they were going...

KP: I hate to interrupt, but why the Washington School as opposed to the Edgar School?

JC: Well, my mother had, she thought the education was better there; she thought the school was better. ... My mother knew what was going on. She was an ambitious lady, not ambitious that's the wrong word, but she was aware and she wanted me to have the best that could be. I was her only child and it was going to be the best that I could be. I think I probably disappointed her along the way but she still loved me anyway. But in the 6th grade we had an operetta, and it was the Piped Piper of Hamelin and I was one of the dancing children, and I caught scarlet fever and was quarantined and couldn't be in it, and they put it on in the high school auditorium and everything and I had to stay home and just stay in my bedroom. ... My grandmother had had a stroke in the other bedroom, and my father couldn't come upstairs to go to bed, so they had to sleep downstairs, ... cause he had to go to work, so he couldn't come by me. So they made an addition onto the house so they had sleeping quarters downstairs. Then the ... poor practical nurse who was taking care of my grandmother got quarantined along with us. So she couldn't go home to her family either.

KP: Even today Metuchen has a number of people who worked in the factories and a number of people who, like your father, commuted into Newark and to New York, but also even some professors who commute. One of the reasons my wife and I selected the town was because it was

easy for me to get to Rutgers. What do you remember about your particular neighborhood and the town in general?

JC: Oh it was a lovely town. It was very manageable. You could walk because times were different, I mean now you can't walk I guess, but you walked everywhere, you walked to church, you walked to Sunday school, you walked to school, you walked downtown to the post office, it was a very homey place. Dick Hale reminded me of something; he said it was the brainy borough. And I knew it was the brainy borough, but I never ... really realized why. But he said because there were at that time, more Ph.D.s in Metuchen than anywhere else in the country. So it was called the brainy borough. And I remember a ... Mr. Potts, they were in the Church and he went to Iraq and Iran, now I forget what it was called before that, but they had just changed the names and he had been over there on some kind of a diplomatic mission. ... There were quite some well intelligent, well educated, and probably affluent people in Metuchen.

KP: Did you belong to the YMCA in Metuchen?

JC: No, I didn't. ... As I say I think I disappointed my mother, I was extremely shy, and I didn't want to change clothes in the same room with everybody else so I wouldn't join the Y. My mother finally ... signed me up for swimming lessons and I had to do it, so I did it. Actually my mother's ambition, ... I have a better life because my mother made me do things. Because she was the one who insisted I go to NJC, and I used to hide my head every time we drove by, because I was terrified to go, I wasn't at all sure I could do it. I wasn't at all sure. Freshmen year was horror, because of that, because ... I lacked self-esteem something awful. But she signed me up for the swimming lessons and I did that, and she signed me up for NJC and I did that too, and once I made freshmen year, I decided I'm going to hang on with my eyeteeth and unless they throw me out, I'm going to graduate, and I did it.

KP: It sounds like growing up your parents, especially your mother, expected that you would go to college.

JC: Oh yes. Very, very definitely. That was important.

KP: It sounds like your father would have also liked to have had the opportunity to go to college.

JC: I think he probably would have. He was a 7th grade dropout; he went to work to help support the family, I think. He worked at Colgate for awhile, he worked on the ferries going across ... from Jersey City to New York for awhile, and then I guess he went to secretarial school and got the job with the railroad.

MM: When you were in high school did you participate in any activities?

JC: I'm trying to remember. I don't remember being in any clubs. ... I took a public speaking course in high school, and I remember that was partly to ... get some self esteem built up in there, you know. The teachers thought I could use it, so she put me in it, and I remember we had a meeting in the auditorium, and we were all giving our speeches and while I gave mine, some kids

threw stones at the glass. You know, when you're a mouse in high school, people will treat you like a mouse, and they waited until my speech to throw the rocks at the glass ... on the roof. But I held on there, I can still remember holding my hand on the podium, and I wanted to change the card and my hand was shaking like a leaf. But I managed to change the card, and I could still see the teacher on the edge of her chair hoping that I'd keep on going, and I did. Then she was thrilled to death that I did.

... But I was, you see during sophomore year our house burned and that was a traumatic thing, and it threw my psyche off some, because I realized that we almost didn't wake up. It was only a matter of my mother waking up and choking that we knew that the house was filled with smoke. Otherwise we would have died of smoke inhalation before the fire even burnt the house, but once my mother opened to door to go outside and everything, it fanned the flames and the house went up. But I thought, "Gee whiz, I almost didn't wake up." And it was kind of hard hard to go to sleep sometimes at night because of that, and it made me ... different in high school. I was more remote then, because I was handling this thing. I remember sitting in study hall and I really couldn't study, because I was just overwhelmed ... with what had happened.

KP: Losing a house is pretty traumatic?

JC: It was.

KP: Did your parents have any insurance?

JC: They had insurance on the house, ... but the insurance on the furniture, no. Not because they didn't pay it, but because the letter was found later after the fire, underneath the hedge, the bill never got there in time for her to pay the bill for the insurance. So they lost all that. ... They would insure the burned out part of the house, but not the shell that was still standing and my parents didn't want to live there anymore. ... And we moved in with a man who had been ... the developer of the neighborhood and he had a bigger house, than everybody else, of course, but he did have the courage to live there, so he must not have been too bad. And he was a widow[er] at the time, so we kept house for him and he gave us a free place to live, and my parents then moved into the house that I lived in after that the rest of high school.

MM: What had caused the fire, did they ever figure it out?

JC: No, there were all kinds of, they had just finished a lot of redecorating, beautiful oak floors on the downstairs, and painting and they had just finished painting the kitchen, and there was a pot stove in the basement, that they said, caused, an over heated pot stove, but when I went down and looked there was black coals on top of the pot stove so it couldn't have been that, probably was electrical wiring, or maybe a mouse got electrocuted and smoldered in fresh paint, and then fumes whatever. Because it seemed to be under the basement stairs seemed to have a lot to do with it, under the stairway. I always thought if there was a fire, I'd go out on the roof of the sun porch, which I did, but my father was coming up the stairs calling my name, so I came back through the window so he wouldn't get lost in the house in the smoke, I went down the stairs with him.

KP: Were you ever a Girl Scout? Your father was very active in Boy Scouts.

JC: Oh yes. ... I was a Boy Scout before I was a Girl Scout. They had more fun than we did, they really did. I was a Girl Scout for two years, I couldn't become a Girl Scout until I was ten years old, by the way, they didn't have Brownies then. No there were no Brownies then, and certainly there were no Daisies. ... My father taught me map making, he made sure I knew everything and passed every badge the right way, that was very important. ... Then my cousin, ... a very bright, intelligent girl, ... earned all the qualifications for the Golden Eaglet, but National Headquarters would not give her a Golden Eaglet because too many people in the New York area, New York-New Jersey area had earned it, and so they wanted to spread it around more, it was the bell curve kind of thing, and so she didn't get it, and I thought what's the sense, so I quit. Don't want to be part of an organization that would think that way, if she earned it, she should have it, that's way I felt, so that's what I did.

KP: Growing up were you active in any other clubs or organizations?

JC: I think I took painting class, WPA painting class. At the suggestion of my mother who was very artistic, and I did paint a tree once rather well, but I couldn't paint much of anything else, but I did try. ... And I was active in the ... girls organization in church, I forgot what it was called, but I was active in that.

KP: It sounds like your mother was more active in the church than your father.

JC: Right. Yeah, my father wanted more attention, and ... my mother was very active in the church, she put on the Christmas Pageant every Christmas, and my father used to be very unhappy that he had to eat out at restaurants and places, and he couldn't have his meal at home when he wanted it, because my mother was too busy to cook. So there was you know, always that little, but it was sparks, ... it was an interesting marriage really, they were wonderful parents, both of them.

KP: But it sounds like your father wanted a traditional role for your mother, that she would be waiting at the door with food ready, and the idea of him having to fend for himself was a very alien concept for him.

JC: ... Right. He learned to do it though, anyway. [laughter] Because she was going to do what she was going to do.

KP: Were your parents active in any other organizations in town?

JC: My mother was in the Eastern Star, very active. She became district deputy, and what else, my father was very busy with the Boy Scouts. ... He was the leader of the Domolay, I forget what that is, a boy's church organization, I think. He was very well thought of by his former scouts. When they were in the war, they wrote to him saying that what they had learned in scouts had helped them so much in Army life and in the war, how to survive and get along.

KP: Did his Boy Scout troop go to the National Jamboree in Washington?

JC: They must've had them, but I don't remember being aware of them. No, they never did.

KP: Yes.

JC: That took money, and people didn't have it in those days, you know. ... They didn't, I don't remember, that they even had money raising, ... they just had troop meetings. And they did, my father took them camping all over the place and let them learn their outdoor skills and stuff. But no, I don't remember my father being into anything else. He worked around the house, he fixed the house, you didn't hire someone to do that, you did it yourself so the rest of the time he was doing that.

KP: You mentioned you did go on vacation. Where would you go on vacation?

JC: We mostly went to New England, and my father would plan them a year ahead of time. He knew where he was going, where he was going to stay, we went [on] camping vacations. So he knew about all the camps. We would pull into a campground, and the first thing that came off was the stove, we had one of those gasoline stoves, my mother started to cook, the kitchen things went up. And while my mother was cooking dinner, my father and I would put up the tent, put up the beds, make the beds, and get everything ready. So then when all that was ready, we sat down and had dinner, and that was my father and I ... worked together on that. I was supposed to be a boy, so I came close to it, you know, as much as I could, to work with my father on things, I helped him around the house, he taught me to cut hedge, put up storm windows, that sort of thing.

KP: So it sounds like your parents wanted a boy. It sound like they taught you things you might not have learned if there had been a boy in the family. Is that a fair thing to say? Or do you think your father still would have had you cutting hedges and working with him.

JC: I don't know. He probably would have. ... He wanted me to grow up with the right attitudes, he wanted me to have, the right attitudes were learning how to do work. Teaching me to work, he knew it was necessary and he wanted to teach me to do work, because that was what I was going to have to do and he was right, so he helped me.

KP: You mentioned that your mother had this vision of you going to college. What did you did think of this? Did you take a college preparatory course in high school?

JC: Yes. That's another interesting thing. I started out, I was not a student, ever going through school. But I started out in the general course, and my mother got all upset, "You're in the general course, you can't go to college." So we worked hard and she went down and talked to the people in the school, and I got into the college preparatory course, and I did make it through there, and I got into NJC and that's the story. ... Yes, I was to go to college, it was important that I go to college and have an education.

KP: It sounds like if it had been left up to you, you probably would have opted out.

JC: Well, I'm glad I went. I praise the Lord everyday that I had that education, and she made me. I didn't learn to swim successfully, but I did get along alright in college. And it opened up the whole world for me, ... since I could do it, I stayed in there and I actually succeeded and got here and there a fairly decent grade, and self esteem also came along, not completely, but I did have some.

KP: You entered in September 1941 and I guess I want to know what you knew about what was going on in Europe?

JC: I knew quite a bit, my mother ... could understand Hitler's speeches on the radio, and she was telling me it's going to be very bad, there's going to be all kinds of trouble, he wants to do this and that, so that I knew, and I knew about the Czechoslovakia and we were quite up on that. I remember in church the young people were supposed to run the service and I was up to give the prayer for peace and I prayed like crazy for peace and then when it didn't come I said, humph. [laughter]

KP: So you were very aware of what was going on in Europe?

JC: Yes, yes we were.

JC: What did your family think about the coming of the war, your father was a veteran of World War I, did he think we could stay out of it, did he want it?

JC: We were patriotic ... and he was in favor of being in the war.

KP: Even before Pearl Harbor.

JC: Oh yes. ... He thought we were going to, and my mother was pretty sure we were going to [after] hearing Hitler and everything she thought we were going to have something. So ... I remember that part, ... they were in favor of it. I can't give you any precise things, but I do know. ...

KP: It sounds like the war did not come as a shock for them as much as for some people.

JC: No, it wasn't. ... I'm surprised ... that people were shocked that it was coming. Jay and I were dating. ... There's a trestle in Metuchen used to be Johns Manville, and these trains always at night would come by. ... I don't know where they went, but you could always see them moving at night, so we were preparing, we were going to be in the war. You could see that it was going to come. I suppose that people out in Iowa were kind of shocked because they didn't see this activity, but around here with the Raritan Arsenal and all nearby, you could see it was coming.

KP: Moving to a different subject, how scared were you your first weeks on campus? It sounds like you were in absolute terror.

JC: Terrified, terrified. It distracted you to wear that uniform that freshmen had to wear. We had a big thick green flannel belt with a green flannel pouch which we had to keep nickels in for sophomore's phone calls. Then we had to wear a flannel headband with ... a green Indian feather in it. And fortunately, we could take it off and leave it in our locker when we went to the train to go home, but the other students had to wear it ... all over campus, they had to be ready all the time. But we left campus, we could go back to our own identity. ... I have a picture of myself in it, and it's just awful, ... awful. Freshman year ... I became almost comatose. We had workbooks to do, staying up at night and, of course, with the rationing coming in, I used to work in the kitchen with the gas stove on and that put me to sleep too. Fortunately not long enough really to go permanently to sleep, but it was a tough year, it really was. I wasn't at all sure. I flunked chemistry, Dr. Girard, I met him in the hall one time and almost fainted. He terrified me, and I flunked chemistry, and I took it at Rutgers, and the nicest thing about that is that I met Jay at Chapel at Rutgers during that summer. Because he was accelerating ...

KP: So you could take summer sessions at Rutgers, but not during the regular year.

JC: Right. ... Journalism students all did. ...

KP: But that's the only exception that I've heard.

JC: There was a ceramics major who went down and ... took courses in ceramics.

KP: Obviously a marriage came out of this, but what was it like being in an all women's school and then all of a sudden being thrown into a class with men again? Did it change the dynamics? Or were you so concerned about passing chemistry that it did not matter?

JC: A little of both I guess. Sure it changed them. You saw these fellows. There were more of them I think, ... but I guess it was a lot more fun taking chemistry at Rutgers than it was at NJC, I'll put it that way. [laughter]

Jay C. Comeforo: Remember this was before the war.

JC: I entered in September of '41, so it was the summer of '42.

MM: Do you remember participating in any Douglass--NJC traditions such as Sacred Path or Yule Log?

JC: Sacred Path was my favorite. ... There was Campus Night, and I still have an unhappy feeling for Campus Night because when we were freshmen we lost the tug-of-war, but when we were sophomores, we were going to win, and we lost again, and so Campus Night ... is not one of my favorite memories. But Sacred Path, we really--I don't know what it's like now--but we really did not walk on Sacred Path until we had the ceremony. I don't think these days you could keep

them off, you know, I think they may as well say, go ahead and walk on it, because I don't think you could keep them off. But then our class did not walk on Sacred Path, we took the long way around. ... It made it more special for us when we could walk on it then. Then we had our class rings, ... and we had the pine trees facing this way until Sacred Path and then we could turn our rings around. ... I think, you know when you have to wait for something for a long time, it makes it extra special for you. Now okay, so we're having Sacred Path ceremony, you walked on that all year, so what's the difference, but we didn't walk on it until then and it was a high for us. See now you have to take drugs to get a high, but we had a high walking across Sacred Path, we thought that was wonderful, we really thought that was special.

And Christmas, when we sang the Christmas carols and we practiced and practiced in chapel. I've enjoyed Christmas carols ever since, I learned more Christmas carols than I ever even had heard of, ... and the right way to sing them. I mean they made sure we learned how to do it right. So those two, being a commuter, ... I didn't take part in all of them. The Yule Log I never did see, I never got to Shack, I signed up for it, but the people on campus had first chance to sign up, so I was always on the waiting list. That sort of thing. ... I was, anyway, in awe, ... of ... College Hall, that's where the post office was, that's where the Dean was, that's where the Dean of Students was, you know, and you hoped Dean Boddie never called you in, that's sort thing.

KP: Speaking of Dean Boddie, I ask all the people from Rutgers College about Dean Metzger, so you're the first person from NJC that I've interviewed, so I'm curious about Dean Boddie if she is as legendary as Dean Metzger.

JC: She's legendary all right, but I don't know if it's in the same way. ... Because of the war, our classmates, quite a few of our classmates got married because they were going to go overseas. And so they got married. And Dean Boddie, there's one classmate that still carries a tremendous resentment for Dean Boddie because she called her in along with all of the other students who were married, and said, now I hope, I understand, they had to live off campus, but they wanted to be sure, Dean Boddie wanted to be sure that they didn't talk about what you did in marriage to all these young innocent little girls who were on campus. You must not tell anything about being married when you come to class. Dean Boddie did that, and she did that to every one of them.

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

KP: ... Women who were married to young GIs were instructed not to talk about marriage.

JC: Oh we must not. ... I'm sure in [a] jam session it must have come out. We had a lot of those. ... Being a commuter, I wasn't in on those things, so I don't know, but I'm sure. The other thing that Dean Boddie did during the war, was that we took First Aid. I don't know whether it was because of the war or whether it was just part of being a freshmen that was one of the things you did. And home nursing. And so Dean Boddie heard that there was a first aid station on the bridge between Highland Park and New Brunswick, and so she thought, "Well now our girls know First Aid." So she volunteered to have our girls go down and work in the First Aid station. And the Army politely refused ... her offer, because that was after all that's where the fellows went through on their last night on the town, and were handed condoms and so forth. On the way



across the bridge. [laughter] And Dean Boddie was spared the knowledge, ... and they just politely refused, but that was Dean Boddie.

And there was another girl who was quite ... brilliant really, she has since ... started and run a ... college of her own, but she was very active, and enthusiastic, and did things, took chances sometimes, was a little bit of a nonconformist, but she was doing things she thought were alright. And Dean Boddie called her in, she had to go in, so she left whatever she was doing, you see back then, during the war we wore, we started to wear the blue jeans and the shirt tail hanging out because we wore our brother's clothes. And she went in dressed that way because she was on her way to do something else, and she stopped in to see Dean Boddie, and so Dean Boddie came out and the secretary said, "Well so and so is here." And Dean (Boddie) said, "I don't see anybody, do you?" And she turned around and walked back in her room. ... You know Dean Boddie had quite a reputation and the people who were there remember her very well.

MM: What was it like commuting to school in times of gas rationing when it was difficult to get around?

JC: Yeah. ... I don't know whether it was double daylight savings or just daylight savings, but they kept it on all year. And it was pitch black in the morning. ... I had a short cut to go through to get to the train, and I had to have a flashlight to see my way, because the lights were either, every other one was out, or they were very dim, and I would get to the train station and it would still be dark. The trains were erratic. I think a lot of it was because ... they were using the cars for transport trains, and ... civilian trains had to wait for transport trains, so you never knew. My father used to ... walk ... and took a later train, but sometime[s] I'd get to the station and I'd still be there when he came down to get his train, waiting at the station for my train to go to New Brunswick, he went to Newark. ... The trains ... well basically it was alright, the trains were okay. ... Going from Metuchen to New Brunswick was pretty ordinary, but coming back from New Brunswick back to Metuchen, troop trains would often be the ones you could get on, and poor soldiers would be draped all over the seats. God knows how long they had been on that train, and where they came from, and ... it wasn't comfortable, ... they weren't in coach seats that you get now, they were just plain seats. ... I remember them, you'd get on the train and ... there was a phrase back then, "Is this trip necessary?" You weren't supposed to take a train trip unless it was necessary, you weren't supposed to go anywhere unless it was necessary. And the soldiers used to say that when you got on the train. It was their amusement, you know, what else did they have to do? And so you got on the train, "Yes it's necessary, I have to get home." But you didn't say that, you just got on the train and sat there. We used to have a commutation ticket, you used to buy that and then you used it until it got punched up, and so you would get very studious after you left New Brunswick, you'd open your book, and you'd be deep in your studies when the conductor came by and then he would stop and ask you, and then you'd have to put your book down and get into your pocketbook to get it out. But sometimes he'd just pass by. ... I thought I was fooling him, but not really, ... he let you have the ride really.

MM: Did you ever feel that it would have been easier to just live on campus?

JC: Yes, I did. I missed people to talk to about studies, I'd be out there and I have a question and I desperately ... need to talk to somebody about it, and there wasn't anybody. My parents didn't have enough education to be able to help me at all, and so I was stuck. And you didn't phone everybody the way you do now, because that was after all, that was a toll call from Metuchen to New Brunswick, and you didn't spend the money, you just tried to do the best you could. I think it had a big effect on my performance. When I lived on campus for eight weeks in practice house, I felt much more comfortable being with the people that I knew though. I did go one time to pin up a hem for a girl in one of the other dorms, and the style of life was entirely different in the dormitories than it was in practice house. Very different.

KP: What was so different?

JC: Well, you lived with Miss Holt for one thing, she was the professor of practice house, so you didn't carry on really. And they were a smaller group and we were together all the time and we knew each other and we were seniors after all, and quite sedate. ... Well you know they didn't have snow days back in those days and we went to class on Saturdays until noon. And if you were a commuter, and you didn't get to school because of a blizzard or whatever, it was a cut. It was your responsibility. You wanted to commute, this was the rule and you had to get there. So it was a cut, and you couldn't afford them, you know, you had to make it. I remember walking knee deep down, I couldn't make it to the station, so I thought I'd catch a bus, and I made it to the end of the street where the bus went by, and fortunately someone I knew, a friend of my father's came along and gave me a ride. So that was alright, but it was tough. You had to get there snow or no snow.

KP: How did the war change Douglass, NJC at the time. What changes did you notice?

JC: Not having been there before the war it was hard, but I imagine, I know that people said the social life was entirely different. There were two things that happened, the fellows got drafted from Rutgers, and so the social life just disappeared really, and the other thing was that it was a ... very serious time. This was wartime and our fiancées and our boyfriends and our uncles and brothers were going ... overseas, and we were frightened for all of them. The girls went down to the library every day and read the newspapers for the casualty lists to see, one of the classmates husband was over there, and she read every day to see whether he was on the casualty list, that's how you found out. A lot of things were curtailed. The classes, ... our whole attitude changed, it became much more serious. They were out there going to war, they were fighting and they were doing their best over there, the least we can do, is do the best that we're going to do, we can be serious about what we're doing. Either that or we should stop doing it, if we weren't going to be serious about it, we should do something else like get a job and work for the war effort, instead of going to school. So if you were to keep on going to class, you were supposed to be learning, because you have a purpose there to learn and do something positive with it. It wasn't frivolous. ... Whatever you were taking, it was something that you should be doing and you should be doing the best that you could at it. It changed a lot of it. That way a lot of concerts, and ... theater trips to New York City were cancelled because of the transportation. People couldn't come to the concerts, because of the gas rationing. So a lot of things that were part of the ... lighter side of college life disappeared.

KP: I have interviewed men from Rutgers College who were slowly going off and they also noticed the curtailment, a lot of balls and dances declined, the football schedule declined. But those who did stay on campus, the ratio of NJC to Rutgers was really out of whack. Rutgers shrank to such a small campus.

JC: They like that, huh? [laughter]

KP: Yeah. Some of the men are really fond of that. [laughter] ... Being on the other side of the town from the NJC perspective ...

JC: I remember there were so few men left, and I remember that being a big problem, but then along came the USO, so that kind of filled in--the USO and dances at Camp Kilmer, and the girls all got dressed up, and had their social life anyway. A lot of marriages happened at the USO and Camp Kilmer dances. I mean that's where they met. ... My high school and college friend met her husband at a USO, and she got married her senior year of college. ... Other marriages happened. One girl, ... her roommate's parents were going to come and pick her up to go home, and they were also going to bring their son with them who was in the service, so he was in the car, and then he met this roommate, ... his sister's roommate, and that sparked up something, and they got married. So if you read in there how many of them got married because of the USO or having met in the war. ... One of my classmates had some kind of a relative ... in Cooper, and ... he also came along to pick up his sister to go home for a weekend or something, and there she was, and he met her roommate's brother, and they've been married. ... A lot of that happened during the war. ... I don't think there were many Dear Johns from NJC. We wouldn't do that. [laughter] We would be sure before we made a commitment.

KP: You mentioned earlier in a very humorous sort of way, Dean (Boddie's) offer of the women for the first aid station where they were passing condoms out which was probably not in her mind. I have asked the men, and I have only gotten a few hints, Camp Kilmer was plopped down in this area very quickly, I mean it was very much after Pearl Harbor all of a sudden you had this huge camp. What was it like to have such a huge number of men, and they are on their way off to Europe. I mean it was very much a transit station, they were not going to be here long. What was it like for NJC women and women in general?

JC: It changed the ambiance of New Brunswick completely. There were the brown uniforms, ... the khaki uniforms all over the place. The girls on campus who needed to walk anywhere, downtown, or to classes over here, or whatever, had to go in groups for protection. That was very important. ... It wasn't the happiest thing to have Camp Kilmer so close. It ... produced some anxiety. ...

I used to work at Johnson and Johnson as so many of my classmates did and some of the other classes too, ... wrapping bandages for the war effort, ... and it was summertime ... and I came home at night. It was dark when I came home, got off the bus and started walking up the street where the bus stopped. Thank goodness it wasn't the street ... where my house was, because there were no houses there. But this street had a lot of houses from the corner on up and there

was one with a porch light lit. I was walking along, and I heard rustling in the grass behind me, and I turned around and there was a soldier who must've gotten off the bus behind me. I didn't notice. And I saw that porch light, and I made a beeline for that house and I knocked on the door and went inside and told them I was being followed, I would like to call my parents, and have them come and pick me up, that's all I did. I should have called the police, the policeman who lived next door to us gave us a problem the next day because I hadn't, because another woman had been attacked in Metuchen that night. And so this is the kind of thing that you had to worry about, that's why they had to walk in groups.

KP: So there were in fact attacks, it was not just simply ...

JC: Oh yes. There were, yeah.

KP: I have been told that the military police also patrolled New Brunswick, someone finally told me this, I just learned it, because I have gotten a very different story from the men, "Oh, everything was fine, there were no incidents." Only a few have told me some more, but I am interested in the NJC perspective because I have recently interviewed some officers who had been in Camp Kilmer, and while 90% would be fine and follow orders, others would jump over the fence did a whole range of things.

JC: Sure. Well NJC was off limit to the soldiers. The only exception was the husbands of the people ... who were in Camp Kilmer and they wanted to visit their wives, so they were allowed on campus. But otherwise NJC was off limits.

KP: How did they enforce that off limits?

JC: Well they did have security there, and the girls were always ... even on campus they had to go in groups. You were supposed to go in groups wherever you went.

KP: Now this going in groups, this was different before Pearl Harbor.

JC: Oh no. Well you could walk all over the places, all over the country at night all alone and you'd be all right.

KP: But with Camp Kilmer.

JC: But Camp Kilmer made a big difference. It made a big difference in Metuchen, ... that's where I got off the bus, ... so they were there in Metuchen, and they were ... around in Highland Park, and all the other places, it made a big difference, yeah. One of my classmates, ... she lived near ... [Camp Kilmer] and she would hear the troop trains going out at night and she felt sad to think that they were going off to war, it made her feel blue over that, so that made a difference too.

KP: You mentioned a lot of women at NJC went to USO. Did you ever go to any of the USO dances?

JC: I had met Jay, so I didn't need to. [laughter] ... I was well fixed.

KP: You actually never went.

JC: No, I didn't.

KP: How did you get your job at J & J or how did that come about? When did you start?

JC: The opportunity came up, you signed up to go down and there were certain times ... when you would go. I think it was three times a week, and it was for the war effort and so we made a little bit of money, pocket change really, but you were doing something positive for the war effort, that's what I mean about it being a serious time. ... We felt privileged to be in school, we wanted to do something positive and that was a little bit of a thing for us to do, to work at J & J, and so you did it, and a lot of them did it at night after classes, and a lot of them did it in the afternoon. Being home ec., I was either in Monday lab, a Friday lab, a Wednesday lab, or on the train, you know. So I didn't have an awful lot of time. That's possibly why I went at night. Well I went because I was going to Rutgers remember, so I worked in the afternoon after I went to Rutgers and then went home at night. Didn't make much money, I think a \$1.50 a week, something like that. That was a lot of money back then, you know more than a \$1.50 is now, but still it wasn't much. But we were doing it to help more than anything else.

KP: What about the blackout restrictions? What do you remember about air raids drills?

JC: Oh I remember those. I remember everything went out in an air raid. All the street lights went out. Everything was pitch black, you better put out all your lights, you should have had dark shades over your windows already anyway, but you better put out the lights in your house and when the air raid whistle went off, you just sat there in the dark until it [ended]. ... I remember I was babysitting in a house one night when an air raid came, and all the lights went out and I had to put all the lights out, and there was a blind dog with long toenails walking around the house on the wooden floors. I went up and sat next to the baby for company. It was the best I could do to ... feel secure, it wasn't my house, it was a strange house and ... all the noises were not familiar.

MM: Did you participate in any of the NJC war fund drives like the stocking collection or any of those kind of things?

JC: No I didn't. Being a commuter I didn't, being off campus. But you bring up some of them--remembering in there--that sparks a lot of my memory. When you went to a prom, your corsage was supposed to be made up of war bond stamps. You were supposed to wear that, that was patriotic. If you wore flowers, well that's all right, ... but you should be patriotic. And the stamps, you put them in a book and when you got enough stamps, you got a war bond, because you paid for each stamp, it wasn't very much money, I forget how much, and then you got a war bond and you were helping the war effort by wearing this corsage, that's what your fellow was supposed to bring you. We had an obstacle course in gym, ... we were all supposed to take that,

that wasn't an elective gym; that was something you were supposed to do. And a lot of us got injured on that obstacle course, [laughter] but we were supposed to jump over the fences, and swing on the bars and all that kind of stuff to keep us healthy and strong, the homefront should be strong. All of our home economics recipes were ... for vitamins, vitamins were a new thing back then. This was the new, big, research that had ... come out, and we were all conscious to have victory gardens and eat vegetables and get vitamins, and be strong and healthy. And when you walked a lot that helped at keeping you not only strong and healthy, but slim. That sort of thing was what I particularly participated in, the victory garden because I commuted and I was home, and my father had a victory garden and my mother canned everything he grew that we didn't eat right away.

KP: And the war, it sounds like for your home, it sounds like it was a great excuse for your mother to get a job. That she had gotten the convenient excuse to ...

JC: Probably it was. I wasn't as aware that was her reason, but because they didn't let me in on their discussions. ...

KP: But she nonetheless got one.

JC: She went and got one, ... and worked shift work yet, so it meant that he was home alone sometimes, if she was working 7-11, you know or 11-7, 11-7 that was it.

KP: So what did your father eat?

JC: Well I was home and I was a home ec. so ... Yeah. And I had a project one summer to take over the household and manage it and plan the menus and do the shopping and all of that kind of stuff, and I had a report to write and all that. But that helped them out that way too.

KP: Why did you major in home economics?

JC: Oh boy. You're bringing up some of these things, but I may as well say--what's the difference. At my age I don't have to impress anybody anymore. ... Anything that didn't have to take math, I took. And my cousin who went to Barnard, she was the one who didn't get the Golden Eaglet, said, "Well you know home economics, if you don't know what to do and you don't want to take math, home economics would be good, because at least you'd have some training." [laughter] Housekeeping and homemaking, so that's why I took it. I wish I had been a journalism major.

KP: Really?

JC: Yes I do.

MM: I was reading in that book and there was something about 66 out of 106 people would choose their major again. Would you do home economics again?

JC: ... No. I wouldn't. I don't know what I would do about the math. But I would rather do, I missed out on all ... the history, the philosophy, the English courses that I would have loved to have had. ... I had one elective in four years, ... and I was in the lab doing chemistry and none of the experiments ever came out, and I was in physics, thank God I had a math major for a lab partner, and we passed and Jay helped me through, that's what we did on dates, we studied physics. ... I was a little out of sync with what I really wanted to do, but I'm glad I went anyway. And it was only opening doors and I could learn the rest of the stuff as I went on through life.

KP: You mentioned that an English instructor, not a home economics professor, was your favorite professor, Miss Louden.

JC: Oh yeah. ... Nobody else liked her but me. She was the one who dyed her hair blue and wore a turban all the time. And she was very strict and she told everybody the way it was, when they handed in their freshmen compositions, she tore them apart. And I remember I took her to heart, because I was interested in writing, that's really what I liked, I guess that's why I was the only one who liked her, I don't know. But then we had to write one of these themes and I took her to heart and put down and I laid it out on outline, and was very careful about it, followed the outline, was careful with words, really produced it. Well! She held it up in front of the class and I was embarrassed for everybody else, because this is the way it should be done. But she was right, really, this is the way it should be done, you do the outline and you fill it in, you filled in the outline and you don't put too much in there, you put what's important. And she was right, and I did it her way and she liked it, and so that's why I like her.

MM: Have you had any contact with her or have you seen her?

JC: No I didn't. I haven't seen her since, ... she was fairly--well, she looked elderly to me when I went there. I don't know what happened to her, she didn't ... stay there too many years longer, maybe the four years, but after that I don't know.

KP: This is the same question I ask Rutgers College people: When you entered college, what did you think you wanted to become, and what did people at NJC want to become? How many thought college was just a short way station for marriage, and how many wanted ideally to have careers?

JC: I think they expected to have careers. My classmates expected that, they ... didn't all do what their major was, but they got enough of the knowledge to do, a lot of them who took chemistry and physics and that sort of thing wound up in research labs and so forth. So a lot of them did have their careers in mind and were doing the kind of thing that they loved. So basically, I think they expected to have a career before marriage. The war kind of set that akilter, but I think they would have, if it hadn't been for the war, they probably would have had a career first, and then marriage.

KP: So in a sense it sounds like you're saying that the war, since your class graduated when the war was ending, it really threw things in a sense, out of whack that in fact a lot of people did get out earlier than they might have.

JC: I think that's true.

KP: And that the several year interval didn't exist, that they sort of expected coming in.

JC: A lot of the people who got married had a career anyway. Even though they were married, they went around ... and had a career. Our class, I am very proud of, because I think we have had it all, you know, we don't like saying, women have it all. They have it all at once, and that's almost too much to swallow, where we had careers, then we had families and children, then we went back and had careers. And some of them, their careers followed right on through the families, the children. So that we have had it all, by this time in our lives, experienced ... every [thing] all the way, the career all the way, the family and the children all the way, the career is back all the way again, and the retirement for sure all the way! Really. So we've experienced every one of them to the full. And I don't think that women now have time to do it all. That's my own opinion though.

MC: You mentioned seeing Eleanor Roosevelt in the train station here. Did you listen to her speak or did you just see her?

JC: ... I was on my way home when she got off the train, that's why I was in the station when she came by. I was impressed with her, I guess you call it charisma, when she walked by, you could feel it. She was just carrying a little case, and she had an entourage, but she was in the front, and she was walking straight and stately, and I was very impressed with what I saw that time.

MC: Had you looked up to her previously?

JC: Oh she had a very bad press, ... so no, I hadn't, really. ... From what I had read, she was rocking the boat down there, you know, and you mustn't do that. ... So I didn't have--it wasn't a deep unfavorable impression, it was just sort of surfacing, but when I saw her I was very impressed yes, and subsequent times listening to her and seeing her confirmed that I was right the first time.

KP: You mentioned you had met your husband at chemistry class, a summer chemistry class ...

JC: No, it was in chapel.

KP: In chapel.

JC: In chapel. ...

KP: So in other words there was chapel in the summer too.

JC: Oh, chapel was mandatory whether it's summer or winter.



KP: And even though you were just taking this chemistry class ...

JC: I had to go to chapel.

KP: Chapel at Rutgers College.

JC: Right, right, that was part of it, it was mandatory. If you cut chapel, it was a cut, and it counted. You mustn't do that.

KP: And I guess since you have a comparison between Douglass Chapel or NJC and Rutgers College Chapel, what was the differences between the chapels, were there any differences?

JC: There were not a whole lot [of] a difference. You got up and you went to chapel and you sat there, and somebody got up and spoke, in either chapel. And then they, that was it, and then you went out and went to your next class. ... It wasn't, once in a while they had a speaker that was worthy of your attention, but most of the time they just droned on and you were trying to think of maybe cracking a book and studying, and all that kind of stuff.

KP: So how did the meeting take place because in chapel you were supposed to be paying attention.

JC: Well, that's right. I apparently sat in the same pew, and a fellow from my class who was in his class, a fellow from my high school was in Jay's class, and Jay said, "Who is that?" And Red Bruno told him, and so then Red Bruno set up a blind date. And that's how I met him.

KP: So where did you go on your blind date?

JC: We went to the movies, what else. [laughter] We went to the movies.

KP: And then you took chemistry together?

JC: No, we didn't. I went to chemistry, but he was accelerating and he was a year ahead of me anyway, and he was brilliant and wasn't having to make up these things the way I was. Every time he calls me stupid since we've been married I say, "Well, you should've known." [laughter]

KP: And you obviously fell in love and got married?

JC: Right.

JC: Do you think the war accelerated your getting married? Do you think you might have waited longer without it?

JC: I don't know. I think possibly. My parents were quite disappointed, they wanted me to work for awhile before--do something with this college career they had paid so hard for, so they were disappointed, but we were both ready, and so we were all set up to get married July 24. ... That

was a big mistake, because it made the reunion and 50th anniversary too close together to handle, but back then it was fine. ... Graduated in June ... and we were going to be married in July 24. Well in between graduation and the July 24th, he got his greetings from the president, and he couldn't leave the country. And we were supposed to go to Quebec and take the Saguenay River Cruise on our honeymoon, and he couldn't leave the country. So we moved our ... wedding up, I have a samplet home that my mother made, and it says 24th crossed off, and 11th on top. [laughter] Cause the sample was all done by the time we changed the date, but my father's stepfather was a printer and he printed up all new invitations to send out just in time. And we got married on the 11th, and took the Hudson River Day line to Albany, instead of the Sanguenay River. And we were going to, after our 50th anniversary, we were going to go on a cruise to Canada and go up the (Sanguany?) River.

KP: Because you've never done that.

JC: No, we haven't. And we had to cancel the cruise, because Jay wasn't feeling well, the doctor said, don't go. So we're not supposed to go there. [laughter] Not going to try anymore.

MM: What was your first home like after you were married? I know you stayed in New Brunswick.

JC: First home. Right. The sewing instructor, Miss Cornell, lived in a nice little apartment on 10 Sanford Street. And Jay and I walked the streets of New Brunswick and any house that had bare windows on it got knocked on the door, do you have an apartment for rent? No, I'm just redecorating, you know all kinds of answers. ... And we walked the streets and we pounded the pavement, and Miss Cornell knew this. She also knew that she was about to leave to go to Northwestern, to get a new job, and her apartment would be vacant, so she told me about it. "Oh, right away, great." And it turned out that my father was a friend of the landlord of ... Miss Cornell's apartment--through boy scouting, and so strings were pulled to get our name up on the top of the list, and we got the apartment, and it was a little living room, hallway, bedroom, kitchen, bathroom, and a porch, the second floor. ... And that was our first home, tiny little place.

Jay C. Comeforo: It was very nice actually.

JC: It was nice. It was convenient, ... I still remember the pots hanging up over the stove, because that was the only place I had to store them, but they were so convenient that I learned that is the best way to do it, so I still do it that way. [laughter]

MM: Was housing difficult to find because the war had just ended?

JC: Very. Very difficult to find. ... All through, even after the war, it was difficult to find. Our first apartment, as I say, had been because my father knew--because we looked at every house I think in New Brunswick, and if they didn't have curtains we knocked on their door, and we didn't find a thing, and if it hadn't been Miss Cornell, we wouldn't have had one, I don't know what we would have done. But when we left, in a year we went to Illinois, it was 'cause the fellows ...

were coming back and it was the GI Bill, and housing was still difficult to get because of that, and we lived in a trailer for three years because of that, so housing was difficult even after.

KP: We'll want to do a separate interview with your husband. Did your husband go off to war? Although V-J Day would come along shortly after getting an apartment, did you stay in New Brunswick then?

JC: He didn't go off to war. ... He was at Rutgers doing research on radar, ceramics for radar.

KP: But he had been drafted, how did that ...

JC: Well that was just before we got married, he wasn't drafted, [but] he can't see and he can't hear, and so he really wasn't drafted, but he was also doing important research work for radar which they needed desperately because of all the submarines out on the Atlantic.

KP: So in other words you had an exemption, or ... ?

Jay C. Comeforo: Yes. I was in military service and I said I was much more valuable at Rutgers doing work on that what she described.

KP: So you basically stayed in New Brunswick in your first home.

JC: Right.

KP: What was it like to go to the University of Illinois and go from this very nice apartment and this sort of world you had known all your life to Illinois, and to a trailer. I have interviewed people from the class of 1949 who lived in the trailers out by University Heights, so I would be curious from a spouse's perspective what the dynamics of the experience were.

JC: It was interesting. Of course, it was traumatic for me, because I had never left home before, you know. And this was, I was married, but I lived in New Brunswick and home was right over there, so that was no problem, but this was leaving everybody. And I remember the first Fourth of July and all we walked around the university and we walked around the streets, and everybody was having a picnic in their backyard and I felt terribly lonely, because it was just the two of us, we weren't having a family picnic. But the trailer life, ... we pounded the pavement in Urbana, Illinois again, and we walked around and walked around. Well, it turned out, we found a nice lady sitting on her porch in the afternoon, and she had some property in the back of her house, so we asked her if she had an apartment or anything, you know she didn't, but she had some property in the back. ... I think we had looked at a trailer in desperation, because we couldn't find an apartment, and wanted to know [if] we could put ... our trailer back there, and well, she thought about that, ... and she was the granddaughter of a pioneer out in those areas, wonderful, wonderful woman, and so yeah, we could put our trailer back there, and the thing that was nice about having our trailer on her property was that our bathroom was in her basement. We had our trailer here and I forget how many hundreds of feet it was down to her basement over there, and you know one of these garage doors, basement doors that you open, you don't walk straight in,

you open it and go down the steps. She had a shower and a toilet down there and a stove, and it was cold to take a shower. You took sponge baths mostly in the winter time. It was, well, the trailer would fit with room to spare, in our living room and dining room now. It was very, very small, eight feet wide, and I think thirteen, fifteen feet long, and it had a couch that you opened up, it had a little bedroom in the back, and then a kitchen, and a gasoline stove that you pumped up, and the oven was so small that a cookie sheet wouldn't fit in, so Jay took his pliers and bent it up so that you could fit it in the oven and we could make pizza. Yeah, but ... I didn't learn how to use that ... gasoline stove, I pumped it up and pumped it up and I couldn't leave the place, ... I couldn't even go down to the landlady's basement, ... 'cause I would lose power. And somebody who also had one came and said, "Oh well after you pump it up you're supposed to push this lever down," a whole year I couldn't leave the place. Finally learned how to use it, then we had our first child there, and our bedroom became the nursery, and we slept in the living room on a hide-a-bed, and what you did was, when he got up and he went down to get washed to go off to work in the morning, I folded up the bed, put down the table, set the table, and had the coffee on and he walked over to the little store on the corner and got doughnuts, and we had breakfast. But it was a system you had to have, because the table couldn't have put down with the bed up.

Jay C. Comeforo: Actually, ... it's much smaller ... than this room. Its nine feet wide, eight or nine feet wide by about 26 feet long, but ideally it's quaint. It was a comfortable, very cozy place and had one big advantage that we seem to forget. It didn't have space to store anything, so you didn't get burdened with all that ... debris going upstairs, basically it had a lot of advantages.

JC: After we had our first child we ... took out the ice box, and put in a refrigerator.

JC (husband): You couldn't get many refrigerators, there were none available.

JC: But we did. We put one in, because we thought the formula would be better kept in the refrigerator than in an ice box.

KP: Well you had a child, that kept you busy.

JC: Oh yes, very busy. The playpen took up the whole living room. Yeah, and ... we had to train her, so we had a little potty, and of course every time you had to empty that, you had to walk way down to the landlady's basement. ... You adjust your life to these conditions, and so we got fine, we didn't have a well, we didn't have water for the first year, we got a big tank for spraying herbicides on trees and things, and Jay would go down to the landlady's basement and fill it up, strap it on his back and walk down and set it next to the sink and pump it up, pump the power up. And so then ... that's where I'd get my water. It was a brand new one so it didn't have any herbicides in it or anything, it was brand new, so that's what we used for our water. Finally, ... I guess after Jeannie was born, there was a pipe and a fixture on the landlady's property, so Jay dug as narrow a ditch as possible, so narrow that his hips got bruised when he tried to put the pipes in, and he dug the ditch over there and connected the pipe up and we had a stop and waste valve, so we had running water in the trailer, cold running water, but we had running water which was a step up in life from the old tank.

KP: And you stayed in a trailer the entire time at Illinois?

JC: Three years.

KP: You never moved up to an apartment or house.

JC: Three years, three months, and three days. No, we never moved to a...

Jay C. Comeforo: We didn't have a car either by the way, and Jean ... [did] the shopping with the stroller. ... She didn't buy much shopping, ... but use that [stroller] to get back as much as you could, so one time she got enthusiastic and saw this nice ...

JC: Watermelon

Jay C. Comeforo: ... watermelon, which grows in Illinois and they're round rather than the usual and ... smaller in diameter, so she bought it, and she's like "Oh my God how am I going to get it home?" So she was pushing her cart and going like this with her foot.

JC: Actually what I did was hide it under a bush and ... took the rest of the groceries home with our little daughter in the stroller and then came back and got the watermelon and then carried that. [laughter] You just don't think ahead, got tempted, eyes bigger than possibilities.

Jay C. Comeforo: We got our bicycles shipped out, and we were going from where we were to the University of Illinois Ag Farm and look at the animals, and they were big.

JC: Yeah, that was an outing. When you don't have a car you'd be surprised at the fun you get doing little things, instead. You adapt.

KP: I know you had your hands full, but did you take part in any activities, did you join any clubs, did you get to know any graduate students, the spouses of any graduate students?

JC: They had a ceramic wives [club] there, and I took part in that, and they had the whiz kids basketball team at Illinois back then, and it was a big thing, and you could buy tickets to only every other game or something, you couldn't have a whole ticket because so many people wanted to get in, so you had to share the games because these whiz kids were something else and they were wonderful, and so we went and saw those, and then that was the first year that Illinois was in the Big Ten. No, the first year they went to the Rose Bowl. This was the first year Illinois went to the Rose Bowl, and Army was the team that UCLA wanted to play, and they were wasting their efforts on Illinois, and all the press was all over, and Illinois beat the stuffings out of them, beat the stuffings out of them, 49 to something I think it was. It was unbelievable.

Jay C. Comeforo: 47 to 19, 49 was the second time.

JC: Oh okay, well whatever it was, ... they got their dander up all right from all those press releases and that was exciting, it was exciting, and we went to a football game, we had movies in

Chief (Illani?) which is a no thing to do now. Which is a shame because it was such a lot, I don't think that calling them ... the Illani after the Indians is a detriment, I think that it was a compliment, because they appreciate the quality ... of the (Illani?) tribe, and seeing Chief (Illani?) was so moving and so wonderful ... and I miss that, you know, ... I never thought it was meant to be derogatory, ever. I thought it was a compliment. ...

KP: You would come back East then after Illinois.

JC: Yes, we did. Jay, let me see now, oh no we didn't come east, we went south. He got a job with the ... Bureau of Mines in Norris, Tennessee, and we ... waited out and waited out, three months, three days thing we were waiting out Congress to make the appropriation so we could have a job down there at the U.S. Bureau of Mines in Norris, Tennessee. And it came through, and we packed the back of the car, we sold the trailer, 'cause as he said we didn't have many things, so everything went in this two-door Plymouth car. When you opened the trunk you could still see the shape of the trunk, it was packed so solid to get the door shut. We drove to Tennessee and bought a little house down there which would fit inside our living room, dining room now. But [it] was wonderful, it had one bedroom, one big bedroom, one big living room, kitchen here, bathroom here, and a porch. And then half the porch was enclosed and it made another bedroom.

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

KP: This continues an interview with Mrs. Jean C. Comeforo on April 10, 1996 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler and

MM: Maria Mazzone,

MC: And Melanie Cooper.

KP: And you were just mentioning about Tennessee, you had this lovely small house, but the ground, the soils were different.

JC: The soils were very [different]. ... In Illinois if you dropped a seed on the ground something came up, in Tennessee if you planted something you never saw it again. At least that was my experience. Other people were always going to mulch piles and they were always improving their soils and doing something, but we lived on a hillside. We lived on such a hillside that the front of the house you walked straight in, but the back of the house--we were the only house in Norris to have a basement. Jay's ... parents came down, and Jay's father put a basement in for us, underneath the whole house, so we were the only one to have a full basement. They were TVA houses. They were built to build Norris Dam, and the people lived in that town to build Norris Dam. We didn't buy one house that would have been better and bigger and everything, because it was infested with termites, and every once in a while the dining room floor fell through. We didn't think that would be a good buy, so we bought this other smaller one, and it didn't fall through, it was nice and solid.

KP: What did you think about living in Tennessee? You were someone who had taken some family trips up to New England, you really hadn't seen much of the country. What did you think of Illinois and Tennessee looking back on it, what was the same, but what were the things that were really different for you?

JC: Well we didn't have a car in Illinois so I didn't see an awful lot of it, especially when the corn was growing, you couldn't see above the corn. When you drove around the roads all you could see was corn. The people, I heard about how friendly the people in the midwest were, and they were on the surface, but I didn't make any really enduring friendships there, except for our landlady who was practically a second grandmother to our daughter, ... she was part of family, she became family, she was absolutely wonderful, and had such stories to tell about when the University. ... Her mother had the entire faculty of the University of Illinois to dinner one night. [laughter] ... So that she has memories of way back, she should be on tape, too bad, but she isn't.

But how did I think of ... Tennessee. ... We had a car ... Jay's parents gave Jay a car when he got his Ph.D. in Illinois, and we lived in Tennessee with a car, but then the second child was born, and I really practically got cabin fever. Jay went away on business trips every once in a while and I was home and he played softball, but he didn't think you should have children around the softball game, so I stayed home, and one of the activities was the African Violet Club which didn't really interest me. The best thing we had was friendships. We became very friendly with people and we went out to each other's home for dinner. One night Jay was complaining I had too many kitchen gadgets, so we said all right, I'll invite you to a gadget dinner, and I tried to make a dinner using every gadget in the kitchen. That kind of thing, that was our social life. The big deal was going shopping once a week in Clinton, and then we found a place in Lake City, it used to be called Coal Town, but the Senator's girlfriend thought that wasn't a pretty name, so they called it Lake City despite the fact there was no lake there, but it was a pretty name. That place had a grocery store that made doughnuts, and we drove to Lake City, it was a pretty ride, and bought our groceries there once in awhile just to get the doughnuts. Make it different, and ... Knoxville was 24 miles away and I went once for dinner, and I got so excited I broke out in hives.

KP: So you were fairly isolated. [laughter] Because you said earlier that you used to go to Newark which was no big deal. And now you are in a sense, stuck in the middle of nowhere.

JC: ... Cabin fever. It really was. ... It was nice, but it was very local, and we had the children, we went to Big Ridge State Park which was lovely, we went in the summertime, in the wintertime it was drab, because ... there were no grays and blue tones in the scenery, it was brown leaves on brown hills with bare trees, and it was drab. ... The first summer we were there we had seventeen straight days of rain. My mother wrote and said, "I just bought strawberries in the store that said, from sunny Tennessee." But it was so dark I had to leave the lights on in the day time, it was so dark and cloudy. But the strawberries were nice, and you could buy strawberries there, you could call up and say I'm coming and say I'm coming at 2:00, and she wouldn't pick them until 1:30. These strawberries would be that fresh.

MM: Have you been back to either Illinois or Tennessee?

JC: Yes, we went back to Illinois. Our daughter and son in law lived in Lake Forest, and so we went to a ceramic convention in Indianapolis and then continued on out to Urbana, and the corn, it was early in the spring and the corn wasn't up yet, and we were just, I mean it's as flat as this table out there, you can see forever in every direction. The landlady's house is gone, and they put an ugly modern apartment, I mean, really ugly modern apartment on her lot, and her house was such a lovely Victorian house, it's a shame. And it's the only one on the four corners that's gone. Just her house is gone, and there's a little house on the place where our trailer was. The University streets looked narrower, more unkempt, than I remembered them being. The University itself had lost all its elm trees, and so that was different, and they moved the statue that used to be by Symphony Hall there, they moved it out to another place so that looked different. The kiosks and stuff were all over the place, the bookstore was in an entirely different place, it was much more modern and not nearly as dignified as I remembered it. You could buy, when we lived there, in Illinois, you could go up to the place on the Ag Farm, they made ice cream with flecks of vanilla in it, and that was superb ice cream, you walked up and could buy that and take it home for dinner.

KP: Were you glad to come back to New Jersey?

JC: I was very glad to leave Tennessee, we moved up to ...Bedford, Massachusetts, and we lived there a year, and I loved Massachusetts, I absolutely wanted to put my roots down and stay there forever, but Jay got this job at Frenchtown Porcelain, and we moved back to Jersey. No, I was not happy to leave Massachusetts; I wasn't happy to come back to New Jersey. It's grown on me, and I like it and I'm glad I did.

KP: So you would've preferred to move away, but not necessarily Tennessee.

JC: No, I didn't want to stay in Tennessee, no.

KP: My wife wants to go back to Massachusetts so I can ...

JC: The only trouble with Massachusetts is it's "Taxachusetts."

KP: Oh, it's not that bad, I could live with the taxes. You would eventually, you were a full time mother and worked in the house, but you went back and worked in the outside work force, how did that come about?

JC: Well, ... our daughter had a bad Brownie leader, and I was telling ... a friend of mine, I didn't know she'd act on it, that the Brownie handbook had more in it. ... You could have a different program every week, so all of the sudden I became assistant leader, and there was no leader, so you can't assist somebody that isn't there, so I became leader. ... First, I was cookie chairman and then I became a leader. And then those girls graduated up into what we call junior scouts, and I had a wonderful troop, I was inspired by my father. One thing I did before that was read How to Win Friends and Influence People, I thought I'd get along with the girls, and it worked, it really



did. We had a great troop, then I became volunteer public relations chairman for the council, because I had done my own public relations for the troop, I didn't pay any attention to the council, I did it myself, and they thought well they haven't got anybody else, so they asked me. ... I became volunteer, ... and then the staff person I was working with left, and they asked me to become the ... staff person in charge of that, and I also had the whole of Hunterdon County to manage, the troops and the neighborhoods. And I loved that work, I had an absolutely fantastic executive director to work for, and nice people to work with.

KP: And in some ways your doing this was a complete accident. You were in a sense in the right place at the right time?

JC: ... Right, Right place.

KP: But it also sounds like your father would have been very proud of your ...

JC: He would've been, yes. He would've been.

KP: What did you enjoy most about the job, especially when it became a paid position?

JC: You know it was--fortunately, this has to be said, fortunately, I was not in economic straits, so the money didn't mean that much to me, but I loved the job. I was very pro--I knew the council inside and out by that time, I was pro-program, I was pro-what it was doing for girls, and I thought it was just terrific. So it was easy to do public relations for them, and the part I liked best was the public relations which is why I said I should've been a journalism major in college.

KP: So you enjoyed doing press releases and talking to reporters and ...

JC: Very much, very much. Writing them, and going to the newspapers and everything else, yes I did enjoy doing that.

KP: And you never thought of journalism while you were in college.

JC: No. Well you see I had such low self esteem when I started college that I didn't think I could do anything. So what are you going to do? Uh ... I couldn't think of anything, because I didn't know anything I could do. But I should have known, because ... in grammar school I helped a neighbor friend sell Liberty magazines, so I was out there selling anyway and doing public relations for him.

KP: And why did you leave the council?

JC: The executive director retired. They had another executive director ... [come] in, that was all right, you could adjust to that, but then another staff person came on who when I was ill and didn't attend meetings would undermine me, and I didn't think the pay was enough, first of all, which I said didn't matter to me, but I was struggling too hard and working too hard to have that happen and make my life miserable in the job I loved, so I left because of that. Really, basically I

left because I could. I left because I could, I didn't have to have that salary, Jay was doing so well, and I didn't need it, I could quit.

KP: But you enjoyed the work a great deal.

JC: Very much, I loved working with the people, everybody said I spoon fed my leaders, but I did everything I could to help them have good troop meetings and everything, and when they totalled up the membership, ... my area was the only one that had grown in membership, the rest of them hadn't because they had changed their ways of handling helping the leaders. They made the leaders come to them, rather than going to the leaders.

KP: So you made it a point to be very active, it sounds like you did a lot of travelling.

JC: I did, yes. And I'd bring projectors to them if they needed it, I was available to sit in two different towns so they could come. And I helped them with anything. They called me up and I did what I could for them. That was supposed, I thought [to be] my job! That's why I was there.

KP: After that, did you try to find another job either in public relations or youth leadership?

JC: No, I didn't. That was not a good time in my life. I found myself very out of sync. The best thing that happened was that Jay retired from what he was doing, and started another company, and he threw me into the office, and that's what I was going to do. And I remember the first time something came in and he handed me a packing slip and I didn't know what to do with it. But I learned, Jay had always said that business was tough, you know, and he said, "Some of the women in business are terrible, ... boy you don't know." I said, "How can that be, I work with women all the time," he said, "Yeah, Girl Scout women, they're different from ordinary working women." And he was right, ... but it opened up so much more of life to me, and I saw a whole other side of being in business that I had never thought about.

KP: So what did you learn, you mentioned there were things you did not know how to do, but ...

JC: I didn't know how to do anything in business when I started, but I kept the books, I answered the phone, I typed the letters, with a great deal of difficulty on every one of those things, ... but the learning curve is high, and I was learning all the while, and finally ... we got big enough that we needed more people, I couldn't handle it all, because I'm not naturally gifted in those skills. And so we advertised, and the nicest, most wonderful looking lady came through the door and became the secretary, office manager, whatever, and I just kept the books. And then I was taking so long keeping the books, I could do it, but it took me a long time because I had to check, because this math thing was still haunting me. And Jay came up and said, "Would you mind very much if we hired someone to keep the books?" I said, "No, when are you going to do it!" We hired a bookkeeper, then I could go into the selling part which is what I liked.

KP: So you did do sales.

JC: I guess so, yeah. Jay did the marketing, I did the sales, and we went on business trips together, and I would set up appointments, and kept the--computer I was afraid of, so we kept index cards, I wrote all the information down on index cards. Besides which I could take it with me, you can't take the computer along--you can [take] laptops now, but they didn't have them then. And we travelled around, we went to California once a year, Florida once a year, Massachusetts once a year at least, and I would set up. One time in Richmond, Virginia, this fellow I called and, yes ... he thought he'd like to see Jay. It turned out, after I set up the information, we drove around trying to find the place and it was hard, and he said the reason he made the appointment is he wanted to meet this guy who brought his secretary with him. [laughter] He said, "Now I see why, you know, his wife."

KP: It sounds like you never imagined you would be in sort of a family company, and you'd be a partner with your husband.

JC: I never thought so.

KP: But it sounds like you enjoyed it.

JC: I loved it, yes I did. When we came home together we were either mad together or happy together, but we both understood why the other one was in that mood. That's one good thing. It wasn't a mom and pop shop though, it was a grandmom and grandpa shop, because at that time we had our only grandchild. Grandma and Grandpa, oh and we have mugs now.

KP: I guess before leaving business, did it surprise you when you were doing this in particular in both jobs you had with the Girl Scouts and then in the family company, that you had these roles and you were someone who had been very shy, and you know that you would call people and try to set up a meeting and try to sell them something, it's really hard, it's hard work for someone who is very shy. Some of my students are terrified when they have to call up people to make appointments, and for the most part we expect them to say yes, but did you ever think about that?

JC: I was terrified. ... When ... he started a business before we got into this one together, he started a business called Consolidated Ceramics and Metallizing Corporation, and it started in our living room really, and I was it, and I was having to call up these presidents of company and I'm thinking, My God I have to talk to the president of a company, ... how can I do that? All of the sudden [I] realized that he's the president of a company and I talk to him all the time, you know they're just like him and I can talk to them, too. So it broke the barrier down just realizing that they're people just like everybody else. And the more I talked the more comfortable I got, and then the person that I really was came out. And it's been coming out, I guess ever since obviously the way I'm talking today, I'm not shy anymore! Well when you get older, you realize that you don't have to impress anybody and you're going to be yourself, and you may as well go ahead and be it, and it's all right, and if they don't like it, they don't have to come.

KP: You have stayed involved with your class at NJC, now Douglass College. When were you the most active? Was it a recent phenomena, or have you always been involved with reunions? And when did you become class president?

JC: I'm not class president, they asked me, but I like being secretary better so I asked if I could stay on.

KP: Oh, okay I just assumed you were president since you had such a role with the reunion.

JC: No, I like being secretary, because I like to write letters. The writing part is what I like to do. Being president doesn't have that activity, it's easier I think, but I like to do the writing. I remember, I think it was our 30th reunion, I wasn't going to be "Josephine College" I'm not interested in that, oh I'm not interested. I know I've talked to other classmates who say the same thing and I know just how they feel. ... So one of my classmates said, "Oh come on you have to go to reunion, you really have to go, you're going to enjoy it." So all right I'll go, and I went, and I had such a good time that ever since then I want to go back to every reunion, and then Jay's reunion's were such a lot of fun, and I enjoyed them so much, and then of course mine was always the year after his, and then five years later his would be and then mine the year after, and I enjoyed them so much, and then he got the idea to write a book for his reunion, and then he said, "Okay we'll write one for yours too," that was the 45th. And everybody liked it so much, and he said, "Well we'll do it for the 50th," and we did it for his, and then we did it again for mine. And the 50th for me was a real labor of love. The more I read the responses to the questionnaire the more I admired my classmates and admired my class. And I just have built up enthusiasm ever since for the class of, great interesting, wonderful, intelligent, able class of '45.

KP: I would not be surprised because the classes I have interviewed from the Rutgers side, are more interesting than they could ever realize, and your class sounds just as remarkable.

JC: Those years were good years, and '45 had a special reputation even when they first came. [laughter] It said so in some of the earlier yearbooks, the interesting class, they were very unusual.

MM: Are you planning any more reunions in the future?

JC: I'm planning, ... I'm doing my best, I go to telethon and the first thing I say was, don't forget May 31st is Vanguard Luncheon, you have to be sure and come, we want to have as many tables of classmates as we can, it's going to be pulling teeth again, people don't make the effort to come so far for the anti-climax.

KP: Your two daughters, they would both go to college and it sounds like you expected them to go to college, and are you disappointed they did not go to NJC/Douglass?

JC: No. They had to go where they needed to go, no I'm not disappointed. They were different students, our older girl wasn't ... didn't appear to be that great a student in high school, but she's doing really very well, she's blossomed and blossomed, both of them were late bloomers, our

younger girl was a late bloomer in college, too. But they made it through and ... they've been better because of it. Our younger girl took a major that doesn't exist anymore at Rider, it was secretarial science, which she took other courses besides secretarial courses so that she would have a background, she was supposed to become an executive secretary, they don't have it anymore because now executives have computers and they don't need executive secretaries. They think they don't anyway, but they forget what ... an executive secretary does for them. ... The older girl is not married, she's an itinerate teacher for the hearing impaired in Delaware County in Pennsylvania, and the younger one is the mother of our grandchild, and works in the library in Peapack.

KP: Which is close by.

JC: Right, thank God.

MC: How did you feel about the name change for your alma mater?

JC: I didn't like it. I thought NJC was great, and I liked the name and I didn't see what difference it made, and I think if it was still NJC, it would ... I'm concerned that the big amoeba of Rutgers is just going to sort of squeeze it. You think so too. And I think if it was NJC it would be easier to remain independent, it's a different enough name, you have Cook campus, and you have Kean Campus [sic] and you have Queens Campus, and you have Douglass Campus, well if you had NJC Campus, it would rattle the rhythm enough that you'd stand out more. So I wish it was still NJC, New Jersey College for Women. I didn't like the name change at all, I put my vote down, but nobody paid any attention. It changed anyway.

MM: When did that happen, in the 1950s?

JC: Oh, I think about, yeah it was. Too bad.

KP: What do you think was the strength of single sex education, of going to a woman's college, do you look back and say ... Because one of your daughters went to Smith which is a women's college, but one went to Rider College which is coeducational. Do you ever look back and say this was really good, I'm glad I was primarily with women?

JC: Definitely. I think it was ... you do your own thing there, there are no distractions, there are no ... the competition is different, I think that the men have an ego that has to succeed, and the women, it just naturally falls that way that they follow along. Unless they have a very strong willed women, ... who wouldn't necessarily be terribly attractive to the men anyway, 'cause too much competition in there. Maybe these days it's different, but that's the way it was, and the women had a chance to run things, do it their way, they run the Caellian, they ran all the organizations on campus, and the government and all, and they didn't have to sit and be secretary or treasurer unless they wanted to. No, they could be president, and they were, and they ran and had lots of chances for leadership that don't exist, I don't think, as much, even now probably on a co-ed campus.

KP: Is there anything we forgot to ask you?

JC: ... I can't imagine it. Can't imagine it.

MM: What about your granddaughter, is she in college now?

JC: She's going to Dickinson out in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. She had an absolutely fabulous dream world high school experience, riding on the top all the way. When she started in college, Jay and I both thought, she's having too much fun. [laughter] She's having too good a time, and she was going here and going there, ... and she has a car, and she's driving back and forth, and she's going to visit friends and she is going to do this and that, and she's bringing home friends and all, and she's going to bed in the morning and waking up at night and all that. And I'm saying, "Oh boy this is something." But now, this last, second half of the year, she's beginning to talk about grades, and classes, and books, and things and so I feel, Jay and I both feel, much better about it. She's a wonderful girl, ... of course he wanted her to be born 30 years old, [laughter] and she hasn't gotten there yet so he's still waiting.

KP: Your life was much more structured, especially when you compare it to your granddaughter. Are you ever surprised how structured NJC was when you look back on it? In both a positive and a negative sense.

JC: Oh, there were positive, you know it's good to have boundaries and rules. I think one of the reasons people seem so disenchanting now, is because there are no rules ... and they don't quite know what to do or how far to go, or how to act, ... even the social rules, the manners and things like that, you did things a certain way for certain reasons. I'm trying to teach our granddaughter ... when you get up from the table in a restaurant, don't put your napkin on the table, it tells the waiter you're finished, put it on your chair. These little quiet things that ease and grease the ways to make things smoother and more pleasant. I don't think that happened when you have a generation growing up at McDonalds. How are you going to teach them about putting the napkin on the chair instead of the table? It's difficult, maybe the pendulum will swing back some, I hope so because I think it's easier to have a certain amount of structure. I don't--I think it was especially before I went to college when I was in high school, it was much too strict and too stiff, but I don't like to see all the rules go out the window, because I think you need some. ... We have a much ... happier and well-adjusted society if we know the boundaries of where we go, so discrimination isn't so much, it's not so much discrimination as you ... just don't belong in those circles. You won't be happy there, and they won't be happy to have you there, and you know all that so you don't try, and that's fine, that's not discrimination, that's just finding your level and enjoying where you are.

KP: You mentioned a lot of people had dated soldiers, but did you know of anyone who enlisted in any of the women's service corps? It's a question I should have asked earlier. And did you even think of all of enlisting?

JC: Oh no, you didn't do that. You didn't do that, and besides which I had a hard time going to college let alone going into the Army or Navy. No I didn't, and I didn't know anybody. In the

book there, there's one girl who desperately wanted to go, but she was an only child and her mother was too worried and so she didn't join. ... One thing I should tell you is I had a WAC bag when I was in college, and it was the most-- I wish I had another one, because it stayed on your shoulder, it fit your hip, it had all kinds of compartments inside so you could find what you wanted like that, it was absolutely fabulous and I wore it to shreds because it was so wonderful, and they don't design them like that, and I can't understand why.

KP: If there is ever a marketing idea, that's a good idea. Really, it was that good.

JC: It was marvelous, it stayed on your shoulder, now it's always falling off.

KP: Oh interesting. I guess one of the questions which is probably more of a distinct memory for men who were in the military, but do you remember where you were when you heard the news the war had ended, the atomic bomb, the Japanese had surrendered.

JC: Oh yes. Oh yes. I remember very well. ... They celebrated, I loved seeing it again on television ... when ... they had all those series during ... the anniversary year. Yeah, it was bedlam and everybody was running around happy. It was such a tremendous relief because it was over, and there wouldn't have to be any more people dying over there, the fellows could come home, and it was wonderful, it just was ... I remember a college classmate, Jay was off on a business trip, and my college classmate came and stayed over with me in our little apartment there on 10 Sanford Street when they dropped the atomic bomb, I remember that. ... My first thought, my very, very first thought was, God didn't mean us to find that out, you know. ... And [having] atomic power hasn't been the blessing everybody said it was going to be, it has too much waste material that you don't know what to do with. ... It's too bad ... that we found that out, on the other hand, I believe that the bomb was no more destructive than other bombs were, and I do believe it saved a lot of American lives, and probably a lot of Japanese lives too.

KP: But it sounds like from the beginning you were a little ambivalent about the bomb.

JC: I wish we hadn't discovered ...

KP: ... the atomic energy.

JC: ... the atomic energy. I wish we hadn't split the atom. God didn't mean us to know that. Then he drove us out of the garden of Eden on account of it, from my viewpoint, that's what happened.

KP: Well, thank you very much, we really enjoyed it.

JC: You're welcome. Thank you for letting me be a ham.

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

Reviewed: 12/1/96 Melanie Cooper

Reviewed: 12/24/96 Kurt Piehler  
Edited: 1/6/96 Tara Kraenzlin  
Entered: 1/8/96 Kurt Piehler  
Corrected: 1/22/97 Jean C. Comeforo  
Entered: 1/28/97 G. Kurt Piehler