

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH LAWRENCE GORDON

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Sandra Stewart Holyoak: This begins an interview with Mr. Lawrence Gordon on November 3, 2006 in Princeton, New Jersey with Sandra Stewart Holyoak. To begin the interview thank you very much for coming to speak with us today all the way from Houston, Texas. For the record where and when you were born?

Lawrence Gordon: Born February 7, 1933, in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

SH: Can you tell me please, starting with your father, a little bit about your family?

LG: Yes, my father was a Russian immigrant. He came over when he was seven years old. It was in 1899. We have the ship's record of him with his family, including seven other brothers and sisters. Obviously, their name was not Gordon, they gave him that name in Ellis Island. So, consequently, when more relatives came over, the name changed from Gordon, to Gorden, to Grodon, so, we had all sorts of names from Portnoi changed to Gordon. So that's how we ended up this way.

SH: Has the family gotten together and made it a unified Gordon spelling?

LG: Just the brothers and sisters, but the Charles Grodin, the actor, is a distant relative and they screwed up the name, that's the way I like to look at it. My mother just made it to this country. She was born in Philadelphia and moved to Brooklyn at a very early age. Her name was May Cohen and she was the oldest daughter (second oldest child). She was the first child born in America for her family of six other brothers and sisters. My parents married in '22, I think it was 1922. She was educated. She went to a business college in New York City. My father was not educated; he made it through the eighth grade and started work at that age to help support the family. He had to go out and help support [them]. So back in those immigrant days the people looked out for the next generation. They did not look out for themselves; they looked out for the next generation, how their children could improve. They were so proud, and I am proud of them, that they were Jewish. The Jews that were in New York City were constantly harping on them, "You are not on support here, nobody is going to help you. You better get out and get a job. We're not going to help you." They would help them in case of illness, or in case of starvation, but there was no government assistance. Of course, that was also told to them when they stepped off the boat in Ellis Island, that there was no assistance for them and they only accepted healthy people. Sick people had to go back on the boat, and go back to where they came from. Now, for our family, I am the youngest child. The oldest was a girl, but she died in the hospital after she was born and my mother, to the day she died when she was eighty-two, she insisted that the baby that died was not the child she delivered. She saw her baby, it was a nice, healthy baby. Then, at the end of the week, the child brought to her was a very sick, very red, terrible-looking baby, and so she never could believe that her daughter had died in the hospital. She thought her daughter was stolen. Then, my oldest brother Irwin was born and then my next brother, Allen. So Irwin is eight years plus older than I, Allen is five years older than I, and, right now, I'm seventy-three.

SH: Thank you. To back up a bit, where in Russia did your father come from?

LG: That's a very interesting question, Sandra, because when he came here he would not speak Russian in the house. We were not allowed to try to learn Russian, nor were they speaking

Yiddish, their second language. They wanted their children to only learn English because in order to be successful in this country they had to learn English. So where I thought my father came from is different than where Allen thought he came from, is different from where Irwin thought he came from. It's only about a thousand miles difference in Russia, so, consequently, we don't know; one of us may be right. But it was a case of what he would say was similar to a *Fiddler on the Roof*, they were chased out and they made it to the United States.

SH: The entire family as a unit is amazing.

LG: Yes, they all came; the two "Gordon" brothers came over very early, saved enough money and sent the money back to the family. So they knew what was going on, and then after one of the final *pogroms*, which the Russians really terrified the Jewish people in these small villages, they just left without any education. My father's father was a tailor, so, my father didn't have any training and he was certainly never talented. He couldn't sew a button on his shirt, let alone being a tailor.

SH: How old was he when he came?

LG: He was seven. He was born in 1892 and came over in 1899.

SH: Now the brothers that were here were his older brothers?

LG: Older brothers. He was the baby.

SH: And they sent back for the mother and father and children.

LG: The baby brother, yeah.

SH: They brought the mother and father and the other siblings?

LG: Yeah.

SH: Did the family unit stay together?

LG: They stayed together in New York until, obviously, they got older and got married and then left the home. But they stayed together and when the father came here, he couldn't do anything. There were plenty of tailors in this country, so the children had to leave the house and go out to work.

SH: And your father, did he talk about needing to find a trade or being an apprentice?

LG: My father never spoke about his time, except that he was very proud that he played basketball of all things on the Lower Eastside in New York City where they grew up. He was one of the Grand Street boys and he had a big photo of his neighborhood boys. It was shocking how many of those boys became successful in life; judges, this one is a judge, this one is a rich businessman, this was so-and-so, so they made it. He had a speaking difficulty in that he was a

very bad stutterer. Then, finally, his brothers opened up a clothing store, First Manufacturer, where they did manufacture clothes and, of course, they sent out their baby brother to be the salesman and, if you can imagine, the salesman could hardly talk through a sentence because he stuttered so badly. ... Business didn't do well and cratered during the Depression. A year before I was born, when they lost everything they had, they moved to Elizabeth, New Jersey, because my mother's brother had a plumbing supply store in Elizabeth and he also had a little apartment building with a candy store at the bottom and apartments above. The deal was my mother would take care of the apartment building, clean the floors, sweep the streets, and my uncle would give them free rent for my father working in his store. My mother had to teach him how to keep books, because she went to this bookkeeping business college, so he learned that. His pay was one thing they would tell me all the time, his pay was five dollars every two weeks. That was his cash, and they supported three boys in this small apartment and we just carried on.

SH: Your mother's family, were they also from Russia?

LG: They were from Poland and immigrated to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Later on, my mother's father opened up a small plumbing supply business in Brooklyn, New York, and that business was alive. After he died, his son (my mother's brother) and son-in-law ran the business, and then, the grandson took over the business. After many years, the business finally closed.

SH: Did your mother, where did she fit in the family?

LG: She was second oldest.

SH: What was required of her, did she talk about...

LG: Taking care of her family, because family meant so much to my folks. They all lived in New York City, Bronx, Brooklyn, and every month, one Sunday a month, we would visit my mother's family. One Sunday out of that month, we would visit my father's family, and one Sunday a month we would visit my mother's cousins. So that's three Sundays a month that we were going into the city and that was a very interesting experience. My mother's family accepted us Gordon kids very well because we were older and we could take care of their kids and play with their kids. My father's family, I was the youngest by far, and Allen was second youngest, I think, and they just wanted us out of the apartment. They just chased us out as soon as we got there, "Go play down on the street." So, you know, I just didn't spend much time with my father's family, to know them well. We did know them, but it was very interesting growing up in this cult.

SH: You talked about your father making certain that you learned English. When they would go on these visits, or you would go on these visits,

LG: Oh yes, that was interesting, thank you, Sandra. My father's family, they would sit around the table and all would speak Russian, except my father. We'd come in and we'd listen and he would always respond to them in English. He was not going to speak Russian, and it was a very interesting family, a lot of them were dedicated Russians, they wanted to go back, they didn't like the communists in power, nor did they like communism. But after the war they said, "Gee,

if we could only go back,” but my father would never go back. He just didn’t want any part of it. He wanted to stay here and have his kids speak English and become Americans.

SH: In your mother’s family did they speak Polish?

LG: They spoke English and Yiddish, and so I didn’t learn much Yiddish. You could hear Yiddish at the table, but through the years of hearing it from other places and taking German in school, I could understand some.

SH: Was the family observant?

LG: My family was very observant, thank you, Sandra. They were what you would call Orthodox Jews and they strictly followed dietary rules and so it was interesting. As I told you, we had very little money and, even through high school, starting in junior high, I had to scrub the bathroom tile floor, the tile hallway leading to the bathroom, the kitchen linoleum and the utility room. Every Friday after school, I would come home and scrub those floors, so we could observe Friday night Sabbath in a clean house. That even continued in high school before my basketball games. The coach one time asked me, “Larry, how come you have so much energy on Tuesday afternoon for one set of games and on Friday night you have little energy?” Of course, it also was that we had a big Sabbath meal on Friday night and after school on Tuesday there was no meal, it was just school.

SH: Did you have your *bar mitzvah*?

LG: Oh I had a *bar mitzvah*, yes, and I, too, was a stutterer up until the eighth grade, when I was *bar mitzvahed*. I sweated profusely trying to learn my speech because I was not a good speaker. ... I had a strong inferiority complex that I could not speak well and that just carried over, and after taking speech classes in numerous grades, I busted it in the eighth grade and started to speak naturally. I lost that pattern of speaking, and although on my whole career later on did not require much speech, I was not afraid of it.

SH: Talk a little bit about growing up in Elizabeth, describe your neighborhood.

LG: When I was eight years old, we moved from the lower-class, small apartment building to an upstairs flat in a lower middle-class neighborhood (lived on that street through college). Made good friends there and have continued these relationships to this day. A funny story to show how life was much different then. During my high school days, my father, in his car, would pass my three friends and I, who were walking to high school every day in rain or snow. He would look at us, but never would honk the horn, nor stop to give us a ride. During severe snowstorms, we would walk into the county courthouse, walk the length of the building and out the front, because we didn't want to be in the snow. He never, in all the years, offered us a ride to school. None of my friends' parents ever gave a ride to their children. The parents went to work and the children walked. None of my schoolmates had cars, which I believe, to this day, makes a big difference in your schooling. If you have a car, you're not going to pay attention in class; you're going to be thinking about other things, such as taking your date out or going someplace with your friends. So, that denial always meant a lot to me. In fact, during my senior year of high

school, my father allowed me to use the car five times. Five times, he allowed me to drive. Of course, the last and fifth time, I wrecked the car, so, I could see good reasons why he didn't allow me to drive.

SH: Had he allowed your brothers to drive?

LG: He allowed them, we were talking about that last night. He allowed Allen, my middle brother, to drive ... much more than I. Of course, he also wrecked the car and that's probably ... [why] my father felt the way he did about me, since I was a much more [of a] wild kid than my brother's Allen and ... Irwin, [who] was off to school. We just didn't have any money for gasoline, let alone drive.

SH: Now was the car used for the business?

LG: No, he just drove it back and forth to work, that's all. He just didn't think we needed it so, consequently, when I went out on a date I walked to my girlfriend's house. ... That's an interesting story, Sandra, if you have a minute, I'll spread it. For doing the floors I would get a quarter. Now, kids, try and think, you got a quarter in high school for your weekly stipend. ... That quarter ... was to ... take my ... [girlfriend home by bus] from the basketball game on Friday night. ... [and then take] the bus back to my house. But, no, I never took the bus. I never told ... [my girlfriend] that I had a quarter, so we would walk to her house in bad weather. ... Fortunately, she always baked a cake in high school and I would have cake after the game, and then I would walk home. On the way home there was a White Castle hamburger place and I used to stop there and eat two hamburgers with my quarter; they were ten cents each, and I was thinking that was really living. If my mother ever knew that I ate a non-kosher hamburger she would never give me anymore money, so nobody ever knew, and to this day, I haven't had a White Castle hamburger in a long time, but I think I'd like to have one. Brings back memories.

SH: I'm thinking of all the ramifications of that White Castle, that's amazing.

LG: You know, they were so good and I was hungry and it's midnight and, you know, you're walking back in the cold and wanted to stop.

SH: As a young man were you involved in any other youth activities, whether they be recreation or Boy Scouts, or anything like that?

LG: Of course being *bar-mitzvahed* [13 years old] in the eighth grade that took care of that [five days per week]. But from the time I was a little fellow, I either was chased out of the house, or left on my own accord to go to the school park. ... I looked forward to the summers ... when the recreational department would have facilities, or at least open up horseshoe pits, badminton nets, softball, and basketball. So consequently, to this day, I have my certificates for placing in the city events in horseshoes and in badminton, ... but I haven't played badminton I think since junior high school. But I just played sports the whole summer and I was happy with it. My mother was happy that I was out of the house. I'd leave in the morning and come back for lunch and then come back for dinner and my mother would always ask, a typical kid, "Where have you

been?" "Out." "What did you do?" "Park." Just not communicate very much but that's the way it was.

SH: Did you have any...

LG: I was in the ninth grade, ... I played basketball in junior high and I was honored to be invited to the high school, which was some distance away, to play on their junior varsity team, which was restricted to tenth graders. I was honored for that, but I didn't play much. I was on the bench, and I thought that was a big honor.

SH: You trained with them as well.

LG: No, I couldn't train with them very much, maybe one day a week, or two days a week, but I would show up for the games and play a little if they found room for me.

SH: Was this because the coach had seen you play?

LG: He must have seen me or heard of me doing something from junior high, we had a good team, and he invited me to play.

SH: Now, in junior high, were you playing other schools within...

LG: Right, junior high school. We had a city-wide league for junior high school and I'm sure that's where he had seen me to invite me and a fellow from the Port Elizabeth area, Paul Ansiko. He was a Polish fellow and he was invited to join the teams and then we would become good teammates for the following three years in high school. Paul was always better than me.

SH: Around the dinner table was there a lot of conversation about politics or what was going on in ...

LG: Politics was never discussed. There was a very interesting time especially during the Second World War. I remember it very well. My parents would always listen to the radio for the news of the war. Irwin fought in that war and my parents prayed for his safety. They just kept in touch. I don't recall details about FDR, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. My father would bring home the *Elizabeth Daily Journal* everyday and when he got finished we could read it. I was big baseball freak and I followed the Brooklyn Dodgers. I remembered and I followed all the batting averages and the pitching earned run averages so I knew all the players on the Dodgers and also on the New York Giants and the Yankees, because if you were a Dodger fan, you just hated the Giants and the Yankees. Even to this day, when I'm seventy-three, I dislike the New York Yankees because they have such a good team and the Brooklyn Dodgers didn't. I became an underdog fan early on in life and so he would come home with that paper and I'd always want to read about the ball scores and the games for other teams in the league, but I was not allowed to take the paper. He would come home and sit on the paper, even through dinner, and we were not allowed to grab a section until he finished with the paper, and then he would put the paper down and we just ran toward the paper to get a section to look at. So it was interesting; it's much different than the way children are being brought up today. We knew our place.

SH: Seen and not heard, that phrase. Talking about your mother, in 1939, are all of her family here at this point, her parents' families? When Hitler invaded Poland was there any discussions on the family visit into New York?

LG: I don't recall any. I never heard any feelings about Poland. They were, of course, they all hated the Nazis. They all hated the Nazis, not only what they did to the Jews and they knew what was going on with the Jews, but what they were doing to America. They were very disturbed with Pearl Harbor, that was a very big thing, and my father and mother were extremely angry.

SH: What do you remember about Pearl Harbor?

LG: I remember listening to the radio on a Sunday morning and heard the news and my father went berserk and we didn't move away from the radio all day. They were true Americans; they just loved this country and would do anything for it.

SH: Did you ever get a chance to, on the lighter side of listening to the radio and keeping up the baseball scores, did you ever get a chance to go to the games?

LG: Never had money to go to a baseball game. We just didn't have any funds, period, and never went to a game. In fact the first game that I ever went to was when I moved back to New Jersey to work in New York City in 1971 and my next door neighbor invited me to a New York Giants football game. We lived in a very nice neighborhood and I was always amazed that he invited me, but in those days you're invited to game provided you pay for the football ticket. Although he had family tickets and I said okay, you know, you paid thirty-forty dollars, whatever it was. I don't recall the amount, but I know it was a nice amount of money but I did want to go to a game someplace in New York, in any sport. Obviously, I never went to the baseball games, or Madison Square Garden, or hockey games or football; I just didn't have any money.

SH: Did you have a job outside of the home?

LG: No. I never worked seriously outside the home, during the school year. I was a paper boy for a while and that became too much. I did that and I remember distinctly stopping at the candy store and buying candy early in the morning, that my mother didn't like me to do, when I would get tips or something from the newspaper delivery. Then, when I was in the summer of the eighth grade, I worked in my uncle's plumbing supply store where my father worked. My uncle was very rough with me, but it was a loving roughness, I do believe. It was big wholesale warehouse so I'd have to lift pipes and big fittings; it was heavy work. ... They would tell me, "Go get this, go get that." I'd go to the warehouse to the bins and bring back the supplies for the plumbers; the pipes, toilet seats, or something like that. After a while I got tired and I would hide upstairs and I would hear my uncle screaming, "Where is that little bastard? That little bastard, that little son of a bitch," and one day my father had enough and he said, "Sam, do not call Larry those names," and my uncle looked at him and yelled it out again, "That little bastard." [laughter] So that's the way it was. So I worked there in the eighth grade and in one summer in high school. At the end of high school, I became a lifeguard. I liked swimming and became a

lifeguard in Linden Pool, it's a city recreational pool. It was my first incident, I don't know whether I should say this, Sandra, my first incident of seeing people do unlawful things. During breaks every once in a while I would come into the office and I saw this guy, he was a more senior person, he would be passing out tickets, but he wasn't depositing money into the drawer. I said, "Where's that money they just paid, why didn't you put that in the drawer?" And he said, "I'll put it there later, we're too busy right now," and I kept going back and checking on him and the day's receipts. I just had a hold of that bookkeeping background from my father and mother and I approached him and I said, I don't recall his name now, "Bob you didn't put the money back in the drawer." He says, "Larry, it's none of your damn business, now get back on the lifeguard stand." So that always stuck with me. Of course, I took a bus to Linden, it was two busses and ... busses back and we just never had transportation, fortunately, the town there had good bus systems that you could go where you had to.

SH: When your older brother joined the military, what was the reaction in the family and to World War II?

LG: He was drafted while he was in college, so he had to leave college and we were all afraid. We had already lost one cousin in North Africa and the family was very afraid now that other members of the family were in service. It was common for people to have many family members in the huge army, so nobody resisted. Nobody said, "I'm going to go to Canada." Nobody said, "Gee, I'm not feeling well," or you know, "I'm a conscientious objector." There was none of that, you just fought for your country, and I can't emphasize enough that that's what made America great.

SH: Did you communicate with him?

LG: We would, I would write, little portions, a couple of sentences. My mother would be the writer of the family and she would write him letters and we would get letters back but not extensively.

SH: Did you continue to listen to the radio to follow the war?

LG: Absolutely, all during the war, yes, we just followed the war and we tried to follow the 179th Combat Engineers Battalion 3rd Army. Of course, nobody knew the details. It wasn't important in the news what that battalion was, "the 3rd Army advances on such and so, Bastogne, or something," so we could never follow where his unit was in the battle, whether he was in the southern part, or in the northern part, or where, but my brother, Irwin, is a hero. He received two purple hearts and so he was a hero to us.

SH: Did you have the flag in the windows denoting...

LG: A little flag, little flag in the front window. Most people displayed a flag. They were very patriotic and proud of what their family was doing.

SH: You had talked about how difficult and yet how full your life was, what about the opportunity, you talked about your brother being able to go to college, did that set the pace for all of you, I mean, was education important to your mother and father?

LG: The education was extremely important, but I have to tell you, let me just introduce this very funny story. My brother Irwin was at Rutgers, drafted, and then he went back to Rutgers on the GI Bill. Then my brother Allen, got a football scholarship and my mother was telling them, "Look, guys, we can't send you all to college so you have to do what's right and Irwin you're going to be out earning money so you can help Allen." Well, Allen got a football scholarship to start with and, then, "You guys, you're going to have to help your youngest brother, Larry," which was okay, but all they wanted me to do was study, my two brothers, "Study goddamnit, you're not going to spend six years in college, we're not going to support you for six years, you better study and get smart," and I fought that pretty well and they would just tell me, "You're just wasting your time playing basketball, study, so you can get into college." Little did they know that I would later get a basketball scholarship so I would not be a burden to them. That turned out pretty funny. But education was extremely important, and to show you what kind of education and how much my folks knew, although my mother went to business college, so, you would think that she would know something about the professions. My oldest brother was in ceramics and my mother never did understand. When people asked, "What is a ceramic engineer?", "Oh, he makes pottery." Another funny story, ... it's an Irwin story, but even later on in life, people would ask her, "Well what is ceramic engineering? What do they do?" And, finally, she got to tell them, "It's very confidential; he does secret work," because she didn't understand what he was doing. That brings up my classic story that my family loves to tell, and my kids do until this day, maybe I should get into it later. Many stories in between, but I was in graduate school and people would come to interview, and I was going to be a mining geologist. But Shell Oil came and interviewed me and, on the spot, they offered me a job and I said, "Well, I'm going into service." They said, "Okay, when you get out we'll give you a job," and so, I accepted because I had worked a summer before for Standard Oil California in Salt Lake City and I liked the work. They said, "Yeah, you're going to report to Denver, Colorado," and I told my mother, I was married at the time with a baby, "Sorry ma, I'm reporting to the Shell Oil office in Denver, Colorado." She said, "Why are you going to Denver, Colorado?" I said, "Ma, that's where the job is taking me." She said, "Larry, there's a Shell Station on every corner, I don't see why you have to go to Denver, Colorado," and that's just the way it was folks.

SH: She knew education was important.

LG: She knows, always, "get a job" and if I had to work in the Singer Sewing Machine factory in downtown Port Elizabeth, I was going to get a job but she didn't know what geology was.

SH: Backing up, we were talking about World War II and communication with your brother and the fact that education was important to you so you knew you were going to college.

LG: I knew that I was going to college but I had...

SH: Were you bent for Rutgers?

LG: No, I had several scholarship offers. I had an offer to West Point, I had an offer to Columbia, I had an offer from Princeton, I had an offer from a couple of others, scholarships. I played basketball a lot, an All-Stater, so I did have these offers. I visited Princeton and I just did not feel comfortable going to Princeton. Having little money, I did not feel comfortable walking around campus with a sport jacket and fancy shoes and a dress shirt, I didn't have any of those things. I'll tell you a funny story, Sandra, I don't know if this is appropriate but I always wore hand-me-downs. My hand-me-downs were, for some reason God gave me long arms, so my cuffs were always way too short. So my mother would cut off the bottoms of my shirttails and make an extra cuff so I'd always had two cuffs on my shirts, so here I am with two cuffs on my shirts and going to an Ivy League School, no way, I wasn't going to do that.

SH: Maybe we should talk more in depth about your high school career, because to be offered all these scholarships I'm sure that's something that we should really get on tape.

LG: Yeah. I went to an all boy's high school, Thomas Jefferson in Elizabeth, New Jersey, and I had an interesting high school career.

SH: Now did you go to Thomas Jefferson because...

LG: It was the only public boy's high school (besides a trade school) in the city. The girls had their public high school and the boys had theirs and there were many parochial schools. The Lithuanians had theirs, the Polish had theirs, the Irish had a few and the Italians had one. I mean that was an immigrant town, and so, you know, it was predominantly immigrant and so you go to the boys schools and I don't remember how many boys we had, maybe a thousand. But I learned from my brother, Allen, if you worked in the administrative office, you got to select your teachers and it was a nice way to go and it was a good way to spend your study period. I didn't have to do my homework. I could just run errands for the office and so I took all the easy teachers I could and, ... not the college prep type of teachers, because I just wanted it easy and it was okay. I enjoyed it and I made friends with a bunch of guys, and there was an old movie, *Blackboard Jungle*, and somehow this group (ten to twelve) of junior Mafioso really liked me. They wore black suits to school. They carried weapons, they carried guns, they had knives. They had the black suit, black shirt, black tie, they were all in black, and they liked me, God knows why, I don't know why, and I was a class officer in my junior year and I was running for a class officer in the senior year. I ran for vice president of the student body, and they wanted me to win. They left their homeroom classes on election day and they walked into every classroom in the high school. They walked up and down the aisle, and they asked the students who they're voting for, and they looked at all the ballots. They wanted to make sure Larry Gordon got elected, and I did. It was pretty bad. I probably should have stayed in Elizabeth and become more successful. [laughter] One other funny story, this would probably go down in posterity as well. These guys were something else and they told me, "Larry, we're going to strike." I said, "What are you going to strike for?" They said, "Well, we're going to strike because the teachers aren't getting paid enough." Well, they were friends with the geometry/math teacher, who was friendly towards them and he was a good teacher, I had him, and they said the teachers wanted more pay, so they set a date to strike.

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SH: Please continue.

LG: Okay. So they set a date, say Wednesday, it may have been a Tuesday, at twelve o'clock. ... The vice principal was a small, thin fellow and he heard that we were going to strike so at twelve o'clock everybody started to bust out of the high school and the vice principal was standing in front of the door with his arms outstretched, trying to prevent these high school kids from running out the door. Well, you can imagine what happened. Somehow the newspapers, the *Daily News* or the *Elizabeth Daily Journal* knew of the strike and they had photographers outside and these guys, my Mafioso friends, just grabbed hold of the vice principal under the arms and carried him a block down the street with the students flocking out of school. Well, I left, too, and the school was empty and a day later I got a call from Principal Averill and he told me to come in. I went into school and he said, "Larry, you're responsible for this," and I said, "Sir, I was never responsible for this, they just decided to strike." He said, "You're the leader of this group," and I was never the leader of the group, but he said, "You're the leader of the group and I assure you, you get them back to school and because you've done this, I'll guarantee you'll never get into a college in your life, I'm going to mark your record so that it is bad, believe me, you're never going any place. You're going to be nothing." I called a few of the guys and told them, "Get back," and somehow, I don't know how, the word spreads to so many and I think we went back to school on Friday. So, two days out, the newspapers were full of the strike and we went back to school. So it was a kind of funny experience. But I was ...

SH: Did the teachers get the raise?

LG: I think they finally did but teachers even to this day are not getting paid enough.

SH: Are there other stories, I mean, obviously this principal didn't continue to mark your record?

LG: He tried. Rutgers knew that I was blacklisted and they called me and told me. In fact, I went to the office in my first semester, they said I'm going to be placed on probation, they're going to hold the tuition, but, they're going to just see how I do because the record was so blacklisted. But, you know, everything went fine.

SH: Are there other Elizabeth school stories that you want to share before we ...

LG: I have a lot of sport stories. Jefferson High School had an excellent basketball team. We were undefeated during the regular season for three years. Our sophomore record was 22-1, junior record 23-1 and senior record was 21-1. Unfortunately our losses occurred with the state tournament every year but we won the union Country tournament each year. The reason for the teams success can be attributed to a superb coach, Bob Cox. (He was inducted into the Elizabeth Athletics Hall of Fame in 2005 after less than ten years of coaching.) He was our coach during my sophomore and junior years. He was a strict disciplinarian who emphasized attention to detail, teamwork, and basic fundamentals. All the players respected him greatly. During my senior year, I broke our school's record and was an all-state selection. Because of Coach Cox I was able to develop my basketball skills that provided me with opportunities for college then

life. (I was inducted into the Elizabeth Hall of Fame in 2001). I was also on the high school track team. I threw the shot-put and the discus. I followed my brother Allen, who was a shot-put and discus thrower. I practiced daily with Roosevelt Grier (Rozelle Park, NJ), a famous New York Giants football tackle and competed against Milton Campbell (Plainfield, NJ) the Olympic decathlon champion. I could hold my own in discus but was not in the same class in shot-put. I didn't know what I wanted to do in life so my brother, Irwin, who was in graduate school for ceramic engineering, I mentioned that pursuit. I said, "I'll become a ceramic engineer." Well, after the first year at Rutgers, which I commuted by train everyday to New Brunswick from Elizabeth, I could see that ceramic engineering was not for me. He advised me, "You know, Larry, you like science but you're not that involved in engineering, maybe you'd be interested in geology." He said, "I took one of those courses and if I didn't make it in ceramic engineering, I think I'd like to go into geology." I switched to geology and thank goodness, he gave me that advice because I have loved every day of it. In fact, I retired from Shell in late '91 after thirty-five years and I'm consulting to this day. Last year I worked five days a week.

SH: Let's go back then and talk about that transition from high school to college. Did you work that summer before?

LG: Yeah, I was a lifeguard at the Linden pool.

SH: That is when you were the lifeguard.

LG: Lifeguarding and playing basketball with friends at the park. One of the friends was Larry Weiss whom I played with in elementary school, junior high, and then high school. He went to Rutgers, as well, and we played together on the same Rutgers basketball team. We have been very good friends for a long time. Larry became a judge in Union County.

SH: Some questions about when the war ended in Europe, and when was the first time that you remember your brother being able to come home, and what was the reaction?

LG: Yeah, he came home, we were just exalted, and people were celebrating all the time and, of course, the soldiers came home at different intervals. He went to Fort Dix and got released from there and it was just a very happy time in the family. He went back to Rutgers.

SH: Did you go down to pick him up?

LG: No. I didn't.

SH: Had you been to Rutgers when your brothers were in school?

LG: We would visit Irwin and Lenore in the University Heights housing for married faculty/graduate families. The housing was like two-sided trailers. We would also attend Allen's football games during his first two years in college. We would drive through the town and campus looking at the buildings, classrooms, fraternity and boarding house on Hamilton Street that Irwin and Allen lived in. The train station was nearby.

SH: You didn't play football in high school?

LG: Yes, I played in the tenth grade. Fortunately, the basketball coach saw me playing as the second team center and he ran up to me and said, "Gordon, are you playing football?" I said, "Yeah, I'm playing football." He said, "You're going to quit or else you're not going to play basketball. If you don't quit, I'm going to kick you off and you won't be able to play basketball, so make your choice, either play basketball or play football." Since I wasn't that much of a football player, I quit and just stuck to basketball, and track of course.

SH: You talked about Elizabeth and the different ethnic, the melting pot that was there, was there any anti-Semitism that you observed?

LG: Always went through anti-Semitism, from the time I was in elementary school and even into my professional career. Anti-Semitism, some of it was very overt, very overt, hollering down the halls about goddamn Jews. I never showed my Jewishness in any way, other than taking time off for the Jewish holidays, and, in fact, early on, my boss, a redneck from Mississippi, he took them as my vacation days because that's what he would allow, although employee relations described it as a qualified day off, he would never give me the time off.

SH: Really? As a kid coming up through the recreation programs, then in the schools, how did that manifest itself as a young man?

LG: I became very competitive, very competitive, and it carried into my professional career. I was not the brightest guy, but nobody is going to be a better geologist, and even to this day, I'm afraid to say, Sandra, I mean, if I don't know something I call highly technically proficient people, experts in the field. I'm honored to work with them, I'm going to learn about it. So I don't give up easily.

SH: So it's one of being a motivator for you.

LG: Yes, and one related comment about our conversation I had with Ken Miller, head of the Geology Department. A very nice gentlemen. Although, a lot of students take geology classes (3,000 he said) but only about 30 majors. Very few of those majors choose to go into the oil industry. I think that small number is a result of the industry having a widespread bad name in academic circles. I relayed a story to him about Rutgers in the '50s. I suggested that the general curriculum be strengthened because the country needs petroleum geologists. The Department does not offer petroleum geology courses, just provide a classical geology curriculum for the undergraduate three years. You can attend graduate school where you wish but just become a classical geologist. I relayed the story that when I went to work for shell, about half of the twelve in our group training program was from the East/Northeast/Midwest and we never had petroleum geology courses. The other half of our group was from the South/Southwest from oil schools like LSU, Oklahoma, Texas, and Texas A&M and they had petroleum geology courses. We didn't know anything about petroleum but we had classical geology and it became a fun thing to compete. After the first section of our training program, when we worked in the field for four months, they said, "Well, you guys did pretty well in the field," you know, "But, we're going to just smash you when it comes to office work." Well, we went to the office and we

became gofers for four months. Then, we went to our classroom training and they kept saying, “We’re going to smash you, we’re going to smash you,” and, lo and behold, after the first week of taking the classes, they came up to us and said, “You guys are right, you win, you got the best education. Whatever we learned was outdated and it didn’t do us any good and here you are, we can see you are just being above the class with your standard geology that you emphasized.” I can’t emphasize enough today to the current Rutgers students, “No matter what you go into, get classical background work, whether you go into music or engineering or geology or anything, don’t try and specialize too much because whatever you learned in college will be outdated.”

SH: That is interesting. So you’ve been able to stay connected to Rutgers’ geology and advise?

LG: I was in Houston Rutgers Club maybe 25 years ago but I dropped out because of my traveling. The club was later disbanded because so few alumni participated. As I mentioned earlier I have been disappointed that so few Rutgers graduates enter the industry. In fact, Dr. Miller told me the energy companies have not visited Rutgers to recruit. When I returned to Houston I spoke to the Shell recruiters and they hired one or two summer trainees. After the trainees left in August to return to school, the recruiters were very surprised how good the trainees were and they were going to offer them positions. When I entered the profession in 1956 they were many Rutgers alumni in the industry and those at Shell were top notch geologists/engineers. Now most of the Rutgers geological graduates become environmental, ground water, and coastal plan specialists. As I mentioned about, take your classical work first and then go into the industry you desire. Don’t rule out something because the media are biased against it. To help the students decide, I recently set up a Gordon Scholarship for Rutgers students to take field geology training and seminars to help them decide on future opportunities. As you can tell, I feel strongly on this issue.

SH: Thank you and congratulations. Now to back up, let’s talk about your freshman year and where you were housed.

LG: I commuted daily by train from Elizabeth to New Brunswick during my freshman year. During my sophomore year I lived in a rooming house on Hamilton Street. I would eat lunch and dinner in my room. I had no money and at that time the basketball team didn’t provide training tables. We did not know of training tables. During my junior and senior years I was preceptor in the dormitory. Again I ate in my room which was not uncommon In those days. Paul Baba was my roommate.

SH: How does one manage to go to school and practice for basketball and be a commuter student and be in geology? It’s not easy.

LG: And be in geology and also take ROTC and so you leave basketball practice at 5:30 or 6:00 and then you take your train home. By the time you got home, you’re too tired to do your school work. That’s probably why I didn’t stay in engineering because during basketball season, you’re there till 5:30, you start practice at 4:30, and your classes in ROTC extend to that time so it was difficult. Of course, having the room on campus was much easier.

SH: Is that one of the reasons that you found a room?

LG: That's, of course, why I liked the preceptor's job because it was a free room. I got my free room and I didn't have to worry about paying that rooming house. Then the rooming house cost something like five, seven, or ten dollars a week. My parents would pay the room rent and I earned money during the summer so I had some food. I'd buy food at the grocery store and keep it in the room and on the window sill. That's the way I ate.

SH: Now did you have a roommate?

LG: In the rooming house my sophomore year my roommate was, I guess, you would call him a celebrity. He was from West Point but was kicked out because of a cheating scandal. The cadets acquired the test before the school exam was given. He was a good guy, we got along very well.

SH: One question I did want to ask is why did you turn down the West Point offer to play ball?

LG: Maybe I didn't want to go far from home. In high school I visited West Point so I was familiar with it. They would have been my second choice.

SH: Did you discuss any of the schools with your parents or your brothers?

LG: No. No. My friends thought I was crazy to turn down Princeton, or other schools, but I would never consider going there.

SH: When you're a commuter student that first year and you're playing ball, did you have time to take part in any of the social activities on campus?

LG: No, none. I never joined a fraternity. I never drank and it sort of turned my stomach when my friends on the basketball team would always invite me Saturday night to the frat house to have some beers and celebrate. Every night was celebration. I just didn't like that. I was not a drinker, I had a girlfriend and I rather take her home and be with her.

SH: Was she in ...

LG: No, she was not in NJC, she was an Upsala person.

SH: So she was from Elizabeth?

LG: She was from Perth Amboy, and that's the gal that I ended up marrying. She went to school at Upsala so she came home on the weekends. My parents would pick her up on Friday night, or Saturday night, and take her to the game, and then we would go sleep at her house or my folk's house and she'd get back to school and I would too.

SH: Now how did you meet her?

LG: It was a blind date that summer after I graduated from high school. Some friends of mine had arranged this blind date and we got along pretty well. We got married the day before

graduation in June 1954. My parents told me, “You are not going to get married before graduation, you’re going to remain in school, you’re going to get your degree before you do anything.” So it was one day before.

SH: Did you get married on campus or ...

LG: No, her family had a little money so we got married where she went to school, in West Orange.

SH: You talked about the classical geology that you had on campus, did that in fact relate to whom your favorite professor was, or did you ...

LG: Well, no. My favorite professor was Dr. Wilkerson, Albert Wilkerson, and it turns out my oldest brother had him, too in optical mineralogy and in mineralogy courses. That’s why I was going to be a mining geologist. That’s what I did my master’s thesis in because I really respected him so highly and I just wanted to work with him so I ended up going in that direction. Wilkerson was great. Helgi Johnson was the head of the department, he was super; Steve Fox, paleontologist and micropaleontologist, was great, and Smith, structural geologist; Martens, the sedimentologist; they all stood out and, to this day, when I see ex-Rutgers people in geology they all brag about those professors. They just stood out so well. They’re only maybe a half a dozen, those that I mentioned, and Peter Wolfe, he taught field geology and beginning geology, so it was fabulous department. Looking back on it, they were all fabulous and taught us well.

SH: Were there any elective courses that you enjoyed?

LG: I enjoyed the music and, as you could tell from my upbringing, I was never much for writing or that sort of thing, but I remember taking my first music test. We had to listen to the music and discuss what we heard and who wrote it. I heard it and wrote down, “Tchaikovsky, 1812,” whatever it was, So and So piece. I got my first test back and it was a D. I went up to the professor, I said, “We heard all these pieces of music, look, I got all the composers right, I know when they wrote it, I recognize what it came from, so why did I get a D?” He said, “You didn’t describe the music.” And I said, “Well, was I supposed to do that?” He said, “That’s what you’re taking the course for. You’re not supposed to just come here to listen,” and I said, “Oh okay.” I enjoyed music and the sociology teacher a lot. I remember him very well, the name escapes me now, but he got to me about thinking about society and that meant a great deal to me. That and music were some of my favorite subjects outside of geology.

SH: When you were an undergraduate, were any of your brothers back at Rutgers?

LG: One brother, Irwin, was in graduate school in ceramics. In fact, when I needed to go out to a prom or something at Rutgers, I borrowed his car, even borrowed his sport jacket. Allen had graduated in June 1950 just before I registered.

SH: Where was he living?

LG: Irwin and Lenore were living in the Heights. It was across the Raritan river where they have the big stadium now. It was for veterans and for graduate students. I tried to get in when I became a married graduate student but they were all full and we had to live in town.

SH: Talk a little bit then about your basketball career at Rutgers.

LG: Sure. I played on the freshman basketball team and then the varsity for the next three years. I had wonderful, wonderful teammates and we became friends for life. Larry Weiss, Wally porter, George Swede Sundstrom, Dudley Tighe, Bill Beindorf, Hal Corizi, Jim Himonas were all a great bunch of guys. Our freshman coach, bob Sterling was outstanding and well thought of by everyone. He turned a bunch of boys into men and of course, very good team players. We had a winning team record of 13-3. There was no doubt in our minds that if Coach Sterling was our varsity coach, we would have had an outstanding team, one of the best in the east. To this day, Larry Weiss keeps in close contact with him and Larry informs us of Coach's condition. I try to visit with the coach when I return to Rutgers during a trip to the northeast. One of the things I remember so well was during the height of the college scandals (1953 or 1954) for throwing games and shaving points. During an away game while I was in the hotel room, I got a telephone call that if I shaved a certain number of points I would be rewarded. That call made me nervous the whole game and I didn't score many points. It turned out the caller was a teammate of mine playing a joke on me. To this day, 50 plus years later, we just look at each other and start laughing because it was so funny. I was afraid to get caught in any scandal; "Do I take this shot and make it?" I missed many shots that game. "What are they going to think about me? Am I throwing the game?" At the conclusion of my career, I was honored during a school ceremony. I was second on all time scoring list but I did that in three years instead of four. My scoring average was 19.0 PPG and still rank on the Rutgers scoring lists. I was an Honorable All-American in 1954 in a poll. I was inducted into the Rutgers Basketball Hall of Fame on April 10, 1944. I continued to play basketball and my final year being 1990 when I played in a Houston City league. I was 57 when I retired. There is one more interesting story involving my basketball career after I graduated. I was married when I entered Rutgers Graduate School of Geology. The first year I received a tuition scholarship and a Geography Research Assistantship (\$120.00/month for 8 months). In my second year I had a Teaching Assistantship in Geology (\$110.00/month for 7months). My thesis was completed and approved early in 1956 after which I entered service. My daughter, Lana, was born in July 1955. I am reporting this to show that little money was available to support two adults in school and a daughter. Mr. George Mackaronis, a loyal supporter of Rutgers and former basketball player, owned New Brunswick Lunch on Main Street in New Brunswick. He formed a basketball team to play in the city league. He asked Dudley Tighe and I to play on his team and for playing we could eat at his restaurant. Well, I took my wife and we ate dinner there. I thought we are there once a week, maybe twice, but when I saw George 40 years later at the Hall of Fame dinner, he said, "Larry, you nearly ate me out of a restaurant." I didn't remember the frequency but I'm sure George was right. My wife was pregnant in her last year of college studying to be a teacher. I guess I took advantage of George, and George, if you hear this or read this in heaven, I'm sorry for taking advantage of your.

SH: But thankful.

LG: But thankful, thank you for filling me up.

SH: The coaching staff and the administration at Rutgers, do you have any stories?

LG: The varsity coach, Bob White, wasn't the caliber of Bob Sterling. God bless him, he was a good nice man, gentle, but he wasn't on us all the time making us do the things we should. We just played .500 ball or less, while our freshman team did extremely well (13-3). So it takes a good coach to teach and to give you discipline. All through life you need discipline. I never had any contact with the administration after my freshman year.

SH: ROTC was mandatory for the first two years that you were in school, is that correct?

LG: Yes, and I also took it for the last two years so I got my degree and my commission. At that time we had a two-year active-duty obligation and many of my friends went into service six months after they graduated. I went to graduate school; I just wanted to finish graduate school. I had three professional offers to play basketball; from the New York Knicks, Washington Capitals, and the Minneapolis Lakers. The Minneapolis Lakers that's the famous team with George Mikan and Jim Pollard and all those famous basketball players. I even got a personal letter from Jim Pollard to come join his team. But the starting pay was only five thousand dollars a year for the newcomers into the league. That was the standard salary for newcomers, and I decided, you know, that's about what my father made at that time and I just want to go to graduate school. It was after the Korean war. There was still a draft going on but I wanted to finish my schoolings. Well, lo and behold, in my second year of graduate school, after I laboriously wrote my thesis over and over and over again, I got a letter from the Army saying I can continue on with my two year obligation, or select a six-month active duty with a total of an eight-year obligation. But the eight years, the seven and a half year reserve obligation, must be fulfilled, unlike the regular type of reserve obligation. I decided, you know, that I'm going to take the eight years. I'm going to go for the six months. We had a baby and I just wanted to go out to work. I went for six months to Aberdeen Proving Grounds, MD, and then reported to Denver, Colorado for Shell Oil Company. My starting salary was four hundred and seventy-five dollars a month and my father was so proud of me, that I was making more than he was. For the rest of his life whenever he saw me, he was asking how much I made, and, fortunately, my salary progressed. But his didn't. So he was always very happy and yet he never asked my other brothers, who made much more, but, I guess, he figured, "This little guy you're just glad he's alive and earning some money."

SH: I think the youngest one is the one that everyone worries about the most.

LG: So I had this eight year service obligation with an active seven and a half year reserve requirement. Being on the one year plus Shell Oil training program I moved from Denver to Raton, New Mexico, to Las Vegas, New Mexico, to Sweetwater, Texas, to Midland, Texas, to Houston, Texas, to Jackson, Mississippi. During these transfers I was able to fulfill my reserve obligation. I finally joined an active reserve unit in Jackson, Mississippi where I served for seven and a half years. I got paid for attending the weekend drill per month and then I would go two weeks during the summer. All during my reserve obligation, up until fifteen years, I would go two weeks in the summer time and go to weekly or once a month weekend drills. I never got paid

after my first eight years. I never got into a pay assignment because I never lived a long time in one place. I just showed up one day and asked, "I want to join the unit," and they're always were opening but never pay slots. So I was not in a pay situation unless I was on the two weeks active duty and then either I would take vacation, or Shell would compensate me to make up the difference in pay. So I continued and I ended up in the reserve from 1954, when my commission started to 1983, twenty-eight years. I only had twenty-two or twenty-three good years because I was transferred so much during my Shell Career. It was difficult to earth the 52 points per year needed for retirement. Even with the two weeks active duty that's only fourteen days (points) and I needed 52 points. I had a great reserve career and I collect retirement pay now. One of my memories of my career was when I was in command of a service company in Jackson Mississippi. All the (275) men were African-Americans, in effect it was a segregated unit. All my officers were white. The African-Americans were allowed to take the vehicles back to Piney Point Mississippi, sixty miles south of Jackson, Mississippi so they could travel back and forth. We only had one racial incident and that was a major one in Columbus, Georgia, Fort Benning, where we would go to summer camp. We went to different camps all around the South and Southwest. We were one company and the adjacent company was all white from a southern school and they started a racial war. I got out there and separated them, and along with the white officers from my unit and the officers from another, we stopped the fighting. It was pretty severe back in the early '60s late '50s, and we got through it okay. The only time I had a scare was during the Cuban Missile Crisis. My wife and three children took a vacation to Gulf Shores, Alabama, and we decided, "Let's get away to a beach and stay on the beach. No newspapers, no television, nothing. Let's just live on the beach and enjoy ourselves and the kids." Well, after five days I picked up a newspaper and read about the Cuban Missile Crisis. It mentioned the units that were called to active duty and my unit "commanded by Lawrence Gordon, in Jackson, Mississippi was called to active duty." I immediately called regular army folks in Jackson, Mississippi and asked, "What's going on?" They said, "Where the hell are you? We've been trying to reach you." Well, there was no way they could reach us. I didn't tell them. Who would think to tell them that I'm going on vacation? So by the time I got back to town and back to the armory, the reserve center there, things had calmed down and they just put us on standby. So that was one memory that I have. The other memory what really helped me in my reserve obligation is I traveled overseas an awful lot. During my Shell career I was gone maybe a quarter of my time overseas, to Africa, South America, Europe, wherever it was the allowed me to join a Research and Development unit in Houston, Texas. They accepted me, and these were all smart Army, Navy, and Air Force officers. They were battleship architects, designers, specialized doctors for bubble-suit babies, NASA designers, etc., and I came in as the adviser for world oil and gas resources. So that's what I did. So every time I traveled overseas to a convention or to visit ministries in foreign countries I got reserve credit. We reported to personnel. In this manner I ended up with sufficient points to retire.

SH: Talk a little bit if you would about your wife's activities in the Civil Rights Movement. Because you came from a melting pot in Elizabeth, what is the shock for a young man from New Jersey to see this?

LG: It was huge. In fact, when on our way to our first southern city, in Sweetwater, Texas, there was a sign in front of the restaurant that we were going into "whites only." I had worked in a New Jersey restaurant on the weekends while I was in college and I just said, "Whites only, we

can't go in there, I'm not wearing a white shirt and jacket." I thought you had to be dressed and she looked at me like I was some kind of nut. She says, "No, that's white Anglos, not blacks." I said, "Oh, my gosh," and that was a real shocker. In Jackson Mississippi we had a cross burned in our yard once because my wife had a garage sale and blacks came in. We had a black maid and blacks came in from the neighborhood to look at the things that my wife was selling, and who is now my ex-wife by the way. But we got telephone calls every night at all hours and then it became worse and worse until there was a KKK cross burned on our yard. Even our synagogue was burned in Jackson. It was a very bad case. My kids remember terror to this day because they saw blacks being dragged out of the Woolworth Store downtown. Dragged out of the stores in handcuffs and thrown into police cars because they were sitting at the counter in the Woolworth Store. it was shocking times. My ex-wife attended Medgar Evers funeral and that had repercussions.

SH: So they were there for the Woolworth sit-in.

LG: They saw it. My ex-wife, became a Head Start teacher and so she would teach the black kids. My kids who were not school age attended the class, too. We visited Tougaloo College, a black school outside of Jackson for artists performances. The sheriffs would be in front of the gate taking our name, license number, to intimidate us if we went in. We went in because many of the entertainers of that day did not want to entertain to segregated audiences and that's all they were, segregated audiences. In fact, I'm proud of my ex for getting involved like that.

SH: Did you notice any of this in your work?

LG: Yes, there was overt anti-Semitism in the office by some of the Southerners and yelling down the hall, "goddamn Jews." Also, one summer I worked in Salt Lake City for another oil company. I don't want to denigrate the manager there, but after the summer he called me in and said, "Gordon, you're a Jew aren't you?" And I said, "Yes." Now I was not a practicing Jew. I did not go to service; I just worked. Nobody knew what I did, nobody knew anything about me, except they found out I was Jewish. He rolled his eyes and said, "You know, there may be another Jew in the company," and I decided, you know, I'm not going to apply for a job there. So, fortunately, there were Jewish people at Shell so we were accepted there. Although I had a boss that was anti-Semitic and there were kids, people, my age that were southerners from Mississippi that were anti-Semitic. It was a very difficult time. Of course, discrimination against blacks was rampant and ugly.

SH: What about your children, their education, in school were they

LG: Well, they saw some of it. My daughter ran across some of it and recalls, to this day, in Midland being picked on because she was Jewish in high school, not very much, not what I went through, and it certainly improved through the years.

SH: How many children do you have?

LG: I have three children; Lana, who is now fifty-one; John, forty-eight; and David, forty-seven. I was divorced in 1977 and remarried in 1979 to a wonderful gal, Norma Jean, a true Texan. She

had a three child family with eleven grandchildren and now we have a great family together. We celebrated our 25th anniversary a few years ago.

SH: Congratulations. You talked about coming back to Rutgers periodically, did you make the reunions or when did you start coming back?

LG: I really started back after the Hall of Fame award. Although, in 1971 when I lived in Mountainside, New Jersey (worked in New York City), I attended many Rutgers sporting events and functions. During the period, 1971-1994, I may have visited the campus once or twice. I made my 45th and 50th reunions in 1999 and 2004. I always stayed abreast by reading all Rutgers publication: the Scarlet R, Scarlet Knights, Alumni magazine, Colonel Henry Rutgers, etc. (My most recent visit was in April 2007 to attend the induction of George Sundstrom into the Rutgers Basketball Hall of Fame. What a great day to visit teammates and Coach Sterling. It was wonderful.)

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

SH: This continues an interview with Lawrence Gordon on November 3, 2006, in Princeton. Please continue.

LG: Yes, I kept in touch with Larry Weiss and so he would keep me informed of what's going on. I attended my fiftieth high school reunion in 1990. That's a funny story. ... After being gone fifty years, leaving the area so you never see, nor hear from any of your schoolmates, except a few, so it was a real experience. I would go up and, although I studied the yearbook pictures, meeting people after fifty years didn't do much good for my memory. One of my favorite stories there, was one of the players that I played in high school with was Sal Angelo. In school Sal was about six-foot-five, very thin with a big head of black hair. At the reunion I would walk up to people and although I saw their names, I didn't recall anything about them. I went up to this one guy, who was not wearing a badge, and I asked, "Well, what are you doing now?" And he told me and I said, "Oh, well, that's good, that's interesting." You know, "I'm doing this, I'm a geologist," and as we were just getting over those brief moments of conversation, I said, "Oh, my name is Larry Gordon, and what's your name?" This guy, he was bald, heavy, and about my height, and he looked at me, he said, "You son-of-a-b\_\_\_h," and just turned around and walked away. I immediately ran to my friend Larry Weiss and I said, "Who is that guy? He just called me a name." He says, "Well, that's Sal Angelo." I said, "Sal Angelo?" He was my height, bald, and heavy. How would I recognize him? And so I got kidded about that incident. It made me careful in future reunion conversations. So, Norma Jean put up with me during my overseas travels in 1977-1989. My main responsibility at Shell, really, was developing new ventures and to this day that's what I'm doing. Most of my career, as I said, I was out of the country a quarter to a third of my time. I visited every country in South and Central America many, many, many times. Countries in West Africa, the North Sea, and Europe. I visited the oil Ministries to meet with officials to review their terms of the oil contracts then I would look at data and decide, "Should we focus on this and get a team to study it and see if we wanted to invest?" I also ran lease sales and decided on what kind of bids we would bid for blocks, all over Argentina, Peru, Ecuador, Brazil, Chile, Guyan Gabon, Senegal,

and Guatemala, Belize, I mean, just all over and most of it was very challenging. That's what I'm doing to this day, developing projects with companies.

SH: Did you speak any other language?

LG: I took Berlitz Spanish four times, I never finished. I took Portuguese once to work in Brazil but never finished. My assignments would change frequently so I could never complete the courses. My assignment would change from Brazil (Portuguese) to Argentina (Spanish) to Belize (English). I took French twice, German, I mean, just wherever I was working I wanted to learn the language, so I could communicate with the people. So I do have a comfortable feel for Spanish because I traveled there, principally, most of the time.

SH: What in all of this, exploration, whatever, what do you think you are most proud of?

LG: I am most proud of being involved in discovering oil and gas fields domestically and internationally for Shell USA and recommending to invest where dry holes have been subsequently drilled. Of course, I have been wrong more often than I have been right but those are the odds in the oil industry. Also, I have been on an ego trip the last few years. I was asked by a very prominent explorer to join his world renowned small staff (5) of geoscientists to consult for major companies. I have enjoyed every minute. The last two years have been five days a week. Finally, my most recent proud moment occurred last year when I recommended a giant U.S natural gas play to a major oil company. They concurred and invested in two large areas. They asked me back a few months ago to explain some details in my report. As I started to leave they said, "Oh, by the way, there was a nice discovery in your area that you recommended." That discovery may open up a whole new play and concept in an area that has not had a major discovery in 50 plus years. Competitor activity has recently occurred along trend.

SH: Were there times that your military background helped or hindered your entrance to these...

LG: I would never mention my military background wherever I went. I did not want people to think I was with the CIA, or anything like that. It just was not a factor. My son, David, always has kidded me about the CIA because events may have happened after I left a country.

SH: Was there any time that the CIA did approach you?

LG: No, no. I had to present papers to our military unit and write up notes to be sent to Washington for research and development but there was never any feedback.

SH: In your military career, many things have happened in our lifetime, you said that the Bay of Pigs was one, the Cuban Missile Crisis...

LG: I get them mixed up but I was in for the Cuban Missile Crisis.

SH: I'm going to guess it was the Cuban Missile Crisis...

LG: I think it's the Cuban Missile Crisis and it'd have to be in the early '60s. But I enjoyed it, you know, just traveling from place to place and being in different units. (ie Quartermaster, Infantry, Artillery, Logistics, Research, etc.) I was sent to various military schools for the two weeks in the summer to learn the specialties and to the War College. Finally, the military released me from service. Because I was in the reserve and I was passed over for promotion twice to full colonel. I was encouraged to contact my senators and prominent people to try and get some political pull to go to the Pentagon. I never felt that I was justified in getting a full colonel position because the people on active duty whom I had the utmost respect for, deserved it more than I.

SH: Was there any chance, especially during Vietnam, that you thought you might be called back?

LG: There was a possibility.

SH: Do you think that your work may have kept you from this?

LG: Oh, absolutely. I was old enough and essential doing what I was doing.

SH: What about your children, did any of them serve in the military?

LG: My youngest, David, enlisted into the Marines for four years. He's still proud to this day that he joined the Marines and he's a very proud fellow. I went out to his completion of basic training in San Diego with his brother John. I'm very proud of my kids. My oldest, Lana, became a criminal defense attorney, successful and very popular in Houston. She took a sabbatical from law for a while for painting and artistry. Her art is abstract. Her main focus now is law. My oldest son, John, worked for the federal government in the US Attorney's Office and, lo and behold, he progressed through the ranks and became US Attorney for Southern California on his merit. Since that is a political position, President Bush kept him there for eighteen months but then found a female Republican for that position. He left for a very lucrative private practice. He's apolitical, so politics does not mean a thing to him; it just got in the way. My youngest, David, got a degree in petroleum land management and now examines and does research for mortgages and that sort of thing.

SH: Do you have anything more or any stories you'd like to leave on the tape?

LG: I'm very proud of my wife Norma Jean. In all the time that I was traveling overseas, most women would be very unhappy because I was gone so much, but I can't say she was happy. She became a crafter and did ceramic crafts. We have a big kiln in our garage and molds galore and so she was doing that, and attending craft shows. She just loved that and she gave that up several years ago. She is still in crafts but now she makes hand-made greeting cards, extremely creative, not with a computer, maybe for the verses only. She was invited to open a booth at the American Association of Petroleum Geologists Convention in Houston this past year and she was invited to go to Long Beach, California (2007) to show her wares at another geologists convention. This just pleased the heck out of me, and so she still stays busy with that, all the day, all night, while I'm doing my consulting work. So we're both very busy. [Tape Paused]

SH: Please continue.

LG: I would like to end with a discussion of my brothers. During our working years we did not see each other very much. It was so expensive to fly. I was in the Southwest and/or South and Irwin stayed in New Jersey, here in Princeton, working in the RCA Labs. My brother, Allen, was in sales and marketing positions, senior positions all around the East and Midwest and so we just didn't see each other. What we would see, maybe at a child's wedding, or when my parents were sick, we would see them during that time but it was very difficult not seeing them. In fact an aside issue. I was in Ecuador when I learned my father died. The brothers called me at midnight that my father had died and the funeral was the next morning at eight o'clock. Of course, that's impossible. So I couldn't attend my father's funeral. But maybe fifteen-twenty years ago, I don't remember when, we decided, "You know, we don't see each other, the folks have died, why don't we get together?" So since that time, we've been rotating, the three of us, visiting and I have the utmost regards for Irwin, who lives in Princeton, New Jersey, we're here this year, this is early November 2006. Last year we were in Houston, Texas, 2005. Next year, in 2007, we will be in Allen's house in Chicago and I have the utmost regards for them. I'm very proud of their military careers. I feel their experience really propelled me to stay in the military so long. I know that was a factor. Irwin was in the Second World War, Allen in the Korea war, and here I am in the reserve, I just better do something to protect the country. I know that was a very big factor, besides the love of my country, but I love them both and I love their families. We have wonderful families. We get along wonderfully. We don't talk behind each other's back, there's none of the gossiping and none of the things that you hear that go on in other families. We're just happy that we're together; we're alive and healthy.

SH: Well, thank you very much.

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Reviewed by Lance Weaver 1/11/2007

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 4/1/2007

Reviewed by Lawrence Gordon 7/10/2007

Reviewed by Elaine Blatt 8/30/2007