

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ALICE TALBOT SOFIN

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and

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Tara Kraenzlin: This begins an interview with Alice Sofin on March 9, 1999, in Jamesburg, New Jersey, with Tara Kraenzlin and Krissy Squitieri. We'd like to begin by asking you questions about your parents. Where were your parents born?

Alice Sofin: My father was born in Denver, Colorado, in 1890. My mother was born in a little town called Burgettstown, Pennsylvania, about fifteen miles from Pittsburgh in 1888. They were married in 1910, and that's the first piece of furniture that they bought, that desk. [Pointing to desk in corner of the room.] My father lost his father when he was ten years old, and went to live with a cousin in Ohio, from there he went to McDonald, Pennsylvania. His mother remarried. When he was eleven years old he went down to work in the mines. He soon got up out of the mines, and was taught the printing trade. He was a printer's devil and ... Mr. (Keenard?) took him on and taught him the printing trade. He became editor of a small town paper in McDonald, Pennsylvania, and he met my mother, who graduated from high school in 1908. ... She was the valedictorian, and I still have her speech. I don't know if you read it or not, but I'll show it to you later. ... I have a picture of her wearing her graduation dress. She went to work in the print shop as a linotypist, and met my father. ... They were married in 1910. They had four children, three brothers and myself. ...

TK: When did they have their first child?

AS: They had my brother Mac in 1911, the year after they were married. Thirteen months later they had my brother, Robert, and five years later they had me, and five years after that, another boy. We had a wonderful childhood, really great. My father, after Bob was born, came East. First, he went to Pittsburgh and worked on a paper there. He then came East to New York City, and worked for the Hearst papers. ... When I was born, he was working at night as a reporter for one of the Hearst papers. I really don't know which one. ... He bought a house in Jersey City, New Jersey, in the ... Greenville section. It was really a two family house, but we had the whole house. My parents were wonderful parents. I mean I never heard my mother say, "Oh ... these children." You know? That was her life, her children, and she was very proud of us. We had nice neighbors. Down the street at the end of the block was the railroad station, and the steam engines would come in at about five o'clock my father would be on the train and I'd run down the street to meet him. He was very good with children, ... the whole house lit up when he came home. He did things like have a taffy pull for the neighborhood children on Fourth of July. ... For my birthdays he would print up little invitations. ... He was constantly playing baseball with my brothers. He took us all over. We traveled a lot.

TK: Where were the places you visited?

AS: Well, he had the first car on the block. It was called a Scripps-Booth. I don't know of anyone who's ever heard of a car like that, but ...

TK: What year is it?

AS: I would say 1918, somewhere around there. I have a whole history of albums from years back, and the car was like one of those coaches with lights on the side.

TK: Sure.

AS: ... Then we had a Chandler, which was a sports car. A touring car with a running board and Isinglass curtains. We went all over New Jersey when there were no roads. I learned to swim at the Delaware Water Gap when I was seven. He tied a rope around me, and threw me in. My mother was standing there saying, "No, no, no. Don't you do that, Ben." His name was Ben and she always called him that. But I survived and I loved swimming, and I still swim. ...

TK: Did you ever go to New York or Washington D.C.?

AS: Oh, yes. When I was yea high, my father would take me into New York to his office, because I guess it was ... Oh, I missed an important part. In 1919, my father was asked to go to England as the financial editor of *The New York Sun*, to cover the Versailles Treaty. So, he took the three of us, my youngest brother wasn't born, yet. We went on the *Baltic*, a big Cunard ship, to England. We lived there for a year. ... I was four then, and I don't remember much, but I had to leave my favorite doll carriage back home. ... I also remember Fleet Street. They had minstrels playing there. Also, we had a muffin man. ... He would come every morning ... with a griddle and muffins, and he would call out, "Muffins! Muffins!"

KS: Do you remember anything about your trip on the ship over to England?

AS: Not an awful lot. My mother said that none of us got sick. We were the only ones that were at dinner every night. So, we came back [to the States] and my father worked on Wall Street.

TK: In Europe, your father was actually covering the Versailles Treaty for the press?

AS: Yes, yes. I have a picture of Woodrow Wilson that he took up close.

TK: When you were older did your father ever talk about his work over there?

AS: A little, we have a scrapbook of all his writings. He had a column of his own on the financial page of *The New York Sun*. My mother kept every column that he wrote. He was a self-taught person, because he only went up to eighth grade. He took courses at night, and he became ... very well informed on finance. My mother was very supportive. She went off to England with three young ... children. My two older brothers went to school there. They didn't like it very much. They had to take dancing lessons, and they had to salute the British flag. They didn't care for that too much. ... They were loyal Americans, but they did do all right. So, we came back ...

TK: "God Save the Queen," and all that. [laughing]

AS: Yes. My mother loved it. She followed every move of the royalty, you know. ... For years she talked about the Duchess of York, this and that, and Princess this ...

TK: So, she didn't mind going to Europe at all.

AS: No, no. At first it was a little daunting, but she liked it. She arose to the situation. After that my father worked on Wall Street for a number of years. We moved to Summit, New Jersey when I was eleven, and I went to Summit High [School]. Through the years, the system in the grade school was that if you showed any signs of intelligence, you were skipped a year, or a half a year at a time. I was skipped a year, so, I graduated from high school at sixteen. I don't recommend it.

TK: What year did you skip?

AS: I skipped half of ... of fourth grade, and half of seventh, something like that.

TK: Did this jar you at all in terms of who your friends were? Did you have to make new friends in your new classes?

AS: As I recall, I wasn't bothered one bit. When I was in fourth grade in Jersey City ... I had to change schools. After fourth grade you went to this different school, which was across the railroad bridge and up ... I would say it was about three-quarters of a mile from home. It was almost, I would say, ... ninety percent black. My mother, especially, "Oh, no, Alice can't go to that school." You know there was a certain reputation that was promoted in those days. I wouldn't say that my mother was terribly prejudice. She just didn't know any black people because she came from the Midwest. My father wasn't as concerned having worked in New York. So, there was much discussion. I can remember it whirling around in my head, but I was too young to know exactly what the problem was. So, they were going to send me to the Bergen School for Girls, a private school, but my mother didn't drive, and my father had to leave for work too early. So they said, "All right," and there was much whispering. So, I started off and I went to this old, old school with stone steps, and we all sat two in ... big seats. The rooms could open up, and you had your auditorium. ... There was no auditorium. So, there was one white girl in the class, Priscilla (Auschull?), and we sat together. I never had a bit of trouble. Those black children were wonderful. It was always, "Yes ma'am, no ma'am," and they came to school scrubbed 'til they shone. The only place we had to be careful was on the playground because some of the boys ... were very athletic, and good runners. You had to watch out. They'd go "Swoosh!" whizzing by, and you could be knocked onto the floor.

TK: So, your parents finally decided that they had no problem with you staying there?

AS: Yes. I stayed. ... There were a couple more white children ...

TK: But, you were definitely the minority?

AS: Definitely. Definitely. In those days, there were no special classes. There was a boy, Robert Duke, who was stone blind. He was a handsome boy, tall, well built. So, they put me kind of in charge of him. I led him around. I would sit with him while he did his Braille, and read some to him. He was smart, oh, very smart. Then there was another boy ...

TK: Did you learn Braille to help him?

AS: Oh, no. I didn't have time. You know the teacher just put me there to help him, not at any great length, but mostly lead him around, and sit with him, and, maybe, reach for something that he needed. Then there was another boy, who was partially blind. I was friendly with his sister, and I used to help once in a while. Then there were twins, a boy and a girl, beautiful, as I recall. The little girl used to come to my house and play. She had ... a club hand, but, you know, we never thought anything of it. In this school, especially from fourth to eighth grade, we had Polish, Jewish, Italian, black, everything.

KS: A really mixed group of children.

AS: ... I don't remember any problems, nobody called names.

KS: I suppose nobody realized that there was a difference.

AS: Well, we didn't. We definitely didn't as children. ... I have to say that I had wonderful teachers.

TK: Do you have any that really stick in your mind?

AS: ... I had a Miss Nixon in eighth grade, and a Miss (Yandle?) in seventh grade. I remember my mother used to dress me to the nines because I was the only girl. She made my clothes. The teachers, once in a while, would call me up to look because she would applique, cross-stitch, feather stitch, and ruffle. So, they used to quietly say, "Oh, let me see." ... I remember when I was in eighth grade, as a family, we used to visit this couple often. They lived in West New York. They were French, Jenny and Henry (Lucier?). My father taught himself French; in fact, he took lessons at one time. I was getting out of the car. It was a Jordan, another one you've never heard of, and I closed the door on my finger. Oh, dear, the end was hanging off. So, they rushed me to a doctor. They ran in and Jenny told them where the doctor was. ... I didn't feel a thing, but my mother was very upset, naturally. So, they pasted it back on. They pushed it back on again, and I had to wear my arm in a sling, or, some kind of support. So, I went back to school and I had to write with my left hand, and my paper was a mess. The teacher called me up, Miss Yandle, she hadn't noticed ... that my hand was in a sling. She said, "Alice," and then she said, "What is this paper?" Then she noticed that my hand was all bandaged up. She forgave me. ...

TK: What was the name of your grammar school?

AS: Number fourteen.

TK: In Jersey City?

AS: Jersey City, yes.

TK: You said that between fourth and eighth grade there was a large immigrant population coming in.

AS: Yes.

TK: It was a lot different from the earlier grades.

AS: No. ... I don't remember first through fourth, and I didn't go to kindergarten because they didn't have a kindergarten in that school. I imagine that it was the same situation, but maybe not so pronounced because that school must have drawn from other areas; whereas, number fourteen drew from the black population over in a different section. I remember my first grade teacher, Miss (Campbell?). There were many Mrs.'s and Miss's, but no Ms's. Then I had a Miss (Cavanaugh?). They were all good. I learned reading through phonics. I can remember that on the board. ... I liked to read, and we had a book in first grade, I gave that book to my daughter, *Dickie Dare Went Out to Play*. I loved to read. ... I enjoyed it. Now, high school was wonderful. I had about six good friends. One, I traveled with [later in life]. Her husband died in '83, and I took a few trips with her because she was used to traveling with her husband.

KS: What were your favorite activities?

AS: I played hockey, field hockey. I was in the dramatic club, and I had a part in a play. Oh, what else? Tennis, I won the tennis cup when I was a senior. I don't know what happened to that cup. My mother used to keep it shined. What else did I do? ... I have my yearbook from high school. ... We had a wonderful time. There wasn't any dating to speak of, a few at junior prom. ... What else? They had a dance group after school, but I went once and didn't really care for that. Oh, I forgot. When I was, ... about eleven, just before we moved to Summit ... I always loved to dance, and in the house in Jersey City there were so many rooms. There was a room that had a Victrola in it, music. I took dancing lessons. I loved to toe dance and tap dance. ... Then I went in one summer, that was another thing my mother said, "Oh, you can't do that." I went to Ned (Wayburn?), a big dance school in New York City. My father said, "Oh, she'll be all right." I took the tubes from Journal Square into New York. I was all of eleven or twelve years old, and I went to Ned Wayburn.

TK: Wow.

AS: But New York was safe then. Every single day, except weekends, and I did acrobatics. So, when I hit high school, I was a dancer in all of the intermissions of the plays. I made up all of my own routines in the hallway of the house, and Gracie, my good friend ... who lives in Virginia, now. Gracie played the accordion, and Gracie was all of ninety pounds, little, little, and she would work this thing, and I would be dancing, and doing backbends and kicks, and all of this. Then one time in the middle of the dance her accordion stuck on one note. Later, we laughed about that. This one note kept playing, but I kept dancing. ... There were six girls. We would go into New York in the evening. We would go to Radio City and come home at eleven o'clock. You know, it was perfectly safe.

TK: What kind of shows were they playing at Radio City?

AS: Oh, a lot of musicals, the Rockettes, you know and all of that. We used to go swimming. There was an estate, the Dodge estate in Madison, [New Jersey]. We'd go up there, and there

was a place you could swim. We had a really good time. I get a Christmas card from one in the group, and Gracie and I call each other, and still keep in contact. Well, that was high school. I graduated and I wanted to be a doctor. I think, I don't know. I know where I got the idea, because a good friend of mine across the street in Summit, Lois (Ryman?), had a brother who was a doctor. We used to sneak a look at the books, ... and I thought, "Oh, wow, that would be great."

TK: When you were in high school, did you always know you would attend college?

AS: Yes, my father was very, I would say, he was advanced in his thinking, and [he believed] that women were very capable. ... We used to sit together, and he would talk to me and he would use words like "enhanced," big words, and then we would talk about what the word meant. ... He did help me sometimes with compositions ... just to get the flow going in the writing. There's an editorial in the high school yearbook that I wrote. The subject was ambition. At any rate ... I knew that I was going to go to college. So, Lois and I were allowed to go observe an operation one time.

TK: Where was this?

AS: Her brother got us in. I don't remember the hospital. It was this very large black woman who was having a gall bladder operation. I remember it as plain as day. ... Her stomach was open, huge amounts of blood. I don't know. I didn't like it. Lois keeled over in a dead faint, and Lois went to the Yale School of Nursing, and I started as a pre-med at NJC.

KS: How did you choose to attend NJC? Did you have any other choices?

AS: Yes. I was accepted at Cornell, but they said that I would have to wait a year because I was too young. I also took college boards to go to Bryn Mawr. Bryn Mawr required a college board for every subject, for every year, which meant ... literally dozens of college boards. I started and I thought, "Oh, no." ... I think that my father said, "Really, you know, this is a little much." I don't really remember how I chose NJC. I didn't know anyone who went there, but I imagine that because it was close by and there must have been some publicity about it.

TK: Did you get a chance to visit the campus before you decided?

AS: No, no. I was admitted without any exams or ... college boards.

TK: Just based on your grades.

AS: Yes.

TK: So, you actually started college at sixteen.

AS: Yes. My mother wanted me to have a single room because I had always had [my own] room, which I didn't. I was in Jameson the first year. ... I was a lost soul. I had long hair in high school, and every morning my mother would roll it up into a bun. Well, I came home on the

first break and my mother said, “Oh, look at your hair Alice.” Aggie they used to call me, because my little brother couldn’t say Alice. So, I had it cut. I lived in a dorm across the hall from two girls ...

KS: Did you declare a major right away upon entering NJC?

AS: I declared that I wanted to be in pre-med ...

TK: The experience at the operation hadn’t discouraged you at all.

AS: No. It didn’t, but, I’ll tell you what discouraged me. My first year I had physics, chemistry, zoology, math, and English. I had labs practically every day. I had never been away from home. I would come back from lab and I was exhausted. I’d fall asleep and miss dinner. I look back and I feel sorry for myself at that stage. It was awful. I never had chemistry in high school. I think I had biology and botany, maybe. I think I had Professor (Sweet?) and the class was huge. We sat in the stairs. I didn’t know what he was talking about. Zoology, I didn’t mind, even though we cut up a frog. Calculus ... wasn’t too bad. But it was the combination, and physics, oh, forget it. It was the combination of everything. At the end of my freshman year I got a “D” in chemistry, and the advisor said I did pretty well, but, ... I was exhausted. I went to summer school, and thereby hangs a tale. My husband was getting his masters on a scholarship, and as part of his scholarship repayment, he was in the lab teaching chemistry. He saw that I needed help. The very first day in the lab I lit the Bunsen burner, and my finger somehow got in the flame and it got burned. So, I had to go to the professor, Professor Sofin, and he quickly came to the rescue and bandaged my finger. Then he said, “Now I know where you live,” because he had it in his book. So, he offered to help me with my chemistry. We used to go to lunch and he would sort of coach me. Well, I did pass chemistry, and then sophomore year was even worse. So, Lou [Professor Sofin] said, “You know, I think you ought to change your course,” and, so, I did, because I began to see that it was not for me.

KS: Did you have your science classes on the College Avenue campus, or were they on NJC’s campus?

AS: Oh, everything was on NJC.

TK: You didn’t have to take anything with the guys?

AS: Oh, there were no men at NJC.

TK: Sometimes, if a woman was taking an engineering class or something, she would take the class on the other campus. The same went for a man taking a language, there was sometimes a mix.

AS: Oh, well, I didn’t get that far.

TK: So, somewhere in the middle of your sophomore year you decide this is not for you.

AS: I decided it was not for me, and I believe it was a very good decision because I've saved a lot of lives by not becoming a doctor. So, I decided that I would change to English and German, with education as a minor. Of course, I lost a lot of credits, which explains why I graduated in '38 instead of '37. That was all right. It didn't bother anybody. My father and mother were very supportive. My mother told me years later ... "I knew you wouldn't be a doctor," although, she never did discourage me.

TK: When did you and your husband start dating?

AS: Oh, well, the minute I came back to school ... the beginning of my sophomore year, he used to come up to NJC. You know, he had a car, a Chevy. His father had died three years before, and he went to work for Merck when he was, well, ... when I met him he was twenty-one, and he worked for a year for his brother-in-law, who was getting a doctorate. The New Jersey Dairy Labs, was owned by ...

TK: Sure.

AS: Do you know them?

TK: Yes, they come up in many different interviews.

AS: Really, why?

TK: Because of different people at the Agriculture School, on Cook campus, who worked in dairy science.

AS: Oh, yes. Well, Dave was my husband's brother-in-law. ... So, Dave was getting a doctorate. So, my husband worked at the lab to help out. The next year he went to work with Merck & Company. He worked there for forty-three years. He started off as a chemist, and ended up in the administrative as director of quality control. Merck has been very good to us. We were married in 1941 in a temple in Brooklyn. The rabbi, the one in New Brunswick, didn't want to marry us because even though my husband was reformed, it wouldn't look good. The conservative one wouldn't. So, my father said, "You want to get married?" I said, "Oh, yes." He said, "Well, all right." So, he knew a lot of people from working in New York. He knew this rabbi in Brooklyn, wonderful man. When he died, he got a big write up in the *New York Times*. He took me in with open arms, and I went for three weeks for instruction. We had a nice wedding in this temple in Brooklyn. It was in a very nice area, and we went to Lake George on our honeymoon. We have two children. ... My son was born in 1948, and my daughter in 1950. During the war, we lived in New Brunswick on Baldwin Street for two years. Then we moved to Linden because it was close to Rahway, and this was ... The war started in this country shortly after we were married.

TK: Right.

AS: Two of my brothers went. The little one, Jack, and my oldest brother, Mac. His real name is Benjamin Maxwell Talbot. He was named after my Father. ... He went, they were both called

in '42 on the draft. My husband wasn't [drafted] because he was working on penicillin in the lab. ... The war put a pall over the entire country, not just rationing, that was a minor issue, and not gasoline and that sort of thing. My mother turned white overnight because two of her boys were called. My oldest brother went in ... June of '42. He went over to North Africa in that early campaign. He was injured in, I would say, September, or October, and was flown to Halloran Hospital. He lost an arm. He was a left-hander, and he lost his left arm. Shrapnel hit him in the head region, but he wasn't truly damaged there. It was just surface wounds. So, we went to see him at Halloran. There were these beautiful young men, with bandages and bandages, and wheelchairs, a sight you wouldn't forget. My brother was in the hospital for quite a while. My mother went to see him a few times, and I went a few times, and then he was transferred, I think, to a hospital in Bayonne. My mother went with my brother, Bob, who was not in the Army because he had a child, plus, he worked for the government. So, my brother, Bob, took my mother and she went to see Mac. Bob said that she came out, and threw up. It was just a terrible, terrible sight to see all of these young men in pieces. So, I gave blood during the war. ... They took a pint, and I could hardly get up the steps home. The doctor said that they never should have taken that much. So, at any rate, my brother came home. He was thirty when he went in, ... and Jack was twenty-one. Jack was in the war for five years without a scratch. He went to the Battle of the Bulge, Normandy, all the way over to Russia and home.

TK: He was incredibly lucky.

AS: I know. Mac though, he was wonderful. He taught himself to do everything. He got shoes like this [pointing to her loafers] ... slip-ons. He could even tie his own tie. The only thing he couldn't do was cut his meat. He could drive. He had a prosthetic. I'm sure they've improved them since then, but he had a hook and he also had a hand. In 1950, I think it was, he got married. He married a wonderful, wonderful woman. He went to work. He was always in the newspaper business like my father. He went back to work as a reporter and he met Emily, who worked for US Steel. They met on a freighter trip somehow. They were happily married for twenty-five years. He died in 1978. So, that's how the war affected us. I worked at the Raritan Arsenal for about six months as a clerk typist. Now, you'll find this interesting, when we were married my husband did not want me to work. Now, in those days, it was a reflection on your husband ... if the woman worked. It was the male pride, but I thought that I should do something. So, I finally got permission and I went to work, but after six months or so, he ... wasn't too approving, so, I stopped. Then I did a little bit of substitute teaching around New Brunswick. Then we had the children and I was home for twenty years ... Oh, I forgot one important thing, I worked at the State Home for Girls when I first graduated. That was a wonderful experience. When I got out, you could not get a teaching job. That was in '38 times were bad. ... It was then that my father started to feel the Depression, not earlier. I went to Summit Secretarial School for six months, and then this job opened up. ... My father heard about it, and I applied, and was accepted. I lived in West Trenton at the State Home for Girls. In a way it was the best job I ever had because it taught me, "There but for the grace of God go I." All of the girls, most of them were from Newark, and many of them were black, not all. I had two little white girls, beautiful, who were taken off the streets. Many of the girls were runaways, and they had no criminal records. We had to read their folders, and I would sit and the tears would come, such stories. We had to read their letters and censor them to see that they didn't write anything, I don't know, critical or whatever. I learned to use the switchboard. We had to

live there, and we had to be on duty one weekend a month. In the summer we had a one month vacation, and the other month, we spent out on the farm. They had a big, big farm. We'd take the girls out, and they'd pick tomatoes. I loved it.

TK: Where was the farm?

AS: ... Right on the property. We had the best strawberries, tomatoes, and corn. I used to go out with the girls and do the picking and weeding, too. I never had a discipline problem, never. Those black girls, some of them were so funny, you know they had their own expressions and they ... really loved us because who else ever gave them attention? Nobody. We would go to chapel with them, and, oh, they would sing.

TK: Was chapel a mandatory part of the school?

AS: Yes, they went to chapel every Sunday, and we went with them. I really liked that job. It was wonderful, but then I left when we were married.

TK: So, you worked there for two years?

AS: Two and a half years, yes. So, after I had the children ... I was down at the grade school ... when they were in kindergarten and so forth. I did a little substituting. The kindergarten teacher said, "Why don't you go for a provisional certificate?" Because in those days NJC only gave secondary certificates. I was qualified to teach English, grades nine through twelve, and German, but no elementary. So, I went and I took one or two courses, and then I just kept on going. Within five years I had my elementary certificate, and then when the children were, well, Louise was in high school, and Ben was, too, ... we decided we would send Ben to private school. It would take a little extra money, so, I said to my husband, "Why don't I go teach for a couple of years and help out?" So, he said, "All right." So, I got a job in Warren [New Jersey], where I had done some substituting. They said to me, "Would you consider teaching full time?" I said, "Well, I might." They said, "Well, there's a principal in Warren who needs a teacher." I was substituting in Greenbrook [New Jersey]. So, I said "Well, I might." In the summer they called me ... I had a wonderful teaching experience at Warren. I did a lot of projects.

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AS: I always used to try to think of projects, and I figured, well, for colonial history a log cabin would be good. I have a very good friend, whom I still see, Bob Shay, from the Somerset County Environmental Center, he just retired. He came to my class because I was researching environmental education, which was quite new then, in the early 1970's. I contacted the center and they sent Bob. From then on he would come every week to talk to my class, and, soon, it branched out to other classes. We concocted a project for that year, building a cabin, a real cabin, and doing a socio-drama for the whole school. Well, it worked out. Some of the teachers were a little annoyed with me because I made them do a little extra work. We had the day. ... This took almost a whole year, and every area was included, music, art, English, language, everything. One of the parents delivered pre-cut logs. I had a boy who was very gifted in that class, and he drew a scale model. [We] took it to the superintendent, ... and asked permission to

put it on the property. It ended up being a bang up project. We repeated it for the township of Warren in October out in their field. ... That's the kind of teaching that I enjoyed, and that's what I did. We did a big, big ongoing project on weather. One of the parents got a specification from the government to build a weather station out in the back. The PTA gave us all of the weather instruments, and one of the parents put a weathervane on the roof of the school. I had the children work up weather charts, and then everyday one student would go in the office and give the weather report over the mic. Oh, they loved that. So, anyway it was great. Then in 1973 our daughter was married, she married an Englishman, and there she was in England. I used to commute practically. I was still teaching. In 1978, our granddaughter was born, with a little pressure I was persuaded to retire and Lou retired the same year. We moved here [Jamesburg, New Jersey] in '83. After I retired, in 1980, Louise [daughter], Richard [son-in-law], and little Laura [granddaughter] came here to live. ... They moved to Princeton Meadows, temporarily. So, I was sitting around, and I saw this little ad in the *Courier News*, "Naturalist needed at Mountainside Nature and Science Center." We were still living in Plainfield [New Jersey]. ... I applied, and it turned out that I knew the director, so, she hired me, and I worked there for two and a half years. I gave talks to visitors at the center. I worked with children. We took walks and bird watched, and all that. I learned a lot there because I had to do a lot of research. So, that brings us up to 1983, ... I had to quit from there because we moved here, and then comes Crabtree, but these are all fun things.

TK: We should mention for the sake of the record that you work with one of the interviewers, Krissy.

AS: Oh, yes. I work with Krissy at Crabtree and Evelyn.

TK: Which is?

AS: In Princeton [New Jersey], on Palmer Square. ... I enjoy working there because of Krissy, and others.

TK: Who are fun to work with.

AS: Marie, and the young people.

TK: How long have you worked there?

AS: Fourteen ...

TK: Just part-time?

AS: Yes, and they come and go. There were some from Princeton and Rutgers, the Seminary [Princeton Theological Seminary], Westminster Choir College. What better way to keep up with what's going on than that? So, I think that, what else can I say? I love my computer.

TK: When did you start getting into computers?

KS: At the church, when I was treasurer, they put in a computer, and we had a neighbor here, who, unfortunately, isn't with us anymore, Charlie Farber, who was an expert in computers from 1953 on.

TK: Wow.

AS: He brought me over to his house about four years ago and he showed me this computer, and what was on it. He was into finance. I looked at it. I couldn't believe it. ... Then he put this program in at the church, and he put a practice program in for me called "Alice's Stuff." So I could get into it, and fool around. Then one day my friend, Francis, who already had a computer, and two other "Rossmoorites" [referring to residents of her housing development Rossmoor] went to look at some computers, and I bought one. I just bought it. Best thing I ever bought. My husband used to say, or he said before I bought it, "What do you want a computer for?" But you begin to feel left out, "what is this www.com?" It's beginning to bother you. So, now, I have my computer.

TK: What have been your favorite things to do on your computer?

AS: E-mail. I e-mail Laura all the time.

TK: Your granddaughter.

AS: Yes, and one of my brothers, and look at Diedre, we've been carrying on, and Betty down the street bought a laptop, a beautiful computer, she and her husband. We all go out to lunch every month or so, and they've been hearing about computers. I said, "Oh, you'll love it." So, they got one. They took lessons from a woman who comes here and teaches only seniors. She doesn't live in Rossmoor. They took a few lessons, and Betty is wild about it. She loves it. So, we e-mail back and forth even though we could just phone. We telephone, also. I look up recipes. I taught Lou how to get into the news, the stock market, and the weather. He's learning to e-mail, but it's hard for him to type, that's the stumbling block. I make my own cards. I haven't bought a card in a year and a half.

KS: Do you do a lot of research on the web?

AS: Oh, I research all the time. We had to do a paper. Of course, every year we do a paper for the study group, and last year I chose the Olympic movement. I went into the computer and I got thirty-five pages. I could have gone on, so, I did my paper using all of that. There's endless, endless information. ... I'm not addicted. ... I think the most I ever sit is two or three hours, and then you begin to get [restless]. I love solitaire, ... you know, sometimes at night if I've had my shower, I go and just play a game or two, and last night I won. ...

TK: Could you tell us a little bit more about this community, why you decided to move here?

AS: Oh, well, Plainfield was getting a little uncomfortable, you know. We had a beautiful house there that we built in 1953. We lived there for thirty years, but you had to be very careful about security, and you couldn't really go downtown shopping anymore. All the stores were ... altered

or changed to suit the population, which, was, well, you know what happened to Newark, Elizabeth, Plainfield. We just didn't feel quite safe anymore. My husband knew two people who had moved here and worked at Merck, Dr. (Hoake?) and another person. So, we came to look in 1981. I didn't like it, that arm went down and I thought, "Oh, I'm never going to get out of here." So, we waited. Then in 1983, we came down again. We looked at a few other places and didn't like those. We came in and looked at some of the houses. There were only a few here. There were lines waiting to buy. This one had never been lived in before. So, I thought, "Well, okay." So, we did. We moved here. We moved the coldest day of the year, January 29, 1983, and for about two months I was a little depressed. You drive around, and there was nobody out, but, then, I went to a guild meeting. I went on a trip with the women, and I volunteered there in the knit group, and from then on, it was fine.

TK: What is a guild meeting like?

AS: Well, we went to visit some gardens in Long Island. They do work from March until November. They knit, sew, make beautiful pillows. Those two pillows that are in the living room are from it. The women are very talented. In November, they have a big ... bazaar. There's a lunchroom that the ... staff ... They make everything, they cook. They make up the salads and so forth. ... In the boutique they sell the pillows, aprons, all kinds. You know what a bazaar is. They have a Grandma's Attic, where people line up. Oh, they come at eight o'clock in the morning. There are things that people don't want. You can find some really beautiful stuff because, unfortunately, or fortunately, people here pass away. That's part of life. You have to die. It's like living and being born. So, they clean out the houses, and there are some lovely things there. They raise lots of money. I'm the finance chair of the guild, and this year they made \$13, 524 in one day.

TK: Wow, and when is it?

AS: November.

TK: Make a mental note.

KS: We'll have to mark it on the calendar.

AS: ... I'm active in that and in the church. I'm assistant treasurer, and I'm an elder. What else do I do? I belong to the study group. In the summer I swim half a mile everyday. In the winter I walk whenever I can, if it's terribly windy I don't. We take trips, and, I just love everything.

TK: What is the study group like?

AS: Well, it's 108 years old. Have I shown you anything? Oh, it's fascinating. You have to be asked to join. It was started by Rutgers professors' wives. ...

TK: Oh, really?

AS: Yes. ... The wife of the head of the botany department at Rutgers for many years sponsored

me. I thought, "That sounds interesting," so, I joined. There's a limit of thirty women, and they're all ages. We have a couple, who are 90 years old. Irma (Schimdt?), the wife of Professor George (Schimdt?), was a member for many years.

TK: Is it actually centered here at Rossmoor?

AS: No, this isn't, this is mostly in New Brunswick. ... These are my papers that I've written for it.

TK: So, this is a select group of women associated with Rutgers in one capacity or another.

AS: Some of them are. We have the president of the Rutgers Theological Seminary as a member, Mary (Cansfield?).

TK: You take trips together?

AS: No, we don't take trips. It's called, "The Traveler's Club," because you travel with your mind.

TK: Oh, okay.

AS: That's what it is.

TK: What is the focus?

AS: It could be anything. Here's a list of all the papers that have been written. "Roads and Trails," "Our World and Space," "Our Nation of Nations." These are the themes, and the program chairman works up all of the topics under it. You have a choice of maybe fifty, and we draw numbers. If you get a low number, you get your first pick, but you usually pick a few topics. This is the sample of the program. That's last year's. This is this year's.  
[Break in tape while Mrs. Sofin shows the "Travelers' Club" papers.]

AS: ... Bernard Lewis, and I said to him, "You're the author of the book on the Middle East?" He said, "Yes." I said, "I just used your book to write a paper," and we had a little chat. Then he came in the next year, and there was a crisis in the Middle East, and I had a little conversation with him. He comes in every so often. I said, "Are you going to write any more books?" He said, "Yes, I'm writing one now." So, he came in last week, and he recognized me, and said, "How are you?" I knew who he was. I said, "Have you finished your book, yet?" He said, "Almost." I said, "Well, be sure to be sure to bring it in because I'd love to see it." The last year, when he came in, he said he was on his way to visit King Hussein on his birthday. He was going to help him celebrate. So, that's why I like to work at Crabtree, another reason.

TK: You've just been talking to us about how you wrote a paper on the Middle East, because we didn't get it on the record, and then the professor who wrote the book you quoted from heavily came in, and you recognized him at Crabtree.

AS: Yes, that's right.

TK: Have you had any other famous run-ins there?

AS: Well, Governor Kean came in when he was governor. Brooke Shields used to come in. Yes, indeed, and she was very nice, very unaffected, beautiful face, big girl, almost six feet tall. ... One time we had kind of a scary incident. It was dark, in the winter, and this man came in. It must have been around five o'clock. He was dressed in a way that made ... him look almost like Charlie Chaplain. ... He had a bouquet up like this, and he said, "Does Brooke Shields live here?" We said, "No," and he left. He went down, she lived only two doors down. ... We alerted the police. He was an intruder. He was someone, I guess, who was enamored of her from a distance, but everywhere she went she had bodyguards, across the street, or alongside of her.

TK: Oh, sure.

AS: Who else? We go on these opera outings with Westminster Choir College, and one of the customers is always on the bus. A woman, her name is (Slybone?), I think. ... I can't think of the others.

TK: You enjoy being out and about in Princeton?

AS: Yes, very much.

TK: This group, just to get back to the study group was founded a number of years ago by Rutgers professors' wives?

AS: Yes, six of them. They wanted a little mental stimulation, and they used to visit back and forth by stagecoach.

TK: The membership is now at thirty?

AS: It's always been at thirty. Here's a note from Barbara Bush on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

KS: It's a well-recognized group.

AS: Yes. We're not a member of ... What is that group that's kind of an official women's group? We didn't want to be part of that, but we've had many distinguished members, as I said, (Leah Body?). ...

TK: How often do you meet?

AS: Twice a month. ... We meet, and two people give their papers. You see it's all ... mapped out here.

TK: In the schedule that she has.

AS: Yes. That's right. Very interesting.

TK: What is the topic for this year?

AS: The topic ... this year was the twentieth century. One paper was on the Bionic Woman, ... the different parts. One was on space. One was on the development of museums, and how they've changed, and so forth.

TK: Do you take a break at least for the summer?

AS: Yes, we do.

TK: Okay, summers off.

AS: The last meeting is a social meeting, and we've had it at the Buccaloo House at times. We used to have it at Helen (Flemmers?) house. She had a great big house at the Princeton Nursery. She was the widow of the owner of the Princeton Nursery school. Do you know Fortenbaugh?

TK: No.

AS: Connie Fortenbaugh, her husband is teaching at Rutgers. He teaches the classics.

TK: Oh, okay. I haven't had any of those courses.

AS: Let's see, Carole Kantor?

TK: Yeah.

AS: ... Her husband teaches at Rutgers. (Quaintance?)?

TK: No.

AS: Charlotte (Quaintance?)? Her husband teaches there still. Elaine Strauss? Her husband used to be the head of the chemistry department, (Ueley?) Strauss. He's retired now. Then we have Alice (Adams?), whose mother was Zimmerli, gave the museum.

TK: Sure.

AS: Her mother was married twice, and her first husband was Voorhees. Alice Voorhees Adams is in the group. So, anything else?

TK: What has been one of your favorite topics over the years that you've been involved in?

AS: Here?

TK: Yes.

AS: I think the oral history. If you want to read Francis' story, it's fascinating.

TK: Right before we break we'll look at it. In that case let's go back, I want to ask you a couple of questions that we might have missed.

AS: Sure.

TK: Krissy, you want to begin?

KS: Sure. What it was like growing up with two older brothers?

AS: ... It was wonderful. It was great.

KS: Did that change at all when your younger brother was born?

AS: No. I was, I don't know how they did it, but ... I don't consider myself spoiled. I really don't remember, except, that I was the apple of my father's eye, but, he was very good to my brothers. ... He taught them, ... but the thing is that we used to chase each other around the kitchen table, and I was always very athletic, and we'd tussle, you know, for fun, and my mother, I can still remember, she'd say, "Don't you hit your sister. She's the only sister you have." ... Of course, I might have gotten away with a little bit, but my brothers were wonderful, and they all made good husbands. ... Now, I don't remember any ... animosity, or any jealousy.

TK: Did growing up with three brothers have an affect on your interest in sports in high school?

AS: No, I was the most athletic.

TK: Oh, really?

AS: Yeah, I was. I was always hanging from my feet. My father put up a trapeze for me in the backyard. Now, my oldest brother wasn't athletic at all, and my youngest brother had asthma almost all of his life. Until, he went in the Army, and he never had it. ... We figured ... out that he was allergic to goose down pillows.

TK: Oh, wow.

AS: In the Army, you don't have pillows. ... I'm very fond of my brothers.

TK: When your brothers were called into the Army, did you write them often?

AS: Oh, yes, all the time. ... I kept my youngest brother's bank account. ... He'd send his money home. Yeah, we wrote.

KS: Did they send you letters back? Were any of them censored by the government?

AS: All of them. I'm sorry [to say], when we moved here, I threw all of those letters out. I wish I hadn't, but I did. They were all musty, you know? But I have a lot of other things, ... pictures, and different mementos. Yes, they wrote all the time.

TK: Did you write to any of the other people from your neighborhood, or any other servicemen that you had known?

AS: No, but one of my little brother's best friends was killed in the Pacific. He never came back. ... (Donny Smythe?). ... They never talked about it much when they got back, very, very little. Never.

TK: Do you remember any differences in their personalities when they got back? Did it seem that they had aged quite a bit?

AS: Not my youngest brother. My oldest brother, of course, he lost weight, ... but he perked up. It took him a few of years, but he ...

TK: Met a nice girl.

AS: Yes, that helped a great deal, and he went back to work. Yes, I would say it certainly affected him, and my mother said he screamed at night, he had nightmares. ... He also had that phantom arm, he thought his arm was there. ... He came to stay with us for a couple of weeks when he ... got out of the hospital, just as a change. Then he went back home. He worked, and then he got married.

KS: Did you participate in any volunteer programs back here during the war like the Red Cross, or Bundles for Blue Jackets?

AS: Yes, I was with the Red Cross, and, as I said, I worked at the Raritan Arsenal, and I gave blood. ...

KS: Did you have a Victory Garden, or did your family have one?

AS: There was no place nearby. We lived in a little apartment in New Brunswick on Baldwin Street. No, I remember that people had them, but we didn't.

TK: You didn't have the space?

AS: Yeah, ... we lived right in New Brunswick, there was no place. We didn't use the car at all. You couldn't for any sort of recreation.

TK: You had a car, but the rationing held you back?

AS: Yes.

TK: Going back to when you started college, you were only sixteen, and you said that being in a

single room had affected you. Do you think that it was too much for someone so young?

AS: Yes, definitely. I wouldn't recommend college at sixteen. ... I was in this room, and across the hall, I remember were two girls. One was very staid, proper, pulled her hair back, very studious, and her roommate was ... I won't say the name. She was a siren. Oh, I still remember her. She had green cat shaped eyes, wavy light brown hair, and a voluptuous figure. She was going with an older man, who later ran the pool. There was a big pool in New Brunswick on the other side of the bridge. ... I don't think you would even know ... I couldn't describe the area. There's been a flea market there, and now there are theatres.

TK: Right on Route One.

AS: ... There used to be a pool there, and it was owned by this older man. She was going with him, and she was caught drinking. She came in with ... liquor on her breath. Well, whew, that was really an eye opener. That was a little bit of a laboratory on the side. ... It was a little bit much. I mean, I didn't disapprove. I was just fascinated. I thought, "Oh, my, this is really unusual."

TK: Did you have a curfew at NJC?

AS: Oh, definitely, ten o'clock.

TK: Your housemom checked on you?

AS: We had a housemother. We had to sign in and out. ... My senior year I was house chairman, and you had to check the book and make sure everybody was in.

TK: Did you stay on the Jameson campus all four years?

AS: No, I was on Douglass and Gibbons. I liked Gibbons best I think. That was fun.

KS: Did you belong to any clubs while you were at NJC?

AS: I belonged to the Jane (Adams?) Club, and [whispering] we have a secret sorority, nobody knows that. I can't remember the name of it, but that was funny.

TK: What was the reason for it?

AS: I don't really know. It was a group of girls, senior girls, when I was a junior, and they invited me to join. ... It consisted of one dance a year, and that was about it, and you were initiated. You had to go on a scavenger hunt. I don't know, now, that I think back ... it was more or less a snobby thing. It was a cliquy. ... When my friend, (Anjeanette?) and I think about it we laugh because there was really no purpose to it. ... My roommate belonged, so, I guess they felt they had to ask me. My roommate was a senior, Carlie Sullivan, beautiful girl. She was chosen, whatever they choose at senior prom, or senior ball.

KS: Who was your favorite professor at NJC?

AS: Um, I guess Doctor Morris, he taught math. Have you heard of him?

TK: No, I haven't heard of him.

AS: No, you wouldn't, but he was very nice. Sweet, elderly man, I guess you would call him. ... Norton taught philosophy. He was nice. I liked him.

TK: When you chose to major in German, did you hear much about what was going on in Germany?

AS: Oh, that's another story, I have to watch the time. ... I had Doctor Hauptmann.

TK: So, you know all about the scandal?

AS: I certainly do.

TK: Tell us about it.

AS: ... I was a mere freshman when I had him, and he was "yea" high, and he had these steel blue eyes, steel blue, and he had a scar from (Heidelberg?), and he'd shave his head at a certain time of the year. ... He was a tyrant. If you didn't have your work just up to the minute, he would yell at you. Some of the girls cried. I never did. He never could make me cry, but I felt like it sometimes. ... He'd get you up against the wall, and he'd stare at you and yell. ... We went to his house for a Christmas party, and they had delicious cookies, and his wife did everything, and whenever he went anywhere his wife walked in back of him. ... We weren't there when he escaped by submarine, and left his wife behind.

TK: This was after your freshman year that he left? How many years after?

AS: Oh, he left in, ... I guess, the year that I graduated.

TK: Right.

AS: Or maybe the year after, but I heard all about it.

TK: He returned to Germany, and was in the Army there.

AS: Yes, he was a Nazi, and a typical Nazi.

TK: He was very authoritarian in his personality.

AS: Oh, of course, very much so.

TK: Do you remember Professor (Burgle?)?

AS: No.

TK: He was an assistant professor.

AS: No, I remember Jordan.

TK: Jordan, (Emile Jordan?)?

AS: Yes, I had him also. He was very different from Hauptmann. ...

TK: How so?

AS: Well, he was mild, ... not overbearing. ... You can erase this if you want, but I remember the thing that was a characteristic of his was he would sit up front, ... up on a little (dious?), in a chair, a big chair. He was a big man, big, and he would constantly grab at his crotch. [laughing] ... We girls could never understand whether his underwear was too small or what. You can erase that if you want.

TK: That made you uncomfortable.

AS: Well, yes. ... It made us laugh, too. We laughed. We never did figure out what his problem was.

TK: Getting back to Professor Hauptmann, did you have a lot of contact with him? He was part of the German club. Did you join that club?

AS: I did not, no.

TK: Did he ever lock the door, or any sort of things like this to get you to do your work, or be in line?

AS: Lock the door? No, I don't think so.

TK: Did he ever talk to you about the state of affairs in Germany?

AS: Not that I recall.

TK: Or reveal any of his Nazi bias?

AS: No, not when I had him, but he was very German in personality and character, and the way he treated his wife, we noticed that. She was not an equal by any means. ... He had children. ... Irma (Schmidt?) knew them. You know, George Schmidt taught history for years. ... He left his wife and children, and all of the faculty gathered around to help them. They were helpless.

TK: In a way, based on his personality, you were not surprised to find out that he had returned to

Germany?

AS: No, not at all.

TK: Did you see enrollment go down in the German department in the years you were there?

AS: There weren't many in my class.

TK: Yeah.

AS: That I know.

TK: It was a very small department.

AS: A very small class.

TK: You decided to stick it out as your major anyway because you had already ...

AS: It was a minor.

TK: Oh, it was a minor, okay.

AS: I think I had three years of it.

TK: Did you ever make it to Europe to visit?

AS: To Germany?

TK: Yeah, in later years.

AS: Oh, yes.

TK: Were you able to speak German?

AS: No, I forgot German very quickly. I remember French. I took lessons from a private tutor when Louise was in high school. She wanted to perfect her French. So, she started, and then I thought, "Well, I'll start." ... We've been to France a number of times, and that I can pick up, but not German. I was in Germany a couple of times, but I guess I'm not that interested in ... the language.

TK: As you are in French?

AS: Yes.

KS: What's your favorite memory from your time at NJC?

AS: Oh, that's hard. I think my favorite memory would be the friends that I made, and the ceremony on Antilles Field. I don't know if you still have that, or not.

TK: I'm not sure because I wasn't a Douglass student.

AS: Oh, that's right. ... I forget what they called it.

TK: There are a number of different ceremonies, like Sacred Path ...

AS: That I know, but this was in the evening, and we roasted hot dogs out in the field.

TK: Oh, yes, I've seen pictures.

AS: ... I don't know. It was just the camaraderie. I counted in the yearbook, there were only 189 in our class. So, you knew almost everyone.

TK: To this day, did you keep in touch with a lot of these women?

AS: Well, Angie and I, Anjeanette is her name, and she calls me Talbot [Sofin's maiden name] all the time. She and I are very close. We have lunch back and forth, and she's coming to the reception. She was the other person who was at the class, the honors class. ... Betty up the street. You know, a lot of us are gone. They're not around, and if they are, they're in other parts of the country.

TK: Sure.

AS: So I think ... that would be it, those two.

TK: Have you been back for any reunions?

AS: Oh, yeah. I went to the fiftieth. I think that's the last one I went to.

TK: ... What was it like? Did you see a lot of people you hadn't seen?

AS: I saw a few. I guess it was the forty-fifth that ... we took the Schmidts with us. That was interesting. That was in 1988. I think that was the last one I went to. I'm not really a reunion person. ... Everything has changed so much. I don't recognize some of the areas, but, some I do. ... They're the same, like the chapel. The library is new. Old Cooper is gone. But, you know, times change and it certainly has grown. ... You had 32,000 at Douglass?

TK: At Rutgers, New Brunswick.

AS: Yes, does that include ...

TK: I think that's all of the undergraduate colleges in New Brunswick, and it's 40,000 with the graduate school in New Brunswick. Then there are the Newark and Camden campuses.

AS: Oh, yes, I know that, but ...

TK: So, in other words, a social security number is your identification.

AS: Oh, yeah.

TK: You're not even known by name for administrative purposes.

AS: How many at Douglass?

KS: I'm not sure.

TK: I don't know off hand, but it's much smaller than Rutgers College.

KS: Maybe three thousand, something like that.

AS: Oh, well, that's good, that's small.

TK: Smaller so that there is a better chance of knowing people from your class, and also because the dorm life is still not coed, so, there's a different dynamic there than there is at Rutgers College.

AS: Oh, it's not coed.

TK: It's still all female.

AS: Oh, good. I think that I would like that. I know our granddaughter is in an all girls dorm, she has chosen that every year. ...

KS: Your daughter went to Smith College?

AS: Yes.

KS: Do you think that your going to an all women's college influenced her choice in attending an all women's school?

AS: I don't think so.

TK: Did she talk much about her motivation for choosing Smith?

AS: Her father chose it.

TK: Oh, whoops.

AS: Yeah, he did. Someone at Merck had a daughter that went there and recommended it, and

he inquired when she was in high school ...

TK: He felt that the quality of education was really excellent?

AS: It was good, very good.

TK: I know I'm jumping here, but you mentioned that your father was working on Wall Street when you returned from England. Was he still working on Wall Street when the stock market crashed? Did he tell any stories about what that was like?

AS: Yes, it was bad. His boss jumped out of a window. You hear those stories, and you wonder, is that true? It is true. ... I remember going into New York, and seeing the men selling apples on the street corners. ... My father left Wall Street. He had to, he lost quite a bit of money, and he ...

TK: So, he got out pretty soon after the crash?

AS: No, he didn't get out until the mid thirties. ... We lost the house in Summit, and they moved to a Jersey City ... apartment. ... I was working. Well, we were all working, so, you know, a lot of people were much worse off.

TK: Your parents lost the house while you were away at school?

AS: Yes, they did. ... In 1940 they lost it. ... My father lost his job on Wall Street, and he taught himself Spanish through some courses that were given, and he worked for the WPA as an interpreter.

TK: Oh, wow.

AS: He was a resourceful man, and very versatile.

TK: Where did he work?

AS: In New York.

TK: In New York, as an interpreter.

AS: Yes, and then the war ended. Oh, wait a minute, before that he got a job with CBS as a publicity man for the assistant to Edward R. Murrow.

-----END OF SIDE 2 TAPE 1-----

TK: This continues an interview with Alice Sofin by Tara Kraenzlin and Krissy Squitieri, on March 9, 1999 in Jamesburg, New Jersey. You were telling us about when your father left Wall Street, and then worked for the WPA.

AS: Yes.

TK: How long did he work for them?

AS: Oh, I would say about five years. Then they moved to Rahway, and he worked at one of the first malls in the area. He helped set up and print the circulars that they sent out.

TK: Do you remember how it was when that mall opened? Was there a lot of hoopla?

AS: Yes, it was quite unique, quite talked about.

TK: People were excited about this?

AS: Yes.

TK: Did you go?

AS: Yes, I was there. ... I don't remember any grand opening, but just the idea was brand new. ... He was progressive, and he had the first one of the early recorders. You know, it didn't look like this. It was a big thing. ... He came to our house, and he said to me, "Now you talk, you talk," and he played it back for me. ... It was very exciting. ... He had one of the first Polaroid cameras, and I often think, "Boy, if he were only around to see the computers." He would have loved that.

TK: He enjoyed technology.

AS: Oh, yes. My mother was unique in her way. She wrote poetry. She loved poetry, and she could say all the books of the bible by heart. She was, I guess you would call it religious. She was ... from the Midwest. Church was a very important part of her life, and she was a very good example. She had all sorts of maxims she would come up with. "If you can't say anything nice about someone, don't say anything at all." "Never leave a job undone," and "If at first you don't succeed ..." and all of those. But you know that sinks in, and she would go around the house singing ... hymns. ... What was the one? ... When I hear them in church I can hear her singing them. ... She was always humming or singing. ... She was a very good mother, that's for sure.

TK: You were mentioning before about all of this technology, do you remember when you got your first television set?

AS: Oh, yes, in 1951.

TK: Where were you living at the time?

AS: There's the case from it [pointing to a piece of furniture in corner of the room]. It was a K-part. You see that mahogany. We had it taken out and it's a (cellerete?) now with shelves.

TK: Oh, neat. At the time, were you the first people on the block to have a television?

AS: No, we were not the first.

KS: Do you remember the first TV show that you watched?

AS: Well, I remember the children's, *Miss Francis*, *Howdy Doody*, and *Captain Kangaroo*, and our son loved Arthur Godfrey. I don't remember watching. I never had time. There weren't that many ... I remember Sullivan, what was his?

TK: Ed Sullivan?

AS: Ed Sullivan, and Jack Benny, and Bergen, the ventriloquist, and what else? Well, you know, we had nothing very spicy, fortunately, but nothing as good as some of the programs are today, you know, like the History channel, or some of the others.

TK: I wanted to talk a little more about your marriage. You had mentioned that you had trouble getting a rabbi to agree to marry a Jew and a Gentile.

AS: Yes.

TK: How did your parents feel about the marriage, especially your mom who was very religious?

AS: She was a little rocky about it, but didn't stand in the way. I knew that it would not be her choice, but after we were married, she was fine.

TK: Was there ever any expectation that you would convert?

AS: I did convert.

TK: You did convert.

AS: But, then my husband is not interested in formal religion, so, we chose Unitarianism. ... I didn't get too much out of that. They went to Sunday school, which was fine, but personally I wouldn't recommend it. It's neither here nor there in its approach and also in its teaching. Although, there was one good minister in Plainfield, (Mortimer Guestner?), whose theme was love, and he expanded on that. ... You can never go wrong on that. But, then, we came here, and Lou said, "Why don't you go down to the church there?" He wanted me to be in a ... in place I guess. So, I went down here and I liked it very much. It's ecumenical. ... We have a few Catholics who've joined, and they keep going to the Catholic Church. We have a few Jewish people. We have Methodist, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, everything. ... The nice thing about Rossmoor is all of the faiths get along. We have an interfaith council.

TK: Right.

AS: ... The leaders of each faith get together and the people, the population here ... a couple of times a year they have a special service, which is good. It's very nice, and everybody gets along,

it seems. I've never ... encountered any kind of prejudice. I guess it's there, it may be hidden, but I don't see it.

TK: Did your husband grow up in a very religious family?

AS: Well, ... his parents were from Russia, and his father was not religious, and I know why. I've read enough about it. Because there was terrible, terrible persecution in Russia, ... and he somehow got here. Lou doesn't know an awful lot. They don't talk. His family didn't talk much. ... They came over here, and his father wanted the children to be American above all. So, he did not stress religion, though Lou went to Schul. His father sang in the ... chorus, and ... Lou used to go with him, but other than that, nothing was stressed. Of course, his mother, they don't encourage women to go, so, he has very little background. I would have made a good Jew. I would have been ...

TK: Why do you say that?

AS: Well, because I would have been interested in the religion.

TK: In learning it?

AS: Oh, yes, it's fascinating. ...

TK: Did you ever learn Hebrew or Yiddish?

AS: ... No. Well, I could understand a little Yiddish because his mother spoke, and it's ... low German really. ... It's corrupt German. ... I find it has wonderful ... ideas and philosophy.

TK: Yeah.

AS: So, I would have managed.

TK: You converted, but decided ultimately not to be observant.

AS: Right, that's right, because Lou wouldn't help. You can't observe by yourself. We did observe Hanukah and Christmas together for a few years when they were little. We had a Christmas tree and a Hanukah tree. So, they grew up knowing about it, but Lou is not ... of a mind to follow any particular ceremonies.

TK: In the '50s and '60s, did you feel like there was a lot of emphasis on religion?

AS: In the '50s and '60s? In what way? Could you give me an example? ...

TK: Yeah, just that there's a lot of talk about how the Cold War kind of brought all the faiths together. Before there was prejudice against Catholics or Jews, and then during this time that kind of breaks down because of the idea of all religions against communism, which is inherently atheistic.

AS: I don't think so. I know ... my husband didn't want the children to be punished ... for being Jewish. Though he didn't hide it, or anything of that sort. ... I grew up with two little Catholic girls, one on each side. We played together every single day. On Saturdays we would be hopscotching, jumping rope, oop, time for confession. So, I'd go around the corner to St. Patrick's, put the handkerchief on my head, genuflect, do everything except go into the confession box. ... I'd wait for them, and afterwards, we'd continue playing. ... Then I went to school, I used to call for (Esther Jacobson?) on the way to school, a little Jewish girl. I called for (Muriel Kurchesky?), a Polish girl, and ...

TK: It didn't matter.

AS: ... It doesn't make any difference. ... My father was that way, ... especially, working in New York. He never called anybody by name, ... those ... derogatory names, anything like that, no.

TK: He had no reservations as far as your marriage was concerned?

AS: No, no, none at all.

TK: What did they say when you told them that you were dating a former teacher?

AS: Oh, they didn't, I brought him to the house. They didn't say anything. ...

KS: I have a question about your parents. I know that they were of different ethnic backgrounds. Was it your mother who was Scotch Irish, and your father who was English?

AS: My father was Scotch Irish, and my mother was ... German. Simpson was her maiden name.

KS: Was there any objection from their parents?

AS: Oh, no, I don't think so.

TK: I have a few more questions about NJC. Do you remember being singled out as a freshman?

AS: Oh, sort of, yeah. We ate in Cooper, of course, and before the meal all of the freshman had to stand up and sing, "I'm a freshman, a lowly freshman, and my ears are made of leather and they flop in rainy weather. Gosh, oh, hemlock, I'm just a freshman. I'm a freshman of NJC, tee hee."

TK: Oh, really, that whole thing every time?

AS: Yes.

TK: And then you could eat?

AS: Then we could sit down and eat.

TK: You had to pay a certain respect to the sophomores, right?

AS: Kind of, yes. When you were a sophomore, you wore a blue dress with buttons down the front, ... but I don't know, no one was ever really mean to us. No, they kind of coddled us along. ... I had ... a junior as an advisor. ... If I thought a little longer I could remember her name. She was very nice.

TK: When we give you the transcript back.

AS: Do you need the name?

TK: Oh, it's not important.

TK: She was supposed to give you some advice.

AS: Oh, yes. She checked in every so often. Oh, Adeline Verner, that was her name.

TK: There you go.

AS: ... She was very, very nice. She was either a junior or a senior. ... They wrote and told us who would be our help.

KS: Did you keep in touch with her at all after school?

AS: No. She graduated, and, ... you know, she went her way. Anything else?

TK: Are there any final thoughts you'd like to leave us with as far as your Rutgers experience?

AS: ... I have to tell you that Douglass gave me a wonderful education, really, it stood me in good stead. ...

TK: You feel it prepared you well for your life?

AS: Oh, definitely, and I hope the girls now are equally ... prepared. I'm sure they are, maybe more so, but from where I was at the time, it did prepare me very well, and, you know, you build on it, that's the main thing. You learn all your life.

TK: They gave you a solid foundation.

AS: Absolutely.

TK: Okay, good. I think that's a good note to end it on.

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

Reviewed by Lauren O’Gara 8/15/02

Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 8/5/02

Reviewed by Alice Talbot Sofin 11/8/02