

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH IRWIN SPETGANG

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Irwin Spetgang on January 12th, 2012 in Voorhees, New Jersey with Shaun Illingworth. Thank you very much for having me here today.

Irwin Spetgang: It's my pleasure.

SI: To begin could you tell me where and when you were born?

IS: May 17th, 1930 in Barnert Hospital, Paterson, New Jersey, local, home grown.

SI: Can you tell me for the record your parents' names?

IS: Yes, my father was Moe, M-O-E, and my mother, Anne, A-N-N-E. Moe Spetgang and she was Anne Kaplan with a K. With great care, you have to be tolerant of me because I have difficulty lifting and a drink and holding it steady.

SI: Starting with your father's side of the family, can you tell me what you may know of your family history, how the family came to this country?

IS: The family came from Poland, that used to be Germany. The borders moved around quite a bit in those years and my grandparents--my father's father--was Louis Spetgang and my father's mother was Mary Spetgang, don't know her maiden name. I'm sure I can dig it up somewhere. They came in the late 1800s, my father's parents, because the reason I know this is my father was the first one born in this country. There were thirteen children in their family, and he was born in New York City shortly after they arrived in 1898. He had a few sisters older than he, and then he had a bunch of sisters younger than he and one brother who I'm the namesake of, the brother was a podiatrist, and unfortunately he expired in his twenties and that's how the name Irwin for me came to be. His name was also Irwin Spetgang. ... Two of them were school teachers, one was an administrator, school administrator, that's my aunt, Jean, she was a principal of schools in Paterson. My aunt Ida was a high school teacher. The other sisters, there were a few tragic things along the way, one of my father's sisters was, had some kind of, I don't know what the disease was, cystic fibrosis or something. She walked with braces on her legs and could not talk intelligibly to me as a young child. I couldn't understand her, but the family did understand her, and she lived with the family. Back in those days there were no nursing homes or anything or special care facilities and the family did it. At one time, before the stock market crash in the late twenties, my grandfather, my father's father had been quite well to do in Paterson and very active in society circles, but he apparently lost everything in the crash--literally--and the family, the whole family, lived tightly in one small house, and he was able to open a little notions store where he sold perfumes and things of the sort. I used to go visit with him in Paterson as a little grandchild, spend the day with him, boring as hell. He saw maybe two, three customers a day. It was a very sad thing.

SI: Do you know what he had been doing before that he was heavily invested in?

IS: Real estate as far as I know. I don't know that much more about it. ... I know that my father and my mother were secretly married when she was sixteen and my dad was twenty, and they kept it secret for four years living with their respective families until someone in my dad's family

found out about it, and my grandfather, still being a member of Paterson's Jewish society, which was sort of a separate enclave, insisted that they have a big formal wedding, and later if you have the time I'll show you their wedding picture from the second wedding. ... Funny the way I found out about the two weddings. I've been curious all my life and I was rummaging through an old secretary, that's a piece of furniture that used to be a desk, became today's desk, but they were called secretaries, and I found a wedding certificate for my parents, then I found another one they had four years later. When I asked my mother about it, she said, "I don't want to talk about it, ask your father." So, one of those situations, but that's the way I originally found out about the two weddings.

SI: Were there any stories within the family about why they came to the United States or what their lives had been like before hand?

IS: I have zero on that unfortunately and it's a sad thing. I have spoken to cousins about it, naturally with all of these aunts and no uncles from that side, I had many cousins and I've talked with various cousins ... and it seems to be something that the family sat on. They just didn't discuss it openly, it was never talked about. Strange when I think of our family today and our kids and so forth.

SI: We often hear that people came here and they wanted to Americanize and put the past behind them. Do you remember any traditions being carried on in the family, anything you would call "old-world" traditions?

IS: Well, I have pictures, mental pictures of, as a little boy, I remember staying at my grandparents' house and getting up early in the morning and everyone was asleep so I'd wander around the house and find my grandmother down in the kitchen. ... There, she had a large work table about the size of this in the kitchen and she was busy baking the day's, ... doing noodles. We called it "lockshin." She would roll it out and roll it up in a spoon, cut narrow slices and then hang it up to dry and all this very early in the morning before the house started its daily household anything, and I loved it because she was there with her dog Queenie, and the dog was bigger than I was, but very gentle, and I enjoyed that time alone with her, but that was a tradition. She started the day, and as most women in that generation, she was a super homemaker, that was her whole job, and it was like an eighteen hour a day job. I don't mean it lightly when I say that was her job.

SI: Let us talk about your mother's side of the family for a little bit. What do you know about their background?

IS: Well, that's different because they came from quite different backgrounds. My mother's side of the family, I knew my mother's mother, I can't remember her name now. I never knew my mother's father, he had expired before I was born and my mother's family was also large, I had aunts and uncles, there were eleven of them, eleven children there, and they came over as very poor immigrants. They were from ... White Russia near the Japanese coast, Vladivostok, and it shows. My mother had eyes that looked slightly oriental, just ever so slanty, and my mother came over with the older siblings, my mother was perhaps two or three when they came over, that was 1902 and they came over, I'm sure, for strictly economic purposes to escape the Czar's

wrath. There used to be these wandering horsemen who would come through the villages, like the show Fiddler on the Roof, just taking, plundering, doing anything they want to. ...

SI: The pogroms?

[TAPE PAUSED]

IS: The pogroms, yes. There were the pogroms and they brought the kids over when they were very small. ... Yes, I do know what my grandfather did, he was a wood worker. He was a carpenter. I know that because it's a propensity that I had, it was something I was heavily involved with until recently.

SI: Did your mother's family also come to New York first or did they come directly to New Jersey?

IS: They came through Ellis Island, and I've since had my mother's name engraved on the edging of Ellis Island. I don't know if you're aware, there's a copper sheathing all the way around the wall, and they have engraved the names of many people who came through the gates ... to Ellis Island. ... I think they settled in Paterson, and because my grandfather died--why I don't know, of what I don't know--but at an early age, my grandmother was left with all these children, and of course in those days particularly with the peasants, my mother came from a peasant family, there was no insurance, the only thing you could turn to was family. So my grandmother, who was obviously very bright and enterprising, somehow secured a few loans to get a small grocery store. She did that thinking that with all the kids, at least there would be food if she had a grocery store, and it worked, and the older kids, of course, had to stop school immediately to work in the store. My mother ... made it through eighth grade, I think, something like around that age, early teenager, and that was the limit of her schooling and just a little aside there, although my mother didn't have schooling, she had magnificent penmanship, and she was wonderful at spelling. Up until and through my adulthood, spelling has been one of my weaknesses and I would turn to her while she was alive. "Mom, how do you spell this," and she'd give me the spelling for it. As a matter of fact, again with this aside, when I came to Rutgers, you go through a series of entrance exams, and I had to take two remedial courses before I could be matriculated as a full time engineering student--one of them was spelling. I had to take remedial spelling and it helped some, not enough. But anyway, they worked in that store and that helped them. The family survived.

SI: Did the store have a name? Do you know it?

IS: Don't know.

SI: It was in Paterson?

IS: Yes, Paterson, New Jersey, and some of the later things, I'll remember names. When we talk about periods of my life, with my father trying to make a living through the Depression, and he finally had a small luncheonette and wine store in Paterson. It was called Bridge Wines and Liquors, and it was on Bridge Street and of course that's how it got its name. ...

SI: Were they more open about what their lives had been like before coming here?

IS: No, never discussed that. The kids came over too small to really remember, and it was only my grandmother who was alive when I was growing up, and she had limited capability. One of my aunts, one of my mother's sisters died of breast cancer at age twenty-one. Gee, I knew her name ... but with all these aunts and uncles, it's hard to keep tabs.

SI: You can fill it in later.

IS: At the time that happened, my grandmother had a stroke when she lost this young daughter and her left side was paralyzed. She had to sort of drag her, she could not move her left arm, leg or anything, and the kids got together and planned a way to care for her, and the way it worked, she would stay with one of the daughters for six months, and then go to another daughter for six months, and then to another one, and the boys would each contribute--which doesn't sound like much now--but they each contributed ten dollars a week, which back in the early thirties was big bucks. That was like almost a week's pay for the lucky people that were working. So the boys contributed to that household that kept my grandmother and she was transferred from one to the other. I, of course, remember as a small child, when she was with us for the six month periods as they occurred, but of course, she was quite an invalid at that time, and all I remember, she was a loving, loving woman, she wanted to hug the grandchildren and kiss and all. Like any small child, it was uncomfortable for me, but those are my memories. She could no longer cook, she could no longer do anything of that sort so my mother tended, I have a mental pictures of my mother picking up her mother, carrying her to the bathtub, putting her in and bathing her, and tending to her, getting her ready for bed and so forth. We took this as a matter of course. In today's world, it sounds a little heroic, at least it does to me today, but it's the way things were then. My uncles went into different businesses. One of my mother's brothers moved out to the West Coast. He was my Uncle Irving, and I don't know whatever became of him, and then I had an Uncle Jack who opened a kosher butcher shop, and I remember him well, and that was in Newark, New Jersey that he opened his shop. My uncle Al, my mother's youngest brother, was a fringe activist in the Mafia. He had a store in Newark that supposedly was a magazine and newspaper store, but from what I remember, there was a lot of book making and that kind of thing going on there. ... I remember my Uncle Al owned part of a contract on a prize fighter, and he once brought me a pair of gloves from the fighter as a little kid. These memories are burned in.

SI: Do you remember the name of the fighter?

IS: ... Allie Stolz--I don't think he ever went anywhere, I think he was a middleweight or something. Let's see, some of the other brothers, one opened a cleaning service. He had a small truck and he would go around to stores and businesses and clean them out before they opened for business, you know scrub them down and so forth, that sort of thing.

SI: You told me the story about how your parents had a secret marriage and then had to remarry. Do you know how they originally met? How they came in contact with each other?

IS: No. I had asked, I never quite got a straight answer about that. I can only imagine that it was either in a high school or my father going in for some reason, going into their store and my mother working in there, I really don't know. It's another hole in the background that I wish I could have filled but never did.

SI: Was your father old enough to serve in World War I, or was he affected at all by that?

IS: Yes, he just missed it. He enlisted at the end, 1918, and he was just reporting when the war ended, when the Armistice was declared so he left, instead went to college, briefly, left school, and I don't know. I know he started a small beer distribution business. I remember that because it didn't fully collapse until early in the Depression, about '33 or '34, and I just have very vague memories of his brown delivery truck, before that collapsed totally.

SI: He was delivering beer then?

IS: He was selling it to, not to individuals but he was a distributor, so distributing it to different little outlets. ...

SI: Were they speakeasies?

IS: I don't know, was prohibition over then?

SI: Prohibition ended in '33 or '34. [Editor's Note: The Twenty-First Amendment, ratified on December 5, 1933, repealed the Eighteenth Amendment, or Prohibition.]

IS: Might have been under the table, yes, probably under the table. I know when you talk to Tilly, she'll have an interesting story about the delivery of booze during Prohibition regarding one of her aunts. That's the only thing I can remember. My real memories start of him in work, his work, start in the '30s, the heart of the Depression, '32, '33, '34, where he had no work and it was kind of desperate. I don't know, am I jumping a subject here?

SI: No, it is fine.

IS: He would go out everyday looking for work, he would take anything he could get, he would one day be pumping gas because someone was sick at the local gas station. He would come home very happy one day, he got a one or two week job where a short order cook had to leave because of an emergency, and he'd take the job as a short order cook, which later came into play with how he made a living in later years. I remember it because it's so indelible. One of my jobs was cutting shirt cardboards to fit his shoes. He would have holes in the leather of the shoes, and in winter days out walking, his feet would get soaking wet and freezing and every day I would collect shirt cardboards, which were common thing at the time, and my job was to cut out inserts so he'd put a stack of them in his shoes every day and then he discarded the wet ones. ... Food, I never remember being hungry during the Depression, and yet, my mother in retrospect was an artist at stretching food. My father's sisters, the school teachers, had work. They were still working, and they would bring a large brown shopping bag of food each week and bring one, and in it would be a chicken and vegetables, some potatoes, and that sort of thing, and I

remember the routine as if it were yesterday, my mother would first cut up and kosher the chicken, which meant wash it, salt it to draw off any blood, and then wash it again. After it was sectioned, it would go into a large kettle. She would make a chicken soup, a rich big chicken soup for the week for the family, and then she would very carefully take all the cooked chicken out and she would glaze it somewhat and broil it, and then we'd have a chicken meal another night, and then, of course all the leftover chicken would be cut up and cut into pieces and she'd make a chicken salad which would serve us for a couple of more nights, but I always thought it was amazing how she could take one chicken and stretch it for four to five days for a family of four, but it worked, but in those days we ate things that some people find disgusting today and other people go to gourmet restaurants for it. For instance, the local storekeepers knew which women were destitute and needed help, and which women had a few dollars, and for instance, the butcher would save throw-a-ways for my mother. ... What I mean by throw-away is they have shin bones with meat still on them. She would take that home, make a beef soup. They would save all, what are known as the innards, the intestine, the liver, the spleen, so forth, even the brains. My mother had about five ways of preparing cow's brains because that was a give away from the butcher. He would look after the local women that needed it, and I never knew that it was a luxury food until Tilly and I went to a fancy French restaurant, and there on the menu were sets of brains, and I was curious, I ordered one. It wasn't done nearly as well as my mother used to make. She used to section them and fry them, and other times she'd boil them and season them and so forth. I have another mental picture of how she used the intestines of the cow. The Jewish term for it, the Yiddish term is kishka--kishka meaning your gut--your intestine. She would take it and stretch it out almost across the kitchen, and she'd sew up one end of it, and then she'd blow in to make sure that it was tight, and the intestine would stretch across the kitchen with air, and then she would turn it inside out, and scrape all the fat off it. Get rid of that, then again, turn it right side, and then she made a potato mixture, primarily potato with onions and seasoning, and she would stuff it, and the way she would stuff this long thing as a child it used to intrigue me. She'd take a big spoon, put a spoonful in, and then with her hand she'd pull the intestine, and push this way down towards the end until it was filled with the potato mixture, and she would curl it up like a non-ending circle, put it in a tray and bake it in the oven. When it was done, she would then take it and slice it, and there were these slices of round potato pancake with the intestine skin around it which was edible, of course. It was a delicious food, and I've been to restaurants where they've tried duplicating, but no one quite gets it the way I remember it, but that may be a memory that's not quite accurate. ... That to me typified how you would stretch food, and then make something that was nourishing and good and sustaining.

SI: How big was your family?

IS: Four of us, my dad, my mom, my sister and myself. My sister is six years older than I so she's eighty-seven right now, and she's suffering from early dementia, and she's in an assisted living home down near the Jersey Shore.

SI: What was your home like growing up and what was the neighborhood like?

IS: ... I didn't do all my growing up in Paterson. I grew up there until my father's business failed, and we still lived in Paterson while he was searching for work. Finally, in the late thirties, he borrowed money from his two sisters that were involved with the school system, and bought a

small luncheonette candy store in Nutley, New Jersey, and that's where I did most of my growing up. I came there as a grade schooler and left for college from Nutley. In fact, that's when I left but I'll get into that.

SI: When did Bridge Liquors happen?

IS: That was later. ... That was after he sold, he went through a few phases, he had this luncheonette candy store until I was gone. He was always intrigued with the used car business, he got a partner and went into a used car business in Lyndhurst, New Jersey. It was called Almo Motors--Al for his partner and Moe for my father--and when they sold the business, he wanted to go into bigger and better things, and was able to get a liquor license in Paterson and opened this Bridge Wines and Liquors, which was primarily mostly a luncheonette with a portion of the back section where they sold liquor. ... Nutley was where my most vivid memories are because of grade school, junior school, high school, all that sort of thing.

SI: Just, if you remember, what was the neighborhood in Paterson like?

IS: It was very nice. It was East Paterson near a very large park on the eastern border of Paterson. I can only remember a hillside with cannons, mementoes of the First World War up on the hillside there. And my father would take me there, often walking as a kid through the park. There was a large synagogue, it was on Park Avenue, I remember that, and I think Barnert Hospital, where I was born, was also on Park Avenue. I have a little side story about Barnert Hospital. I got a job as a youngster, maybe eight, nine years old, selling *Liberty* and *Saturday Evening Post* magazines, you know, door to door, trying to sell them, cold calling, and it was frustrating, and I'd sell a few, and it never went further than that, and one of my aunts, one of my father's sisters, who was a school teacher said, "You know, you're really not doing a smart thing, [there is] a much better way to sell magazines." "Really, what can I do?" She said, "Get your magazine bag, go stand in front of the hospital entrance. When people go to visit other people there, they see you and they realize, 'Gee, maybe I'll bring something along as a little gift,' and you'll sell more magazines," which I did, and indeed I did sell more magazines, so many that I won the prize for the best weekly sales and so forth, and I won my first pocket watch, and that was another, there's a story attached to that very, very quickly. The YMHA had a magician show, and I went to with many other kids and the magician said, "Does anyone have a pocket watch?" ... Of course my hand shot up and I brought it up to him, "Oh this is a beauty," and he put it in a little velvet bag, and laid it on the table, then he took a mallet and proceeded to beat the hell out of it, and he dumped out a bunch of parts, springs, gears and what not and my heart sank. I was sick, I couldn't get over it. Later he said, "Wait, I need help opening this big box here," opened the box, smaller box, went down until the final box, my watch came out, and he returned it to me, but those images stick with me, just little incidents, but it was a rather normal childhood. I remember one thing my father did during the Depression. He got a job as a shoe salesman at a chain called Father and Son Shoe Stores, and he was so exceptional at it they made him a manager of the store and later made him their trouble shooter. Now, that caused trouble and that led to the buying of the luncheonette in Nutley, and the trouble was that every year they wanted him to go to another store that was in trouble. We moved to Brooklyn one year while he straightened out one store. We moved up to Binghamton, New York one year while he straightened out the store there, and this is when my mother got frantic about my sister and I

being jerked from school to school and wanted things to settle down. ... It was during that period that my father borrowed the money from his sisters, and I think by then he had some slight savings and got this little luncheonette.

SI: What was that like for you to be moving around and having to make friends?

IS: It was exciting, it was exciting. I remember we didn't have a car, nobody had cars, nobody that we knew had cars during the Depression years, and when it was time to move, the moving truck would come, and when it was loaded, my mother and I would get in the front bench seat with the move men and we would go with them on the trip, whether it was a five or six or seven hour trip, whatever. My sister would go with my father by train to the next location, and they would look for a place for us to live and then they'd send word back. We had a neighbor who had a telephone. It was a rarity also in our neighborhood, people did not have phones. I have memories, it's funny, memories are begetting memories. [laughter] I have memories of the excitement in the neighborhood when an airplane flew over, word would spread, everyone would run out of their apartments and look to see the airplane. I remember the ice truck. We had ice boxes to preserve food, and you had to have ice delivered every day, and it came in standard sizes, fifteen pound block, twenty-five pound block, thirty-five and so forth, and those of us that lived in the upper floors had little signs that had different weights on each side and we would put it in the window so the iceman didn't have to run upstairs and find out what we needed and go down. He could look up, he would see the sign, it would say fifteen, he would cut a fifteen pound block and take it upstairs to us. That was in Paterson before we started moving around, and then while he was going upstairs with the ice, the kids would all run to the ice truck and get little chips and suck on them. That was the big excitement of the day. A lot of street games with the kids. The best play thing we'd ever get was when someone in the neighborhood got a new ice box, and there would be this large crate being thrown away, and of course that became a fort, and we'd cut doorways and windows into it.

SI: Were there other street games you would play with these kids?

IS: Oh, yes, sure there was stoop games, throwing balls against the stoop, and then we had, actually had penny games where we threw coins to see who could get closest to the building and a penny at a time, and whoever got closest collected all the pennies there and we did it again. You'd have to have about five or ten cents before you could get into that game. It's funny, the one address that sticks in my mind in Binghamton, New York, we lived at 139 Seminary Avenue, and there was a large park nearby, and during the winter several things would happen. The winters were severe in Binghamton, New York. They would flood the baseball field and make a massive skating rink out of it, and then they had ... to my young eyes, it was a tremendous toboggan slide, and the town of Binghamton gave out toboggans. You stood in line, and they would give you a toboggan, and then you'd get in line and go up the steps, all the way up to the top and get a ride down the slide, and then it continued on in the park where they had walls built so you stayed within the walls on your toboggan and then you'd go back and start again. ... The lines were always so long that you got maybe two to three toboggan rides a day, but it was an exciting day. Another thing we did in Binghamton that was wonderful--the plows would come through and make very high piles on the side of the road, and then people who did have cars and driveways would dig out the driveway and they'd make like an even higher pile at

each side of the driveway. Well, the kids, we would dig and make an igloo out of these big piles, and then we would make tunnels through to the next driveway, and the parents, for our safety would come out and throw water on them, and they would freeze up. You know, parents were wise enough to know that it could collapse on the kids, but I can remember going from one end of the street to the other through these passages that we made where the snow plows had piled snow on the side of the street. So these were the kinds of fun things that we did, and they were fun. ... Another memory in Binghamton, I remember hobos knocking at our door, they would never come and ask for food, they would come and ask, "Are there any odd jobs, is there anything I can do? I don't even need pay, just a bite of food but I'll do anything, any kind of repair," and I remember my mother would always have them in for our meal, whatever meal was coming up, she would tell them to stay and they would join us either for a lunch or for a dinner, and that wasn't terribly unusual. You know I had no sense of the fact that this was an abnormal thing. To me, this was the normal course of life at that time, neighbors did the same thing, but I look back at it today, it gives me a different perspective on today's world where people have cars, television and so forth, and our own welfare because they fall below a certain threshold, a financial threshold, and I know how expensive things are today, and I can understand there is a need, but it's a very different picture that was in my mind of the Depression years.

SI: You mentioned the story about cutting out the inserts for your father's shoes. Were there any other things you would do to make the household economy stretch, such as looking for pieces of coal or something to heat the home?

IS: We did that. That was just the normal thing, there were railroads nearby. This was in Paterson that I remember doing this. I never remember doing it when he had the job as a trouble shooter for Father and Son Shoes but when we were in Paterson between the time he lost the beer distribution business and was out struggling for any kind of work, me and my friends used to, we all did the same thing, we'd go to the railroad tracks, and I remember looking for the big chunks, and there were. The trains would go through with coal cars loaded, and of course if the tracks weren't perfectly level and straight, the cars would rock and there'd be spillage, and we would pick up the spillage and bring it home. I remember in Binghamton, when we lived on Seminary Avenue, it was, of course, coal was the main fuel then. My father would go down and shake the grates to get the ashes down and put fresh coal on and bank the fire, and I would hang out with him down in the basement and I remember finding a window shade roller, you know with the little springs in one end, and the fixed piece at the other end, and being very curious, I was looking at here and there and there was an empty light socket up above me and ... I wanted to see if I could get it in there. ... I got it in, of course, it blew out all the lights in the house and shorted out the whole system, and my father was working on it, and I remember him roaring, but little funny memories come back.

SI: You mentioned this job that you had selling magazines when you were about eight or nine.

IS: Yes, at the Barnert Hospital, yes.

SI: Was that just so you would have some money or did you have to contribute to the household?

IS: No, I didn't contribute, I did not, that was strictly for me. Although I do know that when my sister graduated high school, she was expected to contribute a portion of her salary to the household, that was standard, but that was done in almost every household, that was not an abnormality. Her first job was as, she took the commercial course, and her job was as a secretary at a real estate firm in town. That was in Nutley, and I remember her doing that because in later years, she gave that up to help me with my college. The way it worked, she started buying war bonds, well they weren't called war bonds, they were called defense bonds early in the Second World War, and my father, the store was starting to do well, the luncheonette, and he allowed that she could have what she used to contribute to the household table, she could be putting into defense bonds, and when I got out of high school and wanted to go to college, there was no money in the family, ... my parents couldn't afford it or anything, she took all the bonds that she had accumulated and gave them to me to help me get started in college, to get me kicked off, but that's another story altogether. I worked a few part-time jobs in college and so forth. A lot of interesting Rutgers stories. [laughter] ...

SI: Tell me a little bit about the neighborhood in Nutley when you moved back there.

IS: Okay, we had a little candy store luncheonette in the corner of Church Street and Franklin Avenue, and directly across the street from us was the junior high school. Right next to the junior high school was ... "the oval." It was the athletic field because that was next to the junior high school, across the street from that on our side of the street was the high school, so it was all clustered there and of course the primary customers for my dad's store were school kids who used to come over and buy a sandwich and get a coke and have their lunch at Moe's. It was called Moe's, and the town was very small. When we moved there, I was in grade school. There was no school bussing in those days, you walked to school, and the grade school that I went to was about three miles from where we lived, and I had friends on my street and the next street, and we used to pick one another up on the way to school so that by the time we got there, we were a cluster of kids.

Tilly Spetgang: It was an Italian neighborhood wasn't it?

IS: Well, the town of Nutley was predominantly Italian at the time. There was one synagogue, there were about fifteen churches. There was one Dutch Reformed Church up on the top of Church Street, that's how it got its name. We, of course, made a fun thing of going to and coming from school, a lot of yelling, running, pushing, shoving and we'd cut through empty lots many times and I had a favorite past time cutting through the lots. I would flip over pieces of shale and stone and look for garter snakes, and every time I'd find one, I'd get it, put it in my pocket, and then generally, I'd wait till second or third period at school, and because my name is Spetgang, I always sat toward the rear. For some reason they sat everyone alphabetically, A's up front, yes, and during a class, during some period, when the attention is focused elsewhere, I'd quietly lean over and let the snake go on the floor, and then just go back to whatever was happening, and then I would love it, there'd be screams from that corner, and the girls would be jumping up, or kids. Of course, there was hell to pay but the teachers never did know where they came from. But that was some of my fun. I remember the school system being very good. I remember a sad note when I started at this grade school, the boys used to line up on one side of the school, the girls on the other and when the bell rang, the doors open and we filed in. Nothing

like today where you just walk up to a door and go in, and I remember my first or second day there, I was up near the front of the line and big, burly at that time appeared to be big and burly fellow shoved me up, "Get in the back of the line you dirty Jew," and that was a new occurrence to me. ... My father had always warned me that this kind of thing could happen, "So whatever you do, I want you to fight, don't just take it, fight back." So I started flailing at this guy and we went at each other, and quickly teachers came over and separated us, but he threatened me and said, "I'll see you after school, across the street, that empty lot," and it became a nightly ritual. A whole group of kids would gather at that lot because they knew Bobby Citrino and Irwin Spetgang were going to have a fight, and we would fight until one of us showed a drop of blood, cut lip, or anything, and slowly it wore off, and we became friends, and later on in junior high school, two of us together started a school newspaper. ... Bobby, unfortunately, was killed in a terrible accident because he was big and rotund, he would play Santa Claus on the hook and ladder in Nutley, and one year he had an accident, and fell off, and it killed him. But that's another memory, of my daily fights.

SI: I wanted to ask you how different groups got along in these communities, or was there a lot of ethnic identity?

IS: !@#\$% Well, there were very few Jews in Nutley. There was one synagogue and it was not just Nutley residents. In my class, I was of a class of 300 in high school, three of us were Jewish. So, of course, we hung out together but we had many other friends and we were comfortable. Friends never gave us any sense of ostracism. I had one negro boy in my class of 300--three Jews, one negro. His name was Eddie Height, H-E-I-G-H-T, and he was a gentle soul and we were personal friends, he was a very warm, loving kind of guy, but there was no exposure, it was almost all Italian. As I was going through school, I would work different jobs that I could get to earn a few cents, and at one time in the building where our candy store was in the front corner, behind us was a small storefront, and a surveyor had his offices there, a land surveyor, and he hired me one summer during summer vacation, I would hold his leveling rod, and he would sight, and I would hold the tape measure while he went to different places, and I remember surveying a farm once and the farmer going up to my boss and saying, "That's a nice Italian boy you have working for you." I guess I looked Italian. I had dark hair, I used to have hair in those days, [laughter] but that sort of personifies the neighborhood, and I took Nadia Demuro to our senior prom. Her father was mayor of Nutley at the time. One thing we didn't do, that is done today, we didn't go to doctors. Nobody went to doctors, at least nobody that didn't have money. Office visits then were generally two or three dollars, and it had to be a real emergency before you went.

TS: Or if the doctor came to you.

IS: Yes, in true emergencies, the doctor would come to you. ... That makes me think of the one very serious illness I had when we lived in Nutley. I got typhoid fever. Now, this is unusual in this day and age, or seventy years ago, in that day and age. Typhoid is spread through feces. Someone handling food or someone handling something that you in turn consume gives you the disease. Things were well enough at the store and it was slow during vacation season when the schools were not in session, that my father allowed my mother and I to go on, we went on a vacation. There was a hotel in Bradley Beach, New Jersey called the Sea Cliff Hotel, and the

cook at the Sea Cliff Hotel was a carrier, was a typhoid carrier. It was later discovered, this all came about after much investigation, and quite a bit of tragedy. I had a persistent fever, the doctors would come to the house shooting me with the new magic drug called penicillin. It had just been discovered, and it would bring my fever down but never gone, and this continued and continued and pretty soon the Board of Health took an interest in it. Then, one day the Board of Health came and my mother was having minor fevers, questioned us about whether we had been to Bradley Beach and the Sea Cliff Hotel, and they had gotten a report it was being spread around New Jersey. Anyone with persistent fever, [they would] check, because there was a typhoid carrier cooking there and spreading the disease. They already lost a couple of people who had contracted it, and I was one of the more severe cases. I remember when they found out, an ambulance was sent to take me to an isolation hospital, and I was put on a stretcher and totally covered with a sheet. They didn't want me breathing or exposing the air or anything. All our neighbors thought I had died because they saw this stretcher totally covered with the sheet but I got to this isolation hospital where I missed a year of school, of course, and I spent about six months in the hospital until I was cured. They had one whole branch for typhoid fever cases, they had another branch for polio where they had the iron lungs, and we were in completely, nobody was allowed in our room except the nurses with face masks and so forth. Each room had a glass front, and when my father would come to visit, he would be there and we would talk through this glass. I couldn't get out of bed, I was bed ridden. I guess my weight dropped by a third, I went from maybe 120 pounds down to about seventy-five or so, and he would bring magazines from the store. I loved *Popular Science*, *Popular Mechanics* and the comic books, Marvel, Superman. So he would bring a batch from the store, give them to the nurse, and they'd be brought in to me, but I'll never forget my mother was in another isolation room, her stay was much shorter, but I would write notes to her, and I'll never forget I once dropped the pencil while I was writing and sure enough it hit on the eraser and bounced away. So I thought, "Well I'll just carefully get out of bed." I didn't think there was any restriction. Got out, put my feet on the floor, and as soon as I took my grasp from the bed, I fell over. It was as if I was balanced on two pin points. I had no sense of balance or anything, I had been in bed for so long, and of course they found me and the nurses came running and scolded the hell out of me for getting out of bed.

SI: How old were you at this time?

IS: Let me figure it out. This was during the Second World War, and I graduated high school in 1948, must have been about '43. ... I was eighteen when I graduated high school. I had fallen behind a little so I must have been twelve or thirteen, and another funny thing about this that is crazy. I was the shrimp of my friends. I have pictures of myself with friends, and I'm standing on a rock with my arms around their shoulders, they're on either side of the rock. I sprouted while I was in the hospital. I suddenly started to grow at age twelve to thirteen, and I must have grown an inch that year and I just went on till I became 6'1" and my friends had to stand on the rocks, but it was the weirdest thing, but that occurred while I was in the isolation hospital. The isolation hospital was in Belleville, New Jersey which was right next to Nutley, and I don't know if it's still there or not.

SI: Did you recover there as well or did they send you home to rebuild your health?

IS: No, I sort of recovered there. They kept me in the hospital till I was reasonably well until I could go back to school and everything. ... I didn't really physically get built back up until I was in the Army, different story.

SI: Just to cover some of what we jumped over, going back to the thirties, what did your family think of FDR and did you ever see any of the New Deal programs in action?

IS: ... Yes, FDR was God. If there was a God, it was FDR. The family thought he was as good as bread and butter, nothing better, and his death was mourned by the family more so than anything I can remember. ... I don't remember any direct benefit, but I do remember the conservation, CCC, Conservation Control Corps or something.

SI: Civil Conservation Corps.

IS: Civilian Conservation Corps. [Editor's Note: The Civilian Conservation Corps was an agency that was part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, which employed young unemployed males in outdoor conservation projects from 1933-1942.] I remember them doing projects around our community, the CCC. I remember, I think it was '37 or so that social security came into being and that was going to impact us and it did upon my father's demise. He died at an early age. ... We saw food kitchens, we did not participate in them. I never remember standing in line at a food line, or to bring food home from a food kitchen, but the feeling was that he was empathetic to the common man. It was just an all-enveloping feeling that he was someone that truly cared for us, and in later years, when Tilly and I visited the Roosevelt home up on the Hudson in New York, we saw how down to earth they were. No fancy frames around pictures, just a little simple black, five and ten cents store frames, and very simple furniture. Sort of verified what our thoughts were. Didn't remember much of politics. Politics did not play a big role in my family. My mother and father always voted, that was important, but never in any way participated in local politics. ...

SI: Leading up to World War II, when Pearl Harbor was attacked, you were eleven at the time?

IS: Yes.

SI: Before that, had you been aware of what was going on in the world? Was it discussed in the family?

IS: Yes, because we were Jewish, we were having stories fed to us about Kristallnacht (1938) when all the stores owned by Jews had their windows smashed and homes had their windows smashed. We were getting stories and we didn't know whether to believe it or not. Our source of news was the *New York Daily News*. We were not aware of the *New York Times* or the *Trib* or any of what I call the "better papers." We knew that something nasty was going on there, but I didn't have any real awareness until Pearl Harbor. That of course hit us like a bomb, and then that began the recruitment, the leaving school, of all the high school students, many of our regular customers quit school, joined the Army and my father started what was called Moe's Defense Council. ... What it was, it was made up of all the girls, the high school girls that were still there. They took on the job of writing to all of the high school, all of the Nutley High

School kids anywhere on the globe, and my father took everything off a back wall of the store and put up a huge map of the world and kept pins. Different colors for the different branches-- red for the Army, blue for the Navy, the Air Corps I think he had yellow or something like that, and wherever we knew when anyone in high school got a letter from any of their friends overseas, and we knew where that person was, they would tell my father, he would put a pin in there, and then the girls after school would come to the store, and there were tables in the back, and they would go to empty tables and they would sit down and their job was to write, to write letters to these young men all over the globe, and the group gave itself a name, Moe's Defense Council. ...

SI: They kept that up through the whole war?

IS: Yes, that continued. In fact it grew to the point where the local newspaper came in and did a feature on it, the local newspaper--the *Nutley Sun*, that was our local newspaper.

SI: What do you remember about the day Pearl Harbor was attacked? Were you at home, were you at the store?

IS: I don't remember where I was. I remember being disturbed by the reaction that I saw from all the adults, that's what I actually have a recall of, something was very disturbing, everyone was very upset and the radios all went on, everyone put on their radios immediately to listen to the news. I remember hearing FDR's address and I knew this was serious. I didn't know what, I didn't know where Pearl Harbor was, but I knew that there was a sneak attack. It wasn't until many years later that I began to understand it wasn't as sneaky as it's made out to be, that there was a great deal of intelligence about where the Japanese fleet was and its movements and so forth, and that perhaps there was a good element of lack of preparedness on our part, but the intelligence apparently was, there was some there, I don't know how much. Obviously, not enough. ... I don't have too many other memories. I know at school it was discussed in class. ...

SI: How quickly did the changes that the war brought to the home front affect your family, particularly with your father owning the store?

IS: The first big hit was on gasoline shortage. Having the store, we used to have our merchandise delivered. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

IS: Could you bring me back to where we were?

SI: You were talking about gasoline rationing and its effects on your father's store.

IS: Yes, the deliveries stopped. All the small distributors that my dad bought from, bought his cigarettes, bought his lunchroom supplies, candy. ... He had to get a car. Well that was, we had never had a car since his beer distribution in the early '30s, he had the truck, and this was in the '40s. He was able to buy a used Dodge, 1939 Dodge, and he would drive to Newark, New Jersey

from Nutley, and that's where the distributors were for the candy goods, the cigarettes and what not and he had to pick up his own. Well, because he needed it for a livelihood, he was given, we had stickers that went in the back window that told how much gas we were permitted to buy per week and records had to be maintained of this. He had an A, a B and a C ticket. A C was the most sought after because that was for people who needed their vehicle for business for their livelihood. The A was given to anyone who had no need for a car other than recreational use. The B sticker, I'm not certain that I remember, it may have to do with commuting distance, but the A sticker for instance, I seem to remember--this may not be accurate--was you were allowed four gallons of gas a week and the C sticker was much better, it was like ten to twelve gallons of gas a week, but that was the first impact. The second thing is we had to have deputies. Air wardens deputies and every street of our town had air wardens, all head lights had to be blacked out. The upper half of the headlight had to be painted black, blackout shades had to be put up on all windows. If the air raid wardens saw light peeking out of a window that wasn't totally dark and he would go to the house, rap on the door and tell the people, "Close off the window." There were raids off the coast of New Jersey, submarine attacks on our shipping that were right off the coast of Jersey and it was seen as a real threat. ... Everyone treated it that way. The kids got involved. We learned how to identify aircraft, we were all given identification cards showing the silhouettes of different types of craft and we had to learn which was identified as a Japanese craft or a German craft and so forth. The food rationing, we lost butter among other things. Eggs were very hard to come by.

SI: Did the store have to like change its menu, that sort of thing?

IS: [laughter] It's an embarrassment but I'll tell you what it is. The kids would come in, and whether they would order a tuna sandwich, egg salad sandwich, whatever they'd say, "Moe, this is a celery salad, this is not," that's because my father had to water down. He was able to get tuna with great difficulty, eggs with great difficulty. He was able to get spam, ham, bacon with some difficulty, but it did limit the menu in the restaurant. ... It was a luncheonette and of course sandwiches, the only real food trade was sandwiches, coffee. It was a big business, an ice cream bar. We had a small ice cream bar, I was quite a soda jerk, and milk shakes, soda, ice cream sodas, floats and all that sort of thing. That was a major part of the business. Many kids would come in and instead of lunch they'd just order their milkshake and that was their lunch.

SI: Did that have to be curtailed because of sugar rationing?

IS: No, sugar became a problem though because ... we used to have, there were no packets in those days, no little sugar packets where you could give [people], and there were no alternatives. There was something, you could buy little bottles, something with a little tiny dipper, saccharine I think it was called, but we had the sugar containers that we put on the counters and on the tables and my father was very hawkish about watching what people used in their coffee. There were some customers who would sit and pour and pour and pour, and then they wouldn't mix it, and my father said, "Aren't you going to stir it?" "Well, it'd get too sweet if I stir it." Well he'd raise hell with them, "Don't you know I can't get sugar," and so forth and so on. I have those memories.

SI: I remember I saw a propaganda poster that said, "Stir all you want, we don't mind the noise."

IS: [laughter] Yes, well that was kind of his cry because he felt and it was abusive of people not giving, they just poured until enough sugar was in so that it would taste sweet and then of course they'd leave the full cake of sugar in the bottom of the cup. This I know well, I was the primary dishwasher there.

SI: How many hours would you work at the store typically in a week?

IS: My father worked a long day, he started at seven in the morning, he opened at seven because he did have a breakfast trade, a lot of the local business people would stop in for an egg sandwich or something like that and it closed at eleven at night. He did not work straight through, he would work till about, till the lunch rush was over, and then he would, my mother would come down. We lived in the apartment above the store, my mother would come down, he'd go up and grab a nap. Later, he would come down, she would go back upstairs, and although she was there through lunch hour, she was there at busy times. I was kept there until after school. I did not have any, I rarely had responsibilities after school, maybe to refill the candy case, you know, where certain candies were down, I would get stock and refill nuts, but basically I was free to run and join my friends and whatever I'd like. The store was the dominant thing in our lives. We lived in the store. My lunches were a sad part of it, and all this leads to coming back to full strength that we talked about when I mentioned having typhoid. ... The minute the bell rang and school was let out, I went directly to the candy and cigarette counter. That was my station. My mother and father were behind the fountain and the lunch board. My father would pre-prepare twenty, thirty sandwiches and set them up on plates above the lunch board and most of the kids would come in, "Where is the tuna Moe," "Over here," and they'd grab a sandwich and then they'd go to the fountain, and my mother would make them a drink. I used to be behind this candy counter and cigarette counter until all the kids had their lunches, then whatever was left became my lunch, if tuna was left, I'd eat tuna, and I bemoaned this terribly. Once in a while my mother would make me a fried egg on the grill if there was time, if it was quiet for a few minutes in the store, but she always made me a milkshake and when I wasn't looking, she'd crack an egg in it, always trying to get nourishment into me but I was very, very thin. ... I'll jump ahead a little. It wasn't until I went into the Army that I discovered three meals a day, regular meals. You could have more if you wanted more, you just go and help yourself as long as you eat what you took, and where there was nothing but bitching in the barracks about the Army food. Everyone was starting to lose weight, I was putting on weight like crazy. I jumped from about 130 up to about 155, 165 when I was in the military, and the clothing, they gave you free clothes. That was a surprise to me because clothes were never important in our family and you wore whatever there was, hand me downs or repaired clothes and that's the way it was all through the Depression years and I used to get a new suit on the Jewish New Year. My father's sisters would give me a suit every year. And I went into the army and they gave me a whole bunch of suits, and clothes, and underwear, and everything new. It may not sound like much but during the Depression years, they did not have nylon socks or anything, it was all cotton, and you put holes in your socks and when I needed socks it was a family concern. My mother and father would discuss and finally my mother would get some money, she'd go out and buy socks for me, always two to three sizes bigger than what I wore so that I shouldn't outgrow them and that meant folding the ends over the toes either under or over and it was never comfortable, I used to hate it, but the socks lasted much longer because I didn't

wear holes in the end and I kept folding less as I grew, but that ties in with the army about how excited I was about the handout of all the clothes. I didn't realize until then when I heard all the bitching from these other guys that people lived differently. I never felt without. I never felt poor. I felt that these hobos that came around asking if they could do work, they were poor. We weren't poor. So, it's all in perspective and it changes over the years. ... Am I talking too much?

SI: No, no, this is great. I like the detail.

TS: I assume from hearing what's going, that you're most interested in the past, the early past.

SI: We are working our way up to the more recent past. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Tell me a little bit about your education. You were moving from junior high to high school during World War II

IS: Yes, all of that stayed in Nutley, and I'm so grateful that my education, grade school, junior high and high school was Nutley because they had a very fine school system. I appreciate it now, then it was school like any other, but now I look back and the creativity that they permitted us, the growth that they allowed was just wonderful, not really by the numbers. As I mentioned at one point, Bobby (Satrino?) and I started a school newspaper and the principal, Mr. Goldberg said, "What are you going to name it?" and we said, "we don't know, we hadn't thought about it." So he said, "I'll tell you what, I'll announce it in the weekly auditorium." We used to do that, once a week, the whole school came together in the auditorium and the principal addressed everyone, and he said, "We'll see if someone can come up with a good name," and of course you'll understand why this sticks in my mind when I tell you the story. We went to this weekly auditorium, the whole school together, it was on a Friday afternoon, the close of the school week and Dr. Goldberg was up on the stage and he was looking around, all around the room, he said, "I see something floating around here. It's a fifty cent piece. Does anyone else see it?" ... "What is he nuts?" He said, "No, it is floating around, it's a reward. Somebody is going to win the reward because we're going to be starting a new school newspaper, and we need a name for it. So I want anyone who can think of a name to submit it, and whoever, which ever name we pick, they get that fifty cent piece." Well of course, it worked, a wonderful name came up for the paper. It was called, *What's Up*. That's what we named our little schoolpaper, and it was a one sheet mimeographed newspaper, of course, but this was in junior high school. I feel now, looking back, it was such a creative thing for him to take a nothing idea of two kids and make it a school thing, and of course, every one couldn't wait for the first edition of the newspaper, but I found school, sadly, very easy. When I say sadly, I would get all my homework done ... when we had our homeroom hour. I never took homework home with me. I was honor roll all the way through school, and it did not serve me well when I went to college, which is another story because in college you can't get by on just natural talent the way you can in high school. Junior school brings me my memories of biology, science, first science courses, terrific stuff, I loved it. Mathematics, why was it difficult for anyone, I didn't understand.

SI: Your interest in engineering related subjects started early?

IS: Yes, it was natural. While we had the luncheonette, one of my part-time jobs was delivering newspapers to customers who lived up Church Street, our regulars. One of my customers was an engineer who worked at Bell Labs, his name was Arthur (Page?), and Arthur (Page?) was a radio amateur, are you familiar with amateur radio?

SI: Ham radio?

IS: Yes, and he invited me to his house, and I saw all the equipment and we were talking to foreign countries to people in foreign countries, shortwave listening in, and I thought this was so exciting, and he saw how enthusiastic I was, he said, "How would you like to build a radio?" I said, "What do you mean build a radio?" He said, "I'll tell you what, I'll give you plans for a little radio, little one tube radio, and help you get some of the parts," and because he was an engineer at Bell Labs, the way it works in these labs for they allow freedom for the engineers to take parts and all as long as patents--ideas created by the engineers--belong to the company. It's a cheap price. So he gathered some parts together and brought them to me and helped me. I built this little one tube radio, and no loud speakers or anything, used headphones, and I had none of that equipment, but it worked. I could actually hear WOR from New York and WJZ. It was so exciting that I started going into the *Popular Science* and *Popular Mechanics* magazines. This was all before the typhoid episode, and I became fans of those magazines because they had beginner's electronics ideas and things you could do. So I started learning how to read schematics and so forth before I was out of junior high school, or high school. One of my friends used to accuse me, he says, "I can't talk to you anymore, you're talking only transformers and tubes and I don't want to hear that." He really jumped all over me, but I found the subject very interesting, and then, later, when I was getting ready for college, my father tried talking me out of it. He said, "Engineering is not a profession for a Jew." At one time that had been so, at the time I was graduating high school it was no longer so, but when my father was, at the end of the war when he started his engineering studies, Jews couldn't get a job as an engineer, there were certain businesses that were closed to us ... and banking, that was another [field], at that time, closed to Jews. So anyway, he wanted me to come into business with him. By that time, I was adept enough that I was doing radio repair work, I had a little shop up in my bedroom. Out of every twenty customers that came in for their coffee and milkshakes, one came in carrying a radio for me to fix and my father said, "The war is going to be ending, there's going to be a tremendous market for appliances. Why don't we open a store, 'Moe and Son.'" He said, "I'll take care of the front end of the store, the appliances, you do the repair, you run the repair business, you'll have a shop in the back and so forth," and I said, "No, I want to be an engineer." ... I've had many opportunities through my life of thinking back and thinking maybe that was the first big mistake I made. I'm just not sure, although I had a very fulfilling career, I might have been financially much better off had I done what he suggested, because many of the big chains that then started opening up started at that time. It was right about toward the end of the war and right after the end of the war.

SI: What do you remember about that period when the war ended and the changes that brought?

IS: I remember the gold stars hanging in the windows. I remember almost every house had a blue star hanging, someone in service, the gold star, of course where they lost someone. Cars,

the big change was in automobiles. Suddenly every dealer, the big three, Chrysler, Ford and General Motors, brought out the most exciting, monstrous, by today's standards, utterly monstrous, you know gas guzzlers, bigger and more powerful, that's all anyone wanted. It was ridiculous. I recall a family in our neighborhood where they lost someone in the war and they had an insurance policy on him, very unusual then, but they got \$10,000.00. I think it was maybe it was a government policy.

SI: I think soldiers could purchase a \$10,000.00 life insurance policy.

IS: Yes, maybe it was. ... They immediately went out and spent half of it on a Lincoln Continental because that was the thing to have a big, gorgeous car with big tailfins and what not in front of your house. That said you had made it. I remember that from the end of the war. I remember, of course, that brings me into my early college days, I remember the flood of GIs coming back on the GI Bill. I remember the shortage of housing and the Levitt's of the world starting the Levittowns and the large communities. GIs were all looking for homes. You could get a GI loan. I will later talk about the GI Bill of Rights and how important it was to me, how it paid for part of my bachelor's degree, it paid for all of my master's degree, that kind of thing. It helped get me an affordable loan on my first house. So it was a great deal of that. There were many, I remember movies, patriotism was true, and it was not until the Vietnam War that we began to see some anti-military thinking.

SI: Going back to Moe's Defense Council, when you would hear that one of these men had lost their lives in the war, would you do anything in the store?

IS: ... I think he had gold stars that he put in for their last assignment and we, the girls in the store in the Defense Council wrote the obits and so forth and submitted them to the *Nutley Sun*, the paper looked to them for this, but that was the extent of it. Where there was a personal knowledge of the person, of course, we'd get to the families to express our condolences or when the families would come into the store, but nothing beyond that do I remember. Well, I don't know, I don't remember, I don't know where I am, but I have some high school thoughts of things that used to be done in those days that wouldn't be considered nowadays. I was active in scouting. I belonged to a scout troop that met in the Dutch Reformed Church up at the top of Church Street, and we had a camp in North Jersey, Camp Tamarac I think it was called, and it was just being built, and we'd spend time helping build the cabins and so forth, and I have a lot of funny stories about that which are so peripheral I wouldn't even mention, but at the time I was into scouting there were occasions of forest fires in North Jersey and the school would allow all the scouts time off and we would go up to the fire site. We would be transported by bus, and we'd be given Indian pumps, a tank that you wore like a knapsack with a pump to put out, to do all the brush fire. We'd be given fire hooks. The firemen would be in the really dangerous part but we'd be limiting the periphery damage, and I think about that today in today's world, would they dare do anything like that, my God there could be litigation and what not. We've become so involved with lawsuits and looking for total protection. I just remember back to those days and think of those things that we did that were useful to the community [and] were educational to us. They certainly added to our experience bank and were maturing, had an impact on, which by the way I think the army was by far one of the healthiest things that ever happened to me regarding

emotional maturity. I guess you hear it from many octogenarians. It's a different world today, it's a very different world.

SI: That is one of the reasons why we do the interviews, to get a sense of what it was like then and what the major changes have been. Tell me a little bit about high school. Your interest in science obviously continued to develop.

IS: ... Today, they call them geeks, I guess we were called dorks or something, but I was the one that would set up the school projector when we'd have films in the weekly assembly and I ran it and I'd make sure the public address system was working. I was very shy about girls. My family was rather orthodox at the time. I have since gone the exact opposite, I'm a non-practicing Jew practically for all practical purposes but the idea of socially seeing or dating non-Jewish girls was a "no, no" in my family. So I had limited social contact in that regard. I had a couple of very close friends, both Jewish and non-Jewish, neighborhood friends, kids that I played with, grew up with. I went out for track my senior year just because. I was anything but athletic, whereas my father was an athlete, he used to play semi-professional baseball in Paterson, New Jersey. I think they were called the Paterson Panthers, and he was always disappointed because I couldn't throw the ball between two points and I couldn't catch a ball, and he never outwardly told me but I knew he was disappointed, so I thought well running is something that I can do, maybe I'll go out for track, and I ran high hurdles and quarter mile events poorly, but that I recall from school. We didn't have what they call honors classes today. They had college prep or commercial, one of the two, and of course I was involved with college prep which was heavier in math and languages and so forth. Couldn't handle the languages, and math was a breeze, didn't see why anyone had problems with it. Loved science, teachers were generally very good. I remember one teacher I did not like, ... history, because it was remember these dates, it was a list of dates, and you had to learn it by rote, and that was all I remember from history, never bringing it to life the way it can be brought to life. It was never real to me, it was just a series of dates and events. The first bicycle was an event. Wanted a bike desperately, the family could never afford it. My father finagled the frame of a bicycle from one of our high school customer kids, he needed money for a date, my dad offered him five dollars for his bicycle, he said, "No, I won't sell the bike, but I have a frame of another bike that I will let you have for two bucks." So my father bought the frame and gave it to me and then I used my peripheral earnings from newspaper delivery and so forth, and Pep Boys was right down the street from us. Then it was just a little store front, it was the big store it is today, but when I had enough I'd buy a fender, I'd buy a wheel, I'd buy a tube, tire, and kept it down in the basement of the store over a period of about a year, I was able to build it into a bicycle. I did a lot of junk yard purchases, I got a rear wheel with brakes that weren't working, a coaster brake, and I disassembled it, cleaned it all up and lubricated it and got it working, and painted everything bright orange and red, put a spray of flags on the handle bar, and when I brought it up from the basement, it was like an unveiling. All the kids, the high school kids all came out to see, my name was Sonny, to see Sonny's bike, that's my family name. I was known as Sonny. So they all came to see Sonny's bicycle, what he did with the bike frame that my dad bought. ... We had a lovely park system in Nutley running from one side of the town to the other with ponds occasionally, and I would often times bicycle through from one end of town to the other. Don't have any other specific high school memories. Oh, yes I do, a war memory with high school. Early in the war [we had] scrap drives. We got excused from school for the whole day, the

whole school shut down, gather whatever scrap you can, bring it to the front lawn of the school. Well, because our store was half a block, I watched this pile grow into a mountain, bed springs, galvanized water tanks, you know, that's the way you heated water in those days, you had a small burner that you lit, sometimes you had metered gas, and it heated enough water for your bath and for doing the dishes and so forth. Everything, stuff you could never dream of, we cleaned the town out, all the empty lots got cleaned out, and large dump trucks came, picked it all up, took it to the scrap yards. But I remember events like that at the school, at the high school.

SI: When the war ended and the GIs came back, do you remember any of them coming back to high school to finish their degrees?

IS: ... I was probably out of high school when they came back. Let me think, I graduated, no I graduated in '48 and they came back in '46. ... I don't remember. As a matter of fact, the Defense Council had dissolved, my father kept a map on the back wall of the store with ... the pins where the guys had been. A lot of people came in to see it, it was a curiosity in the town, and I seem to remember that some of the students were veterans. I imagine they had returned just to finish their schooling. I don't remember GED programs of any sort at that time. I think you either came back to school and picked up where you left off or not. At least, that's all the memory I have of it now. I do have the memory of them coming into college when I started college in '48 at Rutgers New Brunswick, and I remember the flood of GIs at that time.

SI: Tell me about that. You mentioned you wanted to go into engineering and how your sister helped you paid for it. Why Rutgers?

IS: Well, I wanted to go to an engineering school. I could not afford to live away, it would be enough to pay tuition without worrying about room, board and so forth, so I decided well Rutgers I can commute to. I had a 1936 Oldsmobile at the time that I had bought for fifty dollars and rebuilt, and I felt I could commute back and forth to New Brunswick so I would apply to Rutgers. Then, I thought there must be some other school. Well, my sister had recently gotten married and was living in Philadelphia just a few blocks from University of Pennsylvania, the Moore School of Engineering. So, I applied there. I applied to the two schools. I was accepted at both, and then I had to make a decision, and I thought, well, I'll start with Rutgers. It was not yet State University, ... excuse me, in 1947, the year before I started, it had been named as a state school, but it really hadn't started blossoming in any way. If I recall it was in '47 that the New Jersey legislation, you probably know better than I do about that. ... I decided that I'd commute, it would be cheaper. Rutgers was very inexpensive at the time. There were three school semesters a year, and we paid by the credit hour and it ran about \$300.00 a semester by the time I put my credit hours together. Engineering curriculum was a little bit more expensive because it was a heavier schedule. It was eighteen to twenty-two credit hours a semester which when you had labs with it, which you did in engineering, it was a hefty thirty-six, thirty-eight hour week in class or in lab, never mind homework. And I went looking for work to start with. I went there asking if I could get a job with the university and they gave me a job in their administrative office typing. There were little metal, like army dog tags, little metal things that you typed in the student's name and school identification number and so forth. You had to make two for each student, and I worked there on sort of a linotype machine, so I was getting paid a dollar an hour to do that part-time. ... After a semester of this commuting, I was having

problems because it wasn't nearly as easy as high school--a discovery--and I had to do homework which I just never, I used to do it in my free home room in our school at high school, but when I came home my father had chores for me to do around the store. All in all, I was starting to feel a little bit sorry for myself, that I was being squeezed at both ends. So, I thought maybe I should think about living on campus, but that would mean more part-time work, so I thought about joining a fraternity where they have fraternity houses, and where I might get a job or use that as a home base. There were three Jewish fraternities at Rutgers New Brunswick. As far as I know, they're no longer segregated, but at that time they were, and I went to all three during rush week, and I was rushed because of a few things because I had been on the track team at high school, they wanted that. That was important, and because I knew a little bit about electronics, could fix a radio, and when I went to two of them, I found out that they were very much cookie cutter. Everyone dressed the same, much nicer than I. They all had saddle shoes and they all had khakis and the third one I went to was a bedraggled bunch that appealed to me, so I pledged to that fraternity. I first made arrangements with them for all my meals, and I got my meals by being their dishwasher. I would get to the kitchen before the meal was served, the cook would ... have a plate ready for me, whatever was being served to the fraternity brothers. I would finish that and I would get to the kitchen when they would file in for their lunch or their dinner. And I would have a couple of tubs, I'd have a soapy tub ready, a clean tub ready, and it worked fine. It covered my food expense which was a major cost, and then, because I also was very good with my hands and tools, I could do plumbing, I could do electrical work, that sort of thing. I had the responsibility of tending to the fraternity house. If a door started sagging on a hinge, I would repair it and I got room for this. They felt it was cheap for them, and it served my purpose. So that's the way it started.

SI: Which fraternity was it?

IS: Sammy--Sigma Alpha Mu. ... I didn't know if I told you, and they're still there, the chapter, the Sigma Delta chapter at Rutgers New Brunswick. What happened is I did fairly well my freshman year. So I moved to the fraternity house and lived there, and there I got exposed to a lot of social stuff that I had never been exposed to before. Our family had never gone on vacations other than that one year that my father sent my mother and me to Bradley Beach to the Sea Cliff Hotel where we got the typhoid. Vacations were foreign to us. You worked, that's it. So when I was at the fraternity house I was exposed to a lot of different things. A lot of my fraternity brothers came from well to do families, some, not a lot, but some did. One fraternity brother, and I don't remember his name, but I do remember him bitching because his father gave him a new car and didn't give him enough money to keep it filled with gas. He would get low on gas and he couldn't travel where he wanted to because he didn't have the gas. That stuck in my mind, and then groups of my fraternity brothers would go out shooting pool and this sort of thing and I was with a much heavier curriculum than most, and I started becoming very envious of them and before you know it I started joining them and my school work started going downhill badly. I made it through my sophomore year with average grades, could have done better but that was it. My junior year started out, I started to fail. ... I saw that if I continued, that was it, I was going to fail, I was going to be thrown out of school. So I decided that before I'm thrown out, I don't want that on my record, I'm going quit and I'm going to get the GI Bill so I have some support when I get back to school so I have a source of funds or at least partially. So I did, I quit school. My parents were very upset about it. Fraternity brothers and all told me I'm out of my

mind, I'll never return, you know, "What are you doing?" and I joined the Army. This was during the Korean conflict.

SI: The war had already started?

IS: Yes, the war had already started. Let's see, I started in '48, so in '49 I started my sophomore year, in '50 I started my junior year, and that's when I quit, and that's got to be when the war started.

SI: The Korean War started that summer in 1950.

IS: So, I joined the army, but I joined under a program. They were desperate for recruits, and they offered a program called the Civilian Commitment Program, and what that meant is that the military committed to me that I could go to Officer Candidate School, that they would send me to Officer Candidate School, and if I should for any reason flunk out, I would be returned to civilian status subject to the draft. Of course, I was subject to the draft before that, we all were listed by the local draft board and so forth, but with this special program, they were not going to accept me into it for three or four months, so I had a three or four month hiatus from when I quit school before I had to report for duty and I had fun. I hitchhiked down to Florida, found the Florida chapter of my fraternity, they put me up, gave me a bed, got me dates--wild story. I needed some money, so I went to get a job shortly after I was there, and I went down to the waterfront. It was gorgeous, you know, Florida, fishing boats, docks, I asked around if anyone needed help and I was told by one ticket booth, "Oh yes, go over there, he lost his first mate," so I said, "What's a first mate?" "Oh, you know, he does handy stuff on the boat, he baits hooks for customers, he gives them a beer." "Oh, I can do that." So I went down, the guy hired me, "be here six o'clock tomorrow morning, we leave early." Went down to the dock, got on board this beautiful little fishing craft, and the customers were all there, and he said, "I'll tell you when I need you, you can just relax." So, I went up to the bow and we're going through the causeways and the salt splash in this beautiful blue water. I couldn't get enough of it, and then we got to the end of the causeway, and we went down into a trough, and up, and I lasted three troughs before I started puking. I got so sick, and I'm lying there with my head over the gunnel, letting it out, and the customers had so much entertainment that day from me. They joked, they made fun of me, and of course it was the one day job, unpaid, it was sorry Charlie, but that's just a little side story. I had fun for three months [then] had to report for active duty. ...

SI: Before we go into your military career, I want to ask you a couple of questions about Rutgers. You mentioned the great flood of GIs coming back into the school. How did that impact your education?

IS: Okay, that was interesting because there was no dormitory space and I had gotten a job as a dormitory--there's a name for it.

SI: Preceptor?

IS: Preceptor and at first there was such a shortage of dormitory space that they went to Camp Kilmer, and there had been an Italian prisoner of war camp at Kilmer, and you probably heard

this story before from others that were involved with it, but there was nothing but rows, sterile rows, barracks and so forth, and these were made into freshmen dormitories where all incoming freshmen stayed there, and I was a preceptor in one of those barracks buildings and there was a bus, a little jitney, that took us from the barracks to campus back and forth to New Brunswick from, where was it, it was just outside New Brunswick.

SI: Was it Raritan Arsenal?

IS: Raritan Arsenal, probably, yes. Did I say Kilmer, might have been.

SI: There was some housing at Kilmer, but in the yearbook it talks about the Raritan campus being the former arsenal.

IS: Yes, that's where it has to have been. It's hazy in my mind, but I do remember that one year they were just filled with GIs, and they were completely comfortable as freshmen in these barracks because they had been used to living in barracks, and it was real barracks, I mean there were fifty on a floor and double decker bunks and one bathroom which served several, you know, and a few hoppers and so forth, and one small room for the preceptor.

SI: You are barely eighteen or so, you have not been in the military yet, and you are in charge of like fifty GIs. Did that pose a problem for you?

IS: Yes. Generally, they were very reasonable and I befriended quite a few and they were always at my side defending, but there were always bullies, but the other guys had a way of taking care of the bullies, almost in a military fashion. They'd give them a scrub down in the shower room, which is quite painful. They have these very stiff scrub brushes that they use for scrubbing floors and they would, you know, there were some that were just dirty, they didn't want to shower, and they smelled, and the guys would grab them, a group of six or eight would grab him and drag him in and scrub him down, and it was kind "Wild West-ish" to the extent, but I don't remember ever getting beaten up by anyone or anything. I have no memories of anything like that and it only lasted for one year. They expanded, new buildings were going up on campus and my next year I was, hold on I'm getting it mixed up with my fraternity living. I lived in the fraternity house part of the time and part of the years I don't know which year it was that I became the preceptor. I guess it was my freshman year and part of my sophomore year that I was at the fraternity, and then I got the preceptor job, which I was hungry for. That was kind of a good job, and it was incoming freshmen that I encountered at the barracks, but hadn't thought of that, my God it's been fifty or sixty years since I remembered being in those barracks.

SI: The veterans you were talking about, where they in the fraternity house or the barracks?

IS: Barracks. The fraternity, I maybe remember one fraternity brother coming back from the service, it was an unusual thing.

SI: What was the impact of all these students on the engineering school? From what I heard they admitted a lot of people and then would weed them out, is that correct?

IS: Well, our first assembly, we met in a large lecture hall and Elmer Easton was the Dean of the Engineering College at that time, and Dr. Easton stood in front and said, "I want everyone to look to your right, look at the person to your right, now check the person on your left, check the person behind you, now look at the guy in front of you," and everyone turned around dutifully. He said, "Now, I'm going to tell you, one of you will graduate out of the five," and then he went on to say, "Engineering is not an easy curriculum, many of you will very quickly realize this is not what you had in mind, you're going to transfer to other schools, some of you will try and stick it out and will fail, but there will be one out of five of you that will graduate," and that was my introduction to the College of Engineering, and of course every one of the five, we'd all say, "We're the one that's going to graduate," and I was telling you that my school work was going down because I was feeling sorry for myself. My attitude was bad, and I started failing courses and I knew the semester would go down the tubes, so I quit, and left it open-ended, and that's when I joined the army, had my military career. I'm going to skip over for the moment because I want to go back to Rutgers. I did come out of it alive, obviously, and went back to Rutgers. I got a special separation from the military. When the Korean War ended, Congress passed a law to help divest itself of the heavy military presence that anyone who had a valid reason, and they came up with a group of valid reasons for being separated from service, who had served more than one year, could be immediately separated. At the time, and I'll come to this later when I talk about military, I was running a communications school at Fort Dix, New Jersey and I was a young lieutenant. I heard this, it came down, we got the news. I immediately went over to the commander's office and put in paper work to be separated on the basis of returning to school. This happened shortly before the semester. It must have been August that the war ended because I had to be, the semester was starting in September, and going back to college was one of the valid reasons for being separated if you had more than a year's active duty, and I put in for it and everyone laughed. They thought it was such a joke, you know, "Come on, the law just came down, what do you want to do?" I said, "Send it off to Washington." They did. The next day, orders came down to separate me from service. So, I made it back to Rutgers in the September semester of, let's see, originally, I was in the class of '52 and then I was later in the class of '54 or '55, and then I graduated in '56, for a different reason I had to leave school again. Well, it must have been, it had to be '51 or '52, went back to Rutgers. Now, I was the veteran, and about half of us returning were veterans, and the other half were high school kids, or what we used to be, and I remember how different my attitude was. I graduated first in my class from the time I returned until I graduated, but it was purely a matter of attitude. I remember I had switched my major from electrical engineering to engineering administration. Having run the school for the Army and all, I liked administrative work, and one of the courses I had to take was accounting, and I remember sitting in the classroom and some of the high school kids were abusive to the teacher. He was a very timid kind of man, very sharp but timid, and he would say something and they'd mimic him and then when his back was turned and it was very upsetting to the class and I remember blowing my cool, I was a different person having been in the military, been through a lot of stuff and I jumped up, I said, "Who said that, who's doing [that], who's the tough guy?" Everyone was kind of stunned [and in] silence. I was ready to throw someone out the window because I had worked hard for getting into school and going as far as I did, and then I screwed up, and I had a second chance, and I didn't want to screw up. ... I was interested in what the professor was saying, I wanted to be, I was there to learn, and someone was messing it up for me and I lost it. Little memories like this flood back and my instructor said, "Thank you, Mr. Spetgang, let's continue," and it was quiet and from then on it was quiet in the class. I still don't

know who it was, but they knew me. About half the class was veterans on the GI Bill, and I was involved with, the first time I was at Rutgers, I was in ROTC, that sort of thing. I was in their drill team. ...

SI: Scarlet Rifles?

IS: Scarlet Rifles, yes. I was part of the Scarlet Rifles doing fancy stuff with the old M1 rifles. When I think back, maybe I shouldn't have done anything extracurricular. I was on the track team again running high hurdles terribly. The only time I ever placed in a race was when we were at Princeton, we had a meet at Princeton and there were only three people entered in the high hurdles. So, I came in third.

SI: What do you remember of the ROTC training?

IS: I was just going to say I had another job at Rutgers which was interesting. I worked for the ... College of Agriculture across town by Douglas College. It was called New Jersey College for Women at the time, it later became Douglas College, and the College of Agriculture had a campus out there and they had a farm and I was hired. I was making a dollar an hour for maintaining integrity of experimental golf turf, turf used for putting ranges, and what would happen, dandelions would sprout up. They had to be killed; they couldn't be sprayed because you'd damage the experimental turf. I had a little can, little juice can, filled with some kind of poison and a paint brush, and I would go wherever there was a dandelion, I would paint the head of the dandelion. The foreman would drive me on the tractor out to the job every day and I'd spend a few hours and he'd take me back, and then I'd walk across town back to my dormitory room when I was at the dorms or my fraternity house. My fraternity brothers, in the worst way, wanted to submit my occupation to a television program called, "What's My Line." I don't know if you've ever heard of it, but they used to have guests on with mystery occupations, and the panel would ask questions to see if they could guess what the person's line was, and everyone felt no one would ever guess that I paint dandelion heads on experimental turf patches, but that was another Rutgers job that I had.

SI: Was that before you left or during your second time at Rutgers?

IS: That was before I left for the Army. After I came back and I had the GI Bill, then I was a paying customer at the fraternity house, and I lived there also. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Tell me a little bit about life in a fraternity house in this era.

IS: Well, it was mostly fun and games. There's one sad memory I have of a young man that wanted to join our fraternity, pledged for us, but was voted out. It just took one vote to stop anyone from becoming. ...

SI: Blackballed?

IS: Yes, and during all my years in and out there, this happened once to a young man who I thought it was wrong that it happened. I thought it was a nasty thing and shouldn't have happened.

SI: Was there a reason?

IS: He was very bright, he was a journalist, a journalism major. He may have made it big time, I see the name in *Time* magazine regularly. Now, whether it's him or not, I don't know, but Jerry Adler was his name, and he was blackballed, but it was fun and games. Of course, that was my first exposure to pornographic films where that was the big thing when they could get a big spool of eight millimeter film of pornography. Parties for any reason that you can make a party. A lot of benefits academically because the older students would tutor the new younger ones. The freshmen would work with juniors or seniors and be helped along if they were inclined to. First time that I ever had an encounter with hard liquor--a real encounter. I had designed something for homecoming, an exhibit for the front of the fraternity house, and our fraternity won the prize, so the fraternity awarded me a bottle of Canadian Club, and then my fraternity brothers rigged up a system to take care of me. They'd come to my room one at a time to have a drink with me, now, by chance. I didn't know it was all planned, so I had a shot with everyone, and before you know it, I was out of it, and drunkenness to me was falling asleep. That's how it impacted me, and I'm grateful for that because I've never been partial to liquor since then. It was distasteful then, and it did nothing but put me to sleep, and why bother, and why the expense, it's so, it's such an expensive habit.

SI: From what I understand, Rutgers had been a small school and a somewhat closed society before the war, and then in the postwar period it was moving towards being more of a socially accepting place, such as racially integrating the fraternities. Do you remember any of these changes, being aware of them, or involved in them at all?

IS: I heard talk in the fraternity that they were going to make the fraternity non-sectarian. Everyone felt pretty comfortable with that, but it never developed further while I was there. To my understanding, Sigma Alpha Mu, Sammies, are still predominantly Jewish, although they have Orientals, Asians, and non-Jews. I still get their publications and so forth, so I'm aware of this. The other fraternities were staunchly anti-Jewish. I mean that's why the Jewish fraternities formed because if it were known that you were Jewish you had no shot at getting into a fraternity. I don't have good thoughts about what existed there, when thinking of liberalness.

SI: Were there outward displays of anti-Semitism or incidents?

IS: There were incidents, not terrible, but incidents. There were reminders, constant reminders, little reminders, but then I grew up with that in high school and to me that was the norm.

SI: When you say little reminders, would it be somebody saying something or being aware that Jews weren't allowed to do something?

IS: No, standing talking with friends, and another group talking next to you slurring Jews not realizing that you were there next to them, that kind of thing, when I say little incidents. I don't

recall anything, something's tickling the back of my mind where I was stopped from doing something because of being Jewish but it's just something very vague and it's not coming clearly and I don't want to fabricate something. No, I was at least as comfortable as I was through high school. ... The things that made me uncomfortable as a child, I'll tell you an incident, and I'm jumping way back now to Binghamton, New York. I was in grade school, early grade school, and we had just returned from Christmas holiday, and I really didn't know what Christmas was. I had no idea, and the teacher said, "Okay now, we're all going to take a few minutes, and we're going to tell what we got for Christmas." And she starts with the As and Bs, going up, and the kids are talking about stuff that my tongue was hanging out from. They got log cabins, where you build cabins out of little play logs, they got an erector set, they got an electric train set and this and that and she's moving up the line and it's getting closer to me and closer to me, and I really, today I look back and I realize I went into anxiety over it, you know, what am I going to say? How do I say I don't know what Christmas is and there are no presents or anything? ... So I took a deep breath and I named off every toy I ever wanted, and then it went to the next person, but that's the kind of carelessness on the part of the teacher that I encountered, rather than what I encountered in Nutley in grade school where that my classmate called me a dirty Jew and started fighting with me because I was up in the front part of the line. I had other places in the military and all, but you take it from where it comes, and a lot of these people were dirt farmers from South Carolina, and I guess one of the most marked anti-Semitic things that ever happened to me was on my way down to Fort Benning, Georgia where I had to report for active duty. I was driving down, this was after I had left Rutgers and after my playing in Florida, I was back home, got the call to active duty, drove down, and on the highway, I passed a car with a pretty little girl in it, so I sort of got in front, slowed down a little, and she passed me but then she pulled in front and slowed down a little, so I figure we're playing games. A short ways later, I came to a road house, and I pulled over and she pulled over and we introduced ourselves and went in later. She lived down near Fort Benning where I was going, and I had her name and address and phone number, and I called her and made a date with her, and then we were on this first date when she said to me, "What are you?" I said, "Well you can see, I'm a sergeant." She said, "No, what are you?" I said, "Oh, what do you mean?" She said, "Well, are you a Baptist?" I said, "Oh, I'm Jewish," and she said, "Ah, no, you can't be Jewish." "What do you mean I can't be Jewish?" She said, "You're pulling my leg." "Why?" "You don't have horns. I've seen pictures of Jews in my Sunday school book and they all have horns." ... This was serious, this was.

TS: Honey, explain to Shaun how the horns came about.

IS: That was Michelangelo's mistake in the instructions from the Pope. The Pope said he wanted rays of light emanating from Moses' head, and Michelangelo, in Hebrew, the word for rays of light uses the same letters with different vowels under the letters and the word for horns was a slight difference from the word for rays of light, and that's how Michelangelo interpreted it. So the first statue, of course, of Moses with the horns is where it started. ... We saw the original, but that's how it came about, and this little girl was taught this in her Sunday school. I just went into that little side story so that you should know. That's about the most overt anti-Semitism, never anything other than Bobby Citrino where they wanted to beat me up. It was all subtle kind of stuff.

TS: Aren't you going to tell him about why we moved from Erlton?

IS: Oh, yes, another incident, just recently, fifty years ago, ... we lived in the Erlton section of Cherry Hill when it was still called Delaware Township, before it was Cherry Hill, and I was away on business. Part of my job with RCA, and even before that happened, neighbors across the street from us went to their next door neighbor, an Italian family, and was knocking on their door and said, "Did you hear Jews bought the house across the street, what are we going to do?" And then later, when we had lived there for nine and a half, ten years, I was away on business and Tilly was visiting with friends, came back, and all our garbage from the street had been brought up and dumped on the porch, on the ground, and what not, and I went through a period of time where I'd get up in the morning, go down to my car, which was parked on the street, and there would be a frozen egg on the windshield. Finally caught the young man that was doing it, I got up early and watched and I saw a kid walking down the street, come up to my car and reach in his pocket, throw an egg, and turn and run, and I went after him. Caught him at a bus stop, got his address, contacted the police, told them about it, police went to his mother. I went to his mother, she said, "Couldn't be my son, couldn't be, you've got the wrong person. I know how many eggs I have in the refridge." Spoke to the police chief, he said, "It's been a constant problem with that family. I'll talk to the father, he'll discipline the kid, it'll stop," but that happened as recently as forty, fifty years ago here in Cherry Hill, but I don't consider that anti-Semitism. I consider what went on in Europe, the Holocaust. ... Well, that was a nightmare. Here at Lion's Gate we have many survivors who were in death camps who survived and it's too often that I see them and think about it, but I fortunately had a much easier life than that.

SI: Well just to end on maybe a more positive note, when you were in high school, just about to graduate, Israel was founded. Did that make a difference to you?

IS: Oh, I have a wonderful story about that. By then I had my radio amateur license. I was a licensed radio ham, and I had a little transmitter receiver up in my bedroom that I had built, and I talked to foreign countries, and one day I was speaking to British soldiers who were in Palestine, and in the middle of our conversation they said, "Sorry, we're going to have to interrupt this, we've just got orders to pack up and leave instantly. We have to drop everything and get out of here." "What happened?" "The United Nations has just passed the resolution, they're making, this is going to become a state of Israel and there's going to be hell to pay here," and I couldn't believe it, that I was hearing it at the moment the British soldiers heard it, and I was talking to them, and I ran down to the store to tell my father that the United Nations just passed the count. It's emotional. ...

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Reviewed by Katie Ruffer 10/10/12

Reviewed by Nicholas Molnar 10/15/12

Reviewed by Irwin Spetgang 2/27/13