RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOSEPH R. KNAZIK

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Sandra Stewart Holyoak: This begins an interview with Mr. Joseph R. Knazik on June 30, 1999, in Rockville, Maryland, with Sandra Stewart Holyoak. Mr. Knazik, I would like to thank you for taking time out of your day to be interviewed here. To begin with, I would like to ask you to tell me when and where you were born and then a little bit about your father.

Joseph Knazik: Okay. I was born on August 14, 1927, in Perth Amboy, New Jersey. My father was born in what was then Czechoslovakia; well, I suppose he was born in, I don't know what it was called before World War I, but he was born in 1903 and in Bratislava and that's where he grew up. He came to this country when he was about eighteen years old. His sisters had already emigrated to the United States and they lived in Philadelphia and he came and stayed in Philadelphia. He had a trade when he came here. He was a linotype operator and he worked in several foreign language newspapers, mostly, and started in Philadelphia. Then, he worked in New York City. I don't know how he met my mother exactly, except that she was working in a dentist's office and he went to that dentist and met her there.

SH: Tell me a little bit about your mother. Where was she born?

JK: My mother was born in Hungary. Her father had come to this continent before she was born, actually, while she [was] still in my grandmother's womb. He settled in Sydney, Nova Scotia. He worked in the coalmines up there and my grandmother brought my mother over when my mother was three months old. They came over and went to Sydney and lived in Sydney and they stayed there from when they came over, in 1907, until she was eight years old, in about 1915. That was during World War I. … At that time, they were Hungarian and they were kind of vilified by the Anglos in that area and their house had been stoned a few times. So, they finally couldn't stand it any longer and they emigrated to, or moved to, Windsor, Ontario, and lived there for a short period of time. By then, other family members had already settled in New Jersey and my mother's aunt had a farm in Pennington and she said that, you know, things were so great in New Jersey. So, they hopped on a ferry boat one day and went over to Detroit, got on a train and went to New Jersey, totally illegally, of course, with no thought about immigration. My father died when I was eight and, after that, my mother decided that she wanted to stay in this country. There would be no chance that she would ever want to go back to Canada or Hungary and, of course, by then, there was a lot of trouble in Europe, anyhow. She decided to get her citizenship and that's when she found out that the whole bunch of them were all illegal aliens here and she had to go to Immigration. [They] talked to her about deporting her to Hungary and that put a scare in her, but she had to go to Ellis Island and reenter the country, legally then, which caused a big furor in the family, because all of the other kids, who were born in Canada, were also illegal and they all had to go through the same process then, but that was good.

SH: Your mother was the oldest of her family.

JK: My mother was the oldest of her family. …

SH: Did any of your mother's grandparents or any other family emigrate? You said her sisters were already here.

JK: Of my grandmother's sisters? yes. They were here before [her]. Well actually, they kind of dribbled over, some here and some not, because one aunt came over much later. She settled in Florida. There was another aunt that settled in Cleveland. I guess, wherever there was an enclave of Hungarians, they would settle.

SH: When your grandfather and grandmother came down to Pennington to work on the farm, how long did they stay there?

JK: They didn't stay there at all. They went to Woodbridge. They rented a farm in Woodbridge and they were in Woodbridge and that's why I was [born] in Perth Amboy.

SH: What is your mother's maiden name?

JK: It was White, or *Fehér*, [which] means "white" in Hungarian.

SH: Did they keep the Anglo name, White?

JK: They changed it. … They always used White, I think, and, when my mother was naturalized, she was Mary White Knazik.

SH: Your father kept the Knazik name.

JK: My father kept his Czechoslovakian name, which translates to "little priests," and, I guess, maybe, he never felt little priestly.

SH: What about your father's family? Did any of them come over from Czechoslovakia?

JK: All the sisters, except one, came over and I have never had contact with the one over there. So, I had an aunt, who is probably dead now, and [her] children, in or around Bratislava, that I don't know at all.

SH: Do you remember if any letters were sent back and forth between either your father's or your mother's relatives?

JK: No, because my father died in 1935 and, I guess, I really wasn't made aware of what was going on a whole lot and we were not that close to my Philadelphia relatives, unfortunately. I have kept up some contacts with them and tried to reestablish some contacts through the years, but we've not been really close.

SH: In New York, was your father also working on foreign language newspapers?

JK: He worked in New York City for a Hungarian newspaper. He could set type in five different languages. So, he had what I'd call, and enviably now, real language facility, because I never paid much attention to language. I wish I had. I speak some Hungarian and I can understand Hungarian, because of my mother's [family], but I never got into the … Slovakian language. He also worked in Morristown for the *Morristown Daily Record* and some paper in

Boonton. I don't know the name of the paper that was in Boonton, New Jersey at that time, but he was laid off around 1931 as a result of the Depression. Fortunately, it [did not] last that long, but, then, he didn't get work until just before he died. He started to work for the Department of Agriculture in Morristown. They had a Dutch elm disease project done at that time and he was just starting to do that when he contracted pneumonia and died. So, he was only thirty-two years old when he died.

SH: Did you have any siblings at that time?

JK: Yes, I had a brother and a sister. My brother is four years younger, or was almost four years younger, and my sister [is] almost eight years younger.

SH: You are the oldest in the family.

JK: I was the oldest in my family, yes.

SH: You were born in Perth Amboy. Is that because your mother's family lived in Woodbridge?

JK: That's where they were. My mother was working in the dentist's office in Perth Amboy and they took an apartment there and, I think, when I was about [?] months old, not very old at all, they moved to Morristown and they wanted to get away from that Perth Amboy area. It's a very industrialized [city], brick factories and that kind of thing. My mother always felt that she wanted to be somewhere else and she said it was better to be at the lower end of the scale in an upscale neighborhood. So, that's why we went and, after my father died, that's why we stayed there, because my grandmother wanted to have us move back to Woodbridge and my mother said, "No way." She would sacrifice however she could to keep us where we were.

SH: Where did your mother get her dental training?

JK: I don't know. She was not schooled, because she only went seven grades in school. She had to be the one to stay home with the kids and, in fact, that was probably some of the reasons [why] she got married when she was only twenty, because she just felt that, here was my grandmother, pregnant with my aunt, who is my age, and she wasn't going to raise more of her mother's children. She might as well have her own.

SH: Was your grandfather a farmer at that point?

JK: No, no. He never farmed. They had this farm property and they worked at it. There were kids by then. My grandfather almost always worked in the brickyard, brick factories and that kind of labor. He was a heavy laborer. When he went to Canada, originally, he worked in the coalmines, which were out under the Atlantic Ocean, out of Sydney. … They would have occasional cave-ins and he was almost sure that he would be drowned out there, and so, the first chance he got to work in a foundry, he worked in a foundry. Now, tragically for him, in a way, [in] the foundry, he had molten steel poured on his back and he had large scars on his back, but it

didn't kill him. So, he … worked there for a while, but he always did heavy labor kind of work. He was not a skilled person.

SH: With your mom and dad living in Morristown, did he still keep in contact with both your mother and father's family?

JK: With my mother's family more than my father's. I think the Czechoslovakians, the way my mother described it, they were people who looked down on the Hungarians as an inferior group, … and she always felt that. Whether that's true or not, I don't know. I always got along well with that family when I saw them. …

SH: After your father died, did you have any contact with them?

JK: Not very much, until I went into [the] service. When I was in service, I was at Fort Dix for several months and I used to go over to Philadelphia to visit with my family, which was much closer than going home and easier to get to out of Fort Dix. So, I did go to visit over there. You know, we have weddings and that kind of thing, but we didn't even get to funerals, that I remember. I don't ever remember going to a funeral with my family in Philadelphia. There were five aunts, and four uncles. One of my aunts never married.

SH: Do you remember some of the customs or the different cultural aspects that your family kept up?

JK: Not so much there and, even with the Hungarians, my mother did a few things that were Hungarian, but very little. Most of it was [that] she was trying to Americanize and, you know, had I known then what I know now, I would have tried to find out more, typical.

SH: I think that is pretty common among the people that we have interviewed. Some families would not even allow the children to speak the language among themselves.

JK: Oh, yes. It's just tragic. Fortunately, I did go to a Hungarian school. … When I would go to my grandmother's house in Woodbridge for a period of time, in the summers, I would go to the Hungarian school down there, which was run by the church. So, that was all right. I did it young and I've forgotten a lot of what I learned, but it comes back to me. When I have had opportunities to listen to Hungarian people, I understand them. I can't speak it well enough to … [converse]. It's embarrassing, because I know I screw up the words, the same as foreign people screw up English.

SH: Tell me about growing up in Morristown.

JK: Actually, … we went to Morristown, we lived there for maybe a year or so, and then, they moved [to] Morris Plains. So, it's even a little more remote from Morristown.

SH: Where did you go to school in Morris Plains? Where did you live? Do you remember?

JK: Yes, I remember a lot about that. I went to a public school. I started kindergarten there. All the neighborhood kids were going to school. I was a little bit younger, so, my mom took me over and got me in kindergarten in a public school, which was right across the street from the house we lived in. I was in kindergarten for about two weeks and I guess they had more kids than they wanted or what, but they moved me up to first grade, which was a tragic thing for me, I understand, because I used to complain that I wasn't getting my naps anymore and, also, I didn't like the first grade teacher. She was kind of like a witchy person, Miss (Kamerhoff?).

SH: Oh, you even remember her name.

JK: Oh, yes. Why wouldn't you? Anyhow, I finished the first grade in that school, a public school, and then, my mom put me in a Catholic school, St. Virgil's in Morris Plains. … It was just two blocks away. It wasn't a great move, but I finished grammar school in a Catholic school.

SH: Was Catholicism the religion that both families practiced?

JK: Yes, yes.

SH: Did your mom work at all while you were growing up?

JK: Well, you know, this gets mingled in with my father dying or not working and all that. She did housework in the early years, that I remember, because my father, after he was laid off, they lost the house they were living in. We had to move. We moved to a large mansion that was owned by a family that, … I guess, couldn't afford the mansion. We lived there in return for taking care of the grounds, cutting grass and stuff like that.

SH: Was this still in Morris Plains?

JK: Yes, yes, everything after this is Morris Plains, until I was in the Army. They were only there for one year. We were only there for one year, and then, we moved behind the store, behind the candy store, which was, I guess, a bug infested place, you know. Storage [areas] are not the cleanest places in the world and we lived there for maybe a year or two. Then, we moved to a half of a house, like a duplex, and we lived there all the rest of my growing up days. I can't remember where I was heading with this conversation.

SH: I asked if your mom worked.

JK: Oh, yes. She worked doing housework while my father was alive. After my father died, she did church work. She cleaned the church on Saturdays. She got five dollars a week for that. She did some sewing and I can't remember who sponsored it. It used to be down at the women's club at Morristown; she would take the sewing. She would go down there every week and pick up what had to be done and she would return what she had cut or already sewn, and so, she did that. I don't remember any other work that she did. If she would have worked and made any kind of money, they would have reduced her widow's pension. She got forty-two dollars a month, widow's pension. There were three of us, kids and my mother, and the rent was twenty

dollars a month. I'm sure they watched every penny to make sure that we weren't wasting that valuable resource.

SH: Do you remember some of your mother's frugal methods?

JK: Oh, yes. She would go to town, like, on Saturday and go to the vegetable market and buy baskets of food that had hot beans sold and then come home on the bus. Then we would have to eat turnips for, God, until you didn't want to see another turnip. Everything was in excess. Also, at that time, we used to get surplus foods, this is during the Depression, and we got surplus foods and we … always had cereals. God, I hated oatmeal. I don't eat oatmeal today, because that was one of the surplus foods we got. We got canned milk, evaporated milk. That was another thing that I hated. You know, you remember those things.

SH: Did you remember any of the other kids in your neighborhood? What were some of the things you did for entertainment and fun?

JK: I don't know, I guess, we kind of grew up normally in that respect. We played out in the field, where there were empty fields. We had ball games. In the summer, we would play tag and kick-the-can and things like that, out in the street. We played in the street in those days, or the sidewalks. There was not a lot of activity around.

SH: How often did you travel outside of Morris Plains?

JK: Well, my mom was always interested in broadening our experience, so, we did go into New York City. We went to Radio City. We went to [the] Statue of Liberty. We did a lot of those kind of things, museums. Later, somehow, I got us interested, I don't know whether it was me or my mother, one of us got us interested in going down to the Paper Mill Playhouse, in Millburn, to plays and musicals there. I don't remember going to movies a lot. They had the Saturday movies for kids and, occasionally, they would have [promotions where] if you took a can of stuff, you could get in free. I can remember going to things like that, but I don't remember going, … like, some kids went to movies every Saturday.

SH: Did your mother ever entertain the thought of remarrying?

JK: She remarried a year before I was married. She remarried [in] 1949. I married [in] 1950 and she married a guy that she knew from before she knew my father. He … used to have a lumbering business. They had, I would say, a kind of a medium relationship. He was a bachelor and he was not involved in raising the kids, other than my sister who was still home, but we were gone by then, even though I was not married. That year, I was in college, and then, I was working and my brother was in college by then.

SH: When you were going to St. Virgil's, what kind of activities did you find most interesting, that you remember?

JK: I had a lot of church activities. I was in the CYO, Catholic Youth Organization. I ran track and we played ball. I played basketball, baseball. I think I was president of the CYO group for

one year. We had sponsored card parties and things like that. There was a lot of church activity. The church was a social place.

SH: Did you ever entertain thoughts of entering the priesthood?

JK: Never. My mother did, but not me and my brother actually started. The church sent him, for a short time, and he was in a pre-divinity school. He went to Seton Hall, and then, he switched over, found girls.

SH: Did you serve as an altar boy?

JK: Yes, oh, I did everything in the church. I was an altar boy. Then, I was, I don't know what to call it, but, like, the master of ceremonies at events in the church. I would be [serving] as a master of ceremonies when I was a little older, so, it's kind of shepherding the altar boys around, keeping track of their services. I was very active.

SH: Did you sing at all in the choir?

JK: Never sang in the choir. I played in the band. I played when I was about, well, right after my father died, I expect. I learned the tuba. There was a man that ran a blacksmith shop and he used to teach music, so, I don't even remember if we paid him, I doubt that we did, Mr. Monahan, but he was a blacksmith who, at one time, had been associated with John Philip Sousa, from Washington, but he turned to alcohol and John Philip Sousa stayed in the music business, but we had a band. There was a little town band. I played the tuba in the band. I suppose I was big enough to carry one and that's probably why I got it.

SH: Did you have any little jobs that you did as a kid?

JK: Well, I started carrying papers. I don't know how old I was when I started the paper route, but, some time in the late '30s, after my dad died, I bought a paper route. I had the paper route only for a short time. Then, around 1940, I used to deliver near this gas station and they were always looking for help there. So, one day, I started helping them, just to keep busy, and they hired me. So, my brother got the paper route. Paper routes stay in the family for a long time, because my sister took it over when my brother got rid of it, but I worked in the gas station. I was working at a gas station when the war started. … We used to have coupons, ration coupons, stuff like that.

SH: Did your mom have a car?

JK: No, never had a car, until just before she got married. She never had a car. She never drove.

SH: Did she learn to drive it?

JK: No. We tried to teach her and it was a trauma. [laughter]

SH: After you finished grammar school at St. Virgil's, where did you go?

JK: Then, I went to Morristown High School, a public high school.

SH: Did you go down there by bus?

JK: Yes, yes. It was on a bus route almost within; well, it ran right in front of our house and it ran within a half a block of the high school. So, I took the bus.

SH: It was not a school bus. It was a New Jersey Transit bus?

JK: No. Yes, it was either this private little line or [a] jitney that ran around or I went up to the Public Service, which was only where the gas station was, two blocks away.

SH: What activities did you get involved with in high school?

JK: In high school, I was in the band. It was a band, orchestra, any place they wanted a tuba. I had constantly tried to quit the band, but I always got suckered back in. The assistant principal would call me and [say], "Now Joe …" [laughter] … Let's see, what else in high school? … I was busy. I was a hall monitor. I was kind of a favorite of the principal of the high school. In fact, I worked for him two summers on his camp.

SH: What did you do there?

JK: I was a counselor. Well, I was a waiter the first time I went, the first year, and then, I was a counselor the second time I went.

SH: Where was the camp?

JK: It was in Vermont, up on Lake Champlain. That's where I met my wife. She was a cook and I was a counselor.

SH: What group was the camp affiliated with?

JK: It was just a private camp. Well, I think … this was during the war, he had originally opened it as a tutoring camp. He used to hire some teachers from Lawrenceville Prep and Princeton and they would tutor kids. There was also a recreational area for the camp. When I was there, the war was on and I think he had trouble getting help and it was not so much a tutorial camp as just a recreational camp, but, anyhow, he set me up. So, I … used to get free lunch in return for doing hall monitoring duty … at lunch time. I got out of class a few minutes early, and then, I bolted my food down and watched the halls, which was fine with me. I've always been busy.

SH: Which subject was of most interest to you? Was it something that you are interested in or did the teacher affect you?

JK: Probably some of each. I love math, but the teacher was so nice. I really liked her. She was a great teacher. I had a good time with her. She took us on trips. I remember going to the circus in New York City, Madison Square Garden. She took, … I mean, a large group. … I don't think we were a club; I think we were just a group of kids. I liked most of the classes I had. The only trouble I had was in language, unfortunately. That's what I said. I hated Latin and I didn't do well in Latin. I flunked, I think. Then, I took three years of Spanish, because I had to be taking languages. I was going to college prep class. My mother always said I was going to college.

SH: Did she?

JK: There was never a question about education. She had [a] seventh grade education. She knew what education was good for. …

SH: Growing up, sadly, without your dad from the time you were eight, were there any men who took you under their wing, other than the principal?

JK: Oh, yes. I was [a] Boy Scout. I was [a] Boy Scout for a number of years and there were always men around. There were neighborhood men that, when they would go somewhere, they would take me. I remember, this one man took us up to West Point, to an Army football game. You know, there were those kinds of things, where somebody would take you under their wing. Church activities; the CYO group did a lot of things that I remember. We had some excursions, I don't remember what they were, going to basketball games. I remember going to see a Golden Gloves thing in Madison Square Garden with a group. So, yes, there were a lot of men's activities, which I appreciated. Later on, when we lived in Endicott, New York, I became a Scoutmaster. For ten years, I was a Scoutmaster, partly because I felt the need to pay [them] back, for other kids to have some adult male companionship.

SH: Did you join any clubs during high school in Morristown?

JK: I don't think so. I don't think I did any[thing] other than these little service organizations. I don't remember any clubs, like the Tri-Y or anything like that.

SH: Did you get involved in the drama department?

JK: Only that I tried out for some plays. I never was accepted and I did work on the plays, though. I'd be stage manager or something like this.

SH: Did you do any athletics or any sports?

JK: I tried out for baseball. My mom never wanted me to play football, so, I never pushed it. I wish I had. I was big. I was starting to be big at least in high school, even though I was only sixteen when I graduated, so I wasn't up to my full capacity, but I did tryout for baseball. I don't know, I just lost interest in it. It looked to me like they had already decided who was going to be the catcher on the team. I wanted to be a catcher, and so, I just dropped out and I did the same

thing in college, too. I tried out for the baseball team, but didn't make it. I didn't pursue it long enough to get cut. I quit. I cut myself from the team.

SH: Did you continue to work after school at the gas station or just on weekends?

JK: Yes, I always worked at the gas station, all through high school.

SH: Evenings?

JK: Well, see, during the war, you only were allowed to have the station open until seven at night, so, I could be out of there. If I had, like, a Scout meeting or church activity, I could go.

SH: Coming from a European background, what do you remember about the discussions in your home with your mom, or maybe even with your dad, before he died, about what was going on in Europe?

JK: I don't remember a lot of discussion about it. Sadly, it wasn't a big discussion. I was aware of these things. In 1940, I went to the World's Fair with the Boy Scouts. I went to the opening of the World's Fair in May and I was there for ten days and I was there during the ten days that the Germans invaded Paris and I remember that this was a big thing. We discussed the invasion of Paris and, of course, at the World's Fair in 1940, there was a lot of emphasis on the fact that the Nazis were overrunning Europe. There was a Russian exhibit there. Of course, at that time, we were starting to ally ourselves with Russia, because they had broken off with the Germans. So, there was some knowledge of the political atmosphere, but not a whole lot and it was not a discussion item at home that I remember. I remember my mom talking about what had happened to them in Canada, but she never wanted to dwell on it very much. In much later life, in 1970, we took my mom back to Nova Scotia, my wife, Cynthia, and I took her. She really got herself worked up into a stew about the things that had happened while they were there, although there were still people there that knew her. It was interesting, but it wasn't anything that was discussed much at home.

SH: While you were in the Boys Scouts, did you attend jamborees? Did you become an Eagle Scout?

JK: No, I didn't. I was [a] First Class Scout; that's the highest I went. I did go to camporees, but never a jamboree.

SH: Where were your camporees?

JK: Up in Andover, in New Jersey. The Boy Scout camp for our council was outside of Dover. I can't remember the town, Sparta? … No, it wasn't Sparta. It was outside of Dover, but the camporees were up in Andover and … I guess we were Morris-Sussex.

SH: Did your brother participate in the Scouts? Did he basically follow along behind you?

JK: Kind of. I think he stayed in. I don't know how long he stayed in or where he dropped out. See, when I was eighteen, I was in the Army and he was fourteen. Last I knew, he was in Scouts, and then, he wasn't in Scouts. You know, we lived separate lives together.

SH: Was there any sibling rivalry or was there enough distance between you?

JK: There was enough distance. I think that we always [got along]. We weren't close until later in life.

SH: You said that education was very important in your home. Your mother really stressed the fact that you would be going on to college. Why did you pick Rutgers?

JK: Dr. Perry, the high school principal, was friends and classmate of the Dean of the College of Agriculture and, when I expressed some interest in the College of Agriculture, we are going to get into that, I suppose, but he set it up so that I could start college there. He got me a scholarship, [a] one hundred dollars scholarship. It was big at that time and, I don't know, [I] hardly remember spending any money for schooling. Now, I must have spent something, because I had to buy my books and, … even at one hundred dollars, there was some tuition left to pay and they set me up with living. I lived with a doctor on Livingston Avenue.

SH: Do you remember his name?

JK: Her, Dr. Klieber. Her husband was an engineer. His name was George Betts and they were, … I can't remember the cross-street, but not too far out.

SH: Did you live there for the full four years that you were in school?

JK: No. I started college when I was only seventeen and, when I came back from the Army, I lived with two other guys and we had an apartment or something way out on Livingston Avenue. … That was one year, and then, I moved to campus. I don't know, I can't remember the name of the hall. … I lived at the quadrangle of Hegeman. There were three buildings there or something.

SH: You entered the University in 1944

JK: 1944. I graduated [in] '44 from high school. I started in Rutgers in '44.

SH: The following September.

JK: Yes. I had really no idea what I was going to do and, even today, I wonder what I would have done at that time. I just picked agriculture. In fact, I thought I'd like to be a county agent. I knew I didn't like farming. I used to work, one of my summers or two of my summers. I don't know how in the hell I had so many summers. I worked for my aunt down at Pennington, twice. I worked my butt off. … They bought a combine and they were … one of the first people to own a combine and they used to do custom work, combining all around, and we used to work from sun up until sun down. … My aunt was the tightest person in the world, trying to squeeze the

last buck out of that piece of equipment. I know, one year, I was probably around fourteen, but I used to throw these 150-pound bags of wheat, which, you know, it's a wonder I didn't kill myself. Anyhow, I worked there for two years and I also worked at the state hospital in Morris Plains one year, on the farm, Graystone Park, yes, … worked up there in the farm. In fact, I got out of school early that year, so [that] I could go up, because things were so tough during the war to get help. So, I had these farm experiences, but I certainly … had enough experience to know I didn't want to do the farming, although my wife's family are all county agent people and her brother was county agent in Hunterton County and she was a home agent in Sussex County, but that has nothing to [do] with the story. Anyhow, I just … knew I didn't want to be a farmer, but I liked agriculture, so, I started thinking about county agent work.

SH: You said that you had also gone to camp in the summer.

JK: I went to the camp twice. That's what I'm saying, I don't know where all the summers worked out.

SH: You said that you met your wife there. Was this before you started college or when you were still in high school?

JK: Yes. I was out of high school, going to college, and she was working there as a cook. She's older than I am.

SH: How did she get the job in Vermont?

JK: She's from Morristown, also, and she knew the principal, who knew that she was a home ec [major], and she had some experience previously, working for a Girl Scout camp as a cook, you know, these work/study projects you do when you're in school, and she had worked at a Girl Scout camp as a cook.

SH: Was she going to NJC?

JK: She was at NJC. Wait a minute, now, she's out of home ec. She was out of NJC. She had flunked out of NJC. She couldn't pass her physics, so, she transferred to Columbia Teacher's College and she finished her degree at Columbia.

SH: Had she finished her degree when you met her?

JK: No. She was still going; … she went to Columbia the following year, the year I started at Rutgers.

SH: Did she give you any pointers about Rutgers?

JK: No. She liked Rutgers, except … she hated the Physics Department at NJC, which I could understand.

SH: You went down there thinking that you wanted to be part of the Ag program and you were only there for one year.

JK: I started there the one year and I finished in the Ag program.

SH: How long were you at Rutgers before you went into the service?

JK: One year, and then, I was going to be drafted. So, I knew that. I didn't return the following year and I was drafted.

SH: Did you enlist?

JK: The war ended on my birthday, August 14, 1945. I turned eighteen, … except the draft was going to continue, and so, I was drafted and I went into service in October. By then, I knew I was going in service.

SH: Had you thought of volunteering?

JK: No. …

SH: Were you just going to let the draft take you?

JK: Yes.

SH: Can you tell me a little bit about that? How did you get your notice? What did your mom think of it?

JK: Well, there was nothing to do and the war was over, so, it wasn't the trauma that I would be going to the Battle of the Bulge or something. I went in the service and I went immediately to Fort Dix. Actually, I stopped off at Sandy Hook. They had us at Fort Hancock and I was only there four days. I got my shots, and then, I went to Fort Dix, because Fort Dix was the separation center, and I worked at Fort Dix for eight months at the separation center. I didn't go to basic training or anything. I went right there. I must have done well. I became a corporal while I was working there.

SH: What were your duties? What did they consist of?

JK: Processing service record cards, getting them all in order, so that people could be discharged.

SH: Tell me about some of the people that you met. You were still very young. You were just eighteen and these guys were seasoned.

JK: The veterans? Veterans had nothing to do with us. We were all in a separate road, barrack building. We worked around the clock; twenty-four hours a day the place ran. I can't remember

much about working nights; maybe I didn't even do it. I don't know, but I know we worked nights.

SH: Did you have any interaction with the other veterans?

JK: The guys we worked with, you mean? Yes, … we used to go into town together, go to the USOs together.

SH: What do you remember seeing or doing?

JK: Not a whole lot, go to the USO, to dances and things. There was one guy, … you probably never heard of him, but George Jorgensen was with me in the barracks and we worked together in the separation center. Do you know who he is? He became Christine Jorgensen and, one day, when I was working in New York, I saw this picture in the *Daily News* and it was George, and I said, "My God, there is George." It wasn't George; it was Christine now. He worked with me. [Editor's Note: Mr. Knazik is referring Private George Jorgensen, who was the first person to receive a sex change. George Jorgensen changed his name to Christine Jorgensen.]

SH: Did you have any thought, at that point, that …

JK: No. I wasn't oriented to sex and all that stuff, so, I didn't know what the hell [was] going on about this. I don't think that was even an issue with him. I think he wanted to be, or was, a female, in his mind, at least. …

SH: There were no discussions.

JK: I don't even remember. If it was, it was over my head somewhere. At eighteen, you think more about yourself than all this other stuff. That was my touch with fame.

SH: Some men have spoken about going to Rutgers as an eighteen-year-old and being in class with what they considered hardened veterans.

JK: Oh, coming back, yes. Now, when I came back, that was how it was. … I was only out for that one year.

SH: You were discharged after one year.

JK: I was discharged after thirteen months. So, I came back [that] January, right after my discharge. I was discharged just around Thanksgiving time and classes started [in] January, so, I came right back. So, I was just out [those] three semesters. We were on quarters when I started, but it doesn't matter, but, then, when I came back, yes, there were these old guys that knew everything about everything and, God knew, we were just lower than whale dirt.

SH: Can you remember any incidents or things you saw?

JK: Nothing, nothing bad, I mean, and a lot of them were nice people. There was a guy named Hobby. He eventually worked for the University. I don't know what he did, but I remember that he stayed on, but he was [an example] of the kind of guys that he knew everything about everything, you know, and they had a self-assurance about them that I didn't have. I've always been kind of timid and meek and mild. You probably don't believe that. …

SH: One guy said he literally cowered in the corner of his room when the veterans would come back to the room.

JK: Well, I always roomed with people I knew. When I started, I was friendly with this guy, (Gene Stano?), who eventually dropped out of school, but we were together. He lived at Winants Hall. That was a dorm then. …

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

SH: This is side two of tape one.

JK: Okay, Gene lived at Winants Hall and I lived out with the doctor, … but we kept up close contact during the year and he was in the same program I was, in agriculture, and then, when we came back, we came back the same year, for the January term, and we all, he and I and another student, got a room out, way out, on Livingston Avenue. We had to take the bus downtown. So, I kept up contact with Gene, then, … until he dropped out of school, and then, I moved down to the quadrangle. Anyhow, he was my closest friend. He lives up in Washington, N.J. now.

SH: How had the University changed since your freshman year in 1944?

JK: Oh, it was just totally different. There were probably only three or four hundred students, civilian students, in college at that time. The rest of them were all in the Army. They had a big Army program, the ASTPs, Army Specialized Training Program. We were in a definite minority and it was an easy life. I enjoyed it, because, when I came back, you got swallowed up in this melee of people. …

SH: Did you have a freshman initiation in 1944?

JK: I don't remember an initiation of any sort at all.

SH: No dink.

JK: No, no, nothing like that and I didn't join anything. It was just that way. When I came back, I did go to the Glee Club then. That became my outlet.

SH: Was that the only activity that you were involved with on the College Avenue Campus?

JK: Other than the Ag Campus had their own little programs. We had a fair every year and I remember working for that. When I came back, I also decided that I would work in the dairy manufacturing [major], that that was a much safer place for me to be, and the program revolved

around the sciences, chemistry and bacteriology, so, that suited me. I like that, but, … like, I made ice cream and stuff and we put on demonstrations at the Ag Fair. So, that was kind of good, but the Glee Club was my main social outlet.

SH: Was there still mandatory chapel at that time?

JK: No, no. I sang for chapel sometimes, with the Glee Club.

SH: When you were at Rutgers in 1944 was there still mandatory ROTC?

JK: I was in the ROTC program, yes, and, I don't remember, if there was mandatory chapel. I got excused from it, because I used to go off campus weekends and go down to my grandmother's house in Woodbridge quite frequently. So, it wouldn't have been a big problem to be excused.

SH: How did you keep up your friendship with your wife?

JK: Letters, and we saw each other periodically.

SH: Where did her family live?

JK: In Morristown.

SH: Was her father involved with the county agents there?

JK: No. Her father was … a tree surgeon. He was the county forester, whatever they called it, I think forester. He was also an alderman in the town of Morristown at that time. … Cynthia and her brother, Bill, both worked for the Extension Service. She first started to work in Maryland. She worked in Snow Hill, the pits of Snow Hill. Her aunt was a secretary in the county agent's office in Morristown, but they were all (mixed-up?) in the county fair. …

SH: Was she involved with 4-H at all?

JK: She was big in 4-H. You mean as a girl? She was big in 4-H as a girl, and then, when she worked as a home agent, she was head of the women's program in 4-H, the girl's program, because they had a male 4-H leader.

SH: What were your favorite subjects at Rutgers? Who were your favorite professors?

JK: I liked the chemistry and bacteriology. I had Dr. Van Mater for chemistry and … he was a funny man, but he was gentle and a good teacher, I thought. I had Dr. Anderson in bacteriology. I liked him a lot. I guess those were probably my favorite subjects.

SH: After spending the thirteen months in the Army, were you on the GI Bill when you returned?

JK: Yes, yes.

SH: Did you have the same amount of GI benefits as a person who had served two or more years?

JK: Well, only in time, not. I used up all my benefits and I needed a credit or two when, … in 1949, I went to summer school at Newark and I had to pay for that. It was like one hundred dollars or something.

SH: Why did you go in Newark? What were you taking?

JK: I took philosophy, no, psychology.

SH: Was it an elective?

JK: Yes, I just needed an elective course. I needed credits, three credits or six credits, I don't know, one of those small numbers.

SH: Were you employed then? Had you thought of going on to graduate school?

JK: I was then. … After I was in college, I started working, when I was home, for my would be father-in-law and I did tree work with him. So, whenever I was home, then, I worked for him.

SH: Had you thought of going on into a Master's or doctorate program?

JK: No, sadly, no.

SH: Did you take part in the graduation of 1949?

JK: Yes; oh, wait a minute, no. Actually, I didn't get my degree. I didn't pick up my physical degree until 1950. I went to the '50 graduation ceremony.

SH: Did your mom come?

JK: Oh, yes.

SH: You were part of the Class of 1949. You just needed those three credits. Is that why they held your diploma?

JK: Yes, yes.

SH: I just wanted to clarify that. At this point, were you working full-time for your father-in-law?

JK: I was, until I finished school. When I finished school, I worked, for a short time, for a dairy in Perth Amboy, Puritan Dairy, and then, I worked for New Jersey Dairy Labs on Easton Avenue

in New Brunswick, and then, I was unemployed for part of the winter, because, unfortunately, I had taken a lot of government tests and I got a letter of availability from the government about a job at Beltsville, Maryland, and I went to my boss and I said, "You know, would this [be] a good job or what are my chances here? Blah, blah, blah." The next thing I knew, he fired me. He said, "Well, you're going to leave me anyhow." So, anyhow, I was out of work for the winter, probably from around Thanksgiving until maybe April, and then, I got a job up in Newton, working in a dairy plant, and I did everything there. I did the lab work, which was minimal, but mostly the scut work, just dumping milk and processing it, bottling it, until I did get a job [in] the government.

SH: Where did you first report for government work?

JK: You want to hear all [of] this now?

SH: Of course, unless you want to tell me something else.

JK: No. I think that's about it. Anyhow, when my wife and I decided to get married I was working in the dairy plant, I could have worked there until they folded. They did, eventually, fold, but I had these pending eligibilities with the government and, in a short time, we decided to get married, on October 7th, and, shortly before that, I got a letter from the Food and Drug Administration. They wanted to interview me. So, I talked to them on the phone and I set up our interview. We were married on the 7th of October and I set up the interview for the 9th of October in New York City, as a Food and Drug inspector. We were married on Saturday, October 7th in Morris Plains, in my church. Then, we went to Newark that night. The next day, we went to New York City and I think we stayed at the Statler or some big hotel, wherever it was. … Harry Truman was there, and we had to use the side entrance. We couldn't use the main entrance, and then, Monday morning, I went for my job interview and they liked me, so, they told me I had to have a physical. So, Monday afternoon, I went to some doctor over in Jersey City, had a quick physical, which, you know, "Open your mouth. Oh, you're alive," and we left on our honeymoon. We went up to Montreal and that was in October and, I think around November the 13th or something, I started work for the government.

SH: Were you working in New York?

JK: I worked in New York City as a Food and Drug inspector. I was hired under what was then the Oleo-Margarine Act, when they got some extra money, so that they could go after these restaurants that were selling Oleo-Margarine as butter; shame on them. Anyhow, that was a job [that] lasted a year. Then, they had a reduction in force and, let's see, our first son had just been born, so, that was a time of trauma. "Daddy's going to lose his job," and so, I … took a job with Pabst Brewing Company in Newark. I worked there about three days and Food and Drug called me, and they said, "We could save your job if you go to Washington." So I came to Washington and worked for the Division of Antibiotics, testing antibiotics. Just lab work, boring, God. … In the meantime, I had gone to the Civil Service Commission to find out about my rights as an unemployed federal worker and they interviewed me for a job as a personnel investigator. So, next thing I knew, they called me in Washington and they said they had a vacancy; could I come to New York? Yup, could I? because we were living in Woodbridge then, and so, I just got on

the bus and came home. I was just staying in a room here then and took the job as a personnel investigator with the Civil Service Commission and that became … where I worked for thirty years, I suppose.

SH: To go back, do you remember where you were and how you heard about the bombing in Pearl Harbor?

JK: … The day of Pearl Harbor Day was a Sunday and I was playing baseball out in the field next to the house. … My mom did tell me that they bombed Pearl Harbor and we stayed in the house then and listened to the radio. … I remember that and just wondering what this all meant, because, here, we were going to be at war, it looked like. … Of course, the next day, when I was in school, on Monday, they took us all to the auditorium and we heard the President's speech, "The Day of Infamy."

SH: What did your family think of FDR?

JK: Well, I think they probably thought he was all right. They were Democrats. My father had worked for [the] WPA [Works Progress Administration] and I think the program that he was in, in agriculture was a good program. They could see that there were ways of working out of the Depression and I think they felt that he was for the poor people and, at that time, we were certainly the poor people. I think we were probably on the lowest end of the scale in Morris Plains. We must have been among the poorest people there.

SH: Were you conscious of that as a kid?

JK: I was conscious that we weren't wealthy and, of course, I always felt that the lack of a father was a detriment, you know. We didn't have the things other kids have. We didn't have a car, if that was a status symbol of some sort.

SH: Do you remember when you got your first car?

JK: Well, when I married Cynthia. She had a car. She had to have a car for work. She first bought her family car from her father, and then, when she was in Newton as a home agent, in Sussex County, she bought a new Pontiac, which was a nice car. When I worked for the government, when I worked for Food and Drug, I had a government vehicle. When I worked for the Civil Service Commission, I drove my own vehicle. So, from then on, … I always had a fairly decent car.

SH: Do you remember being informed that FDR had died?

JK: I was in school at the time and Dr. Kleiber told me, when I came home from school, that the President had just died in Warm Springs. I felt sad about it.

SH: How did people react to Truman taking over as President?

JK: First thing I heard was, "How do you get a President impeached?" because people thought that he was … really a nothing and that, you know, we were in real deep trouble. That's what I remember and I don't remember [there being] a lot said about him being such a great guy until later; I don't know how much later I heard. Now, thinking back about it, the burdens that he must have felt when he, all of a sudden, became the President, the atom bomb, all that stuff, he didn't even know about these things, because Roosevelt didn't confide in him and, all of a sudden, it was all his.

SH: Do you remember when you heard about the atomic bomb being dropped?

JK: I just felt that it was good. My first thought was, "The war will end. … The war will end."

SH: You were still at Rutgers.

JK: I was home for the summer and I thought, "The war will end now and that's good," because the war in Germany was over and it was just time for it to end.

SH: Before the bomb was dropped, were you aware of the planned invasion of Japan?

JK: No. You would know that it was going to happen. We … were mobilized. We didn't need the troops there [in Europe]; we could use them there. It seemed inevitable.

SH: In Morris Plains, do you remember any blackouts or gas and sugar rationing?

JK: Yes, I remember blackouts. I remember people going around with their helmets, the Civil Defense people.

SH: Were there any drills in the school?

JK: I think there were drills. Vaguely, I remember that kind of thing happening. I remember the blackouts, that they would tour around. …

SH: Your family was living in Woodbridge. Were they living with your grandmother or near that area?

JK: When is this now?

SH: When you started working for the government, the Civil Service?

JK: Oh, we moved. Cynthia and I moved. When we were first married, we lived up at Kittatinny Lake, which was up near Sussex County, and I was still working at the milk plant. Cynthia was still a home agent, although she could not continue as a home agent after she was married. So, they let her finish to the end of the year, at that time. It was back in those dark days of feminism, and then, she was pregnant. It was not going to be any question, she was not going to work. They had, maybe, one married or two married home agents in the whole State of New Jersey at that time. So, we were up at Kittatinny Lake. We were moving to Irvington, New

Jersey. We took an apartment in Irvington and we were in the process of moving, on Washington's Birthday, 1951, when my father-in-law died. He had previously fallen out of a tree and broke his pelvis and arm and, that day, we stopped at the house. Oh, I borrowed their truck. I borrowed his truck to help us move. We went to the house and he was missing and people were looking for him. We were looking for him all over and I found him dead in the garage. He apparently had gone out to see, maybe, about starting his car. He couldn't drive yet, but, anyway, he had a heart attack and died. We moved to Irvington. Irvington was a little expensive for us. It was seventy-five dollars a month rent, which was a lot of money at that time. When I started for the government, I was making 2950 [dollars] a year. Then, we moved. My mother had moved, in the meantime to Woodbridge, to a two-family house that her husband's family owned. They lived downstairs, so, we moved upstairs and we moved to Woodbridge and we lived there. So, that's how we wound up in Woodbridge. It had nothing to do with my grandmother's family. It just had more to do with my stepfather's family and we stayed there from about September, … yes, about September or one year, until the following September, when we moved to Buffalo, New York, the big Buffalo.

SH: Did you just have the one son at that point, when you moved to Buffalo?

JK: Yes, yes.

SH: Do you have other children?

JK: I have one more son who came along while we were in Buffalo and he's Stephen. Stuart was the first, Stephen was the second.

SH: Did either one of your sons go to Rutgers?

JK: No.

SH: You only have two children.

JK: Two children, yes, Stephen and Stewart. Stuart … started at VPI, Virginia Polytech, and then, he went to Montgomery College here and, also, Towson. He did not graduate. He's near to graduating, but, for some reason, he won't graduate. That's his business. Stephen went to Michigan State, MSU, and he's a doctor and his wife is a doctor. He works at Children's Hospital, Detroit. Carla works in another hospital, St. Joseph's Hospital.

SH: Does Stuart live around here?

JK: Stuart lives here in (Laurel?), yes. He has two children and he married a woman with two children, so, they have four children. Steve has two children.

SH: After Buffalo, where did you move? Where did your career take you?

JK: This is just all with the Civil Service Commission. We were doing personnel investigations, mostly for clearances, mostly, at the beginning, for the Atomic Energy Commission, and they

expanded to a lot of other agencies. I was in Buffalo until 1955. We moved to Endicott. I worked at Binghamton. We had an office at Binghamton. I was in charge of that office and, in 1962, we moved to Syracuse and I was then in charge of several offices in New York State. In 1967, we moved to Washington, worked my way up to management here.

SH: Did you ever regret not going back to the dairy industry?

JK: No, not really. I didn't miss it. I mean, you know, there's a logical progression, at the time. I went from "food and dairy" to Food and Drug. I enjoyed the Food and Drug work. At the Civil Service Commission, I felt that it was … worthy work. I enjoyed the personnel work at the time. In later life, I felt some of it was probably … not necessary, and it wasn't the nicest thing to do, to be tracking down people's behavior, habits and things like that, and confronting them. I became a boss and I became a boss of the people who used to rate the people in and out, like homosexuals, and it was a different kind of thing in life to be doing, but totally unrelated to the agriculture thing. It became more worthwhile to change whole concepts of the value of people.

SH: Do you think some of the policies have changed for the better in the government?

JK: Oh, I think so. I think we are more forward thinking, although it's not going to be in my lifetime that it will be changed that much, but I'm glad it's changed.

SH: What are your passions now? What keeps you busy?

JK: I retired in 1985 and I went to nursing school and I'm a nurse now, a registered nurse, and I have been working in a psychiatric hospital. May of this year, we went on a trip and, since I came back, they haven't called me, so, I don't know … if I'm finished now or not. I mean, I'm going to be seventy-two, but I have been working part-time since I was seventy.

SH: Where did you get the interest to go into nursing? What triggered that?

JK: All this stupid stuff. [laughter] Maybe in the mid-'70s or so, I decided. Well, Cynthia was sick one time. She was really sick in 1970. She had gall bladder trouble. When they operated on her gall bladder, they found that it was cancerous and it had burst, and so, then, they said, well, they'd have to operate on her liver because it had burst into her liver. So, they did that. They cut out half of her liver. You know, all these things are traumatic to me. They were awful, but I could see a lot of good being done in hospitals, and, some time soon after that, I started volunteering in the hospital. … I had always volunteered then, but volunteering in a hospital is a pain, too, because you can only fill so many water jugs, empty some of the wastebaskets, and so, I thought I could do more. Well, I did get to volunteer in the emergency room and there they let me do some things like wrap bandages and things on people, but there was more that could be done, so, I decided, "Well, at this age in my life, I could be a nurse." Doctoring was going to be out of the question. Of course, I had a doctor son by then, so, at least I had a role model. So, that's how I got into the nursing field.

SH: Why psychiatric?

JK: Psychiatric became a self-preservation technique, because, when I worked in the med-surg unit, it was always, "Joe, Joe, you have to do this. Joe, lift this person," constantly using your brawn, not your brains. So, I went to where you could use your brain and, psychiatric, that's what you do.

SH: Where did you get your degree?

JK: I went to a community college, Montgomery College, and I got an AA degree and took my boards.

SH: What do you think of the GI Bill and its affect on this country? Do you have any opinions on that?

JK: Oh, my God. It just opened up a whole list of different people that probably had no thought at all of doing the kind of things that had happened. You know, when you look back, like when I go back to high school reunions and I look at my yearbook, … most of us, at that time, had no thought of getting to college, or, if we did, it was going to be a struggle and it just made it so much easier. … I think, even now, kids can get out of high school and, unless they really don't want to do anything, they can get into colleges. There's all kinds of help for people now and I think the GI Bill probably was what started all that up. I think it had a lot to do with making it accessible to people.

SH: Before we end the interview, is there anything that you want to recount for the tape?

JK: I think I've met a lot of nice people in my life, people who have helped me. I think, when things are tough for us, I think people helped us as a family. I've tried to pay back a little bit for the kind of help we've received, I received, and try to help other people along the way. Sometimes, I regret when I stopped doing the Boy Scouting and I miss those days. … For ten years of being a Scoutmaster, I used to camp every month with the kids and I took a lot of advanced training with the Boy Scouts. I enjoyed that and I think, somewhere along the way, I've probably helped some kids that needed a helping hand and, working for the government, I think, I've tried to be fair and honest. I supervised a large number of people at times and I've tried to be fair and honest with the people I worked with and for.

SH: Have you stayed involved with your church?

JK: Only minimally. I've had my share of difficulties. Churches are hard places to get along. I still attend church. Right now, I'm not doing much. I used to sing in church, I used to be a cantor and a lector, but I had run-ins with the priests, and so, I just tend to my knitting now; let the Church take care of itself for a while.

SH: Did you go back to the fiftieth reunion of the class of 1949?

JK: No, I did not. We were in, I don't know where we were. We were either in Florida or New Mexico. We took a trip. We had family obligations, high school graduations and things like that. We left in early May and came back in June.

SH: Okay. I thank you very much for taking time to do this and I appreciate it.

JK: Well, thank you.

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

Reviewed by Stephanie Darrell 10/11/04
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 10/15/04
Reviewed by Joseph Knazik 03/11/06