RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JACK KONNER

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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PORTLAND, OREGON
JUNE 3, 1999

TRANSCRIPT BY

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Althea Miller: This begins an interview with Jack Konner in Portland, Oregon, on June 3, 1999, with Althea Miller and …

Sebastian Bernheim: … Sebastian Bernheim.

AM: I would like to start by asking you about your parents' history. I see that both parents were born in New York.

Jack Konner: No. My mother was born in New York. My father was born in Paterson, New Jersey, I'm quite sure. [laughter]

AM: They were both Jewish.

JK: That's right.

AM: However, you were born in New York City.

JK: Yes, because we, the family, lived in New York City when my parents were first married.

AM: You grew up in Paterson. How old were you when your family moved to Paterson?

JK: I was about thirteen.

AM: Can you describe your experiences in Paterson growing up?

JK: Well, Paterson, … it's a nice town; it was a nice town. … At the time I was growing up in it, it was a very nice town, because it was an old industrial town, big silk industry. There was a locomotive industry, a gun industry. Of course, at the time I was growing up, the change started. Most of the people, a lot of the people, moved, were moving out to the suburbs, and the center of the town deteriorated terribly. A lot of businesses moved out, but most of that was after I was grown up and, now, the town, hopefully, it's coming back. It's become a town mainly of minority peoples and the business section of it, all the old-time businesses … either went out of business or moved away. I haven't been back there in many, many years, so, I don't know … what it's like now.

AM: Your father was a clothing business owner.

JK: Well, … originally, when they were first married, my father was in … some sort of investment business having to do with the silk business, I guess, which was based in Paterson, but he was living in New York and doing mostly trading, I guess, and he lost everything in the Stock Market Crash of 1929. I can remember, I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth, because we lived on Central Park West, and I can remember being wheeled in a baby carriage. … I'm sure I remember this, but, you know, they say you can't remember when you're two, three years old, but I remember being wheeled in a baby carriage in front of the Museum of Natural

History and we're living in a fancy apartment. This was, I was born in '27, so, I can't be more than two years, two or three years old. After the Crash, our family lost most of their money and we moved to a much smaller, modest apartment.

AM: That was in New York City.

JK: Still in New York City, yes. I remember, we used to have help, … when we lived in Central Park West. I don't remember that, but, presumably, we did, but I can remember growing up on West End Avenue in, you know, a much more modest apartment, where my mother had to do, you know, all the work, the cooking and the cleaning, but my father then went into what had been his father's business, but his father had died, in fact, died before I was born. … One of his brothers had taken over the business and my father had been in the silk business with … another of his brothers. There were four brothers, so, they both went back into the family business and, eventually, all four brothers were in the business. … The circumstances of my father joining the business, after he … lost his money and he joined the brother who had stayed with his father, caused a lot of bitterness, and all I can remember is the bitterness of that business as long as they were in it. Somehow, the business survived for awhile, but there was just constant battling [laughter] among the four brothers.

AM: Do you know what caused your father and your mother to move to Paterson as well?

JK: Well, that's a long story. I'll try to make it short. My mother was from a large family. She had … three sisters and two brothers. She was extremely close to her sisters and the thought of moving away from them was difficult, and she was very much a New York person. She always reminded me of the famous *New Yorker* cover, which goes back many years before you, … shows New York City, and then, shows the rest of the world. New York City was the center of the world for her. She considered New York "the City" and every place else in America was "the Country," see, and so, … moving to Paterson was moving to "the Country," see, and we tried it out one year, when I was about six, and it was terrible for my mother. First of all, the house was horrible. … We had to shovel coal and all the pipes froze and we didn't have an electric refrigerator, we had an icebox. … All I can remember was the ice leaking all over the kitchen floor. Anyhow, my mother took the bus back into New York every single day, and she just hated it. So, it lasted about six or eight months, just my school year. As soon as I was finished with school, we went back to New York, but, then, when I was about thirteen, she somehow convinced … two out of her three sisters to move with her. So, then, that was [acceptable]. … We all moved on the same block, three houses, the three sisters. So, they were together, three out of the four sisters. So, that was the only way she could go to [Paterson], you know, get out of New York City.

AM: It was like a little community.

JK: Yes, yes. It was very nice, because we interacted. I was very close with my cousins and, you know, we were eating dinner at each other's house, always, you know, up and down the street, and it was like a little community, yes.

AM: You had a brother as well.

JK: Yes, yes, younger brother.

AM: Was he much younger?

JK: Four years, yes.

AM: However, you enjoyed having a brother.

JK: Yes, we always got … [along well]. My brother and I always got along well together. He lives in Cape Cod now. We don't see each other too much, but, you know, he's been out here and … we went back to his house last fall.

AM: I see that you were very interested in music when you were in high school.

JK: Yes, I've always been interested in music and, to this day, I still play in the Beaverton Chamber Symphony. I also play in string quartets and with a pianist.

AM: What do you play?

JK: Violin.

AM: Wow.

JK: But, as a kid, I played clarinet and piano and I never got very good at it. I just always loved it. … After I was married, I decided I'll never master the piano, so, I took up the violin in my twenties and stayed with that.

AM: You were quite young when the war started. You were fourteen.

JK: Right, right.

AM: Hitler was in power before then. Do you remember your feelings about the war starting? I know there was a large labor community that was very active in protesting Hitler's regime.

JK: Yes. Well, of course, we all knew that Hitler was a bad man, presumably. Nobody really realized what was actually going on. Being Jewish, … you know, we heard that Jews were being persecuted, but we didn't have any real concept that he had this plan to murder all of them, … but we knew that people were trying to get out. … There was a very strong anti-war feeling in this country at the time. I always felt that Roosevelt very much wanted us to get in the war, but, being a politician, he had to, you know, … look at both sides of the fence, … especially in the Midwest. I can remember people like Father [Charles E.] Coughlin who was, I guess, some sort of a religious leader. I don't know what his affiliation was, [a Roman Catholic priest], but he was on the radio. We didn't have television in those days and, I mean, he was also quite anti-Semitic, too, and probably very strongly pro-German, and very much against us getting in the war, … but there were many, many other people like that, some very prominent people, like [Aviator Charles

A.] Lindbergh was very much pro-German. … I don't think he was anti-Semitic, but he was very much pro-German, I think that was his ethnic background, and very much, and so, … there was a very strong feeling against us getting involved.

AM: What about the community in Paterson?

JK: Well, Paterson, at that time, had a very large Jewish community, which, as I say, since has pretty much moved away, some into local suburbs and many just spread all over the map, like me and my brother. So, the sentiment, the Jews, at that time, were very much behind Roosevelt. … So, they were very much for getting involved in the war and helping out the British, and I think they were a little more aware of what was going on, but, as I say, not really. I certainly wasn't aware of it, that people were either getting murdered or going to be murdered. I don't think I [knew of the Nazis' genocide plans, but] I knew of *Kristallnacht*. Are you familiar with *Kristallnacht*?

AM: Yes.

JK: That was one of the very early atrocities against the Jews, where they just … burned all the stores and broke into homes and things like that.

AM: Yes, that was 1938, [November 9-10, 1938].

JK: … Yes, I can't remember whether we knew about that at that time, but I don't think we were very aware of what was going on.

AM: It sounds like your family was several generations American.

JK: Not really. My father's parents were [immigrants]; they came here. Interesting thing about them was that they were both from the same town in, well, actually, it was Austria-Hungary. … It was part of Hungary. Today, it would be part of Hungary; at that time, it was Austria-Hungary. They were from the same town, but they never knew each other there. … That wasn't all that unusual, because it was very common, at that time, and I think I'm pretty sure it's still very common among immigrants, that people that come from the same part of a foreign country will tend to gather in the same place in this country, which is exactly what happened. … Paterson, New Jersey, … happened to be a place, I presume, where people from this certain town in Austria-[Hungary] would come, because they knew that there were already people there from that town, so, they would all gravitate to that town. So, they actually met here and married here.

AM: Do you remember when you found out about the concentration camps and what was going on? Did you find out before you entered the war?

JK: Well, I think we knew that there were such things as concentration camps. I don't know if they were called that at that time, but … we didn't think that people were being killed in it. We knew that the Jews were being persecuted, but we … had no idea …

AM: The extent of the persecution.

JK: We had no idea that they had planned to murder them all.

AM: What about the war with the Japanese in the Pacific? Do you remember any feelings about that?

JK: Well, all we knew was that, you know, all of a sudden, maybe I just wasn't, at that age, … attuned to what was going on in the world that much, but, all of a sudden, we began to hear that [Japan was allying with Hitler]. Well, we knew that Japan was sympathetic with what they called the Axis, at that time, was first … the Rome-Berlin Axis, and then, it became the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis. They were called the Axis Powers. So, we knew that Japan was sympathetic to … Italy and Germany, but … a lot of economic things started to happen. … The situation got [more tense], you know, began to escalate, where … Japan was annoyed about certain things we were doing and we were annoyed about certain things Japan was doing, but I think the Pearl Harbor attack, … you know, was a complete surprise. We had no idea that they were planning an attack.

AM: This all happened when you were quite young and in high school.

JK: … Yes, I was in high school. That's right, I was at the beginning of high school, yes, because, let's see, I got into the war … [in] '45, I guess I put down there, and that was my senior year, so, yes, … I guess I started high school in '41.

AM: Your father was in World War I.

JK: Yes, yes.

AM: However, he was not called into World War II.

JK: No. He was too old, yes.

AM: Old enough to not be called up.

JK: He was in his fifties, I guess.

AM: How did he feel about knowing you would be going into the war, because you went right from high school?

JK: Yes, well, they were very, very nervous about the draft, because draftees were [cannon fodder]; they were taking in anybody. [laughter] If you could walk or see, they were taking anybody and … you were going right overseas. So, they were very nervous about that and they actively were helping me, not evade conscription, but get into a program where I would … have a better chance of being protected. So, the whole idea was … to enlist into the Navy, which they felt, at that time, was a much safer place to be, and, also, to get into some program, which I was able to get into. I guess we can get into that later, when we get into my naval experience.

AM: Did your father ever talk about his experiences?

JK: He never saw combat. He was in the Quartermaster Corps, I guess because of his business experiences, although, at that time, … he hadn't even been in business, so, I don't know how he [got that duty]. He had gone to Wharton School, so, I guess he was drafted from there. So, he had a business background, a business education background. So, he went into the Quartermaster Corps, which, evidently, gives out uniforms, or something like that. [laughter]

AM: When you went to enlist, since your parents gave you a lot of good advice, you went right away to get into the Navy.

JK: Yes, well, I mean, I was avoiding the draft, not like they did during the Vietnam War. I avoided the draft by … enlisting in the Navy and the Navy, of course, had a lot [of prerequisites]. It was much more difficult to get into the Navy, at that time, than, you know, as I say, if you're drafted, they took anybody. In the Navy, you had to have passed certain physical and mental requirements and my parents had heard about this, I can remember, it was called the Eddy Test. … If you passed this test, you got into an electronics program, and I passed the test, and so, I got into this program, which would ensure that I would be trained in this country for about a year, before I even went to sea. … At that time, you know, we felt that, by that [time], you know, the war, I think, [when I enlisted, it] was already after D-Day, well after D-Day, and they felt, after a year, the combat would be over.

SB: Did you actually have any interest in electronics at the time of your enlistment?

JK: Not really. [laughter] I mean, I was always fairly mechanical. You know, at that time, electronics is not what it … [is] today. I mean, there was no such thing as transistors, we had radio tubes, you know, if you've ever seen those, the old radio vacuum tubes, and the only electronic equipment, basically, … was an old-fashioned radio, and so, you know, it was no big deal. It wasn't a big field at that time, but, of course, World War II was the catalyst for enlarging the field. I mean, that's when all the inventions happened, and so, … the field of electronics was tremendously enlarged during the war.

AM: What were your interests in high school? Were you planning on going to college?

JK: Oh, yes, definitely, yes. Yes, my interests were mostly in the arts, well, literature and the arts, more so than sciences.

AM: You also had a background in music.

JK: Music, yes.

AM: This was a real change for you, to go into electronics.

JK: Well, you know, it was always a practical thing, you know. As far as the Navy goes, … or any of the Armed Services, you just have to look at it from a practical viewpoint. First of all, if you're patriotic, how can you be helpful? but, also, you know, I don't think … anybody who goes

into the service wants to get killed, you know. So, you're looking [at] how to get into a billet … that you're going to do well and protect yourself, yes.

AM: Yes, I know that a lot of people tried as hard as they could to avoid the infantry.

JK: Yes, yes, that was the [case]. Well, at least if you saw *Saving Private Ryan*, I mean, I never got into action, but, boy, you know, it was [horrifying], and nobody, even today, even at that time, … they couldn't tell you what it was really like and it was only afterwards, when, you know, people realized it was just … slaughter, absolutely slaughter.

SB: You said before that your father had gone to Wharton.

JK: Yes.

SB: I understand it must have been a pretty high level of education.

JK: I don't think he graduated. He didn't graduate, though. I guess … maybe he was taken right in the Army and maybe didn't go back after. I can't remember whether it was before or after his Army service.

SB: Did your mother have any education?

JK: No, in those days, women didn't go, very much, to college and my mother went to finishing school. That's how she met my father, because one of her best friends there was my father's sister. So, that's how they met.

SB: Your father had a college degree.

JK: I'm not sure that he did. I don't think he did. I don't think he ever got his degree. … In fact, I don't even know how many years he went. … He always was very proud that he went to Wharton, but, for all I know, he may have been there for six months or he may have been for three years. … I have no idea.

AM: Do you know what his interest was there?

JK: Well, it's a business school, so, some [aspect of business], you know.

AM: When you passed the Eddy Test and were accepted, were you immediately sent to Chicago for electronics training?

JK: … Well, at first, you've got to go to boot camp, which was in Great Lakes, which is north of Chicago, on Lake Michigan, but they put us on a train, which was a cattle car, and, at that time, of course, the whole transportation system was terribly disrupted. As a matter-of-fact, I would have thought you'd want to know a little more about what … the country was like, you know, before I went in the [service].

AM: Yes.

JK: And so, let me just backtrack, because I wrote a few things down here. … World War II, as everybody knows, was very much different from any other wars we've had since then, Korea, Vietnam and [the] Iraq War [the 1990-1991 Persian Gulf War]. Everybody was involved. Of course, the threat was much greater. I mean, for all we know, we were about to be invaded. We thought if England went down, and, at that time, in the middle of the war, after [the Battle of] Dunkirk, everybody pretty much thought England was finished, … we thought, when England … went down, … we would be the next thing that Hitler would be ready to invade, and Japan, of course, was right off our coast. … Oregon was bombed, actually. Not many people know that, but … they actually bombed Oregon and there were subs sighted right off the coast. [Editor's Note: During the Battle of Dunkirk, between May 24 and June 4, 1940, the British Expeditionary Force and other Allied forces held off the German Army while evacuating to England. In June of 1942, the Japanese submarine *I-25* shelled Fort Stevens on the coast of Oregon to little effect. From late 1944 to the Spring of 1945, high-altitude balloon bombs carrying incendiary explosives were launched from Japan against the American Pacific Northwest, several hundred of which reached the region. Several civilians were killed near Bly, Oregon, by one of the bombs, but, overall, the campaign was ineffective.] … So, everybody was involved, I mean, we had blackouts, we had air raid alerts, you know. … We had blackout curtains, I remember. We had air raid wardens and … there was rationing. You couldn't really drive your car, because … you got very, very little gas. You couldn't buy tires. No cars, no new cars, were being made, so, you just had to keep repairing the old one. So, there's no transportation to speak off. As I say, it was rationing, all your products were rationed. There were price controls. We had victory gardens. … You had to save everything. I remember that slogan, "Fat will win the war." We used to save our Crisco, used Crisco, whatever it was, fat, in cans. I don't know how fat was going to win the war, but I remember that slogan. … One reason why I felt that the Vietnam War was so obscene and, to an extent, most of the other wars since then, is [that] … the people at home were never involved. I mean, we watched the war on television like it was entertainment. I felt this was obscene.

AM: There was never any threat of invasion.

JK: Doesn't matter. … If you're sending kids over to be killed, people have an obligation to be involved, totally involved, and, you know, I'm basically a pacifist, but I feel, in some cases, a war is necessary, you know. I mean, if you have somebody like Hitler, what are you going to do? You have to do something about it, just can't sit there and let him do what he wants, but, if you're going to have a war, everybody should be involved. People shouldn't be sitting at home profiting from it, while … their kids are being sent off to be killed, but, anyhow, … that's my feeling about World War II and why it was a very popular war and why the veterans are always so popular, because everybody was involved in it. … Then, getting back to the travel, so, when I went to Great Lakes …

SB: Before we get into that, can you give us some examples of what you and your family used to do, since you were on the home front for many years before you enlisted?

JK: Yes. Well, I mean, … we had a victory garden and … we would be saving things. …

AM: Did it have a large impact on your family or was it just something small?

JK: It had a large impact on everybody. I mean, … everything was with the war. All the entertainment, if you've ever seen the movies from that time, they were all propaganda movies showing how wonderful it was on the front and, you know, they didn't show anybody being killed or anything. …

SB: I saw a movie called *The Heroes of Bataan* last week. I think it starred Cary Grant and he had this machine gun.

JK: Yes, that's right, but it was, you know, … propaganda. We had to have propaganda, just like they did, and, of course, there's the whole war bonds thing. All the entertainment was geared to selling war bonds and everything.

AM: I imagine your school was also very involved.

JK: Yes, yes. I can remember … the air raid alerts in school. You know, we had all these things going on.

SB: Did you go around picking up cans and newspapers, things like that?

JK: I think we did, yes, as I remember that. You had to save [material]; everything was presumably going to be used in some way. So, anyhow, getting back to the travel, so, there's no such thing as air travel. The air travel had just begun before the war, so, … really, I don't think you could really take a plane anywhere. People traveled, most people, by train and the train, it was very difficult even to get on trains at that time. Most of the trains were being used for the war effort. So, when we were loaded on to cattle cars, and it took us three days to get from New York to Chicago, because they routed us through Canada. … I only remember about this, we were sleeping, it was all wooden berths, I call it [a] cattle car, because … it was just wooden berths, and we were sleeping on these wooden berths, and it was so rough that I remember just bouncing up and down on these wooden berths for three days, trying to sleep. … It was worthwhile, because, when I was finally discharged, … one of the things they asked you [was], "Were you ever out of this country while you were in service?" and I knew I hadn't been overseas, and I said, "Yes, I was in Canada." "Oh, so, that … entitles you to overseas pay." So, I got an extra hundred dollars when I was discharged, for that trip. So, it was worth it.

AM: Were there a lot of other enlisted men on this train?

JK: Yes, all the inductees, you know, were put on this train to go to [boot camp], all the ones that were going to go to Great Lakes Naval Station for their boot camp.

AM: They were mostly from the New York area.

JK: Yes, yes.

AM: You got to know them and talk to them a bit on the train ride.

JK: Well, I can't remember that at all, although I did make some friends in boot camp who … stayed with me through my whole experience, and I presume they were on that same train, although I can't remember.

AM: Could you tell me about your experience once you got to boot camp?

JK: Well, yes, it was pretty funny actually, looking back on it, although, as a seventeen-year-old, I mean, just going right from high school graduation right into service, I think the next day, it was pretty scary at the time. … I mean, you get to, I can't remember whether it was Chicago or Great Lakes, wherever it was, but you go into a room, this big room, and the first thing they do, … they had these numbered squares, you see, and each square had a carton in it and everybody had to go to a certain square. The first thing they do, and, of course, … I can't remember what they called it, [he] was the equivalent of a sergeant, but, in the Navy, I guess they called it a first mate [petty officer first class?] or something like that, whose job was to make you into a sailor. So, they really … were very rough on you, because it was all part of the psychological training. So, the first thing they do, they barked out, "Strip, take off all your clothes." So, here are all these sad-looking recruits standing on their squares, buck-naked, okay. Then, you took everything that you had, except your wallet, and you put it into this box, and then, they close the box, and then, you put your address on the box and that was mailed home. … So, you start off in the service like a newborn child, that was the whole idea of it, you know, and the only thing you had was your wallet. … Then, the next thing you go through, presumably we already had our physical test, because we must have got that in order to be inducted, you had to go see the psychologist. The psychologist asked only two questions. First, he looked in your wallet for dirty pictures. [laughter] I don't know whether they threw you out if you had dirty pictures in your wallet or not, but that's what he was looking for.

SB: Did they let you get dressed first?

JK: Oh, no. You were still absolutely naked, [laughter] and then, the psychologist asked you if you wet your bed. That was the only two things he was interested in, and they actually threw people out if you wet your bed, in the Navy. … In the Army, I think you could wet your bed all the way to overseas, but not in the Navy. I guess there was too much water out on the ocean or something, anyhow, because I can remember, … of course, everybody lied about it, if you did. I didn't have that problem, fortunately, but I can still remember [that], in boot camp, because we had to stand watch and our main duty on watch, because we didn't have to worry about being invaded in boot camp, our main duty on watch was what was known as "piss call." You may have to edit that on your tape, but, anyhow, "piss call" involved waking up these [men]. We knew the guys who had the problem of wetting their bed and we'd wake them up during the night, so that they could [urinate], that they wouldn't get caught and be thrown out of the Navy and end up … in the infantry.

SB: There were several of them.

JK: Evidently, yes. I can't remember how many, but there were, yes. So, anyhow, … after we got through the psychologist, then, we went through; I can't remember whether they gave us our clothes first. They give you an allowance. See, in the Navy, at that time, you bought your clothes. So, obviously, we had everything we owned in this box, … they assumed we didn't have any money on us, so, they gave you your first advance on your first pay. … I can't remember how much it was, … but, then, they took back the amount for your Navy uniform, which they gave you your various things that you needed, you know, two uniforms, a winter uniform, a dark uniform, and a white uniform for summer. It was summer when I went in. This was right after graduation, so, I spent the summer in the boot camp.

AM: How many weeks was that?

JK: I can't remember, maybe it was six weeks, eight weeks. I can't remember how long it was. So, after … they took the money for your clothes, you had five dollars left and this was called the "flying five," because, then, they took that back, and then, they gave you a toothbrush, toothpaste and, you know, a few other things, and I can't remember what else it was. … Anyhow, I remember, it was called the "flying five," because they handed you the five dollars, but, then, they took it right back from you, [laughter] and then, of course, you went through your shots. … All I can remember about the shots was that you'd walk down a line and they would just stab you on each arm as you went through this line. [laughter] I don't know how many shots you got, and I can remember a bunch of guys, just a lot of guys, passed out. You know, they would just see the needle and they'd immediately pass out. So, they just would lean them over a chair, head first, and all these guys were … bending over chairs until they … came to, and that was all I remember about the induction process, … and then, boot camp. The only thing I remember about [that], I can't remember too much about boot camp except … just obstacle courses, you know, every day, running obstacle courses, climbing over things. I was in pretty good shape in those days. I was much thinner and, you know, … we had to learn how to shoot, which I never did too well, and learn how to fight fires on ship and, you know, various things like that. It was very, very intensive, extremely intensive.

SB: Did you feel proud, at this point, that you had joined the Navy?

JK: Yes, at that age, I was very patriotic. I'm still patriotic, I think, but, you know, … I was pleased to be in the Navy, I guess. I can remember one funny thing from boot camp. As I said, I got in at the end of the war. The War in Europe was already over, that ended during the spring, before I graduated, and we were still fighting Japan and, while I was in (Chicago?), we dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Of course, nobody even knew that we had an atomic bomb. It was a very well-kept secret at that time.

SB: While you were there?

JK: I was in boot camp at the time. Of course, our whole battalion was this electronics group, which, at that time, was called RTs, or radio technicians, and we were very much disliked, I guess is the word, by the rest of boot [camp]. … Great Lakes was a tremendous place. They all knew that we had passed this test and that we were going into some [advanced training]. First of all, that by passing the test, we presumably were smarter than the other people, you know, and

they all knew we were going to go to school for a year. So, all the other groups, you know, the battalions or whatever they were called at that time, kind of looked down on … what they called the RTs. As a matter-of-fact, we weren't called RTs; we were called "bleeping" RTs. I mean, that was just the [way it was]. You never said the RT without the qualifying adjective.

SB: You are censoring yourself; you were not called "bleeping," correct?

JK: No, we were called the real thing; you want me to say it over this?

SB: No.

JK: You know what I mean. …

SB: Started with an "F?"

JK: [laughter] Yes, the common word for making love, anyhow.

AM: They put you all in the same battalion.

JK: Yes, we were the whole battalion of RTs at that time. The name became so unpopular that, shortly after that, they changed it to ETM, from a radio technician to an electronic technician's mate. … They probably eventually got the same adjective, but, as far as I know, I never heard it spoken that way, but, anyhow, the funny thing was, after they dropped the atomic bomb, the next morning, and we didn't even know about it, oh, we got a call. The whole Great Lakes is being called on to … the field where everybody would line up. I mean, you're talking a hundred thousand people, kids; I don't know how many there were. I mean, it's a tremendous, tremendous base. Everybody was lined up by battalion, as far as the eye could see, [you] see, and, of course, we ended up kind of in the front row. Your whole battalion was lined up, see, and each one with their commanders in front of them, and the commander of the base was up on his dais there with a microphone that was loud enough … [that] you could hear all over this field. "You're here today because I want to announce that we have dropped an atomic bomb on Japan," you see, "and I haven't got the," … I guess he used probably a swear word, "a bleeping idea what an atomic bomb is, but I understand we have a group of intelligent people here, these RTs, and I'd like one of them to come up here and explain to us what an atomic bomb is." [laughter] Well, of course, none of us had [a clue], we didn't have the foggiest idea.

SB: None of you wanted to raise your hand.

JK: Of course, you never volunteered for anything in the Navy. … There were three things they told us; … one of them was, oh, I remember now, "Keep your mouth shut, keep your bowels open and never volunteer for anything." [laughter] So, anyhow, so, obviously, … nobody would step forward, and, oh, he got more [angry], "You mean to say you guys are so smart, … none of you know how this thing works?" and he was pretty stupid himself, you know. [laughter] So, anyhow, that was boot camp.

AM: Did you have any interaction with the community?

JK: Not at boot camp. Boot camp, you don't get leave. There is no interaction at all. You are isolated for the time you're in boot camp. Boot camp is very, very intensive; it's a psychological [intensity]. … In addition to being a physical thing, it's supposed to get a bunch of slobs into shape, it's a psychological thing, where you were trained, instead of being an individual, you become part of a team. So, you know, I think it's a necessary thing. Democracy doesn't work good in the Armed Services.

AM: Where did you go from there?

JK: Well, we went to a first school, which was called Manley, and I had forgotten all about that. It was … probably a grammar school [high school] in Chicago, downtown Chicago, that was taken over by the Navy, and I had forgotten all about it, except one of the pictures I came across was our graduating class at Manley. I don't know what we learned there, but we were only there for about a month, but, from there, we went to the Navy Pier, which I remember very clearly, because Navy Pier was a great place. Chicago was a great place, Chicago and Milwaukee. We must have had liberty almost every night. I can't remember how often we had it, but all I can remember is going out on the town in Chicago. People in Chicago were so much behind the war. I mean, you couldn't stand on a street corner for ten seconds and a car would pull up and say, "Sailor, where do you want to go?" you know, "Take you somewhere? What can I do for you?" They had a building in downtown Chicago; they took over one of the biggest hotels in downtown Chicago, made it into the USO, and you walk in there and there was everything there. If you want tickets to a play or a concert, I saw some great concerts, … there were free tickets to anything you wanted to do. I remember seeing [Jascha] Heifetz, [Gregor] Piatigorsky, [Artur] Schnabel, Chicago Symphony. They had the whole building. They had libraries. … If you were a musician, they had practice rooms, with pianos. Of course, they had dances there every night and they had real girls there, as a contrast to what I'll tell you later on, with my experiences in the South, and so, I remember, we had a wonderful time. We met a whole bunch of girls that we got very friendly with. I can remember the girl that I dated; her father was a motorman. He ran a streetcar in Chicago. In those days, there was the Loop, which … had the elevated trains, but, then, the streetcars were everywhere. So, we always got free rides on her father's car to take us out somewhere, that we went out in the outskirts of Chicago on her father's streetcar. I remember that, and then, we'd hit the beaches; it was summertime. … At that time, they had beaches right in downtown Chicago, on Lake Michigan. You'd go out on the beach in the summer. All I can remember, it was pretty much of a lark. I suppose we did some work … during the day on the Navy Pier. The Pier itself was an old, rotting [pier]; I think they've rebuilt it now. It's some sort of center for something in Chicago. It's still there, but it was pretty much of an old, rotting hulk in those days and, I remember, there were pigeons in the ceiling and rats on the floor. So, the best bunk, we only had triple-decker bunks, the best bunk was a middle bunk, because, [in] the top bunk, you had to fold your mattress back, so [that] the pigeon droppings wouldn't drop on your mattress. I remember, the latrines were hanging on the outside of the pier, you know, and the rats would be running up and down the latrines. So, you went in there with a flashlight, not so much for the light, but to protect yourself against the rats. [laughter]

AM: This was a boat you were staying on.

JK: No, this is a pier. It's Navy Pier that goes out into Lake Michigan, goes way, quite a ways, out and we had our classrooms and everything was on there. …

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

JK: Oh, one other very funny anecdote that I have to tell you about Chicago. My parents, somehow or other, managed to get out there. They … somehow managed to get on a train. They got out there to see me one time while I was in Chicago. They came with my cousin, my girl cousin, and so, they had arranged that we're going to have dinner in the Pump Room, which, at that time, was the fanciest restaurant in Chicago. So, they asked me if I wanted to bring any of my friends. So, I think I asked two of my friends to come along. Well, one of them, I can't remember his last name, his first name was Charlie, he was swabbing the deck … on the Navy Pier the day before and he stepped in the bucket and went head over heels and sprained his ankle. [laughter] So, he was on crutches. So, the three of us, with my parents, walk into the Pump Room. … We were all three in our Navy uniforms, Charlie is on crutches, and … we walk into the Pump Room and … they had an orchestra playing there. All of a sudden, as we walk in, … the entrance to it was up high, up on a stairs, and you walked down into the room, as I [recall]. So, we're standing at the top of the stairs and, as we get to the top, everything stopped. The orchestra stopped playing and everybody stopped talking. They looked up at us, and, all of a sudden, the band started *Anchors Aweigh*, and everybody started to cheer. They assumed that Charlie, you know, he was a war veteran. If they had known that he had sprained his ankle swabbing the deck on the Navy Pier, it would have [been] very embarrassing. [laughter]

AM: He must have been very embarrassed. That is a very good story. You were only in Chicago for a short while.

JK: I can't remember how long. It was four or five months. I remember … the next place we went to was Gulfport, Mississippi, and that was in the wintertime. So, we must have been there four or five months.

SB: It was still part of the training.

JK: No, it was still part of the same course.

AM: It was mostly classroom instruction.

JK: Well, yes, in Navy Pier was mostly classroom instruction and, [in] Gulfport, we actually got into the labs and how to construct equipment, and service equipment. That was mainly what we were doing in Gulfport.

SB: Do you remember what you were learning?

JK: I remember I was pretty bad at it. I think it was pretty lucky for this country that I never got to sea, because we would have certainly lost the war. [laughter] I can remember, our main job was constructing our own superheterodyne [receiver]. Now, a superheterodyne was a very fancy

radio at that time with the old-fashioned vacuum tubes. Now, you have to know something about Gulfport. [In] Gulfport, the naval station was right next to the biggest radio station in the South. I mean, it broadcasts, I think it's still, probably still, there, … all over the country.

AM: What state was this in?

JK: Mississippi. This station was so powerful that the people in Gulfport would hear it over their water faucets. Anybody with false teeth would hear it in their teeth, but I could never get that station on my superheterodyne. As a matter-of-fact, I could never get any station on my superheterodyne. How they ever passed me in that course, I'll never know. [laughter]

SB: By that time, it was probably just, "Okay, you pass." [laughter]

AM: How did you feel about the atomic bomb once you found out what it was?

JK: Well, we … had no idea that millions of people, or thousands of people, … were killed by it and … we didn't even know what it was. All we knew was it was going to shorten the war, and it did shorten the war, … you know, very much, right after that. Actually, when I was in Gulfport, the war was probably over, because I think the war ended pretty quickly after the atomic bombs. … For some reason, the people who were staying, I'm not talking about us, because we were just passing through as part of … the course, but the people, like the doctors and the dentists and the people who were actually stationed there, it was a cushy place to be. I mean, Gulfport, you know, being on the Gulf Coast in the middle of winter, you know, I'm sure these guys went out and played golf every day. So, they didn't want to get transferred, you know, sent overseas, to Germany or a place like that. … I can remember, with the dentists, we must have had dental inspections every month, and anything you wanted done, they would look at you, "You sure you don't [need anything]? Let's see, I think you need a cap there, or…" They were just … creating work for themselves. We would have our teeth examined monthly and, in other words, if they could show, the same thing with the doctors, you know, the more work they could show, [it would] show they were needed at this base, because the base was actually winding down. They weren't bringing any more students in, because, you know, the war was over. So, they had to show a lot of work to keep themselves there. … Actually, my feelings about the South were pretty negative at that time, and I guess they still are, because "Southern hospitality" may have existed, but it didn't exist for us. I think I got my first real dose of class consciousness, which is much, much stronger in the South, or at least it was at that time; maybe it's changed. At that time, it was very strong. I mean, the officers had it good, but the inductees, the enlisted men, which I was, we were called "swabbies," we were treated like dirt down there. It was such a contrast with Chicago and Milwaukee; I didn't mention Milwaukee, … because we used to go to Milwaukee almost every other weekend. Milwaukee was just a wonderful town for service people. The beer flowed like water, I mean, but, anyhow, as I [said], … on a street corner in Chicago or Milwaukee, you couldn't stand there for ten minutes with[out] somebody pulling up. In the South, you could stand there forever and, you know, you'd drop dead, nobody would give you a look. … We quite often went into New Orleans, because New Orleans was quite nice. They treated us pretty nice in New Orleans, but, … in Mississippi, it was terrible. … At first, we'd try to hitchhike into New Orleans, but, eventually, we gave up, had to take busses, because, in all the times I tried to hitchhike in the South, I got picked up once, and that was by a

guy from Brooklyn who was passing through, [laughter] but, I mean, the USO was staffed by, at that time, the women looked like that they were eighty years old. You know, now that I'm in my seventies, I may have a different view of them, [laughter] but there was no young women for us. There was a girl's school right … near the base. In order to date a [girl], I think it was a girl's college, in order to date a girl from this school, … I think you had to have three references from people in your hometown, plus, a letter of recommendation from your minister. Since my minister was a rabbi, I figured it wasn't even worth trying. [laughter] … Just the general attitude, you know, we felt pretty isolated down there, and I'm not talking just about being Jewish, I'm talking all the enlisted men. They didn't have any particular use for you, and so, my feelings about the South are fairly negative.

SB: Do you think it was tougher because you were Jewish? Do you have any specific recollections of anti-Semitism?

JK: No, I don't think so. I don't think so. I remember, there was … prejudice against New York people, mainly from, there were a lot of guys from Texas, you know, and the Texans always … made jokes and remarks about anybody from New York. Now, that may have had to do [with the Jewish aspect since], you know, a lot of the guys from New York were Jewish. So, it may have been a little bit of anti-Semitism underneath, but I think it was mainly Eastern prejudice, prejudice against Easterners.

AM: Did you have any Black Americans in your group at any point?

JK: Nope, I don't [think so]. Yes, I think, at that time, blacks were segregated, and I'm pretty sure there was a black; I don't think they were called battalions, I can't remember what they were called, but, you know, [the] equivalent of a battalion was black. … So, it was total segregation at that time.

SB: There were not any going into RT school.

JK: I don't remember any, and, if they were, it would be a separate company. Let's see if I remember anything else about Gulfport. …

AM: Was that the last place you were stationed before you were discharged?

JK: Yes, yes, that was the last place. The only … other thing I remember about Gulfport was that I was terribly homesick, especially, as I say, the South was such an unwelcoming place. I was terribly homesick. So, at Christmas, we got three days' leave over Christmas, but they warned us … not to try to go home if … our home was any further than, say, out of state. You know, they didn't want us to attempt to travel. Traveling was very difficult in those days. So, they said there would be severe penalties if we didn't get back on time, but everybody tried it. … Somehow or other, I managed to get up on a train and it was the longest ride I can remember. It was three days' leave and I think I managed to … be home for a few hours, [laughter] then, had to get back on the train. I felt it was worth it, because, as I say, I was terribly homesick, but, of course, the train coming back, the trains in those days, I mean, if you were on a train, you were immediately [sidetracked]. All the troop trains and the trains that were carrying supplies and

everything had priority. So, any train that wasn't carrying troops, and, of course, I was on a passenger train, was sidetracked, so that … they'd [let the] the priority trains go through. So, the ride back was even worse than the ride going up. … I got in there hours and hours late and, of course, as did everybody else who tried to go home. … Of course, the MPs, SPs, … in the Navy, they were shore patrol, were waiting for us right at the station, as we got off the train. … We were presumably thrown right in the brig. Unfortunately, or fortunately, there were so many people in the same boat that the brig wasn't big enough to hold them. [laughter] So, we were all confined to barracks, … and so, I can remember spending New Year's Eve confined to barracks, was a very sad, sad New Year's Eve.

AM: At any point, such as in Gulfport, were you on a ship?

JK: No, I never was on a ship. …

AM: It was mostly practical and classroom experiences.

JK: Yes, yes.

AM: That was New Year's, and you spent the next six months in Mississippi as well.

JK: Well, I got discharged in the summertime, June to July. I know I was in thirteen or fourteen months, so, … I think I enlisted in June.

AM: Yes, you wrote down here that it was June 1945, and then, you were discharged in July of 1946.

JK: Yes. So, it was thirteen months and it was in Lido Beach, I remember, in Long Island. So, I don't know how I got there, but, somehow or other, I got from Gulfport to Lido Beach for a discharge, and can't remember too much about it. I remember getting the hundred dollars and going from room to room, where they had "salesmen" doing their best trying to convince us to reenlist in the Reserve, but I had had enough. …

AM: There must have been a great sense of relief, though, that you did miss action and that the wars were over.

JK: Well, you know, action, … it was a mixed feeling, you know. … Looking back, I probably would have liked to get on a ship, as long as it wasn't sunk, [laughter] but, on the other hand, … it was good to get out and get on with my life, too.

AM: Once you were home, you worked that summer as a counselor.

JK: Did I write that down?

AM: I think there is something about you being a counselor.

JK: I can't even remember what I did that summer.

AM: Yes, Camp Greycock.

JK: Greylock.

AM: Greylock.

JK: Yes, I was a counselor [for] a couple of summers, so, it must have been before, and I can't remember whether it was after I got out. Maybe I remembered more clearly four years ago, [when Mr. Konner filled out his pre-interview survey].

AM: I am sorry, it looks like it was before.

JK: I think it was before, yes, yes, because after, I can remember, oh, part of … getting discharged was joining the 52/50 Club. [Editor's Note: The GI Bill entitled veterans to twenty dollars in unemployment funds a week for up to fifty-two weeks, a provision known colloquially as the "52-20 Club."] I think you did that, like, after you got [out]. The GI Bill was very good for after the war. We thanked Roosevelt for that; he pushed that through. In addition to getting my whole college experience, and, you know, I was only in thirteen months and it was based on how long you were in, but, somehow or other, I managed to get [my education paid for]. Well, of course, I did college in three years, because I got credit for the courses I took, and then, I did one summer. So, between those two things, I was able to do college in three years and the thirteen months in the service was enough GI Bill to pay for the whole three years.

AM: What was the 52/50 Club?

JK: 52/50 was, for fifty-two weeks, this was [for] all servicemen, you got fifty dollars a week, after you were discharged. So, fifty bucks, in those days, went a long way.

AM: You decided to go to Rutgers. Why did you choose Rutgers?

JK: Well, I think it was the only one I could get into at the time. [laughter] I applied to three or four schools. … Of course, you know, applying at the last minute wasn't the easiest thing to do. I can't remember whether I'd made any applications in my senior year … in high school. I probably did, but, you know, I knew I was going in the Navy and it was kind of a half-hearted thing. Everybody was in. So, then, as soon as I got out in July, I don't know how many schools I applied to, but I was accepted at Rutgers and that's where I went.

AM: You knew you wanted to go to college; that was your intent.

JK: I wanted to go to college, yes.

SB: Did you maintain any interest in electronics or did you just take the credits from those courses?

JK: No, no. My experience at Gulfport had pretty much soured me on electronics and I felt, at that time, that I wasn't very adept at it, although, in later years, I got very much interested in it and, today, I'm pretty much computer-mad. My wife complains I spend too much time on the computer, but, no, at that time, … actually, I became very interested in science generally, later. I got a degree in anthropology, later on, but I was pretty much turned off by electronics when I got out of the Navy. So, my degree in Rutgers was English, English major.

AM: Is that what you started as, an English lit. major?

JK: Yes, yes.

AM: I would like to ask about your Rutgers experience. Did you live at home when you were at Rutgers?

JK: No. … We lived at school.

AM: Do you remember the dorm?

JK: Well, … the dorms were almost impossible to get in. You've got to remember that Rutgers went from a small school to getting a whole [bunch of], I don't know how many, GI Bill guys. … I guess the one reason why I got into Rutgers as easily as I did, I didn't have a great high school record, … I guess I had a "B" average, maybe a "B" with some "Cs," but I guess the schools were benefiting from the GI Bill, too, in some ways. I don't know how, but Rutgers got a tremendous amount of these guys and it must have tripled or quadrupled … the size of the school. So, obviously, the dorms were totally …

AM: Packed.

JK: Yes, I mean, … you just couldn't get into a dorm. So, I wrote my cousin, who had been also in the Navy. We had started out together, although we got separated, he was the same age as I and same name as I, believe it or not. We were both named after my grandfather, we had different middle names, … and we roomed together. We got a room. I can still remember that first room, it was right on, I think it was … called College Avenue; is it still called College Avenue? …

AM: You were very close to the school.

JK: Yes, yes. The school was right across the street, and that was practically the whole school at that time, just right across the street, you know, [from] Old Queens, and then, there was a couple of other, few other, buildings, but that was it, pretty much the school, right then. … I know there were dorms right across the street. … We were in a rooming house on College Ave. I can remember the woman, Mrs. (Frame?), because she was an elderly woman and rather senile and totally out of it. … It was really pretty weird, because we were pretty weird, too, you know, two kids, although, you know, Navy veterans who were supposedly grown up, but we were still pretty much kids, I guess we were.

AM: You were the only two rooming there.

JK: Yes. Well, … she rented out rooms, but maybe there were some other kids in other rooms, I can't remember, but there was a collection of people in there, in the house. It wasn't that big, I mean, maybe three or four rooms that she had. I can remember some silly things. I can remember, my uncle, who was in the carpet business, gave us one of these carpets. … It was a commercial carpet, … you know, wasn't woven; … the commercial carpets in those days, they were kind of packed or something, I don't know. I guess it was like the stuff they use outside today. So, this thing kept tearing, you know, as we're using it. So, we would just keep tearing off pieces. I can remember, by the end of the year, the whole carpet, which originally covered the whole floor, was about that big, center of the room. [laughter] …

SB: A little bit bigger than a bread box.

JK: What?

SB: A little bit bigger than a bread box.

JK: Yes. I remember, we had a clothes tree, and so, we started off with all our clothes in the closet and in dressers, I guess, but we ended up, we'd keep putting them on the clothes tree. So, I remember, my parents came down, about four or five months later, my mother and my cousin's mother, who was my aunt. So, they came down. Of course, they were horrified at this room, [laughter] and they saw this clothes tree, which was tremendous. I mean, it, like, covered the whole room. So, at first, they started taking these clothes off and, when they finally got down to the bottom, … remember, this is Christmas, around, you know, middle of winter, when they got down to the bottom of the clothes tree, there was still a wet bathing suit hanging there. [laughter] Those are the only two things I can remember about that room. The next year, we both got into a fraternity, which I regret, because … my fraternity experience was not that great. … I made some friends there, but I kind of feel that I've always been anti-fraternity ever since and, luckily, my fraternity went out of business. …

AM: Yes, I actually never heard of Phi Epsilon Pi.

JK: Well, they went out of business. They were absorbed by another fraternity, and the fraternity that absorbed them was our enemy fraternity, you know. … They keep sending me things, you know, to update myself and, you know, be part of that fraternity, give them money. … You know, I couldn't in a million years, aside from the fact that I don't like the idea of fraternities anymore, I would certainly not be interested in that fraternity, because, [as] I say, that was our rival fraternity. … You know, at that time, fraternities were religiously segregated and this was a Jewish fraternity, although we did have … some non-Jewish boys who joined our fraternity, but, you know, at that time, it was quite an honor to get pledged to your fraternity and we were seduced by it, my cousin and I. We actually got in because some of our high school buddies, who had not gone into the war, who were a year … ahead of us, you know, kind of, as soon as we got there, they had been to high school with us, so, … that's how we managed to get pledged to the fraternity. All I can remember is, basically, wanting to study and, every night, somebody would come in and say, "Why do you want to study? Come on, let's go out and drink

beer." So, we'd go out and drink beer, or taking overnight excursions to Philadelphia, you know, without even sleeping, and doing stupid things like that. So, my marks took a nose dive that year. Then, I got married at the end of that year.

AM: While you were still in college?

JK: Yes.

SB: How did you meet your wife?

JK: We grew up on the same block. As I said, we had three houses on the block, which was my mother, we were at the end house, and it was my mother's sister and her other sister, and the house on the corner was the Sterns. … Jack Stern was my father-in law and his daughter was my wife. … She was part of our group of friends and we dated. Actually, … she dated my cousin and I was dating somebody else, … but, I mean, everybody dated everybody else. It was very, very innocent in those days. I mean, sex was something we didn't even know about. I mean, making out was kissing a girl. … That was a big deal. … So, you know, our dates … consisted of getting on … the bus down at the corner and going down to see a movie and having an ice cream soda afterwards, you know, and, of course, we had, you know, dances and parties and things like that, but, eventually, Joan and I married, and … we're still married. We celebrated our fiftieth anniversary last June.

AM: Wow, congratulations.

JK: But, anyhow, it turned out that that last year, being married, was my best year at college, my best marks and my most enjoyable year. We had a house. I remember, we paid thirty-five dollars a month. We had a whole floor, a second floor of a house.

AM: This is a house in New Brunswick.

JK: In New Brunswick. We had a living room and a kitchen and a bedroom and a bathroom, for thirty-five dollars a month. Those were the days. Of course, we were living on, the GI Bill gave me, I guess, a hundred dollars a month. So, we were living on a hundred dollars a month and, [with] a hundred dollars a month, we only paid thirty-five dollars a month for rent and I think we were spending less than ten dollars a week for groceries. I think we actually put money aside on a hundred dollars a week, but, anyhow, … married life, I was able to actually study at night, which was a new experience. … So, as I say, I remember that year as being a very enjoyable year, because I can remember going to, joining, I can remember being in a literary club and a couple of clubs, remember Shakespeare Club, … which is something that you don't do in a fraternity house. In a fraternity house, you just goof off. So, that's why I don't think they're an aid to education. Are you [in] a sorority?

AM: Actually, I am a member of a co-ed fraternity now, Gamma Sigma at the time, otherwise known as the Georgian Club, but it would have started as soon as you had pretty much graduated. Twelve World War II veterans started it up who were either black or Jewish and had really bad experiences, especially with hazing, at other fraternities.

JK: So, evidently, it has a different attitude.

AM: Yes, there was no hazing, no discrimination.

JK: We didn't have hazing, either. … Well, the hazing, it was kind of nice. I guess I can tell the story now. It was a deep, dark secret in those days, … because it's defunct, but the whole hazing was they would scare you to death with stories about the horrible things they were going to do to you, and then, of course, when the time came …

AM: They never did it.

JK: There's nothing. That was the secret, that it was all a joke. There was no hazing.

AM: They actually had a house.

JK: Yes, we had a fraternity house, yes. We lived in the fraternity house, yes.

AM: Was it near College Avenue?

JK: Yes, it was the street behind College Avenue.

AM: Union Street?

JK: Yes, Union Street. I remember the name now, Union Street.

AM: That is where Gamma Sigma is.

JK: Yes, well, all fraternities … [were] along that street at that time, yes.

AM: Do you remember the name of your rival fraternity? Was it by any chance Sammy, Sigma Alpha Mu?

JK: I don't think so, no. What's the other Jewish fraternity?

AM: I know they were a Jewish fraternity, because, at one point, we were mostly Jewish and we actually shared a *kosher* kitchen with them.

JK: … Was there another Jewish fraternity? It's a very famous Jewish fraternity. … I don't think it was SA[M]; I remember SAM, but, no, it was two Greek words. … It'll come back to me. I still get their mail. It'll come back to me sometime, but, right now, I can't remember.

AM: There was Delta Phi.

JK: No.

AM: Was it on that street, on Union Street, or was it on College Avenue?

JK: I remember it was a block or two away, someplace.

AM: There is a Chi Psi, a Chi Phi.

JK: No, I would know it if I heard it. … Maybe they don't exist anymore either, at Rutgers.

AM: Anyway, there was no hazing, but the fraternity was not conducive to studying.

JK: And, also, I mean, so many dumb things going on.

AM: Were there a lot of veterans in the fraternity?

JK: … Quite a few, quite a few, but I guess about half and half. I can't remember exactly. I remember a lot of dumb things that we did. … I think it was called either "knocking nickels" or "pounding nickels;" we had a payphone and somebody discovered if you put in a nickel and banged it, it would register as a quarter. So, I think we called it "banging nickels." [laughter] So, that's how we made our calls, until the phone company finally had enough of us and came and took the phone out. So, then, we didn't have any phone and, of course, the parties were terrible and, of course, the whole idea of the party was to get a girl up in your room, you know. It was a dumb scene, the whole thing. I hope it's a lot better now.

SB: No comment, right?

AM: No comment. The popularity of fraternities has gone way down.

JK: Good.

AM: Do you remember other events that you, or maybe your fraternity, got involved in, such as homecomings?

JK: Oh, I remember, we went to all the football games. … I remember one homecoming; I don't know whether it was homecoming or some big football game, big weekend, anyhow, when my wife was going to [Mt.] Holyoke [College] at that time. This is in the first two years, because she dropped out of school. … In those days, … they got what they called the "Mrs." degree, you know, … women would drop out. It was a stupid thing, and she's regretted it deeply ever since, but, anyhow, she dropped out after … two years. I guess, she was a year, yes, she's a year younger, … behind me. So, the fact that I lost a year in the Navy, we were both in the same years in college. So, she was in Holyoke and … I went up to Holyoke quite often, which is another whole set of experiences, because girl's schools, in those days, were quite different. I mean, the restrictions were pretty strong, but I can remember, she came down for one weekend, it was my birthday, and it just happened to coincide with a big college weekend. … So, I invited her, but she had completely forgot it was my birthday. We were going together at that time, but not that strong. She was dating other guys and I was dating other girls, but we were … still dating each other. She had completely forgotten it was my birthday, so, she came down with a

pair of socks, knitted socks. Of course, afterwards, she told me that she had knitted them on the train coming down. So, she had knitted very fast to make up [for] the fact that she'd completely forgot that it was my birthday. That's one thing that I remember. I remember, you know, the trips up to her college, because, … to get out, they had to sign their life away to get out at night and you had to, if you were late, … I remember sneaking into … her dorm, because a couple of times, we were late. You had to actually sneak in or there's severe penalties and, oh, in the hotel, you know, … I had a hotel room in, I guess, … South Hadley, was where Holyoke is. … So, I would get her up to the room, not that we did anything up there, but, … even in a hotel, for a man to bring a woman up to a room was strictly no-no. … We'd have to sneak her in up the backstairs or something, just to get her to come up to my room. Those are some of the things that I remember. Actually, I don't remember that much … about college. I can remember, NJC, at those days, was a separate school. It was not part of Rutgers.

AM: Was there any interaction with the women over there?

JK: Yes. … You could exchange courses. I remember, there were some women that were able to take courses at Rutgers, and men would take courses at NJC, but, you know, if it was a course that wasn't given at either school, you could take a course. So, there was some sort of a connection, but, at that time, they were separate, totally separate, schools and, you know, I remember we dated the girls at NJC. … I think my second year at college, I had a car. My parents were so pleased at the fact that they didn't have to spend a penny to send me to college, so, they bought me a car for one of my birthdays at that time.

SB: What kind of car was it?

JK: It was an Oldsmobile convertible. It was the only convertible I ever had. I can remember going up to Holyoke one weekend and I had the top down. … We parked it outside, went into a restaurant, I still remember that restaurant, it was beautiful, one of these old-fashioned restaurants. It was a theme restaurant, with historically themed [features from] up in that area. We spent a lot of time having dinner. We had no idea that it was a sudden rainstorm, pouring rain. We looked outside and the car, I think the car was filled up to the top with water. I opened the door and the water flowed out, but I don't remember too much else about college.

AM: Do you remember any professors?

JK: Oh, yes, yes. I remember mostly the English professors. Two courses that I remember, I remember a Chaucer course, because that was a fascinating course. We had to learn the language. At that time, I don't know if you're familiar with Chaucer, but Chaucer was written in a foreign language, basically, Old English. It was only until Shakespeare's time that language became standardized and this guy [the professor] was, like, President of the Chaucer Society. So, it was very exciting. Every class, he would bring in Chaucer artifacts. I can't remember what they were, but … it was a great course and I remember the Shakespeare course was somebody who was very much involved in Shakespeare. So, I remember, that was a wonderful course. … I took a philosophy course with the guy who eventually became a television star, and then, became President … of Rutgers. Mason Brooks, do you remember Mason Brooks?

AM: Do you mean Mason Gross?

JK: Mason Gross, that's it, Mason. He's dead now.

AM: Right.

JK: … He gave a philosophy course that was fabulous. It was so popular that they had the biggest auditorium on campus at that time, it wasn't even a classroom. He gave his course, it was three times a week, I guess. … He would give the course once a week in this tremendous auditorium, and then, the other two times, you had assistants giving the courses. They'd divide up the class and [were] giving the courses in classrooms. … He was so good, I mean, everybody had to take that course, and then, of course, shortly after that, … I don't think he no longer taught, but he had a television program, some kind of a quiz program, I think, about philosophy, I guess, which became quite popular for a number of years, and then, eventually, … he got back involved with the school again and, eventually, became President. He was a terrific guy, terrific guy. [Editor's Note: Mason Gross appeared on the television game shows *Think Fast* and *Two for the Money* in the late 1940s and early 1950s as an expert and/or judge. Concurrently, he was a Professor of Philosophy, and, later, Provost, at Rutgers University. He became President of Rutgers University in 1959 and held office until 1971.]

AM: He was a very accomplished president.

SB: The School of the Arts is named after him.

JK: Yes. Well, I guess I'm privileged to have taken a course with Mason Gross, and I remember my German professor, … I was never very good. He was a nice guy and it was a tough course, but he was down on me because I was terrible in German. I wanted, desperately wanted, to learn the language. …

AM: What interested you in German?

JK: Oh, music, I guess, basically. You know, if you're interested in [music], I don't know how much interested you are in music, but, you know, most of your great composers were German.

AM: Yes, a very large contingent, and some of the Italians, some of the Russians.

JK: A few of the others, but, if you start adding them up, … most of the great ones, the really great ones, were German-speaking, not necessarily [German], Austrian or German.

AM: Yes, I was going to ask you about a club you were in. Besides the literary club, you were in the *Deutscher Verein*.

JK: I was? Did I put that down? [laughter] Boy, I don't remember that. … You must have gotten that from my record. Did you get that from the record?

AM: Yes, and it actually says that you were on a social committee as well.

JK: Wow. See, these are things I don't even remember. …

AM: The Judicial Council. Do you remember the Judicial Council at all?

JK: … Judicial Council of what?

AM: I am not sure if it is saying here that it was part of the fraternity.

JK: I have absolutely no [idea].

AM: [laughter] Okay. Yes, this was filled out when you were quite young. It looks like it was filled out when you were actually in college.

JK: When you're finished, I'd love to have a look at that. [laughter]

AM: Yes. It was filled out in 1947.

JK: It's funny, when you get up into your seventies, … at your age, it's like … it's a different person. You can't really believe it was you, because, you know, you change so much over the years. I've changed so much.

SB: Do you remember the attitude that was taken at the University towards returning veterans? Were there very many support organizations, and did they tend to congregate together?

JK: I think there was good support. I can remember, there was B'nai Brith, which was a support organization for Jewish kids. … I'm sure there was a veterans' support organization. I think the veterans, at that time, were not discriminated against. I think they were [respected], you know; I didn't feel any discrimination as being a veteran.

SB: Quite the contrary, in fact.

JK: Yes, yes, I think we were looked up to.

AM: You have more of a unique situation, wherein you did not go overseas, you were on the home front, but you were different than those that came right out of high school into college.

JK: Well, of course, yes, the veterans felt they were more mature. They probably weren't, but … there was a difference, generally speaking, between the non-veterans, because the … non-veterans, of course, were younger, and the veterans; most of the veterans had been in [the service] longer than a year, you know. … Most of them had been in two, three, four years. So, they were, you know, … considerably older than the kids who were coming in directly from high school. So, there was a maturity gap there, not so much for me, but for a lot of the others.

SB: Did they mostly hang out with each other? Did they tend to congregate together or was it generally mixed socially?

JK: Well, I can only speak for myself and, … in our fraternity, there was a total mixture. I mean, … you just didn't even think about who was a veteran, who wasn't a veteran.

AM: When you entered into Rutgers, because of your credits from electronics school, were you considered a freshman?

JK: Yes, yes. I started as a freshman. You had to take all those freshman obligatory courses. Yes, … then, when I got the, I guess, … credits, and then, I think it was only after I did the summer school, which was after my second year, that I was officially moved from the Class of '50 into the Class of '49.

AM: Was there any freshman hazing, even with all the veterans attending?

JK: I don't recall any, no. There may have been.

AM: I know, in the pre-war years, they actually hazed freshmen as if they were in fraternities. I understand the veterans' view of that was quite different.

JK: Yes, yes, I don't [recall], yes, and, of course, with the war intervening, things changed a lot and that was one of the changes, I think, that would have definitely happened.

SB: Do you remember talking with other people, other veterans coming into Rutgers, about your experiences as a soldier, or was it generally something you did not talk about?

JK: You know, I don't remember too much of that. I remember, over the years, you know, war stories. You know, the thing about a war, everybody always remembers the good things and, of course, if you survived it, that was a good thing to begin with. … I actually didn't know anybody who was; well, one of my best friends. You know, I was going to say, "I didn't know anybody who was really wounded;" one of my best friends was wounded. He was driving a jeep in Atlantic City [laughter] and he drove off the road and got himself all banged up and, as a result of that, he got a disability which pretty much supported him to this day. I mean, he's in bad shape today. … He's on dialysis. He's got a million things wrong with him. He's still back in New Jersey … and he had a lot of business problems. He went bankrupt, and this disability was his lifesaver, you know, because he was so banged up that he got a very high disability [rate]. To look at him, he doesn't look like he has anything wrong with him, and all his diseases that he has now, which he has a few, I don't think have anything to do with his original disability, but he was in the hospital, you know, for quite awhile. … All of his broken bones mended and everything, but he … ended up with a fairly large disability payment. He's the only one, and a few others got disability.

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

AM: You were saying that war is a class thing.

JK: … Because of my education, I was able to get into a program that kept me fairly safe while I was in the service, and I think this opportunity exists pretty much up and down the line. If you're middle class, or if your parents have a good education and give you an education, you have a very good chance of not getting wounded or not getting killed, … you know, even not even getting into service. Of course, today, it's all-volunteer anyhow, but, even if you were drafted, you know, … an education goes a long way and education is very much of a class thing.

AM: Do you think that the GI Bill actually helped a lot more people who would not have gone to college otherwise go to college?

JK: Oh, yes, oh, yes. Of course, there was a lot of frauds, right after the war. I mean, all these colleges opened up, you know. Anybody who wanted to open up a college, they would put an address up and have a college, just so that they could get money from the government. … So, there was a lot of illegitimate education going on, where … people weren't even getting educated; they were just collecting money from the government in a bogus school.

SB: They would give part of it to the student.

JK: I don't know how it worked. Yes, I'm sure the student was benefiting from it and the school was benefiting from it and, eventually, they caught up with these [fraudulent colleges], because, of course, the GI Bill ended, and then, all these places went out of business. … Any time you have a big government program, there's going to be fraud and discrepancies, but, overall, you know, I think the World War II program, basically the GI Bill, was a tremendous benefit and I think it was a tremendous spur to the prosperity that occurred right after the war, because it put a lot of money in the hands of people who were ready to spend it.

SB: I do not know if you would have noticed something like this, because you were in college, but, when veterans returned, did it seem like there were a lot of veterans who could not adjust or could not find jobs or could not really go back to their normal lives?

JK: The contrast with the Vietnam War was tremendous. There was tremendous prosperity right after the war [World War II] and I don't think there was any problem getting jobs. I don't recall any unemployment problem. I mean, you know, the whole idea of the 52/50 Club was to give veterans a year to adjust, you know. It was to give them [money] so [that] they wouldn't starve until they could find a job, and I think there was an extension voted to the 52/50 Club. … Just recalling now, I think we got us some extra time on that, too. I think maybe they extended it for another year. So, maybe there were some veterans having problems, but nothing like the Vietnam War. I mean, there was prosperity, businesses were starting up all over the place, so, there were plenty of jobs, and I don't think anybody who had their head on fairly straight had any real problems.

AM: You had gotten married in your last year of college, but I know that the Korean War was coming up. Do you remember when you first heard about that? Were you graduated by then?

JK: Yes, yes. As a veteran, I was exempt. Had I joined the Reserves, like they were trying to [get me to do], and … my cousin's husband, he was in the Reserves and he ended up in Korea. He was in World War II and he ended up in Korea. So, yes, I was very much aware.

SB: How did they get people to join the Reserves? What methods did they use to sell the concept?

JK: I don't remember the methods. … I don't remember the exact methods, but I just remember [they would come on] very strong. You know, I don't know if you've ever been to some of these places where they try to sell you second homes or time-shares, you know, that type of thing. I'm sure you've heard about it. I've never been in one, but I have lots of friends who got stuck in it, where you just can't get out. I mean, … if one person can't sell you, they turn you over to somebody else and, if he can't sell you, they keep turning you over. Well, that's the way it was. Not as quite as bad as that, but they really did a salesmanship job on us, trying to get us to reenlist in the Reserves and, you know, they had a good reason to. They had spent all this money training us and it would be a waste, you know, if we didn't go into the Reserves. So, I certainly thought it was a good thing that they were doing, but I just wasn't buying it. [laughter]

AM: Your younger brother did not serve in the military, either, since he was in college. Was he in Rutgers, too?

JK: Yes, he went to Rutgers, too, and he was there, I guess, I went out in three years, so, he didn't go into service at that time, so, he would have been [there with me] had I been there the fourth year. I've always regretted [that]. I can't understand, what was my big hurry? but, of course, everybody was doing this at the time, big hurry to get married, have children, go into business. What was the big hurry? yes, but I was in a hurry and everybody else was in a hurry, at that time. It was part of the psychology of war, you know. That's why you had the big, tremendous Baby Boom. My kids were part of the Baby Boom. My first kid was born in 1950, but my brother came to college, … his first year would have been my fourth year and he went into the ROTC. So, he eventually went into the Air Force and he ended up in Alaska for a year, and that was his year of service.

AM: After graduating from Rutgers, you then went into business.

JK: [I] went into my father's business, which, as I said, since Paterson was going downhill, that lasted about ten years and the business was going nowhere. So, then, … my father-in-law asked me to come into his business, so, I went into business with my father-in-law, and I stayed in that from, I would say my whole business [career]. I was there about close to thirty years, in that business.

AM: What type of business was that?

JK: I was a tire distributor, mainly wholesale and industrial, commercial tires, in Paterson, but, then, my children weren't interested in the business. They had all moved out West and, about that time, my father-in-law was dead and I was in business with my brother-in-law and his kids wanted to go into the business, my kids didn't, so, he bought me out, which turned out to be a

very good thing. It was a very generous buyout and I … invested the money and it turned out it's given me a comfortable retirement. … Of course, when his kids came into [the business], he has one son who came into the business and we didn't get along very well. So, I took early retirement at sixty-two, but it didn't turn out to be a real retirement, because I volunteered as a literacy volunteer and, before I knew it, within a year, I was running a literacy program, full-time running a literacy program, full-time, in Essex County College in Newark, which is in desperate need of literacy, as you probably know.

AM: It still is, yes.

JK: … Actually, I started up the program and I ran it for four years. By the time, … my whole object, I knew I was eventually going to move out West as soon as my wife retired, who was working for CPC in Englewood Cliffs.

AM: What is CPC? [Editor's Note: Corn Products Refining Company merged with Best Foods in 1958 to become Corn Products Company.]

JK: You know, Best Foods, Hellmann's Mayonnaise, Skippy Peanut Butter, big, big, Mazola Oil, big, big company. She was there. … She ran their whole program of, you know the horrible stuff you get with the Sunday paper, all those … glossy, colored stuff, that you cut out the coupons?

AM: Yes.

JK: That was her. She ran that for the whole company, all the stuff that's in the Sunday papers. I forgot what [it was called], it had a name, but I forget what it was called, [circulars?], but, anyhow, where was I? Oh, so, the literacy program was the most enjoyable thing that I did in my whole life and, as I say, by the time I left, I had the whole thing on a computer. I actually built my own computer program to run the whole program. By the time I left, I can't remember the actual figures, I think we had about, I was working with about six hundred volunteers, I think something like 150 tutors and the balance were the students, just managing the whole program. It got to be so big. The whole idea in the program was to eventually turn it over to the local people in Newark, mostly, you know, ethnic people of Newark, to run it and I had a woman that … was working with me, [who I] was very fond of. … We worked together and she eventually took over the program, and I managed to get quite a few grants, a grant from the State of New Jersey and some private grants. So, while I was out working … mostly on a volunteer basis, although I did get paid for … teaching the tutors, so, I did get some pay out of it, but … we were able to fund her, so that when she took over, … hers was a paid professional position, and she was also … one of the officers of Head Start. So, she was doing two jobs, Head Start and the literacy program. … Her name is Ernestine Johnson. … I think she's still quite active in Newark, very fine woman.

AM: I know of the Head Start program.

JK: Yes, I don't know whether she's still active in that. I think what she took over in Head Start was a literacy program in Head Start for the parents of Head Start children. I think that's what it

was, because it was … [that they] were working together with our program in Essex County College, but I've lost touch with them. I kept in touch for a year or two, but I've completely lost touch.

SB: Why did you decide to move out West?

JK: For my kids. Yes, all my kids moved out West. My daughter went to the University of Oregon, where she met her husband. She's divorced, but they're still very friendly, and my son is in Northern California. My other son is, he's a Westerner, his wife is from Portland, actually, although … they are, … the two of them, perpetual students and world travelers. [laughter] So, they were two years in Peru, where she had a grant from the University of Michigan. She was with the Population Council, working with the Population Council in Peru, and, now, they're in Santa Cruz. She's going to the University of California now, taking more courses.

AM: If you do not mind, I would like to just go back a little bit to when you gave us some of your views of the Vietnam War; was your oldest son old enough to serve?

JK: Yes, well, … my oldest son was, as I said, … born in 1950, so, he was a typical '60s [person]. … Was it the '60s that was the tough era? … Yes, I guess it was the '60s. The Vietnam War started in the '60s.

AM: Yes, it really started to take off in 1965 and it lasted until around 1975.

JK: Yes, yes, my son was the typical '60s kid. He was the first one on the block with a beard, very much into drugs, much more so than I ever realized. I think they learned how to smoke pot from the babysitter, who was a kid up the block, [laughter] all my three kids. I had a suspicion they were into pot, but I had no idea he was … into much more than that. He was very much against the war, and he just told me; you know, let's see, well, he turned seventeen, he turned draft age right at the height of it, I guess in '67. He said no way was he going, even if he had to go to Canada, but he found out a way. He did it all himself. He found a psychologist, in Hackensack, believe it or not, who was willing to declare him insane, or whatever it is, "Psychologically unfit to serve," and the draft board bought it, which I was surprised. … I had no connections to keep him out, but he was determined he wasn't going to go, and I backed him up on that. You know, I had problems with … some of his attitudes at that time, but I must say that we never lost communication, and it was difficult, because I had people in my family, mainly my brother-in-law, who were very conservative people, you know, "Throw him out of the house." You know, "How can you stand the kid?" you know, and I know a lot of people who threw their kids out of the house, at that time, because it was a very tough, tough time, generational split. … My father-in-law was very good with him. My father-in-law was a very open-minded, intelligent man, and so, my father-in-law had lots of talks with him, and so that my son never lost contact with either me [or my father-in-law]. … Of course, he went to [college]. He started college and he dropped out in the middle of his first year, New College [of Florida] in … Sarasota, Florida, which was a typical hippie school at that time, and dropped out of his first year. He was a typical, guitar playing hippie and he just went around, bummed around the country, for five or six years and did odd jobs. I think he was a worm farmer, God knows what he was [doing], odd things that he was doing, eventually, ended up in Grass Valley, California.

… His guitar career ended rather abruptly when … during a job, the owner of the café pulled the plug and, of course, they went silent, everything was electronic, and told them, the only thing they could hear was, "Boys, you're fired." [laughter] That was his last job, and he was … getting a little afraid, because they were running into a lot of the biker crowds. … The Hell's Angels would come in and, you know, he was getting fed up with it anyhow, the whole scene, the drug scene, but he has since told me he was into LSD and the whole bit. Is that the word, LSD?

AM: Yes.

JK: Yes, I'm not much up on it. [laughter] Believe it or not, I've never tried it. I have no desire to try it, because I'm a non-smoker anyhow. … He ended up in Grass Valley, and so, he applied for a job. They were advertising for groundskeepers at this electronics company, Grass Valley Group, and he applied and he was turned down because he was over-educated, over-qualified, for the job, but they said, "If you'd like to be trained as a machinist, we'll offer you that." So, he took it. He just trained as a machinist and he went through the whole bit. He became assistant engineer, eventually. The company was taken over by Tektronix. Tektronix discovered that they had an engineer who had no degree in engineering, [laughter] because, at that time, it was a small company. So, they made him an offer that he couldn't refuse. They told him … either he could leave the company or he could go to engineering school at their expense. So, obviously, he went to school, but it was very tough. He already had one kid, another one on the way, he was married by that time, he had an hour-and-a-half commute, each way, to Sacramento, to the school, and he did it for five years, got his engineering degree. The company was eventually spun off by Tektronix and, now, he is director of the company. So, it's a real success story, and he is the most conservative of all my kids. … He has two girls and those girls better not try smoking pot, because … [laughter]

SB: Because he knows what it smells like. [laughter]

JK: He just did a 180-degree turnaround.

SB: You said before that you supported his desire to not go into the war. Can you tell us a little bit more about what went into that? Did you have many discussions with him? What was your thinking about Vietnam?

JK: Well, my feelings were it was an obscene war, … going back to my original feelings that the people were not involved. I mean, having been involved in the Second World War, I said, "You don't conduct a war this way." You know, I've always been fairly liberal. I've never been a Communist, but, … actually, I ended up studying Marx and I feel that Marx, the difference between Communism and Karl Marx, … there's really very little connection. Karl Marx was an idealist. He really was trying to better mankind and what Communism ended up [being] as a dictatorship was absolutely nothing that Karl Marx had in mind, but, unfortunately, he's got a bad name because of what Communism eventually turned into, but, while I didn't have any particular sympathy for the Communists, … I felt that the war was obscene and that, … you know, the whole "Domino Theory" was a stupid theory and that we had no business being there and I was very much against the war. So, obviously, I supported the fact that he didn't want to go get killed in it and I really felt sorry for the kids, because, … you know, it was the poor kids,

without education, who were just sent over there to be killed. It was stupid. All wars are stupid, but some are more stupid than others, I guess.

AM: I take it your feelings are somewhat similar about the Gulf War or what is happening now.

JK: Well, you know, I've had a lot of discussions about this war; I deplore the bombing, but I can understand, I can understand it. I mean, the alternative is to do nothing. I mean, I felt we had gone as far with our diplomacy, at that time, as we could and the alternative was to do nothing and … we had to do something. So, I can understand it. I don't like it, but I can understand it, and I hope it's in the process of ending now.

AM: You eventually came out to Oregon because your family is out here and it is where you retired.

JK: Yes, we have grandchildren and, you know, when our grandchildren were young, we would see them once or twice a year, which is very hard. Now, we see them all the time. …

AM: When you were running the literacy program, where were you living at that time?

JK: We were living in Fair Lawn, the whole time. We lived in the house forty-two years in Fair Lawn.

AM: You were still close to Paterson and close to Newark.

JK: Yes, Fair Lawn's right across the river from Paterson, yes.

AM: That concludes all of my questions. Do you have anything to add for the record?

JK: Nope, covered all my things that I had my notes of. …

AM: Okay. Did you have anything to add, Sebastian?

SB: I think I have asked everything that has come to my mind so far.

AM: Okay, and that concludes our interview.

JK: Well, it was a lot of fun.

SB: Thank you.

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

Reviewed by William Nesson 4/14/2010
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 6/11/2010
Reviewed by Jack J. Konner 6/25/10