RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH BURTON H. KREVSKY

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Mr. Burt H. Krevsky on April 24th, 1996, at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler ...

Ken Gilliland: And Ken Gilliland.

KP: And I'd like to begin by asking a few questions about your parents, beginning with your father, who emigrated from Russia.

BK: Well, that's correct. He emigrated from, actually, my father was born around 1864 in Russia, and probably in his early twenties when he was being conscripted for the Russian Army, which was sort of an equivalence to a life sentence over there, he decided to leave the country and head west. He settled in France, lived in France for about eighteen years, I imagine, and was a shopkeeper in France. He actually was awarded a gold medal by the City of Paris for having the best cheese in Paris in the year, I don't know, 1895, or something like that. Interesting. I still have the gold medal. It's not really gold. It's sort of gold plated. And he then immigrated to the United States somewhere around 1910 and met my mother, who was a native-born United States citizen. She was born in 1885, in New York City, of parents who came from Austria, Hungary, that area. And they got together, were married around 1911, I believe, and proceeded to have a family of myself, well, I'm the youngest, my two older sisters, a brother, and myself.

KP: What prompted your father to leave France? It sounds like he was very successful there. Did he ever tell you why he left France? Why did he pick France in the first place?

BK: Well, actually, he was married in France and divorced. And apparently, the divorce was, at that time, a tremendous upheaval in his family situation, and he decided to start over new in the United States.

KP: So it really had a lot to do with the break-up of his marriage.

BK: Right. Right.

KP: How much did he tell you about this?

BK: Oh, I really didn't know my father. My father died. Since I was conceived when my father was about sixty-one. He died at age sixty-five or sixty-six.

KP: You were six when he passed away.

BK: Five. And so I really didn't know him. I vaguely remember, but these are stories from various uncles.

KP: Oh, okay. So that's how you pieced together your family history.

BK: Yes. Apparently, my father was an energetic, go-getter type of guy. He was one of those who, when he got to this country, used to put a knapsack on his back with thread and needles and

housewares and go out to Pennsylvania and sell from door to door and made a living that way. And he apparently brought over his brothers and sisters from France and Russia. He provided their transport, so he was ...

KP: You have a large extended family because of that.

BK: Quite a number of cousins, uncles. Right.

KP: Did your mother remarry?

BK: No, no. She was a widow with four children at the start of the Depression. And I can't conceive of how she managed to do it, but she managed to run a small business, a little dry-goods store. It was called "Krevsky's Department Store." And she maintained that business from the time my father died until the late 1970s.

KP: And it sounds like she made a go of it.

BK: Oh, yes.

KP: How tough was it during the Great Depression?

BK: Well, let me give you an idea. There were some days when the total sales in this little department store were three dollars or four dollars for the entire day. Yeah, that was pretty miniscule. I should say this, that some of my other, my maternal uncles were quite successful at the time, but my mother didn't take anything from them. She supported herself. In fact, one of my uncles was president of a company that later merged with Libby Owens Ford. He was, I guess, the president of a subsidiary, and quite wealthy. So my mother was quite a strong character and not inclined to ask for help.

KP: Really? So she was very independent.

BK: Independent, right, and brought up four children. And during World War II, they used to have stars on the windows, four stars, and my two brothers-in-law and myself and my brother were all represented by these stars on the window.

KP: And your mother was very proud that she had these.

BK: Oh, yeah.

KP: That all her family was in the service.

BK: Well, she wasn't too happy with us being in the military at that time, but that was the way things were.

KP: How did the war change the store? I imagine that you all worked in the store at some point.

BK: Every one of us, yeah. And by the way, I wish that my children and grandchildren had the same opportunity, because I can't think of a better way for children to learn basic economics, business, and life as it is, than working in a small store where you do what you have to do to earn a living. You sweep the floors, you straighten out the stock, you put labels on things, you sell things, you give change. The mathematics training is great. My grandson has great difficulty with math. He's a fifteen-year-old. When I see his math ability, compared to my brother, myself, and my sisters, it makes me feel bad that he didn't have better training.

KP: And you attribute a lot of this to the store.

BK: Oh, yeah.

KP: How young were you when you started working at the store?

BK: As young as, well, five years old, six years old. You straightened out a little. At five years old, I remember straightening out little spools of thread, you know, in the thread boxes, just keeping them straight. Sweeping the store, picking up the papers, and you know, little obvious things that a child can do.

KP: Where was the store located in relationship to your house?

BK: Okay. Originally, like most early immigrant families, they lived in back of the store, and then above the store, and then they bought a house across the street from the store. So we were right across the street. All we had to do was dodge the trolley cars.

KP: So was this an entirely family-run store.

BK: Oh, yes.

KP: Were there other employees?

BK: There were many part-time employees, you know, school girls and women who helped in the store. We lived in a, obviously, with the name Krevsky, it's a Polish-Jewish type name. I shouldn't necessarily say Polish. I should say Russian-Polish-Jewish type of name. We lived in a predominantly Catholic neighborhood in Bayonne, New Jersey. We were right down the block from St. Mary's Church, and most of the people in the neighborhood were Irish-Catholic. And this neighborhood supported this store. It was a neighborhood type store. It wasn't in the business district. So it was really, oh, I think it was a great way to grow up and learn about all types of people, religions, ethnicity.

KP: Because it sounds that you were the clear minority in this district.

BK: Oh, yeah. Yeah. But there were, in addition to the Irish, next door to us were Poles, down the block were Italians. There were actually, in the neighborhood, a couple of blacks. This was a mixed neighborhood, but predominantly Irish-Catholic.

KP: When would the store be open?

BK: Seven days a week.

KP: Seven days a week?

BK: Right. It was, actually, six and a half, I should say. Six and a half. But that Sunday morning business was actually very important because sometimes the store would do as much business on Sunday morning as they would do all week. The reason being, I mentioned St. Mary's Church. The church, at that time, was one of the best-attended churches in Bayonne, and every time a mass would let out, waves of people would go past the store and stop in for various sundries and items, stockings and handkerchiefs, and you know, whatever, and they depended on us to be open. In fact, when they passed the Blue Laws later in the 1930s, [that no store would be open on Sunday], the mayor of the town, I think he was named Donovan, at that time, who attended St. Mary's, dropped in one time when we closed up on Sunday because of the law, and suggested that since so many people depended on us to be open on Sunday morning, it might be a good idea if we said that we're open in order to sell, not pharmaceuticals, but drug items, you know, like hair curlers and things like that. So it was a six and a half day week.

KP: I'm curious about the Blue Laws because it was a big issue for other people whose parents had small stores in the late ‘30s.

BK: Oh, yeah, yeah. It was a law passed that [said] businesses, except for essential drugstores and food stores, couldn't be open on Sunday. And it was a logical law for that type of town. But as in, this is Hudson County, New Jersey, and as in any town, the people who were connected with the politicians could bend the laws very easily.

KP: It sounds like your store was almost a personal convenience of the mayor.

BK: Oh, yeah. Yeah, the mayor and his wife used to stop in and shop on Sunday morning. She used to get her nylon stockings, or I guess they were silk stockings, at that time, before nylons. So that it was convenient for her, and she probably prodded her husband.

KP: How did the war affect the store in terms of supplies?

BK: Shortages, great shortages. Of course, nylon stockings were a big thing, starting in the early ‘40s. And, of course, the shortage of nylon, which was being used for wartime purposes, made nylon stockings a prime target of everyone. So getting supplies for the store, like stockings [was difficult]. Other clothing became scarce, too, but there were sufficient supplies [for them]. One of the problems was that prices were controlled which meant, theoretically, that the wholesale prices were controlled. But, in actual fact, the wholesalers boosted on extra premiums in order for you to

get any goods, they'd say, "Oh, sure, we'll send you something at list price, but if you really want to get it, ten dollars more a dozen," or something like that. So it was a squeeze on raw materials, you might say, for sale.

KP: And getting your supplies.

BK: Getting the supplies.

KP: Do you remember any particular wholesalers who were like that?

BK: No, I was ...

KP: It sounds like your mother would know that.

BK: Yeah. No, I just remember some of the names of some items. This was a little department store, so we had everything from children's wear to men's wear to rugs to shoes and sneakers. You know, I remember PF sneakers. They were the premium brand. They used to sell for a dollar ninety-eight. You can't imagine that?

KP: No.

BK: Well, the pricing of all these items during the Depression era is just unbelievable to anybody alive today. I mean, they can't conceive of a woman walking into our store, for example, and I would sell a house dress (at age eleven) to a woman, and she'd say, "No, I want something, you know, size forty-two, and two dollars and ninety-eight cents is too much. Do you have one for a dollar ninety-eight?"

KP: So you really had stiff price competition.

BK: Oh, yeah. Yeah. It was, even during wartime, it was a, this was not a big profit-making situation. However, it was a store that supplied middle-class Bayonne people with their needs.

KP: So you had a very reliable market.

BK: Oh, yes, yes.

KP: I've interviewed other people who lived through the Depression, and it was a very precarious situation for them. It sounds like you weren't quite in those dire straits.

BK: Oh, no. We were on the corner of 12th Street and Avenue C, and to this day, when you run into somebody from Bayonne, they'll say, "I remember Krevsky's." And people, especially after the war, would stop, fellows who were in the Army and Navy, would stop in the store because it was sort of a centralized location, like the old general stores out West, you know. This is where they used to be dragged by their mothers when they were shopping and so forth. I don't know whether I'm giving you a picture of this, but it was a, well, it was a key factor in my growing up.

KP: Because it sounds like you got to meet people you normally might not have gotten to know.

BK: Oh, well, of course. You know, some people who turned into famous people.

KP: Who did you have that was famous used to come to your store?

BK: Famous or infamous?

KP: Or infamous, maybe, I should say.

BK: Well, I can just think of one. What's his name? Brennan, the fellow who became a big financial power and owned the Garden State Racetrack. He used to stop in every once in awhile. I think he was selling insurance at that time. Well, this is not quite during the war; he was probably post-war.

KP: Yeah.

BK: Well, I can't recall any particular others, but some very interesting people came out of Bayonne.

KP: What happened to the store?

BK: The store was in business from 1917 until the late '70s or early '80s. It was about seventy years. Well, let's see, seventy years and, no, it couldn't have been seventy years. It must have been seventy-two years. My mother died in 1965, and to tell you the type of woman she was, she was eighty-four or eighty-five, at the time, and still working. And you know, it's like that old joke of people standing around, and "Who's watching the store?" I don't know whether you're familiar with this joke. But my mother was doing the books for the store two days before she died.

KP: So your mother worked until ...

BK: Oh, yeah.

KP: … the end.

BK: Oh, yeah.

KP: It sounds like she got a lot out of it.

BK: Yeah.

KP: She enjoyed this a lot, and it wasn't ...

BK: Since we're on this, I should go back a little. I mentioned I had two older sisters. When my father died, my eldest sister was in high school, just about to graduate. And my younger sister was fourteen, very bright, very sharp young girl. She had to drop out of school and help my mother in the store. She actually dropped out of an accelerated school program to help my mother in the store. Later on, she finished high school in night classes, business school, and, I guess, the equivalent of associate's degree. All at night. And my brother was only about ten at the time. I was about five or six at that time.

KP: So your going to college had a lot to do with the store and who was needed to work in the store.

BK: I was the only one who went to college, formally, and it was really a fantastic thing. I wasn't a particularly brilliant student or anything. I graduated high school in January of 1941. I had, I guess I had skipped a couple of classes, so I had just turned sixteen, and my mother didn't want me to start college in January, especially since I was a little sixteen. I looked about eleven or twelve. And so I took postgraduate courses in high school. Shorthand and typing. Then around the spring of 1941, somebody mentioned that there were some scholarship exams going on for Rutgers, so that sounded good, because I was thinking of trying to get into some cheap school someplace else. So I went over to Newark and took the scholarship exams. It was a Saturday, in Newark, maybe 600, 700 kids were over there taking this exam. I have to mention, one of the valedictorians of the June class saw me walking up to the scholarship exams. And he said, "What are you doing here?" It was sort of a devastating remark, you know; "I'm here to take the scholarship exam." "Okay." Well, comes July, we get a letter in the mail saying, "You have won a four-year scholarship, full tuition at Rutgers." Apparently, I hit the exam very well. That day, I remember, it was probably the most gratifying experience in my life, of my young life. I went up to the local tennis courts where all the kids hung out. And there's a mob of kids there. And sure enough, this valedictorian of the spring class was staring. They're talking to one another. "Did you get one?" "No, no, we were rejected." And I'm sitting there listening to this and starting to gloat. And then this same kid, I don't know whether he had something against me, yelled over, "Did you get your letter, Burt?" "Yeah. Yeah, I got it." "What do you mean you got it?" "I got a scholarship." Then silence, and the feeling of, "Oh, boy, did I stick it to him." He didn't get one.

KP: You got the state scholarship?

BK: I and three other fellows: A fellow named Al Brady, he's Class of '45, who was a top student in my class, a fellow named Herbert Dern, who was in the June class, and a fellow named Max Hollander, who, I think, was the salutatorian of the June class. We four, out of several hundred, got scholarships.

KP: So you must have learned quite a bit in high school. I mean, you did better than you even realized.

BK: I don't know. I would say our high school was just an average high school, with typical 1930s teachers.

KP: What do you mean by typical?

BK: Well, in those days, they didn't pay teachers too well, and most of these teachers had bought their jobs.

KP: Because of Hudson County?

BK: Hudson County. In order to get a teacher's job, I don't know how much they paid. Half a year's salary or something like that.

KP: And this was widespread?

BK: Oh, yeah, this was understood. This was, to get a teacher's job, in order to get a teacher's job, you bought your job from one of the politicians, from someone like Donovan, or one of his men, and you contributed to the local, what do you call it, drives? You know, the political drives. You have political drives, and, you know, the dinners and what have you. And that was part of being on the local payroll. But some of the teachers were, as you know, they, you've probably seen in movies typical representations of these old-time teachers. You know, they wore the same dress for six months and just managed to keep the kids quiet in class, never taught them. In fact, I credit the non-learning in my high school English class to the fact that I did so well in English, freshman English. I came to college, I really didn't know too much about English, or English composition, and the professor I had had a very specific way of wanting his students to write. For example, a five-paragraph form. I don't know whether you are familiar with the but, anyway, since I didn't know any real English from high school, I had to follow his exact instructions. I think I was the only one (at that time, the classes were, the grades were one, two, three, four, with the one being, one point zero being the best) who ended up with a one in English.

KP: And you did this without knowing how to write when you got there.

BK: Right, right. So I can't say that our high school training was super.

KP: A lot of people I've interviewed have romanticized their experiences in high school. I'm glad to find someone who didn't find it so romantic.

BK: The elementary education, I think, was better, much better than present day education.

KP: What made that better?

BK: The rote training, the emphasis on basic multiplication tables, addition, subtraction, the, what do you call it, even the little specifics; the teachers trying to get you to write better, to hold a pencil correctly, to make those little curls, curled As, or whatever. I remember that as a kid in school, struggling with it, because I was never a good writer. But some of the kids of my generation, you can see their writing is beautiful, and I look at my grandson, and I say, "Didn't they ever teach you how to write?" And not only my grandkids, my son and my daughter. So the elementary school education was clearly reading, writing, arithmetic type of thing. And actually, the social studies, I

think, were pretty good, because it seemed to me, that as young kids, we were more aware of the world around us, what was happening. I think I was in the third grade, and we got into a discussion about the Huey Long assassination in Louisiana. I can't picture these kids, at that age, discussing that, but I remember ...

KP: It sounds like it's a very distinct memory, too.

BK: Yeah, I remember it.

KP: Did you discuss the New Deal?

BK: Oh, yeah, you know, the New Deal, the NRA, social security, etc. These are kids that are ten or eleven, or you know, in that range.

KP: How much to you remember about Roosevelt's Fireside Chats?

BK: Yes, I recall those. We would gather around these old-fashioned radios and listen to President Roosevelt. He was a fascinating individual, a father figure. Maybe, you know, the fact that we didn't have a father was even more emphatic.

KP: How much did you miss not having a father?

BK: Yeah, there was always that feeling. But when they talk about one-parent homes now, I can empathize with that because you don't really miss what you don't know. I think my sisters and my brother felt it more than I did.

KP: Well, because for you, your father was just a vague memory.

BK: Right.

KP: You were just used to having your mother go off and work.

BK: Right. I vaguely remember walking down to the railroad station to meet him [when I was] three years old or something like that. And, quite frankly, kids in those days were much less, shall we say, "supervised." And when I suggest that my daughter let my granddaughter walk home from school, which is about a half a mile away, she's eleven years old, "Oh, she can't do that." She said, "You have to realize that, you know, that she'd be walking home alone." I said, "Yeah, but it's a normal neighborhood. It's not through the slums." "No," she said, "You don't realize how times are today," you know.

KP: It sounds like you went off on your own a lot.

BK: Oh, yeah, yeah. I remember, as a kid, I'd borrow my brother's bicycle and go bicycling all over. We'd get down to the bay, and at that time, they had the hulks of old sailing ships still out in

the bay. These are old ships from the 1800s. And we, as ten, eleven, twelve year old kids, would go wandering out on these ships, among other things.

KP: So ...

BK: So this type of a, you're really not on World War II.

KP: Well, we're doing three wars.

BK: Oh, okay.

KP: So it's also putting it in context.

BK: Oh, okay. I'm ...

KP: It sounds like you had a very happy childhood.

BK: I would think so, yeah.

KP: Yeah, I mean, you're really conveying a ...

BK: Yeah, I've often said that I really would wish this on any kid, because it was an interesting childhood.

KP: How active was your mother in the community? For example, was she expected to give a certain contribution to the Democratic Party and the Democratic organization?

BK: Well, I don't think she was active in, the store was too all encompassing. It was just ...

KP: Really? It was just ...

BK: Yeah, I mean, this was, they were open from eight o'clock in the morning until nine o'clock at night, and on Sundays from eight o'clock to twelve-thirty or one o'clock. So that doesn't give you much time to get involved with other community activities. And also, she had four children to take care of, even though one of the, my elder sister was now seventeen and working. She got a job in New York and eventually went to work. That might be interesting for you.

KP: Where did she end up working?

BK: Well, my mother, who I said was born in New York and lived in New York, and was actually an executive secretary for a major importing firm in New York. The company may still be in business. It was called Stromeyer and Arpe. My mother was the secretary to the president of that company. This is the company that imports King Oscar sardines, if you ever noticed this brand in the supermarket.

KP: Yeah, I've seen them.

BK: Great sardines. And here it is, twenty-one years later, or something like that, in the middle of the Depression. "My daughter's a high school kid with secretarial training, looking for a job." My mother called up the president of Strohmeyer and Arpe, and they said, "Okay, send her over," and they gave her a job. I think she started at fourteen dollars a week, which wasn't bad.

KP: So your mother, in another generation, might have been a very successful businesswoman.

BK: Oh, yeah. I can picture her, in today's age, being a CEO of a ...

KP: Major corporation.

BK: A major corporation.

KP: I imagine that you didn't travel very much as a kid, simply because there was always the store.

BK: No. But I think the furthest we traveled was to Staten Island, to the beaches. We used to go to Midland Beach. But people used to come to us, rather than ...

KP: Than you'd go to them.

BK: Yeah.

KP: On the survey, you mentioned that your father was Orthodox Jewish and your mother was Conservative Jewish. It sounds like you only closed the store for the high holy days.

BK: That's exactly right. That's exactly right. My father, well, actually, my father and mother were supposedly orthodox, but they were liberal orthodox types. I don't know whether you're, in other words, we didn't keep a kosher home, and ...

KP: And you didn't close for the Sabbath.

BK: No.

KP: Which you couldn't ...

BK: We couldn't. Well, we couldn't because of economics. But also, we were not that observant, so we were liberal orthodox. I wouldn't say conservative.

KP: Did you go to Hebrew school growing up?

BK: Well, not quite. Not quite. I went one week. The Hebrew school was uptown in Bayonne, and I and a friend went uptown, and during this first week in Hebrew school, I think we were about

eleven or something like that, my friend got beat up by some kids on the way to school. I stood there and watched.

KP: Why was he beat up?

BK: Oh, just, ordinary 1930, you might say, anti-Semitic type of thing. You know, they saw we were two kids on the way to Hebrew school. I guess we were carrying books or something, though we weren't wearing yarmulkes or anything. But that was, I would say, you know, just sort of expected.

KP: Really? This didn't shock you at that time?

BK: No, no, it didn't. I don't know why they didn't beat me up, but they beat up my friend, and my mother said, "That's it." So at that time, it was very easy to get somebody to come into the house to tutor, so she got one of these elderly Jewish guys. I don't know how, I don't think he was a rabbi, but he was an elderly Jewish man. He'd come in, I think, for a dollar a week or something like that, and teach me for a couple of hours, and that was my Hebrew school.

KP: Growing up, you mentioned going out to the ships. What kind of other activities were you involved in?

BK: I was very much involved in Boy Scouts, when I hit eleven and a half, I joined the Boy Scouts, and that was the biggest thing of my life. The Boy Scouts of America. We joined, I'll go into detail on this if [you want me too.]

KP: That would be great.

BK: All right. It was a small troop, Troop 17, of Bayonne, New Jersey. When I joined the troop there were about eight kids in it. In fact, I wasn't supposed to join until I was twelve, but I was eleven and a half, and they needed kids. There were only about eight kids in the whole troop, only enough for one patrol. And I remember that patrol name was, "Foxes" or something like that. And I was, like, the ninth kid, and the Scoutmaster said to me, "Gee, if you could get some other kids, you could be a patrol leader." So I went around recruiting some of our neighborhood thugs. I say "thugs," these were the tough kids in the neighborhood. And the way I recruited them, I said, "Hey, we're over at Public School Number Eight, and you can play basketball every Friday night if you want to go to the Scout meeting. They got a basket over there and they got a ball," you know. So I got eight of the toughest kids in the neighborhood. I probably saved them from a life of crime, and we became the Flaming Arrow Patrol. Now, these kids were all thirteen, fourteen. Big kids. They were tough kids. And before long, we started winning all the athletic contests in Hudson County. We were the, I don't know, champions in track and various things. There was only one problem. When we would go out on a hike to Staten Island, before the hike, I would go down to the local butcher and get steaks and everything. And by the way, steaks in those days, I remember going in there and getting fifteen cents worth of steak, and it was enough for a couple of meals. And we would go out, and I would notice that the boys didn't have any food with them. And I'd say, "Gee, wait a minute. What are you going to eat?" They would say, "That's all right. That's all right." And

we'd be marching over on Staten Island, and all of a sudden, a couple of fellows would disappear, and the next thing you know, they'd be back with chicken and turkey and chicken and corn and tomatoes.

KP: They had lifted it?

BK: They had lifted it from the local farmers.

KP: So you remember Staten Island as a place of farms.

BK: Oh, my God. Staten Island was empty. Not only farms, swamps. Because I once took them on a hike, this is later on, and we slept in a swamp over there. And in the middle of the night, we all had to leave because we were totally bitten up. Mosquitoes. Anyway, the Boy Scout thing, to this day, I love the idea of being in the Boy Scouts because it was a wonderful experience. Going through the, you know, Tenderfoots, first class, second class, first class, Life Scout, Star Scout, and almost Eagle Scout.

KP: Did you make Eagle?

BK: I never made Eagle. I had about twenty-eight merit badges. I could never pass the lifesaving test. I passed camping, I passed bird study, I passed, with a great struggle, the athletics, because I wasn't really an athlete. And every time I would go up to the Y pool, they would get a 300-pound gorilla, and he'd jump in and say, "Save me." And I was about a hundred and ten pounds, five foot. And I would (at that time, you had the over-the-chin carry, I don't know what it is now) but you'd get your arm around the guy, and I'd be under water, under this 300 pounds. I could never pass lifesaving, so I never got to be and Eagle Scout. That was one of the biggest disappointments of my entire youth.

KP: So the scholarship was one of your great moments and not getting Eagle was one of your biggest disappointments.

BK: Exactly right.

KP: It sounds like you tried fairly hard.

BK: Oh, yeah. And I stayed with the Boy Scouts up until the time I went to Rutgers. It sort of coincided with the time I got interested in girls and Friday nights ...

KP: You didn't want to be at the Boy Scout meeting.

BK: Yeah. You know, there was the contradiction there.

KG: Did you have to do a community project as a Boy Scout back then?

BK: We didn't have that, no. At that time, there were not that many community projects. It was a much simpler type of thing. You know, they just wanted to get the kids in and let them learn the miscellaneous things about the Scouts. The merit badges were really, I guess, that was the closest thing to community service.

KG: So did you do a decent amount of field time in Staten Island, or did you go anywhere else?

BK: Oh, yeah. Well, in order to get a camping merit badge, you had to camp out fifty nights and fifty days. Not consecutively. Originally, I thought it was consecutive. I never got that. By the way, I only went to Boy Scout camp one year, for about two weeks. It was a wonderful experience.

KG: Which camp did you go to?

BK: It was Watchung. Watchung Reservation, at that time, had a Boy Scout camp. It was the most wonderful thing. I never forgot that.

KP: Did you ever go back into scouting as an adult, when you got back after the war?

BK: Well, no, I didn't much. I never had the time. This is, time is the most valuable thing. I don't know why, because before I got married, there was a, there should have been time. But I guess, at that time, I was running around with the fellows and we were looking for girls.

KG: Where did you hang out when you went out looking for girls?

BK: Well, back when I first got interested in the girls, this is back in the early ‘40s, when I was turning fifteen, sixteen. Then we would look forward to parties that the girls used to throw at their house. And I remember very well the first party I ever went to. Let's see, did you want this?

KG: Oh, no. Keep going.

BK: Well, you know, this was the old kissing game party. Oh, my God, this is, you know, at age fourteen, I guess it was. And you know, I say, “You know." They played “spin the bottle” or something like that. What an experience to kiss somebody. You know, this was a totally new experience. It opened up a new world for me.

KG: A lot of people romanticized their neighborhoods, and you've given a very interesting account of how tough your neighborhood was. I mean, there were people who would beat you up and who got into all sorts of trouble.

BK: Not in my immediate neighborhood.

KG: But you knew …

BK: Bayonne is a mile long, a roughly rectangular city. And we were down in an area around 12th Street, and I would say within a circa of six or eight blocks. It was all lower middle-class and

relatively nice, friendly people. Up a little further was a sort of a slummier area, up around the twenties, and a different set of kids and ...

KG: Who would ...

BK: Who would say, you know, "This is our territory, and these kids are coming from downtown. We'll beat them up."

KG: You mentioned the kids in your patrols, how they would disappear and steal things.

BK: Yeah. Well, actually, I shouldn't get into this too much, but like one of my ...

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

BK: Well, this one kid, I guess you might say, his father was "connected," from an Italian family, and, I guess, his father was a part of the New Jersey family. So I think he took the lead in most of the chicken raids.

KP: Did you ever get to the Washington Jamboree?

BK: Oh, no. Oh, I would have loved to have gone to national jamborees, but we went to the county jamborees. That's about it. And I'm trying to think. I think you mentioned, I mentioned Watchung Reservation. At that time, there was also a camping ground called (Shiff Reservation?).

KP: In Mendham?

BK: In Mendham. We once went there in the middle of the winter, and it was really like Valley Forge, because we were freezing to death. It was below zero, and these kids were, we were in little dugouts, you know, lean-tos. And I remember that we were all standing around. One of the kids actually got frostbite, so the scoutmaster wasn't too well thought of after that one. But he was a wonderful guy.

KP: Who was the scoutmaster? Do you remember him?

BK: He was an insurance salesman. I think his name was Fletcher. Terrific man. He and his wife didn't have any children, and he was in scouting and, was it Fletcher or McFletcher. He was Scottish. Just a wonderful person, because when I think of it now, here he was, in the Depression, and I'm sure he put out a lot of his own money to do the things that we did in scouting, because this was certainly not a troop that was self-supporting.

KP: It sounds like you barely had enough money to do ...

BK: Oh, yeah.

KP: I mean, you did quite a bit for very little money.

BK: Yeah. I don't think anybody in the troop had a full uniform. We all had the kerchiefs, and we all had some sort of khaki pants or shirt, but there were very few Boy Scouts of America uniforms in that troop. In fact, when there were parades (this was one of the big things) we all had to scrounge around to try to look like Boy Scouts, but it was really a wonderful thing. And as I was a patrol leader, I always was very proud of myself because I was the youngest senior patrol leader in New Jersey. I think he made me the senior patrol leader at the time when I guess I was just thirteen.

KG: That is very young.

BK: … And I was very small, so I was always very proud of myself.

KG: How did your Boy Scout experiences help you in the military?

BK: Not at all.

KG: It didn't?

BK: Not at all. No, it was a, [there was] no direct relationship.

KP: Really? You mentioned you were very aware of current events. I mean, you have distinct memories of discussing the Huey Long assassination when you were eleven or twelve.

BK: Right. And also, you mentioned the Roosevelt things, the NRA, the AA, whatever the various things ...

KP: What about the coming of war in Europe in the 1930? How much did you ...

BK: We were very aware. And this is what gets me now. When people say they weren't aware of what was happening to the Jews in Germany, it seems to me we knew, or we understood that this was a really life-threatening situation over there.

KP: Even before Pearl Harbor?

BK: Oh, yeah. You know, they were threatening anyone of Jewish descent. That was really ominous, he was the symbol of evil.

KP: Because a lot of people I interviewed had said that the events of the 1930s were very distant to them.

BK: No, not for me. I understood this. And I wasn't particularly involved in any Jewish organizations, but we understood this.

KP: It sounds like you read the paper quite a bit growing up.

BK: Yes. Yeah, we were into books and papers and listening to the radio, news reports. You might say [we were] a literate family.

KP: So in other words, it sounds like your education came from working at the store and in reading on your own and in family discussion, more so than your high school.

BK: I would think that would, it would be a good description of it. I shouldn't denigrate the high school. It was good all-around high school. It was just not, you know, not a Rutgers Prep.

KP: What did you think of Lend-Lease and the whole series of events before Pearl Harbor?

BK: We thought this was a, I thought that this was a very logical thing and that it didn't even go far enough, because to me, it was obvious that this was an evil empire.

KP: So you were all in favor of intervention?

BK: Oh, certainly, and knowing that it would be war.

KP: Was your older brother subject to the peacetime draft?

BK: He was one of the first draftees in1940. He was twenty in January 1940. And he got a low number, and he was drafted, I'm sorry, he actually ended up being drafted in 1941, but he registered in 1940. He was in the Army Air Force for six years, and he, my brother, ended up as a corporal. However, he literally ran several Air Force bases. Have you ever seen *MASH*? Remember the company clerk?

KP: Yeah.

BK: That could be my brother.

KP: Really? He was the company clerk who knew ...

BK: Right. He knew who got what, where, when. In fact, I'll tell you a little anecdotal story. He was down at Savannah Air Force Base at the time that I was in the Navy, and I was stationed in Charleston, South Carolina. I got one of my few passes for forty-eight hours, and I took a bus down to Savannah. I didn't know where he was. I knew he was at the Air Force base. Went out to the Air Force base and asked for my brother, Seymour Krevsky, and they said, "Well, he's off for the weekend. He's got a pass. He's out for the weekend." And I said, "Oh, my God." So I go down to downtown Savannah and walk into the USO, and there is my brother. So, okay, so he took care of me then. He took me back to the base. And in fact, I was a seaman first class, but he put me up in the bachelor officers' quarters at the Savannah Air Force Base. And then late on Sunday, I said, "I have to get back. I have to get back, I think, nine o'clock or something." And one of the young flying officers there said, "Hey, I'm going up to Charleston. Let me give you a lift on one of my T-29 trainers," or something. I said, "Oh, great." And my brother said, "You're not going with him." He grabbed me by the collar and dragged me away. I said, "What's the matter?" One of his

jobs, not one of the officers' jobs, but one of his jobs was to clean out the lockers of these trainee pilots who were killed in training, and apparently, there were quite a number. And he would catalogue what was in the locker and get it all prepared for the officer to send it home with a note. And he wasn't about to let his kid brother go with one of these crazy kids, young flyers, so he put me on the bus.

KP: So you missed your opportunity to fly?

BK: At least with the Army Air Force. But anyway, I am jumping into the wartime thing, but Charleston, South Carolina was one of the worst possible domestic US places that I could ever think of to be in the military during the latter part of World War II.

KP: We'll come to that.

BK: Oh, okay. I don't know how much time you want to spend on ...

KP: Oh, we have as much time as you want to spend, so ...

BK: I mean, I'm busy talking away here, you know.

KP: No, no, no. It sounds like you would have probably barely made it to college but for the State scholarship.

BK: Well, no, I was going to go to college, but ...

KP: If it hadn't been for the State scholarship, what would you have done?

BK: I had applied to NYU and a college up in Boston. I don't remember which one. And I was also thinking of moving in with my uncle in New York and applying to CCNY, which, at that time, was a fantastic school. But that would have been a non-tuition type of thing.

KP: So you were pretty determined to go to college.

BK: Yeah, even though I was very naive and young and didn't have any idea what I wanted to do.

KP: You mentioned coming to Rutgers. How much of a shock was it, and what did you enjoy most during your first year?

BK: Rutgers was not an enjoyable place at that time. It was a culture shock, you might say. The most I knew about colleges was what you used to see in the 1930 movies, which was really ...

KP: So your image of college came from movies?

BK: That they were a bunch of rich kids here who were going to school and enjoying themselves, and you know, drinking beer and fooling around, and that it really, that the few people who came here for a serious education were a small minority.

KP: That was your image of ...

BK: Image, right.

KP: And when you got to Rutgers, what was the reality?

BK: Sort of, oh, I don't know what, I have to think of this one. I think I always felt that there were an awful lot of smart kids here and that I was no longer one of the few smart kids in the class. I was sort of one of the middle-of-the-classers, you know, that all the other kids were bright and sharp and valedictorians and salutatorians and all that.

KP: And in fact, your colleagues were very good …

BK: Right.

KP: ... For the most part.

BK: Right. A lot of my friends were pre-meds, and these kids were, you might say, grinds. You know, they, of course, at that time, their primary objective was to get good grades to get into med school or dental school or whatever, and these kids were bright, sharp. And as I said, I wasn't an outstanding student in high school, eighty-five average, or something, eighty-seven average, or something of that nature.

KP: What was Rutgers' reputation compared to NYU, or Columbia, or Princeton?

BK: Rutgers, as of now, I always felt that Rutgers was a step below the Ivy League schools. We had a pretty good conception of where it stood in the hierarchy of colleges. At that time, you had the Ivy League schools, which were obviously for the wealthy or people who were somehow connected with something. And the Rutgers and the Lafayettes and the ...

KP: Lehighs.

BK: And the Lehighs were, and University of Pennsylvania. Well, University of Pennsylvania was a little far for my consideration. My cousins all went to the University of Pennsylvania, and several of them went to the University of Pennsylvania medical school, so they were constantly telling me "come on down here," you know. But Rutgers had a very nice ring to it, you might say. It really was a, and it was a totally different school at that time. In September 1941, the freshman class was about 465 kids, and the entire school, Rutgers College, was about 1600, 1400, something like that. So it was a totally different university. It was a small university, a land-grant college. The thing that impressed me fantastically was we, if you were on campus at Rutgers as a freshman, there were many nice, simple rules and customs. We used to wear these little dink hats, or

whatever they called them, and if you were on campus, no matter whether you were a freshman or not, you had to attend chapel, Kirkpatrick Chapel, and listen to the dean and the, I forget who else used to lecture there. But it was very interesting.

KP: You didn't mind going to chapel?

BK: No, no, no. As I said, we got a pretty broad, you might say, ecumenical feeling from growing up in Bayonne. I've attended Catholic churches on Christmas Eve, and you know, gone to Protestant affairs, so this was not a shock. The Kirkpatrick Chapel thing was something that you were responsible for attendance, you had to get an excuse slip if you weren't going to be there. I don't know whether you are aware of these student rules, or if this even strikes a bell with you.

KP: Not at all.

BK: But apparently, you're familiar with ...

KP: A number of people have talked about it.

BK: But they were always interesting. This is the thing, I really enjoyed those Sunday morning chapel visits.

KP: Well, probably because you had very good speakers.

BK: That is right.

KP: I mean, one of the things that I've been struck with was the fact that you were exposed to a wide of range of speakers. I was very impressed as with my students, when reading the *Targum* articles about the speakers who would appear.

BK: Right. We really, that's just part of the broader view, I think, that we used to have a lot of knowledge of what was going on.

KP: What did you think of Dean Metzger?

BK: Ah.

KP: Everyone seems to have memories and opinions of him, simply because he seems like a very memorable figure.

BK: He was not a sympathetic figure. [laughter] He was a figure of scorn and many ribald insults. I remember some of the lyrics to the various songs, which, by the way, I never cursed until I was about twenty-one, so it was a, but some of the songs that they used or the lyrics that they used to talk about Dean Metzger taught me a lot about pornography. I didn't really know him.

KP: You never had any run-ins with him personally?

BK: No. I don't think I ever met him.

KP: You lived off campus at first. Where did you live?

BK: I lived, there was a, right across Hamilton Street, not diagonally, but at the end of College Avenue, if you keep on going on College Avenue, there was a store there called "Stollman's Restaurant Delicatessen," and up on the third floor, they had about six rooms. I roomed there the first year with a fellow named Herb Dern, who was one of the boys from Bayonne. And a brilliant boy, by the way. And he went on to be, he's a member of my class, and he went on to be a professor of electrical engineering at Columbia, and very, very high-powered person. Upstairs, in the room, we, by the way, we paid the munificent sum of four dollars a month each, for the room, and it was a good-sized room, and had a couple of beds and a desk. And in the other rooms, there were a couple of graduate students. There were about eight, maybe eight or so young people up there, and it was a very nice off-campus room. And I think I selected that room because, obviously, I didn't want to be a financial burden to my mother, who was struggling with this store. And when I tell people that my entire freshman year, including the entire costs for student fee, which we had to pay, which was, like, fifteen dollars or something like that, plus books, plus car fare going back to Bayonne on weekends, plus the few times that I used to get over to NJC. "Dates," so-called. My entire first year cost me about a hundred and thirty-five dollars. I have my records at home.

KP: That shows what you ...

BK: What I spent.

KP: Did you work at all?

BK: Well, in the store on weekends.

KP: On the weekends at Bayonne, but not at school?

BK: Yeah, not the first year. Not in my freshman year, no.

KP: But later years, you held jobs?

BK: Oh, yes. I had a, this was a wartime job. During the early years of the war, Raritan Arsenal, down here, was handling all sorts of military equipment for various Air Force, Army, or maybe it was just the Army, but half the student population who wanted a part-time job could get a job at Raritan Arsenal, loading boxcars, and taking things out of warehouses, and just putting; in fact, I had my first narrow escape from getting killed at Raritan Arsenal. I was loading a boxcar with a couple of kids, and just in the back of the boxcar. I was back there and, all of a sudden, a lift truck came in with a tremendous crate that had a tank engine or something, some sort of an engine in it. One of those big crates, you know, you see these boarded up. And it's coming straight at me, and I'm at the back of the boxcar. And apparently, he didn't know I was there and I just managed to

squeeze over. The thing went, “zoom,” into the back of the back of the boxcar. And I had nightmares thinking of being crushed by that thing. A narrow escape.

KP: How many years did you work at the Arsenal?

BK: Probably over a period of two years. And we would, I think we got seventy cents an hour, and we could come in whenever we wanted to, so we'd go over there at seven o'clock at night, work until eleven. And the main problem was getting over there. You'd have to get on a bus. And one of the, one or two of the guys had cars, but they, oh, in fact, one guy had a car, and he got extra gas-ration coupons because he was taking us to work at Raritan Arsenal. At that time, it was a little coupon they used to put on the front of the cars. A, B, C, D, you know. And he got a B coupon because he was taking people for essential military work. And it was a very easy way to make some part-time money. I mean, physical labor.

KP: And in a sense, you were also helping the war effort.

BK: I don't think that was primarily the purpose of everybody's going over there.

KP: It was good pay and flexible hours.

BK: At seventy cents an hour, great. I guess there was some thought that, you know, we're not in the Army, so we're helping them.

KP: But it sounds like the money was good.

BK: Yeah, I think so, I really do. I also had another job at Rutgers. It used to be the Ag school. I had a wonderful job there; there was a professor over there. I can't remember his name. Also, Mc something, (McLean?), or something like that. And he was also the state county agent for inspecting fruits and vegetables. And he had a laboratory over there, where he was doing various experiments, and he needed somebody. So I went over in the laboratory and he gave me the key to the lab and would leave me instructions and would say, "You can come in any time you want." So I'd go over there sometimes, after I worked at the Raritan Arsenal, at eleven o'clock at night, work for a couple of hours, and go home. Also, at that time, we had NJC, and even though I was a little young, I'd like to get over there. And sometimes, I'd go over there, and the girls had a curfew. They had to be in by eleven. So after dropping the girls off, I'd go over to the lab in the Ag school and work for a couple of hours. So those were nice jobs. I don't remember, I think that one paid seventy-five an hour.

KP: So you had a fairly good part-time job during the war?

BK: Yes, yes. And I would help in the store on weekends. That was the weekend assignment. The other things were during the week. In my senior year, I got a good break. They were running out of instructors, so they let some of the seniors instruct, I was an instructor in a physics lab. And that one was great pay, that was a dollar an hour.

KP: There would be a professor who would lecture, but you would run the lab?

BK: Right, and would, sometimes we had to give a little talk in the lab about how to run experiments and things like that. That's when I decided I wasn't cut out for teaching.

KP: I imagine that your first year of college was very stark, because you entered while America was still at peace, and then Pearl Harbor comes, and then the school steadily shrinks in a lot of customs.

BK: Well, yeah, this was a changing environment. I showed you that book. Now, that, if you ever get a chance, you can get it from the alumni, but in there. For example, *Targum* had a speech by Dean Metzger right after Pearl Harbor. You know, "Don't do anything drastic, don't run off to war, and wait and see," and all that sort of thing. Of course, there were all sorts of programs that I really wanted to get into. There were V-7, V-8 programs, the Army/Navy programs, and ...

KP: You wanted to go?

BK: Well, yeah, I felt that. There was a different atmosphere in that period of time. I guess, you'd call it patriotism, but it was also the feeling that this was the thing to do. It might also have been aggravated by the fact that a lot of us were interested in girls, and we always felt that uniforms were a great way to, I'm just kidding on that, but to ...

KP: But some said that a lot of people signed up for advanced ROTC because that way, they could go to the Military Ball in uniform.

BK: Same idea.

KP: I wouldn't say that would have been the primary ...

BK: No, but there was certainly, there was a feeling. I and my classmates, who were left, were all under Selective Service, called 2-A, which [made us] exempt because of schooling. We were mostly engineers, chemists, other science majors. And by the way, we were accelerated. Our courses were accelerated. And you asked me about Rutgers and whether it was a fun time. I think that was one of the problems, that when the Rutgers' acceleration started, we started going to class six days a week. We would have classes starting at eight-thirty, go through until six o'clock, Saturday classes. I remember lab classes running from the morning to the afternoon, so it was a real grind, and that took a lot of the fun out of it.

KP: Well, in fact, in '42 in the *Targum*, students were not pleased to have summer sessions. Do you remember any of that?

BK: Oh, yeah. The summer sessions were terrible. That, and the fact that I was working a number of jobs and the fact that I couldn't sleep too well because I didn't get much sleep during my college years. I think a good night's sleep would have been about five hours, six hours, something like that.

KP: You mentioned you didn't know what you wanted to become when you came to Rutgers.

BK: That's right.

KG: I'd be curious if Dr. Reiman …

BK: Reiman.

KP: Reiman had something to do with that, your chemistry professor?

BK: I liked him. I liked him very much. Dr. Reiman was a good, what do you call it, image? The only reason I took chemistry was because I liked the high school chemistry teacher, too, and I felt easy with it. But I never really felt that this was where I wanted to end up. It was like many kids, you really didn't know what you wanted to do, and it wasn't like I had any, at that time. Some of the kids had really strong feelings they wanted to be a doctor or they wanted to be a lawyer.

KP: You didn't have those?

BK: I didn't have that strong feeling. And I certainly didn't have the feeling that I wanted to be in a business, you know, despite the fun and training in the Krevsky Department Store, the idea of waiting for people to come in and buy your goods.

KP: You didn't want to spend your whole life waiting for someone to come in?

BK: No, especially, I guess, I remember those Depression days, you know, very well, where you've got this whole store full of goods that you spent money on, and nobody's there. You know, three dollars a day. It's pretty disheartening.

SPKR2: When did you decide to major in chemistry?

BK: Well, when I came to Rutgers, I had to have a major.

KP: So you decided to ...

BK: Okay. And I'll try chemistry. And I knew I wanted to be in some sort of tech science, technical field, some sort of science technical field. Because I really, thinking back on it, it probably would have been wiser of me to go into electrical engineering because I really had a feeling that the world was going to go in that direction, even at that time. I guess we all read science-fiction books or something.

KP: How much of a shock was Pearl Harbor to you?

BK: I heard it on the radio, and I remember it distinctly. I was listening to our big old Majestic radio and, oh, my God, you know, this was really a shocker because we were more aware of the events in Europe than they were in the events going on in Asia. By the way, we knew about the

China invasion, the rape of Nanking, the horrible things that were happening over in Asia, but we didn't know about these negotiations going on with the Japanese. I guess that was beyond my ken at that time, so it was a real shocker. And of course, you know, the surprise attack was really something that, just like Hitler. So it galvanized everyone, at that time, into a patriotic feeling.

KP: Because there was a strong anti-interventionist sentiment at that time.

BK: Not in my area of the country.

KP: Really? You didn't ...

BK: No, no. I think that anti-interventionism came from the Midwest. The feeling was, you know, that some groups out in Michigan were America-Firsters.

KP: You had a big Bund movement in America.

BK: I know.

KP: Did you know any of ...

BK: Oh, yeah, I knew the Bund.

KP: In Bayonne?

BK: There were some people in Bayonne who were American Bunders, heading out to Union, New Jersey. Yeah, it was, we sort of accepted the fact that there were, what can we say? Not nice people … there were cruddy people around. They were part of the whole environment.

KP: You played freshman tennis?

BK: I don't remember writing this, but yes. Obviously, they were out of tennis players. I played tennis, but I really, obviously, I'm short and not really an athlete type, but I loved to play tennis, and they needed tennis players, and I got on the tennis team. My God, I got my 1945 letters, and I put them on my sweater, and oh, it was great.

KP: Did you play any other sports? I've interviewed people who ended up playing in sports because there weren't that many people left in the school.

BK: Yeah, like, yeah, like one of my friends, who's a hundred and forty-five pounds, he was playing quarterback on the team. I think it's Acolia. No, Jacoby. Anyway, the pressure of work, the six-day schooling and everything else, cut down on the available time. Time was just, you know, it really, we really didn't have leisure time.

KP: Well, in fact, the students have noticed in the *Targum* that a lot of the activities that you probably experienced in '41, '42, just start gradually disappearing.

BK: That is right.

KP: Including the *Targum*.

BK: Right, the *Targum* was discontinued.

KP: The balls, you had this very elaborate social ...

BK: Yeah, that was sad. I was a little young for the girls at NJC. This sort of made me feel bad. And I always felt sad for the girls over there because there were no eligible fellows available.

KP: Now, did you date much after the war started?

BK: I really didn't ...

KP: You didn't take advantage of this real ...

BK: The only thing, I was once invited to a formal affair over at NJC by a really nice gal. I wish I could remember her name. And she was a year older than me, and I always felt a little uncomfortable. You know, at that time, age had a lot of difference. You know, I was kind of young, and I ...

KP: So you felt too young to be in college?

BK: Oh, yeah. That was another thing. I always felt that I was a little too young, that if I had it to do over again, I'd probably take more postgraduate courses.

KP: You would have waited to go to school when you were eighteen or nineteen.

BK: At eighteen, yeah, I think so. Because starting school at sixteen, especially a little sixteen, I always had the feeling that the girls over there were really condescending to go out with the last remaining males. However, this one party over there, I remember I borrowed a tuxedo from my brother-in-law, who was in the Air Force. He had left his tuxedo at home. And he had the tuxedo altered so it would fit me, and, you know, I wasn't about to rent a tuxedo. And I remember going over there in the tuxedo to this NJC affair. It was really nice, but I really felt sorrier for the girl, because she had to go with a young kid in a rented tuxedo. Not a rented, in a borrowed tuxedo.

KP: You were in ROTC even before we entered the war?

BK: I wasn't in ROTC.

KP: You weren't in ROTC?

BK: No. Bad eyes.

KP: Really?

BK: They were very selective.

KP: Even though it was mandatory?

BK: Right. And this was another thing that got me. I was, I had one bad eye. They said I was pratically blind. In fact, jumping forward a couple of years, in 1945, when I went into the Navy, January, somewhere around there, when I went out to Great Lakes, I had been enrolled in the special, what we call a radar-technician program, which is sort of a nerd program for these military, you know, they fix the radars. And I got out to Great Lakes in my civilian clothes, and they give us a physical, and they kept me in the infirmary for about two weeks after the physical. Finally, even though I was kind of frightened and everything, I got myself up to the base commander and said, "What's going on? Why are they keeping me here? Is there something wrong with me?" And he looked over the records, and he says, "Well, you're practically blind in your right eye, and we're trying to decide whether to give you a discharge or whether you should go in." I made a wisecrack remark. I said, "I can't go home. I had a farewell party." So he said, "Okay, you're in."

KP: But you probably could have gotten a 4-F.

BK: Oh, yeah.

KP: It sounds like ...

BK: Oh, yeah.

KP: You had the perfect reason not to join the service.

BK: However, I should qualify this thing. I may have actually joined the Navy to get away from some very dangerous jobs. When we graduated college, July 9, '44, I figured I was going to go into service almost immediately. I was, my 2-A was now over. So I went to work for a company near my home in Bayonne called "Tidewater Associated Oil Company," makers of Veedol. I don't know whether you remember those names. No? Okay. This was before John Paul Getty put together his billionaire Getty Oil. Okay. They had a refinery in Bayonne. One of my jobs, as a new young chemist in a refinery, was to go out to New York harbor and climb aboard tankers that had been unloaded. This is before the OSHA laws. I, by myself, would put a little red flag up on top of the hold. With a little meter in one hand and a flashlight clipped to my helmet on top, I would go climbing down an oily, greasy ladder into the hold, where they had, hopefully, cleaned out the gasoline and various diesel oil and so forth, squeezing the bulb on the little meter, holding on with one hand to the forty-foot ladder, and seeing whether there is any explosive or toxic vapors still left in the hold of the ship. Okay. I did this maybe a dozen times, and a couple of times, I slipped, and you know, but no problem. But now, it's around December of 1944, and it's freezing cold. There was snow. I'm climbing down the hold, and, "Gee," I said, "This is really terrible." I come out of the hold. This is, you know, "I've got to get in touch with the draft board." Because the next day, I

read in the papers, in the *New York Times*, three inspectors, doing exactly the same job that I had, three, had succumbed to gas and were dead. I went down to the draft board and said, "Look, I've been waiting now since July. Have you forgotten about me?" And they said, "Oh, no, your number hasn't come up yet," or something to that effect. I said, "Well, I'd like to go in." I said, "I enrolled in this RT Navy program, and if I go in, I'll go in the Navy." And they said, "Okay." Within the month, I was in.

KP: But you were looking to get in?

BK: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I thought I was going to go in any time from July on. But I must have been caught in a bureaucratic crack.

KP: You mentioned you enrolled in the RT Navy program. What program was that?

BK: This is the radar-technician program. The radar training, at that time, was a very elaborate course. Started off with Great Lakes Naval Training Station. First, you went through boot camp. Well, I should say that there was a, they gave a test to civilians to see whether you were adaptable for this. It was a very simple aptitude test, and anybody with a little bit of technical training would score well in it. In fact, most of my classmates ended up in the RT program, and we went out to the Great Lakes boot camp, eight weeks or something, six weeks, or whatever it was, and then you went to pre-radar training. And it was a very good course. Basic electrical engineering, you might say. And then we started getting into preschool. And about that time, let's see, I'm not sure how the timing worked, but this is, we're now around April of 1945. The war ends, the war in Europe ends. And we went through the first level of this radar training, and then, August 1945, the war in Japan ends. And they said, "Anybody who doesn't want to continue in this course, we'll ship them to someplace else." So, like a, after having gone to school under a concentrated effort through all these years, I said, "Good, get out of school." Dropped the whole thing. I was sorry I did, but they then shipped us out to California. I went into specialist training, specialist training being a person trained to discharge other sailors. So that's a quick resume of the military service.

KP: Were you at Rutgers when you had the influx of ASTP people?

BK: Right.

KP: And what was that like, to have such an influx of people who were sort of here but also not here?

BK: Really, there wasn't that much of an impact. I was thinking about that. Really, it was just like having a group of other people in another class, and some of them were in our class. They were wearing uniforms. They were being paid by the Army, by the Navy, or whatever. And really, there was practically no impact. They were just people who lived in different dormitories.

KP: They didn't take any of the girls away?

BK: I doubt it. I doubt it. They were just, well, of course, I wasn't really in competition. I was still going out with the high school girls.

KP: What about Camp Kilmer and its impact on the area?

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

KP: This continues an interview with Mr. Burton Krevsky on April 24, 1996 in Rutgers University with Kurt Piehler and …

KG: Ken Gilliland

KP: The tape got cut off before, but what was the impact of Camp Kilmer on the area?

BK: I think that the impact was not felt on Rutgers campus. In fact, there was no particular reaction**,** you might say. But in the city of New Brunswick and at NJC, there was certainly an impact. "The soldiers are coming. Lock up the girls," literally, because most of these fellows were heading overseas, Camp Kilmer was an embarkation point, they all knew that the fellows were gonna be shipped out. They got over the fence, they were looking for a great time in New Brunswick. I guess, there were occasional fights or something, in downtown New Brunswick, between students and soldiers. And there was probably more trouble over at NJC. There it really had, as I said, very little impact on the campus, on Rutgers College.

KP: Do you remember any of the blackouts or anything of that sort in New Brunswick?

BK: Vaguely. Really, we thought that that was, really, to get the civilian population into the mood. To someone who was following the war, the sightings of submarines off the coast and that sort of thing, it was ridiculous. As students, we all felt that we were beyond that sort of thing.

KP: Did you have any experiences with the black market?

BK: I knew people who, for example, the fellow who had the car, and one fellow who had the concession stand at football games. He was taking us to school, occasionally. By the way, he probably took us to the Raritan Arsenal twice or so, and that was that. He got away with the stamps. But I was not aware too much of the black market, of the short supply. The closest thing that we had to that was, oh, I forgot another job I had. We were still having football games, and one of my jobs was selling hot dogs and hamburgers over at the stadium at that time, whenever we had a football game. I remember one of the fellows' fathers had some connections in the meat industry, and he was the one who probably got the black market hot dogs to sell. At every football game, we would get hundreds of soldiers from Camp Kilmer who were let out to come to a Rutgers football game.

KP: So the football games were still really popular?

BK: Oh, yeah. And we would sell out of hot dogs and hamburgers before the half.

KP: And then you just watched the game?

BK: Yeah, right. But during that first half, we were busy. And I remember selling hot dogs, we ran out of rolls, we're just selling the raw hot dogs. And at that time, I don't remember what we were getting for a hot dog, I think it was fifteen cents or something like that. I think we raised the price. We, as the employees, weren't, but whoever was running the concession there was making out like bandits. Like black marketers.

KP: You never joined a fraternity.

BK: Yes, I did. However, I never felt like a fraternity man. The only reason I joined, I told you I was living off campus. The next year, I lived in Winants, up on the fourth floor, in the corner.

KP: It must have gotten very hot.

BK: No, very cold over there. This was one of the saddest things in my college career, I'm gonna mention something here which is sort of personal. The fellow I was rooming with was another fellow from Bayonne, a fellow named Max. And the best way I can describe him was he looked like, acted like, and was like Henry Kissinger. Very bright guy, very sharp, but typical German. "You vill do this." He was Jewish-German, but he was arrogant. He didn't like Rutgers, for some reason. He said, "We will be Phi Beta Kappa in our junior year." Okay. I had a fairly good average. I had a few activities going on. I was working, I had a heavy schedule. I liked to go over to NJC every once-in-a-while. And he sort of was irritated with me, that I didn't spend more time in my books. And we ran into roommate problems. One time, I had a tremendous cold, and he was a fresh air fiend, sub-zero, and we're up there freezing away. At some point, we stopped talking to one another. I moved out.

KP: Did he make Phi Beta Kappa?

BK: Oh, yes. He made Phi Beta Kappa his junior year, he got his doctorate from some school, and then on to, I don't know, be the research director at someplace. He was one of the guys in our class who's never at the reunions. He didn't want to have anything to do with the class or Rutgers. I think he got into some fracas when he was a graduate student at Rutgers. Dr. Reiman or somebody got into some real confrontations with him. He always said that he didn't want anything to do with Rutgers.

KP: So this experience in Winants compelled you to join the fraternity?

BK: I was looking for someplace else to live, and the Sammy house, they had a house right along George Street. It was right up near where the dormitories are now. They had an empty room, so I rented a room up there. I was on the porch. Talk about cold. I went from cold to colder. It was a porch, and my roommate at that time was a fellow from the Class of '42, by the name of Elliot Bartner, and Elliot was a graduate student, and we had a couple of bunk beds out on this enclosed porch in the Sammy house. Well, after living there six months or so, they said, "Why don't you

join?" Well, I didn't want to particularly be a fraternity man, it just didn't strike me. But finally I did. I joined, and I must admit that I never had any fraternity feeling, I really didn't have much time to get involved with the fraternity activities.

KP: Did you go through initiation?

BK: It was slightly barbaric. You know, paddles and that sort of thing. And I did my share of it after becoming a member, I ashamed to say. I always felt embarrassed. I felt it was kind've stupid. But they were a nice fraternity, I just didn't have any close associates. I guess it was the fact that we were so busy with classes that I really didn't have time. Socially, there was nothing going on. I guess we had a couple of parties. Come to think of it, I think I remember a fraternity party I brought one of my high school girls to, great girl.

KP: How did the date go? How was the party?

BK: That was a great date. Come to think of it, there were two of them. Now that I'm thinking, one of them was the greatest date I ever had. She stayed over. I should say something here. This is a different time and a different era. She stayed over, she slept in my room, there was no sexual context, other than a little necking.

KP: We've been impressed by how innocent it all was.

BK: We were really innocent, maybe, not by choice.

KP: We've interviewed some women alumni, and they pointed out the interesting dualities.

BK: By the way, I still occasionally run into this girl who stayed over. She was the cousin of a best friend of mine. She and her husband and I often kid about that.

KP: Is there anything we forgot to ask you about Rutgers during the wartime?

BK: Rutgers in wartime. The thing I remember about it is, as I've said several times now, is the fact that we were so busy, so heavily involved in classes and trying to study for them. The external, or extracurricular activities were minimal. The thing that we, Rutgers then was a, as I said, a small school, and many of the personalities in the school were very pronounced, like Ralph Schmidt.

KP: Oh, yes.

BK: Now, I knew him. He was a chemistry major. I always looked at him as one of the Jackie Cooper [types], you know.

KP: All of my interns love Ralph, and I've known him for about three years now. I get the impression that everybody loved Ralph.

BK: I mentioned him, but there are a few other people, I can't think of their names offhand. They were campus personalities. And I must say, that I still had that impression that I was one of the, not outsiders, but one of the kids who were not really up to the level of the …

KP: Well, you weren't a man about campus.

BK: Right.

KP: Because Ralph was the epitome of the college man.

BK: BMOC.

KP: Right. Ralph was also remarkable because he was a great chemist and he was a great athlete, as well. He did it all.

BK: Well, there were a few fellows like that. I can't think, offhand, of their names. By the way, I mentioned my roommate, Elliot Bartner. He had some interesting wartime experiences. He was one of the early, as I mentioned, he was a graduate student, went to work at Squibb. He was one of the early people to work in blood, blood collection. He went on to become the vice-president of some company in blood collection. That was one of the early companies that got involved with the Red Cross in collecting blood for servicemen.

KP: Is he still alive?

BK: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

KP: You mentioned that you had to force your draft notice.

BK: Literally, yeah.

KP: Where did you report, initially, and how did you get to the Great Lakes facility?

BK: That was fairly easy. The draft boards, Selective Service Boards, had a local office in Bayonne, New Jersey. You went down to the draft board, they put you on a bus, took us over to Grand Central Station in New York, or was it Pennsylvania Station? I'm sorry, it was Pennsylvania Station in Newark. We boarded a train in Newark, and it was my first experience with a sleeper [car], going to Chicago.

KP: You had a sleeper car going to Chicago?

BK: Right.

KP: Those are pretty comfortable, compared to the troop train.

BK: We each had a sleeper bed, and at that time, they used to have the porters, you'd put your shoes out, they'd shine them. It was really an experience for a young person who had never traveled before.

KP: Because you had not really left New Jersey or New York before.

BK: The "clickety-clack" of the railroad tracks. I'm sure I don't remember it, but it seems to ring in my mind. And then you'd get to Chicago. And then there was another train, the train right into the Great Lakes Naval Training Station. And then, it was the typical boot camp, where you had a Sergeant Bilko-type of [person], except the Navy equivalent.

KP: Did he had all the characteristics of Sergeant Bilko?

BK: And this particular guy, I guess he was a petty officer, second class, he really hated us. I'll tell you why. The average boot, in this particular group, had the minimum of a bachelor's degree. Many of them had master's [degrees], and there were a few Ph.D.s spread around. It was an academic type of group. And this fella probably hadn't finished high school. Certainly not. And we were sort of privileged. We all started as seamen, first class, rather than seaman, second-class, because we were in this RT program. And as I said, it was like the Sergeant Bilko, maybe I'm using the wrong term, but he was like a southern petty officer with a bunch of northeastern nerds. Subsequently, a lot of little things happened there, in boot training, that were funny.

KP: Any incidences that you remember? His speech must have been very different. He must have had really bad grammar.

BK: I remember he had an assistant, a third class petty officer, who used to distribute the mail, and for some reason, this son-of-a-gun took a disliking to me, I don't remember doing anything to him, and he would withhold my mail. And you're away from home, you expect a letter. One time I saw him, I was standing up in a barracks, take a letter and sort of put it aside. And I confronted him, and I said, "Hey, that's my letter." And it turned out to be [mine] and we got into a real argument. And this guy was a little bigger than me, maybe five foot, seven [inches], or something like that, a big fat guy, and we got into an argument, and we were on the verge of getting into a fight, and the fellows around us said, "Hey, you've got to go into the gym and fight this out." "All right. We'll go there at five o'clock tonight. The gym at five o'clock." You know, I was not a fighter, but this was one of those things. Some friends of mine in the group went over and casually mentioned to him that I was the junior lightweight champion of the Eastern Collegiate [Division]. I go over to the gym at five o'clock, and nobody told me about this, and all these fellows around there, and he doesn't show. They, thereupon, put me on their shoulders, carried me back to the barracks, and I was declared the winner.

KP: So they bluffed a victory?

BK: They bluffed a victory. It was a great bluff. The guy never, he never blinked anymore, I got my mail on time. Everything was fine.

KP: I've interviewed someone who was at the Great Lakes facility the same time you were there, and he told me he had a dreadful experience, in terms of being cold and having bad food.

BK: Well, the food wasn't the greatest, and I certainly was no judge of food, because I had, at that time, I had very limited tastes. I think I mentioned that I was in this infirmary for two week, in civilian clothes. During those two weeks, I existed on candy bars because I didn't like the food. One time, at Great Lakes, I remember there was nothing on the menu that appealed to me, except for Jell-O. So I piled up my tray with Jell-O. Now, they were a little, what do you call it, strict when somebody is sent to a reform school, I ate as much of the Jell-O as I could. But since I wasn't eating anything else, I had piled a real lot on this tray, like a mound of it. When I went to discard my tray, the petty officer, of course, at that time, who was in charge of examining the trays, said "Back. You gotta finish off that Jell-O." That was typical. You couldn't discard food. This was really a boot camp, where they watched over every little thing you did, and were very petty and restrictive, and I remember swallowing down a lot of Jell-O.

KP: You were in a technical program, but it sounded like your experience at boot camp was just like everyone else's.

BK: The boot experience was just like everyone else's.

KP: Did you do firefighting?

BK: Firefighting. That was wonderful. That was the most interesting part of that camp, how to put out an oil fire. You'd have a blazing test chamber, and you'd go in there with a hose and a water spray and put it out. And I'd never realized, even though I worked in a refinery, that this was something that can be done on a routine basis. And, of course, they were doing this on ships all over the Pacific.

KP: Did this confirm your decision to get out of your previous duty of being on a ship?

BK: I realized that many times. I hate to say it, but I joined the Navy to get out of a deadly job.

KP: What else do you remember about boot camp? You had caught scarlet fever.

BK: Right at the end of boot camp, I got scarlet fever. They put me in the infirmary, as I said, I was a little afraid that I was going to miss my leave and the chance to show off my uniform to these girls in Bayonne. Essentially, that was it. So I fooled them by drinking all this ice water, getting my temperature down for more than twenty-four hours and saying that I felt fine. I get home, I took the train, it was all trains, sitting up, going back to Bayonne. Got home, was sick as a dog for seven days, got on the train, went back to Great Lakes. We had our pre-radar training in a high school in Cicero, Illinois. Great place. It was thoroughly enjoyable. We didn't get any passes, but here we were in this high school in Cicero, right outside of Chicago, and it was, let's say, it was movie-like. We put on a play. We learned things. It was real fun.

KP: You enjoyed the classes?

BK: Oh, yeah, that was great. I met a number of guys there that I kept in touch with for many years afterwards, good friends, mostly fellows whose names began with "K."

KG: When you were at boot camp, did you have a lot of contact with officers?

BK: No. Only petty officers.

KG: So what was your opinion of the officers?

BK: My opinion of the officers was mainly [due] to my friends who went into officer's training. So I really didn't have any negative opinions. A lot of my friends ended up as Air Force pilots, navigators, you name it. A few in the infantry. By the way, I should mention one other thing that spurred me on, into getting in the Navy as soon as possible. In December 1944, soon after I told the draft board that I wanted to go, a cousin of mine was killed in the Battle of the Bulge. His name was Louis Krevsky, from Elizabeth, New Jersey. He was blown up by a 155mm German shell. And I just couldn't, I just wanted to get into the service, because I felt I couldn't face his family, being here, safe, while he was out there getting killed. It was a foolish thing.

KP: Some people have told me that there was quite a stigma of not being in uniform.

BK: Oh, yeah. This used to drive me crazy, because everybody would say, "Oh, he must be 4-F." 4-F meant [you were] either physically, or emotionally [unstable], that you were a homosexual, or that something was really wrong with you. For a young, teenage or twenty year old guy, this really was kinda hard. Especially when you're interested in girls.

KP: So you were at Cicero when you heard about the atomic bombs?

BK: Oh, no. This was, Cicero was probably [around the end of] the European War. I was in, then we went into the regular school at the Navy Pier. We were in there when the Japanese War ended.

KP: How far were you in your training to be a radar specialist?

BK: Practically at the last legs of it. We weren't taking it too seriously, I must admit. All of this being in school for four or five years under a concentrated effort, you're getting a little logy. A little too much information being poured in. Not the feeling that you really wanted to do this.

KP: Really? Even though the war was still on?

BK: Because it was obviously ending.

KP: Even during July and August?

BK: Wait a minute, I'm sorry. I'm giving you the wrong time. July, we were still thinking that we were going to end up in Japan, because we were still thinking about the invasion of Japan. None of

us were familiar with the atomic bomb and the fact that the war was going to end suddenly. Thinking back, I guess we were all still conscientious, working hard, [thinking] that this was going to be a longer war. That's right, because the finish wasn't in sight.

KP: But when the bombs were dropped, it sounds like the attitude really changed.

BK: Oh, my God. Especially to somebody who had some technical feeling. I mean, some of the people didn't understand what an atomic bomb was. But an atomic bomb, my God. The fact that they didn't set off the atmosphere was …

KP: Did you expect that would happen?

BK: Well, I would have, had I known about it. At that time, what we knew about chain reactions was very limited.

KP: How surprised were you that they could create an atomic bomb?

BK: Well, I'm also a science fiction reader. And, for a number of years, science fiction writers were predicting atomic weapons.

KP: So it wasn't much of a surprise.

BK: No, not to me. It was a surprise that they got it.

KP: Did you listen to the Martian invasion broadcast on the radio?

BK: I certainly did.

KP: Were you taken in by it?

BK: No, I was so mad. We were out, it was a Sunday night, and I wanted to get back to listen to Orson Wells. And I came back and we started listening to it, and "the people are all frightened in Princeton, New Jersey." It was really great, and somewhere, just before the end of the program, before I could find that they were all rusting away, the Martians, I think my sister said, "Go down to the corner and get a couple bottles of milk," or something like that, or soda, or something. And I said, "No, I have to listen to the program." "Go ahead." My sister, this is the one that dropped out of school. She was also very bossy. So I missed the end of the "War of the Worlds." I caught the beginning, anyway.

KP: Did anyone panic in your neighborhood?

BK: Not in my neighborhood.

KP: You didn't have any crazy people?

BK: No. That's an exaggeration. I don't think enough people were listening to it.

KP: You mentioned that you decided not to continue with the radar technician program because you had had enough of school.

BK: Right. That was my reason.

KP: Why do you regret not staying? Did you think that this would have been a bridge to electronics or computers?

BK: Certainly. It would have been a help to me in my later career. I might have gone into it. At the very least, I could have fixed my own television sets.

KP: But you did get to see more of the country, though.

BK: A little bit. I didn't get too many passes. I got one pass in San Diego.

KP: Where did you go?

BK: Los Angeles. One of my bunkmates lived in Beverly Hills. That was like something out of a movie, too.

KP: So you spent the day in Beverly Hills?

BK: We were down in San Diego. I'm at this specialist tech school, this roommate of mine says, "Gee, would you like to come up with us on a pass?" I said, "Oh, I'd love to." He said that his father drives down from Beverly Hills in a big Cadillac something-or-other. He must have been in the movie industry, and he took myself and the other fellow up. And we come up to his house, which was a very nice house, and coming out of the house was a gorgeous teenager in shorts and a halter top. And she and I spent the day together, and it was like being with a starlet or something like that.

KP: You were almost doing stuff they would do in movies.

BK: That's exactly right. Nothing sexual. It was just a great, it was a sailor's dream.

KP: You were learning how to discharge people. How long did your training last?

BK: Oh, probably about three or four weeks.

KP: And what exactly did you learn?

BK: Actually, I was an insurance advisor, which, essentially, it came down to telling these guys, "Keep your GI insurance. It's the cheapest, best insurance you're ever gonna get. If you want to, you can convert it." I was explaining how to convert it, and the details of discharging, going

through the various forms. The Navy has forms, and there're always special cases, and that's what took the so-called "special training." And then I was shipped to Charleston, South Carolina, which at that time was a hole, because there were over half a million soldiers, sailors and Marines there, all of whom wanted to get out. This is around September of 1945. Everybody wanted to get out.

KP: In a hurry, too.

BK: In a hurry. So we went on, starting to discharge sailors and Marines. And we were working six and seven days a week, just interviewing, just the way you're doing, only asking them to fill out the forms. One of the questions we asked was your question on "What do you think of your officers?"

KP: And what did people say?

BK: Almost unanimously, "Bad."

KP: I'd be curious, because …

BK: Oh, yeah, [in] the interviews, we knew what to expect. These young sailors had very little education. A large proportion were from the South and the Midwest, and there was a great deal of resentment against officers' privileges. I don't know how many of these guys told me about officers on an island on the Pacific getting shipments of booze in the airplanes while they were rationed on water. Other similar irritating stories. Officers being allowed certain facilities that they weren't allowed into. Everything of that nature.

KP: I've interviewed sailors who are still upset about this, fifty years later. And it strikes me that the Navy is very hierarchical. Did you have similar complaints from Marines?

BK: Not as many. The Marines were much more gung-ho. I guess their officers died with a lot of them. A lot of their officers were front line people. That was the distinction.

KP: So they were not as bitter towards their officers.

BK: Correct. That is correct. And this is the result of interviewing, literally, several thousand.

KP: It must have been really pronounced, if you're still remembering it now.

BK: Oh, yeah. It was a question they told us to ask, and when we got the answers, some of these guys would be mumbling and mumbling, you ask them this question, boy, they would perk up and … On ships, especially. Apparently, the distinction between officers and the ship's company, [there was] a great gap. The feeling was that this was a real, Catholic Church-type of thing, you know, bishops, cardinals, and down here, the regular priests. That may not be a good simile.

KP: Did you ever get the sense that the war was really bad for some people?

BK: Oh, yeah. There were, I would say, probably less than twenty-five percent had, what I'd call, a bad war. Another fifty percent had a boring war, and another twenty-five percent had a great war. Really, some of these fellows had a great war, in terms of doing things that they would never have done, [going to] places they'd never been …

KP: And not in harm's way, either.

BK: Not in harm's way. There were an awful lot of, like myself, I never got into combat. By the way, I should mention something about my brother-in-law. I had a brother-in-law, who's since deceased, a fella named Charlie Rudolph, he was working in Bayonne, married to my sister, at a place called the Maidenform Brassiere Company, doing war work. They were doing parachutes, nylon parachutes. There's a similarity. He was about thirty-six years old, thirty-seven years old, maybe, thirty-eight. He was drafted in early 1944. Now here's a fella, thirty-eight years old, you figure, doing mechanic's work and all that, and the next thing I know, he's out in Wichita, Kansas, training to be an aerial gunner. And the next thing we know, he's over Japan in a B-24, a thirty-eight year old guy, but apparently he had a very, very good eye. He knocked down three Japanese Zeros. My thirty-eight year old, or thirty-nine year old, by that time, he was thirty-nine year old brother-in-law, he got the Distinguished Flying Cross. He came home and went back to work at the Maidenform Brassiere Company.

KP: And he really saw it all.

BK: Yeah, he saw it all. He was on Saipan, taking off in these B-24s, flying over Japan, I'm not sure whether it was all Japan, but it was the Pacific Islands. My other brother-in-law was in the Eighth Air Force in England. He dropped a few bombs on Germany. He was an enlisted man, a sergeant. They were really involved in the war.

KP: Going back to your duties discharging people, I just wanted to make sure that what other people are telling me matches with your experience.

BK: I'm sure it does because this was a common thing, this "officer antipathy," you might say.

KP: Did you see any other patterns in these exit interviews?

BK: The pattern was that the Navy, apparently, targeted certain types of people for their job. For example, there were a lot of below-decks job requirements, the engine room people. I would say that, primarily, they aimed these at the least educated, the Southern kids who went through about fourth, fifth, or sixth grade. And it seemed to me [to fit] that pattern, [where] they would automatically throw them into the fireman school or engine room school. The high school graduate they would put on the upper decks. So it was below decks and upper decks type of thing.

KP: Were you really surprised at how different people's backgrounds were?

BK: We came from an urban area where public schools tried to get kids to go through high school. There were a few dropouts. All of a sudden, you realize that in other parts of the country, at that time, a high school education was considered a pretty extensive academic career.

KP: And you had gone through college.

BK: And we were geeks. We tried not to mention that, by the way.

KG: When you went through basic training, did you see any instances where Southerners were not used to civilization, like indoor plumbing and that type of thing?

BK: No, we never ran into that.

KP: Because your unit was pretty elite.

BK: We were an elite unit. As I said, our average education was [at least] four years of college. I don't think anybody in the group was just a high school grad, well, there were a couple of kids there who didn't finish college but had a couple of years.

KP: You mentioned that you were also an insurance counselor.

BK: That was one of the things that I ended up [being] one of the experts on.

KP: Did you encourage them to take advantage of the GI Bill?

BK: Oh, yeah. But that wasn't one of things that were on most people's minds when they wanted to get out.

KP: But did you ever actively encourage people to take advantage of the GI Bill as a way of getting into college?

BK: I'm trying to remember when the bills were passed, because I was still discharging people through March of 1946. I'm sure I did encourage them to take advantage of all these new schooling opportunities.

KP: But it was mainly the war insurance that you were pushing.

BK: Yeah, tell them to keep their insurance.

KP: Did many of them take your advice?

BK: I don't know. I don't know. As far as signing up afterwards, they didn't have to sign up then.

KP: Oh, it was something they did later.

BK: Yeah, they had a certain period of time, a grace period, in which to either keep their term insurance. I encouraged them, even at the worst, to keep their term insurance, because, at that time, it was $10,000 worth of insurance. I don't know what it is now. $10,000 was a lot of money in 1946 …

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

KP: You encouraged people to at least hold on to that part of the insurance.

BK: That was my primary focus as a discharge specialist, to try to get these guys to understand that there were certain things they were gonna get out of the Navy. Most of them just wanted to get out. That was the overwhelming thing. "Get me out of here. What do you have to fill out these papers for? Just get me out of here." But I was trying to tell them, "This insurance is something that is really valuable to you. And even if you keep it as term insurance, it's cheap." I think it was six dollars a month, maybe even less than that, five dollars a month, or something. And it was really the greatest deal they could get. Then, of course, we had, a lot of these fellows who had either wounds, or some wartime injury, and we had to make sure that the medical information was recorded properly, because, again, most of these guys just wanted to get out. But we knew that most of these guys deserved some sort of compensation for a disabled arm or something like that. That was another hard thing to get through.

KP: It seems that the people in charge of the discharge wanted to make this process as easy as possible on the sailors.

BK: Oh, yeah. We were all good guys. I think that everybody that met in the discharge things really wanted to do their best for the guys.

KP: In a sense, these could have been your experiences.

BK: That's right. Maybe we felt guilty because we weren't out there on the front line or something.

KG: So you weren't out in a DMV type of thing, where everyone was cranky?

BK: Oh, no. This was not a DMV. These fellows, most of them were delighted to see us, because we were the last, we were the guys who were getting them out.

KP: Were there ever problems with people's discharge or their records or something?

BK: Oh, certainly. I guess that was all part of the training, because a lot of these guys had demerits or brig time, and they were coming up for a discharge, and they might not have gotten honorable discharges. Some of them had served time. They were not all lily white. I shouldn't say that. These were all white.

KP: You didn't discharge any black sailors?

BK: As far as I remember, none of the people who went through our desk were black. Or if so, it was very unusual.

KP: Were black sailors discharged in a separate location?

BK: I don't know. Come to think of it, maybe they weren't discharged. Maybe they were long-term, they wanted to stay in because the fact that the Navy was opening up. Except for the fact that the Navy wasn't opening up then. But it was white servicemen, primarily.

KG: Did you ever have the opportunity to go out to sea?

BK: Nope. I once went on an aircraft carrier. I walked on, saluted the flag. This was in San Diego. I wanted to see what a ship looked like. By the way, I've been embarrassed about that in the past. My friends came back from Europe and they were in Patton's army, and this and that, and, "What did you do during the war?"

KP: In some ways, you've told more that they would have. Some people tend to romanticize their experience in the war.

BK: The stories that we got, in pretty horrible detail, about the living conditions, the boredom, the total difference that they perceived between their lives and the officers' lives. And it was real, they were not imagined gripes. [They were] corroborated.

KP: And you reported this to the …

BK: Oh, yeah. We wrote it all down.

KP: Did you have a sense of who read this stuff?

BK: I know there were a couple of officers in our group who read it, and I can vaguely remember one of them shaking their head and saying, "Doesn't anybody have a nice word to say?" Something like that. But I can't say that they did. There were, I would say, no favorable remarks about the officer-enlisted man relationship in the Navy at that time. And as you pointed out, there was a distinct difference between the Navy and the Marine people. The Marines seemed to have greater respect and regard for their officers. By the way, I found this out later. I did a little stint of consulting at the US Marine Corps headquarters in 1951, I spent a few months on a project there …

KP: When you worked for American Power Jet?

BK: Yes. That was a consulting firm. It was sort of an East Coast Rand. Are you familiar with the Rand Corporation?

KP: Yeah.

BK: We did operations research. OR. And I got the impression, when I was at the Marine Corps headquarters in '51, the officer-enlisted man relationship was great, especially under battle conditions.

KP: That's the sense that I've gotten from interviewing Marines. Could you talk a little more about Charleston?

BK: It was just inundated with military people.

KP: What was the relationship between the military and the civilian population?

BK: I think the civilians were frightened to death, quite frankly. The streets were flooded with soldiers, sailors, Marines. I imagine that any father, with a couple of teenage girls, kept them under lock and key, because it was just too much.

KP: What about living in the South?

BK: I didn't get any impression of that. I spent most of my time on the base, except for that one pass to Savannah.

KP: And even that was like living in another place.

BK: I may have taken one other pass. I think I got out of town. I thumbed a ride up to Columbia, South Carolina. I wanted to see the South Carolina countryside.

KG: Did you ever had Shore Patrol duty?

BK: No, I never got into Shore Patrol. I mean, this was not something that the ordinary sailor got into.

KG: I thought that the Shore Patrol was something that you got assigned into once-in-a-while.

BK: I don't think so. I think that's a special area, like insurance specialist, they pick out those they think would be logical, police-type people, and put them in the Shore Patrol. That's a guess. I should mention one other thing here. I don't know why it occurred to me, you were talking about people with bad wartime experiences. From my high school class, there were many casualties, fellows that I knew. And it really made us feel as if we had to get in. One of my best friends in high school, a kid named Billy Miller, was taking Air Force training, and one weekend in early 1944, I was still in college, he came in, and, I remember, we went over into New York. He was in uniform, and I was this little civilian. We picked up two girls around Times Square, or something like that, had an innocent few hours with these girls, and then went home to Bayonne on the bus. And I remember him telling me that he was really frightened of flying one particular aircraft, because it seemed to be so fast, he always felt as if he wasn't in control. He was flying a B-25. The next week, his mother got a telegram. He crashed into a mountain in Pennsylvania, killed in a B-25. It was really sad. Any casualty is sad.

KP: It sounds like you did not want to stay in the Navy.

BK: It was over.

KP: When were you discharged and why Ledo Beach? Why not just get discharged in Charleston? Is there a story there?

BK: A very little story. I'm really taking a lot of your time. I was in Charleston, I didn't like it there. I was discharging sailors and Marines, I said, "Gee, I could do this somewhere near home. I could get back to my Bayonne roots." So I went to the chief petty officer, he was an old Navy man with stripes and bars on his arms. He said, "Nobody gets out of Charleston. You're here and you're gonna stay here." I said, "Gee, the Navy doesn't care." "Nobody gets out." So I had a friend who was in the office there, a young WAVE, and I was friendly with her. She said, "Well, you know, you can put in a request. There's a rule in the Navy that you can always put in a request." So I said, "Okay, I'll put in a request." And I wrote down, "I can do this discharge duty closer to home. My mother is a widow, my brothers-in-law are all overseas and there are no males around, it would be nice during this period, since I could do the same thing close by," sent the letter in. I think she facilitated to get it on the desk [of the captain of the base]. I don't hear anything more about it. This is around October of 1945. I don't hear anything else about it until January of 1946. Suddenly, a written order comes through, "You will report to Ledo Beach on Monday morning," this was like Thursday or something, "pick up your traveling papers and everything." I go into the chief petty officer, the one who says that nobody gets out, and I said, "Gee, I just got this order." "What do you mean?" And he looks at it, and, have you ever seen these Edward Kennedy movies, these old movies? He took off his hat, a white hat, threw it on the floor, and stomped on it. Apparently, nobody had ever gone through the routine of writing a request and having it approved. Apparently, these requests had to go to Washington, and somebody in the Chief of Naval Operations stamps the requests and says, "Ship this guy out." Well, nobody in the whole barracks would believe that I did it with a request. Nobody had apparently tried it. And I got tired of explaining this. I said, "All right, you want the truth? Didn't you ever hear of Rear Admiral Seymour Krevsky? My uncle." That they believed. I ran into a couple of fellows from there, years later, and they asked me how my brother, the admiral, was. I think I said, "Uncle." I went up to New York, and there was a Navy Bureau Office on Battery Place, I believe it was. I presented my papers and they were supposed to ship me to Ledo Beach; but there was a WAVE there, and I guess I was a cute kid in a Navy uniform. She said, "You want to go over there?" I said, "Is there any choice?" She said, "Sure. Where do you live?" I said, "I live in Bayonne." "Well, there's a Bayonne Naval Supply Depot." I said, "Can you send me over there?" "Sure." So she sent me over to the Bayonne Naval Supply Depot.

KP: What did you do there?

BK: I worked on old IBM machines, but the first day I got there, all right, I'll tell you this one. This'll give you the idea of some of the feelings of basic Navy men versus these semi-Navy men. When I got into the Bayonne Naval Supply Depot, they said I was assigned to a barracks, which was a Quonset hut. Actually, two Quonset huts, about forty feet long, and there was a chief there,

a Southern chief, who looked at my record and said, "You're a college graduate, huh? I got just the job for you." Between these two Quonset huts, they were separated by about twenty or forty feet, there was a pile of coal about fifty feet long and about thirty feet high. Coal, you know, that you shovel in the furnace? He said, "You see that wheelbarrow over there? You see that shovel? I want you to move this pile to the other side of the Quonset hut."

KP: So you spent the day doing that?

BK: A day? Two weeks. It took me two weeks.

KP: Charleston must have looked better.

BK: I needed showers at least twice a day. Finally, I got the coal over there, I was assigned to an IBM type machine, some computer-type machine in the office there, logging in old munitions or something.

KP: And you spent the rest of your service in Bayonne.

BK: Until Ledo Beach discharged me.

KP: And you knew the process very well.

BK: I knew the process inside out.

KP: And you kept your insurance, I assume?

BK: I kept my term insurance and converted it, after getting married in 1950.

KP: And you still have it?

BK: I sure do. It's the most wonderful insurance. You can let that insurance build up, so you get more insurance, or else you can take the dividends. Well, I've been taking the dividends every year, and this year, I get checks for $540 each year, on that paid-up insurance. This was fantastic. It was like making an investment in a good stock, back in 1950, which I didn't do.

KP: You used some of your GI Bill benefits.

BK: Yes. It was a wonderful thing. When I got out of the Navy, still not being sure of what I wanted to do, but figuring that I better do something, I went back to school full-time, at what was then called Brooklyn Polytech, got a Master's degree, and I got it in one year. I also used it towards a Ph.D., but I never got the Ph.D.

KP: And getting this graduate school training would have been more difficult without the GI Bill.

BK: I would assume so. I would have probably gone to work and done it at night.

KP: But this way, you could do it full-time.

BK: I did it full-time. It was a really fantastic thing. It was like having a four year scholarship, only more.

KP: Because you got living allowances.

BK: You got a little living allowance, I think it was sixty-five dollars a month, or something like that. And it paid for miscellaneous things, like books and slide rules, and all these things that, even with the best scholarships, you don't get. So the GI Bill was a nice gift from the government, for a relatively short period of service.

KP: In your case.

BK: In my case.

KP: You ended up working for another oil company.

BK: I went back to work for the same oil company that I was working for, only this time, [I was in the] research department. White-collar job.

KP: So your other job had been a blue-collar job?

BK: I was a chemist then, it was a white-collar job, but with basic requirements that were a lot more manual, you might say.

KP: Were you in a union then?

BK: No. I was never in a union.

KP: Because you mentioned that you were part of the Oil and Chemical Workers of America on the survey.

BK: What did I say? It does not sound right.

KP: Oh, wait. It said, "Does your business have a union?" I'm sorry.

BK: I couldn't have said that. I was never in the union. I was always part of management, even when I was crawling down the hull and falling down a ladder.

KP: What did you do in the research department?

BK: This was general petroleum research, I worked on various lubricating oils, gasoline, the early stages of detergents. You wouldn't know about this, but there was a time when there were no

detergents, no "All," or there were just old-fashioned soaps, and we were working on the early saponification type things, with oils. It was really a, when I think of it, it was pre-history.

KP: But you saw those changes occur.

BK: However, I got my master's degree in polymer chemistry. Physical chemistry but polymer chemistry. I really liked the idea of the plastics industry. This was really fascinating, because at that time, the plastics industry was very, very small.

KP: And very little was in plastics. Now, it's everywhere.

BK: At that time, almost everything was what we called "thermoset plastics," which were non-melting plastics. They were things like the old bakelite and billiard balls, that type of thing. Nobody had any conception of typewriter cases or television cases or anything like that. That was far beyond anybody's dreams. That was really an early time, I can go on for hours about plastics. Don't get me started. Remember the movie *The Graduate*?

KP: Yes.

BK: "I have one word for you. Plastics."

KP: And there seems to be some truth in that statement.

BK: The concept of the plastics world was not in place in 1945-1946.

KP: In the movie, that was a very comical scene.

BK: The movie was in 1967.

KP: That was when plastics was fairly well-accepted. But in '45, '46, it sounds like you were very excited to be in on the cutting edge of technology.

BK: Yes, but I went back to work at the oil company, because that's where I had the job. Jobs were not easy to get, even though, coming out of the Depression, even though the war had lifted the economy, it was a good idea to take a job. By the way, the first time I went to work for Tide Water Associated Oil Company, forerunner of Getty, I started at what I thought was a reasonably good salary of forty dollars a week, which was pretty good. A dollar an hour. Except that we weren't on a hourly basis. We were expected to work whatever hours were required. But forty dollars a week was pretty good. I went back in the research department, I think I started at $175 a month, which is a little more than forty a week. When J. Paul Getty took over Tide Water Associated Oil Company, he passed an edict. Now, he must have had, at that time, 30,000 employees. No one in the professional staff got a raise without his approval. Our raises, at that time, were like twenty-five dollars a month. That was considered a normal raise. And this didn't happen every month. This happened every year, or fourteen months, or sixteen months, or something like that.

KP: And he would personally approve everyone's raises?

BK: Jean Paul Getty, whatever his name was. The billionaire.

KP: You would end up leaving the oil company.

BK: Right. I finally decided to leave the oil company. Are you interested in this post-war stuff?

KP: Oh, yeah.

BK: Okay. I left the oil company, I had gotten married, I got married January 1, 1950. We're gonna have everybody in the world celebrating our fiftieth anniversary. January 1, 2000.

KP: Did you plan that when you got married?

BK: Yes, we planned it that way. I'm kidding. A lot of people ask me, "Why didn't you get married in December, you could have had an income tax deduction?" But at that time, my wife was in art school, she wasn't making any money, she wasn't working at all, and I was making the minimal, so income tax didn't come into it.

KP: How did you meet your wife?

BK: Blind date set up by a friend. I met my wife in New York on a bitter cold day in January 1949. I said I was going to take her to a movie. I had parked my car, it was very difficult to find a parking space, and she said, "Oh, I love to walk." It was a windy, rainy, sleety day. I made her walk from 82nd Street, on Broadway, to 5th Avenue and 49th Street. And we got to the movie, it was *Henry V*, playing at the Plaza Theater. And we went up to the box office, and they said that it was five dollars a person. Five dollars per person in 1949 sounded like a Broadway show. I said, "Gee," this is my first date with this girl, "I didn't realize it was so expensive." She said, "That's all right. We don't have to go here." So I said, "Why don't we go down to Radio City Music Hall?" So we walked down from 59th Street to Radio City. Meanwhile, this blizzard is going on, the wind is whipping down, we're both sniffling. We go into Radio City Music Hall. That was okay, I think, it was a buck and a half or something. And unfortunately, they were showing *Little Women*. And she's sort of sniffling from the cold and from *Little Women*, and I'm sort of sniffling from the cold. We get outside, I said, "Gee, we better get a cab, or jump on the subway." "Oh, no," she said. "We can walk." So we walked back to 82nd Street in a blizzard. Sub-zero temperatures.

KP: So it sounds like you were fated to be together.

BK: We get to the front door, my wife puts out her hand, we shake hands, and I said, "That was very nice. I had a great time. Goodbye." Never see her again. Okay, next scene, Jersey seashore, July 4th weekend, my friends all have dates down there. I came down late, I was working in the store on the weekend, come down late, and they said, "Oh, we'll get a girl for you." "No, no. I can get my own girl." Somebody told me that my wife, Sally, was around there. Call her up on a Saturday night, on July 4th and said, "Gee, I just happened to be down here. Would you happen to

be busy this weekend?" "No, I'll be glad to go out with you." That did it. Okay. By the way, my wife, at that time, was sort of a dead ringer for Elizabeth Taylor.

KP: Really?

BK: Light blue eyes. So you can see what happened.

KP: Could you talk about the work you did at American Power Jet?

BK: The thing I remember the most about that was it was like the first year at college. I felt I was in with a group of geniuses, and being just an average human being, that I was at the low end of the scale. These were extremely bright human beings. Extremely. Some of them had Ph.D.s, various levels of education, but they were all sharp. They were all people that you would expect to be at the head of a department in an academic setting. And this was the early stages of operations research. Are you familiar with OR?

KP: Just the basics. What was the project that you worked on?

BK: They were all classified projects at that time, but they're declassified now, so I can talk about them. One of them was how do you get an amphibious Marine division over a mined beachhead with the least possible casualties. And this involved all sorts of ways that you break up minefields, and we went through all the Russian military reports, of how they did it with the Germans. The fellows who did it in Saipan and Taiwan and Iwo Jima and everything. This was at the time of the Korean War, so we were trying to figure out if they had to, there was the Inchon invasion, if they had to make another beachhead, how to do it. And this was one of the projects. And there were Air Force projects. We had a couple of Marine projects.

KP: It sounds like you were making an important contribution to national defense.

BK: Oh, yeah. We were part of the national defense scene. We had to go through Top Secret classification. And, in fact, we were classified "Top Secret: Atomic." So we were a part of the military-industrial complex. But this was the intellectual analysis of these operations. By the way, you're not familiar with OR, but OR was one of the big success stories of World War II.

KP: It sounds like you had a big commitment to this work. You knew that it was important.

BK: Yes. It really was. It was a fascinating field. A lot of statistics, a lot of …

KP: I've seen some of the Rand studies.

BK: Modeling. That's the type of thing.

KP: Why did you leave?

BK: I have a new wife, a new baby, making a little bit of money, not too much, and I was thinking, the company got into trouble. The head of the company was a guy named Dr. George Chernowitz. He was the youngest member of the War Production Board during World War II. There're many stories about him. He was one of these geniuses. A doctorate in physics, a doctorate in electrical engineering, a doctorate in some other field, and youngest member of the War Production Board. When the war ended, he set up his own little company. The only thing was, he was not an ordinary boss. He was genius; he was the type of guy, I'd walk in his office and he'd be sitting there with his feet up at the desk, reading a comic book. This was a distinguished, executive character. One day, we get a call from the Marine Corps headquarters, they've notified us several times, and they're coming up to pick up their top-secret documents. Top-secret documents can only be taken out for certain periods of time. They're loaned out to the military, let's say, for sixty days or thirty days. You can get an extension for another thirty days. I think there were 6,250 documents that were overdue by as much as six months. We go into his office, he was off on a trip someplace, I think it was at Wright-Paterson or something. And on his desk (this was a small company, by the way; there were only about forty people) we find four telegrams from the Marine Corps on subsequent dates, asking for these documents back. Well, we were using the documents, and apparently, we had run out of extensions, and he ignored them. He was that kind of guy. The next morning, a contingent of armed Marines drive up in three station wagons and proceeds to go through our locked cabinets and take these documents out. Six thousand and some odd documents. I figure, "Boy, we're gonna lose these contracts. This company is going down the drain." So that, in combination with my very practical thinking, "Maybe I better get into something civilian."

KP: Even though you liked the work a lot.

BK: Oh, yeah. But as I said, I always felt that I was one of the less likely people to be in this field.

KP: That you were not going to be the leader.

BK: Right. I felt that in order to be in this field, you had to be at the genius level. It's a feeling of, "Gee, I'm out of my league."

KP: It's rare to have the gift of genius.

BK: I probably was wrong. They probably weren't as bright as I thought, looking back on it now.

KP: So you went into lubrication engineering.

BK: Very practical.

KP: Yeah. I wouldn't say boring, but …

BK: Back in the oil industry. I looked for a job in the plastics industry, but this one turned up, and this was a small company doing reprocessing oil. They had a little refinery in Newark, and they went under four different names. Lubrication engineering, I can't think of the names right now. Four different engineering companies. We would go around to different companies, major

companies, and, literally, do surveys on their plants and suggest different kinds of oils and greases. And during that, the biggest thing that I ever did there, I set up a grease plant for them. I still have some of the old grease that I made in 1952. Great grease.

KG: Is it true that you have your own patent?

BK: Not at that plant, I did everything with readily available technology. There was nothing creative in my part except putting it together. Well, I might have been a little creative, because I did it very inexpensively. The whole plant was only a few thousand dollars, compared to one of these other oil companies. But I was young and eager.

KP: It sounds like Union Carbide gave you your big break in plastics.

BK: When I went to work for Union Carbide, I said, "That this is my last job. This is it. I'm in the big time. The big corporation that really is in the plastics industry. This is what I want. I'm not going any place but here, I'm not going into my own business, or anything of that nature."

KP: And for a good part of your career, that was the case.

BK: That was the case. That's right.

KP: What types of projects did you work on at Union Carbide?

BK: Well, let me put it this way. Back in that period, there were only two producers of polyethylene, Union Carbide and DuPont. And polyethylene plastic polymer was only being produced at the rate of a few hundred million pounds per year. Right now, today, there are probably forty polyolefin polymer producers, polyethylene, polypropylene, and the amount of product manufactured is greater than the amount of steel manufactured. So you can see how …

KP: So you've seen the transformation in your lifetime.

BK: Yeah, I really feel as if I lived through the, not the birth, but the teenage years and the adult years of the plastics revolution. We really, with Union Carbide, we were really with the company that literally started it. DuPont certainly was well represented, but Carbide had the initial impetus into this whole market.

KP: I remember that their image, in the 1960s, was that they were a really futuristic company.

BK: They did a lot of things right. Unfortunately, the company did a lot of things wrong.

KP: Yeah, the most famous was Bhopal, India.

BK: Well, that was '70s, '80s? '82? Sometime in the '80s. Bhopal. I had left in 1979, three years before, I think. Two years before, something like that. So don't blame me.

KP: So what were its major strengths?

BK: All right, it's gonna sound a little strange. When I joined Union Carbide, it was like, suddenly, going into an industrial, Ivy League school. And most of their officers came from Ivy League schools. They had a mindset that they were corporate Ivy Leaguers. They depended on consulting firms like Boston Consulting, that type of thing. They went through, every six or seven years, a new reorganization, based on one of these Boston Consulting-type firm's recommendations. They had a lot of really good people, but they also had a lot of dimwits.

KP: Who had good degrees.

BK: Who had good degrees.

KP: And had been in the right eating club or something like that.

BK: Right. Exactly right. I'm not saying it was all nepotism or anything, but it certainly paid to be out of Yale, and in the Class of 1954.

KP: Even though someone from a less renowned school might have been the better researcher.

BK: Right, and that's exactly right. And they made a lot of really bad corporate decisions. I remember one of my bosses, very nice guy. Terrific guy. Bill Quiby from Princeton University. He was head of crew down there. He was vice president of new products. This was 1959 or so. We were buying polypropylene from Shell Chemical and reselling prior to building our own plants for polypropylene. Bill Quiby made a decision, I guess, based on some advice from other people, that polypropylene was not a good plastic material, that it had too many weaknesses. Cold temperature impact and that sort of thing. And that really in the long run, it was not something that Union Carbide should sell. So we got out of polypropylene. Even though you're not into plastics, you know that polypropylene is a huge commodity material, just the kind of thing that many companies wished they had gotten into many years ago. It's a money cow, or whatever they call it. Cash cow.

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

KP: This continues an interview with Mr. Burton H. Krevsky on April 24, 1996 in Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler and …

KG: Ken Gilliland.

KP: You mentioned that that there was a downsizing.

BK: There was downsizing, yes. It was one of those things where Carbide had run into some problems where they weren't producing enough profits and their share price was dropping, and they decided to offer a severance package and such to certain employees. At the time, they told me it was all employees, but I don't believe that. Either that or take a ten percent [pay cut.] It didn't end

up as ten percent. I feel like I took a six percent drop or something like that. But I was a decrease in salary at a time when everyone [else's] was going up. So that really irritated me. After about six month, a friend of mine called me from a company called Wilson Products, which is part of Dart Industries, which was not a competitor of Union Carbide, and asked me if I wanted to become the new products director of the company, with the object of becoming an officer of the company at some point. [It was a] small company. And after thinking about it for a few months, I decided to go with it.

KP: Were you glad that you left Carbide?

BK: Yes. Even though I didn't take the severance package ...

KP: Even though that would have …

BK: It would have been smarter, financially smarter, but I went to Wilson Products. Small company, few million dollars in gross sales, but in the plastics industry, one that I was familiar with, and they were part of Dart Industries, which was a major corporation.

KP: Did you get more experience at your new job?

BK: Well, I was new products director, and my job was to get this company into new and different fields, which I endeavored to do.

KP: And how did it go?

BK: It went pretty well. It went very well. We ended up with several new markets, and the company was going along pretty well until they decided to consolidate two companies, Wilson Products and Fiberfill of Evansville, Indiana, and they brought in some new management, who immediately proceeded to clear out the old management. I was particularly lucky, I was the only one of the old management that was left, out of thirteen people. I don't know why they kept me, but the president of the company, a fella named John Lomax seemed to like me, and he put me into a different line of work. I now became manager of the …

KP: Polymer development?

BK: Not polymer development. I'm trying to think of the, well, it was the mechanical products department, despite the fact that I'm not a mechanical engineer, and that I didn't have any experience in that. But he told me that this was sort of a temporary holding action until he could sell the whole department to some other company. And he said, "And, of course, if we sell it, it might be wise to look around."

KP: So they were being nice to you …

BK: They were very nice to me.

KP: … By giving you room to look around.

BK: Yeah, because this was July of 1982, June of '82. I tried to find some buyers for the company, but the bid and offered price were too far apart for John. Finally, in January of 1983, I joined my last company. And that is a small, polyethylene film producer called, Edison Plastics Company.

KP: How did you enjoy that company?

BK: Great. By the way, I might mention, for anybody looking at this, this is sort of an experience of how you get jobs. It's the whole story of networking. My job at Wilson Products, I got through a fella named Charlie Lowe, who was the executive vice-president. Charlie had been at Union Carbide. He and I had worked together at New Products back in the '50s. Charlie was a graduate of the Merchant Marine Academy. He was the fella who was supposed to become president of the company. Of course, then the consolidation occurred, he ended up as being one of the downsized people. But Charlie was the reason for my getting into that company. Another old friend from Union Carbide mentioned that Edison Plastics needed someone to run their technical department, and I went over there and talked to the president of the company. He wanted to know if I played golf. I said, "No." I said, "I play tennis and some bridge." He said, "You're hired."

KP: Are you still working there?

BK: No, I retired from there on December 31, 1994, at age seventy. I worked there from about January 1983 to end of December '94, eleven years. I think that I was partially responsible for the growth of this company. When I joined them, they were doing about twelve million dollars worth of business per year, making polyethylene films, some polypropylene films, and when I left in December '94, the company's revenues were about $150 million.

KP: That's a lot bigger company.

BK: I would like to say that my salary increased comparatively, but it did not, although it was satisfactory.

KP: Was there a lot more freedom in these smaller companies than at Union Carbide?

BK: Absolutely.

KP: It sounds like Union Carbide was very bureaucratic and had an old boys' club.

BK: At that time, yes. I think it's different now. But it was a nice company. It was nice to be an employee at Union Carbide

KP: There are pleasant aspects, because the responsibility can often be diffused.

BK: That's right. There were not the kinds of pressures that there are on current research people now.

KP: Or like in a smaller company where …

BK: In a smaller company, there are a lot more pressures. Get things done, just get to the point. Don't elaborate. It's a different atmosphere, as you realize. The smaller company, the control of your time is much more important.

KP: What did you think of the Vietnam War? You were with Union Carbide during the '70s, and they had a lot of defense contracts.

BK: Well, in retrospect, I think I had the right idea, because, I'm going back a little further. In, I believe it was 1953, I came home one night and said, "My God, in Indochina, the French had just had a tremendous defeat in … "

KG: Dien Bien Phu.

BK: Yes, it was Dien Bien Phu. I came home and it was really a shock. I said, "Gee, this is terrible. The French have really been wiped out there." My wife was not familiar with this, but she remembers me saying that. So the Vietnam War, I was aware that the country was getting into a real mess, and, quite frankly, I had very little regard for General Westmoreland, because this "light at the end of the tunnel" thing was like me listening to the weather bureau now. I'm not saying I was against it, I'm just saying that I was skeptical of everything they said, because they were optimistic about a situation that had defeated the French, and these French Foreign Legionnaires and the French Army in Indochina were not amateurs.

KP: A lot of the scientists at Rugters during this time were very hawkish and supported the war effort.

BK: Yeah, I'm not surprised.

KP: What were your colleagues like?

BK: I would say that most of my colleagues at Union Carbide were hawks.

KP: And you were not necessarily against the war, but you realized the …

BK: I realized the problems. I wasn't against it. I felt that the Domino Theory sounded logical and all that. But this business of, "Oh, the war is going to be over by Christmas" is, "These guys are dreaming. And Westmoreland is not really aware of all the facts, or he's glossing them over." And I remember very well being always skeptical whenever I heard any comment made by him. But I was not a peacenik. I didn't join any marches. In fact, I wouldn't have thought of joining any marches.

KG: You wrote a couple of articles.

BK: Technical articles.

KG: For magazines?

BK: Maybe ten or fifteen, in various plastics-oriented magazines. "Society of Plastics Engineers."

KP: So you had a good childhood, you worked too hard in college, and you enjoyed your career in the plastics industry.

BK: I would say that sounds like a good summary.

KP: If you had to do things over again, what would you have done?

BK: Well, back in the 1940s, '50s, for example, at Tide Water Associated Oil, there were people there who couldn't believe that I was gonna leave that company. And of course, once you got a job with an oil company at that time, it was like "in solid," you know. Your lifetime career. By the way, I should mention something else. At that time, in that particular oil company, I think I was probably one of maybe two or three Jews in the company. It's really odd, when you think of it now.

KP: When you started in chemistry, did you think you would have employment problems?

BK: I knew I was gonna have employment problems. It was like medical schools in that time. My friends, who were trying to get into medical school, knew that they had to fight a quota system. That's why my cousins down at the University of Pennsylvania had encouraged me to take medicine because they thought they could get me in.

KP: Were you interested in medicine?

BK: I should have been. I would have made out better financially. No, I think the reason I wasn't was because I didn't intend to go to school for that long, [while] being a drain on my mother. Even though the amounts we were spending were infinitesimal compared to what you're thinking of now, at that time, it weighed on my mind.

KP: Do you think that anti-Semitism hurt your career at all?

BK: My career? No. I have been very lucky. As far as I know, my career would not have differed much if I was Catholic, Protestant, Ukrainian, whatever.

KP: But you really saw the industry change while you were in it.

BK: Oh, yeah, it's unbelievable. Bell Labs, as far as I know, back in the old days, had very few Jews. Now, they practically have a congregation there. But at Union Carbide, there were, or maybe it was like the oil company, there was probably a few Jewish names, or people, but you didn't get the impression that there were too many Jews around. I had the feeling that I was the

second or third Jewish person in the R&D department. But I never felt that therea strong was anti-Semitic bias as far as things in the corporation.

KP: It sounds like the reason you didn't go to Princeton had something to do with anti-Semitism.

BK: I would say so. Absolutely. Or Yale or Harvard. A lot of crazy things used to go on that, right now, seem idiotic, and you'd say, "How could these people have thought that way?" "That was the way things were." That expression covers a lot. And especially since this interview was on wartime things, I think that's a description of a lot of the things that seem a little odd. "That's the way things were." People accepted it. It was, like I talked about my friend and I walking through the rough neighborhood and him getting beat up. It was expected. The way things were.

KP: Is there anything we forgot to ask you?

BK: Gee, I've been talking for three and a half hours here.

KP: We really enjoyed this interview. Thank you very much.

BK: Well, I enjoyed talking about myself. It was sort of an ego trip.

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

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