

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD MACK

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Nicholas Molnar: This begins the second interview with Mr. Richard Mack, in Somerset, New Jersey, on May 18, 2012. Just continuing from the first interview, I want to start with Mr. Mack's military career. You wanted to share some sentiments about it. Let us begin.

Richard Mack: My military career, two things happened. I was going to Washington and Lee University. That's the first college I went to. I left there after approximately two years, because I was put on academic probation. That was during the Vietnam [War]--no, it wasn't Vietnam, it was Korea. My gosh, I'm forgetting how old I am. My father, at that time, since [I was] an only son, would not allow me to go into the Army. Besides that, I had gained a huge amount of weight. I weighed about 226 pounds. If you see how short I am, that looks like a five-by-five person. My father said, "Well, you have to continue to get your 2-S deferment to stay out of the service." So, we went around looking at different colleges, and it wasn't easy to find another college in mid-semester.

Then, we found one that was open, and that was Pennsylvania Military College. I don't know if I spoke about that, but that was the college I went to. As I said, it was great, because I had discipline. I had to get up at a certain time in the morning, I had to be in a class at a time, I had to go to meals at different times. As I said, I just love discipline. The fact that it was military, I wasn't impressed. I'm not a person who believes in wars, but I certainly loved the military and I could have made a career out of it. But what happened was that I did very, very, very well there. As a matter of fact, in my junior year, I received the award for having the highest cumulative average in the junior class, and that was because I had nothing else to do but to study. If you're studying all the time, you've got to do something good. Then, when I finally graduated from there, I went into the service, and I got my commission as a second lieutenant. If you're going to go into the service, the best way of doing it is as an officer, [which is] better than as an enlisted man because you get many, many more privileges than other people do.

Then, I had this two-year deferment to go into the service, and I wanted to go to law school. I had been accepted at NYU [New York University], but they wouldn't give me a deferment for me to go into the service and then come back. I'd have to reapply, and it wasn't good to start law school and then come back. I had this time in the summertime after I had gotten my commission. Probably, it was the last week in August, beginning of September. I went down to--I wanted to get my master's in marketing, and I went to Rutgers in Newark for that. As I was passing Seton Hall, I applied for law school there. I went to law school there for six months, and then they came out with a new law. They said that you could go into the service for six months and then be in the Reserves for eight-and-a-half or nine years. I said, "That's perfect for me," and I got my orders to go down to Fort Benning in Georgia. Anyway, I went down there, did my basic infantry officer's course down there, and then was sent to Fort Riley, Kansas to the First Division there. I loved being in the service because I had the discipline of everything. Then, when I came out after six months, I went back to law school, was there for another year. I didn't really like law school, so I went into my father's business. That was in New Brunswick.

New Brunswick was a wonderful, viable town. At that time--this was back in 1956-'57--it still was a close community and it was very, very nice. Of course, later on, as a matter of fact, right now because of gentrification, it's entirely different.

I think we want to get into how [Manny's Den] became a gay bar. There was a gay bar that was down the street from where we were. We had a restaurant going and our bar, and it just happens that the gay bar was closed by the Alcoholic Beverage Control because they had--I think they called it--"lewd, lascivious and immoral acts." Just the mere fact that you were gay was "lewd and lascivious and immoral." Anyway, they were closed, and some of the gay people started to come into our restaurant. Our restaurant, there was a review that was given about it, and they said it's the closest thing to Greenwich Village because we had all these cute little things on the walls and paintings and our food was good. It wasn't great food, but it was good.

When do single people come out, whether gay or straight? They don't come out until after ten o'clock at night. We had a piano there. As a matter of fact, it was a player piano. So, people could come in and put the music on, and they could sing to it. Or there were many talented people who could play the piano, other talented people who could sing. The theater group from Douglass College would come in. These were all theater people, and they loved to sing and tell stories. It was really wonderful. A lot of people were going to the movies. After the movies, they would come in, and they would have sandwiches and cakes. My mother used to do the baking, so that the desserts were really great. We would give sandwiches like the delicatessens in New York would give, the stage delicatessen, where it would be five-inches high, and people loved them.

Anyways, what happened, you had all the gay people that started to come in. They were enjoying themselves. A lot of the straight people enjoyed it too, because it was a very conservative--we kept it very conservative. My mother was there, my father was there, I was there working all the time. It really was great.

Then, over the years, what happened a few years later, the ABC [Division of Alcoholic Beverage Control] came in and said that we were allowing "apparent"--in quotes--"apparent homosexuals" to congregate in inordinate numbers, and this was against the ABC laws. So, they wanted to close us down. Having gone to law school, I said, "This is crazy." As a matter of fact, at the time I called the ABC, one of the attorneys, I said, this being in the early '60s, "If we had a number of blacks who were homosexuals, they would then picket our place, say that we're discriminating against blacks because we're not allowing them to come into our restaurant." He says, "Oh, well. That's your problem. That's not ours." Anyway, we lost in the ABC hearing. We then took it to the Appellate Division in New Jersey, and we lost there, even though there was another opinion saying that we should have won. Then, we went to the Supreme Court of the State of New Jersey. Now, there were two other gay bars that joined with us. There was one--I don't remember their names really--I think it was Murphy's Bar in Newark and another one that was down in Atlantic City. However, the person who handled our case was [Theodore Sager Meth] ... [Editor's Note: One Eleven Wines and Liquors joined as appellants with Val's Bar in Atlantic City and Murphy's Tavern in Newark in the case *One Eleven Wines and Liquors, Inc., A New Jersey Corporation, v. Division of Alcoholic Beverage Control* 50 N.J. 329 (1967) 235 A.2d 12. In the ruling, the New Jersey Supreme Court struck down the ABC's anti-congregating rules targeting homosexuals, thus legalizing gay bars in New Jersey.]

[RECORDING PAUSED]

RM: What happened was that the person we used as our attorney was Theodore Sager Meth, who was in Newark. Give a little background of Ted was that he taught me when I was going to Seton Hall. I just felt that he was probably one of the most intelligent men I had ever met, especially knowing the law. Not only was he an attorney, but I think he went to Yale Theological Seminary, so he was very active with the Episcopal Church. He was really very, very good. Then, the other person that came and was a good friend of my best friend, Ray Fogelson--and my mind is going blank on names and I should know him very well. Well, anyways, he went to Wesleyan with my best friend. Later on, we found out that he was gay. We weren't sure at the time.

Gerald Carlucci: Was it David Morris?

RM: David Morris. Oh, my gosh, yes. David had been working for the state--well, had worked for a number of good corporations and then had worked for the state. He offered to help Ted and do some of the research. They wrote a very, very good brief to get to the Supreme Court. In law, they call it a Brandeis type of brief, not what the law is, but what the law should be. What they really wanted to do was say times have changed since the repeal of the Volstead Act and Prohibition in 1933 and that the law, which said that apparent homosexuals gathering in inordinate numbers was--why can't they go into a bar, as long as they're not doing anything which truly is lewd or lascivious, and then that's a matter of opinion what is lewd or lascivious.

I can recall being in the Supreme Court, and the judge is sitting up there. They asked the state attorney general, when they were discussing this, and one of the questions was, "What is the number that you consider to be an inordinate number?" He said, "Twelve or more." It's interesting. Knowing you can't put, in law, it's very difficult to put a number on anything. As soon as they put the number on it--he said twelve or more--I knew we had won. That was because, as I said, you mean the ABC is going to come in and they're going to go, "One, two, three, four" and count twelve people. "If there are only ten, it's okay, but if it's twelve or more, it's bad. You have to be closed down."

The other thing was that they then discussed what they thought was lewd or lascivious. At that time, men used to carry these little purses. In Europe, everyone knows that men would walk hand and hand or put their arms around--and women, too. It was all right for a woman to do this. It was all right for women to dance together. We showed that in Europe men do dance together, in other cultures, so we wouldn't think that it would be lewd or lascivious to see two men dancing here in the United States. We see that there are many cultures where men kiss, thinking of the European culture, especially in France, where they kiss on both cheeks. There are many cultures, that in my growing up, in Russian, Polish, Jewish culture, my father would kiss me on the lips; my uncles would kiss me on the lips. It's a different kind of kissing, so that if you might see two men or two women or heterosexuals kissing in public and it was not just a kiss of hello or goodbye, but it was one of passion, then we might consider that lewd or lascivious.

So, it finally did come down to the fact that as times changed so must the Alcoholic Beverage Control. They literally made gay bars legal at that time, meaning that you can't put a number on twelve or more, and as long as there isn't anything going on in the men's room or there isn't groping or other things like that. My mother, who was very, very short, would walk along the

bar, and if she saw someone putting their hands where they shouldn't be, she would go over there and slap them. It was a no-no.

I can remember one time--as a matter of fact, the guy still comes in here and they're still partners, over thirty years. Look, how many heterosexuals are still together after thirty years? [laughter] They were at the bar, and there was something going on. We had this soda gun. I took the soda gun, leaned over, and sprayed them with water. I said, "Maybe that will cool you off." These are little stories that used to go on in the bar.

We did two things. One, we felt that it was civil rights, just like they're talking right now of marriage, of two gay people getting married. I mean, marriage, personally, is a religious thing. The rights, the legal rights, that a married couple have is a different thing, and that's what the state or the federal government gives you. So, just the mere fact that was one step that we brought together. As a matter of fact, this was before Stonewall, which was the gay liberation that came out for everyone in New York City. Then, everyone started to wrap themselves in the gay flag or purple or whatever it was, and people were coming out and saying they were gay. [Editor's Note: On June 28, 1969, New York City Police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in Greenwich Village that was owned by the Genovese crime family. As the police arrested over a dozen people and beat one patron, the crowd outside of the Stonewall grew, until patrons and locals began rioting in protest of ongoing police harassment. The unrest continued for the next five days. The Stonewall Uprising galvanized support for the gay rights movement, launching the modern LGBTQ+ movement.]

That was one good thing about this revolution that was going on. As I said, Manny's Den or One Eleven Wines and Liquors was one of the first to make it legal in the State of New Jersey. So, my parents and I were very, very proud of what we had done at that time. I even think that our attorney--I know David Morris was very pleased, but our attorney Ted Meth always had that on his resume that that was one of the things that he had won in the Supreme Court. So, it was very good. It did change a lot of things in the State of New Jersey, especially for homosexual rights.

In the meantime, here I am going around making the legal rights for all gay people, and I'm a captain in the Reserves. It's so different, which was also very interesting because, in retrospect, I had a sergeant, who was my supply sergeant, married, had two children, and he used to come into our bar. This is one of the things; there are going to be men who are very, very straight looking and have a propensity towards being a homosexual. Probably, he's more of a homosexual than he was a heterosexual. Where am I going with all of this? We won, made gay bars legal, I was still in the military, which the difference between the two, which, as I said, I still loved. I probably would have stayed in the Reserves. Well, I certainly would have gone regular Army if it weren't for the fact that my wife, at that time, said, "If you go stay in the Army, regular Army, I'm going to leave you." I should have known at that time something was wrong. [laughter] I had to wait almost thirty years later before I got a divorce. As I said, I thought that I was going to finish law school, stay in the Army, be in the Judge Advocate General's [Corps], and, geez, what better life can you have, really? That's the way I felt about it.

When I was in the Reserves there and I was a company commander, Vietnam was on. I felt I had put my time in, my eight-and-a-half years or whatever it was. I felt that my staying in the

Reserves, even though I loved it, was allowing other people to fight in Vietnam, and I was opposed to Vietnam. So, it was difficult to be in the service and be opposed to that. If it were a World War I or World War II, but for Vietnam, I couldn't see it and I can't see it today for what's going on in Afghanistan or places like that. So, as I say, I think there's a place for the military. I like the military personally, but I don't like the military when they're fighting the kind of so-called wars that we're fighting right now.

NM: I want to ask a few follow up questions. What was the timeframe for the legal actions that you have described?

GC: It was two years before Stonewall. Stonewall was 1969, right?

RM: No, it was before that. I think that's when the decision came down. The decision came down, I think, [in] about 1967. I think that it was like two years before that, like '65, I think it was.

GC: When the ABC came in?

RM: When the ABC came in. So, it took that long to go through the process of the ABC hearing, the Appellate Division, the Supreme Court.

GC: Did you lose your license?

RM: No, we stayed open all that time. As long as you were continuing to appeal it, then they couldn't close us down. There was probably one month--this was probably around the ABC hearing--there might have been one month that we tried to discourage gay people from coming into the bar. What happened was that one of our bartenders left, and he was working at a bar that was on the corner of US Highway 1 and Livingston Avenue, which was all the way out there. A lot of people started to go there. They called me up. As a matter of fact, the person who owned it, I knew, and he called me up. He said, "We have all these gay people coming in." He says, "We don't want the gay people coming in because we don't want to be shut down by the ABC." So, they discouraged it. Then, we discussed it, our family discussed it, including with the attorney, Ted [Sager] Meth, and we said, "We're not going to stop what we're doing." Our case, of the three cases between Murphy's and the other bar in Atlantic City and ours, was the cleanest. What I mean by the cleanest [is] when they went into those other bars they found that there was some promiscuous acts that were being committed in the men's room. In our bar, the only thing that they said was that there were apparent homosexuals, the twelve congregating, and that they were wearing tight pants, they were wearing fluffy sweaters, they were drinking tall drinks through a straw, they were making eyes at one another--just a lot of silly things that they were talking about in there. That was the only thing that they really had against us. There was nothing else. As I said, there were some men who got up and sang. They might have sung a song that really was about a woman singing it, but a man would be singing it and just like a man is trying to make out with a woman, he would make eyes at her, look at her, might touch her hand, something like that. He would be singing to that person. Of course, later on, he would buy a drink, and you're trying to make a date. So, these were other things that they said that people were looking and singing to one another. These were silly things.

This is the way the Alcoholic Beverage--this is what they were trying to do. They were trying to keep--personally, we're still a Prohibition country. To be in the liquor business, we have to be licensed. We still have some ABC. There are very few people who are in the ABC anymore. It was very political. The person who was the ABC commissioner was appointed by the governor. You had a number of people, they would come in, they would check your bottles to see that you weren't watering it down. The biggest thing that they worry about right now is fruit flies, which is the most ridiculous thing. We have some bio-scientists, food scientists, that come in here and work professionally in the United States. We asked him if there are fruit flies in the liquor. He says, "Well, first of all, if they are in there, they're dead. There's no way a fruit fly can hurt you. There's no way. It's not going to bite you. As I said, it's dead. There's nothing that it can do to you." So, the ABC put a law in that every bottle--I don't know if you noticed the bottles all have the little--the pourers have screens on them, so that the fruit flies won't come out and get into somebody's drink. Well, they can give you a fine if they came in here and they found a fruit fly in there. It's silly because all you have to do is filter them out if you have fruit flies. As a matter of fact, in the summertime, especially right now, we're very cognizant of it. Our manager Danny and I--Jimmy also does too--he will check to see whether there are any fruit flies in some of the bottles, especially the ones that are sweet--sweet drinks, sweet whiskeys, like the cordials and things like that.

NM: You mentioned that at the ABC hearing, you were denied and also at the Appellate level.

RM: Right.

NM: What kind of arguments were they making against you?

RM: The only argument that they had was that we were allowing apparent homosexuals to congregate in inordinate numbers, period. That was it. That was written in the ABC law at that time.

NM: When was the ABC law established?

RM: It came in after 1933, at the repeal of Prohibition. We're talking like thirty years later, and think about thirty years ago for yourself. You're not even thirty, so it doesn't make any difference, but when you think about it, as the Supreme Court said, and as our brief said, as times changed so must the laws. There's no way that "apparent homosexuals gathering in inordinate numbers"--and I keep quoting this--is going to be against public morals. They're only making it for a liquor place. If they went into a place that wasn't a licensed place, it was fine. If you went into Macy's, it would be fine. The only place is because the Alcoholic Beverage Control wanted to control what was going on in bars. I mean, the same way that it says that in a bar, every employee, we have to have their name, their address, their social security, where they were born, whether they're citizens. If anyone was in jail, they can't work in a bar. This was another thing that they said that if you were a homosexual and you allowed too many homosexuals to be in the bar, it was against the law.

NM: In the decision in support of the appeal in the New Jersey Supreme Court level, what was the wording? It said the laws must change with the times.

RM: Right. Basically, that's what they said. I don't recall the exact quote, but it did say that they had to change the law, that it was not against the law to allow homosexuals to gather in a bar, and it was unanimous. There was one judge who was a bit conservative. He said that he felt if he saw two men passionately kissing, he might find that offensive. As a matter of fact, after, when we had won the decision, we decided--I don't know if I spoke about it--we decided that one of the things we were going to do--there was a Playboy Club, we were going to start a Gay Boy Club. At that time, we had two separate rooms in the bar. So, we made one of the rooms the dance room, and we said that you could go in. We would charge admission to go in there, and if there were any heterosexuals or people that we weren't sure of who they were, we would say, "If you want to go in there and dance, if you find it offensive that you see two men or two women dancing together, then don't go in." Now, we were telling them in advance, and we were protecting ourselves and our customers, at the same time that the ABC isn't going to come around and say that they find two men dancing together offensive. By this time, we already won the case, but we were letting any heterosexuals who wanted to go in there know the same thing.

Of course, a lot of people became very liberal at that time. I think a little later you also had--and I don't recall the exact time--the liquor laws in the State of New Jersey changed that you could drink at the age of eighteen. So, people became even more liberated. There was also what was going on in California and Haight-Ashbury and other places like that. People were smoking a lot of pot. You had more liberation and it made it much easier to be a gay person, much easier to run a gay bar because of that. People were more liberated about that. There was another question you asked me about. [Editor's Note: In New Jersey, the legal drinking age was eighteen between 1973 and 1983.]

NM: I wanted to ask a couple more questions about the atmosphere of your time in the Reserves and during the Vietnam War. We will follow up on that a little bit more. I wanted to ask about, because Stonewall was this watershed event, did the decision that happened here have any impact elsewhere? We know that in New Jersey, it changed the law with the ABC. Did it impact the metropolitan area, New York City?

RM: No. Very interesting. One of the things that I tried to do at that time was I was trying to become more political and get the bar more political. In the bar business, you're there to serve and have people have a good time. It's not a place to become political, I found out later. You might have heard--as a matter of fact, he just recently died--Frank Kameny, who was from Washington. He had done a lot in the '50s and '60s. He was openly gay and trying to change things. The Mattachine Society, that's what he was very active with. I had set up for him to come and speak and to talk about gay rights. I think this might have been just after Stonewall, because at Stonewall, a lot of gay people were very, very pleased that there was a coming out and they felt that they beat the cops and all of these things. He came up and he was talking about the rights of a gay person, what they could do. [Editor's Note: After being fired from a federal job in the late 1950s because he was gay, Frank Kameny became a gay rights activist and cofounded the Washington, D.C. chapter of the Mattachine Society to advocate for LGBT rights.]

As I said, I then learned you cannot become political at the same time when you're running a bar. You want to get people--they're all individuals. I would say, "How can a gay person vote for a Republican?" You're going to vote any way you want to vote, even though there might be on a Republican or another Democratic platform saying that we don't believe, right now, in gay marriage. If I tried right now to get fifty people in here, homosexual, bisexual, lesbian, and say, well, the Republican Party we know is against gay marriage. President Obama has come out and said that he believes that there should be gay marriage. I would dare say that they're going to be many people that still say they're going to vote for a Republican. They're not even going to think about what their rights are or what can happen. This is the way they feel. So, as I said, at the time, I then realized that I cannot in a bar become political. I think a number of years ago--it might have been three or four years ago, President Obama--at that time, he was Senator Obama--and the Democratic Party had people who were going around to get people to vote. They had these gay people who were coming in, and they wanted to be here and talk about it. They did come in, and they talked about it. I wasn't opposed to it at that time, but you're not going to find that people are going to change their voting, because I think that's more something that they get from their parents, that they're going to vote a certain way. I might be wrong.

NM: Gerry, do you have any follow up questions? You're the expert.

GC: Quite a few. Back to the beginning, the start of when the other bar was closed down the street, in your opinion, why do you think they mostly went to your parents' bar? Was it because your parents' reputation?

RM: The reason it was because we were not in any way--we knew that they were gay. We could see the way they walked, they talked, the things that they said. We knew that a number of them were across the street where there was a school for hairdressers there. They would come in during the day to get a drink. My father, who had been in showbusiness--maybe that's where he found that there were other gay people. We were also very liberal, so there was no way--we were very understanding. We were very open to having gay people come in.

GC: What about your reputation with other businesses? How did they react?

RM: Okay, I'll tell you. That was very funny. Until they read in the newspaper that the Alcoholic Beverage Control had said that we were going to be closed down, people thought we were closed down. They didn't know that we were still operating and still there. We had a wonderful lunch going. We had a good restaurant. We had all the business people coming in. What went on in the night time, even though they might have gone to a movie and then come in and had dessert and sandwiches and coffee and drinks and there were gay people there--you would have couples coming in, and there were all these men who were at the bar. The woman would be holding her boyfriend's hand and she would be leading through to get through to all the men who were there. As I said, it was just a wonderful mix of people, and no one cared. What I'm getting back to is that until it was written in the newspaper that it was a gay bar and that the Alcoholic Beverage Control was going to close us down, no one said anything or cared about it. To this day, sometimes I hear, "Oh, Manny's Den or The Den," and they say, "Oh, that was the gay bar on Albany Street." Or there might have been many people who just said, "Oh, we used

to go there for lunch or dinner." They didn't know what was going on in the nighttime unless they had read in the newspaper that the Alcoholic Beverage Control was going to close down the bar for it being gay. People didn't even think about that it was gay until they said, "Oh, it's illegal. It's going to be closed down."

GC: Was it a different crowd between the day and the night?

RM: Of course. The daytime, we had all business people and J&J. Bobby Johnson, who is from Johnson & Johnson--and I can remember they were developing Micrin, the mouthwash that J&J owns. He would have all his suits--I call them all suits because they all used to wear suits--and they would come in, they would drink their lunch. They would come in at 12:30; they wouldn't leave until 2:30. How they ever got back to work I don't know because they used to finish off with stingers. You had all J&J coming. I used to do a lot of wine business with J&J. I had many of the officers there, meaning the vice presidents, who would come in and buy wine. I had them on charge accounts. So, I had a packaged store going, I had the restaurant going, I had the gay bar going, and they were all at different times. If people came into dinner, they came in between five and nine. Dinner was usually finished by nine o'clock. If we would continue to serve sandwiches, fine, people came in. People did not care that there might have been seventy apparent homosexuals standing at the bar until it was written in the newspaper that the ABC was going to close them down because it was illegal.

NM: What effect did that have on the business?

RM: Not the daytime business. A few people might have read it and they might have felt, just like HIV, that you can't go near anyone who has HIV because it's going to get to you. We all know how HIV is--how it's [contracted] through [sexual] contact, but just touching someone or being in the same room with them or anything like that isn't going [to spread HIV]. That was another thing that later on, in the '80s, when AIDS came in--as a matter of fact, there are many, unfortunately, people who used to come into our bar who died from AIDS. Even today, I'm not familiar with what goes on in the bar anymore because I'm not there at night, but I know there are a lot of young people, they all think they're invincible and that they can have any kind of sex they want to have. Unfortunately, as I said, they feel that they're invincible, they're not going to get anything.

The other thing that was in bars was cocaine became popular and this place used to be packed with [it] at that time. We had to have people standing at the men's room and lady's room because they were going in there and doing lines of cocaine. I don't care what kind of drug anyone wants; it's up to them. I mean, we're selling drugs, alcohol, here. I say that if they want to legalize pot that they should give bars the license to sell it, because we're already selling drugs, so we might as well continue to sell it. Then, what was happening is that cocaine was one of the best things that happened to a bar, because it kept people up all the time and they could drink more. So, we're selling more alcohol. Of course, the other thing that was going on, we were also selling more water all the time too, because people started to--especially when it came to--what's the other drug that they were taking?

GC: Heroin?

RM: No, not heroin. We didn't have any heroin here. Coke was the thing. Coke, pot and ...

GC: Crystal?

RM: No, they weren't doing crystal.

GC: Ecstasy.

RM: Ecstasy, yes. Some of that.

GC: For the night crowd, was anybody in the gay community afraid to come in after the ABC?

RM: I tell you, there was like one month that we, as the owners, discouraged gay people coming in.

GC: How did you discourage them?

RM: We just talked about it, because we were afraid of losing our license, and we also knew that a number of them were going to the other bar. So, then, we said, "Hey, this is silly," and we said, "No, everyone can come back in. We're not going to have any problems and we're fighting it. We're taking it to the ABC hearing, and we're going to take it right up to the Supreme Court." So, at that point, it was an entirely different thing. You tell your customers that; they could care less.

GC: What was the gay community's reaction to the case?

RM: Really, the gay people, some of them were concerned. They thought that the ABC was going to come in and arrest them and take them out. Then, we reassured them that nothing like that was going to happen. I said, "The ABC has already been here. They've already charged us and they're not going to come in again. So, you're not going to have any problems." The reaction of the gay [patrons], there were a few people who were concerned, but very few, very few. Gay people still wanted to be with gay people and Manny's Den was still open for them; they were there. They were certainly being discouraged from going to the other bars because the other bars were concerned that they were going to be closed down. So, everything drifted right back to Manny's Den. So, there was really no problem.

GC: Do you remember when the agents came in? Were they undercover?

RM: Yes, they came in a few times. Then, finally one night, they came in, they showed their badges, and they said that they wanted to see our license. Then, they start telling us about the homosexuals. As I said, I looked at him and I said, "Are you serious?" I don't remember if they were allowed to carry guns at that time. Could you imagine, an ABC man has to carry a gun? The only reason that they went out and got the right to carry a gun is because as soon as you carry a gun, you get more money. So, they get a higher salary. [laughter] Anyways, they came in, and like all police enforcement, you're concerned, you're a little frightened that they're

accusing you of something, but as I said, I looked at them and I said, "You've got to be kidding." I asked them, I said, "Did you see anything? Was there anything that was going on?" meaning was there anything promiscuous going on. And, no, everything was "apparent," and they were so happy that they could count the number of people that were there. They really did. It was crazy.

GC: What about the reputation between the bar and the town government? Did they mind having a gay bar in New Brunswick?

RM: They all knew that there was a gay bar in New Brunswick, and the police used to come in--at that time, they used to walk a beat. We knew all the police, and my father was always on very good terms with all the police because we ran a very, very straight place, if you'll excuse the expression straight. As I said, my mother was there. It was like a mom-and-pop place, it was. As I said, my mother would do the baking. The police would come in, in their uniform--it was cold out--and my mother would encourage them to come in, "Sit down, relax. I'll give you a sandwich." Typical Jewish mother, she was taking care of them. But she said, "If you're coming in like that, you've got to take off your cap and take off your blouse because people would get worried if they saw a cop sitting there." So, they would come in, they would relax in there. They would have their coffee, they would have their sandwich, they would have their cake.

I'll tell you a funny story, another funny story. (John Peyton?), who was one of the cops who walked the beat there, left a note. I came in the next morning. It was about nine o'clock in the morning, and there was a note there. He said, "Dick, last night while I was walking around here, I found that the gates"--we had these metal gates that were out on the street--"that the lock was off it. So, I opened it up, went down." He says, "I went in and I went to the back and I made myself a ham sandwich." [laughter] Then, he left. He says, "But I stayed around to make sure no one went in through there." This was, as I said, the kind of place that we ran.

Do you know what they called "the wall"? In New Brunswick, the trestle where the train station is, the wall is the area that goes right where Rutgers University starts. That was what they called the cruising place. Unfortunately, there were two things that would happen in the cruising place. One, there would be the straight guys that would come along and would want to beat up on a "fag," using a bad expression. Or it was a place where people could meet up and they could make contacts with one another. Right across the street where the steps go up to the train tracks up there and the platform, there were telephone booths. That was also a place--people knew the telephone booths. So, some of the gay people would stay there, and someone would call up and say, "Well, would you like to have a good time tonight? I'm driving such and such a car, and I'll meet you over there." Well, (John Peyton?) told the story to us. He says he was going along there. The telephone rang. He picked it up, and he said, "Yes, yes. I'm wearing a blue suit." [laughter] He wasn't going to arrest these people. One of the things that he would do, he was there and some other cops, the same way. They were there to protect the gay people. So, you're talking about how the town reacted. You're always going to have someone who is homophobic that is going to be police or someone like that, but the police were very good about it. The majority of them were.

As for the mayor, Mayor Lynch was there at that time, Johnny. He knew that we were running a gay bar, but we were one of the places that never called the police. We never had a problem. We didn't have any fights. They knew that even if the ABC came in there, they might have said that we were a gay bar, but we eventually won the case, so it was legal. Secondly, we never had any problems with the [ABC]; we had nothing against us.

Getting back to it, the only time we had a problem with the ABC was in here. This was many years ago, when we had a performer who took his G-string off and was performing in front of the mirrors over there. The problem was that in doing his performance he had a hat that he would put over his front, but the mirror was behind him, so everyone saw his bare ass. So, the ABC got us that night for allowing a dancer like that. Personally, I think that--when I say set up, I think someone called the ABC and told them to come in. Usually, it could be another one of your competitors who would do something, but whatever it was, they were here and we had to go to an ABC hearing on that. As a matter-of-fact, I was the one who--the other thing they got us for was fruit flies. [laughter] I wrote the brief for--I say the brief--for the attorney who handled it. Now, listen to this. Because we're a corporation and they have the ABC hearing, even though I'm the president of the corporation--I'm just saying at that time--I can't go into the hearing. The only person who could go into the hearing is the attorney that is representing us.

NM: I wanted to follow up with that a little bit more, in terms of the 1965-'67 ABC case. You said that from your legal training you understood that the ABC's case did not have too much merit. In terms of the actual preparation for the case, did you do any legal research?

RM: Oh, yes.

NM: Could you tell us about that?

RM: Yes. The legal research that I personally did was there were other ABC cases that were brought to--I don't remember--Appellate Division. Every case that is decided is written and is put into a book. Many, many attorneys have their own libraries with all this, so they will do research when they have a case. They can find out, well, if the set of facts are basically the same, and the Supreme Court or the Appellate Division said this and this. It's precedent they're going through. I looked up, and the one bar that I had looked up, there was a bar in Asbury Park a number of years prior to that that was closed because of the same thing. They're saying apparent homosexuals. There were a few other bars that--not all bars had taken it up to the Appellate Division or to the Supreme Court. As a matter of fact, I think we're the only ones who ever took it to the Supreme Court. I say "we" because even though there were two other bars that joined--we all joined together--it was our case. It was our attorney. It was our brief that won the case in the Supreme Court. Even the article that was in *The New York Times* when the case was decided talked about One Eleven Wines and Liquors [and] Manny's Den and just peripherally spoke of Murphy's Bar and the other bar that had also won at the same time. As I said, it was Ted [Sager] Meth's brief and David Morris' brief that won the case. Ted [Sager] Meth, when he got in front of the court and the way he answered the questions for the Supreme Court, you could see, when you're sitting in the courtroom there, that the judges themselves sort of sat up taller and were listening to the answers that Ted [Sager] Meth was giving. You knew

that his answers were something that they were listening to and taking true note of. So, as I said, it was Ted [Sager] Meth, David Morris, our brief that won in the Supreme Court.

What it did later--there aren't that many more gay bars. As a matter of fact, there are less gay bars now than there were at that time. One of the main reasons is because gay people can go any place they want to go. They can go into straight bars. You can have ten or twelve gay people in the bars today. It's not going to make any difference. If you were catering to a certain group of people today--we're catering to a younger group of gay people. I think that there are more women that are coming in now than before, but there are a lot of young women that are coming in. There is something going on every Saturday night here. We're only open four nights a week, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Basically, there are only two good nights; it's Thursday and Saturday, sometimes on a Friday when there's something special going on. Times have completely changed. Back in the '60s, the only place people had to go was to a gay bar if they want to meet people or to walk to "the wall." The other thing was, today, you're spending a hundred dollars a month on your cable, you're spending almost a hundred dollars a month on your cell phone. This is two hundred dollars a month that people used to have to go out with. We were open seven nights a week. I think we might have closed one day in the year. Otherwise, we felt that we were a place that people could always come and feel that there was a place for them to go. My father instilled in us that if you were supposed to be open until two o'clock in the morning, you stayed open until two o'clock in the morning, even though you might not have had a customer in there [since] twelve o'clock at night. But people would know that if you're going to be open until two, you stayed open until two. We don't do that here, especially on a Wednesday night, because people aren't coming out. They're staying home. They have so many other things to do. I think one of the greatest things for them too--communication--is computers. People are always on that computer, and they're talking back and forth. I'm sure there are gay talk rooms where people are going on to all the time.

GC: How did you get Ted to take this case? Was it because he was good friends with you or his background?

RM: He took it because he is a liberal person, because he felt what the law should be. I wasn't great friends with him at that time at all. I made an appointment with him and I said that I wanted him to take this case. He was very proud to take the case because he wasn't concerned that it was gay. He wasn't against anyone who was gay. He took the case because he felt legally it was a good case.

GC: What about David Morris? [telephone rings] Let's pause.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

RM: What we're doing right now is we're talking about my experience--I'm seventy-eight years old--of being in the business for so many years. The restaurant, growing up in it since I was six months old, but we were talking about now, we're only open four nights a week. Then, what happens is that it goes in cycles, and the other thing that happens is that when a straight bar isn't making any money, they always think that the way that they're going to make money is by having a gay night. I don't know the name of the club that's out ...

GC: On Staten Island, Eve.

RM: Okay. A new club opened up. They said, "Oh, well, Thursday hasn't been a good night for us, so we're going to make it a gay night." So, where we used to have a very good Thursday night here--I also think it's because--it's been like a month now--that part of it is Rutgers University, because on Thursday night, you were getting even some straight people who were coming in who liked karaoke. So, what happens is that you're going to have that cycle, that it's going to slow down for Thursday nights because people are going to be going to Staten Island to Eve and they think that there's going to be more action there. They're going to see the same faces. The only thing that happens is that where you see more people, you think it's better. So, people are going to go to another place where there are more people for a while, and it's going to turn around and come back again. We haven't been a gay bar for forty years or more without seeing these cycles coming and going.

At that time, there weren't just places that were opening up for one night, a straight bar, these places were opening up full time. There were a lot of go-go bars. I don't know if you remember--you're probably too young--but that was a big thing. The go-go bars weren't making it after a while because some of them were being closed down. So, they became gay bars. So, our business went down; it was going to come back up again. There's always going to be some reason and it's going to happen; we know that's going to happen. You're not going to be the only person in town.

The other place that has been in business for a long time is Paradise, which is out in Asbury Park. He runs a very good place there. He's got a different type of venue. He has a motel there; he has a swimming pool. It's much larger. He advertises very well in a lot of the gay magazines. In the summer, it hasn't really affected us. We know that during the summer, it's slower anyway. If the gas prices were higher--just like people don't go on vacations or go for long drives, it's the same way. If the gas prices were higher, people wouldn't be going down to Asbury Park, but they're still going to go down there. It's going to make some difference I'm sure, but it's not going to make that much difference. This is the way business cycles run, especially in the bar business.

The only thing I can say that has been very, very, very good has been Sophie's Bistro. Peter has had this for ten years. There was probably one year during this recession, like two years ago, that Peter felt it. It was one year that his business didn't go up, but it's continually growing. It's getting better. The consistency has been very good. Oh, you can read--there are some people who say in the comments that people make online and everything--I don't know if you knew about it. We had one group of people that came in here that were sitting at table ten, the round table. I think there were three couples and they came in; they probably had some cocktails before they came in. When they served cocktails, they said that it wasn't filled to the top. Well, when they make drinks, they don't fill their martinis all the way to the top because it's a big glass. Secondly, if you have to carry it, you're going to spill. So, they were quite insulting to the server. Peter went over and tried to accommodate them. They were very, very rude, especially to the server. That's where he became a little bit upset, and he told them to leave. Basically, I think he said, "Get the fuck out of here." I'm not sure if he used that language, but he felt that

people here who are working here should not be insulted by your sitting down at the table and being rude to a server or anyone who's working there. So, they wrote a big article, a big thing, saying how the owner was so rude and told them to get the fuck out, but they don't tell them why they were told to do that. [telephone rings] Excuse me. Let me get that.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

RM: In any business, no one is going to say that you are the most perfect place. You might talk about Per Se, the great restaurant in New York City. Everyone says that's a four-star restaurant, how great it is. They have enough people and the way they do things, it's going to be that way. We're just a simple country place. We feel the same way about the gay bar and we feel the same way about the restaurant. We want people to come in, feel very comfortable, feel that they're getting value for their money, and be consistent; that's all.

NM: You mentioned that you were in the Reserves and you were opposed to the Vietnam War. All of this was going on and in the backdrop is the war in Vietnam. I wanted to ask how, in your experience, how it affected New Brunswick, the community.

RM: A few of our customers were drafted, if you're talking about people that I knew who were drafted, who went into the service, and who went to Vietnam. It really didn't affect our business. Certainly, it was something that people were talking about all the time. If it wasn't talking about the war in Vietnam, you were seeing pictures on TV all the time. Then, you were seeing demonstrations against the war in Vietnam. So, at that time, it really didn't affect the customers in any way. In living through it, it personally affected me, because, one, as I said, I was still in the Reserves, but I loved the Reserves. I loved the Army and everything. Somewhere along the line, I had to make some sort of decision about what my life was going to be and how I was going to support it. I'm probably more of a gadfly than I am a person who really goes out and demonstrates. I will say to someone else, I will inject them with the idea and let them do it, but I don't do it. I don't have the guts to do it sometimes or the inclination to do it. I did find that there were many people--as a matter of fact, I even marched when they had, in New Brunswick, people who were against the war in Vietnam. I marched at it. I can remember, at that time, I allowed my hair to grow longer, much longer, I had a beard. I remember Peter and Randi, my son and daughter, gave me a beret to hold my hair in the back. [telephone rings]

[RECORDING PAUSED]

NM: You were saying that your hair was long and you had a beret.

RM: I wore Brooks Brother's suits. I remember I was walking, marching with everyone, and we were going past, it was on Paterson Street, where the courthouse was. I grew up with a group of men who are all attorneys. My group was Malcolm, Ronnie and Bert Busch. Here I am marching down, and someone yells out, "There's Dickie Mankanoff." [laughter] At least that was one time that I was demonstrating to show my--of course, I think I was out of the Reserves at that time because I had grown a beard and let my hair grow long. But, as I said, as much as I loved the Reserves and I felt that we had a very, very good outfit--the 78th was very, very good--

I felt I couldn't stay in any longer, that I was allowing someone else to go over to fight in Vietnam at that time because of that.

NM: Could you speak more about the atmosphere in the Reserves, in terms of your experience there? Were people in the Reserves concerned about possibly going to Vietnam?

RM: There were some people who were concerned that they were going to be going overseas. We were also concerned at that time about--I was also in when they were doing the airlift into Berlin; that was at that time, but I don't think any of us were really concerned about being called up. I don't think any of my men felt that way. The majority of the men were in there because they felt that, one, being in the Reserves, they weren't going into the service, and, secondly, there were some people, they had already done two years in the service and then they came in and stayed in the Reserves because they wanted to get a pension at the end of twenty years, which is pretty good if they did that. It was something extra that they would be getting from the government. I don't think that I had any people, either officers or enlisted men, that were really that concerned about being called up.

NM: Before the Vietnam War, did you think that you might stay in the Reserves for twenty years?

RM: Yes, yes, I thought that I would. I looked at it in the same way that some of the other men did. One, I personally liked it. Secondly, I thought, "Well, this is another way of getting some sort of a pension," when I was ready to retire, which I thought was very good. As I said, I liked it. So, you stay with something that you like. I have to say that I was good at it also. My company would always get very, very high grades for being very good. It wasn't because of me; there wasn't anything I personally [did]. It was because I was very fortunate to have good people under me, who really made the company be as good as it was, but, as I said, it came to a point where I couldn't stay any longer, as much as I liked it.

NM: Do you have any questions?

GC: Oh, yes.

RM: Go ahead.

GC: Going back to the Manny's Den, when you had to move locations, can you go through all the locations for Manny's Den and why you moved?

RM: That's interesting, because when I was moving--I was on Albany Street. I was right where J&J is right now, across the street from, I guess, Rafferty's almost. We didn't own the building, and at that time, J&J had been buying up all the places there. Some places they were giving huge amounts of money, but that's beside the point. When it came to us, they wanted us to get out of there, so I bought two buildings. One was on Church Street. You have the corner of George and Church, one building in on Church Street, I bought that building. Then, I bought the building which is right on George Street; it's a sub place now. It has apartments above, and it has this sub place below that. Peter and Randi were going to join me. As a matter of fact, the place

was going to be called RPM, Randi and Peter Mack, RPM. We were just going to do it that way. We were going to have an Italian restaurant on one side, and we were going to have a disco up on the top floor and the gay bar was going to be on the Church Street side in that building. I had made architectural plans for it and everything. There were two things; one, at that time, where Harvest Moon, the beer place there, I was too close to it to have another liquor license, to move my liquor license there. Later, they changed the law in the City of New Brunswick and said on George Street in the downtown area, you could have bars right next to one another. But in the meantime, I couldn't do it. I was going to get the permission to do it, but in the meantime, I was being evicted from the location that I was in on 111 Albany Street. So, I then bought the place which was right around the corner from the Frog and the Peach. I bought that building, and then I bought another building. I'm telling you I was mortgaged up to here, but business was very good and I was able to pay all my bills, except that I had two kids in college, which was a very--even though some of them had working scholarships--it was very, very difficult. But these are all things that you get through and you keep doing.

So, here, I own three buildings, and I'm paying mortgage fees on it. The same way I feel that people are against President Obama, I don't care what you say, is the fact that he's black. I don't care what they think about his economy or what they think about his Medicare plan, what they think about his infusion of monies that he's put into the economy, all of these things, I think they're still against him because he's black. [Three] things are against him; one, he's black, two, he's very bright, and, three, he went to--where was it--Harvard. Of course, many other men have gone to Harvard too or Yale. Anyways, it's the same thing. In the back of their minds, when I wanted to move to George Street and Church Street there, they were still thinking that it was a gay bar. These are the city officials. I had to go to the City Council a few times to get permission to move my liquor license there. Then, I moved down to Hiram Street. We fixed up there, and we were doing very well there, too, open seven days a week, always doing well. Then, they came along, and they were taking that over by eminent domain. So, we had to leave there, and Danny--you know Danny.

GC: Yes.

RM: He was working for us and also in the real estate business, and he found the bowling alley here. So, we bought this place here. We bought it, one, because of its location and, two, because of its liquor license that it had. At the time, all we did--we used half of the building. The other half was all storeroom. Danny and Peter were here like for six months, at least, in the wintertime too, building this place. They were the ones who built it, the two of them.

GC: Were you worried to leave New Brunswick and come to this location?

RM: No, not really. The only thing that worried me at that time was once again having to run around and get mortgages, having to get loans from banks. When we opened, we had lines around the block, people coming into The Den when we opened. The only thing that we were concerned about at that time [was we] had too many people coming in, and that was for a year. I mean, it was like everyone all of a sudden--we're talking twenty-some years ago--everyone knew that The Den was opening up again, and everyone was in line to get in. Both straight and gay were coming in. So, I say that if you have a good reputation, if you're fair in doing everything,

you're going to have people come back again. The same way we were talking about just a minute ago that another bar opens up, it has its ups and downs, etcetera, the same way. That first year, every night, we were busy, every night. Then, it slowed down, people found other places to go to; they get tired of the same place. What's going to happen, they're going to go to another place and see the same people there.

GC: Because of the success of the bar, did you want to make Manny's Den a chain? How did that come about?

RM: That happened before. That was because of two things; one, because we had been successful in winning the case against the Alcoholic Beverage Control, and, two, we thought that the way we were going to do it was that we were going to have a separate room in every one of the bars that people would show their Gay Boy Club card and they could go in there. We would have sandwiches for them there. We would make it that it was worth the twenty-five dollars or thirty-five dollars that they were paying a year to be a member of the Gay Boy Club. We started the one in New Brunswick. Then, we started one in New Orleans. Then, we had one in Phoenix. The one in New Orleans was being run by two men who were partners. The one in Phoenix was being run basically by my father, but my father had emphysema at that time and he couldn't be doing everything, but we had some very good people who were there, Sam Jones being one of them, who was excellent. Then, I was going to be opening one in Chicago. I was doing this, and I was becoming exhausted, flying from Newark and New Brunswick to New Orleans to Phoenix to Chicago and back again. It was very difficult on my life. I just didn't want anything like that. It's the same way that Peter has his success here, and we say, "Well, why don't you open another restaurant and you'll be doubly successful?" He's happy. You don't need huge amounts of money. You don't have to have millions of dollars to be successful or happy in your life. How much money does a person need? I mean, you're living in a new apartment now, the same way that you have your Ph.D. now. It makes it better for your life, but you're certainly not going to be--what's the guy's name who owns Facebook?

GC: Mark Zuckerberg.

RM: Right, where the stock is going for thirty-eight dollars. My best friend has taught at the University of Chicago. With his pension plan that he had from the university there--he just retired this past year--he's got maybe four million dollars. Now, of course, part of it is because the stock market has been so good. It might not have been so good in the past two weeks or so, but I'm just saying that as a professor, as a Ph.D., hopefully you're going to be able to do the same thing and that eventually you get your job. What do we look for? We look for our retirement. Like myself, I don't want to retire because it's the only thing I know. The same way with my best friend Ray. He retired, but he says that he's got more work now than he ever did, because he's still doing a lot of graduate students, he reads their papers and he's still teaching two classes. You still do these things. Of course, he keeps busy, because that way every Monday he can go back to his office at the university. Then, he goes out to lunch with all his buddies there, all the other professors, and this is what he loves. It's the same way--there are certain things that you like in life. I loved being in the Reserve; I liked that discipline. I don't have the same discipline in business, and I certainly don't have the same discipline in my life without having that. As I said, I would hope that every high school graduate in the United States, when they

graduate, both male and female, have to go into the service for at least one year. It does two things; one, it cuts the umbilical cord, and, two, it gives them a certain amount of independence that they've never had before and they can be much better people in our society.

GC: I completely agree.

RM: Good.

GC: My friend is from Israel. You have to go in the military and it teaches you so many things about life.

RM: Yes. So, I've been very fortunate that this business, the things that I've gone through--lucky. I say part of it is the luck. I was just talking with some people about [New Brunswick]. I know who it was. As a matter of fact, I saw the doctor on Tuesday. Just as an aside, this is pertaining to cancer and stuff, it is the first time that I've ever been with a doctor for two-and-a-half hours. You're never sick, you guys. If you get ten minutes with your doctor, it's a lot. Of course, he was interviewing me about going into certain programs, experimental programs. Anyway, he's from Highland Park, much younger than I am, and he said, "Well, how do you feel about what's going on?" I said, "I'm disappointed in New Brunswick." Not that it isn't nice what they've done, but I remember, as I said before, how New Brunswick was such a wonderful community, that the downtown area, all the people who owned businesses there knew one another. There was the unwritten law that you go into someone's business there, you would get a ten percent discount. You had grocery stores, little grocery stores around. You had the shoe repair shop. You had the cleaners there. You had the lady's dress shop, the men's clothing stores. You had the pharmacy. You knew these people. You had the movies, the movie theaters that were in downtown New Brunswick. When people would go to the movies on Friday and Saturday, you used to wait in line to get in. You no longer have that in any of the movies or any of these experiences. Now, as I said, New Brunswick has certainly gentrified tremendously. Places where we used to live that Hispanics have moved in there or because of downtown Hiram Street and Memorial Parkway and all of that has gone down, you have a lot of the people who were in there, the blacks, who have moved to other neighborhoods too that used to be all white and all middle class. There are so many people today who are middle class in this. Then, you have all those people who have moved out of town.

As I said, I love New Brunswick. I thought New Brunswick was a wonderful place to live and grow up. Even on Friday night football games, when we used to go to the stadium up on Livingston Avenue, kids used to walk up there. The stadium would be packed and we would go to the football game. I don't think that they have that anymore. Of course, I don't think they have the night games anymore because they have too many problems with it. As I said, New Brunswick was a wonderful place to grow up. I know that, being in the Rotary Club, we give scholarships to the schools in New Brunswick and North Brunswick and some in Highland Park. I see who the scholarships are being given to. In this area, the majority of them are black or Hispanic. We're just pleased--I'm pleased to be part of the Rotary Club, to be able to give these scholarships to different [students]. They're very bright and really very, very good students. But I guess every place has changed.

NM: Could you talk a little bit more about the New Brunswick you were just describing, from your experience, the changes from the 1950s on?

RM: In generalizations, I would have graduated from high school, if I went to high school here, which I didn't. I only went through junior high school. I would have graduated in 1951. As I said, the teaching was very good. There were a lot of students who went to college from here. You went to football games. You went to basketball games. You went to house parties. You had religious organizations, your churches, your synagogues, which had parties there on different nights. You could meet people and you could be "with your own." You still had this division at that time. When you were in school, there were a number of blacks, but not a huge group of blacks. The majority of the blacks that I associated with and knew, I might also call them middle class. The white people certainly in my association were attorneys, accountants, dentists, doctors, at least their fathers were. You would then go and be the same thing that your father was. As I said, I found that it was a good place to grow up. I found that, even though you didn't realize that you were living in these different sections with the same people all the time.

I think New Brunswick, as I said, New Brunswick was a wonderful, safe place to grow up. I know between New Brunswick and Highland Park, we had different groups and organizations that you belonged to. I was a Cub Scout. I was a Scout. You had a lot of people who were doing this all the time. I also think that in growing up, the majority of the people, you sort of did what was expected of you, that you were going to be a Cub Scout, you were going to be a Scout, you were going to belong to this organization, you were going to belong to that organization, you were going to go to this club or that club. You were eventually going to get a job. You knew where you might be able to get a job. You were going to go to college. We didn't have too many community colleges at that time. You would go to Rutgers University. People were very New Brunswick town-oriented in their own way.

NM: Say a little more about demographic and physical changes that took place in New Brunswick and when Johnson & Johnson began to buy up properties.

RM: Prior to that, when you started to have--I don't even remember the dates; it had to be in the late '60s when you had the problem in Los Angeles, in Detroit, in Newark. In New Brunswick, we had some but very, very little. There weren't any problems there. This was specifically blacks protesting. Then, you started to see-- because as people, as the whites were moving out of one district, you then had the blacks were moving in, or later on, the Hispanics were moving in. It started to change the demographics of the town and the area. Then, what really changed was the gentrification, when Johnson & Johnson came in and started--it was J&J. I lived in Highland Park at that time, and John Heldrich, who was one of the vice presidents at J&J--as a matter of fact, the hotel in downtown New Brunswick is called the Heldrich; that was for John. He just lived up the block from where I lived. I remember going to a meeting when he was putting this New Brunswick Development Corporation together. He said that they were trying to stop the insidious creeping--I forgot the word that he used. He was afraid that the people from New Brunswick, specifically the blacks, were going to move across the bridge, the Albany Street Bridge, into Highland Park. He said that if we start doing what we have to do [in] downtown New Brunswick and cleaning it up, then they won't be coming into Highland Park. If you see going across the bridge there, you might see flowerpots that are hanging off--I don't know if

they're still there, but they used to be there. They were put there because of Mrs. Heldrich, John's wife. You would have the J&J little golf cart, which would have gallons of water there, go along the sidewalk there and be putting water into all of the plants there, so that it would look good coming into Highland Park or going into New Brunswick.

J&J, they built their beautiful campus there. They came in, and they were the ones who, surreptitiously through a law firm and a real estate firm in Philadelphia, were coming into buy the property. It's interesting because one of the real estate brokers who was doing this, was a man who--well, two things. One, he was a ZBT [Zeta Beta Tau]. ZBT was a fraternity and it was mostly a Jewish fraternity, but I think, like all fraternities, they had to allow everyone to come in. He was a ZBT. I knew him from there and he was also gay, which was incidental to it also. He was telling me what was going on with J&J, meaning that they had all these companies that were coming in and buying the property. In a way, it was very good what J&J did, but at the same time, it's gentrification, where everyone started moving. Of course, the other thing was that the same thing that happened in Newark and other places where they built these high-rise buildings for minority people to be in there, what you were doing is you were ghettoizing all the people. So, you're having, unfortunately, the crime going on in their own backyard, their own place there. You're having problems keeping the place clean, keeping the place graffiti free. So, I'm trying to think, did they still have the building? Then, they realized that what they needed was low-rise buildings, which are better. Then, they put other houses around that one building there too. I think they have some senior housing there too. Then, they're doing some more work on the corner of George and New Street there too, in New Brunswick.

I go through New Brunswick. I try to go through it on George Street just to see the changes. I say, "Oh, geez, what was there, they knocked that down. What was the other thing that they knocked down?" What they're trying to do, from what I understand, is they're trying to make a safe corridor from the Rutgers campus all the way over to the Douglass campus, that whole corridor there. As I said, at one time, it used to be, in the '50s, it was a good walking corridor there. Then, as times changed, it wasn't as safe.

GC: Speaking of Rutgers, was there a relationship between Rutgers and The Den? Were there a lot of Rutgers students going?

RM: Yes, there were, but you do know that Rutgers then had--when gay people started to come out--I think they still have the gay organization there--I don't know what it's called. [Editor's Note: Mr. Mack is referring to the Queer Student Alliance, founded at Rutgers in 1969 as the Student Homophile League.]

GC: It was the second one in the country; Columbia was the first.

RM: We used to work with them. Unfortunately, at that time, the other problem--it's not a problem--is that the majority of them were under twenty-one. So, here, I think Jimmy, what Jimmy does, he does some nights for the Rutgers gay organization there. That's for those people who are under twenty-one. He works that way with it. We've always been very supportive, in one way or another, trying to help them. They can be political, because it's not the same thing as

trying to make money in a place. So, we can support them, but we can't be political with them in any way.

GC: How do you support them?

RM: We support them by giving them a venue to come in. They're the ones who ask us to do this, not so much that Jimmy asked them or anything.

GC: I know you have lots of professors from Rutgers who come to Sophie's. Can you talk about how this became a place professors come?

RM: I have no idea. Many academics travel, and in their travels, they've been to Europe and everything, so they were looking for a place that was going to be a bistro. We tried to make this as much as a bistro as can be. So, you had many professors, many people would come in because it was bistro food, it was bistro wines, it was comfortable for them. I can remember there was one night here, we had President McCormick and his wife were sitting at one table. [Editor's Note: Dr. Richard L. McCormick served as the president of Rutgers University from 2002 to 2012.] What's his name, Blimling?

NM: Dr. Gregory Blimling. [Editor's Note: In 2004, Dr. Gregory Blimling became the Vice President for Student Affairs at Rutgers. In 2013, he accepted an appointment in the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers.]

RM: Right. [Blimling] was sitting at another table. Barry Qualls was at another table. [Editor's Note: Dr. Barry Qualls, Professor Emeritus of English at Rutgers University, served as the Vice President of Undergraduate Education.] Then, there were some other professors who were in here. The funny thing was that they were going past McCormick, and it was almost like they were genuflecting. [laughter] But they were all here almost at one time. Peter knows Dr. McCormick, President McCormick's wife. She's been in here with other friends and people that he knows. She's come in with her adopted child. I don't know if you know anything about the family there. I only know it from what I see here, a really nice family. As a matter of fact, his daughter worked here. If someone asks Peter, "Can my daughter work here during the summertime?" and if it's McCormick, you say yes. [laughter] That's one of the ways. I guess it's just [that the] word spreads. Then, you have--and he's gay.

GC: Dean Schuster? [Editor's Note: Dr. Mark Schuster served as the Dean of Students for Rutgers-New Brunswick and as the Dean for Graduate Student Life since 2016.]

RM: Dean Schuster, Mark. He's a friend. He'd have dinner with Randi, my daughter, and Mike. There was a group of them that would sit every Friday night at a table ten there, the round table. Then, unfortunately, John and Karen moved down to New Orleans, and that was Mark's ride to get here. So, he has to look for a ride. Then, you have Dr. Barry Qualls, who comes in all the time. He's always been very, very kind and very nice. I don't know why they've all gravitated [here]. Then, they have some of their little parties here too. I have no idea; it's just that a lot of them like the place and have gravitated here. Maybe one person came, another person would come and it's been very, very good that way. It's funny, people think, "How did you come to

Somerset?" The same way that I would have loved to stay in New Brunswick, but even though I had these two buildings where it would have been a wonderful place and it would have been a good mix. As I said, the same way that we have the gay bar here--people still, they ask, "What's The Den?" They don't know. We just say, "It's the night club."

GC: Do you still have a day crowd and a night crowd?

RM: Right. We serve lunch here. No one knows what's going on in the back there, and it doesn't make any difference. What is going on there? People are having a good time, period, that's all.

GC: You previously mentioned the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. Every time I've spoken to anybody, they have vivid memories of their friends, especially people in the bar scene. Can you elaborate on any of that?

RM: It was very interesting. I mentioned before that when the ABC had [tried to shut us down] and it was written in the newspaper that we were a gay bar and that we had the violation against us, we had a lot of people, gay people and some straight people, who didn't come in. That was the same thing that was happening during the '80s when HIV and AIDS came about. You had people who were afraid to come in. I'm not talking about straight people; I'm talking about gay people too. It was because people were just afraid and they were seeing what was happening to a lot of their friends. That was a very, very difficult time in the gay society especially. You must have been talking with some of the older people.

GC: Yes.

RM: As a matter of fact, I was just talking with one of my first customers, Buddy Hall, and we were talking about--I think I might have mentioned it on here--the guy who made Manny's Den gay, Billy Virginis. Buddy called me to say that Billy had just come out of the hospital. He has been HIV-infected for a long time. Billy has to be--he's got to be in his '70s, early '70s. One of the problems that he had was a respiratory problem, which is part of AIDS, and he's still going, which amazes me, because if there was anyone that I knew who was promiscuous, he was it. He could sit at our bar and he would be sitting at the end, and he would look down the bar and there might have been seven people there and he would say, "I've had every one of them." There were certain people like that. The other thing that was happening at that time, which was just prior to it, there were a lot of what they called backrooms--not in New Jersey here--but in New York. People were going to places like that.

The dichotomy of being gay and being in the Army at the same time, I'm seeing both things. It was very rare that I would walk into Manny's Den wearing my uniform, not because I was afraid. It just happened that it wouldn't be at the time that I would do it. But the difference between the two lives, personally, that I was leading was knowing so many gay people. Even the talk, there are different words, different ways to talk, that you have with a gay person. A lot of straight people don't know what some of these words mean. So, it was like you're almost speaking a different language.

GC: Did you have a lot of military people coming into Manny's Den?

RM: There were. You know Kent. There were a number of guys. As a matter of fact, I told you that the person I leaned over and sprayed with water at the bar there, a couple of weeks after that, we knew that he was going into the service. There were many people that I know that were in the service and who were gay.

GC: Were they open about it?

RM: I doubt it. They weren't open, not that at that time.

GC: But here they could be.

RM: Here they could be, definitely. The other thing, when priests used to come in, they would take their collar off and they would be dressed differently, we used to know who they were too, found a lot that way. In the service, the highest incidence of homosexuality was in the airborne. Now, here these big guys who were jumping from planes that were doing all this physical stuff and everything, let's say they'd go into a locker and you'd open the locker and you would see an Arnold Schwarzenegger, a body builder there, rather than a Marilyn Monroe or a picture like that, because a lot of these men revered the male body more so than they revered the female body. No matter where you go, when you put men together, you're going to find that there's going to be homosexuality. Same way, we used to laugh about if they're going to arrest every homosexual that's in a gay bar and they're going to put them into prison, what better a place? It's just like going to heaven. [laughter]

NM: You were in the Reserves for eight-and-half years.

RM: Yes.

NM: Were there ever any judicial dealings or incidents with homosexuality? If there were, was it dealt with through other means?

RM: I never confronted any, either being on active duty or in the Reserves. Part of the time, I was with basic training companies. I never had any problems there either. Anyone who was so openly gay and those young men who were in some way effeminate, they never would be going into the service. Fortunately, if they did go into the service, sometimes, I hate to say it, they'd be raped, just like going into a prison. So, no, we never had anything. I never confronted anything like that, never.

GC: Did other members of the service know your views and know about the bar?

RM: I was open about where I worked and what I did and the bar that I had. I never had any problems like that. All the people that I dealt with, officers and enlisted men, I don't think anyone--oh, there might have been some people who were homophobic or some people who might make comments, but it certainly never affected me or anyone went against me in any way. A lot of times, people would just make a comment like that. It was more a joke, or sometimes

they were using the wrong word, which they shouldn't have. I found that the service, [as] a whole, was quite liberal in that way, except that they really never had to confront it. I mean, if they ever really had to confront that they had someone who was gay--at least I never found any problem like that, because they never confronted it. They didn't have anything to say about it and really have any opinion about it. As I said, there was always going to be someone in the service who was going to be against homosexuals, but there weren't that many.

The only time I ever confronted any problem was that my ex-wife would go to the swimming pool when we were at Fort Riley, Kansas, and she had a darker complexion. She would get very dark. This is back in 1956-'57. I had some enlisted men who were talking with me, and they said, "Is your wife Indian?" because they had seen my wife. I knew what they were getting at, that she might have been black. At that time, there was still great prejudice. As a matter of fact, I popped up right away and said, "No, she isn't black, which you're insinuating, and at the same time, even if I did marry a black person, it wouldn't make any difference to me." There was always going to be someone like that. You confront that.

NM: On the same subject, from our research and from what other interviewees have talked about in their experiences in the military, there sometimes was racial tension. Was that something that was prevalent? Was that something that you encountered?

RM: Yes. The Army at that time and all the services, there wasn't supposed to be any prejudice against blacks. When I was graduating from my basic infantry officer's course, I was coming back from Georgia. There were a few people who were black, and one of the men, I gave him a ride. I was going back to New Jersey. He lived in Norfolk, [Virginia]. He couldn't get out of the car and we couldn't go into the same restaurant together. I remember one night as we were driving back, we wanted to get some food. He sunk down in the seat, and I went in to get food, so they wouldn't see that he was black. Here is a guy who graduated from college, was a second lieutenant in the United States Army, as a matter of fact, wanted to stay in the military and make it a career, and this was one of the problems.

On the Army base, you didn't have a problem. There might have been some problems with enlisted men, but I never saw it with the officers. We might, as I say, see it with the enlisted men. If you went into town, in Georgia there, certainly a black would have a problem, but on the Army base, you didn't see it. I'm sure, there's no doubt about it, well, just like I said, they thought that my wife was black, because she had a good tan. There were people who felt that way. I was fortunate I really never confronted it as much.

The other thing that was good was that I didn't confront anything about my religion either, even though I'm a non-religious person. It was very easy for me to go under the name of Mack, M-A-C-K, instead of our true name, which was Makanoff, M-A-K-A-N-O-F-F. I'm sure someone would have made a comment about Makanoff either being a Jew or a Russian. But as I said, it made it much easier in that I was Mack rather than that.

GC: I wanted to ask a question about David Morris. Can you tell us a little bit more about him, how you met him?

RM: As I said, David went to college with my best friend Ray to Wesleyan. They were both in the same fraternity. I think David was once again probably one of the first blacks--David was very light-skinned too and came from an upper-middle-class family, I think. His father was a doctor, his mother was an attorney, his sister was an attorney. David was an attorney later on. There were three people that were very close. There was David, there was Ray, my best friend, and there was one other fellow--I forgot his name--who, when he was drafted into the service, became one of the color guards in Washington, D.C. at Arlington. We also knew that he was a very liberal person, like all of us were, and here he is in part of the color guard being very spiffy and with his highly-polished shoes and everything.

I had met David when we were undergraduates, and then later, when I was going into Chicago, I would be staying at Ray's apartment there, and I would meet David there because he was working, I think, for American Can Company, one of the corporations there, as an attorney. So, we would go out to dinner and we would sit and talk and other things like that. Then, over the years, later on, I met him here in New Jersey occasionally. Then, when the case came up, that's when I met him. At that time, he really wasn't out to me that much, but it was one of those things, "We think and we know that you're gay, but we never talk about it." David was, as I said, also a very bright guy and was also very active with the gay community, I think specifically with a lot of the younger gay men, young men, that were coming out. He was trying to help them. He also did a lot in the state with the state police, and he gave courses there about gays and how they should be handled. There shouldn't be any prejudice against a gay person when they're stopped or whatever happens like that, how to handle that.

GC: What was his role in the case?

RM: In the case? He was doing a lot of the research. Like I said, you go and you look into the books of other precedent cases. There weren't a huge amount of cases, but there were enough for him to learn about what the cases were. Then, he wrote notes and wrote the brief on what should be the law, rather than what is the law right now. Ted [Sager] Meth was able to communicate that. Certainly, he was with David on all of this, and he was able to communicate it to the judges in court. So, it was very good.

GC: What happened to David?

RM: Yes. He died unfortunately; he had a bad heart. I had seen David just about a few months before he died. As a matter of fact, he was with his sister, and he was getting an honorary thing for being very active with the gay community. It was at the Pines, I think. A huge amount of people were there and he got the recognition. I think by that time he wasn't living in New Jersey anymore, he was living in New York, but he was very active in New Jersey.

GC: Switching gears, I would like to hear about your family, about Peter, your daughter, raising them.

RM: It's funny because I spoke about Billy Virginis just a minute ago, and Billy went to the hair dressing school across the street on Albany Street, and he used to come in all the time. Then, he was working as a hair dresser in some of the shops. My wife used to go to him to have her hair

done. I don't remember exactly when it was or why it was, but Billy came to our house. He was, I guess, doing my wife's hair. Randi was very small, and he also did her hair. So, we've known Billy for years and was always doing hair.

Peter and Randi both grew up in the business. Because I was working, a lot of times they would come down and have dinner at Manny's Den when we had the restaurant going. They wouldn't be there late at night, but we had many gay friends, so they would come to the house or they would come especially on Sundays. We had a pool and we always had some sort of party and we'd always have some gay friends who were there. So, they grew up and were very liberal. There was no difference in anything.

As a matter of fact, there was one time we had to go away for--getting back to the service again--we had to go away on weekends to Fort Dix for the Reserves. One time, I took Peter with me. He was very young. I don't remember if we had a little fatigue outfit for him or not, you know, the Army fatigues. He went down there. I was able to do that because of what I was doing at that time, I could bring him down. So, one, he saw part of the military that I was in at that time, and he also saw all the people who were gay. As we always said and we always told both Randi and Peter, what two people do in the privacy of their own bedroom is their business, it's not ours, and that's the way you accept people, if you're talking about something like that. You accept people for who they are and what they are and not what their sexual preference is.

NM: This is a shot-in-the-dark question, but since you've lived in New Brunswick and you know New Brunswick, in 1956, there was the Hungarian Revolution and there's a big Hungarian community in New Brunswick. Is that something that affected the city?

RM: It really didn't affect the city. The majority of the people were coming in through Camp Kilmer, which was over in Piscataway there at that time. As a matter of fact, one of my father's cousins, first cousin, who was from New York, she was working with the refugees who were coming in at that time and trying to place them. The Hungarian community was very good about all the refugees that were coming in and the community itself in New Brunswick. We knew that there was a large number that were coming in, and they were all placed and all taken care of very well. It really had no effect on the town, except that the town itself, having so many Hungarians, knew what was going on and that they were helping out.

NM: I want to ask about your involvement with the Rotary Club and some of the civic involvement that you yourself have been involved in, in New Brunswick. Could you speak about that?

RM: The Rotary Club over the years--and I've been in it for almost thirty years--the Rotary Club has advanced. When I first got into the Rotary Club, I would say that we would have almost a hundred members, and then people started to drop out and it was difficult to get members. Then, there might have been thirty and we were lucky we would get fifteen to twenty people to a meeting. Then, because of certain people who came into the Rotary Club in the past ten years, especially a man by the name of Mike Blackwell, who's very active. I think he's in charge of the New Brunswick Recreation, and he's a very outgoing person. He was able to get more people involved in Rotary. So, now, we have at least thirty people that come to our meetings, who are

active in doing things. I haven't been there in almost a year where I've been active, mainly because of my cancer, but they have been very active. The whole thing with the Rotary Club is doing enough projects to make money so that they can give scholarships. We're basically doing a lot with scholarships or we do certain things with other clubs, even in other countries, to help them. But the other thing that they've been very active in is young people who come over, who need heart operations or other operations, one of the Rotarians will take them into their home, will pick them up at the airport, bring them into their home. The mother, who has come with the child, would stay in the home. The child might be in the hospital for a number of weeks, at Robert Wood or St. Peter's. So, Rotary would pay for or try to get the airline to pick up the ticket, or Rotary would pick it up. The other people would be volunteers who would take the people from the airport to the home, to the hospital. As I said, they do a lot with the scholarships for students. I'm trying to think.

The whole thing that Rotary is trying to do is to have different events where they can make money to help other people. We don't do a huge amount in New Jersey, in our club, with other countries, like trying to dig wells. One thing that we did do, we had one man who had been to Africa and he saw that they had the schoolrooms--they had stubs of pencils and they didn't have any books. They didn't have any pads and they didn't have any of these things. So, over a year or so, we collected books, we collected pads and pencils and then found a shipping company that would donate one of its carriers to put everything in, and then they would ship it over. Unfortunately, sometimes we have to pay for the shipping, which was a lot of money. It would get over to Africa and it would help in the schoolrooms there. Rotary is also very active in stopping--my mind's going blank--not tuberculosis.

NM: Malaria?

RM: No. Isn't it horrible how you forget about it? Where they give people the piece of sugar with the stuff on it. Sabin was very active with it. What do they call it, the disease? It's not malaria; it's not TB. That's what happens when you get old, you forget things like this. They have been trying to eradicate--they've done a very good job. [Editor's Note: In 1953, Dr. Jonas Salk announced that he had developed a vaccine against polio. In 1954, clinical trials took place, and, in 1955, a nationwide inoculation campaign commenced. The Sabin vaccine refers to the live-virus, oral polio vaccine that was developed by Dr. Albert Sabin.]

NM: Smallpox?

RM: No. It has to do with the lungs. Unfortunately, I remember in the '50s, that people would be put into these--what do you call it--tanks that looked like a coffin.

NM: Iron lung?

RM: Iron lung, right. What did they call that disease? Isn't that horrible? [Polio], that's what Rotary has been trying to eradicate. We've been doing a lot in our club with--once again, it's the donation of money. You try to do also things for the community. One time, we did go out and we were along the Raritan River and doing cleaning up of the Raritan River, trying to help the

community that way, but as I said, the majority of it is putting on events to try and get enough money to help the community in one way or another.

GC: I want to ask about the future. Manny's Den has been here for so many years, especially considering bars pop up and they go away fast. Do you have any plans for the future of Manny's Den?

RM: I have no idea what Peter has planned there, and I don't think there are any plans for the future. As things go along, they're just going to continue to--you try and think of new gimmicks to get people to come into your bar. As I said, what happens, even if you don't do a thing, you're going to have a cycle where it's going to be up, it's going to go down, it's going to come up again, but you try to do something that's going to bring people in.

GC: What has made you so successful, where other bars failed?

RM: Consistency. As I said, one, we're fair about our prices. We hope that the people who are serving you are good servers. The same way I talked about those sick people that were at [Sophie's Bistro] and how they were rude to the server. If Peter himself can have respect for his servers, the people who come in have to have respect for the servers. If they have no respect, then Peter doesn't want them in here, and it's the same way on The Den side too. You have to be nice to the customers; the customers have to be appreciative of what you're doing for them, even if you just say, "Hello, how are you doing?" just talking with them that way. You don't have to have people getting drunk--they certainly don't get drunk anymore. They don't drink anyway like they used to.

Times have changed all over. This is what happens when you get too old, you remember all of this shit, but the registers are computers and so you know how many drinks are being served, you know what kind of drinks are being served, you know how many people are coming in, you have a count, and at the end of the night, you divide into what you took in, how many people, and what the average person was spending. The average person is spending less today because they're drinking less, even though our prices have gone up, than they did twenty years ago, and even though some of the door prices might be higher. If you go to a movie, what are you paying? Nine, ten dollars at least for a ticket. Forget about the fact that you're then going to buy a Coca-Cola or some popcorn. By the time you get out of going to a movie, you spend fifteen dollars. Many people don't spend fifteen dollars here in a night.

GC: It's so true.

RM: They've been here, they've had a place that is warm, they have a TV going, they have a DJ going, and you would think that they would at least spend the same thing that they would spend going to a movie. As I said, times have changed. The same way that back at that time, people were joining the Reserves or the National Guard. People, when they were going out, as I said, they're spending almost two hundred dollars a month just on their electronics. People would go out every night because they wanted to meet people, but now they don't have to go out every night. Now, you can have a good time one night a week, that's it. The same way, as we were growing up, that Friday or Saturday night was the night that you used to take your girlfriend out

or boyfriend out or whatever it was, and you'd go to a movie. Then, afterwards, maybe you'd go to a bar for a drink, or sometimes you would go out to a bar with your partner and you would have a couple of drinks and go home. But, today, you're only doing it one night a week. People don't have the money for it, especially now with the economy the way it is. It's hard enough trying to stay in an apartment. It's hard enough to pay for the gas that you're paying 3.75 for a gallon. It's hard enough to pay for the insurance on a car. So, all of these things in our lifetime have changed. We read about how many young people are moving back into their family's home again. Many years ago, when a person was unemployed and there might only have been thirteen weeks of unemployment, they were living at home. So, they didn't have to pay anything. What they were making on unemployment was enough, even though it might only have been a hundred, 125 a week, if it was that. If they were working some place, they might not have been making more than 250 dollars a week. It's relative on how much you're making and what it's costing you to live thirty years ago and what it is costing you to live today. Now, as I said, more people are going and living at home. That was another reason that people, as I said, were joining the Reserves or the National Guard; it was extra money that they were getting for going there. So, it really wasn't too bad. Take a weekend, maybe a month, once a week, going to a Reserve meeting a couple of hours, and they're making money that way. It was good.

GC: I have no more questions.

NM: We talked about how the economy affects the business already.

RM: Yes, the economy certainly does in all businesses, unless you're a banker. I'm joking when I say that. [laughter]

NM: So, at the end of an interview, we open it up and if there's something that we missed, please feel free to speak about it, or if there's something you'd like to add for the record, please feel free to speak about it.

GC: Especially what you're doing now and plans.

RM: It's not my business; it's Peter's business. I vicariously enjoy. I vicariously see how well it's doing and can talk about it and see how things have changed over the years, but otherwise, I have no plans for it. When my father was running the business, I was working for him and I was managing the place. Then, when I took over, then later Peter came in and he became manager and then he became owner. So, during those times, my father was making a decision, I would talk about it with him. Peter and I would make a decision, but now I'm no longer really in it. We talk, and certainly Peter, Danny and Debbie and other people will sit around. I have had experience and know what happened here, but things are so changed. The only thing I can say is cycles. I know that in all businesses there are going to be cycles and they're going to be up and down, and there's always going to be something that's going to happen. The big bank right now that has lost almost three billion dollars ...

NM: JPMorgan Chase.

RM: JPMorgan, right. Or J&J, who had a problem with some of its drugs. So, these are companies that are not going to go out of business. It's the same way. This is a small, small business. We're going to have our cycles too. As long as you're consistent--how many businesses, small businesses, can say that they have had the same ownership since 1944? Some people say, "Oh, you must be doing something right." Well, the only right thing that we're doing is that we're consistent. We try to be consistent. We like our business, we like our customers and we try to be fair, that's all. If you keep doing that, I think that you're going to stay in business, you're going to be all right. Personally, I have been fortunate--like, we were talking about the service. As I said, I would have loved to be regular Army and stayed in the Army, but I also had a business that I took over from my father, and I was lucky that way too. In someone's lifespan, and so many different things happen to them, and in talking about all of this, it brings back wonderful, good memories of how New Brunswick used to be. As I said, I was talking about New Brunswick and I said, "Oh, well, I liked old New Brunswick." He said, "Well, I remember when I first came here in the '70s what New Brunswick was like then. You were almost afraid to walk down the street." Well, I never felt that way. I always felt there was something I liked about New Brunswick. Highland Park has never changed. He's from Highland Park. In New Brunswick, they said, "Oh, well, I couldn't walk ..." Now, they feel that they can walk any place in New Brunswick. Well, not any place, but it's still very, very--I think it's a safe place.

What is New Brunswick? New Brunswick is hospitals and a university. You talk about why do we have so many of the deans coming in here, so many people from Rutgers University coming, we also have a huge amount of people who come in from St. Peter's Hospital and Robert Wood. You can have some of these same people. We can go to the Frog and the Peach; we'll go in there and we'll see our customers there. People go to different places all the time. As long as they're going to come back to you for one day or one time a year, you know that's a good customer. It's the same way with The Den over here. You're not going to be able to keep the same people or all the people all the time. There are new people that are coming in all the time. There are new people who are turning twenty-one, who could then come out to a bar. It depends on where they're coming from. The Staten Island people, it's much easier for them on a Thursday night to stay in Staten Island than come across the Outer Bridge Crossing and coming into New Brunswick and Somerset here. We have many people who come from Princeton. My wife and I go to the Blue Point Grill in Princeton all the time because it's a good fish place, so we'll drive the fifteen miles there too. People aren't going out as often as they were because they don't have the money, but if you can get a person to come back, then you know you're doing well. I told Debbie, there are a lot of little stories, and Debbie is a very, very bright person and she's very articulate. She writes very well. I have to get her a little tape recorder like this, [so] that she can go home every night and just talk about certain little things that have happened in the restaurant. Can I give you a little example? Is that okay?

GC: Of course.

RM: We had a little party here last week. The man was doing a sixty-fifth birthday for his wife. First of all, he tried to bargain with us on everything. We had a menu that was, let's say, a twenty-seven-dollar menu, a thirty-seven-dollar menu and a forty-seven-dollar menu. So, he took the twenty-seven dollar menu, but he said, "Can I have the steak that's on the thirty-seven

dollar menu and put it on the twenty-seven dollar menu?" [laughter] Peter was talking with him and he said, "This isn't *Let's Make a Deal*." He called up the day of the party and he said, "Oh, you're going to put flowers out, aren't you?" Debbie said, "No, we don't supply the flowers. If you want us to supply flowers, we'll charge you for it." But she gave him the name of Biagio, and they delivered the flowers here. He wanted only four pitchers of wine, house wine, the least expensive, which is good. He wanted two red, two white. He originally said there were going to be fifteen people; there were eighteen people. So, the people came in, and they went through the four pitchers. Then, some people wanted more wine, so Whitney brought two more pitchers out, one red and one white. At the end of the night, he's paying the bill and he saw that there were six pitchers of wine. He said, "I only wanted four pitchers." So, Debbie said, "Okay, we'll take the other two pitchers back, but we'll charge you for one glass that came out of each pitcher." So, he settled with that. After he paid, he said, "Oh, I'd like to take those pitchers home." So, Debbie said, "But you didn't pay for them; you only paid for one glass." He says, "Well, what are you going to do with them?" So, he only wants to pay for one glass on it, but he still wants to take the pitchers home with him. These are stories that you could tell, the same way that I told the story about the people who were complaining that the drink wasn't high enough, and then when they billed the drink up, as I said, they were very, very rude to the server, very insulting. Peter told them to leave. I mean, this is another little story that you tell.

There are many little stories that you have. We have the people who came in one time. They had a little party here, and they wanted crepes. When we serve the crepe, we put ice cream on it and then put syrup over it. She couldn't understand why the crepe wasn't warm. She says, "The only time I've ever had crepes ..." I said, "If we put ice cream on top of a warm crepe, it's going to melt." She couldn't understand why she couldn't have a hot [crepe]. I said, "If you just want crepes, we'll give you crepes. We'll put powdered sugar on it or we'll put some sort of syrup on it," but she couldn't understand that. All these little stories, I wanted Debbie to write a little book about it, because Debbie, if you noticed, is always reading all the time.

GC: I have a question I forgot to ask you. Were you the one who started the Miss Den Pageant?

RM: I'll tell you another story about that. I have a story for everything. Yes, we did. We used to have a Halloween pageant. We would build a runway, and this was in the old, old Den on Albany Street. One time, my cousin was very friendly with Michael Douglas, and Michael Douglas came down and was one of the judges at the Halloween Den Party. So, that's another thing; we had Michael Douglas here. This is before he was on the TV shows he was on, before he produced [*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*] and other things like that. As matter of fact, it's funny because *The Streets of San Francisco*--was it?--that he one of the detectives on it, I don't know if you remember, with the guy who had the big nose. Well, anyway, Sam Jones, who used to work for us, who I said was one of the best bartenders I ever saw, he was also on that show and was living in San Francisco at that time. So, we went out and went on to the set, and we saw Michael Douglas again. He always remembers the time that he was a judge at Manny's Den.

GC: He was a judge for the Halloween pageant.

RM: The Halloween party, and that's how the Miss Manny's Den came about. So, then afterwards, we then started to do the Miss Den thing.

GC: Okay. So, then you had the pageant and the girls would compete to go onto Miss New Jersey.

RM: That came later on, yes. That, they developed over the years, but mainly it came really from the Halloween pageant that we had and then we started doing the Miss Manny's Den.

GC: Do you remember anything about the drag scene at the time?

RM: Oh, yes. There was a big scene. Interestingly, you didn't have a huge amount of people who came into the bar in drag, nothing like that, but you had a lot of people who really liked to be dressed up and they would make their own clothes. I don't know what they're doing now, but they would make their own gowns, they would do their own hair, because most of these people were hair dressers anyway. They were all these either thin or big guys. You would see them walking down with their tattoos on their arms and all dressed up as a woman, but a lot of people took it very, very seriously.

GC: Did you ever have a resident drag queen? Do you know when that started?

RM: That started later on. That started here.

GC: With Peter?

RM: With Peter, yes. First of all, we had more room for it. The venue was completely different. We used to do shows on Hiram Street when we were there ...

GC: Drag shows?

RM: Drag shows. But nothing as big as what we do here. I shouldn't say that. There was one time that they did do--well, New Hope was very, very big for drag shows. There was one club there. As a matter of fact, that club is knocked down, and there's a bank there now. New Hope, there were three gay bars at that time in New Hope. As a matter of fact, my mother and father were asked to go and judge, to be judges, for one of the drag shows there. I forgot the name of the club, it's been so long ago. I can remember my mother getting all dressed up with her little mink jacket. My mother and father went there and they were the main people who were there because they were going to be judging.

Then, we did some things like that, and this is when we were still on Albany Street. I mentioned Billy Virginis. Billy Virginis was a great, great drag. We'd do these little drag shows and they would do the Supremes, he would get them together and mouth the words and everything. They even would do some of the dance steps of other shows that were popular at that time. So, there was a lot of drag at that time. When they got here, you saw that was more professional, like Alex ...

GC: Alexis.

RM: Alexis. We even had her wedding here, when she got married.

GC: Wow.

RM: So, I've known her for years. Billy was very, very good, but Billy was too old by the time we started here.

GC: For someone who doesn't understand drag or even the concept of drag, for someone who's reading this, can you elaborate on what drag is, what the performance is, and what the audience gets out of it?

RM: It's very interesting because here in the United States--in England, it's one of the biggest things. If you remember, you had Benny Hill. Benny Hill used to be a great drag. Here in the United States, you used to have Milton Berle, who was a great comedian, who used to do drag, too. These were comedians that would do drag. Oh, my gosh; I forgot his name--a comedian-actor, who does his stand-up comedy in high heels and lipstick and dressed like that, not full drag. I forgot his name. In drag, what you have is you have many people who liked to dress in women's clothing and look beautiful--do their hair, do their makeup, have clothes that fits them as well as a woman, even to put padding in their breast, in their behinds to give them the look of a woman. They're very proud to get up there and perform. It is a performance. You have to get into the act and the feeling that you are a woman, you're pretty woman, and you can dress this way. People are judging you for how beautiful you look and how well you dress and how well you move. Then, when they have contests, they have performances, how well you could lip-sync. There are some people I know that are so good at it they sing with their own voice. I've seen some performers here who were that good and they sound very much like a woman, even though it might be exactly like a woman. There are many people who like to see--it's a performance. It's not just someone getting up and dressing; they are actors who are up there and they're acting this way. There are people who like to see these performances. What's on Broadway right now?

GC: *Priscilla Queen of the Desert*.

RM: *Priscilla*, which is a drag show.

GC: It is interesting that it is becoming more mainstream.

RM: It's always been very mainstream in Great Britain--that I know--but it's becoming more mainstream here in the United States; they're getting away with it, yes.

GC: That is so interesting.

RM: As I said, it's a performance. It's a very good performance. I'm sure that there are nights here when they have ...

GC: Like tonight.

RM: Tonight, it's Friday night. You'll have straight people who are coming into see the performance. It's a great act, it's a great show, and they're getting better and better at it all the time, they really are.

GC: The last Miss Den Pageant, I sold about thirty tickets. There was a professor at Rutgers University that required her students to go to a place where they were considered the minority. My roommate was in the class, and my roommate said that I worked here. She suggested going to The Den. About thirty people bought tickets. They came to the show, and they actually had trouble writing their papers because they said they felt like they weren't a minority. No one treated them any differently. Everyone was extremely nice. They were confused--they had all these questions, they could understand drag. For a lot of them, it was the first time they were in a gay club. It was so interesting to see their reaction. They were supposed to go to a place where they were considered a minority or outcast, but here it was extremely welcoming. No one really cared. No one cares what you're doing. You're a man in a dress; no one really cares. So, no one really cares what you're doing at all. So, it was interesting.

RM: They were just disappointed. [laughter]

GC: Yes, they were disappointed. They couldn't write their papers.

RM: That's part of what The Den is all about. That's what I'm trying to say is that we've always felt that way. As I said, my mother was at The Den. My mother would gather the younger people who were under twenty-one, and she would keep them in [what] she would call her "kiddie section." There was always going to be an older man that wanted to have a younger--I don't understand things like that--where they'd call them chicken hawks, where an older man likes to have a younger man, or an older man likes to have a younger woman. It's the same thing; they're chicken hawks. A lot of them wanted to tell their parents that they were gay. My mother said, "Your parents might have in back of their mind that you are gay." But just like Clinton said, "Don't ask, don't tell" or whatever it is. The same way; you don't have to tell your parents because when you tell them that you're gay, then they're going to be upset, "What have I done to make you gay?" It's nothing that they have done. This is either a genetic thing or whatever it is. Sometimes, a father would say, "I'm going to disown you." The day before you didn't tell them, it was fine. Now that you've told them, "I don't want a gay son." So, my mother would say, "In a way, they knew. Your parents knew." Unless you were questioned about it, then you might have to say something, but otherwise, you don't have to.

The same way that we wanted everyone to come into The Den. We wanted everyone to be comfortable there. We wanted a mix of straight and gay people. The majority of the people are going to be gay, but the mix is better. This is how society is. Now, it's true that here you're getting more gay than you are straight, but at least it shows that you can get along together. The other thing is that a lot of younger people, it's easier for them to be more liberal. It's when some of the older people become very conservative. I know people who were extremely liberal, and all of a sudden they move down to North and South Carolina, and they became a red state. [laughter] But younger people, it's much easier for a younger person to accept all of this. I think that it's very good.

Over the years, we could have closed down The Den and done something [else]. As a matter of fact, I've been trying to tell Peter--we do a lot of parties; Debbie has been great in getting parties in here--we need a larger party room. We turn parties away. If we took over the dance floor over here--and maybe this is something that we were talking about do I have any plans for the future. I personally don't have plans, but I would like to see--I think it could be done, that the dance floor become a catering room. It could hold approximately, it's large enough, to make it a room that could hold a hundred people. It's large enough to have a divider that you could have fifty people on one side and fifty on the other. Bar one, where it is right now, leave it that way. Then, you move into the storeroom there, because we still have a lot of room there, and make that into a dance room. Then, we still have to build another kitchen. We'd have to arrange it that we build another kitchen for the catering. This is something down the line that Peter will have to do or doesn't have to do if he doesn't want to, but you do certain things because eventually, you think that you're going to accommodate more people and you think this is another way of making more money. The other thing is you could close The Den down entirely and not do it that way. Why close something down that you've been doing for so many years and you know that it's going to go up and down? So, it's working.

It's the same way that the Frog and the Peach in downtown New Brunswick, which is one of the finest restaurants in the State of New Jersey, the people who built it, Jim and Betsy, they just sold it. They sold it to Bruce, who was the chef there for many years. He's going to continue it the same way. You're proud that the next person who's coming in is going to continue it. As a matter of fact, his wife used to work here as a server, so Peter is very friendly with them. But these are things that you progress as a person and you want to do a little bit more. Then, you think, "Well, do I really want to do more and have more headaches and do all of this, or am I content with what I'm doing right now?" Then, as I say, you think, "Well, I can go further and do more," but at the age of seventy-eight, you get to a point [where] you say, "It's over. I've done my thing. Now, I want to enjoy the fruits or vicariously enjoy the fruits of what's going on."

GC: I remember you saying before that Manny's Den might become a historic landmark.

RM: I don't know if you went online--hold on one second. I'll be right back.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

NM: Is there anything else you would like to add?

RM: At this time, I think I'm talked out. [laughter]

NM: Okay. We're going to conclude the interview with Mr. Richard Mack and Gerald Carlucci and Nicholas Molnar. Thank you very much for having us here today.

RM: Before you stop, you should call yourself "Dr. Nicholas" now. You should be very proud of that.

NM: Thank you.

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

Reviewed by Molly Graham 4/22/2017  
Reviewed by Randi Mack 10/15/2019  
Reviewed by Zach Batista 11/1/2019  
Reviewed by Kathryn Tracy Rizzi 1/2/2020