

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS MATTIA

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kathryn Tracy Rizzi: This begins an oral history interview with Thomas Mattia, on June 2, 2020, with Kate Rizzi. This is part of the Class of 1970 Oral History Project. Thank you for joining me in this interview.

Thomas Mattia: Thank you. Thank you for having me.

KR: To begin, where and when were you born?

TM: I was born November 2, 1948, at Columbus Hospital, in Newark, New Jersey.

KR: I would like to start by asking you some questions about your family history.

TM: Okay.

KR: What do you know about your family history, starting on your mother's side of the family?

TM: My mother was from Baltimore, Maryland. Her mother, my grandmother, was predominantly German with a little bit of French, I think. She came from the Ripken family, so I am somewhat distantly related to Cal Ripken, the baseball player.

My grandfather, whose last name is Murray, had a long family history in the state of Maryland. I'm doing some ancestry research, which I guess is what you do when you hit your seventies, when you decide you want to figure out where everybody came from. It was interesting, depending on which organization, because they tend to slice them a little bit differently, there's the chunk that's Italian. I just always went into it figuring, "My father's completely Italian. The family's completely Italian. Therefore, half of me is Italian." It didn't work out that way, because there's actually elements of Middle Eastern and Saharan Africa that get mixed in, but there was all this sort of British background. My grandfather Murray and the family always said that he was Irish--they were Irish Catholics. In doing the research, I discovered that on my grandfather's maternal side, that the Murrays had, in two points, had married into very longstanding British families, who had come over to Maryland with Lord Baltimore. Now, I actually can trace, because it's so well documented, I can trace my family history back to the fifteenth century. I mean, you're now ten times out, so that the spread gets much wider. So, yes, there's this big British side that I never factored in. The frustrating thing for me is I can trace the Murrays through to an individual who was born before the Revolutionary War and died at the Battle of Camden, I think, in 1780, but I can't get past him. I can't find any records of him, so I'll keep working on that. That's my mother's side. [Editor's Note: The Battle of Camden was fought on August 16, 1780 near Camden, South Carolina during the American Revolution. It was a decisive British victory.]

That family, my mother had five siblings; there were six kids. My grandfather worked as a paintbrush maker at the Pittsburgh Paint Company factory in Baltimore. They had a house directly across the street, which when I was a little kid and we'd drive down to see my grandparents and we'd pull into this parking lot, I always thought it was kind of interesting that my grandparents had this big parking lot for their house. [laughter] It was years later that I figured out that, actually, it was the parking lot for the factory. I think the sons all worked there

a little bit but not much. She had three brothers. One became a police officer in Baltimore. The other two--you know I can't remember--I don't know what the other two did. She had two sisters, and of that group, one remains living, my Aunt June, who was the baby of the family and who is now ninety-five, I think. My mother was the eldest daughter and second-eldest child. She's the one who helped the most taking care of the other kids. In talking to my Aunt June, years and years later, she said my mother was always kind of nervous, and that sort of carries through. I have a little bit of anxiety. One or two of my children have anxiety, probably from that strain.

My mother did not marry early and was beginning to verge on the prospect of being an old maid when the war broke out, and she went into the WACs, the Women's Army Corps. That is where she met my father in Joplin, Missouri, on the base [Camp Crowder] in Joplin, Missouri. They were married.

My memories--on my father's side, both of my grandparents had died. On my mother's side, my grandparents were still alive, and that really did create a difference in the way the families bonded. There was still a maternal-paternal structure on my mother's side. Everyone came to my grandparents for the holidays. That's where everyone spent it. Even when they got older and had bigger families themselves, they might do something early but always came over. All of my holidays, I remember as a youth, were at my grandparents' house. They originally had a house they had built out in the country and then moved back to the city house after my uncle moved out of it.

On my father's side, he had three brothers and a sister, who all lived relatively close by, but all of their families were a bit older. Their children were a bit older. Their parents had gone. We'd see them, but there wasn't that same closeness. We'd see them around the holidays, but the family gatherings were not quite as frequent, I guess. So, I always felt closer, I guess, to my mother's family than my father's family. There were grandchildren there who were--there was a very wide range, but there were certainly some in my bracket. There were some younger than me. I'm an only child, so those kind of cousin relationships were important. Are you still there? You faded out and came back. Oh, you're frozen and circling. Are you there? Oh, there you are. You're moving again.

KR: Yes, you dropped out for a minute. I heard you talk about your cousins.

TM: Yes, just the fact that I was an only child, and so the relationships with cousins were the closest things I had to relatives my own age. That was on my mother's side, not my father's side, largely. I had one cousin on my father's side who was actually very close to my age. They lived in Weequahic, and we lived in the North Ward. My father's brother had married a Jewish woman, and the kids were raised in the Jewish faith. I always used to get mad, because at Christmastime, they would get Hanukkah and Christmas, which didn't seem completely fair to me, but there you have it. It got me over to the Weequahic side of Newark.

KR: I am curious if your parents ever told you stories about how the Great Depression affected their lives.

TM: Much more for my mother. I don't know if you're there or not. Oh, there we go. It might be my Internet.

KR: I can hear you.

TM: Much more from my mother's side, I think. Not that there wasn't any from my dad's side. It's just because my grandmother was still around, so I not only heard it from my mother, but I heard it from my grandmother as well. There was just an element of that family, the house they lived in was the same house they lived in through the depression and through World War II. It looked very much the same. It smelled like 1948. I mean, there's a piece of me that thinks I lived through part of that because they hadn't left it behind. There was a lot of talk about that, and it had a tremendous impact on my mother. [Editor's Note: The telephone rings.]

She was always worried, she had this angst anyway, and worrying about finances were a very big part of her. My father worked for the Public Service Bus Company, which is now New Jersey Transit, and he was a mechanic for the bus company. He would walk the half a block from our house to the corner, take the Number 82 bus downtown, take the bus to work, take that same bus home, on a fairly straight schedule. I remember, when I was small, he would come in, and they must've been paid in cash, because I remember him coming home with cash. My mom would meet him at the backdoor with a big envelope that had little envelopes inside of it. She'd take all his money, and she had it set up for the bills that needed to be paid and to buy food and all that stuff, all segregated. She'd fill out each of those envelopes, and if anything was left, that was my father's sort of spending money, which was coins, not dollar bills, for a long time. They were people who didn't want to take on debt and made sure they had their money and tried to do savings and all that stuff, so very much impacted on that side by memories of the depression.

It isn't that my father didn't have those memories. It's that my father was more--they were an interesting couple when I think about them--my father was far looser. My father was in his thirties as well when they met during the war. He had been a bachelor. He had been sort of footloose and fancy-free. My Uncle Jerry, who was one of his older brothers, told me stories about my dad not showing up to work. My Uncle Jerry got my dad the job at the bus company, and in his youth, my father would skip some days and go play pool. [laughter] [Editor's Note: A phone starts to ring.] My Uncle Jerry would go find him, and he said he'd knock the cigarette out of his mouth and make him go back to work. So, I think my father lived through the depression but maybe in a--he was the youngest--well, he wasn't the youngest, but I think he was my grandmother's favorite. So, it happened around him, but he didn't seem to worry about it too much. So, they were an interesting couple when they got together, as they were living through the early '50s.

KR: Can you hear me, Tom?

TM: I can.

KR: What was your father's military service like during World War II?

TM: His service, so it ended up being--because I refused induction for the Vietnam War, or that was my plan. I refused it. We'll get to that story later. So, we had this battle because it's not that he volunteered, but when he was drafted, he went, but he ended up never going overseas. I think he served most of the war in Joplin, Missouri, certainly a good chunk of it. He rose to staff sergeant or first sergeant, whatever the highest level of sergeant is, whether that's staff or first. He led the motor pool for his company. The first time his unit was preparing to ship out, his mother died, my grandmother died. They were all locked on base, and they wouldn't give him a pass to go back for my grandmother's funeral. As I said, I think he was her favorite. So, he went AWOL and went back for the funeral and then returned and was arrested and court-martialed and put in the brig and busted down to buck private.

To his credit, by the end of the war, he was back up to staff sergeant, whatever the second level is. He had an impacted wisdom tooth or something that struck just before he was supposed to ship out, and he didn't ship out for that. I think there was a third time that his unit was called up, and for some reason, he didn't make it. So, his military service was very much running the motor pool at the Army base at Joplin, Missouri.

They met there and were married in Joplin by, initially, a justice of the peace, which I think is [the reason] my mother then for years didn't go to church on Sunday. When I was small, I didn't quite understand why. I would go with my dad. We were a Catholic family and pretty religious. When I was old enough to be going to confession myself, so eight or nine, my mother, one day, there was this big thing and we all walked to church. My mother went to confession, and then she came out and prayed for a long time. [laughter] They never told me what it was about and then [my mother] started going to church again. They never told me what it was about, but I surmised, after I figured out that they had gotten married by a justice of the peace first and then a priest later, that she, while she was legally married, in her mind she wasn't religiously married. I am sure they cohabited for a while, and I think she carried that with her for a long time. It's interesting, because the church was very much one of the major centers of our family and our community, until I went away to school.

KR: Which church did you go to?

TM: St. Francis Xavier, which is still there. I went to the school as well. It had a K through eight school. St. Francis is in the North Ward as well. It's just off Bloomfield Avenue. It's right across the street from Schools Stadium, which is the big stadium in Newark, or was at the time. I think Barringer still plays football there. My defunct high school, Essex Catholic, played football there.

St. Francis was really the center of things, because I was going to school there. I spent a little time as an altar boy, but really my longest service was as a choir boy. I sang in the choir I think through high school, certainly into high school. I may have stopped during high school. There was a brief period of time I thought I might become a priest, very brief. As you go through puberty and you're trying to figure out what girls are all about, priesthood seems like a simpler way to deal with it all, for a little bit but then that passed.

I was still very religious until I went to Rutgers. There's a Catholic church [St. Peter the Apostle] at the edge of campus. My dormitory my freshman year was Frelinghuysen on the river. The neat thing about Newark was it was far enough away to be on your own, but not so far away that you couldn't get back if you needed to. I know when I first started school, I'd go back home on the weekends, get my laundry done, go to church on Sunday, and I could take the train back and be back on campus in the afternoon. As I got settled in and got more on my own, I would go back home fewer weekends. At first, I'd still go to church on Sunday, and then one Sunday, after a lot of pizza and beer the night before, I rolled over and just didn't go. Lightning didn't strike me and I didn't die and I didn't get sick, and I said, "Ah, it's safe not to go to church." [laughter] I stopped and didn't go back. To this day, I'm almost completely sectarian or irreligious or agnostic or whatever. I'm here, I can see you.

KR: Yes, you dropped out for a minute there. I have you now. Can you hear me?

TM: Yes, I can hear you.

KR: Okay. Before we talk more about your Rutgers years, can you describe what it was like growing up in the North Ward of Newark?

TM: [laughter] We spent a lot of time outside. Friends were really important, especially if you're an only child, so your relationships were all with your friends. Pretty free to roam, I'd be out all day, leave in the morning if we weren't in school. There's a public school--I don't know where it was--three, four blocks down First Avenue, First Avenue School. It had a big, fenced-in, asphalt-covered playground in the back, and we pretty much lived there, certainly during the summer. It had gates. When we were smaller, where the gates pivoted, they had space, so we'd get around this hump and there was enough space, when we were smaller, to be able to sneak through that. As we got bigger, we'd have to climb the fence, which was pretty tall, as I remembered. It was like four sections tall of chain link. We'd climb over and climb back down, unless the playground was open, in which case we just walked in. We were there all the time. We played stickball, touch football. We had fights.

I still have--my kids kid me--I have a scar in the shape of a Y on my forehead. When I was very small, my mother used to wear steel inserts in her shoes. At the time, the science was that if your arches were low, you wore these steel inserts. At any rate, I had one in my hand, I slipped on a scatter rug and jammed it in my head and got a cut that I still have. There's a little Y-piece, and that came from some kids from another playground came over, I guess, when I was in my early teens. I had just gotten a Tony Kubek glove, a baseball glove, which was a big thing. Up until then, I had had these old gloves that looked like you were holding your hand out straight. So, it was like my first real, decent glove, and I almost lost it in that fight, which was a big thing. I got hit in the head with a steel rod in the middle of the fight, because people were swinging bats and stuff, and that gave me my other Y. So, that would happen, although infrequently. It's not like we rumbled. [Editor's Note: Tony Kubek is a retired Major League Baseball player and television broadcaster. He played his entire career for the New York Yankees, from 1957 to 1965, during which time he played in six World Series.]

We were just kids. We ran around. There was probably a ten-block area, where we all lived and we all moved, and it was our part of town. We played a lot at that playground. We played a lot, as we got older, we'd sing on the street corner of First Avenue and 13th Street. We knew everybody. You had your set of friends. It was heavily Italian but, interestingly, still diverse. There were a couple of Irish kids. I was an oddity because I had an Italian last name, but I wasn't completely Italian. There were one or two Black kids in the neighborhood. The neighborhood across, on the other side of the school and the church, started to get far more diverse and far blacker. While the Black kids in our neighborhood were okay to come to our playground, it really was not acceptable for Black kids--or any other kids, actually, but certainly not Black kids--to try and come and play in our playground. So, we had some scuffles over that and/or chased some people away over that. Largely, we ran around.

If we were able to scrape up some money, we'd get subs at one of the two delicatessens on First Avenue. I played Little League baseball. St. Francis Xavier had a Little League, so I played Little League baseball from the time I was nine, I guess, until twelve. I had the misfortune of my father deciding it would be a great idea for him to coach my team. That's why I never coached any of my kids' teams. It's really hard. It's hard on the parent, and it's hard on the child, especially when the child is not the world's best baseball player. The interesting thing was, if your parents were sitting in the stands and you do something, you miss a flyball or something, they can yell out at you or yell at you, and usually the coach will turn around and tell them to keep quiet. When the parent is your coach and they yell at you, there's no one to stop that. I love him for the fact that he wanted to do it because I was doing it, but it was not an easy time for either of us. Would that I could have been a better baseball player, it would've made his life easier. I played all those years and had one homerun, and that was only because it went through the leftfielder's legs and rolled under the stands at the stadium. They couldn't get to the ball. But I remember it as a good time.

There were a group of us that [went to St. Francis]. There were a group of kids that went to the public school. After school, we were all together. It was a pretty heavily Italian-accented group of kids in an Italian-accent community. Most of them lived in multiple-family environments. There were a lot of triple-deckers in that part of Newark. So, there were a lot of kids who had grandparents on the first floor and they lived with their parents on the second floor, and somebody else, you know, an aunt or uncle or somebody, lived on the third floor. So, a lot of that, a lot of families living in side-by-side triple-deckers. [laughter]

We lived on North 13th Street, which I always found interesting. They didn't have a 14th Street. They had a 13th and a 15th. How odd is that? I mean, you always skip thirteen. At any rate, we lived on 13th Street. We lived on 13th Street and there was no 14th and then 15th Street was Bloomfield. So, we were right on the Bloomfield border. Then, my uncles lived on 17th Street, so within like three blocks of our house.

My parents, when they got out of the service, I guess they got some money through the GI Bill, and they certainly could get a VA loan to get a house. I think their first thought was there was a gas station available for sale close to where my mother's parents lived outside of Baltimore. I think they thought about buying that and opening up a gas station, and my father would be the mechanic and they'd do that stuff. My parents, they weren't entrepreneurial. I think my mother

would've been really scared because of her depression-era stuff. My father, the bus company had his job waiting for him when he came out, so I think they took the easier way and took the certain job back in Newark.

His two brothers had purchased a house on 17th Street, and it was a triple-decker. One brother lived on the first floor, one on the second, and there was a small apartment on the third, where one of my uncle's sons had lived for a while. They had moved out and my parents moved into that place, and ended up buying half of a duplex house then three blocks away. So, they owned half of a duplex, literally four rooms. Downstairs was a living room and a kitchen, and then upstairs were two bedrooms and a bath. It had a little backyard, and it's still there today.

A long time ago, when my eldest daughter went away to college her freshman year, which would've been the summer of 2007, we drove up. We were living in Atlanta, and we took a van and drove up, made it a road trip. We stopped to see my parents' grave and to see my Aunt June in Maryland, and then we stopped in Newark. My street largely hadn't changed. There was one new building that I could see on my street. Everything else was very much the same. I went to the house where I grew up, and I was just going to look at it from the outside. My wife made me go up and knock on the door. The people who had owned the other half, the other side of the duplex, had been an Irish family, a son and a daughter and the mom and dad. The mom and daughter were still living in that half of the duplex, lo these many years later. The side that my parents had owned, they sold in like 1980. My mom got real sick, and she finally convinced my dad to go back to Maryland, so she could die there, in essence. That side was now owned by a Newark policeman, a mounted cop. I just said, "This is where I grew up," and he was nice enough to let us in and we walked around a little bit. Then, my kids looked and were flabbergasted that it was so small, because it was literally four little rooms.

That was my house and neighborhood. I had friends. Bobby Barbello lived down the block, and Al Falcone lived a couple blocks over. Al Pecatello lived one block up. We saw each other all the time. When we went to high school, most of us, most of the Italian Catholic kids, ended up going to Essex Catholic High School, which was actually a pretty good distance away. Essex Catholic, the archdiocese bought a big building that was put up by an insurance company at the far end of Broad Street just before the crash in the late '20s, when they expected that Newark would continue growing in that direction, that the downtown would get bigger. It didn't, and it was sort of sitting there in what became a residential area. It's certainly a blue-collar, middle-class, working-class neighborhood. So, that was pretty far away from the North Ward to there, and we could take a bus, the old 82 bus. I spent my life on that bus. To this day, I will not get in a bus, and my wife never understood. I said, "Because poor people ride buses, and I'm not going to get in a bus." We'd take the 82 bus down to where Bloomfield Avenue crosses Branch Brook Park, which was about two-thirds of the way to school, and get off there and then walk to school. As we got older and wanted to save the money on the buses, there were times where we'd walk the whole way. I mean, it was pretty good exercise now that I think of it. We had these bags that looked like bowling ball bags, slightly bigger bowling ball bags, to put all our books in, because even though we had lockers, we had to take everything out every day and bring it home. So, that was interesting. Yes, a lot of those kids I went to high school with. Al Falcone and I both went to Rutgers together.

KR: What was the education like, first at St. Francis Xavier and then at Essex Catholic?

TM: They were a good, fundamental Catholic education. [laughter] Pretty strict, pretty strict. We had nuns in grammar school, and then we had Irish Christian brothers teaching at Essex Catholic, neither of which spared the rod. Corporal punishment was in vogue at the time. You drilled a lot, you learned your lessons. It gave you structure. Grammar school was coed, and in seventh and eighth grade, especially those who had matured a bit sooner than others were starting to understand that relationship. Leaving that for an all-boys' high school, in some ways, was a good thing, because in high school, we could not go to dances until we were juniors, I think. My junior and senior year, you could actually go to dances and meet girls. The separation, in some ways, was good. It kept you focused. In some ways, it was bad, I'm sure. I'm sure it stunted my emotional growth for a while.

The grammar school was in a couple of small buildings, a couple of houses, and one building that had been the original church and meeting hall, they turned that into classrooms. I think, when I was in sixth or seventh grade, they had built a new school, which the school building is still there. It's still a functioning actually. We started in that new school building, and I remember Kennedy running for president and having discussions in that building about, "Isn't it great that a Catholic is running for president?" [Editor's Note: Democrat John F. Kennedy won the presidential election in 1960. He was the nation's first and, to date, only Roman Catholic president. There have been several Catholic presidential candidates, including Al Smith, John Kerry and Joe Biden.]

Then, high school, they had this great big building, which served them very well and in many ways was a good school building, but because it was built as an office building, it did not have wide corridors. So, changing classes was really problematic. What they did was not change classes. You had a homeroom, you stayed in homeroom, and the teachers would change classes, except for a couple things like a language class or something, if there was something different. So, your homeroom really was your homeroom.

The thing I remember is we had one brother who had a belt--not a belt--a strap. He had slices of rubber that were used to make the heels for shoes in a couple of different thickness. They were the things they would stamp the heels out of. So, he'd have this--oh, we lost you again. All right, you seem to be back.

KR: I can hear you.

TM: He had a set of these straps. He had names for them. I remember the one that caused the most pain was "Big Bwana." If there was an issue, you would literally walk to the front of the class and bend over the desk and get whacked with this strap. Yes, physical punishment was accepted. Like a lot of kids growing up, you didn't go home and tell your parents. So, if I ever told my father that either a nun or a brother had hit me, his first response would be to hit me and ask me what did I do wrong. So, you didn't want to double the pain. That said, we were all kids, again, running around. We were pretty free, back and forth to school all the time.

I tried out for football in my freshman year, was not very good, did not make it very far. As a sophomore, interestingly, Essex Catholic High School had a fencing team, go figure. Why would an inner-city Catholic school have a fencing team? It just so happened there was a doctor in the area who was a fencer, and there was a family, whose name escapes me, who were really good fencers and had a son. Anyway, there is this fencing team. So, I started fencing, along with several of my friends, and we ended up getting varsity letters senior year for fencing. The team was state champ. We were state champions in my junior and senior years.

There's actually quite a few fencing teams in New Jersey, not only private schools but prep schools. We'd load on this beat-up Yellowbird bus in Newark and drive to Lawrenceville to fence Lawrenceville. We're coming from Newark, what do we know? We're all in like lime green, iridescent pants and pointy black shoes and Italian knits. You drive into Lawrenceville and the campus--well, it is like a college campus--we'd never seen anything that big with that much space, with academic buildings and, of course, everyone just sort of dressed very preppy. We pull up to their gymnasium, which is bigger than our school, and get out of the bus with our fencing stuff, wearing teardrop pants. These guys are looking at us like, "Clearly, what boat did you get off?" Then, we beat them. For whatever reason, we ended up being good fencers. It was an interesting prospect. I do very clearly remember the first time going to Lawrenceville and just feeling like, "Who are these people?" Fortunately, they were not particularly welcoming. They were fairly arrogant and snotty, and that just puts a chip on your shoulder I guess and you try a little harder. I mean, that's who we fenced, Lawrenceville, Hun, Rutgers Prep, schools like that.

At the time, a couple of the big archdiocesan schools, I think, were starting to fence as well, maybe Bergen Catholic, maybe somebody like that was doing it. I mean, there was enough to have a full season. Before we talk again, I'll look up, I'll see if I can find an old schedule to find out who we fenced.

KR: I am curious, what season was fencing?

TM: I have to remember. It's like a fall--I have to remember--yes, I'm pretty sure, it's a fall into winter kind of season. It's indoors. I think it's pretty much a fall into winter season. Then, since we were pretty good, we then fenced off season. There was a big fencing club in North Jersey. I came in second in the state under eighteen championships for epee, which was my weapon. That was a setup to go to Olympic trials, but I didn't fare well enough in the Olympic trials to go to the Olympics. Yes, we fenced straight through. [Editor's Note: In fencing, the three weapons used are epee, foil and sabre. All three command different styles and have their own competition category.]

My memory is when we hit our senior year, the school was good and the education was good, but the idea of counseling and SAT prep and counselors to help you figure out where do you go to college didn't exist. So, you did the best you could, and then you were sort of on your own to figure out where you were going to go to school. If my memory is correct, Seton Hall pretty much said, "Anybody graduating from Essex Catholic ..." They based it on the PSATs, the things you take in your junior year. If you did decently on your PSATs, you would get admitted to Seton Hall. We all had Seton Hall, most of us, as a backstop.

But in fencing, there was this discussion around--oh, the other place we fenced is we fenced the freshman team for Columbia, NYU and Princeton. My memory is that NYU and Columbia extended scholarship offers to the graduating seniors from our team because we were state champions. There weren't too many freshmen coming into college with those kinds of credentials. I don't know about Columbia; that seems a bridge too far. Columbia was Ivy League and didn't give scholarships, but maybe there was some discussion about help. I don't know. NYU certainly offered scholarships to us, but the cost of everything--they were tuition scholarships--the cost of everything else was so high that it was cheaper to go to Rutgers, who didn't offer us scholarships but was happy to have a person or two to join the team.

I ended up going to Rutgers, and Paul Pesthy, who was getting old by the time I got to work with him, but he had been the coach of the Hungarian National Team, had fled Hungary with the uprising in '56, he had a son who was a fantastic fencer, and who I really liked. He was good. That was back in the days when all sports were--you started out on the freshman team. There was a freshman team; you couldn't do anything else. As a freshman, you had to play freshman athletics. So, I spent a year on the freshman team and then went to the varsity team my sophomore year and fenced on the first team all the way through and got my varsity letter, I think, discovered marijuana, and drifted away.

KR: Interesting. We will talk more about that when we get into your Rutgers years. How well did you do academically in high school, and what were your academic interests?

TM: Ah. I did well. There were two tracks at Essex Catholic. There was a college prep track and what they call--I think they called it business. I did well in grammar school. You had to take an entrance exam for a Catholic high school, and for some reason, I did not do well and I was bereft. I thought I'd end up going to Barringer, which was not something I particularly wanted to do. Our family was very active in the church. The church was run by a guy named Monsignor Doolan and he was one of the few monsignors for any parish. He was something of a power within the diocese. They opened up a few more spots, and somehow--because I thought about it years later, I had friends who had been admitted and ended up in the business program--I had had to go back and seek some help, but I ended up in the college prep program, so go figure. I don't know if I had to take a second test. Maybe we had to take a second test. At any rate, I was in the college prep piece.

I was always a good student. I was always an A-minus kind of student in the upper end, if not the absolute top, and stayed that way in high school, had a constant dean's list in high school, made the honors society, I think, every semester. I won the American History Award in either my junior or senior year. So, history was a favorite. I took Latin and Spanish--and I don't know how I got through them, because I'm not very good with languages--and advanced math and that kind of stuff, which I dropped as soon as I could. I loved history and English, so that's where I ended up drifting off to. I was conscientious, a lot of homework.

Being an all-boys' school, for us, there was school, there was athletics, there was homework, and there was sleep. I mean, that was really pretty much the four categories. Even when not fencing, there was a really active intramural program at Essex Catholic. We were kept busy. The school

day started pretty early, and we were there into the evening most evenings. By the time you got home, you had time to eat, and then you had homework to do. By the time you got done with that, I'd listen to Cousin Brucie on the radio and do my homework, and there wasn't much time during the week for anything other than those. Then, you go to sleep. Those four activities were about it. The weekends, certainly, as we got into high school, then you could go to football games and there was some other stuff going on, but they kept you pretty active and pretty focused on doing well in school. [Editor's Note: Bruce Morrow, known as Cousin Brucie, is a radio host who started his career in the late 1950s on WINS (AM 1010) and became known for his nightly show on WABC (AM 770).]

KR: You mentioned Kennedy's campaign in 1960.

TM: [Yes].

KR: I am curious, what were political discussions like in your household?

TM: Well, the discussions certainly got more heated as I got older. That's for sure. As I got older and faced Vietnam, they got pretty intense. I mean, with Kennedy, it was really was this disbelief that an Irish Catholic could possibly be president and then become president, a sanctification and adoration of him, which only increased after he was shot and assassinated. It was interesting because it was a very Catholic and very Democratic household until Johnson. You get through Kennedy. You get through Johnson's first term. You start getting into the second term. Democrats are more engaged in civil rights. They're more engaged in the poor, and they're stuck with that horrible war. My father was very active politically at street level. [Editor's Note: John F. Kennedy served as the president from 1960 until November 22, 1963, when he was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. Lyndon B. Johnson, the vice president, assumed the presidency and then defeated Barry Goldwater in 1964. In 1968, Johnson did not seek reelection, due to his unpopularity from the Vietnam War, a conflict that he inherited from earlier administrations and then escalated.]

My friend Rick Sinding, who I mentioned earlier, who had been the sports editor at *The Targum*, after he got out of the service, he was a political writer for first *The Trenton Times* and then *The Bergen Record*. He used to have arguments with my father--and he really thought he knew New Jersey politics--he'd have discussions with my dad, and my dad would say, "No, that's not the way it's playing out on the street." He still owes my dad two pizzas from the bets he lost to him. Every now and then, I threaten to take them up for my father.

[My father] Tony was really active in street level politics and his statement was, the party grew away from him. Democrats were no longer his party. He became a Nixon Republican and then a big Reagan Republican. I became a radicalized Democrat, facing the prospect of fighting in Vietnam. When I came to Rutgers, I joined ROTC for my first two years and immediately dropped it after I finished my sophomore year. I got my credits for doing it, because if you didn't take a second year, you couldn't get the credit. Then, [I] just got increasingly engaged in the topics of the time. [Editor's Note: Republican Richard Nixon defeated Hubert Humphrey in 1968 and then won reelection in 1972. Republican Ronald Reagan served as president from 1981 to 1989. Between the 1960s and 1980s, there was a realignment of American political

parties, resulting from the breakdown of the New Deal Democratic coalition, with Southern Democrats, working-class Catholics and working-class Democrats shifting to the Republican Party.]

That's why I find living through what we're living through now interesting and disturbing and sorrowful. Two of my kids are out marching today, one in New York and one in Chicago. I support them in doing that, although I'm not quite sure, because I think the movement itself is unclear as to what it's asking. I think that's the issue. I think the movement has to be clearer in what it's asking, and the system has to respond with something other than saying, "Boy, it's too bad the guy got killed." I mean, there needs to be this discussion about how you change policing in the United States. That has to be what we're focused on, not all this other stuff. It requires both sides to be clear, and I think we're being less than clear, so that's problematic. At any rate, it reminds me of me. As I joked with one of my kids, "I'm the only one in my family I know of that's been tear-gassed." So, it's a long time ago, but I remember its stinging. [Editor's Note: This refers to the widespread Black Lives and anti-racism protests that erupted across the United States, as a result of George Floyd's arrest and death at the hands of Minneapolis police officers on May 25, 2020.]

Yes, politics were a big discussion for us and with us, and the war was a huge discussion. Both of my parents, having been in the service, it was hard for them to understand why I wouldn't be in the service. But for my mother, the fact that her only child and only son might be killed in the war tempered an awful lot her thoughts about how stringent she wanted to be about me going away. My father had to face the same thing, but as a man in the culture of the time, it was not easy for him to accept that his son wouldn't go, even though he had this background of managing not to have to fight. He was in the service but managed to stay away from battle, which was something I think he carried with him and thought about from time to time.

As we were going down this process, I started out very early saying I had made the decision that I didn't think it was a just war. I filed for conscientious objector status and fought that. It was funny. I lost--it was turned down because I wasn't claiming to be a Quaker. I wasn't claiming that I was a pacifist. At least I was being honest about saying, "It's not like I am unwilling to fight because I'm unwilling to fight in all wars." I'm saying, "I'm not willing to fight in this war because I don't think it's a just war and it makes no sense." There was a question about, "Would I serve as a medic, non-combatant?" and I had to think about that one. That was not an easy one to think through, but I finally came out of the thought process saying, "Well, that just frees up another person to go get killed." I mean, I take somebody's place, and the place I take has to pick up a rifle. It still aids the effort, and the effort is what I am saying I disagree with.

As I remember, the vote at my local draft board was close, five-four, six-four, something like that, and I had two more appeals, I think to the state board and I think one other. Each time, the vote was more heavily against me, so I didn't get CO status. I got a draft number, which I think was three. I think my year, my birthday was the third, was number three. [Editor's Note: November 2, Tom Mattia's date of birth, was drawn at position 34 in the first Vietnam draft lottery, which took place during the senior year of the Class of 1970. On December 1, 1969, the U.S. Selective Service held the draft lottery, broadcast live on television and radio. The lottery

selected birthdays to determine the order in which men born between 1944 and 1950 were called to report for induction in 1970 during the Vietnam War.]

They had this thing called a pre-induction physical. Largely, it was kids getting ready to graduate high school who had no deferment and were not going to go to college, and it was all the kids like me, who had gone to college and had a deferment and now were coming out of college. So, you went to your local draft board, and it was hundreds of people, hundreds of guys. They loaded you onto a bus, and they took you to downtown Newark. There was this big processing station. You went through all the testing, mental test and physical test. It was the place where if you had some physical ailment, it was the place where you made the case that your ailment, like bone spurs, should keep you from being inducted. It was the place where you told them if you thought you were going to refuse induction.

It was a big bunch of people who I hadn't seen since high school, because we were all graduating from college at the same time. [laughter] So, the guys who had gone to Seton Hall, or the guys who had gone to NYU, and us, we were all back together. We were primarily white. It was primarily kids from the neighborhood. There were guys walking around with X-rays and notes from their doctor and psychological things and whatever. I didn't have anything. So, we went through all the stuff, we get let go, and they said, "Okay, you passed, so you'll be getting an induction notice after you graduate," which is, in fact, what happened, several weeks after graduation. By then, I had made it clear to my father that I wasn't going to go, that I was going to refuse induction, and, "We'll see how that plays out." To his credit, he said, "I'll help you get a lawyer."

There was a law firm in Newark that dealt with people who were refusing induction, and they had a process you go through. On my induction day, I go back to the same local draft board. There's nobody I went to college or high school with. It's really, literally, as I remember it, it was me, two Black guys and three Latino guys who were young. No twenty-one-year-old coming out of college that I could see. They took us down to Newark again, and this, now, is a bigger group of people. At the start, we were all standing, and there's a guy in the front, and at the start, he said, "Okay, here's what the process is going to be. You go through your twenty-eight stations for checking all the things we're going to check. If you pass all the stations, you come in, we'll swear you in, you step over the line, and we swear you in and you get taken off." Then, he said, "Is there anyone here who plans to refuse induction? Raise your hand." There was at least one other person--there might have been two--in this room of hundreds. I raised my hand.

They then assigned a Navy guy to follow me around that day, I guess, to make sure I didn't try to run away. I know my lawyer said, "You go through the stuff, you get to where you step over the line. Don't step over the line. They'll come and arrest you. We'll come up and ..." because they arrest you and they take you to The Tombs in New York City to hold you until they bring you to court. He said, "We'll be there. We'll make sure you don't go to The Tombs, and we'll get you out on bail and then we'll fight this." I go, I raise my hand, the guy follows me. I go through all twenty-eight stations. We get to the end, and there's an Army doctor there, checking a list that you've passed everything. So, I passed everything, and he said, "Is there anything else you have?" The one thing I had done, I had gone to see a psychiatrist, hoping [laughter] maybe I

could get some kind of letter. The psychiatrist said, "No, you're anxious, but I can't give you a letter. I will give you a prescription for some medication to help with the anxiety, but I can't give you a letter."

I got to this last station, fully expecting to go through with this, and I just said, "Look, I don't have a letter from a doctor, but this whole process has made me very anxious to the point where I am taking medication for the anxiety." I thought he'd just say, "Okay," and move me along. Instead, he looked at the medication, gave it back to me, and said, "Okay, go to room" something. So, I went to that room, and there are a couple other people. Another Army doctor walks in and says, "Okay, you're all here for drug use. I want you to fill out this form." It had a list of drugs and it said, "Do you now or have you ever used any of these drugs?" I checked off everything that wouldn't leave a track mark. I mean, anything you could swallow or inhale, I was checking off. He took it back, and he went back, took us all back, and then went to the same doctor. He looked at me and said, "Okay, you have a six-month deferment for drug-induced depressionary syndrome." [laughter] I looked at him. He said, "Well, you know you can get called back in six months." I said, "Well, if I keep doing drugs, you won't take me in six months?" He looked at me and said, "Well, you want to be cured, don't you?" and I said, "Not if the cure is worse than the disease."

I walked out totally surprised. I called my lawyer's office to let them know not to look for me, and there's this silence on the other end. The lawyer says, "We had you down for tomorrow, for induction tomorrow." I thought, "Wow, had I not gotten that six-month deferment, I would've have stepped over the line. I would've been handcuffed, expecting them to take care of me, and I would have been shipped off to The Tombs, at least overnight." That's my sad story.

I got the six-month deferment. I was reclassified 1-H, which put me at the back end of my class, which meant if they had gone through all 365 other birthdates, then they would've come to me. At the time, they were not getting, even though they were drafting a lot, they weren't getting through [an] entire year's worth. So, they didn't get to me. The new draft class was picked, and that was it. They never called. [Editor's Note: 1-H is a draft classification that is defined as "Registrant not currently subject to processing for induction or alternative service."]

KR: I have a question. As a conscientious objector, was there ever discussion of alternative service?

TM: No, it was one of my big arguments. The offered alternative service was being a medic. My argument was, "I am happy to do alternative service. This is not a question about not wanting to serve my country. I am happy to do alternative service if it'll count." As I remember it, what you could do is the Peace Corps, but it didn't count. It was a deferment. It wasn't alternative service. It took a while to get through. So, thinking about the Peace Corps, it wasn't like, "Okay, I don't want to do this, I'll do the Peace Corps." "Okay, here's where you sign up and you can go." The Peace Corps had this long list and a waiting list. If you're not smart enough to do that in your junior year of college, the chances of having the Peace Corps as an alternative were slim. So, yes, my memory is the only offered alternative service was being a medic.

KR: I would like to delve into your Rutgers years.

TM: Okay.

KR: You mentioned living in Frelinghuysen, initially. What were your first days and weeks like at Rutgers College?

TM: Well, it was back in the days where we still wore a beanie. Freshmen wore freshmen beanies and a tie. We had to wear a beanie and a tie. We still had to learn school songs. I still sing "Loyal Sons" at the end of football games with my two friends. I don't think there are very many people who remember the words to "Loyal Sons" anymore. But we had to learn the songs. There was a bunch of freshmen activity that we went through. It was a real learning experience, especially for an only child who didn't even go to away summer camps. I just went to day camps. The idea of being away from home, it was an exhilarating, exciting but also kind of a scary and unknown situation to be suddenly answerable only to myself, with some regulations and a dorm counselor and some of that stuff, but really making decisions on my own.

Like I said, a couple Sundays in, I did not go to church. No lightning came down from the sky to strike me down, and I realized that I could not go to church if I chose not to go to church. So, I stopped going to church. The first time really drinking to any great extent. We had done a little bit in high school, and at the time, the New York State drinking age was eighteen. So, you could drive over to Staten Island using the Outerbridge Crossing, or you could drive up to Greenwood Lake and go to the New York side of Greenwood Lake. When I was sixteen or seventeen, I guess, New Jersey driver's licenses then were literally pieces of paper, type-written pieces of [paper]. How did I do that? My birthdate's November 2, 1948, so that would've shown up as 11/02/48. I did something to make it look like I was a year older. I forget what it was. I changed the numeral, but none of that makes sense because it was just like making something a zero.

KR: Yes, you perhaps used a little contact paper and ink.

TM: Yes, yes. At any rate, the guys at Greenwood Lake didn't care much, [laughter] as long as you were close. So, we'd done a little bit of that but really not a whole lot, good Catholic kids, not too much. You get on campus, and suddenly, on the weekends people are buying big things of beer. I remember the dormitory had its first keg party. It was like, "Wow." My friend Al Pecatello, who was supposed to come to Rutgers with me and we were supposed to room together and he backed out at the last minute and went to Seton Hall, he drove down for the first big keg party. Beer and girls and really not understanding or dealing with limits very well. As I said, there was, I guess they were called counselors or a RA, a resident advisor something or other at the end of the hall, who sort of tried to help us and look over things and stop us if we were being really stupid.

It was just being responsible for getting up for class on your own and starting to work through things and understanding what college classes were like. I remember I took German, because I was tired of Spanish and was not very good, and I thought, "Oh, German, my grandmother was German. I can probably learn that." I was going along thinking I was doing fine, and I ended up

doing abysmally. I failed German my freshman year and had to take it again, first semester again in second semester, and come back for summer school, with another friend of mine who had also failed German. So, it was working through that kind of stuff. Fortunately, my other grades were good, so the German, while it hurt my GPA, it didn't kill it. I wasn't at risk, but I struggled. It took me three years to get through two years of German.

It was neat. When you go home for Christmas, now, I really am eighteen, going up to Greenwood Lake for Christmas and partying and heading back to campus. It was rush, "Hey, fraternity stuff, woo-hoo." Before you even got into your classes and figuring that stuff out, you're having invitations slid under your door every night. You're making the rounds every evening, and you're drinking at all these fraternity houses and you're figuring, on one hand, it's like, "Just give me somebody who wants to take me," and on the other hand, you're trying to be somewhat determinate about where you think you feel comfortable and where you'd want to go. So, that was a really interesting time.

At the time, there was a big Italian-American fraternity, which was Lambda Chi Alpha, in a building right next to the Barn, which is now Hillel or something. It was one of the nicer houses. It was a big house. There was the Italian fraternity. So, all of us hung out there a bit.

The other end of the spectrum was Chi Psi, The Lodge, which was The Lodge then, and was the closest thing to [an] Ivy League eating house on campus and populated by the same kind of folks, very preppy, very white. So, we went there a couple times for laughs, because we knew we were like the last group of people that would be comfortable there or be considered comfortable by them. Then, there were a bunch in between. [Editor's Note: The Alpha Rho chapter of Chi Psi was established at Rutgers in 1879. The fraternity house, known as The Lodge, is located on College Avenue.]

Sammy [Sigma Alpha Mu] was a big Jewish fraternity. TKE [Tau Kappa Epsilon] and DKE [Delta Kappa Epsilon] and DU [Delta Upsilon] were big jock fraternities, and DKE is still there. It's still in the same house. The fraternity house that's now a sorority house, a very nice-looking house, like one or two houses over from DKE, is the old DU house. I had some friends who pledged that who were wrestlers.

I ended up in Alpha Chi Rho, which no longer exists, but was at 11 Union Street. The house is still there. Crow has been kicked off. It was kicked off campus at least twice and I think is not allowed back. It was a good mix. There was like a lot of high school athletes who were either playing minor sports or no sports now at college, fairly good academically, not super stellar, but not laggards either. We had a lot of engineering guys, a lot of--they didn't call them STEM then--but a lot of STEM guys. It was just a good mix. So, it ended up being a fun place, because we competed pretty heavily in intramurals, and that was a fun thing for guys to do. [Editor's Note: The fraternity Alpha Chi Rho, Beta Phi chapter, known as the "Crows," was located at 11 Union Street.]

We were a pretty big party house, the first ones to get a sound system, and we built it. The house had two living rooms, a front room and a back room, and a hallway. So, you walked in the hallway, the two living rooms were off to the left, and to the right was the dining room. Then,

the kitchen was in the back. We built these two gigantic speakers that were, literally, like ten feet tall, big cases, and a reel-to-reel tape deck. So, for an audiophile, actually a pretty good system, and it also meant we could make these long playlists and have tapes that would play through the night. It was back in the days of fraternity parties, and we were big players, because even on Friday nights, if you didn't have a live band, we had the best music. So, we partied a lot. [laughter] I stayed pretty involved with the fraternity. I ended up as the vice president my senior year; even though, by that point, I wasn't really taking the fraternity stuff awfully seriously.

Three of us get together now--or four of us actually--on Fridays for a virtual cup of coffee. One is Rick Sinding, who graduated in 1967, and then myself, who graduated in 1970, and then a third friend, Bill Hughes, William Hughes, who graduated in 1971, a fourth guy, Fred Whittles, who graduated with me in 1970. We were talking about that there was sort of a dividing line between the classes, a really distinct and firm one that hit with our class--with Freddy's and my class--as we were moving from our sophomore to our junior years. More of us grew our hair out. More of us started smoking marijuana. More of us started getting involved in civil rights activities. There were a big bunch of us that worked for Bobby Kennedy until he was shot. Of course, a lot of us acted against the war. Rick's Class of '67 had graduated. The Class of '68 and '69, '68 was still very much conservative, toe the line; '69 was starting to change a little bit. '70, there was really a fracture. Half the class were really hippies and half the class were not. Then, Billy's class of '71 really started to be all long hair, all dope smoking, all radicalized, and then, from there on in, those classes became that way. So, it was interesting to watch the change just in our little fraternity of whatever we were, a hundred and something people. [Editor's Note: Fred Whittles, RC '70, was interviewed as a part of the Class of 1970 Oral History Project, which can be found on the Rutgers Oral History Archives website.]

KR: Did you live in the fraternity house?

TM: I did my sophomore and junior years, and a group of us lived off campus my senior year. There were two apartments, 65 and 67 Louis Street, as happened I think with a lot of fraternities, they became annexes of the fraternity. There were a set of people who just kept it in the fraternity. As one set of seniors would go, other people would filter in. It actually started with Rick. Bobby Lloyd and Jim Valvano lived together at 65 Louis Street, when they were the big stars of Rutgers basketball. Rick knew them because he covered them as sports editor of *The Targum*. They lived at 65 and were moving out the end of their senior year, and Rick took that lease from them and was joined by a couple guys from the fraternity. Then, the following year, that was kept in the fraternity, and 67 opened and so people took that. So, by the time we lived there, we were the third or fourth generation of Crows to live at that address. But it went back to Bobby Lloyd and Jim Valvano. [laughter]

KR: That is really cool. I actually lived on Louis Street also, when I was at Rutgers.

TM: Really?

KR: Yes.

TM: Where on Louis Street?

KR: I am going to have to look up the address. I lived on the block between Hamilton Street and Somerset Street.

TM: This was 67. I think it's just off Easton Avenue, if my memory serves me right. There was a bar at the corner of Easton Avenue, and we were about halfway up the block. I don't know when you were there. When we were there, the neighborhood still had a lot of Hungarian families and still a lot of relatively new immigrants who had come, because the Hungarian community was big. That bar at the end of the corner was populated by older guys. A goodly number had served in World War II [inaudible] in a group of Hungarian Americans. We were the hippies who lived about midblock, and every now then, I'd go in there to buy a pack of cigarettes from the cigarette machine, never to sit down. I would never risk sitting down and having a beer. I was not that confrontational, but I'd go into get a pack of cigarettes. I'd always hear something as I was getting my cigarettes about, "Look what the wind blew in." [Editor's Note: 66 and 67 Louis Street are located on the block of Louis Street between Somerset Street and Hamilton Street. The bar being referred to was called Angie's and is now Ale 'N 'Wich.]

KR: I am curious, when you were living in your fraternity house your sophomore and junior years, was there still a housemother?

TM: When I joined the fraternity, there was a housemother. My freshman year, my pledge year, there was a housemother. I think there was a housemother my sophomore year. I know the housemother had gone my junior year, because we started using that room for more housing. So, yes, housemother was kind of an interesting, somewhat strange institution. I will say, having a housemother around certainly made the dynamics much different. With the housemother gone, with absolutely no governor on the throttle, things certainly become looser and not always in a good way, so there's certainly a difference.

KR: I am looking at a map right now of New Brunswick. When I lived on Louis Street, I lived on the blocks between Hamilton and Somerset.

TM: Ah, okay. So a bit further up. Cool.

KR: How are you doing with time?

TM: I'm good. I'm fine.

KR: Okay, good. I am curious, the summer after your freshman year, did you return to Newark? Were you living in Newark?

TM: Yes, I was. Yes, I'm trying to think. I think my first couple of summers, I returned home. The summer between my senior year of high school and my starting at Rutgers, my father got me a job at the county hospital in Belleville as a porter. The county hospital, it wasn't a straight-up hospital. It was for the elderly, and I don't think it was categorized a psychiatric hospital, but it had elderly people who were unable to take care of themselves, a really unhappy place. Old, it had been built in the '30s and looked it. Our job was to care for people who soiled the sheets all

the time, who really had limited ability to care for themselves. It was staffed with maybe one resident nurse on the floor and a lot of nurse's aides and stuff and a couple of porters, I mean, people who really weren't trained very well in how to help these people, not much for them to do. I mean, really not an uplifting environment. Porters who were older and drawing their pay and not wanting to go too far out of their way doing it.

That was a very unpleasant summer, but I made money, because my deal with my parents was they could afford tuition and room and board, but that was it. I had to buy my books and make my own spending money, so whatever I was going to spend during the year. So, it paid okay and I could save money, so I did it.

I came back after freshman year and I had scored a job with the Tasty Cupcake factory, which this was going to be it. It was a factory job, and the pay was really pretty good. It was the makers of Twinkie. So, I worked in a factory that made Twinkies, after which I never ate another Twinkie, after watching what happened in the factory that made the Twinkies. [laughter]

I started that job and that looked great and I forget what it was, but something happened and they closed the plant. Suddenly, we had no jobs and we're stuck. I've got to make money in the summer; this is tough. [laughter] My father got me my job back at that same hospital, so I spent another disgusting summer in that hospital. But by then, I was a college guy. I had Alpha Chi Ro shirts and jackets. My friend from high school, Al Pecatello, was an organ player who had a band that played up at Greenwood Lake, so I could go up to Greenwood Lake with him.

I hung out with Al Falcone and his family. Al Falcone's family was one of those triple-decker houses. Some relative lived downstairs, his parents in the middle, his aunt or something lived above him, but his extended family also had the house next door. So, they had this driveway, and they did the Newark thing in the summer where--there would be driveways alongside of the triple-decker houses and a garage in the back. Often one member of the family would be a winemaker. They almost all had a little patch of grass in the back and they'd grow grapes. Then, they'd have a press either down in the basement or in the garage and have wine for the summer. The thing was, you'd open your garage and then put folding chairs in front of the garage and then sit there all day and talk, I mean, not even out at the street. I mean, you'd be looking down a driveway. Then, in the afternoon, you'd go in and play Pinochle.

I'd go over and I'd play Pinochle with Al and his mother and father and sister for hours. Then, he, rightfully, called me up--not called me up on the phone but confronted me with the fact that I was spending an awful lot of time with him and his family during the summer, but we didn't spend much time together on campus, when we had been on campus together. Part of that was we had hung out a bit in the first half of freshman year, but then the second half of freshman year, he did not get invited not to pledge my fraternity or any other, as it happened. I was off doing pledge stuff and getting engaged with my fraternity, and he didn't see me. He lived in the quad, right across from the River Dorms. So, I took that to heart, and I sponsored him to pledge the beginning of sophomore year at Alpha Chi Ro. I was a newbie and there were guys who didn't like him, and he didn't get in. So, he and I drifted apart. I'd see him on occasion but not often after that.

Junior year, I got a job. Again, my father came through, this time with a decent job. [laughter] I got a job as a tour [director]. Public Service ran bus tours up and down the East Coast, out to the Midwest, ten, fifteen-day bus tours. There was a bus driver and the tour director, and so I got a job as a tour director. That meant I just had to make sure everybody had their rooms and all the bills were paid and any meals and all that kind of stuff. For me, it was this great job. I got to get out, get across the country. My evenings were my own. I was off to Niagara Falls or out to Chicago or up to Boston or down to Florida or whatever. During the day, I had to make sure everything was taken care of, and I had to do things so that the people on the tour didn't get bored. So, we sang songs, and I handed out candy. So, it was actually a pretty good job.

By then, junior going into senior year, we already had the apartment at Louis Street. My parents didn't see much of me, because I'd be on the road with the bus tour and I'd come back and I'd come back to Louis Street and hang out for several days at Louis Street. It's, for me, a period of time I'm not particularly proud of the way I related to my parents in that time period, not that I was particularly mean, but I was certainly distant. I was into being a hipster and I was into being out on my own and I was into being a poor man's version of Crosby or Stills or something. I didn't go to see them. It was infrequent. [Editor's Note: This refers to David Crosby and Stephen Stills, who were members of the folk-rock group Crosby, Stills & Nash, which was formed in 1968 along with Graham Nash and later joined by Neil Young.]

The one big thing I did for them is, when we got to graduation, there was a lot of discussion about not attending graduation, because we were coming off the strike and closing campus. The school decided to have graduation. At that time, we were holding it in what was then the old stadium, the concrete stadium. So, I agreed that I would go to graduation, because my parents rightfully said, "We supported you all this time. We paid all this money. We want to see you graduate." So, I said, "Okay, but I'm not going to cut my hair," which was shoulder length. My mother came back to me and said, "I have another request. Would you please trim your hair?" I did that, so I trimmed it. It was still sort of over my ears but very acceptable all the way around.

I did graduate. There were a group of us that stood, turned our backs, and held up our fists at graduation, so we did that. But I graduated. They could be there and see it, and I was glad that I had done that. Fortunately, as I got older and more settled in, we got closer again and I was happy for that, but this period of time, I wasn't being very cordial. That's especially tough on them, because I'm an only child. It's not like there is somebody else to make them feel better, so that's a weight I have to carry.

KR: July 1967 was the Newark rebellion, sometimes called Newark riots. How did that affect you and your family?

TM: Well, one of the things we did as we got older was we would sing acapella on the street corner in the evening. One of the corners where we did that was the corner of First Avenue and 13th Street, so half a block down from my house. That piece of First Avenue is a commercial strip. On my side of First Avenue, there was a dry cleaner and then a couple of other stores. Across the street, the corner we used to sing at was a laundromat. Then, down the other corner was a delicatessen, where I used to get Italian bread and stuff.

At any rate, we had a National Guard machine gun nest on the roof of that laundromat, which must have, in some ways, been one of the lines of last defense, because, as I said, Bloomfield started like a block later. It's like the last block of Newark, the back end of the North Ward, which was the Italian, sort of white neighborhood, now largely Portuguese, I noted. A lot of families moved out of the Ironbound and up into the North Ward. Oh, what was the name of the guy who led it at the time? Tony Imperiale. It was Tony Imperiale's neighborhood. There were organized groups of probably mafia, these leftover mafia guys, I don't know, that were patrolling the neighborhood, and the police. I mean, that riot would've had to have completely blown up. To get up to that point, if they had reached that point, Newark would have been melted down, because we were about as far away as you could get from Broad and Market and downtown Newark, where the worst of it was.

So, it was there. We were aware of it. It was disconcerting to have the National Guard. It was the beginning of my starting to really think through issues of race, because we always kind of thought that we weren't bigoted. We just knew that everybody was different. When you grow up in a place where largely everyone's different, you make fun of their differences, you recognize that you're different, and maybe sometimes you get into a fight over it. We didn't have access to real hard weapons. No guns for sure. So, the fights were less threatening, I think, in some way, but the point was we just thought of everybody as everybody. You might call a Jewish person a kike and they might call you a guinea and you both might call a black person the N-word, but it's just the way you were. At the time, you didn't think about how hard set those thoughts were, because you really did think Polish people were stupid. They really were dumber than you. People really did think Italians were all basically mafia people. People really did think Jewish people were cheap, penurious money grubbers. I mean, you kidded about it, but in that kidding was something that was setting inside your soul, letting you know that's justifying or solidifying a thought of that's the way people were.

So, those riots in '67, you start out with black people, animals, burning things, threat, and have to then start watching how they're treated, where they're living, what they're burning, what's left, and start thinking, "Wait a minute, [inaudible] why wouldn't I be upset? I wouldn't want the police to treat me the way the police treat them." Horribly, that's still a discussion we have today. That's exactly the discussion we have now, maybe a few more people enlightened, but a whole lot of people still willing to be scared. I had a long talk with one of our daughters in New York today. It was really about, "We have to end the police state." I said, "Well, you have to change it." She said, "No, you don't understand. It's not broken. It was built this way, and it was built wrong. It has to be torn down and reconstructed." [I replied], "At seventy-one, I understand what you're saying, but I don't necessarily agree with it. I can think of ways to restructure what we have."

At seventeen or eighteen, whatever I was in 1967, certainly by '68-'69, I was where my daughter is today. The state has to change. The structure is wrong. The police are not here to protect. Well, they are here, but they're not here to protect me. They're here to protect wealth and privilege and money and power. Whether they do it intentionally or not, that's what the structure protects. It doesn't protect those who are unfortunate, who are disabled, who are undereducated, who are underemployed. It doesn't protect them. It protects us from them. So, I hear what my daughter is saying, and to be now at the other end. My dad died at seventy-one, so I've reached

his age. He was seventy-one in 1983, so he was, what, in his fifties for the riots, still working and in his late fifties when I had to figure out what to do about the war. I'm a bit older than he was, but I now understand both my daughter and my father. [laughter] I encapsulate both of them, and so I understand what she's saying. Yes, I remember '67 and then on into '68, although not so bad in Newark but still to worry. Then, in '68 and on into '69, really the anti-war movement becoming larger and larger and driving down to D.C. for the march on Washington and that kind of stuff.

KR: Let's talk about that. When you were an underclassman at Rutgers, what was the campus climate like in terms of activism?

TM: It went from virtually nothing to being fairly radical. Again, my class is the class that surfed on that change. It's not that there weren't some pro clusters and some hipsters in the Class of '67 when I arrived--or '68 or '69--but they were few and far between, in my memory. My memory of radicalization is my junior and senior years. My sophomore year, I moved into the fraternity house with two other guys, and the posters on my wall and ceiling were The Four Tops and The Temptations and Smokey Robinson, and the music that played was very much their music. By my junior year, in the fraternity house, I was put in a much better room, because I was a junior. It was Rolling Stones, Janis Joplin, kind of Grateful Dead kind of stuff, and that was my music. In the course of my sophomore year and that summer and coming into junior year, I was fully down the road by the time I exited sophomore year and started into junior year. I think a lot of my class went through that.

There's a good bunch that didn't. Fred Whittles, Fred and I were pretty close friends in the fraternity. We pledged together. He lived with me at Louis Street. He was a borderline guy, grew his hair slightly long. He smoked marijuana like many of the rest of us did, stayed pretty straight, but not straight. He looked straight but wasn't completely. He was one of those guys. There was this group that stayed fairly clean cut, kept their drug use mainly to marijuana, and structured themselves to go back, you know, you graduate and go into some kind of job.

Then, there were the really straight guys who did what the classes before them did and did not get into drugs in any way, or really minorly, but didn't change their mindset at all. So, Fred changed his mindset. He was ready to go back out into the world, but he had a different view of how the police acted. He had a different view of how minority communities were interacted with. So, he carried that with him. There was a group, they could have graduated in 1967 as well as 1970. Then, there was a group of us who had stepped out and stepped over, who were active on a number of levels, who did use drugs to a greater extent. There weren't people running around doing heroine or even cocaine. It was largely psychedelics. If not marijuana, it was mushrooms or something.

KR: Tell me about your involvement in activism and in protests on campus.

TM: What I remember is being very active. It was a time of teach-ins. As I think I mentioned somewhere along the way, in the spring of '70, the campus got more and more activated, and there were campuses where administration buildings had been taken over. So, there were a lot of groups moving around campus a lot, marching up and down College Avenue, marching around

campus, big teach-ins at the Barn, big teach-ins at whatever the big lecture hall is, I forget [Scott Hall]. Lots of groups, because there were anti-war groups, there were civil rights groups, there were indigenous peoples' groups for the first time, there were actually activists around Earth Day and that kind of stuff. It was an environment in which people were going to class less and less. There were more and more activities outside. The weather had gotten warmer. There were tables set all over the place, and that moved to marches, that moved to teach-ins, that moved to more activities.

They started getting more vociferous. There was a teach-in. We were at the College Avenue Barn, and there was a teach-in. The way I remember it, we were at a teach-in, and people came running in saying that students had finally broken into Old Queens. In the middle of all these protest activities, there was a group that formed and it called themselves the Marshals. They were self-formed, self-designated. I joined them. Their stated goal was to keep the peace, to stop people who were causing physical harm amongst the protestors, and to keep the police, as best they could, away from people who were protesting peacefully. When word came out about Old Queens, a bunch of people run down. As we get there, the rumor started circulating that the governor had called the state police and the National Guard and that they were on their way to clear out the protestors from Old Queens. So, the Marshals all formed in a big circle around Old Queens, with the idea that we were the buffer between what was coming and the people who were in Old Queens, who, at the time, I think, had the windows open and were throwing papers out the window.

Fortunately for all of us, I think Mason Gross, at the time, told the governor not to do anything. I think it was his initiative, and so no one came. Gross came to campus in the morning and met with the folks, as I recall, met with the protestors. I remember standing around arm's length and the Marshals, the signature was they had torn up white strips of cloth, so you put a white strip of cloth around your arm. There were all of these guys standing around, and I had a roommate who had combat boots, they were steel toed, so I borrowed his combat boots. At the time, I was running around campus in a long-length Army overcoat and my father's World War II--they had these caps, like a brimmed cap that they would wear, so I'm standing there in that outfit with hair down to my shoulders and arm's length.

At some point in the night, you realize, or you ask yourself--probably more than one point in the night--you certainly ask yourself, "How wise is it to be here? You're not going to stop anybody from coming. You're going to be the first one hit. You're going to be the first one arrested. Does it really make sense?" But we all stayed. I mean, because we said we believed that what we're protesting about, which is an end to the war, is a righteous thing, and so you need to protest. We also believe in non-violence, so we don't want to see violence on either side of this equation. So, we're not really happy with what they're doing in there, and, in fact, we had people go talk to them to tell them to stop vandalizing. We also didn't want them to be overrun by the state police. I mean, you just stand there for hours, hearing rumors flying, "Oh, they're coming down, they're at Exit 9," and then not showing up, and suddenly, the dawn starts to dawn.

We must've heard that Gross was coming. As I remember, the folks who were in Old Queens calmed down, waited for Gross to come. My memory of him handling that whole thing is a positive one. I don't know how he's viewed by history, but as I think of it now, I think of

someone who was able to come in, not try to push people around, not try to use force, accept some damage, and accept the fact that he was dealing with people who really weren't quite sure what they were asking for. But to hang in there and listen, and give them their voice, that brought down the temperature very quickly, and campus settled down. It was sort of like, "You want Old Queens? You got it." After a while, there was no big deal in holding Old Queens. They just sort of evaporated is my memory. So, we were running around doing that. [Editor's Note: Following President Richard Nixon's expansion of the Vietnam War to Cambodia, a nationwide student strike commenced in the beginning of May 1970. The strike began at Rutgers on Friday, May 1. On Monday, May 4, two thousand protesters gathered on the Old Queens Campus, and Rutgers President Mason Gross addressed the crowd, calling the protesters his guests. That day, two hundred students occupied the second and third floors of Old Queens, including Gross' office, resulting in a two-day sit-in of Old Queens. On May 4, Ohio National Guardsmen opened fire on anti-war protesters and bystanders at Kent State University, killing four and wounding nine. In solidarity with the National Strike, the Rutgers College faculty voted on Tuesday, May 5 to make classes and final exams optional and instituted pass/fail grades for the spring semester 1970. The faculty also voted to eliminate ROTC on campus the next year, though that was later reversed by the Board of Governors. On May 5, massive demonstrations continued at Rutgers, and protests and counter-protests continued for several weeks at Rutgers and on campuses across the nation. On May 14 and 15, 1970, students at Jackson State College protesting against racial harassment were fired upon by state and city police, resulting in two deaths and a dozen injuries. (From Paul Clemens' *Rutgers Since 1945*; Kent State University Libraries, Campus Strike Papers: New Jersey: Rutgers University, 1970)]

I was dealing with--there was an active group of people helping folks with low draft numbers, who were figuring out what they wanted to do about the draft. So, they helped me, and then I worked with them, counseling other guys who were coming up to a draft decision about at least what steps they had to take and what kind of counsel they could get and where they might go. I have a memory of a group reaching out. It wasn't the Black Panthers. There was a group in New Brunswick of black activists that certainly through the Marshals we talked to. I don't think they were Panthers. I think, there were certainly Panthers or people supporting Panthers around, but there was an activist group in New Brunswick that we dealt with. That's my memories of that. [Editor's Note: The group being referred to could be the Student Afro-American Society (SAS), which was formed at Rutgers College in 1967 and active in the Black student protest movement. The Black Organization of Students (BOS) formed at Rutgers University in Newark in 1967 and became active at the colleges of Rutgers-New Brunswick.]

KR: What were the meetings like with the Marshals? What sort of training did you undergo, in terms of you're trying to promote nonviolent protest?

TM: My memory is of chaotic groupings of the Marshals of recruiting on campus. They were one of the groups out there saying, "Come join us." There may have been some kind of professional people in the center of it, who actually knew what they were doing. I don't remember it. What I remember is being twenty-one years old, full of the righteousness of being right, on the side of good, drunk with the power of my person, the ability of an individual to effect change, to be part of the change, to recognize change needed to come, to be completely scared about the prospect of having to go to war, worried for my friends, very worried for me,

and convinced that the old people had lost the thread and no longer knew what they were doing and were not responsible. They needed to be held accountable for their decisions, because their decisions were impacting us and they weren't impacting them, very much like any young person would feel today.

I've had a lot of discussions with Millennials and Gen Z'ers [Generation Z] because of school, because I was teaching and then I was back in school. I get it. At seventy-one, I am perfectly happy to step away and let you guys take it, but do so. Get out and vote. Get candidates who can run. I'm not the one who wants a seventy-seven-year-old guy to be president--no offense to Joe [Biden]--or a seventy-three-year-old guy to be president, or a seventy-year old woman to be president. You have to work the system to get it to change. If Joe Biden can be an ally and bridge you over to someone younger four years from now, then I would be behind it and take it and use it.

Bob Dylan was very much a voice of that generation, "The times, they are a-changing." They were. I look back on it now and say, "We clearly didn't change them enough. Clearly, the system and the structure is so embedded and so well in place that it's going to take a fairly radical movement to do it. I'm worried a bit that that impacts me because I'm now comfortably set up within that structure, and if it comes burning down, it may take the last years of my life with it. It is something that I have to think through. I understand the rage, and I understand the argument that says, "This doesn't evolve. It's not an evolution; it's a revolution."

I think people who, today, look at what's going on and focus on looting and rioting are like those guys in my class in 1970 who didn't--most of whom, by the way, had high draft numbers and didn't have to worry about the draft--who didn't see that the change was much more than not wanting to fight in that war. The change was not to fight these kind of wars, and while we were able to stop eventually Vietnam, we didn't stop fighting those kinds of wars. Now, we have several generations who have been impacted by those kinds of wars. It may well take something more radical to get that kind of change. Bernie [Sanders] was that kind of radical on the side of tearing it down, but you don't have to hurt people to do it. In fact, you want to tear it down in a way that helps people, whereas, I believe, President Trump is on the side of, "You've got to tear it down and burn it, and anyone that you hurt deserves to be hurt anyway." I think that's very much where he is.

People who see what's going on now as, "Riots that need to be put down by stronger military force," don't see the issue, which is people being put down by strong military force. To pepper spray and gas and baton quiet protestors, so that the President of the United States can walk over across a street for a ridiculous photo opportunity, if you can't see that and see, "That is the problem," you're going to have a hard time dealing with what's happening. So, I don't know. Maybe my youngest daughter is right, and maybe this needs to be a whole lot even worse than it is, in order to get people to understand it. You don't want a civil war. It's a hard time, and having lived through something of a hard time, although probably not as hard as this in its own way. I think we had older people who were more set in their ways and more intransigent, and I think that mindset went deeper into the adult population than it does today. But we certainly have a group of adults with a hardwired mindset that goes fairly deep. [laughter] We'll see how

it comes out. I've been going for almost two-and-a-half hours, so you must be getting tired of hearing me.

KR: How about I ask one more question today?

TM: Okay.

KR: Then, we will continue tomorrow.

TM: Okay.

KR: What protests did you participate in off campus?

TM: Well, protests, I remember rallying for Robert Kennedy, doing stuff in and around New Brunswick for him. I remember working for--what's his name, who ran four years later-- [George] McGovern. The major rally I remember going to was the one in Washington, the march on Washington. My parents had given me--my graduation present was--a used VW [Volkswagen] Bug, which I got at the beginning of my senior year. So, I had a vehicle to get around in. [Editor's Note: The march on Washington refers to the Moratorium to End the War in Vietnam, which took place on October 15, 1969. There was another large anti-war march in Washington, D.C. a month later, on November 15, 1969.]

I remember we jammed at least five people into that Bug and drove to D.C. Then, I parked it somewhere and then walked. We spent a couple days there. A lot of the churches were open. A lot of churches were giving us places to sleep. There was medical treatment. There was water. There was some food around. Much like now, you'd be out in this big moving crowd, and it would take a turn on its own. It would move on its own. You just move with it. There was always discussion about rumors about what's happening where and when and where the police were. It ended up being a very well-armed and active police and military presence.

We were marching to the monument. I remember marching down, I remember being on the grass, in the promenade, but maybe we were in the street. The street probably makes more sense. The canisters started coming over, landing all around us. I had never--your eyes are burning, your face is burning, you're choking, everything is white, everything smells. All you can do is run to get away and get out of it and look for some church.

Once you're out of the worst of it, everyone's trying to get to the church and they'd put water on you and clear your eyes and give out milk, if I recall correctly, using milk, and rest up and let that piece go. You go back out and find another group and hook up with it and find where it's going and hook up with another group and figure out how you work your way back and figure out, "Are we going to the Lincoln or are we going to the White House?" or, "Where are we going?" It was two days of doing that, going from place to place.

All I remember is it broke up, and I remember driving back up I-95, I guess, cars coming back--we all had signs in the windows--cars coming back from the protests. You'd be riding along with people who had signs in their windows, and you'd be honking and giving the peace sign. They'd

hit their exit for Philadelphia or something and they'd pull off for Philadelphia, and we'd keep going. We'd be with a bunch of cars and they'd keep going up towards New York, and we were getting off at New Brunswick. I just remember the Turnpike being just full of cars with people coming back after that and feeling as though we had made some kind of statement and moved the needle. How real that feeling was is up to debate, but that was the biggest one. Small ones for sure around campus and other stuff, but that was the biggest one for me.

KR: Well, thank you so much for sharing your stories with me today. It has been absolutely fascinating.

TM: Oh, that's good.

KR: We will continue tomorrow. I still have a bunch of Rutgers questions that I would like to ask you.

TM: Yes, and it's been an interesting journey getting from there to being the Chief Communications Officer for Coca-Cola. So, it's fun. You'll enjoy it.

KR: Okay, good. Yes, I cannot wait to hear. So, tomorrow, 11 AM, your time?

TM: Yes.

KR: Okay, that sounds great.

TM: Okay, see you then.

KR: Okay, sounds good. Have a great night.

TM: You as well, bye-bye.

KR: Okay, thank you, bye-bye.

-----END OF TRANSCRIPT-----

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