

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH CARMINE THOMAS PERRAPATO

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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DELRAY BEACH, FLORIDA

JUNE 9, 2009

TRANSCRIPT BY

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Sandra Stewart Holyoak: This begins an interview with Carmine Thomas Perrapato on June 9, 2009, in Delray Beach, Florida, with Sandra Stewart Holyoak. This is made possible in part through the generous gift from the Class of 1942. Thank you for having me here today, Mr. Perrapato. You have this wonderful collection of albums, so, please, do start telling me some of these stories.

Carmine Thomas Perrapato: Well, one story I'd like to tell you about is my father. He was the Mayor of Garfield, my uncle was the Chief of Police, [and] my other uncle was on the Board of Education.

SH: Wow.

CP: It was a town of thirty-two thousand people. ... Well, anyway, he [his father] was in Cuba with a Republican Senator. I assume they went there for a reason. At the same time, Al Capone was in Cuba. On his way back, on the ship, somebody knocked on his door and said, "Mr. Capone, can I have your autograph?" He says, "I'm not Mr. Capone." Well, when he got back to New York, he was met by reporters, detectives, all [who were] told Al Capone was not wanted in New York. ... Of course, they realized he wasn't Al Capone, and he said to them, "My brother, the Chief of Police, looks more like Al Capone ...

SH: Oh, my. [laughter]

CP: ... than I do," [laughter] and that was the story, but what happened, of course, it became public that he was meeting with a Republican, and whatever was allegedly planned, I guess, fell apart.

SH: I am assuming that your father was a Democrat.

CP: Yes, ma'am.

SH: Okay. Do you have any idea what was being planned or which Republican Senator he was meeting?

CP: Yes, I think so.

SH: Would you like to share that?

CP: I think there was a possibility of my father running for sheriff and getting the help of some [Republican politicians], but that's not positive.

SH: It is family lore then. Where and when were you born?

CP: I was born in Garfield, New Jersey, on 7/10/1920.

SH: Okay.

CP: Now, I've had a very peculiar life. When I was a little boy, a young boy, rather, I went to the local grammar school and I was very, very difficult to deal with, because I felt I was king. My father was Mayor, my uncle was Chief of Police, my other uncle was [with the] Board of Education and I was "God." [laughter] Well, it got to the point where my father transferred me from the Italian section, which we basically were [living in], to the Russian section, and it didn't do "God" any good. So, he said to me, one morning, "Son, you're going to military school." My mother didn't like that, because I was her only boy and the youngest one. There were two older sisters; anyway.

SH: How old were you at that point?

CP: Thirteen.

SH: Wow.

CP: ... Thirteen years old. So, what happened [was], I went to Peekskill Military Academy, Peekskill, New York. In my first year, I got more plebe hours, penalty hours, than any plebe ever got in the history of that school, but, as time went on, I ended up becoming a lieutenant. I played football, etc. It did its job very well. So, after I was through there, it was time to go to college and we picked Rutgers. How? Why? Right now, I don't remember. ...

SH: Really? I was going to ask why.

CP: I don't remember why, unless, of course, it was [because it was] in New Jersey. We picked Rutgers and that's where I went and, when I went to Rutgers, my father was so thankful that I've changed that he bought me a convertible. So, as a freshman, I went to Rutgers with a [convertible].

SH: You continued being "God." [laughter]

CP: With a convertible.

SH: Oh, my. When did you pledge the fraternity?

CP: I think it was the second year. I lived in the regular unit first year.

SH: Do you remember where?

CP: It was on the campus, but I don't recall exactly.

SH: Okay, all right.

CP: It was near that so-called stadium thing they've got, that it was then a stadium. [Editor's Note: Mr. Perrapato may be referring to Nielson Field on the College Avenue Campus, the main Rutgers University athletic field prior to the opening of Rutgers Stadium in 1938.]

SH: Before we talk about Rutgers, could we talk a little bit about your family? You have told me this wonderful story, from all the newspaper clippings, of your father and your uncle, but did you have grandparents or extended family in Garfield?

CP: My grandfather and grandmother lived in Garfield and, originally, my father had nine sisters and three brothers.

SH: That is a big family.

CP: And they all lived, to start with, in Garfield. My mother had eight sisters and two brothers and they all lived in Brooklyn, it was with the family, and, of course, as time went on, this one got married, that one got married and ... they moved all over.

SH: Do you know how your parents met?

CP: Yes. They [their families] came from the same village in Italy, Sala Consilina. My father was born there.

SH: Okay.

CP: And what happened was, they came to America first, when my father was about six months old, and, about a year later or so, my other grandfather decided to bring whatever family he had then to Brooklyn. One was in Garfield, one was in Brooklyn, but, of course, they were buddies. They were friends and, a year later, they got married in Brooklyn, ... Miss Paladino, which was my mother's maiden name, and my father. ... Of course, they moved with the man to Brooklyn, and, of course, I was familiar with the Bronx; when they moved to Garfield, rather. I'm sorry.

SH: To Garfield, okay.

CP: They moved to Garfield.

SH: How old was your father when they came to the United States?

CP: He was a little baby.

SH: It was a few years later that he met your mother.

CP: Yes, and then, later, they got married.

SH: Okay, they met as young children.

CP: Yes, because, well, the two grandfathers had a relationship that they kept up and they all knew each other.

SH: Good. What did your grandfathers do as their occupations?

CP: My grandfather, the one in Garfield, had a saloon. That's where I was born, upstairs in the saloon.

SH: Were you? [laughter]

CP: Right next to a railroad track, and my other grandfather ...

SH: Paladino.

CP: Paladino, he had what you call (ideal?), a three-story building, [the] bottom floor [was a] grocery store, [the] second floor [and] third floor [were] all the family, and that was basically the two [families]. My grandfather did not live in the tavern. We lived upstairs. He lived in a house and upstairs was one of the sons that got married.

SH: Okay.

CP: And, etc., and that was basically [it], and my father did a little bartending for awhile, but not much.

SH: Was Italian spoken in your home, in your generation, or was it spoken only when you were with your grandparents?

CP: What?

SH: Did you speak Italian with your grandparents?

CP: No. My grandparents ... also spoke English, because I never learned Italian, because my parents felt they came to America and we should learn to speak English.

SH: I have heard that before.

CP: And that was a fact. The only words I knew in Italian, you wouldn't want to hear them.

SH: [laughter] Could you tell me how much older your sisters are than you?

CP: One was four years, one was three years. They're both gone.

SH: I am sorry. Did they take good care of you as a little brother?

CP: Not particularly. I think that I was a pest to them. ... As I said, I was "God." ...

SH: You talked about how Garfield had an Italian section and a Russian section; were there other ethnic groups there as well?

CP: Polish, Russian, Italian, I think it was Czechoslovakian [as well].

SH: Did you each have your own church?

CP: We each had our own church.

SH: How active were you in your church at that time, as a young man?

CP: Well, as a young man, I was president of the society. I even got the; [to his assistant] it's in my bedroom. ... I was chairman of the committee.

SH: Which society?

CP: She'll get that now.

SH: Okay, thank you.

CP: My memory is not the same.

SH: That is okay. You really had a rough time.

CP: That's right. I'm now eighty-eight years old, you know. ...

SH: You sure do not look it, sir, for the record. I know this is an audio recording.

CP: I never thought I would get that far, but that's the way it goes.

SH: I am glad you are. What are some of your earliest memories of growing up in Garfield?

CP: The earliest memories of growing up in Garfield were ...

Josephine Ann Spataro: Holy Name Society, the Holy Name Society, Mount Virgin.

CP: The Holy Name Society of Mount Virgin, that was [it].

SH: That was the name of the church.

CP: Church of [Our Lady of] Mount Virgin, [in Garfield], yes.

JAS: He was president.

CP: Yes. As a matter-of-fact, Father (Cassley?) was my priest, later on, and we were very close, took him to the first football game. I'll tell you about that later.

SH: Good. I asked what your earliest memory in Garfield was.

CP: My earliest memory was with my cousins. When I went to school, I thought I was, you know, ... the king, and the people treated me accordingly, because we had all the power in the town and they treated me accordingly.

SH: How soon did your father become involved in politics after coming to this country? He grew up here as young man, but do you know how soon he became involved in politics?

CP: No. All I know is that he became involved and he won an election.

SH: Okay.

CP: I don't know. Plus, he was disappointed in what was going on, and I don't know the details.

SH: Okay. What became your father's profession?

CP: What do you mean, the bartender?

SH: You said he was a bartender once in awhile.

CP: Yes. Well, he left that and ... he opened his office, Anthony Perrapato, Inc., an insurance corporation, and he sold a lot of policies to people. ... We would go collect the premiums, in those days, and, of course, [with] his position, most people thought he was a real nice guy.

SH: That he was what?

CP: A nice guy, so, they bought insurance from him, and he had a terrific insurance agency, which finally became mine.

SH: You followed in his footsteps then.

CP: Not particularly, no.

SH: No, okay. [laughter] As a young teenager, were you involved in any political rallies? Did he have to run for office often?

CP: I didn't become politically active until after the war.

SH: Okay. When your father went down to Cuba, was this a trip that he took often?

CP: No.

SH: That was the first time. Did the family take vacations? Did you go to the shore in the summers?

CP: We had a summer home at Yankee Lake, New York, which was twelve miles below Monticello.

SH: Beautiful.

CP: And twenty-four miles above Middletown, New York. ... We were fortunate enough, when [we] built our home there, [to be] the first ones to have electricity.

SH: Really? What would you do up there in the summers? What kept you busy?

CP: Well, I had friends up there; other Garfield people had homes right where we were. The home behind us was for the Mayor of Lodi, [Michael] (Packey?) Cavallo and his son, who was a good friend, his two daughters were there, and across from us was the lawyer's from Garfield [who] was my father's chief Councilman, and she had a butcher shop and he had three sons, four sons, all friends. We all knew each other and all were friends with each other, and we met a few strangers that were in the area and they became friends, but, basically, ... we all knew each other from back home.

SH: Were you doing water sports at the lake? What kept the kids busy?

CP: Fishing. I used to row a boat. We ... were not allowed to have anything on the lake that was burn[ing fuel], mechanical, so, the only kind of [boats] you have [were] a rowboat and a canoe.

SH: Okay.

CP: That was basically what we had, and I used to fish with the rowboat, buy bait. I used to fish on them and that was basically the fishing, but I did a certain amount of it, but we also chased girls.

SH: I bet you did. [laughter]

CP: That's where I met my wife.

SH: Did you really? Was she from Garfield and up there for the summer?

CP: My wife was from Middletown, New York, and I had a very good friend from Middletown. He used to come up and we used to spend time together and whatnot. Well, at night, we'd go to the, I think it was called Pop's, or something, one of these places on the highway. Those highways weren't very busy in those days and we were there one night and these three girls walked in and I said, "Oh, my God, who's that beautiful girl?" He said, "Oh, that's Ruth Billings. I know her. She's from Middletown." So, he took me over, introduced me to her. We spent part of the evening together. When the time came to go home, she said, "I'm sorry, my father's going to take me home," in those days. So, her father took her home, but I go, "Where?" They'd just bought a place on Yankee Lake. [laughter] So, the next day, I went to visit them at their place and I got to meet her and got to know her.

SH: How old were you then?

CP: How old was I then? just about seventeen, eighteen.

SH: Okay. You would have been at Peekskill Military Academy at that stage.

CP: That's right; no, no, I [was] just out of military school, because I had the car.

SH: That convertible. [laughter]

CP: Yes. That made me seventeen, eighteen, and at Rutgers.

SH: You had already started at Rutgers. It was between your freshman and sophomore year perhaps. You came to Rutgers as a very young man. You were not very old at all.

CP: Seventeen.

SH: I saw in the *Scarlet Letter*, the Rutgers yearbook, a picture of your fraternity house.

CP: You mean the old Johnson Mansion? [Editor's Note: The home of the Kappa Sigma Fraternity during this time was the former home of the prominent Johnson Family of the Johnson & Johnson Company.]

SH: That is the most beautiful, ornate building. I am so sorry it is not there to see anymore.

CP: Well, it was a beautiful building and, when I was Grand Master of my fraternity, I had that bedroom and it had windows from the floor up, in those days. It had a bedroom in an alcove ... and it was a beautiful place. Of course, in those days, it was wonderful being in a fraternity, because we had our own cook.

SH: Did you?

CP: And it wasn't very expensive. We used to have our ... three meals a day and we had a cook and a cleaning woman. ... My father used to send me a check, or his secretary, of twenty dollars every week. In those days, that was a lot of money, and I used to pay for my food at the place and everything else and still have a few bucks left over. When I had a few bucks left over, I'd go to the CT, Corner Tavern.

SH: Do you have one of those steins with your name on it at the Corner Tavern?

CP: No, unfortunately. I may have, but I don't know where it is. So, the Corner Tavern was one of the places that we used to [spend time at], just around the corner. They were here, [we were] here.

SH: Just a short walk.

CP: Yes, it was.

SH: When you came to Rutgers, as you said, you are not quite sure of how the decision was made, but what did you plan to major in?

CP: Accounting.

SH: You knew right off the bat that you wanted to do accounting. Who was your favorite professor?

CP: My math professor. I forget his name now, but we knew he and his wife.

SH: Really?

CP: And his son became a fraternity brother of ours.

SH: Really? That is interesting. Why did you rush Kappa Sigma? Why did you choose that fraternity?

CP: Well, ... I met some of the people, Vinnie Utz, Otto Hill. As a matter-of-fact, one of the fellows who was a fraternity brother with me, I don't know if we got there at the same time or [if] he was first, was from Lyndhurst, New Jersey. His father was a Republican Assemblyman and we used to have more fun kidding each other, he was an "R," I was a "D," and he was a fraternity brother of mine. When we had my, [in] 1961, [testimonial] dinner, ... we had 1,300 people [who] came to my dinner. I've got a book on that and the Governor was there and all that, but, anyway, I asked him if he would speak there. He said, "But, you're Democrats." I said, "Yes, but you're my fraternity brother."

SH: What was his name?

CP: Horace Bogle, Jr.

SH: Okay, that is interesting.

CP: As a matter-of-fact, he came and he spoke.

SH: Did he?

CP: Yes, spoke as a fraternity brother. [laughter]

SH: He was still a Republican, right? You did not convert him.

CP: No, no.

SH: Talk about, if you would, what your first impression was of Rutgers. Did you come down to visit the campus or did you just come down as a freshman?

CP: I don't have the least idea.

SH: Okay, all right, that is fair enough.

CP: All I know is one side of the [Raritan] River was empty.

SH: Was what?

CP: Empty, there was nothing there. Yes, that was the first time they built a stadium. [Editor's Note: Rutgers Stadium opened in the Fall of 1938 after three years of construction.]

SH: That is right.

CP: I was there then. They built the stadium on the other side of the river, the only thing we had on that side of the river then. Of course, as you know, soon [it was developed], but [not then].

SH: You were there for the first game in the new stadium.

CP: Yes, oh, yes.

SH: Did you go out for any sports, or anything else, while you were at Rutgers?

CP: No, I was not a sportsman. I belonged to the RO[TC].

SH: ROTC?

CP: Yes.

SH: That was mandatory for two years.

CP: [Yes].

SH: Did you stay in it longer or did you stop after two years?

CP: I tried to stay in it, become an officer. They turned me down; why?

SH: Do you know why?

CP: Yes.

SH: Why?

CP: My feet, I had flat feet.

SH: Oh, no.

CP: I have flat feet, turned me down as being an officer, and I left all my military ...

SH: I was just going to say, after four years in a military academy ...

CP: My school [behind me], and then, ROTC for two years and whatnot. I'll never forget when he said, "I'm sorry, we want to appoint you, but we can't, ... [because] you have flat feet." That took care of that. Then, as far as [that is concerned], then, I went off into service. I got married. ...

SH: I wanted to ask about that. Since you had already met Miss Billings, did you bring her down to campus?

CP: Oh, yes, we went [out]. She came to the dances and we went out and I got to know her family very well. Then, finally, we eloped.

SH: No kidding.

CP: No, I'm not kidding.

SH: How was that taken by the family?

CP: Well, knowing me at the time, "Hey, he's a nice kid." Well, the nice part about it was I liked her.

SH: That is good.

CP: And she became a fantastic Italian cook.

SH: Did she?

CP: While spending the summers up at the lake with my mother, she learned to cook the way she cooked, not by the written [recipe], but actual, physical being together. Then, I went into service.

SH: You got married right after your senior year.

CP: Before it.

SH: You got married before you graduated. Had she come to school at NJC [New Jersey College for Women, later Douglass College and now Rutgers University's Douglass Residential College]?

CP: No. She didn't go to college.

SH: Okay.

CP: She was just; the years [were] different, where she didn't go to college, and then, when Jeffrey was born, I was already in service.

SH: Where did you live in your senior year?

CP: ... My fraternity house.

SH: However, you were already married.

CP: Yes.

SH: Where was your wife?

CP: [With her] father and mother.

SH: Okay, all right.

CP: We were married, but we weren't married.

SH: Okay, I have got you.

CP: Then, I got married again in Garfield.

SH: In the church?

CP: Yes, to satisfy my parents; the same date, but a different year.

SH: This way, you would not forget and get confused. [laughter]

CP: May 8th. [laughter] I even remember it now.

SH: Was this after you graduated? When did you get married the second time, I should say?

CP: After I graduated.

SH: Okay, in 1942 then.

CP: Yes. So, then, when I was called, I was waiting to go into service, they put me on reserve.

SH: You had already enlisted.

CP: Yes, I already [had enlisted].

SH: Can you tell me where you were when you first heard about Pearl Harbor?

CP: Yes. Ruth and I were traveling in the car in Middletown, New York, when we first heard it, and, the next day, there's pictures showing my fraternity brothers sitting around the television.

SH: They what?

CP: [The pictures] showing my fraternity brothers sitting around a television, watching.

SH: A radio.

CP: Yes, oh, it was a radio, not television.

SH: That was in the newspapers.

CP: ... Yes, that was that. ...

SH: Had you had any sense that the United States was going to go to war?

CP: What?

SH: Did you have any sense that we were going to get into a war before you heard about Pearl Harbor?

CP: No.

SH: No.

CP: I didn't have any idea that we're going to go to war. So, then, what happened was, I went into service and, of course, I couldn't become ... an officer. So, they sent me up to school for courses in accounting and whatnot.

SH: Really?

CP: And I went to Florida for a short period of time.

SH: Whereabouts in Florida?

CP: I don't even remember the name now.

SH: Okay.

CP: My mother came down, my wife, [they] both came down to visit me. Then, [I was] only there a short time. Then, I went to my part where I was going to be all service; guess where? Newark Army Airbase. [Editor's Note: Newark Army Airbase was originally Newark Airport; during World War II, it was closed to passenger traffic and used solely by the Army Air Forces.]

SH: How did you work that?

CP: I don't know. ... Strange as it may seem, I didn't pull any punches.

SH: No strings were pulled?

CP: No strings. All of a sudden, I end up there. In Weequahic Park [in Newark] was where we had places to sleep.

SH: Did they set up tents or barracks?

CP: Yes, yes.

SH: Tents? okay.

CP: Sometimes, I slept there, sometimes, I slept at home. I was twelve miles away. Garfield's here, Weequahic Park was here and that's where I spent the rest of my time.

SH: What did you do? What was your military occupational specialty?

CP: I was an accountant, paperwork.

SH: Really? What were you doing, though? Were you in charge of paying people?

CP: I don't even recall exactly. ...

SH: What would a typical day be like for you? You would go into the office.

CP: In the office and [work on] transfers, do (jiggles?), planes that needed fuel and all that stuff.

SH: Okay. What was at Newark? Was it an Army airbase?

CP: It was an airbase, yes, and that was it. So, when I finally got out, I went and got a job in New York, [in] an accounting firm, and we rented a house, rented an apartment, rather, in a house that my brother-in-law found for me. My wife and I moved in. ... It was in Passaic, next to Garfield.

SH: I am sorry.

CP: The town of Passaic, P-A-S-S-A-I-C, and it was a couple blocks from the railroad and I used to take that railroad into New York.

SH: Okay.

CP: And I had a car and my wife was taking driving lessons. Well, one time, I came back from my trip to New York, again, every day, I [would] come to get my car, [but this time] it was gone. She got her license. [laughter]

SH: Did she remember to come back for you? [laughter]

CP: I walked back, two blocks. That was that.

SH: You said that your first son was born while you were still in the military.

CP: Yes. [As a] matter-of-fact, they couldn't notify [me] for a couple weeks, didn't know where the hell I was. Those were the things that happened in those days, but, then, he was born in Middletown. Scott was born in Passaic. It was a hospital. There weren't any hospitals in Garfield, and then, I went into business, went into [the] building business, with ... three friends, a builder, the lawyer, an accountant, another builder. We built two-family homes, one-family homes, a slew of them, and then, I went into the accounting business, along with a neighbor of mine in Garfield, a neighbor of mine I grew up with, (Leo Bernetti?). He was a CPA and we had a business and he died and I sold it. I inherited my father's insurance business, I inherited his building, etc., and then, I built our own home in Garfield. I ran for the City Council. I became a Councilman and I became very active, politically, in ... Bergen County, which was basically a Republican County. I became a Democratic Committeeman in Bergen for awhile, but, when Dick Hughes [Richard J. Hughes, also a Democrat] ran for Governor, I went with him to every community in Bergen County, even the smallest one. ... When he got elected, he said to me, "Carmine, what can I do for you?" I said, ... "I want to become a Commissioner at Passaic Valley." "Well, why'd you pick that?" There wasn't much to it then. ... I said, "My father was once a Commissioner there, when he was Mayor." So, it was like anything else, picking something, because I wasn't looking for a job, a meeting once a month, five thousand [dollars] a year, you know, that sort of bit. ... It worked out very well, but, then, I told you, they had a ... dinner for me ... in 1961. I had 1,300 people [attend] and every one signed the book.

SH: Wonderful.

CP: I've got a whole book signed and pictures of every table.

SH: How nice.

CP: Beautiful; one of the Governors was there.

SH: Do you remember which Governor?

CP: Starts with an "M."

SH: Meyer?

CP: No.

SH: No.

CP: I don't remember his name right now.

SH: We can look that up later. [Editor's Note: It was Governor Robert B. Meyner, who served from 1954 to 1962.]

CP: Anyway, Hughes was there, too, but he wasn't the Governor then. [Editor's Note: Governor Richard J. Hughes served from 1962 to 1970.] ... So, then, actually, in 1977, who was Governor? What's his name? I forget all these guys; Governor [Brendan T.] Byrne, [who served from 1974 to 1982]. Governor Byrne was not the one I meant; he was the one that I went to, through his Chief of Staff, [when] the [NFL's New York] Giants built a stadium. No, somebody built the stadium and the Giants were coming in. [Editor's Note: Mr. Perrapato is referring to the development of Giants Stadium within the Meadowlands Sports Complex in East Rutherford, New Jersey, which opened in 1976.] So, I went to the Chief of Staff of the Governor, saying, "Can I get tickets?" I always was a Giants fan, and it ended up [that] I got four tickets, front row, mezzanine, in the aisle line, terrific, plus, the membership in the club. So, my wife became a fantastic Giant fan. Every game, we'd take a couple to the game with us, go early, and we had parking right out front by the club, go in the club, have lunch, go upstairs, watch the game, come down after the game, have a drink in the club while the crowd went out, and then, go up for dinner. So, we made that a social [event] and, well, of course, the first game wasn't a couple [that we brought], ... it was my priest. [laughter]

SH: That was what you said.

CP: Father (Cassley?), he was the first one I took. So, actually, I became very politically active. ... I was a delegate to the J. F. Kennedy convention [in 1960], delegate to the Johnson convention [in 1964]. ... I worked for the prosecutor in Bergen County for awhile, as financial aide. I used to handle the financial matters in the cases. Then, basically, my real income was the father's insurance business, which I inherited, and the accounting business, which I later sold, plus, I received the building, which also had a local newspaper in it.

SH: Did you?

CP: Yes. It wasn't my newspaper. [laughter]

SH: Right. Did you ever consider running for Governor, or did you ever think that you would want to be an Assemblyman or State Senator?

CP: No, no. I ran for Mayor and got beat, which was unusual, I thought, anyway, because I was a Councilman for four terms, more than anyone in my party before then, but they thought, most people thought, I was a pretty nice guy. Will you get that thing in the [closet]?

JAS: I can't find the testimonial books. What did you do with them?

CP: In the closet.

JAS: They're in the closet?

CP: No, no, in the closet, get that [thing], with my picture on it.

JAS: Oh.

CP: Yes. I want to show it to her.

SH: Thank you. I want to back up to when you first came to Rutgers. You mentioned some of your classmates and fraternity brothers. Were there social events that you attended at Rutgers?

CP: Yes, but I don't remember now.

SH: Okay. [Looking at Mr. Perrapato's testimonial book] That is lovely. This is a newspaper article from the *Bergen Record*, dated June 26, 1974. It says, "The Hard Man In the Backroom, Garfield's Hardnosed Politician Who Is Admired By His Enemies." [laughter] Did you go by Carmine or did you go by Thomas or Tom?

CP: CT.

SH: CT, that was your nickname. It would be great to have a copy of this for your file. You were only fifty-four when they wrote this, it says. That is quite amazing, nineteen years on the job. I think it is interesting that there was actually a William Capone, who was the former business administrator. [laughter]

CP: [laughter] Yes, the name. ...

SH: Since we started out the interview talking about your father being mistaken for Al Capone. [laughter] This is grand. Can I just leave it laying here for a minute?

JAS: I'll take it. Okay, sure, if you want it to refer back to, that's fine.

CP: Yes, go ahead.

SH: One question I wanted to ask was, do you have a favorite Vinnie Utz story?

CP: Vinnie went to war, he came back a hero, and then, he died. I don't know how, but he was also a very good football player for Rutgers. He and Otto Hill were two players from our fraternity. Otto Hill was ... a center.

SH: A center.

CP: A center, and that was about it. I don't remember stories and stuff.

SH: Okay, all right. I ask because people have talked about him being a football player and that he came back, and I think he had lost his arm.

CP: And he died.

SH: In a fire, trying to help people.

CP: Yes, he was a wonderful person. I enjoyed him in the fraternity.

SH: Was the housemother that you had in your fraternity strict?

CP: I don't have the least idea.

SH: Were you the only one in the fraternity with a car?

CP: I don't recall.

SH: Okay.

CP: I don't recall.

SH: All right. Did you go home often on the weekends or did you stay in the fraternity?

CP: I don't remember how often I went, but I know I went, but I don't know how often.

SH: When you were at the Newark Airbase, how big was the group that you were with? Was it a huge base? Was it small?

CP: No, it's a big base, big base, and, beyond that, I don't know. I don't remember any more about it.

SH: Okay. Did you keep in touch with anybody that you met in the service?

CP: No.

SH: How did rationing affect your family and the soldiers? Did you have to have ration cards or gas cards?

CP: They lived the same way anybody else in the town lived. There was nothing different.

SH: Did they ever talk about how hard it was to get meat or shoes or tires?

CP: No, not really. I think my father was in a position to [be able to get those things].

SH: What was the reaction among the soldiers and your family when President Roosevelt died?

CP: We thought we really lost someone that really was needed, and then, what happened, Truman came in.

SH: Did you have confidence in Truman?

CP: Everybody, including myself, "Oh, God;" it turned out [he was] one of the best we ever had. My "Oh, God," ... I take back. He turned out to be a wonderful President.

SH: When the war was over in Europe, did you think that you would be moved to the Pacific? Had you heard those rumors?

CP: No. All I knew [was], when the war was over in ... Europe, I was just released and that was that.

SH: You were what?

CP: Released.

SH: You did not stay in until the war was over in Japan.

CP: To be honest with you, I don't remember which one [I was released after].

SH: Okay, that is fine. That is fair enough. It was a long time ago. Was there a celebration amongst the soldiers when the war ended in Europe and when it ended completely in Japan?

CP: Well, they were happy, but I don't remember any real celebration.

SH: You did not go to any of the tickertape parades in New York or those types of celebrations.

CP: No, no.

SH: Okay, fair enough. I am going to put the tape on pause and look at some of the material here. Perhaps we will have a story that we do not want to miss.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: I was reading through some of this material, which indicated you were released from Garfield to go to work for ...

CP: Englewood.

SH: Englewood.

CP: Yes, an accounting firm, [in] which a friend of mine, they were friends of mine, were doing the work in Englewood, as an outside accountant. ... Englewood was having a lot of problems and they felt that I could help them.

SH: This was the Board of Education.

CP: Yes; no, it was the accounting firm.

SH: Okay.

CP: ... They told the Board of Ed. [that] they should hire me, that I could take care of it. They did [hire me]. I squared the whole thing away, got all the praise I could get. Then, they thought I was going to settle in there, and then, [in] Passaic Valley, the Governor, I was appointed to the Commission, which didn't bother them. Again, I'll tell you that story in a minute, and then, what happened was, Governor Brendan Byrne decided that he should use me as the E. D. [executive director] to build this plant.

SH: The headline from the *Star-Ledger* reads, "615 Million Dollar Complex Rising as the East's Largest Sewage Plant." That was that headline.

CP: I'll give you this. I've got a copy here. What we did was, we built the largest sewage plant in the East and I became the E. D. That's when that case started with that other thing, [with the Board of Education?], but here, and I built the plant. ... I didn't build it, I was in charge of building it, and we did a terrific job. All we got was, in the final analysis, plusses.

SH: Wow. This is for the Passaic Valley ...

CP: Sewage Commission.

SH: Sewage Commission.

CP: That's where I was.

SH: How difficult was it to deal with agencies like the EPA, since this was 1979?

CP: Well, yes, it was difficult, especially when we had [to expand], because, you'll see in there, there's a plant this big [planned], the one we ended up [with] was this big. It was a question that we're going to have to spend all this money, but we finally realized that, "Who's kidding who? It's going to have to be done."

SH: That is really neat. What is an E.D.?

CP: Executive director.

SH: Executive director, thank you. Was there ever a job where you said, "No, I cannot do it?"

CP: Of course not. [laughter]

SH: Okay, I asked because it is amazing how much work you did. Did you think that your Rutgers education paid off?

CP: It helped. [laughter] I'll be polite. [laughter]

SH: My word, this is amazing. I am sorry, I will just read another headline, "The Agency Shunts Patronage Aside As Sludge Rules Are Tightened." Some of these headlines are tremendous. Some of these names, I recognize from other places. I have never seen such a big special report done in the *Sunday Star-Ledger*, just on this. The incinerator, you did that as well.

CP: The whole thing.

SH: The whole thing, and the oceangoing barges that take the sludge away.

CP: ... Unfortunately, we finally didn't use them anymore, and the people in Newark, unfortunately, lost their business, because that's what we were doing, was getting rid of bringing the sludge to the ocean. ... The people that owned the barges that we would rent to take it, take the sludge out, were people that lived in Newark, or I think it was Newark, and, also, they happened to be Republicans, but they were very nice people. See, he's a Republican. [laughter]

SH: I witnessed this. Jumping to the national political scene, when you went to the John F. Kennedy convention, was that the first political convention you had attended as a delegate?

CP: Yes.

SH: Was it exciting?

CP: Yes, it was exciting. It was different, it was new and, here you are, representing your people. The Johnson convention, of course, was the second one, ... and that was in Atlantic City. That was a lot better.

SH: A lot closer.

CP: And Governor Hughes had his suite right close by and we'd go in and have a cocktail party. [laughter]

SH: You have served under many Governors. Do you have a favorite, or should I not ask that question?

CP: Well, depends on what you mean by favorite. The one I was closest to, [which] was because I campaigned with him for fifty-some-odd days, that was Dick Hughes and we became very friendly. He'd call me Carmine, like [on a first name basis], you know, and his wife and my wife became very friendly and that made it a big difference from the others, not that they weren't nice people.

SH: They had a big family as well. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: What was the difference between the Kennedy and the Johnson conventions?

CP: Well, the Kennedy convention was something new. It was a new person, it was a whole new situation, to bring in this young fellow, and so on.

SH: He was young and he was Catholic.

CP: That's right. So, that was [an] entirely different type of convention. The Johnson convention is, you brought someone in, we knew who was going to be picked. It was just a question of going through the ritual, and that's the difference.

SH: Did you go to the convention supporting Kennedy?

CP: Yes.

SH: We all know now that Johnson was trying very hard to turn it into a Johnson convention.

CP: ... As I was serving at Passaic Valley, I was also president, for awhile, of the AMSA, Association of Metropolitan Sewage Agencies. All the agencies in the area, we had a group and we operated and I served this time as president of that, and other people, later on, served, ... and the same thing with the ... NACWA, the National Association of Clean Water Advocate [Agencies]. [Editor's Note: The NACWA was established in 1970 by twenty-two municipal sewage agencies to improve sewage treatment as well as the quality of water.] That was a national one, and they had the offices in Washington. I served as president for that for awhile. ... So, actually, I've been involved in wastewater treatment storage, clean water, worked through all these different functions.

SH: Almost as these agencies matured.

CP: That's right.

SH: Did you have that idea of the need for clean water, and how do you think you became involved in this?

CP: Well, I became involved in it by having the job. When I had the job, I found out that we didn't have clean water, that we were dumping sludge in the ocean, etc., etc., and the question was, "How could we correct this?" and [the] answer, of course, I mean, the state, the Federal Government, rather, said, "Hey, we want clean water now. You do it or else." When they did that, we had no choice, but we believed it should be, just a question [of] we didn't have the loot to do it with.

SH: Did they not sell bonds and things like that to fund things like this? Were you involved in any of that?

CP: Well, I was involved in a sense. We put them up for bids. ... My opinion was, "Everything had to be bid. You don't pick anyone out of the air, really, unless there's a particular reason for it." Now, I picked two people out of the air for the Commissioners to select. When this thing came up, nothing came up. We needed a table of organization. Here, we were going from this

big to a plant with an incinerator, with this, with that, with everything you could think of, "Now, how are you going to run this thing? How many employees [are] you going to need?" things like that. Well, we weren't in the position to select that, I wasn't in a position to guess that. So, I recommended to the Commission that they hire the Republican Comptroller from Washington, a Republican, and a Democrat from North Jersey, a friend of mine, [laughter] and those two got together, they were selected, and we also got a good headline out of that in the paper.

SH: I bet.

CP: That they select a bipartisan [team], and these people came up with all of the [plans], number of people we needed, the type of people we needed, everything. We didn't have to do a darned thing but put it together.

SH: Okay.

CP: And that meant, now, we could have done that politically, and we would've ended up with a mess, but we decided to do it the right way.

SH: How often were you pressured by people, who were perhaps not qualified for a job, to help them out?

CP: Oh, quite often.

SH: Were you?

CP: Yes.

SH: How did you resist that?

CP: Very simple. I said, "You don't fit in this job. Let's look, see if we could find one for you." I tried to help where I could, but it had to be one that you were qualified for, otherwise, and I had some very good friends that I did find positions for that were qualified for those type of positions. ... I told every employee in our place one thing, very simple, "Don't let me ever catch you people having lunch with contractors."

SH: Really?

CP: "Or," etc., "with the contractors. Your job is here and that's it," and we built that type of relationship.

SH: What was your relationship like with the unions that worked in the different entities that you were involved with?

CP: No problem, no problem, because I did not do anything but treat them fair. It's a funny thing, though; let me tell you one little story. When I first hired this secretary, (Jeri?), she was a black woman, had one son, no husband anymore, and she was a good secretary. Well, anyway,

she came in as my secretary, and, which I very seldom did, I dictated a letter to her. When she brought it back to me to sign, I said, "(Jeri?), this is not what I said." She said, "Mr. P., that's all it's supposed to be." [laughter]

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: I will put this back on then. Thank you for lunch. You were going to tell me about some of the trips that you took.

CP: Read that, out loud.

JAS: ... "Former School Business Administrator of the City of Garfield, Carmine T. Perrapato, and presently Executive Director of the Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission was elected one of thirty top figures in the sewerage management by People to People International to participate in an environmental water management delegation to the People's Republic of China. People to People was founded under the Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1956. It was a citizen's ambassador program based on a philosophy that political barriers are overcome by the universal desire to exchange ideas and information on a most professional level. This project is more than a goodwill mission. It is a formal program of professional exchange and cultural orientation. Substantial time will be spent in China on professional seminars and various symposia, technical discussions, a facility visit, field trips and informal gatherings with foreign colleagues. His wife, Ruth, will accompany him for this three-week trip. President Reagan is honorary chairman of People to People. Mr. Perrapato was elected, in May, Director of the Association of Metropolitan Sewerage Agencies. This consists of all sewerage agencies throughout the country and serves more than 250,000 people. There are ninety-two authorities that belong to the association, including Chicago, New York and Los Angeles. Four New Jersey agencies belong to the authority and they include Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission, Bergen County Utilities Authority, Middlesex County Utilities Authority and Ocean County Utilities. Mr. Perrapato was elected in January as the Authority's Director of the State of New Jersey. This association consists of authorities within the state and has a membership of eighty-two, which deal primarily with wastewater treatment. He also gave testimony on ocean disposal by Congressman Norman E. D'Amours, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Oceanography, in May. It concerned itself with the Fisheries and the Merchant Marine Committee to the US House of Representatives. Mr. Perrapato has been a Commissioner for some time before being designated to the position of Executive Director."

SH: Does it give a date for the newspaper article, Jo Ann?

JAS: He put it here, 6/30/1983. Yes, that would be, probably, about right. It's not on the newspaper itself, though, no.

SH: Okay, thank you.

CP: That would be the *Star-Ledger*.

JAS: She can read. [laughter]

SH: The *Star-Ledger*, no, that was what I was asking.

JAS: That was the *Star-Ledger*? oh, okay.

SH: Can you talk about getting nominated to take this trip or about the trip itself? What do you remember? That is quite an honor. You testified before the House of Representatives, and then, you went to China.

CP: They selected me as one of the ones who's had a past experience, and we went to China. ... There were engineers and administrators, and so, the combinations. We all went, some of us took our wives, and we looked at their equipment and told them how bad it was. Their waters were polluted.

SH: Really?

CP: Very bad, and we told them what we did and what we were doing. That's about it.

SH: Did you go to Beijing? Is that where you went in China? Did you go around the country or just stay in the city?

CP: No, we went a few places. I don't remember where they were.

SH: What did you think of ...

CP: One thing we did there, the Great Wall, we walked the Great Wall. We got on it, walked on it, and said to ourselves, "How in God's name did they build this without the equipment we have today?"

SH: How did the Chinese people treat you? Were you allowed to talk to them?

CP: They treated us very well. As a matter-of-fact, we went to visit some village and, when we pulled in with our bus, all the employees were there in white and clapping for us. ... When we went to our rooms, they all had cement floors and they were just washed.

SH: Did the people look well-fed and happy at this point in China, in 1987?

CP: No, a lot of the things we saw were [fine]. Of course, we saw different people, but ... most of the people we saw were pretty well.

SH: The Chinese security, the Communists, did they keep you from really interacting with the people?

CP: No, they did not bother us at all.

SH: Really? That is good.

CP: And we didn't get into too much of that. We weren't there for that purpose and we didn't want to disturb the main purpose we went [for]. If we got into that completely, China would have said, "Get the hell out of here. You came here to help us, not to annoy us." Now, that was what we were basically there for.

SH: Who led the delegation that took you over?

CP: I forget his name now.

SH: Okay, that is okay. Were there other trips that you took similar to this?

CP: Oh, yes, took one to Germany, to look at a certain [sewage] plant that they had, to determine whether ... it would be feasible for us. ... While we were there, we had the pleasure of going across the Great Wall [Berlin Wall] with a bus and, when we came back, one of our inspectors, of the Germans, before they let us through, looked under the bus to make sure nobody was hiding, to get out.

SH: Okay. You went through the Berlin Wall.

CP: Berlin Wall, and came back, and, when we came back, they looked underneath to make sure there was no one hiding. [laughter]

SH: The security was almost tighter in Germany than it had been in China, it sounds like.

CP: Yes, in that sense, yes, and we've gone to a lot of other places, gone to a lot of places. I can't even remember them all.

SH: That is okay. You did some tremendous things. Have you stayed in touch with anybody from Rutgers over the years?

CP: I saw Otto Hill a couple times, that's about all, and, of course, I saw Bogle when he came to speak at my testimonial.

SH: That is right. [laughter] I liked that story, the bipartisan aspect of it.

CP: Yes. There was a lot of people, 1,300.

SH: That is amazing. Garfield is not that big; it is bigger than when you were a child.

CP: Garfield's not that big, and, also, I wasn't a State Senator or anything; I was just a miserable Councilman.

SH: [laughter] I think that is not true; you were not miserable, I do not think. Is there anything that I have forgotten to ask you about that you would like to share with us, either about Rutgers or New Jersey or your family?

CP: Tell you a little story. Jeffrey, [his son], the heart surgeon, was in Guam. I guess when Jeffrey was home, he had a dog that Santa Claus brought him. ... He had a boxer that Santa Claus brought him. His life went on; then, when he went into service, [he] had no boxer, naturally. In Guam, somehow, he got a boxer, and he had a boxer in Guam. So, when he was being shipped back, I got a phone call, "Dad, I'm sending my dog. Please, pick him up ... at the Newark Army Airbase." [laughter] So, Scott and I went to the Newark Airport, as directed, picked him up, took him home, took him in the yard and he walked over to the pool and there was thin ice there. ... He stepped on it and he went in. We had to pull him out. I didn't realize, we didn't realize, that ice or whatnot, being in Guam, wouldn't ... affect him. [The boxer] said, "What the hell is this?" [laughter]

SH: A tropical dog. [laughter]

CP: Yes. Well, that's a story I thought would be interesting.

SH: Thank you. It sounds like you had a very interesting career and a great family.

CP: Jeffery picked ... his brother's name.

SH: Did he?

CP: When Ruth was in the hospital, giving birth, she had a list of names; they were all girls. She had one boy, one more coming and she wanted a girl. ... They're all girls. So, we couldn't come up with a name, her and I, at the hospital, talking. I went back home and Jeff was in bed and I said, "Jeff, we haven't got a name for your brother yet." He said, "I know a good name, Scott."

SH: Aww.

CP: So, I went back to Ruth. I said, "Jeff recommends Scott." She said, "Good idea, let's make [it] Scott." [laughter] So, he became Scott, because of his brother.

SH: How far apart are the two boys?

JAS: Twelve.

CP: Twelve years.

SH: Twelve? He had been waiting for a long time. [laughter]

CP: Well, his mother was waiting for a girl.

JAS: Actually, it's thirteen years. ...

CP: Now, my son, Scott, went to medical school also, where he met his wife, Tracy Hawk. When they both graduated, of course, they got married, to be Drs. Scott and Tracy Perrapato.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: Just for the record, could you state your full name for us?

JAS: Josephine Ann Spataro.

SH: Thank you. One of the things I wanted to ask you about before I leave today is, I know that when you became an Aviation Cadet, after your graduation from Rutgers, you were sent to the University of North Carolina. Was that in Raleigh-Durham or were you at Chapel Hill?

CP: Chapel Hill.

SH: Chapel Hill. What were you studying there?

CP: It was in the accounting area, math, but in the accounting area.

SH: The way the Army did their accounting.

CP: Yes, so on.

SH: Then, they sent you on then to Yale.

CP: First, it was Yale, and then, South [North] Carolina.

SH: Okay, I had the order reversed. Were you impressed with Yale, coming from Rutgers?

CP: ... No more than I ought to be.

SH: [laughter] I thought I would ask. Then, you were sent to Newark.

CP: Yes.

SH: For now, I am going to put the machine on pause. We can help to put all these wonderful albums away and, if something comes to mind before I leave, we can record it.

CP: My son, Jeffrey, went to Bergen Catholic. ...

JAS: Hopefully, it's off.

SH: No, it is on.

CP: It was the first year, I think, [after] its opening up and he had to go so many blocks before he could get on their bus, because they could not go on the Garden State Parkway.

SH: Okay. The busses were not allowed.

CP: Whether they go on the Garden State Parkway [or not], they could take a certain different route. So, I spoke to the Director, Chairman of the Garden State Parkway, told him what the situation was with the students at Bergen Catholic. ... The next thing you know, the bus was able to go on the Garden State Parkway and Jeff only had a half a block to go to get on the bus.

SH: [laughter] I will bet you they still go on the Garden State Parkway. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

CP: I'm going to tell you one more, that's all, about Jeff's car. ... Yes, when my son got his new car in Washington, when he graduated, and I gave him a new car and he was in med school.

SH: In Washington, DC?

CP: Yes, he was still in [Washington, DC], still there.

SH: Did he go to George Washington University or Georgetown?

CP: He went to Georgetown.

SH: Georgetown, okay.

CP: Then, he graduated from Georgetown and went to Georgetown Med. In the meantime, he got this new car and it was stolen and he called me and said, "Dad, my car is stolen and I'm having trouble with the police looking for it." I said, "All right, let me check it out." So, I called Senator "Pete" Williams, who then, at that time, was a US Senator. Well, lo and behold, a day later, Jeffrey got his car, believe it or not. [Editor's Note: Senator Harrison "Pete" Williams represented New Jersey in the Senate from 1959 to 1982.]

SH: How could that be? [laughter]

CP: It meant that someone then did their work. Of course, it wasn't too hard a car to pick out, a convertible, and so on.

SH: You got him a convertible, too.

CP: Yes.

JAS: It was a red Corvette, wasn't it?

CP: Yes.

JAS: Before you think of anything else.

CP: She's taking that away from me. ... She didn't want me to tell you the others.

SH: [laughter] That is a great story, though. I thank you both very much for being such great hosts. I do appreciate the opportunity to come and talk with you today.

JAS: Thank you.

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

Reviewed by William Nesson 1/28/10
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 3/5/10
Reviewed by Carmine T. Perrapato 3/14/10