

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT REDFIELD

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Molly Graham: This begins an interview with Robert Redfield, our third session, the date is Tuesday, March 3, 2015. The interview is taking place on 102 Ryder's Lane in East Brunswick, New Jersey. Robert, let's pick up with something you brought up last time. You were talking about Martin Richards, who had won awards for the production of *Chicago*.

Robert Redfield: Richard was a young gay singer that I put in the Copa before he married the Johnson heiress. I got him his first job that he ever had modeling. He came out of the Bronx with no background, no money and really no talent, but he wanted to be in the business. He could sing a little, but his first job was a modeling job. From that point, he sang a little bit. I paired him with another girl singer and they performed at the Copa. They alternated times singing in the lounge. Downstairs at the Copa would be the big shows, the big productions with bands and big stars. Upstairs was the lounge, where people frequented all the time. The lounge was on street level, on East 60th Street. When you walk in, you walk into the lounge. There was a big bar and the captains from the Copa would bring everybody seated. There was a booth where the host interviewed celebrities on the radio. Some lounge music would always be going on. There was a little stage where I'd put four or five piece groups. I did most of the lounge groups at that time. When there weren't bands playing, there would be a boy or girl signing with the piano. In the lounge, they would have to keep something going all the time, like a piano player and a singer, usually a boy and a girl. So, I put Marty in as the boy. He made, I think, a hundred dollars a week singing there. There was a place where people in show business hung around called Hanson's Drug Store, which is in midtown Manhattan. They had a soda fountain and a place for kids to meet and talk about show business. People would come in, like Barbara Streisand, before they were discovered. Marty would hang out there. Eventually, he married the granddaughter of Johnson & Johnson. She had a lot of money. This brought him into Broadway and from that point on, he became a big producer on Broadway and for movies.

MG: I am surprised he was a model. He seemed kind of short.

RR: Well, he wasn't modeling men's underwear. He might have done headshots or something like that. He wasn't overly successful as a model, but I could get him some jobs, which he survived on for a while.

MG: Do you think he developed his talent over time or just got lucky?

RR: With him? He's probably still doesn't have any talent, but he could produce and get the best of the best, Broadway's best writers, like Bob Fosse, Stephen Sondheim, etc. to work with.

MG: You mentioned you wanted to talk about Dean Cornwell.

RR: Yes, I'm going to tell you about him. He was a tremendous muralist, artist and painter. I used to spend a lot of time at his apartment because I managed his girlfriend. I can't remember her name though. She did modeling. For one job, she modeled completely nude and painted gold. He worked with James Montgomery Flagg and even did murals in Radio City. Anyway, I think I told you that I had collected autographs for a year and then some little kid at a casino took the book and tore it up. I quit collecting autographs after that. I had some really amazing names in there.

MG: Such as?

RR: You want to see it? I got it here. Most of the names are before your time, but you may recognize them. (Lillian Shaw?), she was a very good friend of my mother. She was a very big star in London, very big. She would visit us in Colts Neck. Mother designed a bracelet that she is wearing in another picture. Mother knew big jewelers like Harry Winston. It was like that wide with rows of diamonds. It's magnificent. (Lillian?) knew England's royalty. My mother made a loan to them on that piece of jewelry, understanding that she could buy it back, but she never got it back. Then there's Harry Armstrong. He was a composer and famous for a song called "Sweet Adeline." He signed this book in 1935 when he was visiting us. I would have been about thirteen or fourteen years old. Then there's an autograph from (Frederick Bauer?). He wrote well known songs. "To Robert, with the best wishes, (Alice Lawlor?)." She wrote a number called, "On the Sidewalks of New York." These songwriters came to the farm from New York all on the same day. They all came down in 1935 to see us at the shore. Here is another guy; his name was Theodore Metz. He was a German composer, known for the song, "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight." Then, of course, here's Max Baer's autograph. And Ancil Hoffman, who was his boxing manager. This guy, Byron Nelson, was one of the top golfers. And here's Jack Benny. Did you ever hear of Jack Benny?

MG: Yes. Wow.

RR: These are great comics. You wouldn't know all of these names. For example, the radio program *Easy Aces* was a terrific weekly show. I also have an autograph from Tess Gardella, who was "Aunt Jemima." Another is Borrah Minevitch, who was a great harmonica player. There's Jimmy Durante. He was a good friend of mine. And Eleanor Powell, who was a big star. She was a famous dancer and movie star. There's Lou Holtz, who was a comic actor. He was a well-known artist and comedian for television but you wouldn't know him. Then Joe Louis, who was a boxer, and Mike Jacobs, who was a promoter and good friend of mine. I remember when Joe Louis fought Max Schmeling. Max Schmeling was the junior champion. At that time, there was a big silent war between America and Germany. So, instead of going to war, two guys fought and it was Louis and Schmeling. I was heavily involved in boxing. There was a big fight between Joe Louis and Tommy Farr, who was the English heavyweight champion, at Yankee Stadium. Tommy actually beat him, but Louis got the decision. Tommy Farr and his manager, Ted Broadribb, stayed at our house at the Shore. Major Bowes was another major figure we knew. He had a program called the Major Bowes Amateur Hour, one of the biggest amateur shows of all time. He would introduce various acts and it was one of the biggest shows on the radio for a long time. He gave so many opportunities to stars, but he wasn't too friendly. Not many people knew him personally. Milton Berle was a real good friend of mine and he had his own show called *Texaco Star Theatre*. Then there's an autograph from Benny Leonard, who was famous boxer. That reminds me. I remember when the Hindenburg crashed in Lakehurst. [Editor's Note: On May 6, 1937, the German airship Hindenburg caught fire over Lakehurst Naval Air Station. Thirty-six people perished in the fire.] That was the zeppelin that came from Germany. My mother knew important people from New Orleans who were on board. Henny Youngman was another person we knew. He was one of the top comedians of all time. He did a lot of shows for me. Everybody knew him. He was famous for his one-liners, like "Take my wife ... please." Phil Baker was a big star, famous comedian. I even have an autograph from the Rear Admiral of the United States Navy. We knew lots of British writers, like Charles Bennett the screenwriter. They were with when we had ringside seats for the Louis and Schmeling fight. Frances Langford was another friend of ours. She is a

famous singer and radio star. That's Buddy Ebsen, who was Jed Clampett in *The Beverly Hillbillies*. Then, Ham Fisher who was a cartoonist, famous for *Joe Palooka* and *Al Capp*. These would be in the Sunday funnies. I saved a few of his cartoons somewhere. Then James Montgomery Flagg, another illustrator. He was famous for his political posters and murals. He was the biggest in the world. He inspired Dean Cornwell. There's nobody better in the world than James Montgomery Flagg. That's probably worth something. Their murals were known worldwide. Then, Clem McCarthy, who was one of the greatest sports announcers. That's Jack Dempsey, who was the heavyweight champion. It's really a shame that that kid ripped out all the pages. There are so many famous names here. Here's James Braddock. He was a famous heavyweight boxing champion. The movie *Cinderella Man* was based on him. Here's Wallace Beery. They were in a lot of movies together. She was around in 1934. She was a very big star.

MG: What has being so personally connected to show business been like for you?

RR: It meant a lot, even going back to my early years. I used to spend time backstage at the *Ziegfeld Follies*. There I met Bob Hope and other big stars of the time. I loved being in that atmosphere.

RR: I was also very friendly with Maxie Rosenbloom. I have autographed photos from him. But we were very close with Max Baer, who died in the Hollywood Hotel when he was fifty years old. Too young. At that time, he was guest refereeing wrestling matches. I also did a lot of work with the Rutgers Soccer Club coaches. I've stayed connected with the university.

MG: Last time you talked a little bit about Jimi Hendrix and how you would book him with some bands you worked with. What were your impressions of Jimi Hendrix?

RR: I thought he was a great guitar player. There was no question about the ability that he had. He went to Europe and became popular. He also played with Jack Hammer, who I managed and who wrote and performed "Great Balls of Fire." When Hendrix died, he was over there, in London. But Jimi Hendrix was a great musician and entertainer. Jack Hammer had "Great Balls of Fire," which was one of the biggest songs ever. I even worked with Joe Pesci before his career took off. He worked as a greeter at different bars around New York and New Jersey. His career really took off in the film *My Cousin Vinny*. He would remember me if you mentioned my name. I knew Joe Pesci in my groups when he was in a comedy team with Frank Vincent. This was before *Goodfellas*.

MG: Tell me a little about developing relationships with your clients?

RR: They would work through my office, which was often a springboard to stardom. There were some people I turned down because I felt they had no talent or I couldn't do much for their career, like Tiny Tim. I worked with Tommy Dix a little bit. Tommy Dix was one of the really great talents. He was a great singer. He was a little guy; no taller than maybe five foot two or five foot three. He had unbelievable voice. He did a movie called *Best Foot Forward* starring Lucille Ball. I think that was her first picture and he did a song in it called, "Buckle Down, Winsoki," which was a great number and he had big voice for a little guy. He didn't stay in the business much longer than that, but he could have and should have been really big. Anyway, that movie was *Best Foot Forward* with Lucille Ball. There was a bar in the Piccadilly Hotel that I would stay at all the time when I was in New York. There was a group I would spend

much time with in their lounge called the Three Suns with Al Nevins and his cousin, Morty Nevins. They had a hit number called “Twilight Time.” That was their big number. You ever hear it? It’s real pretty, but you’d recognize it if you heard the melody. Al Nevins was partnered with Don Kirshner, a big music producer. The name of their company was Aldon Music. So, Al Nevins from the Three Suns and Don Kirshner formed Aldon Music, which is where Carol King, who is on Broadway now, worked through. They produced a lot of artists, like Elvis Presley, etc.

MG: What were you doing with Three Suns?

RR: Well, I knew them all. I had a friendly association with them, but I just wasn’t in direct business with them or manage them.

MG: How is managing a boxer different than managing a singer or a musician?

RR: With boxing, it helps to know the promoters. You meet with them often at the training gym. I worked with two or three fighters that came out of the Golden Gloves, which is before they become professional. Before that they were with different amateur fight clubs in New York. I would have a good feeling for who might make a good springboard into something great in professional boxing. One of them was Billy Pickett. He came out of the Parks Department. I signed him to a management in the professional fighting business. We used to train at Stillman’s Gym in New York, which was the biggest boxing gym for the top fighters to train. All your major fighters trained there: Rocky Marciano, Sugar Ray Robinson, etc. I had three or four guys that I managed. Pickett moved along at a pretty good pace. Freddie Brown and Whitey Bimstein were the trainers. Pickett won about twenty in a row and then they sent him over to England where he did pretty well, but then he got involved with some underage young girl and got thrown out of England. I found out subsequently that he had been on drugs and it was a problem. But he was a heck of a fighter. I had a good relationship with the head matchmaker for Madison Square Garden, Teddy Brenner, who arranged many matches at the fight clubs. They wouldn’t give Pickett good fights because they didn’t want the big name fighters to get beaten off. So, there was a fight scheduled with Dick Tiger, who was the top middleweight at that time, second in line to the champion. He was going to fight Fernandez, the top fighter from Cuba at Madison Square Garden, but Castro wouldn’t let him come out of Cuba. So, Tiger was scheduled for the main bout in Madison Square Garden and it gave us a chance. Teddy Brenner called and offered Billy Pickett the fight. We said, “Yes, that would really be good.” So, Pickett fought at Madison Square Garden against Dick Tiger, the main event, which you can probably still even see on the internet. It was a close fight, but Pickett lost. But it was real close against a really great fighter. Then, Pickett started getting into a lot of trouble with drugs and I got out of my involvement with him. The mob was heavily involved in boxing. Around that time there were investigations because of their influence in boxing. I was called in because of my connection to boxing. But I never had trouble with the mob. I stayed clear that way and an investigation absolved me.

MG: What do you think made you a good entertainment manager?

RR: I had the background and experience in show business, but also a feeling of what was very right. First of all, I was in a position to get some of the big acts, like the Temptations or the Main Ingredient, who did, “Everybody Plays the Fool,” with Cuba Gooding, Sr. Acts and groups would seek me out or I would seek them out. I had a lot of contracts. People like Jack Hammer,

who wrote “Great Balls of Fire,” signed with me. I told you about Ray Stark, the movie producer. He was Fanny Brice’s son-in-law. He married Fannie Brice’s daughter, Frances. We had good relations with him, and he was very important in the west coast and in movies. I also briefly managed Lou Dunbar, who was in the Harlem Globetrotters. I helped negotiate his contracts with the Harlem Globetrotters. I think I mentioned that I managed Dorn Taylor, who had been with the Pittsburgh Pirates and roomed with Barry Bonds. Do you know baseball at all?

MG: Not really.

RR: Dorn Taylor was with the Pittsburgh Pirates Triple A farm team in 1978, but they would often bring him up to play with the Pirates. So, he would go back and forth between the main team. Right before he came up with the main team, he roomed with Barry Bonds. Barry Bonds got in a lot of trouble for using steroids. Barry Bonds and a whole group of players were caught using performance enhancing drugs. So, when I used to call Dorn Taylor, Barry might answer the phone, but he wasn’t very pleasant and I didn’t even try to talk to him because I didn’t like the guy. I also knew very well Joe DiMaggio, who played with the Yankees and he married Marilyn Monroe. When DiMaggio retired from baseball he became friends with two very good friends of mine, Lou and Cecil Wolfson. They were the ones that had made a fortune after World War II when the Navy sold the battleships to the public and they bought it for scrap iron. They made a fortune in Florida in a deal with the Navy. From that point on, Lou and Cecil Wolfson became very big industrialists and they also controlled the surface transportation in Washington D.C. In other words, they operated all the buses, trolleys, etc. They became that big. They also had big insurance companies. Joe DiMaggio worked for them in public relations and they used him for all their advertising. Cecil Wolfson, one of the brothers, was a very good friend of mine and my mother’s. We had contractors that did a lot of work with the brothers and got to know on a personal level. He also connected me with the best doctors, like (Dr. Cheskie?) on Park Avenue. He was a real nice guy. He was also Joe DiMaggio’s doctor. I used to sit in the office talking to DiMaggio and wait and see who was going in first to see Dr. (Dr. Cheskie?)

MG: What was your impression of Joe DiMaggio?

RR: He was quiet and nice. He didn’t communicate much with people in general because he was so famous. Lou Wolfson owned a horse named Affirmed, who was the last Triple Crown winner, thirty years ago. [Editor’s Note: Affirmed won the Triple Crown in 1978. No horse won the Triple Crown again until American Pharaoh won in 2015 which occurred after this interview had taken place.] Another friend of mine was (Bruce Moran?), who worked for CMA Creative Artists when I signed the former lead singers of The Temptations, meaning David Ruffin, Eddie Kendricks and Dennis Edwards. Remember, they had all the hits, but the Temptations name had been trademarked. When I signed them up, that was a big deal because the Temptations at that time had to be considered one of the top ten musical groups in the world. Everybody knew the Temptations. We had Ruffin, Kendricks, and Edwards, former lead singers of The Temptations, and I put their show together. I have a tape of their first show together. Bruce Moran approached me about signing Ruffin, Kendricks and Edwards. Other agencies didn’t want to take them on because David Ruffin had so many problems and was so hard to deal with and even might now show up for shows.

MG: He had some drug problems.

RR: Heavily. The others, Eddie Kendricks and Dennis Edwards were more dependable. Even Eddie Kendricks and Dennis Edwards wouldn't work with him because he was so unreliable and if they booked a show with Ruffin, he might not show up for it.

MG: Yes, you told me he was tricky to work with.

RR: But it was worth it to sign him because he was so famous and such a talent. "My Girl" was his big hit. He was amazing. I was first approached by Eddie Kendricks and Dennis Edwards to manage them, but I knew we had to bring David Ruffin in for it to work and be a big time draw for audiences. They could sing all their biggest hits. Eddie and Dennis were not interested in bringing David Ruffin back, but I talked them into trying it again.

MG: What year was this taking place?

RR: Probably around '87, '88. Dennis Edwards and Eddie Kendricks were booked as headliners at a show in Chicago. I had to talk David Ruffin into leaving a horse farm in the Detroit suburbs where he was hiding. He was afraid to leave because he might get picked up by the police as he was wanted on some drug use charges. I worked out a deal for all kinds of clothing and promotion and rehearsals and the end result was the first show of Ruffin, Kendricks, and Edwards. So, it was Bruce Moran who approached me to sign the act. He thought if anybody can get this group to perform together, it's me. It was a twenty-four hour a day job for me, making sure David Ruffin got to engagements and where he was supposed to go. Bruce Moran subsequently became an important and major big act booking agent and from there has become one of the owners of Live Nation, arranging and managing the largest and most important shows worldwide. It's humorous as you look back at some of these incidents, but it wasn't funny at the time. I also worked with Ruth Bowen, who was a famous talent agent and managed Aretha Franklin. What are some other things I wanted to mention? I had a wholesale meat company for some time. We were living in Central Park South. We had an apartment in a building that the Shuberts owned on Central Park South

MG: When was this?

RR: In the early '60s, maybe.

RR: Just married. We had the apartment on Central Park South. We were able to get it from the Shuberts, who were very good friends of my mother. I took my dog Pilly to Central Park, which was right across the street. I took her on a walk before meeting with a client. This was when I had a wholesale meat business. We specialized mainly in the top quality meats. I had some accounts in town. One was at Frankie and Johnnie's, a very famous steak house. So, I let Pilly out to run around in Central Park near a very famous place called Tavern on the Green. It was on a beautiful spring day and the sun was out. About a half a block away, a modeling shoot was set up in Central Park. They were filming a commercial there. So, I opened the back door for Pilly to jump in the car and I drive downtown. I pulled in front of the restaurant. I had a permit to park any place I wanted in New York. I parked down below Frankie and Johnnie's, which is over near Tenth Avenue. It's a small place, but very famous. I went up and I saw Johnny, the owner. I spoke to him for maybe a half hour or so. When I got back to the car, Pilly, who would always sitting right there, was gone. I couldn't figure out what had happened. So, now I'm distraught. I go back to the apartment without Pilly and I'm really distraught. Right next to our

apartment was Stamlers, a famous restaurant right on Central Park South. Their doorman saw me and he looks at me funny because I was walking in alone with no Pilly, because the dog was always with me wherever I went. So, I get upstairs and there's Pilly waiting to greet me with everybody else. It turned out, I never went downtown with Pilly. I had so many things on my mind that I wasn't thinking. Pilly never jumped into my car in the park. The models at their shoot saw what happened. Pilly just walked home. It was upsetting at the time, but funny looking back on it. Pilly had ID on her collar. Everyone was actually worried about me because Pilly always came home with me. I mentioned my meat business. That gave me an opportunity to become friendly with so many chefs. And I did all of this without cellphones. I would use phonebooths on the road to make all my orders. One day, in the middle of winter, all the orders blew out of my hand. I was calling them in to get ready to be picked up. The orders seemed a mile high in the wind. Jo and I got in the car to try to catch them. We're driving down Route 36 looking up and trying to see where they might land and if they're going to land. I finally caught up with all the orders after chasing them for a mile or two, and called them into the office.

MG: Did Jo help you with the business?

RR: She'd be with me since I would not travel alone. I didn't know if I mentioned that to you yet.

MG: You did.

RR: I have phobias real bad and that kept me from being rather big in the business.

MG: In what ways would Jo help you?

RR: Just for moral support. She was always with me. My phobias got worse and worse. And I've never been able to take medication to relax because I didn't want to lose control over myself. But the phobias really limited me.

MG: Did you ever have any competition in the business in terms of management during these years? What other people or agencies were doing what you did?

RR: There was a lot, yes. But I was doing everything myself. As management you had to do everything; not only managing, you also had to book them, which is what an agent does. You had to make sure they were a certain level of talent to even warrant management. I might have fifty, sixty people working for me several nights a week and I had to know where everybody was. Most of the agents, they make mistakes, or they might have two bands at one place, or maybe nobody even showed up. The other agents didn't focus on lounge acts and music clubs. They might only get into catering or wedding jobs. My light was on until four or five o'clock in the morning. I did all the contracts. I did all the negotiations. If it came to any legal things, I did that too, even though I wasn't a lawyer. I did all the legal negotiations with big clubs in Las Vegas, me alone. I did that one on one without any legal experience--arranging important legal and sometimes long term deals with Las Vegas venues like Harrah's.

MG: I know when you started off in the business you worked with your mother. How did her role change over time?

RR: She helped sign our initial clients and acts because she knew so many people in show business. One of the main acts was McHarris and Dolores. I didn't know if I mentioned that name to you, but they were well known in the black circuit, like the Apollo Theatre. For shows like this, you'd have a dance team open up and then you'd have a comic come in and keep it going. Then, the star of the show may be singing or another drawing attraction, whatever it might be.

MG: When your mother got older or stopped working, how did the business change for you?

RR: We had an office at the Edison Hotel in New York, which was a very well-known hotel. We had our office there, along with another big agency. During that time, we were booking a lot of acts in the Catskills, at hotels like the Concord Resort Hotel and the Nevele Hotel. The agent would put the act up while they performed there for the weekend. The main booker of the main hotels and big name acts was Charlie Rapp. He would book acts for five shows a weekend and put them up as well. We got along good with Charlie Rapp. That was an important part of show business back then. Most big name acts would work the circuit in the Catskills mountains. They would use some of the smaller acts to also support the show and so your big names really got started up there, like Martin and Lewis. [Editor's Note: Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis were a comedy duo for ten years. They went on to have successful solo careers.] My mother was always a big help because when I was out, she would answer the phones in the office. She would have been really impressed with my work with the Temptations and many other big name attractions. I forgot to mention that my uncle, my mother's brother, owned a hardware store near LaGuardia Airport, right near Northern Boulevard, which was one of the main streets. During the war, it was very hard to get gasoline. You had different tickets issued to you. I had an A ticket, which gave you four gallons a week. If you had B, it would be two gallons a week, something like that. I drove all the time and needed gas, so we'd also get our gas in the black market. For example, the Esso station on Route One in Linden. I would stay over at my uncle's apartment when I was out on Long Island. I'd go into his hardware store, where they legally sold, by the barrel, a kerosene called Valso. Anyway, they could use that for gas, for driving, because it would work in the car. So, I go out there one time and fill up my tank with this stuff. I pulled out of the driveway in my Packard Clipper--it was a really nice car--and I hit Northern Boulevard. The next thing I heard was an explosion like Hiroshima and then a series of booms in my car. I thought the car would blow up. It was a reaction from this kerosene type of product. So, I got gasoline. It is sort of funny now, but not then.

MG: Probably not in the moment.

RR: Not then for sure. Another time, my two buddies set a fire in the back of my car while we were going through the Holland Tunnel.

MG: That sounds so scary. Now, I know you mentioned putting a book together about your life.

RR: Ye. There is so much material and some people want me to write this or to write it themselves. There would be a number of categories--show business, politics, humor. It would make an interesting book. Everybody that knows me says I have to do it. Hopefully, when you get finished, you might think it will make a good book.

MG: I think it will.

RR: There's a lot about entertainment. I knew so many people who went on to become very well known. I wanted to mention James Street, the famous novelist. He was my roommate's father when I went to Riverside military school. I think I told you the first time we met that I was the only one in military school that couldn't participate in parades and certain other activities because of polio, but I didn't feel left out and I did what I could. My roommate was John Street and rooming next door to us was his brother. The two brothers went there. James Street was their father. He would come visit them, either in Hollywood, Florida or Gainesville, Georgia, where Riverside had facilities for Riverside Military School. The Hollywood facility isn't there now. I got to know the Streets very well. At that point, I was only eighteen or nineteen. I wasn't in the business yet, but James Street was exceptionally nice to me. He was the foremost authority on Mark Twain. He wrote *Oh, Promised Land*, which was a tremendous book and then a lot of movies with big names and big stars. Did I tell you when my car was stolen?

MG: I don't think so.

RR: It was humorous how it got stolen. When Max Baer was doing a show in Asbury Park near the Berkeley-Carteret, which is a big hotel and very well-known. If it was in New York, it could have been like the Plaza. So, Max Baer was down there with some big orchestra leaders. Anyway, the captain of the Asbury Park police department, who was a good friend of ours, came over. He asked to borrow my car. I said, "Sure, that'll be okay." So, in front of the Berkeley is a circular parking area where the doorman would watch the car and stuff like that. So, at two o'clock, three o'clock in the morning, when I was ready to come home and we go down to get the car, it wasn't there. The car had been stolen from that lot. The officer had left the keys in it. They couldn't find it until two weeks later and only ten miles away, it was spotted in front of a diner in Belmar, which is down the Jersey Shore. They found the car. The tires were stripped off and there was some minor damage. So, the fact that I loaned the car to the captain of the police department and it was stolen was pretty funny. Not hilarious, but had a degree of humor. I used to drive fifty to sixty thousand miles a year. One of my accounts was at Monmouth Park, which was the big racetrack in New Jersey. Harry Stevens was the biggest caterer to sporting facilities ever known. They had catering at all the ballparks, tracks and clubhouses, from hot dogs to fine dining. He was one of my accounts and I knew him personally. In order to get to his Monmouth Park office, we had to come in under the grandstand of the stadium where he operated. My dog Pilly would come with me everywhere I went. I also knew Joe Sharkey, who was involved in Democratic Party politics in Brooklyn, pretty well. He was the Democratic Majority Leader of the New York City Democratic Party. We had done some favors for his aunt and mother when they were in Florida, and he never forgot that. Joe's office was in City Hall when he was acting mayor of New York City and we would visit him there very often.

MG: Before we get into politics, did you want to say anything else about Martin and Lewis or George Hopkins?

RR: Oh, yes. I wanted to come back to that. George Hopkins was a comic coming into New York from Florida. He had looked us up and came to New York to see us. He was like a white Sammy Davis Jr. He could do everything. He was a great comedian. He could dance. He could sing. He could do everything. So, we signed him up to manage him. He was talented and ready for the big time. He was a young guy in his early twenties. So, I knew Jerry Louis, Martin and Lewis, and their manager, Bud Granoff, who was married to Kitty Kallen, another big star. He

was very big in the business. Bud Granoff and I signed George Hopkins up together. He eventually went to William Morris Agency. He was booked for a gig in Florida and he drove nude on his motorcycle through the hotel lobby. I think, the Nautilus Hotel. That episode helped end his career with William Morris. We weren't involved with him at that point, but he was destined for something really big.

MG: Did you want to say anything else about Joe Sharkey? I'm afraid I interrupted you.

RR: He was really involved in and was a major factor in New York politics and, as I mentioned, he would help arrange anything I asked for. He was so nice to us throughout the years. Here's something else I wanted to show you.

MG: What is that?

RR: Frank Caruso was a famous cartoonist. He created the character Betty Boop. We managed her, I think I told you.

MG: Yes.

RR: Betty Boop's real name was Helen Kane.

MG: Right.

RR: We managed her. She didn't become a big star, but she was a big personality. Remember I told you about Eddie Layton, the organist? When I first met him, he was seventeen. He was a famous organist for many television shows and for the Yankees. He did so much, but never had a driver's license. Another singer I was involved with was Frankie Avalon. And have you heard of Dion and the Belmonts? They did a show for me at the Dyckman Theatre in New York.

Jo Redfield: Did you tell Molly about Shorty Powers? [Editor's Note: John A. Powers, or Shorty Powers, was a public affairs officer in NASA from 1959 to 1963. He was the commentator for the Mercury space missions.]

MG: He didn't.

JR: I was kissed by Shorty Powers.

MG: Oh, yeah?

JR: He was known as the "the voice of the astronauts."

RR: Yes.

MG: Tell me that story.

RR: Shorty Powers was the voice of the astronauts.

MG: What does that mean?

RR: He would do the broadcasting for NASA when the astronauts were off and in space.

MG: How did he end up kissing Jo?

RR: He came to a christening party for one of my children. He came to our apartment. I knew him through a group I had up from Florida to play the Copa. Everybody knew who Shorty Powers was.

JR: Yes, he was the voice describing the astronauts in orbit.

RR: Yes, what was happening as it was happening. I had also mentioned Joe Sharkey, who was heavily involved in politics in New York. Here is a letter he wrote to the police commissioner on my behalf.

MG: “Dear Commissioner, this note will introduce you to Mr. Robert Redfield, a personal friend of mine. I would greatly appreciate it, indeed, if you would assist him in every way possible.”

RR: That’s why I could park in any place in New York. They didn’t have the blue handicap parking tags back then.

MG: Oh, wow.

RR: Here is another thing for you to read.

MG: “The Republican members of the United States Senate cordially invite Robert Redfield to become a member of the Republican Senatorial Inner Circle as nominated by the Honorable Bob Dole.”

RR: Do you know who that is?

MG: Yes. So, did you become involved in the Republican Party?

RR: Well, I liked them. Here is a picture of my mother at the Round Table restaurant, which is a famous club.

RR: Let me see, this is the Round Table in New York, a famous club. That’s my mother, after that of the picture. This is Rudy Vallee. I don’t know if you ever heard the name, but he’s very famous band leader. This is Steven Sondheim.

MG: Yes.

RR: His mother is Foxy Sondheim, who was in the Ziegfeld Follies with mother. My mother would take me over to their apartment and I would spend time with Steven when we were kids. If you ask him, I don’t know he’d remember playing with me in his mother’s apartment. Oh, here’s an article about me from junior college.

MG: “Class is now to be held in gym under direction of Redfield. Student attitude serious. Junior college students with an eye on the future, preparing themselves for induction into various branches of the armed services. Once a week the group goes through preliminary close drill order and meets at another session for lectures on military courtesy. The project was initiated and organized entirely by myself. Head of the instruction staff is Robert Redfield, who has two years of training at military academies, Freehold Military Academy in New Jersey and Riverside in Georgia. He is assisted by Jenkins and Rich. The evening classes have been meeting in one of the classrooms in Pfeifer. The first drill was held in Pfeifer Lobby, but the arrangements have

been now completed to use the gymnasium during one of the periods when students are running the obstacle course. Under the new arrangement it is expected that the few remaining college students will report for drill. The fundamentals taught in both groups will be helpful in any branch of the service. Anyone interested in joining the group should see Redfield this week.”

RR: Getting back to politics, George Herrick was a good friend of ours. He went with (Peggy Sanchez?). She used to stay with us in Florida. George Herrick was the kingpin in an illegal gambling operation in New York. Fiorello La Guardia was the mayor at the time and Herrick was answering to him. Herrick’s operations were trying to be uncovered all the time. Herrick would get warned of a raid and he’d have to turn the whole apartment inside out, so it didn’t look like gambling by the time he was raided. He ran the biggest one in New York. He was a good friend, a really good friend of ours. LaGuardia is the one that used to read the funny papers to the kids on Sunday when he was the mayor of New York. Jim Farley, US Postmaster General, was another good friend. I will think of some other categories to discuss for the next time you come.

MG: That sounds good. I’ll look forward to that. I will turn this off for today.

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

Transcribed by Jesse Braddell 10/6/2015
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