

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOSEPH SCHENKEL

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

MOLLY GRAHAM

CAPE ELIZABETH, MAINE

AUGUST 24, 2015

TRANSCRIPT BY

MOHAMMAD ATHAR

Molly Graham: This begins an oral history interview with Joseph Schenkel for the Rutgers Oral History Archives. The interview is taking place on August 24, 2015, in Cape Elizabeth, Maine, and the interviewer is Molly Graham. Let's just start at the beginning. Can you tell me where and when you were born?

Joseph Schenkel: Jersey City.

MG: In what year?

JS: 1941.

MG: Did you grow up in Jersey City?

JS: No. My parents moved to North Arlington when I was very young. I don't know the age.

MG: Before we talk more about growing up in North Arlington, can you tell me a little bit about your family history starting on your father's side?

JS: As best I can. My father came from a fairly large family. He was born in 1899. The last four years, I talked with one of my cousins and she thinks that his father was born in the United States. I don't. They are Austrian by nationality. He had several brothers and one sister. I remember two of the brothers quite well. One was a World War I veteran. His sister, I only met a couple of times. You have actually, for this program, interviewed someone who may be the son of that sister. I'm not sure.

MG: Do you know the name?

JS: Yes, Seymour, Seymour Schenkel. I remember the name. I somehow was doing something with the oral history, saw that name. I can't even tell you how he fits into this whole thing. I did not know my family very well.

MG: Do you know anything more about how your father's family came to the United States?

JS: He was born here. My father was born in Newark. I have pictures of him. I know something about his father and I know where they lived. They lived on Prince Street in Newark. My grandfather made everything for men's hats, but the hat itself, or the body. So, all the ribbons and everything for the hat. My uncle was a hatter, my father's brother. So, I spent, it feels like, every Saturday up until I went to college, in Newark, up on Springfield Avenue. I don't know that it's a claim to fame, but my uncle's store was the epicenter of the Newark Riots. [Editor's Note: The Newark riots lasted from July 12 to July 17, 1967. They began after the police arrested an African-American cab driver and rumors spread that he had been killed in custody. The riots resulted in over two dozen deaths, over seven hundred injuries, fifteen hundred arrests and property damage exceeding ten million dollars.]

MG: Tell me more about that. What happened?

JS: Well, I can't tell you more about it, because I don't know all that much. What I know is that my uncle decided to go down to the store. While he was there, one of the fellows that worked for him, a fellow named Eddie--Eddie, of his family, was the smallest and Eddie was 6' 4", I think. Well, he and one of his brothers--they're both black--came to the store, locked my uncle in the bathroom, took as much of the merchandise as they could, threw it in a truck, grabbed my uncle, threw him in the truck, and, believe it or not, drove to Weequahic. So, if this story is true, what you have in the middle of the Newark Riots, two black fellows and my uncle, who was an older white guy, showing up in Weequahic. So, it's almost laughable--with this truckload of clothing. A couple of years later, I went back to visit Ralph. I had never been afraid in Newark. I was afraid. It looked completely different. It was demolished. If you go on Springfield Avenue, what you see is not what was there. Springfield Avenue used to be lined with shops. I managed to get a place to park on the other side of the street. There was nothing there. My uncle's store, he had sold it to Ralph and it had a long, glass entryway, an old-fashioned store. I looked across and I thought, "Well, I'll run across the street. I'll run into the store. If Ralph's there, I'm safe. If not, I'm in trouble." Stupid. It was paranoid reasoning. Well, I ran across and my head was down and, boom, I came up against something hard as a rock. What you then must've seen was 6-foot-4" Ralph and me hugging each other in Newark. So, he was there. That was the last time I ever saw him.

MG: Did your father go into the hat business?

JS: No. My father was a football coach, very much involved in athletics in Jersey City. He started the teams at [Henry] Snyder High School, as far as I know. As a little kid, I used to go--when my father had stopped coaching, but he knew all the coaches, and knew everyone in that area, we'd go to a high school game, go to Roosevelt Stadium and rather than sit in seats, we'd go up to the press box. I very distinctly remember--how he let me do this, I don't know--I was a little boy, running around on the roof with a couple of coffee cups, and I was a football player. What could I have been, seven, eight years old? Something like that. Then, there's a picture we have. One day in high school, I went to a dance and people kept asking me if I had seen my picture in the Newark Sunday paper. The first one, I thought they were crazy. After enough asked, I finally asked, "What are you talking about?" They said, "The front page of the Newark paper is you." Well, I don't know why we didn't have the paper, but I mentioned it to my father. Next day was Monday, and my mother came home with about five of them. People brought them in to show her. My father said, "Do you want the actual glossy photograph?" I said, "Yes. How are you going to do that?" He said, "I'll get it." He got it and a couple of others, because he knew all the people down at the newspaper. So, that hangs in the hall.

MG: What was the story on or the picture of?

JS: Oh, I was recovering a fumble, and it was just--I don't know why. I mean, it was a sports page, so, for some reason, they decided to use that picture. I have no idea why.

MG: What do you know about the family history on your mother's side?

JS: Not much. There were seven sisters, I think. There's a whole mob of them. I don't know if my mother was the youngest or not. They lived in the Bronx, in a tenement house. Her mother

was very old, blind. I only saw her a couple of times. I was frightened as a little boy. Her father lived well into his nineties. I don't know what they were. Russian immigrants? They weren't Russian, but Eastern Bloc immigrants of some sort. That's about all I know.

MG: Do you know how your grandmother went blind?

JS: No. In those days, probably cataracts and they couldn't deal with it. The only other part of the family I know is, one of the sisters, her husband, World War I, I understand, Croix de Guerre winner, which is the French Medal of Honor. [Editor's Note: The Croix de Guerre is a French military award, given to individuals for heroic acts. It was created in 1915. It was commonly given to military members of foreign French allies.] They produced two sons. I think both of them were pilots in the Second World War and one stayed, made a career out of flying. That's all I really know about them.

MG: Do you know what growing up was like for your parents, what their lives were like as young people?

JS: No. I only know my father was involved with sports. I've got some of the medals. I know that my mother, at age fifteen, was--I say I know, I think I know--was awarded a full scholarship to Hunter College, and she felt she couldn't take it, because she had to support her parents, which she did. She must've been a very bright woman.

MG: This is jumping ahead, but did she pass that on to you? Did she insist on you going to college and was education important to her?

JS: Well, something happened. You have to think about the year, the years--graduated high school '59. So, it was '57, '58. For the first time, there was mobility--well, certainly the returning veterans. So, there was mobility. People were talking about college. I came out of a lower middle-class town. We all went to college, and at least all of my friends did very, very well. There wasn't a slacker in the bunch and they all--one of my best buddies, the family--it's primarily an Italian town. They were Italian immigrants. He went to Holy Cross. Another fellow, I don't know if his family--he's Irish--I don't know if they were immigrants or not. He went to West Point. A guy I still am in touch with went to--well, that's a long story. He went to Lafayette. Another guy went to Lafayette, I think he became a political science professor. Another guy went to Albright. Then, he went to Jefferson Medical and he's a plastic surgeon. I mean, not bad for a bunch of poor kids.

MG: Yes, I was going to ask how the Great Depression impacted your parents.

JS: [laughter] That, I don't know directly. Indirectly, it was for my father to tell me that, "If you're thirsty, you drink water, not milk." The idea being milk is a food, therefore, it costs more money. Other than that, I don't know. They were relatively unaffected by the war. He was too old.

MG: I am curious how your parents met. Did they meet a little bit later in life for those times? Your mother was in her thirties and I think your father was forty or forty-one.

JS: They met at summer camps. I went to summer camp from--the only reason I didn't go in my first year of life was my mother left camp to go back to Jersey City to have me and figured she'd stay home that year. After that, I was in summer camps until I was about twenty (the last years working).

MG: What was she doing in summer camp before she had you?

JS: She was the officer manager.

MG: Was your father an athletic director?

JS: He did everything. Well, it depends. He started out directing the swimming program, for years and years and years. Ultimately, he became the head of the grounds crew. There were a whole variety of camps involved.

MG: Where was the camp?

JS: All in Pennsylvania.

MG: They met there and married in 1940.

JS: Yes, that sounds right, doesn't it?

MG: You were the only child?

JS: Yes.

MG: Just tell me a little bit about life growing up, memories you have from being a young child.

JS: Well, I don't know if I want this in.

MG: I can turn off the recorder.

JS: Why it was so late? Both of them had been married before. My father for two months, I think, a ridiculous situation. My mother had married a very successful man, apparently, who dropped dead at a very young age on a handball court. So, that's why their marriage was so late in life. It was unusual.

MG: When you were pretty young, your family moved to Arlington.

JS: North Arlington.

MG: What part of New Jersey is North Arlington in?

JS: Oh, it's Bergen County. Yes, that's where Route 17 starts. You've got Kearny on one side. This street running down here's the Belleville Turnpike. You take that into Jersey City. If you want to go the other way, you wind up in Newark.

MG: What kind of neighborhood did you move to?

JS: Lower middle-class homes. Oh, that's not true. We lived in the garden apartments for years, and then, we moved into a duplex, a sizeable duplex. Never owned a home.

MG: Did your mother work outside the home?

JS: Mother didn't work for a while. Then, she started working. I actually know where she started working, the Cardinal Glove Company. What prompted any of that? I don't know, but, when I was in grammar school, she was home. I think it was shortly after--we moved from one end of town to the other and it coincided. Sure, it did. No one thought about middle schools in those days. Maybe they did somewhere, I don't know, but that high school was seven to twelve. So, when I completed sixth grade in the elementary school, that's when we moved over to the other side of town. I think that's when she started working.

MG: You mentioned your mom was a great cook. What kind of meals would you have in the house?

JS: Well, it depends. Actually, if it was anything broiled, it was my father that would make that. It wasn't as if everyday meals were great. It was the special meals. As far as every day, I don't really remember all that much. I don't remember. I remember beautiful pies that she made. She was a very stylish woman.

MG: Oh, yes? Can you describe her?

JS: My mother? I can show you a picture of her, if you'd like.

MG: Sure.

JS: I'll show you two pictures, while we're at it, since we talked about playing football.

MG: Oh, yes, I would like to see that too.

JS: Gosh, you're going to get the whole rogues' gallery. This is the football picture.

MG: Oh, wow.

JS: That's me.

MG: What position did you play?

JS: The reason I'm thinking was, I was on defense then. I could've been a linebacker, playing linebacker. I also could've been playing on the line. I've even played safety, I was bigger then, but I could play all those positions. It didn't matter. I was a guard on offense. This is our son and his wife at graduation. These were his college roommates.

MG: Which son is that?

JS: That's our only son.

MG: Okay. Is he the one that went to Harvard?

JS: Yes, and Yale undergraduate.

MG: Okay.

JS: Yes. That's his predecessor, Emma (looking at dog pictures).

MG: That is a cute name for a dog.

JS: That's my mother.

MG: Oh, wow. She is beautiful.

JS: That's me and, as my mother used to say, "friend-girl." I have no idea who she was. That's me.

MG: Oh, wow.

JS: That's high school.

MG: And some cute grandkids over here.

JS: Stephen and roommates, one a successful businessman; another a surgeon and an Episcopalian priest, and the third a chemist.

MG: All right.

JS: Yes, they're something else. Stephen and dog. What else? Oh, this is nice, with Emma.

MG: Oh, she is cute.

JS: We're in our dingy, just coming up to our boat, I guess. This is when he was in prep school.

MG: Okay.

JS: That's me, New Mexico. Oh, this, look at this.

MG: That's really cute. And these are your grandkids?

JS: Two of them.

MG: What are their names?

JS: There's a third one now.

MG: Oh, yes? And what are their names?

JS: You ready for this?

MG: Yes.

JS: This is Penelope Wen-chi.

MG: Okay.

JS: That's Wen-shiang Albert, and the new one is Tyco Wen-ze. Tyco is Greek for luck. If you're a good father-in-law, you learn something, just shut up. You just nod. They're adults. Okay, so, let me show you the other picture.

MG: Oh, wow.

JS: I found that about a year ago or so, and did that with it.

MG: Where did you find it?

JS: In a box, in a closet, got a fair number of those things, not that--and that is our daughter-in-law at the wedding.

MG: Oh, she's beautiful. Where did they get married?

JS: The Ford Estate in Dearborn, Michigan.

MG: Okay. Oh, wow. Is she from Michigan?

JS: No. Actually, most of her life was spent in St. Louis. Stephen was doing his residency in Michigan. That's where they decided--what had happened was Stephen was in medical school. He was also at the Kennedy School. That's where they met. After graduation, he left for his residency. So, they had this long term, long-distance relationship. Somewhere along the line, she moved to Michigan, but it really didn't change much. She was consulting for someone and, ultimately, they got married in Dearborn. The Ford Estate is lovely. So, they decided that's where they'd get married.



MG: We were talking about your mother. You had mentioned that she went to work, but could you say what she did?

JS: Much the same kind of thing, clerical sorts of things. But usually, for whatever this Cardinal Glove Company was, and they did a lot of stuff internationally, I think, she was essentially the--I don't know what you would call them today--the numbers person.

MG: Sort of a bookkeeper?

JS: Yes, but it's another step above that. I know that, for example, at camp one summer, I found her. She had passed out and we rushed her to the hospital. Turned out that--well, this I knew--in mid-coma, she wakes up and says, "Make sure to close the safe." So, someone closed the safe. Well, that became a bit of a problem, because no one had access to the safe. The owners didn't have access, because Minnie knew the combination, and no one would bother her, either. "The heck with it." And she had similar positions after.

MG: What else about growing up do you remember or stands out to you? Things you did in the neighborhood, friends you played with?

JS: Yes. I mean, there were all kinds of things. As a very little boy, there's a big rock in the garden apartments. I can remember sitting on it and pretending I was a cowboy or some darn thing. I can remember playing baseball. I marvel today at how parents are so protective. We used to play in the street all the time. I remember playing stickball. You got together a couple of cents, you got a pink ball, you had a broomstick and a wall, and you made a box. You had fantasies. I remember getting my hand caught in the sewer grate going after a ball, thought I was going to die. I remember someone bringing a knife to school and putting a surgical cut right in this brand-new leather jacket that I was wearing. When my mother saw it she almost passed out. She realized that the jacket saved my life. It was enjoyable. I feel very fortunate that somehow--this doesn't mean there weren't bad things in the world and what have you, but somehow it was a good place and a good time to grow up.

MG: What do you remember about the schools you attended?

JS: People.

MG: Any teachers or subjects stand out to you that you liked or maybe didn't like?

JS: Yes, I liked football. No. I didn't have to work, which probably wasn't a good thing. Hey, I guess what it amounts to is, I wasn't challenged and--it sounds presumptuous--no one realized that I should've been challenged. So, no, I remember football coaches the most. I remember one in particular, my head football coach, who was a fine man, and I remember--it's a horrible story, at least coming out of the mouths, or being so young--we didn't have many on the squad. We didn't have enough. We didn't roll out three, four, five platoons. So, coaches would stand in and they'd have dummies that they'd hold. When you're practicing plays, you'd hit them. We had a young assistant coach, a big man, he was holding this out and I told you I played guard. I remember like it was this day. I hit him, blocked him. Now, this guy weighed two-hundred-and-

forty pounds and he was in the prime of his life. He had just graduated college. He played for a Big Ten team. What am I going to--am I going to move him? No, but I keep hitting him. The whistle blows. I keep hitting him and he's saying, "This is great. This is motivation." And all I'm thinking is, "You stupid ass. Do you think I didn't hear the whistle?" I'm playing him for a fool and he's my teacher, and didn't like that.

MG: Anything else besides football that you enjoyed, extracurriculars or certain teachers?

JS: I was involved in a number of things. I was on the newspaper for a while. I was in track for a while. Girls. Hung out a lot.

MG: I wondered if your parents shared anything about life during World War II. I know you were probably too young.

JS: No. Anything that I've told you, I've gleaned and put together. I really wasn't told much about anything. And I didn't have the brains to ask.

MG: As a Jewish kid, did you ever encounter any discrimination?

JS: Oh, sure.

MG: How did that manifest itself?

JS: Especially, if I beat out a guy for a football position, I became a kike, but, then, again, our attitudes were completely different. I called my buddies names all the time. And they called me names all the time. Now, we didn't let anyone else do it. You have to understand that. Yes, I was subject to that. I think I was even subject to it at Rutgers, playing football, by a coach. So, that's another story.

MG: Yes, we will get to that.

JS: Well, I'm not sure it's true. I was playing lightweight football, and there was one, not the head coach. He was very nice. There was one assistant coach that would just go after me constantly and I remember, very distinctly, not comments--I have a vague recollection of that, but, and I don't know where we were playing, I was on defense and the other team ran a reverse. I was in a linebacker spot. I knew what was happening and I held my position. All the while I could hear the assistant coach screaming at me, what a stupid idiot I was, and going on and on and on, and I made the tackle, because I held my position. It didn't stop him. Something was going on there. That left me with a bad taste in my mouth. The other side of it is, something wonderful happened--wonderful?--for a kid it did. I came out of the locker room one day, and in those days, for all I know it's the same, you couldn't wear your cleats inside. You had to go outside. There were benches, and I sat down to put my cleats on, and this heavy-set man wearing coaches' clothing--coaches' clothing in those days was khaki, like football pants, no pads, and a t-shirt and a whistle around the neck. In fact, I can imagine my father. He sat down next to me and he asked me how I was doing and how I liked playing football, very nice, five minutes. Imagine this happening today. He gets up and wishes me well, and leaves. I thought it

was nice. He was a coach. I didn't know him. It was John Bateman, he was the head football coach. [Editor's Note: John F. Bateman was the Head Coach of Rutgers Football from 1960 to 1972.] There was no reason under the sun for him to do that, but he's an educator and was a nice man. That stands out, yes. That really does.

MG: Well, I want to ask you much more about your experience at Rutgers.

JS: Yes, I know.

MG: Before we get there, you grew up during the period of the Cold War and the McCarthy era. Were you aware of what was going on? [Editor's Note: The Cold War occurred from 1945 to 1991. The era involves the tension between the communist Soviet Union and the democratic United States, and their desire to influence their ideologies around the world. Within the United States, in the 1950s, communists were labeled and blacklisted by the government. Senator Joe McCarthy led a witch hunt where he accused many of being communists.]

JS: No. I really wasn't aware. I don't know if it was just me or all of my friends. We seemed to be oblivious to all of that, but we weren't inundated with it either. Today you have to be careful not to take in too much news. In those days, you had to seek it out. I suspect, in a way, I think I lived in a fantasy world, Not a psychotic one. Just life was okay. There was trauma--bad word. There were difficult times, in all the things growing up, all of that, but on balance, there was this feeling that if you stayed in school, you did what you're supposed to do, all will be well.

MG: How would you get your news? Did your family have a television at that point or was it on the radio?

JS: Let's see. In those years? Well, it started out on Saturday night and my father would go to the corner shop. I'm trying to think which came. I think he got half the *Times*. I think half the *Times*, half the Newark paper, and the *Mirror*, and the *Daily News*. Then, he went back in the morning to get the other halves. My mother used to sit there in bed covered in newspaper, [laughter] full of newspapers on the weekend. I suppose there was a daily paper that came. That I don't remember, but the others I do--and she used to sit there with white gloves on. I don't know your experience. The *Times* seems to be getting a little better, but there was a day, you couldn't read that. I would never buy a *Times* to fly anywhere or to go, especially if I was wearing any light-colored clothing. I'd look like printer's ink. But she sat there with her gloves and read it. We had a television. I don't know where it was. Wow. I don't know where the television was. I know that before we moved across town, we bought a television. I know where that was. Had to be there somewhere. I don't know where it was. So, it wasn't central to anything. I remember having a Victrola. That was important to me. But you didn't get any news through that thing.

MG: What kind of music would you listen to on it?

JS: Popular. I still know the songs, I just. Do you have Sirius Radio in your car?

MG: No.

JS: On '50s and '60s, I could sing a whole heck a lot of those songs. I'd play a lot out of the Great American Songbook. We had records, certainly. I still have them, some of them, but I don't have the popular songs, I don't have the 45s. I actually have old Caruso records, 78s. [Editor's Note: A 45-rpm record, or 7-inch, were records that possessed a single, or one or two songs. A 78-rpm record, or 12-inch, also possessed singles, but were only produced before 1960. Enrico Caruso was an Italian opera singer who lived from 1873 to 1921.]

MG: You came of age at an interesting time in music and rock and roll too.

JS: Yes.

MG: What was that like?

JS: Well, we didn't know it was interesting. It was just the music of our age. *American Bandstand* was on television. During lunch, in the gym, kids would dance. The basketball floor was covered with sawdust and in the middle were mats set out for tumbling, and then, you could dance around it. We had victory dances Saturday nights, win or lose. I think win or lose. It was a lot of fun.

MG: When your football team would win a game was there a particular way you celebrated as a team?

JS: Yes, we used to go to a place called Eddie's. Eddie, if you recovered a fumble, scored a touchdown, he gave you a free malted milk. Heaven forbid you scored three touchdowns. [laughter] So, that always was postgame. Everyone went to Eddie's. Then, my closest friends, there was an Italian restaurant and they had a downstairs. It was called the Open Door and for all I know, it's still there. Upstairs was for adults and families. There was a place downstairs inside for the kids. As I recall, we would go. There were five guys, that's five pizzas, until we got to the meatball sandwiches. I mean, we could eat. [laughter] And if there was a dance, of course, we would go to the dance. So, that was it. That's the way we celebrated.

MG: You mentioned having the television in the home and a radio in the home. Were there shows that you particularly liked or tuned in to?

JS: No.

MG: You also talked earlier about some of your interests outside of football and one of them was women. Did you date in high school and what were dates like back then?

JS: I'm trying to put things--yes. What were dates like then? Go to the movies. Go to the movies. [laughter] You go to the movies, you go out to eat afterwards. If there was a dance, you might go to the dance with someone. You might leave the dance with someone. There were proms. I had a particular girlfriend from out of state; nothing special. It was a little different at Rutgers, only in the sense that you had pre-date dates.

MG: What does that mean?

JS: Well, in the old library, there was a reading room. I was talking to the head librarian about this, because I tried to find the room where all this occurred, and he showed me, but it's been changed so much. There was a room for required readings that couldn't be taken out. It was downstairs. It had a resident dog, big, overstuffed leather chairs, and on Friday nights, you say to a girl from the coup, "Do you want to come over and study together?" Well, that's where you would go, because no one had any intention of studying. That's where you talked, or you went out for coffee. Then, you decided if you wanted to have a real date and spend money. So, you had your pre-dates.

MG: In high school did you have a car you could drive?

JS: In high school? No, well, I guess my father let me drive, on rare occasions, the family car. I guess. I don't even remember driving. I remember when I first got a--oh, wait a second. Whoa. Hang on a minute. You had to be seventeen to get a driver's license. That's why I don't remember it, because it was the end of my high school career. So, the answer is no. And I didn't have a car until my junior year at Rutgers. I had a 1950 Studebaker with a hole in the floor that I bought for fifty dollars. Art professor wanted to buy it and offered me a hundred. I said, "I can't do that. I paid fifty dollars for it." You'll see why I never became a businessman. He said, "I want to give you a hundred." I said, "No. It's not right, not right at all." He said, "But I want the car." We settled at seventy-five.

MG: [laughter]

JS: That's how I sold my car.

MG: In high school, did you have a sense of what you wanted to do when you got out of high school?

JS: I wrote a paper, an award-winning paper. [What do] they call those things? I've forgotten. It was for the Rotary, I think. Yes, I wrote it on psychiatry.

MG: You had a feeling then you would pursue psychiatry?

JS: I guess. I mean, things took circuitous routes in college, but I guess so.

MG: How did you come to find Rutgers? How did you decide to go there?

JS: I had very little guidance. So, you have to understand that. I knew that Rutgers existed and put in an application. I was invited down for--in those days, Rutgers didn't give sports scholarships, which few people can imagine today--but I was invited down for this weekend and I was housed at a fraternity. It was a big fraternity school. I had a lovely time. There's a big dinner on Saturday night and the football coach is the speaker. Well, I didn't give a damn about the football coach. The state wrestling championships were in town, over in the gym. So, that's where I spent my night and I went home, but there was this school that I wanted to go to, and I

was actually interviewed twice. The second interview, they said, "Well, if we can't give you a full ride, only a partial scholarship, would you come?" I don't know if I was cocky. I don't know what I knew. I know what I didn't know was the real answer, because no one talked to me about things like this. So, I said, "No." About two weeks later, I was rejected. Almost simultaneously, I found out I had a scholarship at Rutgers. So, that's how. When I got down there, I remember, over in Zimmerli, those were the days of IBM cards. I walked in. Someone gives me a card and he said, "What sport do you play?" I said, "Football, I guess." I go to a couple of other places. Someone else asked me a similar question. Get to my adviser, "What position do you play." At this point, I said, "Please. They're big guys out there. What are you talking about?" He said, "Well, you have this certain scholarship. You know that Rutgers doesn't give sports scholarships, but what your scholarship says is it's an academic scholarship and you have to fulfill this, but you have to participate in an extracurricular activity." I said, "Well, that's not necessarily a sport, is it?" He said, "I don't know. Let me find out," and he did. A couple of days later, he said, "No, you just have to participate in an extracurricular activity." So, I sailed, and then, I ultimately played lightweight football. That's all.

MG: Where did you sail?

JS: Oh, a variety of places. We sailed in the river. We owned Tech Dinghies at that point. We sailed down at Princeton. What we would do, there were only a handful of us, but it was a club, a club sport. We would get women from Douglass--I mean we weren't completely stupid--and we assumed they didn't know the first thing about sailing, and most didn't. So, they would crew for us, except for Mel. And Mel would beat any of us into the ground. She was a Douglass student who just was an exceptional sailor, and beautiful. So, anyone would crew for Mel.

MG: You mentioned earlier that you are involved in the board of the crew team now. Was there crew back then?

JS: You don't know what just happened a year ago at Rutgers?

MG: I do. I just want to get it on the record.

JS: Oh, yes. Of course I was, yes.

MG: Were you involved?

JS: No. The closest I came to it was I had to take a course. There were things that were cancelled. It was my senior year. I [needed] one elective. I was in trouble and I wound up taking freshman sociology at Douglass. Two guys in a bevy of women. Who is the guy sitting next to me? He's a coxswain on the crew team. That's as close as I came to it.

MG: Where did the interest in preserving the crew team come from in your later years?

JS: Because I believe in athletics. But I believe in amateur athletics. I abhor what is happening. I wanted to be able to support it and what you probably don't know, I had been an offshore sailor for thirty-five years. I taught sailing growing up. I was always on the water. I knew what crew

was. I knew the beauty of it and I had an inkling of the type of people that get involved. So, I researched a little bit. I talked with Steve and there I am.

MG: Who is Steve?

JS: Steve Wagner, coach. [Editor's Note: Steve Wagner has been the head coach of Rutgers crew for thirty-one years.]

MG: Tell me about getting on the football team. Did you have tryouts?

JS: No. Well, any football team, without the big-time stuff that's going on now--no, you come out for football. That means you're going to practice. You're going to get in shape. You're going to try positions, coaches are going to move you around, and some fateful day, they're going to say, "Okay, this is our starting eleven. This is our second eleven. You've got those positions for the first game, let's see what happens. We'll be moving people around." So, is that a formal tryout? Yes, you were always trying out, but they're observing you all the time. There are certain things that are, if you're playing college ball, you came out of high school. Someone watched you in high school and said--I'll give you an example of what can be, because of what coaches will--they look at your body. They look at your speed. A funny story--a high school coach got angry with our fullback and I was a lineman. I'm supposed to be slow. So, he's going to embarrass the fullback--I was talking with this fellow a month ago, I guess. He's going to embarrass him and he's going to make me suffer. So, he said, "All right, the two of you clowns get up in the end zone. You're going to run hundred-yard sprints against each other." So, this was to mortify my buddy. I mortified him more. I beat him. [laughter] So, he really felt bad, but the coach would never have put me in a fullback spot. My buddy, he was built better, he was just more powerful. They put me where I was, but I never actually tried out for anything. I know when he asked me to play safety--asked me?--told me. I looked at him like he was stark raving mad. "I'll get lonely back there," and I did.

MG: What other colleges and teams did you play against?

JS: The league was, as I recall, I think it was Princeton, Yale, Harvard, West Point. I think Navy, may have been a sixth team. I don't remember.

MG: Who was your biggest rival?

JS: I don't know that there was one. I mean, you're talking about a sport that was played on Saturday mornings and the crowd consisted of your girlfriend and your mother.

MG: Well, I was going to ask if your father came to games. As a football coach, was he interested in seeing you play in college?

JS: No. First of all, I only played one year, but that isn't it, no. No, my father used to help out as a volunteer at the high school games. Did he ever actually sit and watch me? I don't know. Never talked to me about it. My mother was always afraid I was going to get hurt. So, she never

came, except at one game where I got hurt. They didn't show much [interest]. They thought it would take away from my studies.

MG: How come you only played for a year?

JS: I think that experience that I had was very bad.

MG: With the coach?

JS: Yes, really took away a lot from it, but I also had--I remember it to this day--it was the first day in the locker room and a fellow comes over and he said--I'm trying to bring his name back and I will. He said, "I know you." I looked at him and I said, "Really?" He said, "Yes, you're so and so." I said, "Yes. Who are you?" He played for East Rutherford and he was an end. We played against each other. It was just so nice. He somehow remembered all of that. He went on to be an All-American lightweight football player, and I can't bring his name back right now.

MG: That first year at Rutgers what stands out to you? What classes did you take your freshman year?

JS: It was horrible. It was fun. It was horrible. It was frightening. The river dorms had people living in the spaces where the elevators are, and you knew what was going to--they sat you down and they told you, "Look in front of you, look in back of you, look to the sides. They aren't going to be here." Before exams were even over, guys were packing up and leaving, and I could've been one of them.

MG: What was the issue? Why could not people stick with it?

JS: First of all, I think most of us were taking twenty-one [credit] hours. I didn't know how to study. I mean, no one ever taught me any of these things. We were young men. Many of us had no guidance. Many were first-generation college. Just couldn't do it, couldn't do it. I don't know I want this printed. I was told that I was put on probation. I lost my scholarship. I went to see the Dean, Dean Boocock, and asked him, "What do I have to do to get my scholarship back?" He looked at me like I was stark raving mad. He said, "Come see me in two months." So, I did. He looked at my grades at that point. He said, "How did you do this?" I said, "Well, I just did." "I'll get your scholarship back." He did.

MG: You picked your grades up in the interim?

JS: Yes, I'm convinced that that's what got me into graduate school, was that rather than seeing someone with either a mediocre GPA or very high level, what you saw was this, [Dr. Schenkel gestures to an improvement in his grades], which spoke to something or other. So, someone was paying attention to that at that point, but even the school psychologist told me, said, "Why don't you take time off, leave school?" My father came down to school for that. And I looked at my father, he said, "Like hell."

MG: This was a recommendation made to you while at Rutgers?



JS: Yes. I went to see the school psychologist. There was such an animal, and that's what he drew from all of this.

MG: That you needed a break?

JS: Yes, would've been the stupidest thing I could've done. It didn't change a whole heck of a lot. I was inducted in my fraternity a little bit late, which was interesting since I was pledge president. Didn't affect much.

MG: Tell me about your fraternity, how you became pledge president and what that means.

JS: Well, it's where I stayed that scholarship weekend. They were nice guys. I enjoyed it and I liked the house. The house is still there. It has become a sorority. I was in it two years ago or so, looks the same. Those days, believe it or not, fraternities had house mothers, Mrs. Bran. Jean, our cook. How did I get involved? There were nice guys, I liked them. What happens is-- I think it used to be first semester. For us, it was second, I believe--rushing starts on a Monday. All the fraternities, I think they have access to records in the Dean's Office, they decide who they would like to look at. So, they put invitations to various meals underneath your door. "Come to lunch." "Come to..." This particular fraternity said, "We're not going to bother. You're invited to everything. That's it. Show up." Oh, they must've done more than that. They wouldn't leave me just hanging. Through that process, you get to know people. I guess towards the end of rush, someone says, "We would like you to join the fraternity," and you say yes, or no. Apparently, I said yes. How did I become pledge president? I don't know. I guess someone decided. They had a vote or some darn thing. That's what I was.

MG: What does it mean to be pledge president?

JS: Well, it's like any group. You're the spokesman. So, when we were being hazed one day about something, I decided--well, we all wanted to leave. So, it was me that said, "Follow me," and led a charge out. That's the kind of thing you do. If the brotherhood wants to send some messages, they go through the pledge president. It's no big deal.

MG: What memories do you have from your fraternity, parties or activities?

JS: Oh, I've got memories and pictures. You don't really want to see them.

MG: I am curious about it, yes.

[tape paused]

JS: This is one.

MG: So, is this from a party?

JS: Yes.

MG: Are you in here somewhere?

JS: I'm in some.

MG: Is this you?

JS: Yes.

MG: It looks like you have your hands around somebody.

JS: Yes, I certainly do. Remember, I told you there was someone from out of state.

MG: Oh, okay. So, would she come visit you at Rutgers or did she go to school nearby?

JS: No. Not sure I'm in this. Oh, yes, there I am.

MG: Are you standing next to somebody new there?

JS: Yes.

MG: That looks like a lot of fun.

JS: Yes, they were good times.

MG: How many house parties would you have a year or a semester?

JS: Well, probably three or four a year.

MG: They are getting more and more crowded. There you are.

JS: That was pretty serious stuff.

MG: Oh, yes?

JS: She died very young.

MG: Oh, no. What happened?

JS: I don't know. She married someone and she died.

MG: Are these mostly Douglass girls?

JS: I don't know. I'm sure many of them were. She wasn't, the one I'm with.

MG: Here we go. Were there other Jewish guys in your fraternity?

JS: Yes. Probably the majority actually were, which I did not realize at first.

MG: I wonder if that is why you were kind of recruited for this group.

JS: It's conceivable. Oh, there she is. She was a nice woman.

MG: Yes. Was there anything particularly Jewish--

JS: About the fraternity? No. No, in fact, there were the fraternities that were known as Jewish fraternities, and they weren't happy with us. I don't know how many Italians we had in the house. And I think we had a black fellow somewhere along the line. My freshman class president was a black fellow. It's interesting. I guess you don't see any more people wearing letters, chenille letters.

MG: No, it doesn't happen too much.

JS: No. Well, I'll tell you a funny story about that. I wound up being entered in the Bergen County Typing Championships in high school. I was so embarrassed that I wore my letter sweater just so I could declare my manhood in this room. [laughter]

MG: How did you do in the competition?

JS: Well, that's the worst part about it. I probably would've won. I cut all my margins short because, but everything else was perfect, but they counted as errors so I didn't win. It's probably a good thing I didn't win. That would've been total mortification.

[tape paused]

MG: Just getting back to that first year at Rutgers. You said it was kind of a tough year academically and you were adjusting to a new place. Tell me more about that first year. Did you have a roommate?

JS: Yes, I had a roommate. Someone at the induction into the Old Guard reminded me how much we didn't like each other. [laughter] Now, it wasn't my roommate. I don't remember who my roommate was, but I did not ingratiate myself with him. In fact, he was rather upset when I brought back an eviscerated fetal pig and put it on his desk. [laughter] I mean probably a fairly normal thing to do for a college freshman. I did have a friend named Lee. We used to walk to town quite often together. He was very tall. I guess most of this was confined to the first semester. I remember another fellow on our floor. I can't remember his name. A guy named Eddie was on our floor. Eddie was a state champion heavyweight wrestler, and a nice fellow, big farm boy, Did extremely well inter-collegiately. Got in trouble with the police doing what came naturally to Eddie. One winter night, we might have egged him on, he swam the Raritan. You're not supposed to do that. [laughter] I'm trying to remember other people from the dorm, but those guys I remember. Oh, George Fosdick, whom I saw at the reunion. I remember him. Oh, I just lost his name. There are a couple of people, yes. I do remember people.

MG: What classes were you taking? Do you remember?

JS: Oh, yes. Chemistry, Biology, Art History. No, excuse me, Art History was second--did I take two semesters? No, Art History was second semester, I think. [Peter] Charanis was a professor in western civilization, and these were all five credit courses. Then, you had gym. Then, you had ROTC, Italian. That may have been it.

MG: That sounds like plenty.

JS: Oh, yes. They weren't fooling around in those days.

MG: How were your professors? How did you find them?

JS: Oh, English. How did I find them? Well, Charanis, he was terrific. I think I was so intimidated by the others, I don't know. I do know, in one of my English classes, we had to write a theme every few days. I got terrible grades. I think it was being taught by a graduate student, but I went to him, told him I wanted to be an English major, and he looked at me like I was a complete idiot, which I don't blame him for. He said, "Wait. We're going to have a midterm exam." So, I get an A on the midterm exam. He said, "How did you do this?" I said, "I don't know." Had more out-of-class themes and I'd go back to getting my D's. We had the final, I got an A. I think there was a rule that you could only drop the grade so much in a situation like that. So, I did well. The only thing I could figure out was, it was the same thing. I did not have the study skills. My buddies were sitting there. They'd write a theme and they would manicure it. They'd do this and that, the way you're supposed to do things. So, I did poorly, because I couldn't even concentrate to do that. When it came to writing in class, it was even, a level playing field, and I could write. So, believe it or not, ultimately having nothing better to do, when I'm fully-fledged in my profession, I was accepted for candidacy for a Ph.D. in English. [laughter] Never went all the way with it.

MG: It is interesting that you have that as an interest. You wrote this paper in high school about psychiatry, but you almost went down a different route it seems.

JS: Oh, it's always been one of my problems. I've done a lot of things in my life and it's because I just seemed to be interested and go after them, but, because of that, I don't have the focus that a lot of people have. I guess one could argue I don't excel at anything. That's okay.

MG: Have you had the opportunity to write as part of your profession? Journal articles and things like that?

JS: I'm not well published. Most of that stuff is fairly structured. So, I have no problem with it. The good researchers really are dedicated to their research and everything revolves around it. I just couldn't do that. Look, when I went to New Mexico, I had to get a work schedule, which allowed me to teach skiing three days a week. [laughter] And it did, yes.

MG: You brought up ROTC, and at that point it was compulsory. [Editor's Note: Until the 1960s, ROTC was mandatory at land grant colleges and universities.]

JS: Yes.

MG: So, what semesters did you take and what did you have to do? Can you describe it? Students today do not know a whole lot about what it entailed.

JS: Oh, well the first two years, it depended. You took either Army or Air Force. I took Air Force, because I was told it was easier than Army. The majority of it was classroom instruction. It could be military topics. I don't even know what I learned in the Air Force. You drilled once a week. That was really all it was and you supposedly conducted yourself as a soldier during that time. Then, you made the decision, what you were going to do. I decided I didn't know what I was going to do and I knew the draft was around. I wanted to go as an officer. They told me that Army is easier the second two years. So, I switched to Army. The second two years, a lot of classroom, but more serious subjects. Then, you went through basic training between your junior and senior year, and you were commissioned at graduation. We had a military ball. There was something I was responsible for. It was in our junior year. I called my friend Bobby who was over in Holy Cross. He had a cousin, Patty Robotella. Patty was drop dead beautiful, and she was in high school, North Arlington. I said, "Bobby, you think Patty would be military ball queen?" He said, "I don't know. I'll call her." I said, "Well, first of all, if she will, you've got to send me some pictures, because there's got to be some vetting on this thing. Hey, I can't just name it." He did, and lo and behold, I was responsible for Patty being military ball queen.

MG: Did you have to do early morning drills and lots of marching in ROTC?

JS: No, once a week, we went out to Buccleuch Park and marched. There was nothing really very dramatic about the thing. In class, they're learning how to--because we're going to be officers, you were going to be teaching--learning how to teach, the Army way how to teach. They're very effective. They really are. You learned about weapons systems. I guess there were some current events in there. I don't even remember that. There's a code that you supposedly live by, you learn about that. I guess we had some work on UCMJ, the Uniform Code of Military Justice. That may have been in the second two years and that was because all officers for--I believe there were three or four different types of court martial, military proceedings, judicial proceedings. As an officer, you had to participate. You could participate as a prosecuting or defense attorney, so you had to know what was going on. On any of the tribunals, you could be a sitting judge. Certainly for two, you would be called upon to sit as the--they're essentially the jury. When I was in the Army, we made a deal that, given what we were doing, we could never be prosecutors. We could only be defense attorneys. So, I did that a couple of times and I sat for courts martial, a couple times. I was even president of the court once, had no idea what I was doing. There must've been some sort of course work in that. It wasn't onerous, and it wasn't onerous the first two years. Do you know why we had that? There is something called the Morrill Land-Grant Act of 18--something-or-other. [Editor's Note: The Morrill-Land Grant Act of 1862 allowed for the sale of federal land to states, which then supervised the founding of colleges and universities. Rutgers earned land-grant status in 1864.]

MG: Oh, yes.

JS: They get money and they demanded--I think there had to be engineering, military training and something else. I believe that's why the [Agriculture] School is there. I believe. I'm not sure.

MG: I think you're right. We can always look that up later, too. The years you attended Rutgers, 1959 to 1963, it was before the Vietnam War, but there still was a lot going on in the world at the time. [Editor's Note: In 1964, the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was passed, authorizing President Lyndon Johnson the power to escalate American presence in South Vietnam. Prior to this, American military advisors were present in Vietnam since the 1950s.]

JS: I think we were oblivious. I was oblivious and I don't remember any of my friends talking about it. You've got to realize that these were Joe college days. You go to a ballgame, wear a suit and tie, carry a flask. We wore beanies. I mean the whole thing. I don't even know how many people remember this, but, at the end of the Princeton-Rutgers football game the freshman class would not go dressed, because you'd get out on the field and fight each other, the two freshman classes, but it was nice fighting. I mean, you'd scuffle with a guy, "See you," go fight with someone else, and then, over the years, local elements came in. So, that tradition went down.

MG: What do you mean by local elements?

JS: Townspeople with weapons that kind of thing, wasn't good-natured anymore. I can remember to this day--remember I mentioned this Eddie--Eddie taking off, smack across the field--I don't know if it was in the middle of the game--to steal a megaphone from one of the Princeton cheerleaders. [laughter] That kind of thing. I mean, there was a fantasy about it. We didn't have the mentality of the returning World War II vets. We were kids. They were very serious, and rightfully so. I guess we were terribly upwardly mobile, but not like what you see today. Most people wanted to have a good time. We didn't, unless I missed out on a lot, there didn't seem to be nearly the drinking. Certainly, there wasn't the drug use. It must've been around. Different world, really a different world.

MG: Yes. Well, I have about a million more questions I want to ask you, but let's save the next part for a future session. This has really been very enjoyable so far.

JS: Does it do you any good?

MG: Oh, yes. It is very interesting to me. This is an era I have not done a lot of interviews on. You really are doing a great job painting a picture of your life at Rutgers. I have many more questions that I want to have another chance to ask.

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

Reviewed by Mohammad Athar 12/14/2016

Reviewed by Jesse Braddell 11/3/2018

Reviewed by Molly Graham 1/13/2019  
Reviewed by Joseph Schenkel 6/6/2022  
Reviewed by Joseph Schenkel 7/18/2022