

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH HELEN IRWIN SHUSTER

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Sandra Stewart Holyoak: This begins an interview with Helen Irwin Shuster on June 29, 1999, in Arlington, Virginia. Conducting the interview is Sandra Stewart Holyoak. I would like to begin by thanking you for allowing me to interview you in your home. My first question is, where and when were you born?

Helen Irwin Shuster: In Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania on October 14, 1922.

SSH: Could you tell me about your parents? Where was your father born and educated?

HIS: My father was an educator, and he was born in Ohio, but, he grew up in Indiana, and he attended DePauw, in Greencastle, Indiana, for two years, and then, he went to Northwestern, and he and his brother George both graduated from Northwestern, and he had a Masters' degree from Columbia Teacher's College, and did a lot of work towards his Ph.D., or Doctor of Education, actually, from Teacher's College. He was a principal of a junior high school in Montclair, New Jersey, when I was very young, and then, we went to Trenton, where he was vice-president of the Teacher's College, and, later on, he became president of the Jersey City Teacher's College, both of which have changed their names by now.

SSH: Do you know what their names are now?

HIS: Jersey City is now called the New Jersey City University.

[Tape is paused as Dr. Shuster enters the room.]

SSH: Dr. Carl Shuster, Jr., has now joined the interview. Could you tell me about your mother's history?

HIS: Well, there's one more thing I want to add about my father.

SSH: Sure.

HIS: After he retired from Jersey City, and, by the way, they named their library the Forrest A. Irwin Library, he went to Fairleigh Dickinson, and established their school of education, and was the first dean of the School of Education at Fairleigh Dickinson, and he stayed there for quite a while after he retired from Jersey City. He and my mother met when she was teaching at the school in (Decker?), where he was the principal.

SSH: Where was your mother born and raised?

HIS: In Indiana.

SSH: In the same area as your father?

HIS: No. He came from northern Indiana, she came from southern Indiana. She came from the Vincennes-Terre Haute area, and he came from the Fort Wayne area.

SSH: How big was your mother's family?

HIS: Very large. Her mother was married twice and she had six children by her first husband, and then, she had six children by her second husband, and so, she had twelve children all together. She was quite a character. [laughter]

SSH: Where did your mother fit in with the twelve children? Was she in the first family?

HIS: No, she was in the second family, and the second youngest in the second family, and we went to Indiana every other summer, when I was growing up, but, we spent most of the time at the farm where my father grew up, in northern Indiana, which, until very recently, was still in the family, but, we didn't see all that much of my mother's family. Her sister that she was closest to, we visited a lot.

SSH: You noted that your grandmother was a character. What were some of the stories you were told?

HIS: Well, I don't think she was doing that very much. I think her husbands were doing that mostly, because she was a Methodist minister.

SSH: Oh, she was?

HIS: She spent a lot of time at retreats, and that kind of thing, and her husband took care of the children a lot.

SSH: What was your grandfather's name?

HIS: Her married name was Tolbert. My grandfather was in the Civil War, so that my grandmother's husband was in the Civil War and her father was in the Civil War. My grandfather was with the Kentucky Horsemen, cavalry, northern, and my mother always said that his brother fought for the Confederates, but, I've never been able to ascertain that, because, of course, the records are very poor on the Confederate Civil War people, because, well, so much of it was burned and destroyed. So, I really don't know about that, but, I do have records of my grandfather, and his pension, and all these pension records, and all of that, because my grandmother, after he died, he was never too well after the Civil War, and, after he died, my grandmother lived on the Civil War pension, which wasn't very much, but, it was enough to live on.

SSH: Do you think she ran into problems as both a woman and a Methodist minister?

HIS: I have no idea. I should think it would be very unusual, but, the Methodists have a lot of itinerant--is that the word?--ministers, who just sort of went around and preached, whether they were actually supposed to be doing that or not.

SSH: They were called.

HIS: Yes, they were called. [laughter]

SSH: Did your grandmother ever preach outside of Indiana?

HIS: I don't think so.

SSH: Your parents met in Indiana?

HIS: Right.

SSH: What brought your father to New Jersey? Were both your parents teaching at that time?

HIS: My father got very interested in the junior high school program, which was new. It was a new idea, and so, I can't think when he first started teaching, at the teacher's college level, but, he was one of the first principals of a junior high school in Indiana, and then, he was asked to come and teach at the Bloomsburg Normal School, and that's when we went to Pennsylvania, where I was born, and he also did summer teaching in Bellingham, Washington, at the college there, on the junior high school program, and he was kind of the authority of the junior high school thing, and then, he went to Montclair as a junior high school principal, and then, he went to Trenton.

SSH: Did you travel with him when he went to Washington?

HIS: No, he went alone.

SSH: Did he go alone?

HIS: Yes. That was when we were in Montclair. The whole family stayed in Montclair.

SSH: Is that the first home you remember?

HIS: Yes, yes.

SSH: How many siblings do you have?

HIS: I have one brother and one sister and my brother went to high school in Trenton. We had moved there by then, and he went to school on the trolley car, and then, they got busses, and so, then, he went to school on the bus.

SSH: This brother is older than you are?

HIS: Yes, and so is my sister, and my sister now has Alzheimer's, which is very sad. She's two years older than I am, so, she is in a nursing situation.

SSH: Was she also educated mostly in Trenton?

HIS: Yes. Now, my brother went to Duke, and my sister went to Purdue, and, thinking that she would go back to her roots, my brother and sister were both born in Indiana, but, Purdue, she was taking home economics, and she was very interested in fashion, and that kind of thing, and she found that, at Purdue, the emphasis was on being a good farm wife, and they weren't really giving her what she wanted, so, she transferred to Beaver College, in Jenkintown, Pennsylvania, and she graduated from there.

SSH: Did you spend any time in Pennsylvania after you moved to New Jersey?

HIS: No.

SSH: You pretty much became a New Jersey regular.

HIS: Yes.

SSH: Your elementary education began in Montclair?

HIS: In Montclair, and then, continued at Junior Three in Trenton.

SSH: Did your mother continue to teach?

HIS: No, no.

SSH: Were they very active in your education?

HIS: Well, not very. I remember asking my father for help on occasion, very few occasions, because he got very involved in teaching me beyond what I had to know at the moment, you see. [laughter] So, I didn't have much input from either of them, actually.

SSH: Did you have any special hobbies or interests as a child in elementary school?

HIS: Well, I was very athletic, which I'm glad about today, because I think I'm in as good condition as I am today because I was very active as a child. So, I did lots of bicycle riding, lots of swimming. In Trenton, we swam in the water power, which had a very swift current, but, neither of my parents could swim, so, they didn't worry about whether we were going to drown or not. I think they had no conception of the danger of the water power, but we swam there every day, all summer, and, sometimes, in the river, Delaware River, which was even more dangerous, and then, I played tennis every day, in the Cadwalader Park tennis courts, and Trenton was very good for activities for young people.

SSH: Was your father home during the summer?

HIS: Yes.

SSH: Did he continue to go to school?

HIS: He was in charge of the summer school at the Teacher's College at Trenton, so, he was always there, and then, I was very active in Girl Scouts, and went to camp, and was counselor at camp, and then, later on, my brother's wife was very high up in the Girl Scout movement, and she led camps a lot, and so, any camp that she was running, I was recruited to be a counselor at that camp, which was very interesting during the war, in that she was in charge of a camp in New York State where the girls from New York City came and harvested the crops, because there weren't people to harvest crops, and they earned money. I mean, they were paid, and I was a counselor, and I went out with them, and harvested crops.

SSH: What kind of crops did you harvest?

HIS: Well, I remember particularly the onions. There was a whole area where they raised onions and, when you came near that area, you knew it. We did those, we did beans and apples, lots of apples up there. This was near Kingston, New York.

SSH: How long would the camp run? Would your crew stay the same while the children were rotated?

HIS: It was pretty much the same all summer, as long as it lasted. I don't remember how long it lasted.

SSH: Did you live in dormitories or lodges?

HIS: Cabins, we lived in cabins, and, every day, we went out to the farms.

SSH: Did a bus take you to the farms?

HIS: Yes, yes.

SSH: How did a farmer get your labor force to come to his farm?

HIS: I have no idea. It was a war thing, and there were lots of organizations set up to take care of war time problems.

SSH: How much older is your brother?

HIS: About six, seven years.

SSH: Was his girlfriend that same age?

HIS: It was his wife.

SSH: Was his wife that same age?

HIS: Yes, she's his age.

SSH: So, she was married at that point.

HIS: Yes. When they had Girl Scout jamborees, she was in charge of the programs that they put on, also. That was national.

SSH: Did you get to travel to any of these jamborees?

HIS: No, I didn't, no. By then, I was married and had my children.

SSH: Did your parents participate in the Scouting movement?

HIS: My mother, she was pretty much the starter of the Girl Scouts in Trenton, because, when we moved there, my sister had been a Girl Scout. I wasn't that old yet, but, my sister had been a Girl Scout in Montclair, and there were no troops. There was nothing, so, my mother pretty much started it and she was the commissioner in Trenton for quite a while.

SSH: Did she stay involved after you were finished?

HIS: No, not after I was finished, yes.

SSH: What would a typical day be like in the Irwin household? Did you attend church on Sundays?

HIS: Always.

SSH: Always?

HIS: Sunday school, my farther was the superintendent of the Sunday school, Presbyterian, and, yes, we always went to church and Sunday school.

SSH: Was your family involved in other activities? How did the Depression affect your family?

HIS: Well, I remember it very well in that there were a lot of beggars that came to the house and my mother would give them something to eat, at that time. We were active in giving toys at Christmas time to all the children. I remember that as being a very big event. My father was not affected in that he always had a job. When we went to Trenton, he was supposed to get raises all the time, which he never got during the Depression, because there just wasn't any money, and, when my brother got finished with college, it was difficult to find a job. I remember my cousin came from Indiana. He had

graduated as an engineer from Purdue, and he couldn't get a job anyplace, and he finally went in the CCC, and there were no jobs. It was very difficult.

SSH: I have been told that vagabonds would mark the houses of people who gave out food.

HIS: Absolutely.

SSH: Were you aware of this then?

HIS: We were aware that word passed, where people might get something to eat. Is that what you mean? Yes.

SSH: Was your mother involved in any soup kitchens?

HIS: I think not, no. They became very active in the United Fund, when that got started in Trenton, but, not otherwise.

SSH: Were the schools you attended segregated?

HIS: Oh, yes, yes. In fact, at my Sunday school, there was a girl who should have gone to Junior Three and did not. She was not allowed to go there, but, she was in my Sunday school class. It was pretty ridiculous.

SSH: So, Junior Three would have been the integrated school you attended?

HIS: I'm saying it was very segregated. No blacks were allowed.

SSH: In Junior Three?

HIS: In Junior Three, yes. She was in my Sunday school class, but, she was not in my class at Junior Three. She had to go to wherever the black school was and I don't even know where it was, but, then, when we went to high school, it was an integrated high school. So, we had a lot of contact there, at high school, but, not at junior high school.

SSH: Did you discuss this at all at home?

HIS: No, no. Completely unaware, except for this one girl. Her family, there were other children in her family, and he was a member of our church, her father, and mother, too, I guess, and so, yes, we were aware that this was going on at church, but, not at school, but it was nothing that we sat around discussing, about how unfair this was. We mentioned it, but, that was it.

Carl Shuster: Could I add something to that? My experiences along that line were totally different. I went to the Pennington Schools, part of Hopewell Township. During the Civil War, there were a number of black slaves that were accompanying their masters at



Pennington Seminary, and, when the war broke out, the story is that they just stayed there, and, actually, the center of Pennington was a thoroughly colored section of the town, and so, I grew up in a school system where we didn't think anything about if these were black students we were with, because they were in all our classes, right from the beginning on up, and, indeed, the same type of camaraderie developed during sports. I played several sports, but, mostly in basketball. We would, after some of the games, go up to the bakery run by one of our black athletes, and we'd buy apple pies, sit out on the front steps, be in front of the bakery in the middle of town, with black and white kids, all eating apple pie. So, there's a totally different type of situation and I would attribute that to the fact that the blacks had been in Pennington for so long. They were in the heart of the town, and it was a small, country-like atmosphere, rather than a large, city structure. That probably is what led to something like that, in contrast with what happened in Trenton.

SSH: Did either one of you ever have any black teachers?

HIS: No, none in the high school, either, although, there were black students in the high school, but, no black teachers.

SSH: Other than the Girl Scouts, what hobbies did you have while growing up? Would it be fair to say you were a bit of a tomboy?

HIS: Yes, I would say so. [laughter] Yes.

SSH: Did your mother try to discourage you from being a tomboy?

HIS: No, no, not at all, although, she seemed to understand my sister better, my home economics sister. She understood her better, but, no, we were fine.

SSH: What subjects were of interest to you in junior high and high school?

HIS: I guess history, I guess.

SSH: What about literature?

HIS: Yes. I think you're right. I never really thought about that.

SSH: Were you a day-dreamer? Did you write in a journal?

HIS: No, no, very down-to-earth. [laughter]

SSH: You mentioned that you had done a lot of swimming. Did you ever do any canoeing or sailing?

HIS: Yes. My brother had a canoe. We canoed, no sailing.

SSH: Did your family ever go camping?

HIS: Not really. We picnicked. That's about it.

SSH: You mentioned that you had gone out to Indiana to visit your grandparents?

HIS: Yes.

SSH: Did any of that family come to visit you in New Jersey?

HIS: Occasionally, but, very rarely.

SSH: Did you ever go into New York City or Philadelphia?

HIS: Yes. We went to New York City fairly often, because, when we lived in Montclair, we went quite often, so, when we moved to Trenton, Philadelphia was the city for Trenton, but, not for us. We didn't go to Philadelphia. We still went to New York.

SSH: Really?

HIS: To shows. My mother liked to go to shows, and so, we did that.

SSH: Were you musically inclined or instructed?

HIS: No. My mother was. She played the piano. She played the organ and my sister took voice lessons in Trenton. I took piano lessons in Montclair, which did not take at all. [laughter] So, no, I was not musically inclined.

SSH: Did you choose NJC or had you considered other schools?

HIS: My father picked Oberlin.

SSH: Oberlin?

HIS: Yes and, I wanted to go to Radcliffe, and so, I was preparing for the college board exams, and, when I went to my father, and I said, "I need five dollars to take the college board exams, five dollars," and he said, "You're not going there, you're going to Oberlin."

SSH: Did he tell you why?

HIS: [laughter] No, but, I think it was because, when we lived in Montclair, two very nice girls went to Oberlin and they turned out very nicely. [laughter] I think my father thought, if I went to Oberlin, I would become the lady, and so, I went to Oberlin.

SSH: Did you discuss with him why you wanted to go to Radcliffe?

HIS: No, I don't think so.

SSH: Did your mother ever intervene?

HIS: No, absolutely not, and my father and I went out to Oberlin to see it, and I was not terribly impressed, but, that's where I went, my freshman year, and, after that, I didn't really like Oberlin. I thought Oberlin was a fine place, but, I did not feel at home there, and I had a very good time there, which was part of the problem. [laughter]

SSH: Can you tell me a little bit about that? Did you know anyone at Oberlin?

HIS: No.

SSH: There were no Mid-West cousins?

HIS: No, nothing at all.

SSH: What did you do when you went to Oberlin in the fall of 1938, 1939?

HIS: '40. Yes, I was there in '40 and '41. Well, I had a lot of dates, is what I did, and they had dancing, every night, or bowling, or something. Something was going on every evening. So, you had to be in, of course, by ten o'clock, or whatever, but, in the meantime. So, I .. wanted to go to college and learn, and I really wasn't doing that, and so, Carl, he was at Rutgers, and, of course, I had been dating him since I was thirteen or fourteen, and so, he said, "Well, why don't you transfer?" So, I said, "That's a good idea." So, I went up, and had an interview, and they said, "Fine," and my mother did intervene at that point, because my father was very disappointed, and my mother said, "Well, this is what she wants to do. This is a good idea." What I said was, "I don't want to spend three more years," at that age, three years seems like a very long time, "at Oberlin," and so, I transferred, and, when I went to NJC, we were assigned tables in the dining hall, and I was assigned a table for four, and the other three were all transfers. So, one of them became my very best friend.

SSH: Do you remember their names?

HIS: Well, Jenny (Deckard?) was one of them, and the other one, I don't know. She dropped out. She was allergic to everything, all foods. She ate cereal at almost every meal and it was a special kind of cereal. She would break out in these terrible hives, and they were afraid it would get in her throat, and kill her. So, she dropped out. So, I don't even remember her name.

SSH: Who was your best friend?

HIS: Barbara Hanson (Miller?). She lives in North Carolina now.

SSH: Do you remember where they transferred in from?

HIS: Barbara came from Syracuse, where she was a freshman, and Jenny (Deckard?) came from a junior college in New Jersey, Stonely, I don't know. I don't remember.

SSH: As a freshman at Oberlin in the early 1940s, how aware were you of the situation in Europe?

HIS: Absolutely aware, because, you see, it's co-ed, and the men knew that they were going to go to war. So, we were very much aware that we were going to be in it before it was over.

SSH: Were men already beginning to enlist?

HIS: No, no, it was just that everybody knew that it was going to happen.

SSH: You mentioned that you had known Dr. Shuster since you were thirteen.

HIS: Yes.

SSH: How did you meet him?

HIS: His father was head of the math department at Trenton State, and he had a prom or a dance that he had to go to, because he was the secretary of the class, or whatever, and his father said, "Why don't you take the Irwin girl?" and, of course, there were two of us. My sister was also younger than he is, but, my father-in-law had his eye on me. [laughter] So, he asked me to that and I dated him not exclusively, ever, but, until we got engaged. I dated him all those years.

SSH: Dr. Shuster had nothing to do with your father's decision to send you to Oberlin?

HIS: No, no, he just thought that was a great school for me to be in. [laughter]

SSH: How much older in Dr. Shuster than you?

HIS: Three years.

SSH: So, he would have been about a sophomore in high school?

HIS: Yes.

SSH: Were you engaged when he suggested you transfer to NJC?

HIS: Oh, no, no. We didn't get engaged until my junior year. The spring of my junior year, we got engaged.

SSH: How was that viewed at NJC at that time? I know it was frowned upon at one time.

HIS: That was all right. It was all right to be engaged. Yes, it was acceptable. Not much else was. [laughter]

SSH: I have heard that.

HIS: Yes, I'm sure you have. It was pretty ridiculous, actually.

SSH: Can you tell me about some of the other rules you thought were chaffing?

HIS: Well, I tell you, the most ridiculous, Carl thought this was going to be his last time to get home before he went overseas. This was my senior year, and so, he said, "We should get married, now." I said, "Fine." Now, this was just before exams. This was a couple of weeks before exams. So, he came home, and I went home, to Trenton, and we arranged for the church, and the minister, and my sister's dress, and I got a call from Dean Boddie, dean of the college, and she said, "You have to come back, today, because, otherwise, you will not be allowed back on campus until you've talked to me." So, I got on the train, and went back, and had this interview with her, and the interview was, "You are not to talk about the honeymoon when you come back on campus to any of the other girls." I can't believe, to this day, that that actually happened.

SSH: That you had to take a trip to New Brunswick ...

HIS: Yes.

SSH: To be told this.

HIS: To be told this. It was absurd. I could go back and get married. She had to be assured that I wasn't going to talk, and, of course, I've always been very reticent and I'm a very lady-like person. There was no way I was going to talk about my honeymoon to anybody, and so, it was really preposterous. Now, after the war started, then, they changed. You weren't allowed to be married at all before that and attend NJC, but, then, they changed it so you could be married and live off campus. You couldn't live in the dormitories, and then, when people were getting married more, they changed that. So, it was all right. When I knew that I was going to go home and get married, I told all my professors, and they said, "Fine, that was great," and, in fact, the whole Spanish Department came down to Trenton for my wedding, which surprised me. I was living in the Spanish House, at that time, and the whole Spanish House came, too, and, plus, my friends. They all came and, well, I don't know. [laughter] What else?

SSH: Could you tell me about your wedding? Was it in the church in Trenton?

HIS: Yes.

SSH: The Presbyterian Church in Trenton?

HIS: Yes, where I had always gone.

SSH: Who were your attendants?

HIS: My sister and, oh, that was another problem. There was nobody around, and my brother was in the Coast Guard, and he said he couldn't get home, and, actually, he did come, but, he said he couldn't, and my sister's husband was already overseas. He was in D-Day, and the Battle of the Bulge, and the whole bit. He was with the Fourth Division, and so, Carl didn't have anybody. His brother was off in the Army, so, he called the Chi Psi House [laughter] at Rutgers, and, "Is there anyone available to come down and be my best man?" A fellow that was there who had been a freshman when he was a senior came down and was his best man, very strange. [laughter]

SSH: Did you keep in touch with him?

HIS: No, not at all. Never saw him after that or anything.

SSH: Did rationing affect your reception at all?

HIS: Yes, we had just the families, including aunts and uncles that were from his side of the family, and the minister and his wife.

SSH: Did any of your Mid-Western relatives come out for the wedding?

HIS: No, no.

SSH: How much time did you have to plan this?

HIS: Oh, like, two days. [laughter] Well, he was only home for about four or five days.

SSH: I will not ask you too much about the honeymoon, but, where did you go?

CS: Buckhill Falls.

HIS: Buckhill Falls Inn, which is where Rutgers used to have the Christmas Buckhill Falls time. So, we had never gone to it, but we knew about Buckhill Falls. So, we went there, and I took my books, because I was going to come back to my exams, [laughter] but, I did all right, and I graduated, which was kind of an anti-climatic thing. My parents came and they were thrilled, but, for me, it was like, "Well, all right." [laughter]

SSH: Dr. Shuster was still at Rutgers for part of your time at NJC, correct?

HIS: Yes, that one year.

SSH: What did you do for entertainment then? Were there dances, concerts, or lectures?

HIS: Well, yes, but, mostly the movies.

SSH: The movies?

HIS: Yes. We went to proms and I went to house parties at the Chi Psi House. I also went to house parties at Cornell and they were so bad. The Chi Psi House was a really nice place. They had a house mother and everybody wasn't drunk. At Cornell, at the house parties, everybody got drunk and it was just plain boring.

SSH: Who were you visiting at Cornell?

HIS: A boy from my class in high school and, actually, he was president of the class at Cornell.

SSH: Did you take the train up to Cornell?

HIS: Yes, that was a problem. It was, you had to change in New York. It wasn't easy to get there, and, when you got there, it wasn't worth it, so, [laughter] and the Chi Psi House was a really nice place to have a house party.

SSH: Do you remember any other activities that involved both Rutgers and NJC? Were there common lectures or concert series?

HIS: I don't think so. We were supposed to go to the concert series at Rutgers.

SSH: Where did you live on campus the first two years?

HIS: I lived on Gibbons Campus, where they had a lot of houses, at that time.

SSH: What kind of rules did you have at Gibbons?

HIS: I think we had to be in at ten o'clock during the week, but, that wasn't really a problem, because after Oberlin, I decided I was going to go to school and learn. So, I studied all the time. I studied in the library, spent all my time in the library, except on weekends.

SSH: Did you stay on campus on the weekends or did you go home often?

HIS: Not very often.

SSH: You stayed in New Brunswick?

HIS: Pretty much.

SSH: Did you have mandatory chapel? They had it at Rutgers.

HIS: Yes, I know. I think we did. I think we had to go to chapel. I believe so. It wasn't a chore.

SSH: Were there any guest lectures that came to speak at chapel?

HIS: Yes, yes, and I sang in the choir, chapel choir. So, that's a funny story, because, in order to be in the choir, you had to be able to read music and you had to be able to sing. You had to be tested that you could sing and I couldn't read music. Well, I knew whether it went up or down, but, that was about it, but, I could sing, and I could sing low alto, and they needed low altos. So, the director of the choir decided that I didn't need to pass the test, because he needed low altos. So, that's what I did.

SSH: Was the faculty predominantly men, or women, or was it mixed sexes?

HIS: Mostly men.

SSH: Who was the dean at the time?

HIS: Corwin, Dean Corwin.

SSH: How much interaction did you have with Dean Corwin?

HIS: I didn't have any at all.

SSH: Other than your pre-honeymoon interview, how much contact did you have with Dean Boddie?

HIS: None at all. We had a campus director. So, I had some interaction with her, but, not very much.

SSH: Did you have women in your house who were elected to be responsible for the house's residents? Did you have any such responsibilities?

HIS: No.

SSH: Do you remember who was in charge of Gibbons when you were there?

HIS: No. I can see her, but, I can't remember her name.

SSH: Did you have a key to the house? Were there ways around the ten o'clock curfew?

HIS: No, not really.

SSH: What were you studying?



HIS: Spanish. I majored in Spanish.

SSH: Were minors available at that point?

HIS: Yes. I had a minor in English and history.

SSH: Did you notice if any of your classmates were beginning to study the sciences?

HIS: No.

SSH: Were there any discussions about that?

HIS: No.

SSH: How common was majoring in a foreign language for women back then?

HIS: I think it was pretty common.

SSH: Why did you pick Spanish?

HIS: Because my father thought that's what I should major in.

SSH: Why?

HIS: I have no idea. I wasn't very good at it, because I don't have an ear for languages. I could write it very well. In fact, I got the award for the best Don Quixote thing from Columbia University, but, that was writing.

SSH: Did you ever have any interaction with a Spanish culture at all?

HIS: No, none whatsoever. [laughter]

SSH: Have you wondered since then why you did this? Do you know what he thought you could do with Spanish?

HIS: No, I don't know.

SSH: Did your father want you to teach it?

HIS: I don't know.

SSH: Did you have any ideas?

HIS: Actually, I was very good in math, and Senior (Salas?) told me a couple of times, "You should really be majoring in math," and then, we took the graduate exam our senior

year, and I had had calculus, but, I never had anything beyond that, and hadn't had that for two years, and I did the best, of all the things that I took on the exam, in math.

SSH: Did you think about a career in higher education after NJC?

HIS: Yes, after my children were born, but, it was too big a problem.

-----END TAPE ONE SIDE ONE-----

SSH: This is side two of tape one. You were talking about your ideas for continuing in higher education. What changes did you notice during the early 1940s, before Pearl Harbor, as the nation prepared itself for the possibility of war? Was there much discussion of America entering the war?

HIS: Well, I think it was assumed by all of us that we would be in the war before it was over, that there was no way that the Allies were going to win without us. So, it was just a matter of when, and I remember Pearl Harbor Day very well, as everybody, I'm sure, does. It was a Sunday and it was a shock the way it happened. The way we actually got into the war was a shock, because, as I say, we had expected that we would have to, but, we didn't expect to be bombed at Pearl Harbor.

SSH: Where were you when you heard the news?

HIS: I was coming home from the library, [laughter] as usual. I was going back to my dorm.

SSH: Had Dr. Shuster already enlisted in the military at that point?

CS: Yes. I was in Advanced ROTC.

SSH: You were still at Rutgers, though?

CS: Yes. That was my senior year.

SSH: We have heard stories about refugees being brought to campus by professors with connections in Europe.

HIS: Well, actually, the Spanish Department came from Spain, because of Franco.

SSH: Okay, tell me about that, please.

HIS: They had fled Spain because they were not on Franco's side, and that's where we got, I think, everybody in the Spanish Department. They were all Spaniards and spoke Castilian, instead of the South American, and that's why they landed at NJC.

SSH: Were all the students in the Spanish House involved with the Spanish Department?

HIS: We were all Spanish majors, and we were supposed to speak only Spanish, and, as I said, I spent all my time in the library, so, I wasn't really in the house that much. We all ate at the same table in the dining hall. Senorita (Merril?) lived in the house, was a marvelous person, and wrote poetry in Spanish. So, she was a joy and I don't really know when she did come over.

SSH: Were you aware of any German exchange students?

HIS: No. After my sophomore year, I took care of two English children who had been sent to America to avoid the bombing. Their mother was some kind of official, in uniform, in England, and had sent her two older children to Canada, and she sent her two younger children to the Goulds, who were the co-editors of the *Ladies Home Journal*, and they lived in Princeton, and they had a daughter, Cicily, and so, I was hired to take care of the children during the summer.

SSH: How did you meet the Goulds?

HIS: Through my father. [laughter] My sister, the year before, the summer before, had worked for the head of Bamburger, who lived in Princeton, and so, the Goulds, when they needed somebody, called my father and asked if my sister could come, and she already was doing something else, I don't know what, and so, my father said, "Well, I have another daughter." So, I went to be interviewed by Mrs. Gould, and she asked me if I could swim, and if I could play tennis, could I teach the children tennis, and all of these things that were very active, and then, she said, "Well, you're really awfully young," and I thought, at the time, "Is somebody older going to be doing all of these active things?" but, anyway, she hired me. [laughter] We went to Edgartown, Martha's Vineyard, and she was otherwise occupied. She did a lot of the interviewing, Mrs. Gould, and so, I was up there with the three children. I didn't know how to do anything in the way of cooking. I could teach them swimming and tennis. We were driven. They had a chauffeur, and the chauffeur drove us up, and that was it, and we had a house up there, and the thing I remember most about Martha's Vineyard was that they were very adamant about blackouts, because there had been a lot of submarine activity right off of Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard. We ate out a lot, but, that was interesting, because they were very interesting children. One night, the little girl, who was only about five, was very frightened, and so, she was telling me about the bombing, and she was afraid that we were going to be bombed, and all of this. So, later on, when I discussed this with Mrs. Gould, she said, "But, she was never there when they were bombing," but, she had just imagined what this would be like for her mother and father, so, and the little boy, it was my first experience with little boys. Later on, I had five. I did very well with him, I think.

SSH: Did the Goulds have other helpers and staff there at the house?

HIS: No, not in Martha's Vineyard. There was in Princeton. In fact, Mrs. Gould had a couple that she hired out of Philadelphia, and he was the butler, and she was the maid,

and, well, she was the cook, actually. She did the cooking, and he did the butlering, and, one day, they had a day off, and they came back, and he had gotten a job at the Philadelphia Navy Yard, and they were gone, [laughter] and then, we went to Martha's Vineyard, after that, so, that's why we didn't have any help, because they took off. [laughter]

SSH: Did you have to do any cooking or shopping?

HIS: No, the chauffeur did the marketing and, no, I didn't know how to cook. I didn't do any cooking at all until we went to Martha's Vineyard. Then, I had to learn in a hurry, but, we ate out most of the time.

SSH: Did they give you a budget to work with?

HIS: Yes, yes, and, in fact, at one point, Mrs. Gould complained that we were eating too many steaks when we went out, but, that's what the children wanted, so, that's what we ate. [laughter]

SSH: Do you know of other families that sent their children from England?

HIS: No, I don't. Supposedly, that was done quite a bit, but, I didn't know any.

SSH: Did they have any playmates their age?

HIS: I was pretty much it, yes. We went to the beach and we played tennis. Now, Cicily had friends there, because she went to Mrs. Fine's School in Princeton, and she had friends that were going to Lawrenceville who also vacationed at Martha's Vineyard, Edgartown.

SSH: Were you invited to take the children over to anyone else's home?

HIS: Well, I was supposed to go with Cicily. I went with her to the parties that she went to, and took along the other two, whether they wanted to or not, but, mostly, they were during the day.

SSH: To observe a blackout, did you put heavy drapes over the curtains?

HIS: Yes. It was very black. I mean, if you went out, there were no lights at all, any place, in Edgartown.

SSH: Did you notice any shortages with the rationing program?

HIS: No. When I was at NJC, we took our stamps and gave them to the dining hall at NJC. So, my mother had had a little grocer that took care of getting her canned things. You couldn't even get canned things. It was really very stringent, but, if he got anything in, he would see that my mother got some.

SSH: Were you aware of the black market at all?

HIS: No.

SSH: You were never approached?

HIS: No.

SSH: You wrote on your survey that you worked with bandages at Johnson and Johnson.

HIS: Yes. Well, they asked NJC if they could provide people to come and work in the plant, which, of course, was right there, across from Rutgers. So, we would walk down, and so, everybody I knew worked there once a week, in the evening, and it smelled like nothing I've ever smelled any place. It was really an antiseptic like smell. It was really just its own J&J smell. So, we had our J&J clothes, you see, and these were what we wore there, and never wore them otherwise.

SSH: Were there only NJC women involved?

HIS: I don't know of any.

SSH: Were you paid for this work?

HIS: Yes. Not very much, but, yes, we did get something.

SSH: There were a lot of ASTP people over at Rutgers at this time. How did this affect the social life at NJC?

HIS: Not very much. I had one friend who got involved, very friendly with one fellow, but, that's the only one I really knew.

SSH: Did the NJC women travel anywhere else to work?

HIS: Not that I know of. I don't believe so.

SSH: Did your mother get involved in any war effort related activities?

HIS: No, I don't believe so. I think she was involved with the USO, but, I believe that was all.

SSH: Do you know what she did with the USO?

HIS: No, I don't.

SSH: What were your activities with the USO?

HIS: We just went to the canteen, or whatever it was, in New Brunswick.

SSH: Can you describe the atmosphere of the canteen?

HIS: Well, we just went and talked to the soldiers.

SSH: Were these soldiers from Raritan Arsenal or the ASTP program?

HIS: I don't really know, I don't know. They were not the ones at Kilmer, because those were being sent out. They may have been those who were working at Kilmer, not the ones being shipped out. In fact, I believe that's who most of them were.

SSH: Do you know how the USO was organized?

HIS: No, it's just that, well, this is the night that we're supposed to go down, and so, we went.

SSH: Was there a schedule set up at NJC?

HIS: Not that I know of. No, it was just ...

SSH: Totally informal?

HIS: Yes, yes.

SSH: Were there bands and refreshments there? Do you remember where it was?

HIS: No, I don't. I didn't go very often, as you can tell. So, I don't really know.

SSH: Were there any Red Cross activities at all?

HIS: I didn't do any.

SSH: Do you remember any recruiting done of campus by the women's branches of the various services?

HIS: I think not. I think if there had been recruiting, more of my class would have gone into the service.

SSH: There was no recruiting for the Army or Navy Nursing Corps?

HIS: Not that I know of.

SSH: All of your news came from the radio and newspapers. Did you have a pattern you followed for listening to the radio? Did you listen to the fireside chats?

HIS: No, because I was in the library. [laughter] I was in the library all the time, but, I would read the newspapers, and, particularly, with reference to my brother-in-law, because I was always interested in where he was, and the newsmagazines.

SSH: Did you write to the servicemen? Were you involved in the effort to send mail to servicemen overseas?

HIS: No, I was not.

SSH: Did you write to your brother and brother-in-law regularly?

HIS: No. I wrote to my brother, occasionally, not my brother-in-law. My sister was doing that. [laughter] That was enough.

SSH: What did your family think of FDR?

HIS: Well, I think my father thought his programs to get us out of the Depression were a good idea. I don't know that they worked, particularly. I think we were still in the Depression until the war came along, but, of course, they were very appalled by his doing away with Prohibition. My parents were teetotalers, completely, and they were not too enthralled with that. I think they were not too enthralled with his trying to enlarge, was it? the Supreme Court, so that he could get more people on it. They didn't think that was a good idea, but, anything that would help get people back to work, they thought was a good idea.

SSH: Was your family Republican?

HIS: I think my mother was, but, my father was pretty liberal.

SSH: Were they ever involved in any political campaigns?

HIS: No.

SSH: Were you ever interested in politics?

HIS: No.

SSH: What did they think of Truman?

HIS: I don't know.

SSH: Some people had very emotional reactions to FDR's death.

HIS: No, I don't know.

SSH: What were your plans for after graduation?

HIS: Well, first, I went to Sioux City, Iowa, where he was, and then, when he went to Herington, Kansas, I went to Herington, Kansas.

SSH: Which branch of the service was Dr. Shuster in?

HIS: He was in the Air Force, and they were flying B-17s out of Sioux City, and it was a worry every time they went out at night. Every time they went out it was a worry, because they ran into each other, and they had a lot of bad accidents. It was really pretty hairy and the same thing in Herington, Kansas. So, we were always worried whether they were going to come back or not.

SSH: Did you live on base?

HIS: No, you had to find your own and we lived in a house that people had turned into an apartment. I have to say, the people in Sioux City were just marvelous. They were absolutely marvelous to all this that was going on, all these people that had descended upon them. [laughter] They were very, very helpful, and this was somebody's house, and had been made into apartments, and the pilot's wife lived in the apartment, in another apartment in the same house, and so, we would get together every night, the officer's wives, and wait until they came home, hoping that they didn't run into each other. [laughter] It was training and they weren't very good at it.

SSH: Dr. Shuster, you were a co-pilot, correct?

CS: No, the navigator.

SSH: Did you find it as hairy as your wife did sitting on the ground? [laughter]

CS: No, we didn't think anything about this plane crashing business. It didn't happen that frequently, but, it must have seemed like it, to those that were waiting. That was where our future wartime crew shaped up, and where we met each other for the first time, and then, practiced together, prior to going overseas.

SSH: How was the transition from New Jersey to the Mid-West?

HIS: Well, when we went from Sioux City to Herington, they didn't like all these people, and it was not a very friendly place, but, we weren't there very long, and they went to Kilmer from Herington, and then, overseas, the crew.

SSH: Where did most of the wives wind up?

HIS: They all decided to go back East by way of Chicago, you see. We were in Kansas, right, so, I told them that, "You shouldn't go through Chicago, you go through St. Louis." No, they really had no idea of geography, whatsoever, so, they all left, went through



Chicago. So, I went through St. Louis, and, let's see, the pilot was from New Jersey, and the others were from New York, someplace. No, one was from West Virginia. So, I don't know how she got there, and so, then, I went home, after wandering around Herington for a whole day crying and crying, and then, I went home, to Trenton.

SSH: Did you reach him at Kilmer before they shipped out?

HIS: No, no. You went to Kilmer, and then, you went out.

SSH: Right away.

HIS: Yes, they weren't allowed out.

SSH: So, you went by train, through St. Louis?

HIS: Yes. Everything was by train in those days.

SSH: Did you have a lot of baggage or were you living out of your suitcase?

HIS: Just a suitcase.

SSH: The places you rented had been furnished?

HIS: Yes, oh, yes. No, I didn't have anything, except my clothes.

SSH: What did you do when you got back to Trenton?

HIS: Well, my sister was there, also, living with my parents, with her little girl. She had a little girl, and she worked for Thiokol, and my mother pretty much took care of my sister's daughter. All right, so, then, what was I going to do? So, I said, "I think I'll go in the Navy." So, Carl had said, "Well, you have to be an officer, see. If you're going to go into a service, you have to be an officer," because he was an officer, which, of course, is another ridiculousness, [laughter] but, all right, so, I had to go to New York, to Wall Street, to the Navy recruiting place. Why they didn't have something in Trenton, I don't know, but, I had to go to New York. So, my father said, "Well, I'll go with you. You shouldn't go to New York by yourself." All right, so, I went over, and they tested my eyes, and I was near-sighted.

SSH: Did you know this before?

HIS: Oh, yes, but, I didn't know that was going to be a qualification. So, they said, "Well, we can't make you an officer, but we really need you to be," whatever, "a non-officer." So, I said, "Well, I can't do that." So, they talked to me for quite a while. They really needed me, but, "No, I can't do that." So, I went back home. Then, what am I going to do? Well, Trenton had, it was an area that needed labor, tremendously. I had worked at the airplane factory, which had been a General Motors factory, the summer

before, but, they assigned you. They had an office where you went and they assigned you.

SSH: A labor force?

HIS: The labor force. Isn't that interesting? So, I think you were allowed to teach if you were a teacher, but, otherwise, you had to be assigned. So, I went to this place, and this office, and so, they said, "Oh, we have just the job for you," which was being a disk jockey in a plant that was making hose for the Navy, long, long, long hoses for ships, and RCA had convinced this plant, and everybody else, I guess, that people worked better if they had music. So, I was never convinced of that, but, I said, "All right, that's what I'll do." So, that's what I did, [laughter] and I thought the whole thing was pretty boring, so, I read poetry, occasionally, to these factory workers, who never complained about it. That was all right and I had contests. If they could name something or other, the band, or whatever, and gave them a silver dollar for the right answer, and I played classical music during lunch. The company provided me a hot meal at noon.

SSH: You must have had quite a budget, also.

HIS: Well, no, not really, just the dollars. I mean, I had nothing to do with the food, but, that was a very good thing. All the factory workers got a really good noon meal, including everybody, and so, I played classical music during the feeding hour, and, otherwise, I just played, mostly, country music. I played requests and they mostly wanted country music. So, that's what I did, and, oh, I substituted on the switchboard, when the other people weren't there, and I did sort of errands, but, mostly, I was the disk jockey.

SSH: Did you play the big band music? Did you enjoy that style of music?

HIS: Oh, yes, oh, yes, very much so. Yes, in the summertime, we would go down to Asbury Park, where the big bands were, and we went to a place in North Jersey. I can't even remember what it is now, where we saw the big bands, and, yes, anytime they came anywhere around, we went to see them. Yes, I'm still a great fan of the big band music.

SSH: Did you get involved with the USO? Were there military installations near where you were working?

HIS: Not near Trenton, no.

SSH: The Philadelphia Naval Yard did not affect you?

HIS: No, no.

SSH: Was your brother married at this time?

HIS: Yes.

SSH: Where was your sister-in-law living?

HIS: I guess she was where he [was]. He was in Newport News. He was in charge of training the Coast Guard people to safely load munitions, and the stevedores had to load everything in a certain way, or they would be shut down, because the Coast Guard had charge of all loading of the ships. So, he was at Newport News [and] Hampton Roads.

SSH: Was there ever any union activity in the naval hose plant you worked in? Were strikes ever called or threatened to be called?

HIS: No. I don't even know whether they were union people. I don't know.

SSH: Were there any union activities?

HIS: No.

SSH: How was the mail service between your husband and yourself at that point? Was it sporadic?

HIS: No, it was pretty good, because he was in England, you see, the whole time. So, it was fine.

SSH: Did you ever keep in contact with the other officer's wives? Did you get together?

HIS: No.

SSH: Did you ever see each other again after that?

HIS: No.

SSH: Did you stay in Trenton until Dr. Shuster came back?

HIS: Yes, and my sister and I used to say, "Oh, we're going to really be upset if the other guy gets home first," you see. So, what happened was that her husband came by ship, he came by air, and they arrived on exactly the same day at Fort Dix.

SSH: Where were you when you heard that the bomb had been dropped on Japan? What was your reaction?

HIS: Well, I was delighted, actually, because it meant that the war might end, and the day that the war ended in Japan was the best day of my life, absolutely, because, even though V-E Day was a good day, because we knew that Carl would be coming back, and my sister's husband would be coming back, we also knew that they would be going to Japan, and, in fact, V-J Day, we were in Greensboro, North Carolina, where he was getting ready to go to Japan, and so, when that happened, it was just the best day,

because, then, we knew that they wouldn't have to go, because that was going to be a horrendous thing. We all knew that Japan had kept back troops, in Japan, and it was just going to be a terrible, terrible thing, like Okinawa was a terrible thing. Well, they were all very bad, but, we knew Japan would be the worst, and then, he didn't have to go.

SSH: Tell me about the reunion at Fort Dix.

HIS: Well, it was great, because my sister had her husband's car. Nobody had cars, but, she had a car, and so, we drove down there. It was just marvelous, because they were both there. They had run into each other at Fort Dix, and so, we both had our husbands back the same day, the same moment, which was really a surprise, because he had been in Europe all that time, on the Continent, and Carl had been in England.

SSH: You went to Greensboro from there?

HIS: Yes. Well, we had a little time off, so, we went to Nantucket, and then, he was to go to Greensboro, so, I went there, too. So, my sister had had this child, you see, while her husband was overseas, and she, and my mother, and I, were all there taking care of this one child. So, I said to Carl, "This is really a neat setup here. Why don't we do that?" So, he had been very opposed to this whole thing, you see, but, "Oh, well, all right." So, when we went to Greensboro, I was pregnant. I guess I was pregnant by then, and so, then, he went to Boca Raton, Florida, where he was to be gotten out of the service, and so, he said, "You gotta go back home. It's going to be too hot there." "No way." So, I went down to Florida, also, and so, then, we came home together, and then, we had our first set of twins. [laughter]

SSH: Did you come back by train or had you bought a car by then?

HIS: No, no. Trains were great. [laughter] They were great. It's too bad we didn't keep up the trains the way we used to.

SSH: How did you quit your job? Did you just quit when you knew he was coming back?

HIS: Yes.

SSH: Were there layoffs?

HIS: Nope, that's it, good-bye. [laughter]

SSH: Was there a big turnover of women workers like yourself, that would leave when their husbands came home?

HIS: Well, the husbands weren't coming back until the war was over. There was a woman who worked in the office next to mine, and, one day, she got a telegram at work, and her husband had been killed. That was so horrendous, but, I didn't see that happen

very often, but, that happened with her. I suppose people quit after I left, but, [laughter] well, a lot of the women who worked in the office, you see I was in the office part of the thing, and a lot of those women weren't even married.

SSH: Did Dr. Shuster go back to Rutgers when you came back?

HIS: [Yes.]

SSH: Did you stay in Trenton or did you move to New Brunswick?

HIS: We had a third floor room, with a common bath, with a couple of other rooms, right there in the center of New Brunswick, and I was very pregnant. From three months on, I was tremendous, because I was having twins, which I didn't know, of course, and the doctor didn't know it, and he had me on a very, very strict diet, because I was gaining too much weight, and so, I spent my time at the New Brunswick Library, and I would go out, and eat at Thode's, and then, I would go to the library, and that's how I spent my time, while he was going back to school, and then, just before the twins were born, I went home, to Trenton, my poor family. At that point, the doctor said, "Maybe we should X-ray." This was two weeks before they were born. "Maybe we should X-ray and see what's going on." So, I don't know why he didn't hear two hearts or anything. Seems to me things were pretty primitive in those days, [laughter] and so, he said, "Oh, you're having twins." "Oh, all right." So, Carl was still in New Brunswick, so, my father took me to the hospital in the middle of the night and that's when I had the first set.

SSH: The first set.

HIS: In Trenton, right. At Mercer Hospital in Trenton.

SSH: Did you stay with the twins in Trenton or did you go back to your third floor apartment?

HIS: No, we never went back there. Well, it took my sister, and my mother, and me to take care of these twins. They were [both] about six pounds, four ounces, which is a pretty good size, but, they were early. They were a couple of weeks early. So, it took them forever to eat, and, at that time, they had, which I think was a very good idea, visiting nurses, who visited every newborn household, which I think was great, because they didn't just go to the poor people, they went to everybody, and, I'll never forget, she came in, and she said, "How are you doing?" I said, "Well, I'm feeding them all the time," and she said, "Well, don't do that. The reason that it takes forever for them to eat is because they're not that hungry, because you're doing it all the time." [laughter] So, she said, "Just feed them every three hours, whatever, and for twenty minutes." So, that's what I did after that and it worked very well.

SSH: Did you breast feed the twins?

HIS: I did not. I tried and nothing was working. I tried in the hospital, nothing was working, so, by the time I left the hospital, I was not breast feeding, and it wasn't such a big thing in those days. I mean, bottle feeding was fine.

SSH: [laughter] Totally acceptable.

HIS: Totally acceptable, so, yes, that's what I did. So, that was very helpful and I'm sorry they don't do that now. That was a city thing, by the way.

SSH: Did Dr. Shuster make it down for the birth?

HIS: Sort of, I guess. Were you there when George and Ken were born? No.

CS: I came down the night before and went back to school again.

HIS: Because, it took me so long to have them. I was in labor a long, long time.

CS: Yes, I was a laboratory assistant, so, I had to get back to class.

HIS: So, then, he came down after they were born, [laughter] which was all right.

SSH: How much longer were you studying in New Brunswick?

CS: We stayed there a while, actually. That summer, following the boys' birth, the house mother at Chi Psi was ...

HIS: Sweet lady.

CS: Summering somewhere else and she let us sublet her apartment right there on Hamilton Street, and that was very handy, and so, we were there for the summer, and, at about that time, when we moved back with either her parents or my parents, Rutgers started up the Heights Campus, and we got a place there, and that's where we stayed, at 12 Marvin Lane, until I left Rutgers.

HIS: So, we were there for eight-and-a-half years

SSH: Okay.

HIS: In those converted, whatever they were.

CS: Headquarters-type buildings brought in from Kilmer.

HIS: Bad, bad, not good at all. In fact, at one point, Carl fell through the bathroom floor.

CS: It had rotted away.

HIS: It completely rotted away. My children were sick a lot, and I thought I had sickly children, and when we moved into a regular house, they were never sick after that, and I realized that it was because of the dampness of that housing.

CS: They were uninsulated and just sitting on blocks above the ground. There's no cellar to it.

HIS: It wasn't insulated at all, and it was just the flooring, and then, the ground, and they were just molding. I mean, they were really, really bad, really bad.

SSH: How soon after did you have your other children?

HIS: Well, then, I had the second set after we moved into the Rutgers housing, the second set, and I didn't want any of my children to be born in New Brunswick. It was beneath my dignity to have anybody born in New Brunswick, and so, I went to Plainfield. My parents had moved to Westfield by then, because my father was now at Jersey City, and so, I went to a doctor in Westfield who went to the Plainfield Hospital, and I started having labor pains two months early, and so, the doctor said, "You have to go to bed." So, my mother-in-law, sweetheart, took the first set of twins, and my mother took me, and I was in bed for two months, but, it kept me from having pre-mature, because, as the doctor said, "You can't afford pre-mature babies here."

SSH: Did you know you were having twins?

HIS: Well, again, I was so big that he thought I was having triplets, so, he did X-ray early, at two months ahead, and said, "No, it's just twins," and so, then, they were born in Plainfield. When my youngest was born, we were still in University Heights, but, about to move out. So, I had told my doctor, "Good-bye, we're going to Delaware, now," but, I didn't make it." So, my youngest was born in New Brunswick, [laughter] which is fine, by then I thought that was all right, but, that was a surprise, because I had thought that I would have him in Delaware.

SSH: I know that with four small children, you probably did not have much free time, but, did you get involved in any kinds of activities then, civic activities perhaps?

HIS: No, no.

CS: Yes.

HIS: Yes.

CS: PTA.

HIS: Well, when they got into school, then, I was in the PTA and was president of the PTA.

SSH: This is tape two of an interview with Mrs. Helen Irwin Shuster on June 29, 1999, in Arlington, Virginia. Could you please continue telling us about the PTA?

HIS: PTA, right.

SSH: Was this in New Brunswick?

HIS: No, this was in Piscataway, you see, University Heights, right. There was a school there, elementary school, called Holmes Marshall, Piscataway Township school, which had been considered the black school. In fact, it was about ninety percent black and this is where the University Heights children were to go. So, at first, when our children were just babies, the children, they sent them to New Brunswick, had to pay tuition, or Highland Park, and, because this school was not where they wanted their children to go, supposedly. Well, then, as the children got more and more, that were old enough to go, everybody said, "This is crazy. Let's just all go over to Holmes Marshall." So, by the time our children went there, there were a lot of University Heights children going to the school. So, I joined the PTA and I became president. What was happening in Piscataway was that every section would vote down any improvement or addition to anybody else's school, so that you had nobody getting anything, any addition or improvement, of anybody's schools, because everybody came and voted down everybody else's. So, I started a community PTA, where we all got together and decided who really needed improvements, who really needed things, and we would all vote for it, and things started to happen. So, I always thought that was a good thing. So, yes, I was very active in the PTA there and that's pretty much all I did.

SSH: Did you then go from Piscataway to Delaware?

HIS: Yes. Carl was director of the marine program at the University of Delaware, which was actually in Lewes, but, we lived in Newark, where the university is, and so, the children went to school there, which is a very good place to raise children, actually, because there's nothing in Newark. At that time, there was virtually nothing, except, the university, and the Dupont research people, and so, it was very good, school-wise, for the children.

SSH: Did you remain active in the PTA?

HIS: No, not really, no. I think I pretty much thought everything was under control, [laughter] which I didn't in New Brunswick, you see, in Piscataway.

SSH: With five children, again, your time was limited, but, were there any outside interests which you pursued? You mentioned several letter writing campaigns. Were you involved in any causes?



HIS: No, no, not really. I did faculty type things, with the university wives, and had a lot of faculty wife friends, including a sewing group of faculty wives, so, I just enjoyed their company, and, otherwise, I was just pretty much involved with all my children.  
[laughter] They were a handful.

SSH: Did any of your children become involved in the military at all?

HIS: Well, of course, the Vietnam War came along, right at the time for them, for the older ones, who are eleven- and-a-half months apart. So, they were all in college, well, in high school, and then, college, so, what happened was that the oldest one was in graduate school. He went to Yale, and then, he was in the graduate school at MIT, and he was working on his Ph.D., and that's when they changed the regulations, and said that they were now going to take people out of graduate school. So, he asked his congressman, his senator, actually, if he would try to get him into naval officer's training at Newport, and he did, and so, he got in there, and he graduated from that. He was already working on his Doctorate, and so, he asked the professor if he could write it up as a Masters' thesis and get his Masters' degree, because, by then, he had enough course work for a Masters'. He was by-passing the Masters', and so, he agreed, so, he got a Masters'. When he graduated from officers training at Newport, they sent him to the Pentagon, and so, he was working there when his captain, that he was working for, came in and said, "We have to let out three thousand people," and so, my son said, "How 'bout if I'm one of them," [laughter] and he said, "Fine," so, he got out of it. He got out of the Navy. His twin went to Rutgers, engineering, and between his junior and senior years, he went into the summer program, cadet kind of program, with the Public Health Service, and so, when he graduated, he went with the Public Health Service, which is a service, in fact, they get uniforms and the whole bit. So, that was his Vietnam service. So, they're both Vietnam veterans not having gone. Then, Chris, the older of the younger twins, he was in school, and then, they decided on this lottery business, which I thought was extremely unfair, and his number was chosen way down, so, he wasn't taken at all, and his twin went into the Coast Guard, and he was very young, not only in age, but he was just a very young person. He's always been very young, and so, when he went into the Coast Guard, he's very good, technically, and so, there were a lot of service interested in him, but, the Coast Guard said, "Oh, you really want to go into the Coast Guard, because we will send you wherever you want to go." So, since he was so, young, we were in Rhode Island, I said, "You mean Boston?" "Oh, yes, that would be fine." So, as soon as he got finished with boot training, or whatever it's called in the Coast Guard, they sent him to Hawaii.  
[laughter] So, he got as far as the Philippines, but, he never actually went to Vietnam, and he's a Vietnam veteran, also. So, that's how we did the Vietnam War, which I always thought was really dumb from the beginning, and so, that's what we did in the Vietnam War. We didn't protest it, but, we have Vietnam veterans who never went to Vietnam, three of them.

SSH: What other activities have you been involved in?

HIS: Well, in Rhode Island, I was very active in the League of Women Voters. I finally decided, well, all right, I'm going to go out and do something here. So, I was president of

the local chapter, and then, I was head of the health study for the state league, and I spent a lot of time. You can spend an awful lot of time on the League of Women Voters, which is why I think they ran into problems, because so many women were working, and you just cannot spend time on the League of Women Voters without spending a lot of time. You can't get involved at all without getting really involved, and I think that's why they decided they would go co-ed, so to speak, because they just didn't have enough women to do the work.

SSH: Was there any specific political belief that led you towards the League of Women Voters?

HIS: No, I just decided that it was good thing, a good organization.

SSH: How did you wind up in Arlington?

HIS: I have done virtually nothing in Arlington. [laughter]

SSH: Did you come here from Rhode Island?

HIS: [Yes], and we've been here twenty-eight years.

SSH: Really. Are there any organizations that keep you busy here?

HIS: No.

SSH: What is your passion now?

HIS: Just keeping going, keeping everything going. [laughter] Carl is very busy with his horse-shoe crab business, and writing the book, and writing articles, and answering phone calls, etc., and going to the beach, to study.

CS: Genealogy.

HIS: We've done a lot of genealogy, both my family and his family, and so, he has various things that I get involved with which have nothing to do with me, really, but, I'm involved with them, and so, I take care of everything else. I take care of all the finances and I do everything else, because he's busy, and that's fine.

SSH: Do any of your sons live in the area?

HIS: Yes, Ken lives here. He works for EPA. When they established EPA, they took over the environmental things from the Public Health Service, so, he went directly from the Public Health Service into the EPA, and he's been with them ever since, and he has been in hazardous waste, solid waste at first, and then, hazardous waste, and he has pretty much written the regulations for the military hazardous waste, which are many, and so, he's been working with the military, or in opposition to the military, whatever, so, that's

his latest thing, and he's been with the federal government for so long that he'll be able to retire in about three years, actually.

SSH: So, he is the only one that is close by?

HIS: Yes. George is in Rhode Island. He is president of Cranston Print Works, which is a fabric printing company. When he left the Pentagon, he went to Yale Law School, and he joined Edwards and Angel, which is a big law firm in Providence, Rhode Island, because his wife wanted to live in Rhode Island. She's from Rhode Island, and through the legal work that he was doing for Cranston Print Works, they asked him to come over, and become a vice-president, to be trained, or whatever, to be president, and so, that's what he is now. So, he's in Rhode Island. Neal is in Rhode Island. He does his own thing, including building George's house. [laughter] George bought property on a lake in Rhode Island, and because they row, they row masters, all four them. They row together in four and they get lots of medals. They're very good, and they row with other people in eights, too, but, mostly, they row their four, and they row in pairs. The two in Rhode Island row together in a pair, and then, Chris lives in New Jersey, and he lives near Belle Mead. And then, our youngest lives in Philadelphia.

SSH: That is wonderful. Well, I thank you for taking time to be interviewed.

HIS: I hope I didn't talk too much.

SSH: I think not. Thank you both. This concludes the interview.

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Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 9/5/99  
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