

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY
AN INTERVIEW WITH SEYMOUR SILBERBERG
FOR THE
RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY:

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WEST CALDWELL, NEW JERSEY
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TRANSCRIPT BY:

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Kurt Piehler: ... This begins an interview with Dr. Seymour W. Silberberg on August 31, 1995 in West Caldwell, New Jersey, with Kurt Piehler and ...

Jennifer Griggis: Jennifer Griggis.

KP: I would like to ask you a few questions about your parents. Your father came from Austria.

Seymour Silberberg: From Austria, correct.

KP: When it was Austria?

SS: Still Austria.

KP: Or, was it the Austro-Hungarian Empire?

SS: It was the Austria-Hungarian Empire at that time. This is back in the, ... I guess, early 1900s. Yes, that's about it.

KP: Did your parents come over together?

SS: No, they had not.

KP: They came over separately.

SS: And met in the United States, as far as I can remember, right, as far as I can remember.

KP: Did your parents come over with their families or did they strike out on their own?

SS: My father came over because he had some brothers here and my mother came over on her own, but, had relatives, right, but, they both came over individually.

KP: What prompted them to come to the United States?

SS: [laughter] I guess what everyone did, they just wanted to get out and ... come over here. ... I mean, there was ... always hardship in Europe, but, there was no specific hardship or problem that they wanted to get out of. Quote, "they wanted a better life," and I guess this was the place for them to get it. So, that's about, that's about it.

KP: Did they stay in contact with their families?

SS: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, yes, yes, they did. They went back to visit, once or twice, as I recall, when I was a little boy. They wrote often, ... until the war, and then, a lot of them were dispersed, you know, killed, dispersed, after the war, during the war. ... After the war, there was very little contact, very little contact.

KP: Did your father and mother try to help any of the family during the late thirties by trying to get them out of Austria?

SS: I can't answer that for sure. I know that they were very hospitable, and very charitable, and I know that they kept in contact with their families, and I am sure that they helped, monetarily, in some way. ... I can't quote you chapter and verse on it, but, I know from listening. Remember, at that time, ... in the thirties, whatever they had, they ... would send, letters and some money, overseas.

KP: How did your parents meet?

SS: I think through ... mutual relatives. That's as far as I know.

KP: Did they both settle in Hoboken?

SS: They settled in Bayonne.

KP: Bayonne.

SS: Bayonne. ... My home was, originally, Bayonne. I was born and brought up in Bayonne until I was seven, then, we moved to Hoboken in 1929, eight or nine, something like that. I finished school in Hoboken, and, once I entered Rutgers at seventeen, I rarely went back, except for vacations and summers, [laughter] because, at eighteen, I met my wife and I came to Caldwell. Okay, I met my future wife, I should say. ...

KP: You have stayed here pretty much ever since.

SS: ... We were married in '44, so, we've been living here ever since. My wife has been here since 1932 or [193]3. So, we've been in Caldwell for a long, long time. Our roots are here. Our roots are here. One of my daughters still lives here, my grandchildren live here, Jane lives here, and her four children have graduated from the same high school that my wife [graduated from]. ... One cute anecdote, if I may?

KP: Oh, please, go ahead.

SS: ... My oldest grandson was valedictorian at our high school and he made a speech. ... We were out on the football field, and he made a very nice speech, and then, towards the end, he turned to his principal and superintendent, thanked his teachers and his superintendent for the wonderful education, and then, he turned to the stands, and he said, "There are two people here I especially want to thank, and one is my mother, who graduated from this high school twenty-five years ago, and the other is my ... grandmother, who graduated from this high school fifty-two years ago," and he shouts it out over the whole [crowd].

Annice Silberberg: I put on my Rutgers ...

SS: ... Your Rutgers pin.

AS: ... My NJC pin for the occasion.

SS: So, he was pretty proud of his grandmother graduating from his high school and so were we. So, we've been here a long time. Our roots are here, we've been practiced here, we've been involved in the community in every which way you want to know. I was a former councilman in West Caldwell, former police commissioner. My wife was the president of every organization you can name, every voluntary, you know, volunteer organization in the synagogue, and the community, outside, everything. So, that's where we were, okay?

KP: Your parents, moving from Bayonne to Hoboken, was this a step up or were there business reasons?

SS: Business. When I was a little boy, I think that while we didn't live in really tremendously large houses, I think that we were fairly well off. I believe so. I know that when I was five years old, in the early 20s, we had two cars, okay? After, or during, the recession, or whatever you want, the crash ...

AS: Depression. ...

SS: Depression, whatever it was, thank you, ... evidently, my family lost almost everything they had, and through the good auspices of one of his brothers, they were able to purchase a (regis?). My father had been in the sheet metal distributing business. ... As I recall, and I was a little boy at the time, but, as I recall, it was a pretty fair-sized business, and I also recall that, when we moved to Hoboken, it was a pretty small sized business. I want to tell you.

AS: Retail.

SS: Retail, thank you, dear, and, anyway, through the good auspices of one of his brothers, they were able to purchase this retail shop, and, between my mother and father, they worked pretty hard, and they got everybody through school that ... wanted to go to school. My sister did not finish college. My two oldest brothers did, and they certainly put me through, and, as I recall those years, in the early 30s, ... they were not great. We always had enough to eat, we always managed very well, but, I can remember, my mother, I'm having two pairs of pants and she would wash one, so, I could have them clean for the next day. So, that's the sort of stuff, but, they managed, they managed.

KP: So, while there was always food on the table, it was still rough going in the early 30s.

SS: Oh, yes, yes, yes. Oh, yes, but, I mean, ... we always had enough, right.

KP: It sounds like they assumed that their kids would go to college.

SS: No, question, they always did. ... They didn't even think otherwise, that was it.

KP: How observant was your family?

SS: My mother and father were both rather observant, religiously. Yes, they were.

KP: Did they keep a kosher household?

SS: We kept a kosher household, that is correct. Right, but, they were very liberal in their outlook, when it came to their children, and to ... me, in particular. [laughter] No, really, they were. ... They did their thing and they liked us to do ...

AS: And, you were educated.

SS: As much as we could, and we were certainly educated, up to a certain point, and we did very well, and ... they really didn't bother us all that much. ... They assumed that we would be good, and that was enough for them, and we carried on, you know, as well as we could. So, ... that's where we stand.

KP: Except for a few years in the Bayonne system, you went through the Hoboken school system.

SS: Hoboken school system, yes.

KP: Looking back, how good was your education?

SS: I think I was fairly well-prepared, I really do. I managed pretty well at Rutgers, you know. I think I was pretty well-prepared.

KP: Did you know you wanted to be a dentist when you were in high school?

SS: No, no. I knew I wanted to go into the biological sciences. I was going to get into medical school and that didn't work out. I went to dental school, and that worked out, and it was pretty nice, pretty nice.

KP: So, you were initially interested in becoming a doctor.

SS: ... Right, right, okay, 'cause we were all doctors at that time, you know, when we [were] freshman, all of us were. [laughter] ... All my freshman class, the whole group of us were. I had a roommate ... who went to the University of Pennsylvania Dental School after three years. He did not graduate and he became very enthusiastic about it. ... He [had] always wanted to be a dentist, and he was enthusiastic about that, and, in our talking, and then, when we didn't get into

medical school, and all of that stuff, we applied to dental school, and he invited me, you know, down to come to Penn, and that was a very nice relationship.

AS: Those were the days when it was very difficult for a person of the Jewish faith to get in to medical school.

KP: What led you to go to Rutgers? Had you thought of other schools?

SS: ... I really wanted to go to the University of Chicago, I really did, and I was fully prepared to go. At the very last minute, my parents said, "No, that is too far," and then, I applied to Rutgers, rather late, but, I guess, because of my record, I was accepted, but, Chicago was my first choice. At that time, ... (Hutchinson?) was there and [it was] very exciting, at least I thought it was exciting. It was going to be exciting, and I came close to going, [but, at] the last minute, my parents said, "No, it's just too far, can't do it." So, that was it.

KP: Did you ever have any regrets that you were not able to go away?

SS: Well, I'll tell you, everything worked out so well at Rutgers, and from then on that I think I've been a very lucky person all of my life. Whatever seemed to have happened adversely turned out to be very, very good. Really, I had a great time at Rutgers. I learned a lot. Through this classmate of mine, I got involved in Pennsylvania, ... and dental school, and that worked out very well. I met my wife at NJC, so, I mean, whatever happened was just [great]. ... I met a great bunch of fellows, whom we are still friendly with, whom we still see, and so, when you say, "Do I have any regrets?" I really don't.

KP: Yet, when you first came to Rutgers, did you have this sense that it was your second choice?

SS: Well, I was seventeen years old and ... I wanted to get away, go out. ... Sure, we all had, and I was a little disappointed, but, my family did not have the means to send me out there, and I did not get a scholarship, and so, you know, [we] had to do the best we could.

JG: Did your family benefit from any of the New Deal programs?

SS: No. ...

JG: What did your family think of FDR?

SS: Well, I am sure that they were all very enthusiastic at that time, because ... things were really pretty bleak. Things were really pretty bleak, pretty bad, and it seemed at least something was being done, and so, they were very enthusiastic about FDR, as a good many other people were, too.

KP: You came to Rutgers in 1938 and you mentioned that the ranks thinned among the pre-med students. How difficult was Rutgers?

SS: ... For me? I had one problem in freshman math. Otherwise, it was no problem.

KP: However, you saw a lot of your classmates dropping out.

SS: Dropping out. That's correct. The one professor I had, he just scared the daylights out of me, and I came close to failing that class, for the first time ever, anywhere, you know. I don't know why, I just never, you know, one of those things, ... but, aside from that, I had no problem with ... any of the [classes]. As a matter-of-fact, my junior year, I was doing so [well], like, I was a student, ... I don't know, apprentice, or whatever they call it, in the biology department. ... I was doing some research for Dr. Nelson. I'm trying to think who else was involved. ... At that time, I thought I might go into biology, I mean, into bacteriology, you know, ... and the biological sciences, rather than going on to graduate [school], you know.

KP: Medical school.

SS: Into medical or dental school, and I don't know, and then, one day, ... my job was to wash about five or six hundred test tubes, and I decided ... that wasn't for me.

KP: You mentioned that your favorite professor was Casper Mannis.

SS: ... He was a very nice [man]. I liked him. He was a very nice guy, and I was a ... biological science major, okay, and this was a diversion for me, okay, English. ... Senior year, I took all the liberal arts courses, psychology, philosophy, and stuff, and ... he just appealed to me. ... He made me think a little bit and he made me read a lot. We just got along very well. We had a lot of good professors, you know. He happened to be the one that ... came to mind at that particular time. He was the one I talked to a lot, let's put it that way.

KP: Did you find, as a science major, that you were exceptional in taking all these liberal arts courses?

SS: I never thought about it.

KP: Really?

SS: I never thought about anybody, to tell you the truth. ... I had finished all of my requirements, all my science requirements, ... I guess, by my junior year, and then, my whole senior year, I just had fun. ... I took music, and ... I didn't want to go to dental school after ... that, three years, and my wife took music appreciation. ... I'm trying to think of that guy's name, before Walter, ... the music director. Anyway, ... we really had a great time that senior year. ... At that time, they brought ... the Boston Symphony and the Philadelphia Symphony down at the school and we had all sorts of concerts at the gym, the old gym. ... So, it was fun. It was fun.

KP: So, you liked music quite a bit.

SS: Oh, ... yeah, I liked music. ... Yes, I had a good time that senior year.

KP: Did you play any instruments?

SS: No. The one thing I can't do is play. ... I'm not tone deaf, but, ... you know, they warned me not to get involved in any musical activity whatsoever. My wife is very musical. She's terrific, she really is. ... She writes parodies and puts on shows for our country clubs, but, ... her main [activity] right now, [is] volunteering. She puts on shows at geriatric, ... old age homes, okay, nursing homes, and she uses the residents as her cast. Like that? How'd you like to have a cast that averages eighty-four, eighty-five, eighty-six years of age and you don't know for sure who is coming to the next rehearsal or not? Well, that's true, that's true, and she's terrific. She does a super job with them. ... I'm in the chorus. ... I run the microphones.

KP: It looks like you had a very active freshman year, for a science major.

SS: ... Tennis, yes, I did, and basketball, and I ran cross-country. I had a good time.

KP: Also, you were able to keep up with your studies.

SS: I think I made Dean's List that year. I hope so. I think I did. I've got it someplace. So, no, I was able to do most everything, right, and I also worked.

KP: Where did you work?

SS: You don't recall the Silver Media Diner?

KP: No, that is long gone.

SS: But, you've heard of it?

KP: No, you are not the first to mention it.

SS: Okay, you've heard of it, right opposite the railroad station. I needed a job while going to school, and ... they had just opened, and I walked in, and he said, "Fine." The boss[es], they were two brothers, and they said, "Fine." They gave me a job, one hour at lunch, two hours at night. We worked six days a week for our meals, no tips, ... what, no tips, I was a dishwasher. We peeled a hundred pounds of potatoes every two days, and ... one of my roommates, Herb Bilus, who also went to Rutgers ... at that time, got him a job, so, the two of us were working, and we worked there for four years. So, it was fun. So, I had a lot of things to do.

KP: How many hours did you work?

SS: Three hours a day. ... One hour at lunch and two hours at dinner and we were dishwashers. We learned to be short order cooks. ... As I said before, we peeled potatoes, we ran around, cleared, busboys, all that sort of stuff. Little by little, we became ... pretty good short order cooks. We really did. ... Go ahead, I'm listening to you.

JG: Was the money you earned used to help pay for school?

SS: I didn't earn any money. There was no pay.

JG: Oh, wow.

KP: You just earned your meals.

SS: I earned my meals. You want another funny anecdote? I think it's funny. To me, it was funny. I graduated three weeks before Annice did, and we lived in the fraternity house, Phi Ep house, ... and I didn't start dental school until a couple of weeks later. So, I had nothing to do for two weeks and ... we were pretty friendly. So, I went to my boss ... and I said, "Look, I need a job for three weeks," 'cause I'd worked there for four years and he loved my wife. Oh, I mean, whatever she wanted, she would come down, and eat anything she wanted to, and he would say, "Sy will pay." Well, Sy never got paid, so, you know. ... Anyway, so, he said, "That's fine. Okay, I'll give you a job for three weeks, but, you have to work a regular shift." I said, "Okay." Now, the regular shift, in those days, for a counterman [at a] diner, was from seven to seven, six days a week.

JG: Oh, wow.

SS: ... He offered me twenty-eight dollars a week. ... I said, "George, you can't offer me twenty-eight dollars a week. I'm a college graduate." He says, "I'll give you thirty, but, don't tell the chef, because he's getting thirty-two." Now, those were the days, those were the days, you know. ... Seventy-two hours a week, but, it was fun, because, then, at seven o'clock, I'd meet Annice until eleven, ... when they had the curfew, and that's what we did.

KP: How did you and your wife meet?

SS: ... My wife went to West Virginia her first year, and then, transferred to NJC in her sophomore year. In our sophomore year, this was our second year, this fraternity brother of mine was looking after two freshman at NJC whom he had known from Newark, from (Weequage?) High. They had been friends, and one of his friends was going with this other girl, so, he was keeping an eye on them, and, one day, he said, "Sy, there is a new girl at the Coop I want you to meet," and so, I went over to meet Annice, and she lived in the same house with these friends of hers, and we managed very well, and we've been married for fifty-one years. So, they were betting against us, but, we managed.

KP: When did you know you would get married?

SS: We liked each other from the very beginning, but, ... we had our moments, like every other courtship, right, and it was on and off again, on and off again, and then, we really weren't sure until after I was in dental school, frankly. ... After all, going to college, we were freshman, sophomores, we were sophomores there, at the time. ... You know, we weren't thinking at all about [marriage], maybe we were. ... Well, we got engaged, I guess, ... I can't remember, I guess, in my freshman or sophomore year at dental school, and we married my junior year.

KP: Of dental school?

SS: Of dental school, on a five day pass. That's right.

KP: Do you have any recollections about Dean Metzger?

SS: I sure remember him. [laughter] Who doesn't, whoever went to Rutgers at that time? ... I really never had any direct relations with the Dean.

KP: So, you stayed out of trouble.

SS: Well, ... you know, I was never a bad boy, you know, and there was no real reason for me to talk to him [or] for him to talk to me. ... We knew he was around and [had heard] some of the stories [about] how tough he was, but, ... so far as personally, me, personally, ... we just never had the reason to get together for anything, you know, for anything.

KP: What did you think of having to attend chapel?

SS: I didn't like it. I didn't like it. ... I just didn't think we should have been coerced into going. I wasn't a free thinker at that time, but, I just didn't think it was the right thing to do. Personally, I didn't like it, and I objected to it, and I went because I had to go, and ... we voiced our opposition to it amongst ourselves, and I'm not sure, but, I think that it was our class, or the group after us, that did make a concerted effort to try to change that particular part of the program. I can't recall it, you know, it's a little vague, but, I know I didn't like it, that's for sure.

KP: You were going to school while the war was being fought in Europe. What were the sentiments of students in your fraternity and, also, at the college in general regarding the war?

SS: Well, I'll tell you, I was visiting ... with Annice, with my wife that weekend, and we were listening to the Giants football game on radio, 'cause that's all they had, Jennifer, and then, they broke in with the announcement. Well, we both had to get back to school. This was some time in the middle of the afternoon, during the football game, and, of course, we were all in a panic, and we went back to school, and ... we took the train back, from Newark to Rutgers, and everybody, as you can imagine, were [panicked]. ... We got back to the fraternity house and, I'll tell you, ... I don't think any of us slept at all that night. ... There were all sorts of ... ideas and propositions thrown around. We were all going to go down and enlist and we were all going

away. We were going to do this, ... everybody, but, we were all going to go down and enlist, ... and then, of course, the first thing Monday morning, the school authorities got together [and] said, "Please, calm down. Just give us a day or so," you know, that sort of thing. So, a lot of us did calm down. A lot of the boys went right down, a lot of them, as you know. I don't have to tell you. I'm not telling you anything you don't know. This is a question, but, I'm sure everyone told you the same thing. A lot of them went right down, a lot of them were put off, a lot of them wanted to wait. ... I had already been accepted at Penn and ... I really didn't know what to do. Of course, my parents said, "Just wait." Naturally, you know, they were going to say, "Don't rush into anything," and then, when we all got together, I can't remember whether it was the school or whatever, they said, "Look, you were already accepted to dental school. You're going, period, and don't you do anything else." So, it didn't come from the dental school, but, it came from Rutgers. They said, "You are going. You've been accepted and all those who have been accepted to the graduate schools are going to go, because they need the dentists, the doctors, whatever they needed. So, you're all set and don't you think about anything else."

KP: You were pressured not to enlist.

SS: That is correct, I did, personally, right, I did. I'm trying to think from whence it came. ... Certainly, it was family pressures, that was one of them, maybe the strongest, but, also, from the school, somewhere. I'm trying to think whether we had a meeting ... of the biology group, but, that's what happened, and so, I said, "Well, if I'm going, I'm going. That's all."

KP: Did your brother serve in the military?

SS: No, no, he was older than I and ... he was not ill, but, he did have a [deferment]. My older brother was too old, ... and my next oldest brother was ... about eight years older than I, and he was not physically able to go. He had had a thyroid condition from [since he was] a child, so, he was exempt. He worked for the government. ...

KP: Before going into your ASTP years, I want to ask a few more questions about Rutgers and your view of the campus. Were there any divisions among the student body while you were at Rutgers?

SS: I think that there was a little [division]. There was some differences between the people who lived on campus and the commuters. At that time, we had a lot of people commuting. I think we only had, maybe, 1300 students, all told. Is that about right? Am I right in that? I mean, we knew everybody on campus. You walked down the hall, I mean, you knew everybody, maybe not by name, but, you knew who they were, ... and there was a big commuting [population], about forty percent at that time. Am I right?

KP: I believe so.

SS: Somewhere. Well, it was large, ... and so, they sort of kept to themselves a little bit. They did not enter into all of the activities, you know, at school. We had a lot of intramural activities,

cross-country, basketball, you know, stuff like that, and so, ... if you talk about the divisions, there was that kind of a division. I would think that there was some divisions ... on religious grounds. There were Jewish fraternities, there were non-Jewish fraternities, just like there are Jewish country clubs and non-Jewish country clubs, you know, and they gravitate to one area, ... but, amongst the fraternity groups, we managed pretty well. We managed pretty well. There was no problems so far as, you know, I was concerned or heard about. We never had any disagreements ... amongst the people who lived on campus, either in the dormitories or fraternities. There were no sit-ins, [laughter] you know, there were no demonstrations. ... You know, maybe there weren't that many issues ... that were really gut issues, at that time, that we had to be divisive about. ... So, did that answer your question?

KP: Oh, yes.

JG: Did you ever feel that you were treated differently because of your religion at Rutgers?

SS: Not really, not really, not at Rutgers, no, just that we had to go to chapel, and I didn't like that, but, so far as any overt actions because we were Jewish, no, no.

KP: Do you think that the quota system hurt your chances for getting into medical school?

SS: Oh, there's no question. There's no question. I had very good grades [and] there is no question about it. We all know that. Everybody knew it. Well, it's been changing. ... Those things were very difficult in those days. ... That was very difficult. I wasn't the only one, but, look [at the] problems women had, okay. So, little by little, they're getting better.

KP: Your roommate, who got you into Penn ...

SS: That got me involved in Penn, ... go ahead.

KP: Did he have any impact on your ability to get into dental school?

SS: Oh, no, no, no. He just got me interested in going, but, I certainly didn't have the greatest record of all, but, it certainly wasn't the worst. I sent my application in and my credentials and I was accepted, you know. That was all, but, he didn't have any influence.

KP: A lot of people remember Pearl Harbor. I am having a hard time figuring out what people thought in 1939, 1940, and 1941. I know, from reading the *Targum*, that there was a big debate over the peace time draft in 1940. There were some groups opposed to America's entry into the war. President Clothier and some students favored aid to Britain. Did you and your friends talk about world events?

SS: Absolutely, and most of them agreed with the national policies. Most of them agreed, at that time, [with] Lend Lease, aid to Britain, getting into the war after all. I mean, especially in my fraternity, which, you know, we were Jewish, and all the problems they were having over there.

We were certainly very much involved in it, maybe more than other people, but, I think that most of the people that I ... came in contact with on campus were in favor of getting involved in the war. That was my impression at that time.

KP: This was in 1940 and 1941?

SS: '40 and '41, right, that was my impression at that time, most of them. There were a few who weren't, ... there is no question, and they were vociferous, but, by far and large, the student population was pro-involvement, okay.

KP: You went off to dental school as part of the ASTP.

SS: No, no, no, no, no. I went off as a civilian, right. My first year was [as] a civilian.

KP: As a regular civilian?

SS: Regular civilian, ... right, nothing to do with it.

KP: How tough was dental school, versus college?

SS: I managed. [laughter] What can I tell you? Was it tough? It wasn't that difficult. ... It really wasn't all that difficult. The sciences, I was excused from ... many of the freshman science courses, because I had already had them at Rutgers. I'll tell you, I had all the science courses, embryology and all that histology. So, I was excused from a lot of the science courses at Penn. ... Incidentally, dentistry, ... when I got involved, was really a very interesting, very interesting profession for me, because it did two things. It has two things. It certainly has the academics, which we needed, and then, it has the technical, ... which is kinda fun. When we'd get tired of studying, we'd go to the lab and we'd start to fool around, you know, or make things. That was great. [When] you got tired of that, you go back up and you study. So, it really was a very ... nice profession at that. It really was better than I had ever thought about.

KP: You liked the combination of academics and technical work.

SS: I did.

KP: It sounds like you enjoyed the mechanics of dentistry very much.

SS: Yes, half and half. I thought it was great, right, I thought it was fun, and so, I really didn't have all that much difficulty in ... dental school, either. I managed, you know.

KP: Did your parents pay for your tuition?

SS: The parents paid for my tuition my freshman year, and then, I was in ASTP for another two years, and then, ... we were all discharged, and so, they paid the last year, okay. The last year, I was married, but, they paid the last year.

KP: Your parents?

SS: My parents did, right. My parents did. ...

KP: You went to dental school as a civilian, but, then, the Army took over Penn.

SS: That's correct and we were in the Army. We went to Fort Meade, Maryland, for an indoctrination of five days, okay. That's all we were [trained], then, we came back as private first class. ... I lived in a fraternity house there, too, but, they were all put into houses, fraternity houses. They were taken over by the Army, and we were in uniform, and we got up every morning, and we marched down to the Polestra for lunch, for breakfast. We marched back, and then, we went to class, and we stayed in class, I'm just trying to think now. ... I should remember. I can't remember about lunchtime, but, I know that, [at] dinnertime, we had to march back down again. We'd get back to our, quote, "barracks," you know, fraternity houses, and then, we'd march back down to this Polestra, and we'd march back, and, after dinner, we'd go on about our studies. ... We wore uniforms. I was married in uniform. I could show you my wedding pictures, okay, ... but, aside from that, and, maybe, we had to salute some of the officers, ... I mean, Army officers who were in charge of this group. We had very, very little military exposure, very little. We may have had a few lectures, maybe, on some military subjects, but, I really can't remember. We were going to dental school and that was our prime purpose.

KP: Was the curriculum changed at all?

SS: No.

KP: Was it accelerated?

SS: ... It was accelerated, yes. We finished in three years. We started in June of '42 ... and we finished in ... May or June of '45. The program wasn't changed in any way. We just had no vacations.

KP: Do you go to school continuously?

SS: We just went right through. The program was not changed, so far as I know. ... I guess we had our two weeks Christmas vacation, and, maybe, a week off in the summer and stuff like that, ... but, we kept right on going. ... So, for three years, ... we just kept right on working.

KP: Since a number of ASTP programs were shut down, did you have any concerns that your dental education would be interrupted abruptly and that you would be shipped overseas?

SS: ... Not if I passed.

KP: Were there ever any rumors going around the dental school that ...

SS: We'd be closed? No. If you did not pass, and ... we had several people, if you did not meet the requirements, then, you were drafted into or taken directly into active service. ... We had a few of those people, that is correct, but, so far as most of us are concerned who were going to be dentists, you worked, you passed, and you were a dentist, that's all, you know. ... Every once in a while, some half-baked professor would say, "[If] you guys don't shape up, we're going to ship you out," or something like that, you know, but, it didn't mean a hell of a lot. You only get a couple of professors, present company accepted, but, you do get a few people like that, as you know, right, okay, and especially when they have a bunch of kids, you know.

KP: When the Army took over, did you expect that you would serve as an Army dentist for the duration of the war? Did they give you any firm word on what would happen to you after you finished dental school?

SS: We assumed that, if the war lasted, we would then go right from dental school into service. We assumed that, but, nobody ever said you would definitely do that, okay. It was just an assumption on our part. ...

KP: In fact, you were discharged before the war ended.

SS: We were. ... We were discharged after my junior year, and so, our senior year, we attended as civilians. Okay, now, we graduated ... in June, May or June, I can't remember, of 1945. This was just between V-E Day and V-J Day. ...

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

SS: ... What am I going to do? I'm going to go into the Army, right, or ... some service. The Army wouldn't have us. They were closing down. They were getting rid of dentists. The Navy didn't want us. They were getting rid of dentists. Air Force didn't want us. They were getting rid of dentists. What'd I do? There was a possibility, at that particular time, that we could have been drafted, ... because the draft was still on and we had not served on what they officially called "active duty," okay. So, I went to my draft board.

KP: In Hoboken?

SS: No, this was in Caldwell, because I was married at the time. I was married at the time. This was Essex County, and the president of the draft board happened to be a dentist at that time, you know, so, I said, "What am I going to do? I'm married, I am a dentist, you know, graduated, passed my statement. What am I going to do?" I said, "Nobody wants to take dentists." [He said], "You'll get a residency for a year and forget about it." That's what I did. ... I got a residency, an internship, at Mountainside Hospital in Montclair, and I was there for a year, and,

during that year, we had our first child, [who] was born while I was still an intern. ... Did I tell you what we got in those [internships]? ... I could have told you about my job as a dishwasher.

...

KP: Actually, a number of doctors have talked about internships and how tough they were back then. I mean, you got pretty much nothing.

SS: We got twelve dollars and fifty cents every two weeks.

KP: I think you got more than most. Most simply got room and board.

SS: Well, I got room, board, and laundry, and my wife could come down. I also got the baby free, okay. ... They worked hard in those days, I want to tell you. I'll tell you some stories about being a dentist. It was a very small hospital. ... You want it? You are interested in this stuff? ...

KP: Yes, please.

SS: It was a very small hospital. Well, at that time, it was a small hospital. There were eight, seven medical residents and one chief medical resident. So, there were eight of us, eight and me, a dentist, okay. ... Now, I was supposed to be there. I lived in Caldwell [with] my wife. We were living with my wife's family at that time. ... I was supposed to be on just a regular schedule that the medical residents were. We were on every other day, twenty-four hours. We had a room. We had a house. We slept over there every other weekend. I was on call and the medical residents were on. There were four on every day, and then, four off every night. I mean, they were all working during the day, and then, four [were] on every night, twenty-four hours, and these guys worked. I mean, they worked twenty-four hours a day, whatever came in, and the nights that I was on, I had nothing to do, because nobody, ... or very few people, came in with a toothache. Occasionally, there would be a broken jaw. Then, they would call me to do something like that, and, anyway, I was there a couple of months, and, one day, there was a big accident someplace. There were people all over the place, in every room, and they were bleeding. I'm down in the emergency room. I walked in, there was one guy, ... his leg was cut up, or his arm, I forget what it was. ... So, I got one of the nurses, the student nurses, [and] I said, "Get a suture kit out there and sew this guy up," you know, and she looked at me. She said, "You know how to sew someone up?" "Bring it out." Of course we knew how to sew things up. ... When you have to suture a third molar area, you can do anything, because this is lying right out in front of you. A leg and an arm, it's the easiest thing in the world, let me tell you. It's a hell of a lot easier ... than doing periodontal surgery or third molar surgery. So, I whipped it out, cleaned up, I sewed it up, and ... walked away. Evidently, the story got around, and, pretty soon, the medical residents were calling on me all the [time] to relieve them, because they worked like hell and I had nothing to do at night. ... We had a very good program ... in general anesthesia. ... This was part of my learning process. They actually taught me general anesthesia in an operating room, and I helped them with the surgery, and then, I used to give ward OB anesthetics, and I used to deliver a couple of babies, once in a while. ... Now, the ambulance, we had our own ambulance, at the time, and we ... had our own ambulance driver. ... I don't know what they have

now, the first aid squads, and they got so busy, sometimes, that they really didn't have anyone to send out on the ambulance. So, we all wore white jackets, you know, white. We had these starched collars at that time and white jackets. I put a stethoscope in my pocket and I'm a doctor. The ambulance driver knew just what to do. He just said, "Doc, just stand around and watch." So, we walk out [to] this accident or whatever, the guy has a broken leg or whatever it was, and the ambulance driver would fit a temporary cast on. I said, "Yeah, that's fine, Joe, that's fine." Then, we'd get back in the [ambulance]. ... Even got involved in a murder, one time, but, that's another story. You don't want to hear about that one.

KP: Did you pick up the corpse?

SS: Yes. ... The ambulance was called. There was a shooting. An estranged husband had shot the mother-in-law, and the wife, and the kids, and ... the wife was still alive. So, we went out and got her. ... When we walked in, it's just like you see in the movies, covered over ... with people and police all around, ... and so, we walked in, they got her on the stretcher [to] bring her back home, and I rode in the ambulance. They operated on her. It was fun. I did everything as a dental intern. As a dental intern, I think I did more medicine [at] that time than dentistry, but, it was fun.

KP: If you had not been drafted, do you think you still would have done an internship?

SS: Oh, yes, yes, I thought that would have been a good idea, yes.

KP: You were going to do that anyway.

SS: I thought that would be a very good idea, yes. Aside from being advised to do so, I think it was a great learning experience. I walked out of there, after a year, a lot more confident. ... I was the only dentist there. We had a lot of people on staff that would come in, and were supposed to teach us, and show us what to do, but, for the most part, I was left alone, and it was a very good experience, a very good learning experience, and then, when I had any problems, I would call on these men in the staff who were qualified in their specialties, and they would show me what to do and how to do it. I really learned a lot. It was a great. ... You want to talk about luck, everything was lucky for me. You don't know how lucky I've been. You have no idea how lucky I am. One of the men on the staff lived in Caldwell, was a dentist in Caldwell, and he was an older [man], not old, but, older, and, when I opened my office, he was my godfather. He just wouldn't take any emergencies, especially over weekends. "No, no, I can't take any more." He was a very busy dentist. [He'd say], "Go to see Silberberg. Go to see Silberberg."

KP: In other words, you had a dentist funneling a lot of work to you.

SS: Oh, sure, yeah. ... I mean, through the hospital, everything worked out.

KP: That internship proved to have long lasting benefits.

SS: Oh, it was great, all the way around. As you're beginning to realize, I had a good time in high school, I had a good time in dental school, I had a good time at Rutgers, I had a good time at the internship. ... I've got a great marriage. What am I going to do?

KP: What was the situation like when you established your office? Setting up a dental office is very expensive, I imagine.

SS: ... Setting up a dental office, yes, it was. Yes, it was, and that, through the good graces of my parents and my in-laws, we were able to borrow the money and set up the office, ... could not have done it without them. I had no money. My wife had no money. Where were we going to get the money from, go to a bank? Sure, part of it came from the bank, and, ... after we get through this, I'll tell you how we took out one mortgage to get another mortgage, okay, but, that was what we did in those days, but, it was a lot easier, I think, in getting started in those days than it is today, a lot easier. ... You put your shingle out and you wait. There was no ... such thing as dental insurance in those days. There were no such things as clinics in those days. If you ... wanted to go to the dentist, you went to the dentist, period, a dentist, private dentist. Somewhere along the line, ... wherever it was, I got a lot of patients from Mountainside, not only through this physician, but, I worked there part time, even after ... finishing the residency, and I just met a lot of people, ... the physicians, the doctors, the nurses, ... very nice, very nice.

KP: One of the things that I have often heard from doctors is that you were expected to do a lot of pro-bono work. Was this the same in dentistry?

SS: So far as pro-bono?

KP: Yes.

SS: All right, no. ... Because I was involved with Mountainside, I became part of the attending staff, and I did go, and I worked in the clinic, pro-bono, one or two days a month, okay. That was the extent of my free dentistry. So far as my making it a living, the first year or two, I told you how lucky I was. My wife had lived in town for a long time, I had been coming up here for years, and a lot of people knew us, and, [with] the hospital acquaintances, ... I started off very nicely and very easily. I didn't make a lot of money, but, it was enough to manage and cover expenses, right, and ... begin to pay off some ... of our debts.

KP: Did you find that you were better off than some of your classmates at dental school?

SS: ... I think that all of us managed moderately well, so far as I can [tell], you know. ...

KP: It sounds like you had a very good situation.

SS: Yes. Well, I had a peculiarly good situation, but, ... most of my fraternity brothers, that I'm most acquainted with, they managed. They managed pretty well. You know, it took some a little

longer than others, but, in those days, if you had perseverance, and a little bit of luck, and a little bit of skill, you managed to build up a practice. Almost everyone did, in those days.

KP: You worked in the clinic in the hospital. Was that an expectation among dentists?

SS: No, very few. Oh, no, no, not like a physician, ... very, very few, just a handful of people who had been involved in Mountainside. This was a small community and they were pretty close. Let me tell you, they didn't keep the outsiders out, but, once you were involved in the Mountainside family, it was an entirely different situation. ... You belonged, okay. There's a status type thing.

KP: So, if, for example, you had interned at a Newark hospital, you might not have had the same opportunities.

SS: That is correct, but, it could have been [possible] another way. If I had really wanted to, and had the contacts at the hospital, 'cause you need sponsorship by the medical board, and the medical professors, and dental professors, I ... probably could have done it, yes, if I had wanted to, but, it was easier this way. Oh, we had people from outside. Oh, they didn't keep everyone out. Oh, no. ...

KP: However, it did help that you had been there.

SS: Oh, sure, no, when a fellow come into town, ... or he lived and went to school somewhere else, and he knew someone, said, "I want to do this," he got on, you know. It wasn't that closed a proposition.

KP: Did you have any regrets after the war that you had not gone overseas or served as an Army dentist?

SS: No, no, the answer is no. I was glad not to have gone overseas. Why kid you, you know? I just really was very happy to be home. I had a wife and we had a baby right away. ... In no way was I sorry that I [never] saw some of the terrible things that had happened. I had enough stories and friends coming back. ... My best friend is Herbert Bilus, who I speak about. [He] was ... supposed to be my best man. We were married June 4th, 1944. What was that day? That was two days before Normandy, right, okay. He was the captain of an LCI in Britain at that time. ... No, I wasn't upset. I was glad to be home.

KP: Did you see any changes in any of your friends, in terms of what the war did to them, for better or for worse?

SS: Not my close friends, no, not my close friends.

KP: What about your classmates?

SS: Oh, I couldn't deal with that. I don't deal with that. You know, once we graduated, we separated. We didn't get together all that often, you know, [with] people in the class, just my fraternity brothers, and especially the close, close fraternity brothers, and they acted the same before as they did after. They had no change at all.

KP: Things went very well for you during World War II. What about Korea?

SS: ... Now, you want a story? Listen to this one. You ready, okay? We lived in an apartment, or we ... had a one family house in Caldwell, and we had the office on the first floor, and we lived on the second floor. ... You want the whole story?

KP: Yes, please.

SS: Okay. In April of 1950, I know these dates very well, ... my wife was pregnant with what was going to be our third child and we started to build a house about a mile or so away from the office, okay, our first, big house. ... We had two children living in this little apartment upstairs. ... The first two were about a year-and-a-half apart. We had three children in about four-and-a-half years, and so, we started to build this house, up further on (Smolder?) Avenue. ... Korea broke out in June of 1950. Am I right? Our third child was born July 3, 1950. My wife's parents had a summer home on a lake in Upstate New York. The third week in August, the second or third week in August, I can't recall which, when our youngest was about six weeks old, yeah, six weeks old, we went up there for our week's vacation. That's all we could take, as well as I was doing. We took one week's vacation with the kids and the parents. ... One of my tasks up there was to go up to the little village and bring back the papers every day.

KP: You had no radio?

SS: Oh, we had radios up there. Oh, yeah, we had radios up there, but, my job was to go and get the paper, you know. ... This one day, I did, and I came back, and I sat on the hammock out in the backyard, reading the *New York Times*, because my in-laws and my wife were fussing with the three little kids and playing with them. After all, ... you know, this was their fun. ... I'm reading the *New York Times*, and on the front page of the *New York Times*, and I remember, the column on the lower right-hand column, it was a two-column spread, right down here, the headline says, "Congressional Committee Passes Doctor/Dentist Draft." I read the article and it said, "Sy Silberberg, We Want You," everything that was in there, all the ASTP bit about not service and not anything else. ... Now, I'd been in practice four-and-a-half years at that time. I opened my office in the Spring of '46, right after my year. I graduated [in] '45 ... [from my] residency, in the Spring of '46, and, now, I'm in practice four years, plus, okay. I read this article, and I call my wife out, and I said, "Read the article," and she reads it, and she says, "What are you going to do? ... What are we going to do?" She said, "What are we going to do?" I said, "Well, I think I'd better enlist," just like that, and she looks at me, and she said, "I think you should." Now, we called her parents, and we showed them the article, and they said, "What are you going to do?" [I said], "We think we ought to enlist." Well, all hell broke loose. "You dumb son of a gun you," this is my father-in-law. "What's the matter with you? You're crazy.

You're out of your mind. You've got three children. They are never going to take you. They are never going to draft you," da-ta-da, and he carries on, "They'll never take you." I said, "Dad, they are going to take me if I don't enlist." Now, this was in August, the third week in August, the second week in August. We go back home, ... I'm still working at the hospital, you know, a few days [later], and I ... have a couple of physician friends who happened to be in the same position we were, [and] we were having lunch together. [They said], "What are you going to do?" I said, "I'm going to enlist. What are you going to do?" They're going to enlist, not one of them, ... "We better." So, we all talked about it, the three of us, that we were going to enlist. I tell my parents, "I'm going to enlist." They think I'm nuts. Annice is the only one. She understood this right from the very, very beginning, that we had to go in. If we didn't, we were going to be drafted. The day after Labor Day, now, this is the timetable, 'cause, how do I know it? the day after Labor Day, I went down to the Air Force recruiting [station] and why did I pick the Air Force? 'cause it's the safest damn place for a dentist. How does that sound? ... We talked about this. You know, Jennifer, ... I had three children. We're going off to somewhere and where the hell [were] we going to go? I certainly didn't want to get into the Army, because I didn't want to be in a battalion aid station in Korea, right, and I didn't want to be in the Navy, because who knows where I am going to be, separated off on a ship, attached to the Marines? Once again, the safest place for a dentist in service is the Air Force, because ... the only hospitals they have, or clinics they have, are in an Air Force base. It's pretty far from active service, believe me. So, I enlisted in the Air Force. Everybody in town, every one of my friends, thought we had gone out of our cotton-picking minds. They absolutely could [not believe it] and I had half of my fraternity brothers, all of my friends, you know, who graduated with me [and] were in the same position, other people called me up, wrote me, "Sy, what are you doing?" They said, ... "They'll never take you. They'll never, never, never, never, never, never, never, never." The upshot of it all was that I was commissioned as a captain, ... because of my civilian experience, and I went to Texas, and I stayed there for two years, and I had my family with me, and I practiced dentistry. ... All the people who did not enlist in something were all drafted, and ninety percent of them were involved in the Army, and most of them went to Korea. How does that sound, another lucky story for you, or, maybe, it was smart? I don't know.

KP: You foresaw that you were all going to get called up.

SS: Absolutely. ... Annice said the same [thing]. She is ... brighter than I am. ... She just [knew] there was no way we were going to get out of it and people were drafted with three children, with four children, with big practices, with small practices. It made no difference. They were taking them at that particular time. So, once again, we were very fortunate. We were smart enough to enlist ... in the Air Force. Shepherd Air Force Base is in Wichita Falls, Texas, and that's not the greatest place at all to be, let me tell you, but, after a couple of months, my family was able to come down with me, and we stayed there for two years, and then, ... we just closed [the office]. Well, I had somebody take care of the office, supposedly, ... you know, part-time, for emergencies, to keep the office going, and, after a while, we just shut it down, and we sent letters out to everybody, "I'm in the service," and everybody was very, ... what's the word?

KP: Understanding.

SS: Supportive, you know, ... and then, several months before we were discharged, ... I had my discharge date, by the way, the day I went in. Well, you know, they said, "You are going in such-and-such active duty and you are going to be out [on] such-and-such a date," active duty, two years, done. One other thing about that, because we enlisted, we were one of the very early groups to come down to this particular area, and there must have been, maybe, fifteen, between fifteen and twenty, dentists, who, evidently, had done the same thing I did, from all over the country, you know, ... and we all met down there sometime ... before New Year's Eve ... that year, and I went in December 15th. I had to go to Texas just before, and that group became the permanent cadre, whatever they call it, at that base, and dentists would be sent in there for two or three months, and then, they'd be sent overseas. Dentists would come in there for three, or four, [or] five months, they'd be sent overseas, and this group just stayed. We couldn't even go anywhere. They wouldn't let us go, ... and then, [as] I say, ... we knew our discharge date, and so, my wife and the kids went back home. We ... still had the house, mind you. That was a little bit of a hardship, building the house. ...

KP: Did you live on base?

SS: Oh, no, no, no. ... I lived on base for a couple of months, until we got a house and my family came down, and then, when they left, I went back [to] living [there], but, we lived in a house. ... There was no, or very, very few, quarters on the base. We lived off the base. Anyway, she went back home, and we sent out letters to all of my former patients saying I would be home on such-and-such a time, and, "If you want to come in, call this number," and my wife made the appointments, and we had everything all set up for us, and we went back to work.

KP: What was Texas like at this time?

SS: Oh, Texas, oh, that was the end of the Earth. Oh, God, when people [heard], "You're going to Texas?" "Where the hell is Texas? "Where's Wichita Falls?" ... I'll tell you, ... I left La Guardia late. It must have been eleven, twelve o' clock, I don't know, and we had to make a change in Wichita Falls, first, not in [Wichita Falls], in Dallas, for a small plane to get us to Wichita Falls. When we got up then, during the day, and we got up on top, and I see this red dirt nothing, and I said, "How in the hell could this be the beautiful Texas they tell us about?" It was awful. [laughter] ... Wichita Falls is in the Panhandle, up north. ... We were forty miles from the Oklahoma border and it was a desolate part of the country. So, it was foreign, all right. It was a big difference up there, a big difference.

KP: Living off base, you must have had some contact with the community.

SS: Oh, yes, but, very little, relatively very little. ... We did not mix too much. ... I would say very little. We did attend high holiday services ... in the community, you know, once or twice. We were permitted to belong to one of the country clubs for a short period of time, but, we didn't associate with any of the country club members. We just were allowed there to play for a while ... and our contact in town, ... with townspeople, was very limited, very limited. All of our

associations ... and friends, ... mostly, were all military, physicians, dentists, primarily. ... The only thing we didn't know about that town, it was really quite restricted, so far as blacks were concerned, in those days. ... We had a couple of very, very fine black dental officers, really nice, lovely families, lovely wives, and, one evening, we decided, maybe three or four couples, ... we would get some barbecue, you know. They wouldn't serve them. We just picked up and left, that's all.

KP: You thought nothing of going out as a group.

SS: ... We would socialize with them, on base, all the time, over our house or something. We had no problems so far as [racism]. ...

KP: Did you go to the officers' club?

SS: Oh, yeah, that was no problem, and ... not every place in town was like that, but, there were many. Annice will tell you stories about some of the officers' wives get-togethers, where they were going to have a box lunch or, ... what do you call those? covered dish suppers or something like that. ... Some major or colonel's wife [said], "I don't think we ought to have that." "Why," you know, "why?" "Well, suppose we get So-and-So's box lunch," meaning one of the black women. Well, you laugh, I laugh, you laugh. We were upset, in those days, 'cause this was a [problem]. ... [My wife] worked for a while for the Army's, I forget the term. ... By the way, she came to Philadelphia, she started working in Philadelphia the same day I started dental school, but, ... we didn't live together. Jennifer, we didn't do it in those days. Anyway, she worked on the very first ballistic missiles in Aberdeen Proving Grounds and ... she'll tell you stories about that. Anyway, so, ... that's Texas. What else can I tell you about Texas?

KP: Were you glad to get out of Texas in 1952?

SS: We were glad to get out. Oh, we had all kinds. You want to listen to stories? I'll tell you, also, we got to be very friendly with several people, physicians, from Oklahoma and somewhere. I can't remember the exact details, but, I know that ... I was offered a position as a dentist in a town, or a county, I guess it was, ... in Oklahoma, and they would guarantee me a certain amount of money. I mean, a guaranteed salary, plus, whatever else I could [earn], ... because they needed a dentist. There was no dentist for forty miles here, or fifty miles there, or fifty miles here, and there was just no dentist, and they wanted a dentist, and these friends of mine wanted me to come and stay with them, and we entertained that possibility for about half an hour. [laughter] My wife said, "Not on your life." I could just imagine what our families would say. ...

KP: What did you think of the Air Force? You had been in the ASTP, but, your contact had been pretty minimal, just some marching.

SS: Okay. I can't even tell you about that, because I was a dentist.

KP: Do you think that the Air Force affected the way you practiced dentistry?

SS: Oh, what, you mean you want me to tell you ... [about] my experiences as a dentist in the Air Force?

KP: Yes. Did you feel as if you were just wearing the uniform and doing what you would normally do?

SS: That's correct. That's great, except, ... there were exceptions. For example, I was working, ... at the very beginning, in the diagnosis department, where these people would first come in and be examined, the examination department, I don't know, okay. ... My superior officer was a little red-headed major called, Major Potts, whom we happened to get, ... who was evidently ... not very well-liked by most of the people. He was a pain in the neck, but, we got along pretty well. A young recruit comes in, he must have been nineteen, twenty, I don't know, and he has a very, very bad cavity in one of his teeth. So, I looked at him ... and he had most of his teeth. I said, "You know, we're going to save this tooth. We're going to send you upstairs. We're going to do a root canal on it." We had a couple of fellows ... who did root canals ... in those days and they were pretty good. I said, "We're going to do a root canal." [He said], "Oh, no, extract, take that tooth out." I said, "No, no, we're not going to do that. ... This kid is eighteen, nineteen years old. He's got all of his teeth. We're not going to take that tooth out. We're going to fix it." He looks at me ... and he says, "Captain," you know, he's a major, ... he's from the South somewhere, "I'm ordering you. Take that tooth out." I said, "Major, I'm going to send this kid upstairs and get that tooth fixed." [laughter] He says, "Suppose he goes off to war or somewhere and he has a toothache when he's right in the middle?" and I said, "He's not going to get a toothache." I said, "We're going to fix him up. He's going to be fine." ... He says, "Okay, it's your responsibility." I thought we got along very well after that, when I wouldn't let him do anything, okay. So, we got along very well ... when we were upstairs and we were working. We worked on both civilians [and soldiers] and I've got to admit, I must admit, that I was, generally, a pretty fair dentist and pretty honest. I was in my own practice, conscientious, and I worked, and we got upstairs, and we're working. I'm right in the middle of doing something, not really ... very sophisticated treatment, but, something, you know, and someone would walk in with a big bushel of doughnuts and say, "How 'bout some doughnuts, fellows?" ... Well, I'd just put the instruments down, and walked off, and got some doughnuts. I never did that in my office. I never even thought of it, and I never thought that I would get involved, but, everyone else did, you know, so, that was a little change. Okay, I didn't like that, but, I did it. One more anecdote and I'm done. We had a rumor. We were getting a lot of people on the base, I mean, all kinds of people. ... Primarily, we were a pilot school ... and we were a mechanic school. We were getting people shipped in [from] all over. So, the rumor started that ... we needed a third dental clinic. We had two. The rumor started, "We were going to get a third dental clinic," and we started getting dentists in before the clinic was even started. Never even saw the clinic. We started getting dentists in until we must have more than doubled the number of dentists on the staff. So, we had dentists coming out of our ears. The Colonel ... calls me in. He says, "Captain, you have to give up your office, your chair. You've got to give up your office, and we're going to have Lieutenant So-and-So go in, ... and take over for you, and do all this work." I said, "Well, what am I going to do?" ... He said, "Well, you're going to be an officer in charge of," whatever the

hell it was, I don't know. I says, "What does that mean?" He says, "Oh, well, you're the officer in charge of," whatever. ... I said, "You mean I'm not going to do anything?" He says, "No, you don't do any work at all. You're going to keep records." ... Now, this is the truth. ... I said, "You're kidding." He says, "No. ... We have so many dentists around, and you're here, and you're the boss, and you're the officer, and you're in charge of this clinic, and that's it." Now, let me tell you, for almost six months, I did no dentistry at all. I couldn't. I was ordered not to pick up a mirror. I was the best read dentist on the base. I had to be there eight o'clock every morning. I had these guys that I was in charge of. I said, "What are you doing here?" "Yeah, we're working." They're all working, I'm sitting, I've got nothing to do, absolutely nothing to do, ... 'cause we were waiting for this new dental clinic. The third dental clinic was never built, but, ... we still had all these people. We started to ship out some of them, little by little. We started to ship them out, ... but, there were still so many around. Finally, ... I guess I was about three months now before I was going to be discharged and go back to work. I go to the Colonel [and] I says, "Colonel, I'm getting out on such-and-such a date. ... I'm going back to work. I've got to get in shape, you know? I've got to start doing some dentistry. I've got to get back into the feel of it," and he thinks quite a while. He thought about it, you know. I pleaded with him, "I want to go to work." He says, "Okay, you can work Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings." [laughter] So, that's what I did.

KP: You would get in and, basically, read all day. What would you read?

SS: I had to be there. Read? Every detective story they had, every historical novel they had, every biography they had, every newspaper they had, ... and I had to be there. You know, you're in the service, you don't do anything, but, you're there. ... Wander around. It was fun. It was fun, but, I got over it. ... At least I could work for a while, 'cause, when I was going back home, ... one of the nicest things that ever happened to me, one of the nicest things that could possibly happen to any practitioner, ... my wife went home, and we sent letters out to [my patients], and, when I got back home, ... I don't think there was an opening for the first month or two. I mean, every patient, ... people had come in and I said, "Well, did your have your teeth [checked]?" ... Ninety percent of them had not gone to another dentist. They said, "No, they'd wait 'til I got back."

KP: That must have been wonderful, especially since you had some concerns, initially, that your patients would disappear.

SS: We sure did. Everybody has to get worried, you know. What's going to happen to all these people? "Oh, no, we're going to wait for you 'til you came back home." I want to tell you, you don't think that was a nice feeling? It was fun. Okay, what else? Where do we go from here?

KP: It sounds like your practice, since then, has run fairly smoothly. Did you ever take on a partner?

SS: I would prefer, ... you said, "Do I want to keep anything separate?" ...

KP: That is fine.

SS: No, no, all right, if you really want the history, I'll give you [it]. I took on a partner in 1960. I had been back home, and then, we took in another partner in 1970, and we had a very big practice, and ... we had two other dentists working for us. ... At that time, we had, ... I think, the largest private group, at least in this part of the country, and we did everything. We did ... pretty well. This was long before insurance was coming in, ... and clinics, and all that stuff, and one thing led to another, and, in 1982, we separated, and they went off by [themselves]. At that time, even though ... we had a big practice and three people, it evolved into that each dentist had their own following. Each dentist had their own following. We could not shift the [patient load]. ... You wouldn't come in to see me one day, and then, this guy the next day, and that guy the next day. That didn't happen. You came in to see Dr. Silberberg, we treated you. You came in to see Dr. Jones, you [were] treated [by] Dr. Jones, okay. We had some families, I would treat the mother, and they would treat the children, and they would treat the grandfather, you know, but, they're all in the family, okay. So, in 1982, we separated, and they went off and practiced by themselves, the two of them, and I stayed in the original office, and I took in another associate, and I had several associates, back and forth, ... for several years, and then, I finally sold this practice, the clinic practice. Let's see, what year? It will be four years in November. It will be four years in November, but, in 1982, after we separated, ... I became quite concerned ... about where I was going to go and end up as a dentist, 'cause you cannot be in practice forever, at least I couldn't. I was there forty-five years, you know, and I didn't know what I was going to do with my time, and, somewhere, I got involved in ... becoming a consultant at a nursing home through one of my wife's acquaintance's husband, who was the medical director, okay, and I could see the possibilities of this, and so, I sent out a few letters to the local nursing homes. Then, I would get a call here, and a call there, and, slowly, ... I would do this on my day off, part-time, and then, it got to the point where it got pretty large, and I hired a person to work with me, to go out and do the clinical work, and then, it got a little larger. I got another home, [and] another one, and, now, this little avocation has become a big-time business. ...

-----END SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE-----

KP: This continues an interview with Dr. Seymour Silberberg on August 31, 1995, with Kurt Piehler and ...

JG: Jennifer Griggas.

KP: You had some thoughts about World War II.

SS: ... Like most of my contemporaries, in those days, we weren't sure we were in favor of the war, but, we weren't sure we were against it, either. I guess, like many of us, we assumed that the powers that were in Washington at that time knew what they were doing. Since then, evidently, we were maybe proved not to have been correct, but, in those days, ... we were fed enough propaganda to believe what was going on, ... so, we really didn't ... join any protests

against it, let's put it that way. As liberal as we were in our social outlook, we were conservative in many respects, okay.

KP: You have lived in Caldwell since World War II.

SS: Oh, yeah. Oh, sure, before. ...

KP: Your wife has lived here even longer.

SS: Long before that, almost the Civil War, no, not quite. [laughter]

KP: What changes have you seen in the community, both good and bad?

SS: When we first came up here, the population was certainly much smaller and one of the reasons that I became a councilman was my desire to stop growth, which I found could not be done. ... People had land, they wanted to develop it, and they developed it. I think, for a long, long time, Caldwell stayed a very stable, solid, middle to upper-middle class community where ... almost everyone in the area were well-established in their own businesses or in large corporations like Public Service, or New Jersey Bell, or one of the banks, you know. They were all middle to ... upper-middle management, you know, some very high. Essex Fells is a very, very wealthy community, as you know. ... There was, at one time, one of the wealthiest communities in the country. In the last ten, twelve years, ... the demographics have changed. Okay, now, when you talk about the Caldwells, we have Caldwell, West Caldwell, North Caldwell, and Fairfield, which was originally called Caldwell Township. Did you know that?

KP: No.

SS: Okay. So, there were four Caldwells at that time, and Roseland was right next door, and each little community developed, well, Caldwell and West Caldwell were pretty close together. ... Anyway, the demographics have changed, and we have been having an influx of people from what were ... blue collar communities like Belleville and Nutley, and, like, they are migrating out into, quote, the "suburbs," and North Caldwell, which is part of the Caldwells, has developed into a very ... wealthy community of fairly large homes, some very large homes, and ... that's all residential. ... West Caldwell has developed ... a pretty fair amount of light industry ... and technical companies, things like that. So, we've got a pretty good mix here, but, ... the demographics have changed. A lot of the people here moved out to Bernardsville, Far Hills, you know. I don't have to tell you. ... You people know more about the demographics of New Jersey than I do, you know. So, this is what is happening in Caldwell. What has happened so far as I am concerned, personally, nothing, very little.

KP: You are still happy living in Caldwell.

SS: ... Well, Annice has friends from grammar school here, you know, and we go back a long time. Many of our friends have moved, there's no question. We had a great, great, great bunch

as we were growing up, through our thirties and forties. I'm talking about age, you know, not years, and we had block parties, and carrying on, and all sorts of stuff, and they've all moved out. They died or moved and we're doing it. We're spending more time in Florida. ... If it weren't for our country club, and, even there, we have many people of our age who, ... you know, have moved out. [They] moved to Florida, permanently. We are not going to move to Florida permanently, as far as I know, not for a long time, but, we spend a lot of time there. My wife doesn't like the cold weather, ... you know, and that's where she goes.

KP: One question I forgot to ask earlier, before going to Texas, had you traveled much while you were growing up?

SS: The answer is no. The answer is no.

KP: Before you went to college, what was the farthest you had traveled?

SS: Pennsylvania, Ohio, you know, and up to New England, maybe, and, south, Washington, but, certainly, within a very limited area. ... In the thirties and early forties, you know, you're talking about no planes. You're talking about, like, propeller planes. ... I know my wife went to the (Winfried?), Pennsylvania, (LaToya?), and so, her father took her out. She went out by plane and this was a great, big thing, to fly from here to Pittsburgh for I don't know how many hours, you know, strapped and with a nurse on board. So, there were very little opportunities. There was no travel. Since we've been married, it's a different story, but, before then, before Texas, Texas was a big trip.

KP: You were not going abroad, but, you were traveling far.

SS: ... Oh, we knew where Texas was, you know, ... but, it was long, long, long, ... sure. It was an experience. ... Kurt, [are] you getting the idea that ... I've had good times in almost everything? Everything has come out right so far, thank goodness. Thank goodness, boy, I'll tell you, boy, I'm lucky. We've been lucky physically, except, my wife, ... the dumbest thing happened to her. We were playing golf, nine weeks ago tomorrow, and one of her friends we were playing with ran into her with a golf cart and crushed her between the two golf carts.

JG: Oh, my God.

SS: She had a broken leg. [It] was smashed. She's doing fine, but, it was a long, tough summer, I'll tell you right now, but, ... that's neither here nor there. Okay, what else do we have?

KP: Is there anything we forgot to ask?

SS: What else do you want to know? What else do you want to know? The kids are all well. Cald's doing very, very well. [I've] got eight grandchildren. They are all brilliant and beautiful.

KP: When you were in college, did you think it would all turn out this well?

SS: Oh, God, hell, who thought of that in college? We lived from one day to the next. We lived from one party to the next. How did we know? We never planned our life that way. Could you? Are you planning your life that way, Jennifer? [laughter]

JG: I am trying not to. [laughter] Have you ever had the opportunity to go back to Austria?

SS: No, no, we did not. We've traveled fairly extensively through Europe, but, ... I would never go to Germany and I wouldn't go ... to Russia or any of the [Eastern European] countries. I wouldn't go to Russia, Poland. I just didn't want to. ... We [went] all through Western Europe. Austria, that's a different story, but, ... I just did not feel that I wanted to go to any place like Russia, and I just didn't feel that I wanted to go to Germany, but, every place else, from Greece on, and the whole southern tier, and all of that stuff.

KP: Did your family ever find out what happened to their family in Austria-Hungary?

SS: No, no, no. We know that ... they did not make any more contact with us. That's all I know. After the war, there was no contact with them at all. So, we have no idea what happened to them, none. ...

KP: I think that was a great interview.

JG: Thank you very much.

SS: Did I help you at all?

JG: Definitely.

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

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 3/19/00
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 3/20/00
Reviewed by Seymour Silberberg 4/00