

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH TILLY SPETGANG

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins the second session with Tilly Spetgang on February 20th, 2012 in Voorhees, New Jersey with Shaun Illingworth. Thank you very much for having me and thank you for lunch. Last time we left off, you spoke about how you first got involved with the photo essays for the *Bulletin* magazine. Tell me how your career there progressed from that point.

Tilly Spetgang: It was wonderful. I had worked for many newspapers in New Jersey. This was the biggest, and it was a big daily, and with the Sunday magazine. ... I became associate editor under Jack Wilson, the editor, and he was a former sports editor and used to men only. So, he and I working together was interesting, you know. He kept throwing me curves for stories and I loved it. It was very challenging. You don't want to hear about all the wonderful stories?

SI: I do want to get into those. You said you worked on the photo essays for a little while freelancing before you joined the staff. Can you put a timeline to that?

TS: I would say about three years we did photo essays, Francis and I. I told you how I got my job at the *Bulletin*. ... Rose DeWolf came.

SI: Yes.

TS: ... Then she called me when I was, on a rainy Thursday, I was sick in bed with the flu. I told you all that.

SI: Yes, the photo of the old man.

TS: No, beyond that, how I got my job. Anyway, I got a call from Rose DeWolf from the *Bulletin*, she said, "Jack Wilson is going on as editor of a new magazine, he's looking for a right hand man, and I told him about you. He wants to see you today." I was in bed with the flu so, on a rainy winter day. I said, "Okay," got up, got dressed, went into Philly, had a wonderful interview with Jack, and then I threw him a curve and I said, "Jack, if I get this job, I'm sorry, I can only work part-time. I have a teenager at home, I don't want her coming home to an empty house." He said, "Well, I'm sorry too because I would have loved to hire you, but I must have a full-time person here." I said, "Okay." As I was walking to the door, I had my hand on the knob and I said to him, "Jack, you're making a very big mistake," and he said, "Why?" I said, "Because what I can do in part-time, would take someone else much more time to cover," and I walked out, went home, went back to bed. The phone rang an hour later. It was Jack Wilson. He said, "Can you report to work on Monday?" I said, "I certainly can," and when I came in on Monday, I didn't know what happened in that hour for him to change his mind. I found out three years later that he had gone out into the city room, and he went to all the men who worked the Jersey beat, and he said, "Do you know Tilly Spetgang," and they all said, "Hire her." So that's how I got the job, and when I came in on Monday, he gave me a big stack of cut lines. You know what cut lines are--the words that go under pictures. Very boring writing, and he said, "Start on those," and about two hours later, I handed the big stack back to him, and he read some of them, and then he said to me, "Your probation time is up, welcome aboard," and that's how I

went on the *Bulletin*. Had a blast, had a blast. Came up with most ninety-five percent of my own stories, you know. I went to nudist colony in Pennsylvania, Suplees, and that was an experience. Oh, that wasn't for the *Bulletin*. They wouldn't have done that--they're too conservative. I did that for the *New York Daily News*.

SI: What year did you join the *Bulletin* approximately?

TS: Don't know, don't remember. ... Let me figure it out. Is it important that you have a year?

SI: Well, I just wanted a rough idea.

TS: A long time ago, a long time ago. [laughter]

SI: Your oldest daughter was a teenager then?

TS: My oldest daughter was a teenager then, yes, and she's now sixty-one. So, how many years ago is that? She was about sixteen.

SI: So maybe the early 1960s?

TS: Yes.

SI: Early to mid-sixties?

TS: Yes.

SI: She was born right after the war?

TS: She was born in '50, yes.

SI: She was born in '50. Okay, so '66 it would be.

TS: Jack Wilson, my editor, was very Catholic, and he came to me kind of bewildered and said, "I got a telephone call from Cardinal Krol," who was a very big theologian in Philly, "and he asked that you, particularly, go and spend three days in a cloistered convent near the art museum in Philly. ... I told him I don't think it's a good idea, she's Jewish," and Cardinal Krol said, "I took for granted she was Jewish from the way she writes about family and food." So, anyway, I did, I went, and it was a wonderful story that went into the *Catholic Digest* all around the world and so forth. ... I went to the Army for three days in the barracks at Fort Dix, and marched and cleaned my boots, and they stole, one of the girls stole my gold tooth that fell out, which I wrapped and put in my pocketbook, and the next morning it was gone. So, when I put an expense sheet into the *Bulletin*, I wrote 250 dollars for a gold tooth replacement, and they paid it without an argument. The stories were endless and wonderful and challenging, and I loved every

minute at the *Bulletin*, and was so sorry to see it fold, so sorry. All of us were. Good paper; much better than the *Inquirer*.

SI: You said earlier it was a conservative paper.

TS: Yes.

SI: In what ways would that come out?

TS: Well, just as the *Inquirer* is a conservative newspaper. They wouldn't write about going to a nudist colony. I got that assignment. Did I tell you about my freelancing when my girls were small?

SI: Yes.

TS: Okay. So, I worked for the *Herald Tribune*, the *New York Daily News*, and I covered all of New Jersey. Every weekend I went on another two features in different parts of Jersey, covered them for those two papers in New York. That's what I did when my kids were small, I freelanced. Wrote at home on the typewriter with a two year old on my lap typing. Can you imagine what the paper looked like with her typing and my typing? It was done. I worked for many papers and magazines and I had a radio program. Did I tell you how that came about?

SI: No, I don't believe so, I don't think it was on the record. I think we were in the other room when you told me.

TS: Want to hear it?

SI: Yes, please.

TS: There was a new hotel opening in Cherry Hill called the Rickshaw Inn. It had a gold leaf roof, and before they opened to the public, they took one weekend with Robert Goulet as our host there, and they opened it to all the press, television, newspapers, magazines and radio and to bring your mate. ... We had a wild, wonderful weekend, lobster, and steak, and a pool, and Robert Goulet singing, and the whole thing. I was standing and talking to some fellow newspaperman, and a stranger, a man, taps me on the shoulder and he said to me, "Would you like to be on the radio?" I said, "With this Bronx accent, you're asking me to be on the radio?" He said, "I like the way you talk, and I take for granted you know how to interview," and he said, "Here's my card, please contact me." So, Irwin and I thought he might be a con man. So, I said to Irwin, "Okay, you'll come with me if he wants me to come in for an interview," which Irwin did and I went in. He was legitimate, and he gave me the job and got sponsors. ... I had a daily radio program, I have a picture of me at the microphone, called "People Talk," which is what my class over the last fifteen years has also been called "People Talk," because I'm interested in people talking. That's part of me and my makeup and my career. So that's how I got on the radio.

SI: Which station were you on?

TS: WKDN in Camden. I think it's a religious station now, I'm not sure, but in that time, they had music, interviews, everything like that. ... I would go in once a week and interview for the whole week. I'd line up people, and it was great, it was fun, you know.

SI: Can you give me some anecdotes from the interviews of interesting people?

TS: Well, I interviewed artists and writers and composers. ... Once a week, I would bring in anonymous women I knew, friends and so forth, and I'd invite them to be on the radio, but in order for them to really open up, I didn't call them by name. I just said Mrs. "A," Mrs. "B," Mrs. "C," and I would ask, you know, all kinds of personal questions, and one time I asked about where do you get money--none of them worked in those days. I was a rarity working, nobody, all my friends, nobody worked, everybody stayed home and raised children, and she said, "I go into my husband's pockets after he's asleep." So, she said that on the radio, and I thought that was kind of wild. ... We did a lot of laughing on that radio program, and people called in and wrote in, liked it. So, that was fun.

SI: How long did you do that?

TS: Two years, yes, and then the radio station was sold. So, they changed format so that was that.

SI: Did you cover any kinds of social movements or that sort of thing?

TS: No, it was not serious, it was more in the field of art--writers, composers, artists, people on television, women on television, things like that, very light, art-centered. I am not terribly interested in politics and so forth. I am in a very cursory manner for a reason. It's very frustrating to me, listening to the news, reading about it, and not being able to do a damn thing about any of it except vote. I am a doer, and in my life I have done an awful lot to make better changes for the better for the world, which I told you before is my philosophy. I think I told you. Both Irwin and I feel that way, which is why we're involved, have been involved for forty, forty-five years in the environment, to leave a better world than we found than would be if we had never been born, but I don't like to be frustrated in things I cannot change ... other than writing letters or making emails, sending emails. I find politics very silly most of the time. I cannot believe what people say when they're running for office, and how they don't follow through, is very frustrating to me. So, even in my class "People Talk," which I've had for fifteen years, most of the students have been with me for fifteen years in one class. I don't bring up, none of my topics or questions are about politics. There will be questions about, let's say the Supreme Court, there will be a question about voting. There will be a question about should, how long a term should senators have and so forth, but not politics per se for the same reason. I like to study the human condition more than politics. I find people endlessly fascinating. It's good that I'm a writer, a journalist, not a fiction writer. Well, a fiction writer, you make up your own people. I

don't read fiction because if I try, people push books on me. If I try, a little voice in my head says to me, "Someone just like you made this all up," and I lose interest in the book, whereas I just finished, I bought and finished *Steve Jobs* (2011), Walter Isaacson's new book. I was intrigued from page one to page five hundred and something even though I did not comprehend some of the technology. Now, Irwin is reading it. That's my kind of book, a people book.

SI: As the women's movement started growing and women were branching out into to all sorts of new areas and pushing boundaries, did you have a desire to bring to the public stories from that part of that movement?

TS: I do in my class, frequently, about the women's movement, good, bad, what do you think about it, let's talk about it, let's examine it. ... I do cover that, I'm interested in that. I don't think it's necessarily good what has happened with women coming into the workforce. I think it's too easy to get obsessed with the career, and that's why I freelanced rather than working full-time. I didn't do that until my kids were out of the house and I worked full-time for the *Bulletin*. ... Until then, well before I met Irwin and I had to put food on the table and I worked full-time, and then I worked part-time. By part-time, I mean freelance, whereas I sold myself as a stringer to the *Herald Tribune* covering New Jersey, all the stories. I told you about what happened when I did a big story for the *Herald Tribune*. The trouble is, I don't remember what I said.

SI: That was when you were investigating the conditions for migrant workers?

TS: Yes, I told you. Okay, and I told you about the four men and the car and all of that. My father begged me not to do that anymore, because I had a small child and it was dangerous. Today, when I watch television and I see young women in a war zone, in the middle of a war, you know, where they could be mishandled, raped, or anything. I say to myself, "Stupid, too much, they're not being realistic." ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

TS: There are certain careers I think women should not aspire to--to which they should not aspire, correct grammar.

SI: You mentioned teaching a class a few times. Where do you teach it?

TS: I teach it in Cherry Hill, at the Katz Jewish Community Center, and when they opened seventeen years ago, I was teaching a writer's workshop there. That was after I taught a writer's workshop at Rutgers. I don't know if I told you about that.

SI: Well, I want to ask about that later.

TS: Okay. ... It went so successfully that they said to me, "Is there another class you would like to teach while you're teaching the writer's workshop?" I couldn't think of anything I was really interested in teaching, so I said, "No thank you." One night, two o'clock in the morning, my

husband gives me the elbow. I said, "What's wrong." He said, "I have an idea for another class for you." He said, "You are a good talker, and you know how to interview and bring people out. Why don't you have a class of people talking?" Then he turns around, and goes back to sleep, and I am up all night with the wheels turning in my head with this idea. So I thought about it, and I realized I wanted to do questions on provocative conversation, which I think conversation is so sadly neglected today. The kids are busy with the little machines and they only communicate in one sentence with each other with emails. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

TS: So, I thought about it, and I went to the board at the Jewish Community Center, I made this presentation, and they were very brave. I mean, they didn't know what I was going to come up with. It wasn't a standard class about astronomy or knitting or computers, and we started fifteen years ago, and it was taught for one morning a week for six weeks. That's how long the session is, an hour and a half each session. I started out with thirty-six questions I came up with that I thought were provocative. I now have over four hundred, but because the men and women who came to my original classes liked it, I found it so stimulating. ... This is for seniors, although I have youngsters of fifty and people till ninety. It's a wide generation span, interesting perspectives on the same question, because they've been with me for so long, I have to keep coming up with new questions. They don't want to hear old questions. So it keeps me on my toes. I love it. I come home very buoyed. I feel good. ... My husband is now in my class, and he's a contributor and enjoys it, and at the JCC, most of their classes have maybe two or three men and twenty-five women. That's how it breaks out. My class, I have half men and half women. A lot of men come. Men don't know how to talk to each other, personally. In my class, they know they're safe. It will not be repeated and they love it, they just love to talk about provocative stuff. Am I free to tell you an off color event from my class?

SI: Yes, of course.

TS: I'll tell you two things quickly. I asked a very simple question. "When you were a kid, what'd you want to be when you grew up?" One woman raised her hand and said, "I wanted to be a singer." I said to her, "Do you still sing?" She said, "Yes, I do." So, I said, "Would you sing for us," and she looks at us and she said, "Yes, I'll sing you the song that I sing at my husband's gravesite." ... She then began to sing, "Wish You Were Here." My class you could have heard a pin drop. Everybody was so moved, it was crushingly sad. That's one aspect which you never know to expect. I asked the class, "What for you is a perfect moment?" A sixty-year old woman raised her hand and said, "Having an orgasm, for me, is the perfect moment." The whole class applauded their approval. An eighty-nine year old woman said, "What's an orgasm," and there I am, the teacher. So I asked the young woman to cup her hand, and explain to the older woman what it is. A man from the back of the room yelled out, "An orgasm is like a very big sneeze only much, much better." ... Then, an elderly gentleman with his Alzheimer's wife, who never spoke, said, "We have a perfect moment every morning after breakfast in the kitchen. I turn on the radio and we dance." So everything happens in my class so that's what "People Talk" is all about. I always taught six sessions a year, and now I'm down to two strictly because

of energy and I have that walker the last two years. So, I limit it to Spring and Fall only, and I have people on the waiting list so it is successful and very satisfying, and you want to hear about Rutgers?

SI: It seems like you have always done that kind of thing, getting out in the community.

TS: Yes I have since I was a kid, yes.

SI: So, in between now and when you were on the farm, are there any other examples of that from your life in the different communities you lived? I realize the environmental movement is in line with that.

TS: That's big time.

SI: Yes, but I want to ask about that later. I cannot even come up with the term for it, but community involvement and bringing the community together in that sense.

TS: No, no only through environmental work. Thirty-five years I served on the, that's a long time, on the community, Cherry Hill Conservation Board for thirty-five years. Irwin joined me after twenty-five years, and the last ten years we were on it together. No, I did not do, get myself involved in community work. I did take classes locally and at Rutgers and so forth, but I was raising kids, I had my work to do. We were campers with the kids in a tent and our dog and we were very busy leading our lives. No, I was not involved except when I was on the farm and throughout my life in New York as a kid. I always did things like putting on shows and writing newspapers, my own newspapers, things like that.

SI: I want to ask a few more questions about your time at the *Bulletin*. You got there in the mid-sixties, '66 thereabouts. How long did you work there for?

TS: I worked there for eight years. When did the *Bulletin* fold? I would say in the mid-seventies. I worked there for about ten years until it folded. From there, I did something that I looked down my nose at. I did public relations work. Journalists do not think highly of PR people, but I had to earn a buck and it was important to me, so I went and I worked for the Medical College of Pennsylvania and hated every minute of it, every day, every minute. Did a terrific job, got big stories for them in the New York papers and on television, but hated the work, and absolutely despised the doctors because they all thought they were writers. So I got into the habit, when I took notes of them initialing each page of notes, I knew they were going to come back and bite me. I didn't say that, why did you put this in and so forth. I almost got fired over it until I brought my notes in and I showed the president. "They're lying," which they did frequently, you know. Doctors are people like everybody else, and they have big concerns about their reputation. So, when I interviewed them, they would say one thing, and then like you said downstairs, they came back, "I didn't say that, why have you got this in," and so forth, and I would prove to them they said it. Anyway, I was there eight years and then I retired. Irwin had

retired before me, and I retired when I was sixty-five and so I'm eighty-five so that's twenty years ago, so what date is that?

SI: 1992.

TS: Something like that. ... When I retired, I was already involved in the environmental work with Mac Wells, which I can go back and start that whole story. ... Then I started writing books because of Mac Wells. You want me to start on how I met him and how that all came about?

SI: You were at Rutgers before then. I am just trying to find out about the Rutgers story.

TS: When I taught?

SI: Yes, when you taught, before that.

TS: I worked at night when I was at the *Bulletin* during the day and earlier, earlier, before I went to the *Bulletin* and after I was there. So, I worked at night--an adjunct professor.

SI: How did you first get involved?

TS: Well, it's a funny story. Irwin was teaching at night. He taught a long time, I think about fourteen years, and they asked him about me, they knew my name from the papers and so forth. They said, "Do you think she'd be interested in coming on board with a writer's workshop," and he said, "Well, here's my number, call her and ask her, I don't know." So, someone called me, a man, and I said to him, "It sounds like a wonderful opportunity, but I have bad news for you. I left Hunter College before I got my degree. So, that will end this conversation," because I wanted to be a farmer, but that was another story, and he was a little rattled, and he said, "Well, I'll get back to you." So when Irwin came home, I said to him, "Yes, I'll hear from him, sure," and that was that. Two weeks later, he called me back, and said he went before the board and told them about what I said. ... They discussed it, and they said, "She has already had over twenty years experience so, you know, why shouldn't she teach at night, you know." It's adult, not kids. I don't think I'd enjoy teaching kids. You notice I'm teaching adults now, I taught adults at Rutgers, and I have a lot stories about teaching for Rutgers. I would stand in the doorway the first night and say hello to people as they arrived, men and women, and one night a priest with a collar walks in. Did I tell you this story? ... I said to myself, "Oh gosh, here comes a priest, and with your language, how are you going to handle this class?" Well, they all sit down, and I start going up and down the aisles, and I said, "How do you want to be addressed, Mr., Ms., Mrs., or what," I had a doctor, and when it came to him, the priest, he said, "Just call me Leonard." ... I said to myself, "Okay, no problem here," and I was right. Never a problem with Leonard Carrieri, who was the head of the Archdiocese in Camden at the time, and we became good friends, and then a very funny story. The doctor, who I told you in that particular class, was too busy, and he and his wife wanted to build a new home. He said to his wife, "We'll do it if you're in charge. Every single screw, every color, everything, don't ask me, I'm too busy. You will build the house, invite me when it's built," and that was the arrangement. He said, "The

only thing I want is a pool room." She said, "Okay." So she builds the house, works with the contractors, and I don't know how long it took, and then she invites him to see the house. He comes in, and it's a beautiful home, he's looking around, and he said, "Where's the pool room?" She said, "Oh, come with me." She opens it up--an indoor pool. He meant pool, [billiards]. You don't think that's funny? I think it's hysterical. [laughter] Anyway, we had a party, a pool party. The whole class went to his house. Another woman, a woman's husband owned many cemeteries. She was a very wealthy woman from Cherry Hill, and they had a huge boat docked in the Delaware River right outside of Camden, and she invited the whole class for dinner and we went on a moonlit night. She cooked the dinner, and we went sailing up the Delaware. These were wild classes at Rutgers, and the best story, and I don't know if I told you this, one semester, Irwin and I had rooms right next door to each other. It was the first and only time, and he was conducting a midterm exam, blue books, and my classes are always a ruckus. Noisy, a lot of laughter, lot of argument, even today in my class, and he felt it was much too noisy for his class taking a test. He said to the class, "You keep writing, I'll be right back." He comes in without knocking, my class doesn't know who he is. He walks in, strides right up to me, and says in a loud voice, "Mrs. Spetgang, your class is much too noisy. I am conducting a midterm exam, please lower the noise," and my class shut up, and they're all watching him like a hawk. ... He turns on his heel and stalks to the door, turns the handle, and walks into a supply closet. My class is silent. They're watching the handle. The handle turns, and he walks out. My class roars, screams ... with laughter. It was a very funny moment, and I enjoyed working at Rutgers a lot. I did it for about ten years.

SI: You taught a writing course?

TS: Yes, I formed the class, I picked what books I wanted, and I did my own syllabus and everything. So, Irwin and I both worked at night in addition to our daytime jobs. Both loved it.

SI: These were adults coming to your class.

TS: At night.

SI: They were not fulfilling a major requirement or anything like that?

TS: No, they were coming because they wanted to be there, which is why the class was terrific. It was so enjoyable. They were there after their jobs, after their careers, whatever, and they weren't tired at night, they weren't falling asleep in their seats, ever. I've never had that happen of any student falling asleep because they wanted to be there, and we had a great class. They used to come in and audit my class, and they were very satisfied and it worked out great. I don't think they do that today. I don't think they take someone on who doesn't have either a teaching degree or certainly a degree from college, but I left after three years and walked and went and lived on a farm.

SI: In our last interview, you talked about how you met Mr. Spetgang because he wanted to buy the farm and then you got married. Tell me from your perspective how your personal life developed from there?

TS: I was tired of dating, I had just gotten divorced, and I was dating four different men at the same time. One of them was Warren Paul who was a reporter. I was woman's editor on the *Levittown Evening Press* in Levittown, a big daily paper, and he was friends with Irwin from Rutgers, and Irwin had mentioned, I was looking to sell my farm. ... I couldn't keep paying the mortgage even though my sister lives there, my mother and father lived there, couldn't pay my share. I was a single mother, my first husband walked and left us with no money and bills, and it was pretty rough. ... Warren told Irwin when he said he was looking for a broken down farm, "This woman's editor has a farm for sale. I can arrange for you to meet her," and he walks into the city room, the most gorgeous looking young man. I thought, "Oh my, that's nice." However, when we got together, and I may have told you this, he opens his mouth and I did not like how he talked, how he spoke, what he had to say. To me, he was like a college kid, and he was just out of college. He was young, he was, well not that young, he was twenty-six, and so we met, we had lunch, and then he left. ... Three months later Warren said to me, we had a date to go the beach, and he said to me, "My friend Spetgang is in the hospital in North Jersey. I want to go see him." I said, "You go along. I don't like him, I don't want to go," and Warren said, "Spend ten minutes, back of the room, don't talk, and we'll leave." I said, "Okay." I did, I spent ten minutes, said nothing but hello and goodbye. I listened to the two men speak and Irwin said to Warren, "I just received a bonus of a thousand dollars from RCA," and Warren said, "What are you going to do with the thousand dollars?" ... Irwin said, "Well, the first thing I'm going to do is pay my mother back five hundred dollars I had borrowed previously," and my ears went "whoops." That was the first interesting thing that young man said because it indicated to me that he was responsible and my first husband was not. Left me with all the bills and scooted. So, I took that idea aside, and then after he was out of the hospital, he called Warren and said, "I'm dating a teacher in Philadelphia, and I want to double-date with you and Tilly. Let's go to the beach," and based on that remark, I agreed to go, a foursome, to the beach, and what happened was ridiculous. Here's Irwin, here's Tilly, we could not stop talking to each other, and it was very embarrassing. The girl saw the handwriting on the wall, sat down on the sand and opened a book to read. Warren smashed Irwin in the jaw and knocked him down to the sand. So the girl suggested that we all go for a walk. So there's the girl, and here's Warren, and here's me, and Irwin was walking in ankle deep water. ... I felt a burning on the side of my neck and face, and I turned toward the ocean, where Irwin was walking, and I looked at him. He was staring at me, and I said to myself, "A-ha, that's the way it's going to be," and that was the beginning. Here we are, a hundred and fifty-five years later. [laughter] So, a year later, we got married. I had received a proposal from Warren, and the other three men, all of which I turned down until Irwin proposed, and that was, I had gotten my final decree in the mail that day. In New Jersey the law is, at that time, was two years you had to wait. ... We went for a walk over on the farm, in pouring rain in the dark with a flashlight, and when we reached the creek, Irwin said to me, "You know, of course, we're going to get married," and I said, "Of course I know that," and that was the big proposal--typical engineering proposal. So, we left the farm after Irwin found the

commute much too hard, and then we just spent summers on the farm when Valerie was born, and then we sold the farm for a pittance and that was that.

SI: What happened to your family?

TS: Everybody had to leave. So they all went different places. My parents went to Asbury Park, and my sister and brother-in-law went to Roosevelt near Hightstown in Princeton, in that area, and we came down here. We were down here in Cherry Hill.

SI: Irwin said in his oral history that originally he did not want you to work.

TS: Yes. When we first got married, he was very old-fashioned. I had been working before I met him, and he said, "I want you to stay home and take care of Wendy," who was little at the time. She was in kindergarten, and I tried it, and absolutely was bored out of my mind. I wasn't getting any ... mental stimulation. So, I went to the *Courier Post* and met Jane Stretch, who was the editor at that time, and I said, "I'm a writer. I'm in this area. I'm going nuts at home. I want to freelance, do you have a story for me?" She said, "Yes, I do." She gave me an assignment. It was of the Sanski family and they had this art store in Haddonfield, New Jersey. I went on the story, I wrote the story, I gave it to her. It appeared in the *Courier Post* under someone else's name. That had never happened to me in my whole life, my whole career. So, I wrote her a poison pen letter, and I soured my relations with the *Courier Post*, and I said, "Thanks for the perfect dirty double cross," and so forth. Anyway, there was a little chain of weeklies, at that time it was Delaware Township before it became Cherry Hill. Don't ask me the year. ... I went to the office, and there were two young men there, Tom Deegan and Dick Smith, and there were three papers that came out of that office, and I told them my story about Jane Stretch and the *Courier Post*. I said, "Do you have any freelance work for me," and they said to me, "The *Delaware Township News*, which had just turned into the *Cherry Hill News*, needs an editor. Can you do it part-time?" I said, "I certainly can," and I became the editor of the *Cherry Hill News*, and eventually, and then I started my column there. I had a column called "Slice of Life," which I took with me wherever I went, and it ran in eighteen South Jersey papers. It was what do you call it?

SI: Syndicated?

TS: Syndicated, right, and ran into trouble because I had a phone that was listed. The papers all came out on Thursday, and people felt perfectly free to call me up and talk about my column. Well, it wasn't one person or two people or three people, it was a lot of people, and I got hate mail from people who assumed I was Jewish. So, between ...

SI: Did they just send you hate mail because you were Jewish or was it because of something you wrote?

TS: Just "Dirty Jew," that kind of crap. So, I got it from what happened to us in Erlton, I got it from people when I wrote the column, and my kids got it too--badly. That's why we left Erlton

and we moved to Woodcrest, and then, and I am jumping, when I put the bricks in everybody's toilet tanks, I got hate mail from all over the country. Not about being Jewish, but about being a stupid woman to think that's a smart idea putting a brick. Most of the mail, and I got tons of mail, it was very, very complimentary, and I showed you the letter from Senator Williams and being written up in the *Congressional Record*, but people are people, and middle America thinks very differently from the coasts as I found out. So, anyway I'm jumping, you have to keep it all straight. [Editor's Note: Published by the federal government since the 19th century, the *Congressional Record* is the official record of the proceedings and debates of the United States Congress.]

SI: I do not think we really got into the papers in Cherry Hill, we just jumped to the *Philadelphia Bulletin*. What would you do there for the *Cherry Hill News*?

TS: Well, I was the editor of the *Cherry Hill News*. I did all the writing and my column every week, and the other people wrote and I edited their work, and would hire people to freelance and so forth. Photographs, photographers--I was the editor so I handled all of that.

SI: In general, on a daily newspaper, what was a day's work like when you were editing this paper?

TS: It was the same on the weeklies as it was on the dailies. You came in and you started looking at the material that needed to be edited. ... You discarded, and made decisions, this is going in, this is waiting, this has to be rewritten, and you dealt with writers. They would come in with their material, and then all the PR junk that came in, and you got rid of it fast unless it was a germ of an idea in it for a good story. People don't know what makes a good story. You and I were talking about good ledes. People don't know about that. Anyway, and then I would write on an old-fashioned typewriter, which I loved, and edit and make phone calls, and then do the layout of the paper, and make decisions on where I'm putting pictures, and I wrote my own headlines, my heads. When you're on a weekly, you do everything. When I worked on the *Freehold Transcript*, when I began my career, every Wednesday night we would put the paper to bed, and we had hot lead presses in those days, and I had to learn how to set the page with the typeface upside down and backwards. That's how you read what was laid out in front of you to go into the press. So on a weekly you do everything including sweeping the floor. Whatever is needed you do, and you want to know something, that's a damn good lesson, a very good education for a young person who wants a career and needs experience, and experience means sweeping the floor, making coffee, and the whole nine yards. You don't just sit in an ivory tower and write. It's much more when you work on a big paper, that's what you do, you write, or you're either an editor or a writer or whatever, but on a weekly, you learn everything, how to do everything, so that if someone is out, you step in and work.

SI: How much staff would you have? How many writers would you have?

TS: Well, there was Gene Gleason, the editor--me. Brian Henderson took care of ads. There were two writers and an editor and an admin--four.

SI: How many pages was it?

TS: I would say about twenty-eight. It was a nice-sized paper, full size paper.

SI: I know a lot of weeklies back then would have Associated Press pieces put in.

TS: Oh sure, UPS, AP, Associated Press and so forth. Yes, you had a lot of stuff coming in from all over the country. If it applied somehow, remember we were a farming community, Freehold. If it applied you used it, and you credited AP or whatever.

SI: I was talking about the *Cherry Hill News*. When you were there, how many writers did you have?

TS: Oh, those times. Oh, that was totally different story. Well, at that time, we started out with the three, the two men and myself, and then we moved into, it was opposite where the race track used to be in Cherry Hill, and then we moved to a building five times larger. ... We had about sixteen papers, and so every like three papers was assigned to one editor and maybe freelancers to fill in and stuff from the press, national press.

SI: At one point, you were in charge of three weeklies.

TS: Yes.

SI: Did they serve different towns?

TS: Yes, Runnemede, Haddonfield, Cinnaminson, all the different south, all south Jersey. ... It was very good, good stroking because wherever I would go, I would go to a department store, take out my credit card, she'd see the name, "Oh, are you the Tilly Spetgang, the writer with the *Cherry Hill News*?" You were known wherever you went, you were known because of those weeklies. People read them. They were lively, they were well-written, you know, and they came to your house free so that was nice.

SI: How long did you do that for?

TS: That's a good question. I can't really answer that because I went from there to the *Bulletin* so I don't know why I accepted the job, I looked for the job at the *Bulletin*, why I was doing this work. I don't know whether they were sold to the Gannett chain or what happened. I don't know how long. It was quite a while, quite a while. I lived in Woodcrest for twenty-eight years and most of that time, it was split between the *Bulletin*, and before the *Bulletin* were the weeklies. The Suburban Chain was the name of the chain of all the papers, and Dick Smith just died and he was the original man, Tom Deegan, and Dick Smith and me. So I'm losing my writing buddies because I'm getting really old now and they're dying off, very sad. You don't understand it because you're too young, but you will. It's sad.

SI: It sounds like it was a very small community of writers.

TS: Yes, we all knew each other, we knew each other's families, we had parties together and it was a lot of fun. If I had to do it all over again, I would not change a thing except I would not go and do PR work, public relations. ... Everything else was learning, learning, learning, learning and by going to Rutgers and teaching at night, I loved it. I found I absolutely bloomed, I blossomed. It was terrific, and they never said one word to me about what to teach and what not to teach but they gave evaluations, and I got terrific evaluations, so that's what they want. They want students who are learning and enjoying themselves. That's what we did, had fun together, grew up together at Rutgers. ...

SI: You moved from the farm to Erlton. Is that around the time when you first joined the conservation board?

TS: No.

SI: It was later that you joined?

TS: I joined the conservation board, let me go backwards. I've been here five years, eleven years in Eagle Oak, and then Woodcrest. I was in Woodcrest, not Erlton. I was in Woodcrest when I started.

SI: How did that come about?

TS: The *Bulletin* gave me an assignment. I don't remember whether I was, I think I was still freelancing for the *Bulletin*. There was a man named Mac Wells who just built an underground, an earth-sheltered office on Cuthbert Boulevard in Westmont, and they wanted me to go there, see it, and interview him. ... When I met him, he was one of the most beautiful men I've ever seen, and brilliant in what he believed in. He was putting his money where his mouth was. He had been a very successful architect. He had eight architects working for him, and he had big clients like RCA and the World's Fair, and the Rutgers Law Library in Camden. He designed all that, and he had an epiphany, and he began to realize that architects were ruining the world and he was one of them, big time. So, mid-stream, he changed careers and began to work with the environment. Instead of paving over, he would have open tiles with grass so that water could go down and percolate into the aquifer and they all dropped him, the RCA and Rutgers, everybody dropped him because it was very unconventional what he was suggesting--earth sheltered, and on the rooftops growing trees, and bushes and grass and flowers and vegetables on the roof. Eighteen inches below the surface of the earth, its fifty-five degrees or forty-five all the time and that's what he did with his beautiful office, under-earth shelter. We went downstairs to where the office was, and anyway I met him. I did the story, and he was not at all verbal. ... So, I said to him, "Look, Mac, I live in Cherry Hill, you live in Cherry Hill. Why don't we write to each other?" I did that because I couldn't talk to the man and that frustrates me. So, he wrote me his first letter and I showed it to Irwin, I said, "My god, the guy is a writer and he doesn't even know

it." Now, I've done this several times, I've discovered writers, more than several, three times in my life. I'll tell you about the other in a minute. Anyway, we began writing, and finally, then Irwin and he and his wife and I got involved in a solar firm called, ... what do you call it, Solar Service Corporation, and I said to him, "Mac, you're a good writer, you need some polishing. Work with me for six months on Sunday afternoons and I'll have you writing professionally." So, that's what we did. Irwin and I would go over, Irwin and Shirley would go off and talk, and Mac and I would work for three hours. ... Then, when I felt he was ready, I introduced him to my editor at the *Bulletin*, and they gave him a weekly column in the magazine, and then he went on in his lifetime to write thirty-nine books, all on bird houses, on underground architecture, on designing houses, you name it. ... He went on, he had a wicked sense of humor and he was a real genius, a design genius like Steve Jobs was. He was not the, not engineer, the, anyway, architect, he was the designer. He had images in his mind of a finished house and then he would lay it out on paper. ... Anyway, when he had formed this little solar firm, Mac and Irwin would be called from ads we ran to come and talk to people about solar energy. It was a new thought, and the guys would spend all their time explaining it. So Mac said, "Tilly, you're the writer, can't you knock out a little coloring book or something that explains the basics so we can give it out?" So I did, I wrote it, I should have prepared a few. Anyway, there's a picture of it there, we called it *Tilly's Catch a Sunbeam Coloring Book*, and he did the sketches in it that were very funny, and that was the precursor to the book I gave you. ... That's what started the whole thing, and so many people, by word of mouth, across the country, heard about this little book that we were giving away. They started writing to us, "Tilly Spetgang, Cherry Hill" no address, it all found me. "How much does the book cost, I want it for my class," across California, Arizona, all over. We had seven printings of that book, it was so successful. ... From there I started, then I wrote the *The Children's Solar Energy Book: Even Grownups Can Understand* which was a big fat book, and from that we went eventually, the third solar book I did was the one I gave you, and Mac died so that he couldn't work on that book, Irwin and I worked on that book. We lifted up from the second book and put it in the third book plus fresh information, and that's how that was born. The other story, very briefly, I was in the hospital in Lankenau Hospital, and one of my nurses had green eyeglasses. So I asked her, you know, I said, "I like your glasses," and her name was June something and we started to talk. We liked each other very much, and I said to her as I had said to Mac Wells, "Why don't we write?" She lived in Philly, outside of Philly somewhere, so we did--King, June King. So she wrote to me, and again, I said to Irwin, "Oh my god, she can write," which she didn't know. So, I wrote her and I said, "June, you can write but the only way you're going to do it," we lived too far apart for us to work together, I said, "you're going to have to sit your backside on a chair in front of a typewriter and write and write and write and write until you learn how to construct a book. ... Then tackle a book, any kind you want, and speak right from your head. Don't worry about grammar. That can all be cleaned up by an editor." She had three books published. That was another student, and there was a third one I don't remember, but anyway. So, I have passed that along, aside from teaching at Rutgers and the JCC. I told you how I got my first writing job when I was on the phone. I told you how I started writing with the ten cents an inch?

SI: Yes, we got into that.

TS: Okay, good, let's stop for a while. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

TS: Once having met Mac Wells, and introducing him to Irwin, and then learning from him, he gave up his car. He rode his bike to work from the Hunt Tract in Cherry Hill. Everything he believed in made so much sense to us, things we had never thought of before we met Mac Wells. Then, I went on the ... Cherry Hill Conservation Advisory Board, and I was there for thirty-five years, and Irwin joined me after about twenty, twenty-five years on the board. ... We did a lot of work in Cherry Hill, and we're very proud of it because we recently took our kids on a drive to show them all the land that we were involved in saving the open space, the wetlands and so forth, that will be free of building forever, hopefully. Anyway, it was while I was on the Conservation Advisory Board that we were talking how can we get the environmental message out to a lot of people in the area, and especially in Cherry Hill. I now have to backtrack because this idea came to me. On the farm we had a well and a cistern, and when we had a drought and the water got low in the well, we would put big stones in the bottom of the well so the water would rise so we would be able to have it in our homes--drink, shower, wash dishes, whatever you needed, and for the coops, pipes leading from the well to the coops. I thought of that well, and I said to myself, "What could we put in a toilet tank that wouldn't erode, wouldn't break, would not interfere with the mechanics, the mechanical workings, that would save water with every flush?" Think of the millions of gallons that could be saved if we took away, in those days they had eight gallon tanks, eight and a half gallon tanks, and I said, "Surely, if we put one thing in that tank, it would still flush." So, I went to Irwin, I said, "How about bricks?" We didn't know if bricks would deteriorate in water over a long period of time. They did not, depends on the kind of bricks you buy. First, we went to the brick yard and learned about bricks, and then we experimented and then I told Irwin. I heard him tell you [in the oral history interview you conducted with him] that we needed money to buy the bricks, and it's true. I did go to the council meeting, I waited, and I did take a brick out of my big pocketbook and I raised my arm with it and I said, "I have something to tell you about," and all the councilmen ducked under the table because they were afraid I was going to throw it. ... I told them, and they were so surprised by that whole idea about being the first ones to do such a radical thing as putting a brick in a toilet tank. It had its amusing side, and I told them that I could get it across, you know, get the word out at least in Cherry Hill, if not across the country, with the contacts I had in the newspaper business, which is how it worked out. ... They agreed to give me the money. I don't know how many thousands were involved. I would have to figure that, I don't remember the price at that time, and then of course we had to arrange with trucks to bring them. Irwin was wrong, we only had one school, Cherry Hill East, where all the bricks were placed on the day of delivery. We had a weekend of deliveries, Saturday and Sunday. ... We had all the kids from the two environmental groups, Cherry Hill East and Cherry Hill West High School, they were there distributing bricks. People came from all over, grandmothers and grandfathers, everybody brought food for the workers, all the volunteers, television was there, radio was there, magazines were there, writers. Before that, to get the news out, I contacted television, three major channels, three, six and ten at that time. ... They sent people to our house in Woodcrest, and they, on that news that night, were showing how to put the brick in and how to flush, and the bathroom was so small for their camera, they

had to stand in the bathtub with the camera. [laughter] I mean this was really classy. ... I got word all over, you know, I now had to deal with the PR, and then it spread around the world. ... BBC called me at the *Bulletin*, and they said, "Now, let's see if we have it right, you put the brick in the toilet?" I said, "Not in the toilet, you're going to clog it up, you put it in the tank." Well, the problem there is that in London the tanks are on the roof with long chains. They're not built the way we have it here in America, but Israel called, and Hawaii passed a resolution. ... They put, and I told them it was perfectly fine, plastic bottles that they bought thousands and hundreds of thousands, you know Hawaii is an island and water is a precious commodity, drinking water. ... They passed a resolution about putting the proper things in your toilet tanks to save with every flush. ... Of course, took us a year, this whole project to get it off the ground, to finish it up, to get the publicity, get the money, buy the bricks, and I got hate mail--again, hate mail. There were people out there, they accused me of being in the brick business. It was costing us money, we fed all the kids where they worked. We would take everybody out to Rustler for dinner and we would pay. You know, the kids worked, they should be rewarded with dinner. Anyway, a year later, two years later, we were in the car going up the Jersey Turnpike to New York, and we had WOR on from New York. Two men from the plumbing industry, two executives were being interviewed, and we were very interested and they were asked why they went from eight, eight and a half gallon tanks to, at that time, two and a half gallon. Now it's less, and they told ...

Irwin Spetgang: 1.6.

TS: 1.6 now, and they told a story of this "crazy" woman from Cherry Hill who put bricks in everybody's toilet tanks to prove that you don't need eight gallons of water to flush the toilet. So I felt, we felt fabulous, because we had helped change the use of water across this whole world. It's not just America that got new toilets, England or wherever, they all got new toilets using much less water. So, our time on earth has saved billions of gallons of water from that one little idea and perseverance, and Mac Wells. So that's the story of my work on the toilet tank. The funny thing is I used to make a joke, on my tombstone, I was afraid they would put, "she put bricks in everybody's toilet tanks" but my husband said I should put the word "unforgettable." So we'll see.

SI: You were on the environmental board in Cherry Hill for a long time. Do you have any other memories of different movements that you were involved in?

TS: I have a funny story to tell you. The whole board, we mapped out Cherry Hill, and each one of us, Irwin and I worked as a team as usual, and we were given assignments of land pieces to walk and take pictures of and write up and so Irwin and I, one of our pieces was behind the school ... in Eagle Oak. Anyway, there was a hill behind the school, and we couldn't take the car down, so we parked the car behind the school at the top of the hill. We walked down, we took pictures, we wrote it up, there was a stream there and so forth. We come up the hill, there's a police car next to our car, and he's standing there waiting for us to come up. ... He said, "You were trespassing, you know. People called the police department. I wanted to know what you two," and we were elderly already, you know, "why are you two people down walking on that

private land?" So, Irwin and I looked at each other, fortunately we had all our paperwork from the committee and the work that we were doing, and we told the policeman. He said, "Okay, go ahead, as long as I know who you are and what you're doing there," and of course the committee loved it, the next meeting, when we reported that we were stopped by the police doing our good deeds. The main thing, the two main things, no three main things that we did, the board and us, is first of all the brick and the toilet tank project which saved untold gallons of potable water. The next was saving open space so that there would be trees and oxygen and beauty for future generations in this little piece of land called Cherry Hill, New Jersey, and we're very proud of each piece of land that we're responsible for. Irwin and I, privately, without consulting the committee, this was before we were on the board, walked the property right opposite the Jewish Community Center and took pictures, and then we went to investigate what it would cost. Green Acres program had just started in New Jersey, and we had read about it, and we tried to find out what it would take to get Green Acres funding for that piece of property. ... We were told, "Don't even bother, North Jersey has all the power, and you're not going to get it in Cherry Hill," and blah, blah, blah, and you know what we did, we got the paper work, we filled it out as two private citizens, and we sent it in, and guess what? We were the first people to receive money from the State of New Jersey, or was that from the United States government?

IS: That was from the federal government.

TS: Federal, Green Acres money, in New Jersey, we were the first people to get Green Acres funding, and we bought that piece of property, which now has a stand of trees that are soaring and beautiful, that whole piece, and it will be saved forever. You know how good that feels? My, my. So it was water, it was getting the word out. Land, water, and getting the word out, constantly getting the word out because people used to laugh at recycling. There was no recycling. Finally, we got three trucks that we parked at the Ellisburg Circle Shopping Center and one was for paper, one was for white glass, ... and one was for cans and you had to bring everything in your car and go there and climb up and put your, that was recycling in those days, and look what it is today. People who live in Cherry Hill are being paid for their recycling, not bad. When we came here to Lion's Gate there was no recycling. We were outraged. Within a month we had formed a committee, we went to management, we started to turn the wheels, and we got people from North Jersey to come down and buy our waste.

SI: Here at Lion's Gate?

TS: Yes. Now, it's a total program here. Irwin's the head of every, all the environmental issues go through Irwin, and we have a committee that we've had since we moved in five years and we all take care of it.

SI: Do you have any idea of how long the Conservation Advisory Board had been in existence before you joined?

TS: I do not. I know they're still in existence.

SI: Had the idea been around for a while?

TS: A very short while, yes, because when I heard about them through the main building, the, you know, the government in Cherry Hill, I asked what do I have to do to become a member, and I had to write a letter to the board telling them why I wanted to be on the board, and I was accepted, but it was a rather new, so I was on it for. Have you seen what they gave us?

SI: Spetgang Day?

TS: Yes, did you see the, I don't want to get up, but go in the office and on the window sill you'll see an Irwin and Tilly pure, ... can't think of the word. Go look.

[TAPE PAUSED]

TS: I talked about Mac Wells, I didn't talk about Irwin Spetgang a lot. I just want to make sure that I get my feelings about him. If I had to pick out two words to best describe our fifty-five year relationship, we were married fifty-four years, met a year before that. We are excellent partners. Give us any job to do. If we're interested, it will be done very well. We each contribute our strengths to the project, it will be done on time, and it will be done beautifully. Whatever the project is, we are very different people. I am the arty type. He likes to say that I'm the kite flying in the air, and he's the long tail giving me direction as I soar. He's the engineer, he's the ultimate engineer. He is obsessive, he's compulsive. He goes from point A to point B, he does not go from A to C to B. He doesn't know how, he refuses, he doesn't think that way. I am the arty type. I rarely go on a straight line. I see around this way, then I find that fascinating, and you know, I'll approach whatever it is in a very different manner. However, our values are almost identical. Our value systems are strong, they're solid. We are usually in agreement about values, how to raise kids, and so forth, and we did a decent job. It's tough raising kids as you will find out. ... The two words that best describe our long term marriage, and I feel, relatively speaking, it's a successful long term marriage, and you know when you go through life, you go like every seven, ten years, you're in a different phase. So, I married him because I wanted a rock of a husband after being left by a husband with my child, and no food and no nothing. I needed a rock, a solid citizen, and that's what I got. I got a solid citizen, and now we're in our eighties, and he's no longer able to be the solid citizen that he used to be, a man with golden hands who used to paint a two story house by himself, who knew plumbing and carpentry and electrical work, and when he wore that tool belt, to me that was absolutely great. Loved to see a man wearing a tool belt, and who knows how to use tools. I am very admiring and respectful of that, which is kind of interesting because I'm a mind person and a word person. He's smart, he's very smart, always has been, but as I said, we are two very different people, but we come together on our value system, and we come together in our enjoyment, certain enjoyments, but in particular the outdoors. We were campers for fifteen years with our kids and our dog, and to this day, we both love lakes and streams and woods and we can no longer get out in the environment. These are the restrictions of our age and our conditions, but we do the best that we can. I mean we'll get in the car, we'll go to the Forsythe Flyway [in Oceanville, New Jersey] where the birds migrate and come down into the swamps. ... We'll drive the car around and enjoy the wild

views, the views of wild birds. So, we're in total agreement on that. You can ask me any question.

SI: I want to ask a little bit about the solar company.

TS: Yes.

SI: You were the treasurer?

TS: Is that what I was? [laughter] I don't remember--that's cute.

SI: You had a very active role in explaining the purpose of the company, the mission, and the philosophy.

TS: Hold on. Honey, would you please get the solar energy book, *Tilly's Book*.

IS: Which one?

TS: The first one, *Tilly's Coloring Book*.

IS: Okay.

TS: Thanks.

SI: In terms of your time, how much time did it take when the company was active?

TS: Almost every weekend. We were working during the week, and just about every weekend we were together, the four of us, planning, answering mail, sending out books, whatever we were doing. We were very busy with this book I'm going to show you. It's a charmer, you know, different.

SI: When I was looking at the award that the Cherry Hill Environmental Advisory Board gave you in 2006, I saw on the wall a letter from President Jimmy Carter that said his family had enjoyed the book.

TS: ... Isn't that cute. [Editor's Note: Mrs. Spetgang is referring to *Tilly's Catch a Sunbeam Coloring Book*.] ... That's how I used to dress in those days, with scarf on my head and a calico dress, went through a phase. ... We made different colored covers, we had yellow, brown, purple, orange, and as I said, we had seven printings because they kept selling without advertising, without our getting publicity. One person told the next person. So, I would say, for quite a while, we were, the four of us were busy, weekends when we were able to get together.

...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: A significant part of the environmental movement was getting into the political arena and trying to convince politicians of the validity of these ideas and to support them. Were you involved in any of that?

TS: It was home grown, grassroots, working within the parameter of Cherry Hill.

SI: Just in doing this, you found you had a national reach.

TS: Yes, afterwards, after the brick, during and after the brick, and as you see, this was a state senator, not a state senator, the two senators?

SI: US senator?

TS: US senator. So obviously, he agreed, although he had a nasty ending. I don't remember what that scandal [was about].

SI: Abscam.

TS: Something like that.

SI: Where the FBI posed as Arab investors who were trying to bribe people. [Editor's Note: The Abscam sting operation led to the conviction of US officials on charges of bribery and conspiracy.]

TS: Some scandal, anyway--too many of them.

SI: Did you have that same kind of affect with the solar work? It seems from the things I have seen around your house that the national media was calling you about solar energy.

TS: You have to realize that when this book came out, nobody knew about solar energy, a handful, and they all knew each other. Irwin was part of the formation of the Mid-Atlantic Solar Energy Association and those people knew about solar energy. Mac Wells knew about solar energy. We knew about solar energy, but nobody else knew and when the book that came after this, the nice thick, which I haven't shown you, a big thick book, we didn't make a lot of money on that because people were not interested enough in solar energy to buy the book for their kids. Of course, that picture has changed radically. It's nowhere near where it should be and we were not contacted by any politicians concerning solar energy. When New Jersey came out with this idea on the telephone poles with the solar panels that put New Jersey first among states in the United States as an environmental state. They put how many, 200,000, 600,000 some wild number. They have put those solar panels and that only saves a percentage of electricity. It doesn't take care of everything in the community, but you know you got to start somewhere and go to wind farms and everything else. No, we were not approached. They were not awakened.

IS: On the subject, this is today's *Inquirer*, the headline. I was just reading the article, one of Mac's ideas is in here among others, the absorbent pavement.

SI: It says, "City a Leader on Clean Water," referring to the city of Philadelphia.

IS: Yes, our young high school leader, ... Maurice Samson, who led the high school crew, is high on the staff of environmental officers in Philadelphia now.

TS: And, by the way, he was a Rutgers freshman, a black boy, and he lived in Cherry Hill, very unusual. ... We knew him from the time he was a kid, and he was involved in putting the brick in the toilet tank with Irwin and me. Absolutely, his name must appear, Maurice Samson, and now he's a big environmentalist in Philadelphia.

IS: This is how far it's come in the last thirty, thirty-five years.

TS: Yes, they're slow. Aren't they slow? [laughter]

SI: Is there anything else you like to mention about your work with the environmental movement?

TS: I'm very proud of it. I would be hard pressed if I were asked by you to name the one thing, other than having two daughters and a long term marriage, the one thing I am most proud of. I would be hard pressed to say whether it's my environmental work or whether it's my writing which has given tremendous pleasure to many, many people. So, that's how important the environmental work has always been to me, it still is. I feel Irwin and I are in our own small way, relatively small way, a regional way, have contributed a tremendous amount to life, better life, everybody because we were here writing, planning, distributing bricks, working on the committees, everything. Very persistent, even here at Lion's Gate in this small community of two hundred homes, apartments. When the subject comes up, we are right in there pitching, turn your lights off, don't let the water run, do this, do this, do this. We are still teaching, and here we are in our eighties. So, it's important work in addition to our two careers and being parents, which is a big time career. So, that's how I feel about it.

SI: Is there anything else you would like to add to the record, anything we did not go over?

TS: One of the questions that I'm taking to ... my new class--name five things that give you pleasure. Now since this will be left for my family, our family, I would like to name five things and I've been thinking about it. A delicious book; a long talk with my oldest daughter Wendy, she and I are on the same wavelength and it's so much fun to talk with her; the friendship in a long term marriage, a field of wild flowers. I have to think of the fifth one as life goes on. What are your five?

SI: I will tell you off the record. Anytime you can come back and we can add things to the transcript, or I might have a follow up after I look at the transcript.

TS: I don't want to put you on the spot, I was just curious.

SI: No, I will tell you after, I just don't want to take up time on the recording. I want to thank you very much for sharing so much with me today.

TS: You're welcome.

SI: And in the previous interview. Thank you very much.

TS: I will tell you for the record that getting those CDs or whatever, you know, the discs, we were overwhelmed hearing the first, the beginning of it, because we realized what a fabulous legacy this is for our family. Hearing us and hearing about not only our lives, but parents and grandparents, and the work that we've done and what we value, it's beautiful.

SI: You are helping us by sharing your experiences with us for the world, but we want to leave you with something that your family will enjoy.

TS: Yes, wonderful, thank you.

SI: Well, thank you very much.

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Reviewed by Katie Ruffer 11/7/12
Reviewed by Nicholas Molnar 1/14/13
Reviewed by Tilly Spetgang 2/27/13