

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH PHILLIP THAU

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

and

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NANUET, NEW YORK

MARCH 7, 2024

TRANSCRIPT BY

MAXIMILIAN GROPPER

Maximilian Gropper: All right. We are currently in Nanuet, New York on March 7, 2024, with my grandfather Phillip Thau. My name is Maximilian Gropper with my professor Shaun Illingworth, and we are here to interview my awesome grandfather.

Phillip Thau: Thank you.

MG: Not a problem. Alright, so for the record, when were you born? So we're starting off with a simple question.

PT: I was born November 27th, 1929 in the Bronx at a hospital that no longer exists. I just lost the place. It's a section of the Bronx Hunts Point. Hunts Point, Hunts Point (MG reiterating what PT was saying) in the hospital, it's dismantled. And now Hunts Point is very busy with the Fish Center and the Center for Food coming into New York City.

MG: Not like meat packing, right?

PT: Is it? No, it's not meat, vegetables, and fish.

MG: Oh, oh. Meatpacking is something else, but, okay. So now we're going to go on to the second question.

PT: Sure.

MG: Why do you have no middle name?

PT: That is a big problem. At first, my brother was born with a middle name, Theodore Benny Thau. We never saw the Benny on the birth certificate.

MG: Really?

PT: So we thought it was Benjamin, but my mother couldn't pronounce Benjamin. We thought, and in order we looked at his birth certificate, it was Benny. And I say, ma, why didn't you give him the full name? That's what they said. When I was born, the depression had started. So I used to joke, they didn't have enough money to give me a middle name. And people laughed and I laughed, and that was it.

MG: Right.

PT: So I never got a middle name.

MG: Alright, well that's very interesting. I never would've thought I got an explanation like that.

PT: Yes. Well, that's my explanation.

MG: Right. So now I organize the questions, the questions with sub-questions.

PT: Sure.

MG: So question 3a would be where did Grandma Yetta and Grandpa Max? No, I'm sorry. When did Grandma Yetta and Grandpa Max come to the United States?

PT: Yes, my mother came, Grandma Yetta; my mother came to this country in 1920 (MG reiterating in the background what year Grandma came to the United States), and my father had been discharged from the Army. He was wounded twice. And by the time he got back to his town, all his brothers and sisters were gone. They went to—

MG: Zabłotów, correct?

PT: Zabłotów. Yeah.

MG: And for the record, it's the Austro-Hungarian Army, not the US Army.

PT: Right. He was in the wrong army, and he was wounded with shrapnel and went to the hospital and the Austrians had this idea, if it's not serious, we send you back to the front. And he went back and he was wounded again. And then he went back to the hospital, and this time the Austrians beat the Italians at Caporetto. But they were exhausted from fighting, and they asked the Germans to help. And the Germans were terrific fighters. And they came and they used poison gas on the Italians. The Italian army panicked. 100,000 Italian soldiers left the field, and the Austrians would've then invaded Italy, gone deep into Italy. But the war, it was in November already, or 1918, and the war ended soon after. So there was no advantage. The Italians had invaded Austria-Hungary, and they did very well. They were in what today is called Slovenia Country, a small country in what was once Yugoslavia.

MG: Right.

PT: So he was not in the field when the poison gas was used, he was still in the hospital and they discharged him and he went home and nobody was home. So the oldest brother stayed with the parents, but everybody else left, all eight kids. He was one of the eight. So he went, he got a visa, and he, you know the story, right? Yeah.

MG: I helped.

PT: I'll tell you the story. He came here and on the boat, they told him he was from Poland now, not Austria-Hungary. And they told him go to the front of the boat, the aft. Oh God. And in case the quota was met, at least you'll be in the front and you'll come to the United States, America. So he went to the front, big mistake. The boat backed into the dock, and they took about a hundred people, and they say everybody else from Poland has to go back to Poland. Oh, was he disappointed. So he did not go back to Poland. He went back to Antwerp, and he was already a carpenter. He had a skill. So he got a job in Antwerp, and he waited a year and then got a Belgian, Visa. Oh, visa. And the Belgians were not running to the United States. So it was very easy. He came here and his family took him in at Coney Island. I don't know if you know Coney Island.

MG: Oh yeah. In Brooklyn. And his two brothers were there and the sister. And so now four members of the family were there. And eventually the, oh yeah, I forgot. There was a younger brother that stayed in Poland, and then he came here. So there were five of the family and just the older brother, oldest brother, stayed in Zabłotów or Zabolotiv, which is now part of Ukraine.

MG: And it got changed to Zabolotiv, I think is the pronunciation.

PT: Yeah and the whole town is Ukrainian and maybe some refugees.

MG: So you actually answered the next question, which would be, what's the story with Grandpa Max? And you already answered that. And one more quick question, I guess to substitute for it. Did Aunt Paula come around during this time as well?

PT: My Aunt Paula, my mother's sister, and brother, my mother's brother came together.

MG: They came together. Okay.

PT: In 1920, her father, my grandfather, who I knew, my grandfather, came here in 1913 thinking he'd make some money here and then bring the whole family. And then the war broke out. So he's here in the United States. My grandmother and uncle and aunt and my mother stayed in Europe. And it was a terrible time because the Russian Cossacks came, or the Ukrainians scared the life out of them. And they went to Bohemia, or as they say, Böhmen. And they stayed there for the whole war. And you know what, they ate skins of the potatoes. The farmers would not give them the regular food because it would cost so much.

MG: Who were the farmers?

PT: Czechs today. We would call them Czechs today.

MG: Oh, the Czechs, gotcha. Yeah. And also for the record, my great-aunt Paula, she was born in 1908, right?

PT: No, she was born in 19, we're not sure. 1910 or 1909. But she was nearly 104 when she died.

MG: Right. Correct.

PT: So she had longevity. Ooh, maybe I have it. I don't know.

MG: Oh, come on. You definitely have it. You're sharp as a tack.

PT: Oh, okay.

MG: Okay. So now my next question would be was Grandma Yetta's story when coming to America? Was it less tumultuous as Grandpa Max being sent back?

PT: Oh no. She went back to her town. My grandfather sent money for them for visas and then very, very tragically, the Spanish flu broke out in that town. And my grandmother died, my mother's mother. So I never knew her. So then my mother at 15 years old was in charge of the family. Oh God. But she had cousins and uncles that were there. So they went to Danzig to go on the boat. And in Danzig, everybody's hair was, all the men had their hair cut off to make sure they don't have the Lice. So my mother and my mother and her sister couldn't stand the idea they would be bald?! They would cut their hair off. So what they did is they dressed my uncle Nat, who was with him, my mother's brother, they dressed him in women's clothing and he put my mother's name down as Yetta.

MG: No way!

PT: And then he went and changed and put his name down as Paula. So that's how my mother and Paula, Yetta and Paula didn't have their hair cut off.

Shaun Illingworth: Oh

MG: That's amazing!

PT: And then they got on the ship, had a terrible time because they were in steerage and they didn't know what kind of food they were eating all they ate was rolls because they had something called a banana. They never heard of a banana. And they pressed it and it popped out and oranges and all sorts of strange things.

MG: That's amazing.

PT: So they were all starving, except for the rolls and butter.

MG: Right. Now I know that Grandpa Max was a carpenter, but what did Grandma Yetta do for a living?

PT: She started out as a seamstress and she was taking care of the family. There was no grandmother, so she learned to cook. I had an aunt here was my close Aunt Tanta. Her name was Sarah. But we called her Tanta, which is German for aunt. And she taught my mother how to cook. So my mother was cooking for the family, and when she got married, she tried seamstress to be a seamstress. She was good at that, but she really hated working. And then she got pregnant with my brother. And so she took care of the family. So she never worked. She tried it once more and it didn't please her.

MG: Wow

PT: So my father had a terrible, in 1942 or 43, he was in a terrible auto accident. I told him that.

MG: Yeah, I think you told me about

PT: That. His boss said, I have a great job in Long Branch, New Jersey, which today is upper class at that time was lower class. And Max, my father come, you work there, I'll pick you up at five o'clock in the morning. Oh God. He'll wake up at four. So my father went and the guy drove, and when he got to New Jersey, he fell asleep at the wheel and crashed the car into a tree. And my father was in the hospital there for months. But he lived! and he came home and he was a mess. And then eventually he started to work again. But that was a year. How we survived monetarily. I don't know. They never told me. I didn't ask. All I knew was there were always food on the table. And every summer we went to the country, to a hotel.

MG: The Adirondacks you went up to in—

PT: No, Catskills.

MG: Oh, Catskills. Catskills.

MG: Alright. So now you don't need to answer this, but what was your relationship with your family like? Was it a good relationship?

PT: I was the favorite.

MG: Oh, you were the favorite. I see.

PT: I was the favorite. According to me and according to my brother who hated me, he didn't hate me. He was always a little angry. Yeah. I thought I was the cat's meow. But actually when I think about it, I was a very sickly kid. They had no inoculations at that time. I got whooping cough when I was six months old. I got the measles at four or five. And what's the other one? Chickenpox and German measles and measles are constantly being sick. And the worst thing is the ear. What do you call that? Ear absence.

MG: Ear Absence?

PT: An absence in the ear. That's the term they use an infection in the ear.

SI: Oh, an Abscess?

PT: Oh, an abscess.

MG: Abscess. Yeah. I was going to say.

PT: Oh, thank you. I looked for the word. An abscess in the ear. It wasn't the next step, which was horrible. Called the mastoid.

MG: Right. This is the mastoid, this bone (Grandpa pointing to me where the mastoid is located). And I had a cousin who kept getting mastoid infection and they had to keep scraping his bone here. Albert, we never became friends, even though he was a first cousin and my father's younger brother. But that's the way it worked out.

MG: So now the next question is, tell me about your childhood and what was your most fondest memory of it?

PT: Wow. My fondest memory was I was the leader of a group of 13 boys. And I was leader for a short time until I was 10. But I made up all the games that we played, box ball, ring Olivio, witch hunt, statues. I don't know if you've ever heard of that.

MG: Whats rig olivio?

PT: Ring Olivio...

MG: Oh Ring

PT: Ring Olivio is a game only in the Bronx. I don't know. They never played it here is that one man, is it one boy is it. And he counts to 10, closes his eyes and counts to 10. And then all the other kids have to hide...

MG: oh

PT: and he has to catch you. And then, oh, and there's a base. When he sees you, IRA! you're behind that bush. Tap, tap, tap. You counter the base and you put him in jail.

MG: Oh, that's so clever. I like that.

PT: Yes. It was a wonderful game. And I was a very fast kid until 10 years old. And at 10, everybody was faster than I somehow I was not the tall guys. My friend Larry became six foot two and other guys .

MG: That's awesome.

PT: Became taller. So I lost my status, but that was the best time.

MG: Right. That's awesome. So now we're going to get into, what was it like being Jewish? Growing up in 1920s, 1930s, New York with the Bund and all being present.

PT: But I was in a Jewish area, a Jewish-Italian area, and I was always saying, why is there other activities in New York like gang warfare? Why don't we have gang warfare here? And we didn't have it in the Bronx.

MG: Despite your neighborhood being Italian and all,--

PT: There was no, the Italians and the Jews stuck together for some reason. I don't know why. There was one kid, my best friend when I was in high school, my best friend was an Italian boy, Peter Piscatelli. And he became very famous. He was Mayor Koch's personal lawyer. We met again, somebody knew somebody else when we were in our fifties or sixties, and they said, oh,

get together. But we got together and he didn't really know me. He knew me, but I was a nobody to him.

MG: Right. And that's awesome. And wow, I'm learning so much about you. Were you religious at all growing up?

PT: My parents went to the shul synagogue on all the holidays, and my brother went to the synagogue and he had a bar mitzvah, a beautiful bar mitzvah, and there was no money for me to go to put me in the synagogue. So they found a synagogue or a shul, I'll use the word shul. And it was cheaper than the regular one. The regular one was Williamsburg, no, Williams Bridge. That's the name of my area in the Bronx, the Williams Bridge. And they found one further south. And I went there. I did very well. I learned Hebrew beautifully. I was an example, and I was Bar mitzvah I, and then everything stopped. I didn't go. My mother couldn't afford to give them \$10 every month or whatever it was. So it was over. And I completely forgot how to read. Completely. I felt terrible. My father was in the synagogue and I went to greet him and sit next to him. And I looked, he was reading and I said, wow, I can't read that. I don't know what happened.

MG: Did you experience any antisemitism?

PT: It really was not serious. The girl behind me in elementary school micolina, she said, do you like ge filter fish? I said, why are you asking me a question like that? And I couldn't answer her. I mean, I love Gefilta fish, but I didn't know why it was, she said she had never been in church. I said, yes, I wasn't a church. I thought that was important. Coming back from school, I once walked past the church and I looked in, I got scared. So I went home and I didn't tell anybody. Eventually though, I did go to that church with some friends. I forgot why. One of my friends' friends was Italian, a wonderful lady. And either she had a friend who was getting married and we all went to a church, a huge church on Gunn Hill Road. It's still there.

MG: Wow. So you briefly went over your father's role in the Great War, and you had said that he was in Caporetto, which I think for the record took place in November 1917.

PT: Oh, did it take place? '17?

MG: Yeah.

MG: Yeah. And—

PT: I think he may have been in the hospital then, or he may have been at Caporetto. I don't remember. I know he was wounded, so he never mentioned that it was very difficult war because in France you could dig trenches. It was all farmland. And that part of Italy and Austria-Hungary, it was stone. It was the mountains.

MG: Right.

PT: So what they did is they built up stone fences, I guess you could call it. And they hid behind the fence to shoot at the Italians. Oh. That's why I stopped liking Italians because my father was fighting against them.

MG: So gathering my thoughts. Oh, correct. Now, you said that he fought in Caporetto. Did he fight anywhere else in that? In other campaigns?

PT: It was, strangely enough, the Austrian army had this a way of having generals. You had to be part of royalty or nobility. And that didn't mean that they had any experience with war. So there were not great fighters. My father, I'm sure was a great fighter. But so the Italians invaded Slovenia and Austria-Hungary, and they went deep into the country. And my father fought against them. And I was telling Shaun they did so poorly, they had to ask the Germans to help them. And then the Germans came. They were terrific soldiers. And then they used poison gas.

MG: Right. Yeah. Also for the record as well, my great grandfather, I had done research a little bit years ago when he first showed me that photo, and he was a part of the Mountain Corps. I had looked at some of the medals and I had found something along the lines of the Mountain Corps. Oh yeah. And I just thought that was very interesting. But also during this time as well, the Germans had used great stormtrooper tactics up in the mountains as well, which was also—

PT: They were terrific soldiers.

MG: Yeah, Terrific fighters. Yeah. Terrific. Now, was he patriotic for his empire?

PT: Absolutely! He didn't have to join the army. He could have hid. I was explaining. He used, you never heard my mother's, my grandmother's maiden name. He used, you don't know my grandmother's name.

MG: What is it?

PT: Zeidner.

MG: Oh yeah. You told me. Zeidner

PT: Didn't I? Yeah,

MG: Yeah. That's what you thought the name was. And then when I found the records for Grandpa Max, it was something else. It was Mortke Hirsch.

PT: Oh, Mortke. Maybe that's was the name.

SI: That was the “M” name.

PT: Yeah. The European name. M-H. It had to be M-H. I never got a middle name. But they came here. They called him Max immediately,

MG: Right. Now, what was Grandpa Max's personality like?

PT: Well, I'll tell you, being wounded did something to him. It made him kind of nervous and tense. Occasionally he laughed, but usually I never found him laughing.

MG: Modern PTSD probably.

PT: Yeah, it was. He was not allowed to talk about the war to us. My mother had a rule, do not talk about the war to us, meaning his kids. But he talked about the war to my cousins, my first cousins, Herbie and Stanley.

MG: You told me about them briefly.

PT: Yeah. They were out close cousins, the other cousins, we weren't close, but they were close. Cause it was my father's sister's children. And you're always closer to the Aunt than to the uncle, because the uncle has a strange wife. I don't want to mention certain things, but they were not the way my mother was, who was a loyal wife. Wow.

MG: Oh boy.

PT: They were not loyal.

MG: Now, now,

PT: Oh, excuse me. They call themselves Americans. My mother used the Yiddish expression, which translates as horse. I forgot the Yiddish word, but that's what they thought by having boyfriends besides her husband.

MG: Now

PT: They're all gone now, so it doesn't matter.

MG: Sure. Correct. Now for the record as well, my great-grandpa Max was born in 1895 and died Exactly in '65. Correct?

PT: ' 62. '62. 1962.

MG: Correct. Now, did Grandpa Max ever meet Grandma or only Grandma Yetta met Grandma?

PT: Wait a minute, say that again.

MG: Okay. Did Grandma Yetta meet Grandma Linda when you were married?

PT: Oh, of course.

MG: But Grandpa Max did not, or —

PT: No, he had died. He died. I got married in 1967. He died in 1962. Oh. That was very traumatic for me because I never said, oh, pop, I love you. I just assumed that's what it was. But when he died, I was so devastated. I didn't sleep well for two years.

MG: Oh my. I didn't know it affected you like that.

PT: Yes. I didn't know it would affect me either. And whoever I met, I said, my father died last year. So what they,

MG: And that would just come out of your mouth like that?

PT: Yeah, I just said, that's my father.

MG: Oh my. Now, now you had always told me that you remember the Great Depression. You were born roughly when it started. What memories do you have from that?

PT: My memory is that, I'm telling you, I always had food on the table. We went away on vacation every summer. My mother had, even though she was from Europe, she had this idea of pollution. New York City is polluted with terrible air. You have to go to the mountains to get pure air. Where she got that idea, I don't know. I can't swim here. And when I was in the country, there was a pool, you can't swim in it, it's polluted. I say, ma, what does that mean? People peed in the pool and you can't go swimming in there. You could only swim in the stream. At that time, the streams were pure. So I only swam in the stream. I'll tell you something interesting.

SI: Sure.

PT: There was a farm in Hurleyville, New York that didn't make much money. So they allowed a private company to build a hotel on the farm property, and they would rent out rooms. It was cook yourself, meaning you could have the room. And then you went to a central dining room and were given a gas range and a icebox. At that time, that's what they used. And you made your own food, but it was a common kitchen. So that's where we went. Now why am I telling you that?

MG: Because—

PT: Down, it was still a farm, and we were on top of the hill, and down below was a stream. And the railroad, the Erie–Lackawanna Railroad had a bridge over it. In order to build the bridge over a small stream, they had to build up the stream, make it wider. I don't know. So they used dynamite and they created a pool, and that's where we used to swim. And I never knew why in a stream that's maybe two feet tall, deep, there was this deep pool. And that's where I learned to swim. My father taught me how to swim.

MG: Oh, that's amazing. Wow.

MG: I'm learning so much. I'm very intrigued.

PT: Yeah. That's where the cows had to cross the railroad track to go up another hill to graze.

MG: Wow. So now we're going to get into World War II.

PT: Okay.

MG: So what was it like on the home front where you were, did your life change from it? From what it once was to what it was—

PT: Yes, it was because one, you had to put a curtain on every window. And when they called blackout, every window had to be covered.

MG: Now, what was this blackout for? To prevent, if there was an aerial attack?

PT: An aerial attack, that you shouldn't have the lights on.

MG: Of course.

PT: Now, an interesting thing is we lived in the back of the building and in the back there was another block and there was an empty space. Nobody built homes there. Maybe later on they did. And next to that was a private house with an Italian family. And the Italians fought with the Germans. So we thought that they were spies. We made that up, of course, but you know they didn't put covers on their windows that faced the back, which was the yard. So we thought they had to be reported.

MG: Because you thought they were allowing them to bomb you If there was to be—

PT: Yeah, they were showing lights in the Bronx. My uncle who lived next door in the next building was a airaid warden. I just thought of it. And he made sure every house was covered during these exercises. And he saw the Italian house, and they were reported. They were not spies. What it was is that one of the men who lived there was either retarded or something was wrong with him. He never spoke. I don't think he heard. And they always catered to him because he only used his hands or body.

MG: Autism maybe, or something

PT: Something like that. We had an oak tree growing in front of our window, which was wonderful. That's how I learned what a blue jay looked like.

MG: Wow.

PT: Okay.

MG: So now the next question is, you had always told me what you did to contribute, but for the sake of the interview, what did you do to contribute to the war effort?

PT: Oh, I'll tell you. We certainly did. I had good friends. We went wherever there was a pile of junk and we collected iron, and they said they were looking for iron to make weapons. I don't know. And then we took the iron and we brought it to a special store and they said, thank you. And then we went looking for more iron.

MG: You never got money for it?

PT: No. But what happened is there was a section of the area nearby Bronx Park East. We were about four blocks from Bronx Park, and they were going to build another housing development there, but they lost their money. It was the depression. So they left dynamite covers, I don't know, rugs. I dunno what to call it. Made of steel. So when they blasted to put concrete on and build the foundation for the home, you dynamite it, but you didn't want the dirt going all over the place. Probably like

MG: A Blast Shield or something.

PT: What?

MG: Like a blast shield (MG reiterating his previous statement)

PT: Yeah. So they covered it with this iron. And then when they lost money, they didn't have any money left. They left everything there. So my friend Robert, Robbie and Jackie, we all tried to dig it out and we couldn't. It was too much.

MG: Oh, wow.

PT: But we wanted to show them that we were patriotic. And in school too, we learned all patriotic song anchors away. And what's the army word? SI and

PT: Kay Sanko.

MG: Wow, that's so cool. Grandpa.

PT: And the Air Force song. Why am I so upset? Okay. Yeah.

MG: You all right, gramps?

PT: Yeah. I don't know why I just thought of it.

MG: You're just reminiscing. I suppose.

PT: I forgot in school, in eighth grade, we had to learn all the patriotic songs.

MG: So now what was your preferred method of keeping up with the war? Did you like reading newspapers?

PT: We had a newspaper today. I wouldn't read it. New York Post. It was a very good newspaper. And on page three, it told you exactly where the war was, where the Germans were winning, or the Italians were winning. And we saw where the Italians were losing the Italians invaded Albany and took it over and from Albany. They invaded Greece,

MG: You mean Albania? Albania.

PT: What did I say?

MG: You said Albany as in New York.

PT: Albania, of course. And from Albania, they invaded Greece, and the Greeks somehow pushed them back and invaded Albania. Oh, why was I happy! But then the Italians called on the Germans, and the Germans took over Greece like a few days.

MG: Correct. And now, did you personally think that the allies were going to win this war?

PT: That's a good question. I just didn't think that they would come here. That's all. I thought. Oh, you're in America. You're safe. That's what my parents thought, that they were safe. My father was upset that his oldest brother was killed. A murdered, have to use the right word.

MG: And we'll get into that later on in the interview.

PT: Oh, Okay.

MG: But now, uncle Teddy, he fought the Japanese.

PT: No.

MG: He did not?

PT: No, he was not in a fighting. He was not in the infantry.

MG: Oh, he was not. I apologize.

PT: When he was here, he was going to be drafted.

SI: This is your older brother?

PT: My older brother, yeah. So he got a job at the post office of all things. And when he got into the Army, he told them he worked in the post office. So they put him in the post office, in the Army, and they sent him overseas to India.

MG: India.

PT: India, Burma. It was a, what's the Word? China? Burma—

SI: Cina-Burma-India theatre

PT: Oh, China, Burma, India. Thank you. Yeah. And there was a road, the Burma road that went from Burma at that time was called Burma.

MG: Correct.

PT: Went to China to Chonquing. That was the capital of China temporarily.

MG: Correct. Because the Japanese—

PT: Japanese and the Japanese surrendered you know in 1945. And so he never fought.

MG: Oh, I thought I always thought he did.

PT: See, no, he was in airplanes and that sort of thing. And he was in an airplane that crashed, but he was not hurt. And then he went, they sent all the GIs to Shanghai where he had the time of his life.

MG: What would he do there? Good food.

PT: Don't ask—

PT: Oh, good food. Are you kidding? You don't have the time of your life of good food. There was a colony of Jewish women who escaped from Europe, two colonies. A Sephardic meaning Spanish Jews, and Ashkenazi meaning European. He was European. We have European.

MG: Correct.

PT: So he met so many girls there, so desperate for Jewish boys. And one of them wanted to marry him. And he said, I have no job, but I'll go out with you. And he had loads of fun.

MG: I never knew, I never took Uncle Teddy like that.

PT: And there was a movie on that, on the army in Shanghai. That section has been, not destroyed, but built up into Chinese housing.

MG: Wow. So now you had always told me that you had one particular campaign that you always took more interest in than the others. What was that campaign?

PT: The Pacific Campaign.

MG: Pacific. Now, why the Pacific? What intrigued you about it?

PT: You about? Because I thought MacArthur was a genius, and he was using what they called island hopping, going and taking, well, the Japanese took over all the islands in the Pacific . I guess I'm exaggerating, but including Indonesia and French Indochina and half of, or maybe a third of China and Taiwan, they called Formosa. So the Japanese were going to invade Australia. And somehow the Americans already had established a base there, and they invaded the Solomon Islands where the Japanese were in an island called Guadalcanal. So we went, the Americans went there. There was a terrible war. We lost so many men, but eventually we defeated the Japanese. And from there, we successfully went to other islands in towa-Tarawa. I remember so many of the names, it'll come to me.

MG: New Britain, Truk.

PT: Oh, Truk. But of course, eventually they got to Iwo Jima. And that was very important because at Iwo Jima, you could build an airfield and fly to Japan. Japan and come back. And that's why Iwo Jima was so important. And when they got there, oh, Whoopi, we were going to defeat them. But we didn't do that right away. We went to Okinawa and we lost so many men there. Oh God. But my brother never went to Okinawa.

MG: That's probably where I got the confusion from. I thought that he had fought.

PT: No, he didn't.

MG: So now your father, how did he react to when the Germans invaded the Russians? Was he absolutely shocked that his former allies?

PT: No, he no longer had any Austria by that time had been diminished.

MG: Annexed. Yeah.

PT: Well, they were annexed by the Germans, but that whole empire became other countries. That was Hungary. There was what they called Yugoslavia. But that became six countries. Serbia, Herzegovina, Bosnia. My father all knew all of those. Slovenia, Montenegro or Montenegro? Macedonia,

MG: Bosnia.

PT: Bosnia. Well, it's Bosnia-Herzegovina.

MG: Oh, correct.

PT: Was one was section. And that's the only section that was Muslim. Because Turkey had invaded Austria-Hungary empire, the 1800s1. And they went pretty quickly to nearly to Vienna. They nearly conquer Vienna.

MG: Correct. So he was not surprised that Hitler invaded the USSR. Right. He wasn't shocked by that?

PT: Other, no, but I said, Pa! we're in the war now. I was so excited. I says, it's like your war. And he said, yeah, let's hope that they win. But he never really worried. He was still in the first World War. He was traumatized by the First World War. And also that accident, that automobile accident. Oh God.

SI: Was he upset when your brother went off to the Service?

PT: Yes. My mother and father were very upset. And we were in the country on our summer vacation, and my mother said, my brother's going to come home. Her son is coming home on a 1 It was the late 1500s and 1683. I forgot to correct my Grandfather furlough. Ma, how do you know that? I know. I dreamt about it. We're going home, but the summer isn't over. He's coming home. So we got a, what do they call it? At that time, not a cab that was used. Another word when you hired a car. What? Some kind of

SI: Some kind of transportation.

MG: Transportation. A tram car?

PT: No, I forgot what you call it.

SI: A Truck. Some kind of truck.

PT: But no. Well, they hired a car, hired a hack-like, and we came home the next day. I'm getting so upset. I dunno why my brother comes home. Teddy, how did you come home? How did you know? My mother just knew. He stayed a week and said he was going to go overseas. China, Burma, India. And my mother was very happy, but very worried he was going overseas.

MG: So now my next question, you don't have to answer this if you don't want to.

PT: Oh okay.

MG: But how did you know the fate of your family in the Holocaust that were murdered by the Nazis? How did you find out what happened?

PT: One person, one Jewish man from Zablotov sneaked out of Zablatov into Hungary. And of all people he met, there was a, the guy who here wrote a book called Night.

SI: Oh, Eli Wisell.

PT: Yeah. Met of all people. Oh,

MG: Wow. Wisell

PT: And he went to his town and said, Jews have to leave. You can't stay here. The Nazis come and they murder all the Jews. You dig a trench, they line up the Jews and shoot them. And some

don't fall in right away. Other Jews are told to come and push them in, and then they have to dig a trench and Oh, it was horrible.

MG: So they were executed on the outskirts of Zabłotów?

PT: Yeah, all of them in the woods. Wow.

MG: My Goodness.

PT: And this guy somehow knew. Okay, so I am I telling you this, eventually he gets to Israel and he writes a book on what happened to the Jews in Zabłotów or Zablotov.

MG: A book. Just about that?

PT: Yeah.

MG: Were you able to have peace in your family? Were they able to be buried properly, or you never—

PT: No. My uncles went to Zov after the second World War in the fifties. And Poland, it wasn't in charge anymore. It was Russia, Ukraine. And they wouldn't give them, they say, this is our house. And they said, no, where's your deed? Or they didn't have a deed. This is where we grew up. Sorry. And they did not give them any recognition.

MG: Wow. So now speaking of Israel, that was going to my next question. Now, what was your reaction when you heard that the modern state of Israel was created?

PT: Oh, I was thrilled. I had my brothers, my father's two sisters lived there. And we visited them, not my family. I went with my friend Larry Rubin in 1961 or somewhere we took it. I said, let's go to Israel. And we went and we stayed at their house. One Aunt Henrietta, well, I forgot her name. Hernia. And then we went to the other sister who was on the other end of Israel at a kibbutz. And we had never been at a kibbutz before wow.

MG: Where did they live and what Kibbutz and—

PT: It was south of Tiberius. If you know Israel, there's a Lake Galilee and south of, it was a kibbutz called Yahuk, or Yitzhak some name I don't remember. And they put us up there in a room and we ate their meals. And then my cousin decided to help us tour Israel. So we toured Israel.

MG: That's Beautiful.

PT: With this cousin.

MG: Did you ever want to live there? Did you ever think about you wanted to settle down?

PT: No. No, no, no. I was happy here in America. .

MG: But it was always nice to have our Jewish State.

PT: Well, Israel at that time was pretty primitive. They had not developed industry or, well, they did, but was—

MG: They didn't have their own economic independence. They just got their own.

PT: But we went back to Israel in 2010 or 2014 or something like that. 10 years ago? No, maybe 15 years ago, Israel was built up. Oh my God. We couldn't recognize it with hotels and highways and industry and all the big companies. I don't know if they're still there because of this horrible war (referring to the Gaza war), but all the big companies that you could imagine, the Microsoft and Google, and they all located somewhere south of Haifa. Oh. And we went on the subway, Haifa, my wife and I (referring to Grandma).

MG: How was that?

PT: It was interesting. It was a different type of subway. And was on a cable because it went up the mountain. So a cable pulled it up like San Francisco has the trolley cars pulled up.

MG: Now we're going to get into your time in the military. But actually no. Before we get into that, did you go into college first and then the military?

PT: Yeah.

MG: Now what—

PT: No, I was explaining to Shaun, my parents were very much against me going into the army. And I was a teacher, so I was allowed to have a deferment until at 26 if you were still deferred, then they never called you. So I never went into the army, but I wanted to go. I wanted to see the world. All I knew was New York City and in the mountains, the Catskills. What kind of life is that? I have to go to Europe. And that's what my thinking.

MG: Right, Right

PT: It turned out I went to Japan. But—

MG: So you went to college first?

PT: I went to college. I got a job. I had a regular teaching job. And I was telling Shaun I wanted to get drafted, but I couldn't do it with my parents around. And they happened to go to Florida on a vacation. My father's sister was in Florida. So with my parents gone—

MG: You went behind their back.

PT: I'm sorry?

MG: You went behind their back and you enlisted?

PT: No, I didn't enlist. I got a letter drafted.

MG: You got a letter.

PT: Oh, and I didn't protest. I didn't say, I want to be deferred. I'm a teacher. I wrote nothing. And they got, when they come back, I showed them a letter on April 24th, I have to go April 24th. Oh, wow. That's my mother's birthday. April 24th or thereabouts, I went to the army. I was drafted, went downtown to New York to Manhattan.

MG: So before we go further into what it was like for you in the military, what was college like for you? Did you join like Greek life? Were you heavily involved in college or you were just in there to get your education and get out?

PT: Well, their social life, I didn't have anything to do with a fraternity. But they had what they called social clubs. And I was in a social club for the whole time until toward the end. I got into another one. My friend Larry talked me into his social club. And it was a better one because they took us to City Island. And I got to know what pizza was like. I never knew the word pizza. Whoever had pizza, didn't call it pizza.

MG: What they call it?

PT: Arbitz. Because the Italians called it a pizza. A pizza. And the Jewish kids didn't hear that. And they said, arbitz. They thought it was arbitz. So when I saw the first pizza, I said to Marsha, this girl who ordered it, "Where's the arbitz?" She says, "This is it, the arbitz." So until somebody explained to me, "You're not saying arbitz, you're saying pizza." Oh. And then—

MG: So what college did you go to?

PT: City College.

MG: Oh, City College.

PT: Yes. I passed the test. I was happy to go. It was hard for me.

MG: And you majored in education?

PT: Yeah. I didn't know what to major in whatever my brother did. He was at City College. He wanted to be an engineer. I wanted to be an engineer. I took one course in physics. I'm not going to go on anything else. Horrible. So meanwhile, he switched to business. So I took a business course. I said, what kind of balogna is this business? So I got out of business and then I said, maybe I'll do something else. I loved history. So I said, maybe I'll be a history teacher. And I went back to my high school and I spoke to the history teacher that I liked Mr. Peck. He said,

don't go to high school. He says, that's terrible. Go to elementary school and you'll advance from a teacher to assistant principal. I said, what's an assistant principal? I didn't know there's such a thing. All I knew was I was in elementary school and there was a principal of the school. I didn't know this as assistant.

MG: What elementary school did you teach at?

PT: P.S. 78 in the neighborhood? Everything. I went to a school called P.S. 76, and it got so crowded, they pushed us to P.S. 41. It's horrible. It really wasn't horrible, but it was over the tracks. There was trolley tracks and you had to walk over them four blocks down and over. And my mother was so frightened I'd be killed by a trolley. So I got scared. But the school was a good school.

MG:.. That's good. So now we're going to go back to the military.

PT: Okay.

MG: So you served in the mid fifties, correct?

PT: Yeah, 1954 to 1956.

MG: And you were a corporal, correct? That's what you Finished as?

PT: A corporal, but I gave it up because I left the army three months before my discharge.

MG: Why 90 days before?

PT: Because I was accepted into teacher's college and the Army would pay for it. So I wrote a letter to my brother, enroll me into teacher's college at Columbia. And I'm allowed to leave three months before if I have a college. So get me a letter that I'll show them. And I got a letter that said I was accepted into Teacher's college. It did me no good. I mean, I did go into teachers college, but I learned nothing. I didn't learn.

MG: I t wasn't really that rewarding for you?

PT: It wasn't rewarding. It was. I didn't understand what they really wanted of me. I did very well. I gave one speech at the college. It's my second speech, my third speech that I got applause. I once got applause in college at public speaking. We had to take a public speaking course. And I gave a speech there and they laughed like crazy. And I got applause. And then I gave a speech in college. I don't know what happened . Oh, on how bees communicate. Oh, and they love that. And then I gave a speech at City College on how I was learned to be, how I was taught to be a teacher by the principal. And somehow I made it. I didn't mean to be funny, but it turned out to be hysterical. And everybody applauded. And when I went back to my seat, one guy said, that was a great speech. Oh, thanks. Thanks. I don't know what I said. That was so funny. Oh, I know what I said. I mean, but—

MG: What did you say?

PT: What happened was when you become a teacher, the principal has to see you three times and every time. And so I said, oh, I have to have a lesson that really is terrific. I'll get a fish tank, but I'll fill it with soil and I'll put seeds in it and the kids will see the seeds sprout. That will be the lesson seed sprout. And I'll tell them how we've done and we'll investigate. We'll take the seeds out of the soil. So that was my client lesson. The principal sends me a note. He can't see me that day. He got very busy. So that goes, takes care of that lesson. Oh no. I'll show them how the seeds sprout and they'll see it growing. And I'll have a second lesson on the seeds. When they sprout, how? I don't know if you know, they don't go straight. They bend. Seed has to bend so it could puncture the soil and then it gets straight.

MG: What do you mean?

PT: The stem comes first and then

MG: So it kind of grows like—

PT: No, it grows with a bend.

MG: Grows with a bend. I see.

PT: See, these were string beans. So they had a bend to push, pierce the soil, and then they straightened up.

MG: Oh, I see.

PT: I don't know if you knew that, but I didn't know that until I read it. So he didn't come again. He canceled. So I tell them that. So they begin to giggle. And I don't think that's so funny. I was so nervous. So then finally when he comes, the string beans are all over the place and they're growing out of the tank. And I explained what happened, and I said, the kids saw the string beans out of the plant. And we pulled it. Each client, each kid got a string bean. And we investigated, well investigated, we inspected the roots. What kind of roots? I don't know if you know this. Different kind of roots. And this was many roots. I forgot the word for it. And then the stem, and then the bud, and then the flower and the seeds. And they were hysterical. So—

MG: Wow, that's amazing.

PT: That's what happened. And they all left.

SI: What grade did you teach?

PT: Fourth, fifth, sixth. And then when the school became, they lopped off seven and eight. So all the seventh and eighth grade teachers left, but they didn't, the grade was still there, so they put me in seventh grade. Oh wow. I had terrible time.

MG: So before I ask another question about your time in the military, how did you get promoted to assistant principal?

PT: Oh, this is what happened. I came and then I was drafted. I stayed in the army for one and a half years, or one or three quarters. When I came back, I had a right to have that position because I was drafted. So the substitute teacher, who was very nice lady, said, I love this class. I said, I'm sorry, but I'm back. And I took over the class. Meanwhile, there was a Mrs. Green in the upper grades, and she was a Catholic teacher. I mean, she was a teacher, but not a Catholic teacher in the class.

MG: Religion teacher?

PT: I guess. And the Pope was coming to New York and he was going to go to Yankee Stadium. So she was very thrilled. She was a lovely lady, Irish lady, Green. So she asked the class, and the class was half Jewish, half Italian. So she asked the class, what famous person is coming to New York this week? And the kids all raised their hand, Mr. Thau. And none of them said the Pope. I was the person that was important that was coming. So—

MG: They said that you were the famous one?

PT: Yeah. Well, she left the classroom immediately and came down to tell me the anecdote. Oh my. She said, Phil, you'll never believe this story. We were all on first names. Of course I forgot her first name. Oh, lovely lady. She told me that. And I always tell that story if I remember it.

MG: So now, what was the overall environment when you were a part of the occupation army of Japan? Did you feel any hostility, any friendliness among the Japanese locals?

PT: I'm going to tell you something. After I was in Japan, I read several books on the occupation. And I said, that's why the Japanese was so cooperative. Because when we bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we destroy the cities and caused a lot of casualties. And the emperor of Japan, Hirohito, we said Hirohito. The Japanese never said that he was called Hirosto. Yes. But no one ever says that because in Japanese, H-I-R-O-S-T-O. Like in English we say "tion." So that's the only time that they vary from pronunciation of the letters. So Hirohito and his group went to those cities and they saw how devastated they were. And meanwhile, Tojo the premier and another group wanted to continue the war. The United States should invade Japan and every citizen will get a gun, or even the women get a broomstick and kill Americans. We would've had a million casualties.

MG: Yes. And also for the record, they estimated that the war would've carried on another two years to roughly '47.

PT: Probably.

MG: And they said that the Japanese combined with the civilian army was roughly three-three and a half million strong. And it were to be a combined Anglo-American force. And obviously

we can see that it obviously did not happen. And sadly we had to take another route, which also led to casualties.

PT: Which one?

MG: Dropping the bombs.

PT: Oh, well, after Hirohito prevailed over Tojo and he said, we're going to have peace and we're going to have peace on the Missouri battleship. And we had peace. They signed the treaty. It wasn't a peace treat, it was an armistace.

MG: Surrender.

PT: And I never knew why it was the Missouri. MG : I never knew. I mean, I visited it, but I never knew why. Is it because that Missouri was at Pearl Harbor, right? Wasn't it?

PT: No, because the president of the United States was born in Missouri. Oh,

MG: Truman. Right. Okay. Now you had said that—

PT: You took, oh, so that's why when I come to Japan by boat, we didn't fly. We went by boat. Lemme tell you one thing on the boat. At first I was seasick, but then I got over that very quickly and I went on deck and nobody was on deck. I said, what's the matter with these people? They don't go on deck in the evening. On the very tip of the boat, the aft was a bird. And what bird would land on a ship when nobody was around an albatros, the largest bird and the earth. And that's the poem that I read, the rhyme of the ancient Marita. About the albatros. I don't know if you had English.

PT: Oh yeah, yeah. Did you have that?

SI: Yeah, we read part of it. Yeah

PT: Yeah. So that was it.

MG: I've never read it.

PT: I have it down in an old literature book and the albatros, and if you go near it, it'll fly away.

MG: That's why no one was on the deck.

PT: Yeah. It was a huge, if he spread his wings, I don't know, 13, 20 feet on each and maybe 10 feet. So it would fly away. It was an amazing site.

MG: Wow.

PT: And then of course, we landed in, not Tokyo, but Yokohama, which was the harbor for Japan. And we stayed there a few days. I have a story to tell, but I don't know if you want to hear it.

SI: Yeah, please.

PT: On the ship said, oh, you're going to Yokohama, go to a restaurant that serves Americans called Original Joe. I said, really? There's a restaurant called Original Joe. They said, yeah, it's delicious. So when you get to Yokohama, after a day or two, we found out where we're sleeping. I said to a group, there's a good restaurant in Yokohama. How do I know I've never been to Yokohama? And they said, what's the name? I said, Original Joe. They knew immediately. Original Joe. They know what that meant. There was Joe and Joe. Lots of names used for Joe. But this was the original. So we get a cab, imagine that already. Yokohama had cabs. And I said, could you take us to the Original Joe? He understood some English. Yes. Or as he say in Japanese, how do you say yes, hai. So he took us to a restaurant that said, eat here if you're hungry. I said, that's not original, Joe. Oh, sorry, sorry. I said Original Joe. Oh yes, yes. Si si Hai, Hai. And he went to another restaurant with another name and this went on. I said, what's the matter with you?! It's Al Joe. I said it that way, like I'm talking Spanish. So he said, oh, and took us to original Joe. When he heard the name,

MG: he could understand your accent.

PT: Yes. And when we got there, it was so nice. They give you a napkin to wipe your hands and a plate.

MG: What did you order?

PT: I don't remember. It was delicious. Whatever it was. I said something Japanese.

MG: What were your comrades like?

PT: Oh, good question. We had a barracks and there was a sergeant in charge, a very nice guy. And then there was a sergeant Chance who was a mean guy. And Oh, did you ask me about antisemitism?

MG: Yeah, I asked you earlier.

PT: I forgot. He was the only time. I'll tell you what happened. He was a nasty guy, so I didn't have anything to do with him. But there was a very nice recreation hall that we all went to in the evening. And he came there and I figured, I'm not in the base anymore or in the barracks. I'm free. I thought. So he said, Thau, what are you doing here? I said, it's not your business. What I'm doing here. Well, I'm off base. He said, you Jews always talk like that. See me in the morning. And the morning was Saturday morning, which I supposed to have off. So when I saw him Saturday morning, what do you want me to do? He says, you're going to do chores for me. And I did some chores. I painted, I moved stuff. And another sergeant came along and said, Sergeant Chance, let him alone. He's a young guy. He doesn't know what he said. And then he left me alone. And we never spoke for the next two years, we never spoke again.

MG: Would you see him?

PT: I saw him all the time.

MG: But you never acknowledged his presence really?

PT: Besides that? I was afraid of him. I didn't know what else he was going to do. Right.

MG: Now, did you witness any cruelty among the Americans to Japanese civilians? No.

PT: Oh, cruelty. Yes. I wouldn't say cruelty, but forcing them to have sex. That's what that was. Cruelty. And this was another sergeant, Sergeant Moore, who was a wonderful sergeant, but he was married, had children, but his secretary was the cutest secretary, you can imagine. And white, but not white in the sense of an American, white Japanese. But the skin was white. Yeah. She was beautiful. Single. He said, I forgot her name. He said, we're going to go out tonight. No, no. My father doesn't let me go out with Americans. You're going out. And he took her out and had sex with her. She said, no, no, no. And he had sex with her.

MG: So he raped her.

PT: I guess he did. And he told everybody,

MG: That's horrible.

PT: I said, how could you do that? I didn't say that. I said to somebody else, how could he do that? But I was very friendly, friendly with a guy named Hans Weber.

MG: That was my next question. I was going to ask you about the German soldier.

PT: There was a German soldier who was in the German army who was drafted. He came here and he was drafted, and I avoided him like the plague. I didn't want to have anything to do with him. Who knows what we did in Germany? Every time I was moved from Gordon to Aberdeen, from Aberdeen to Washington state. And then on the ship he was there. And even in Yokohama. And I kept away from him. And then when I went to Southern Japan, I didn't mention the name of the town was Sassabo, but Kyushu was the name of the island.

MG: That's that near Russia, Kyushu Island?

PT: Or is it no place near Russia?

SI: It's south. Yeah, it's south.

MG: Oh, I'm thinking of something else.

PT: There are four main Japanese island. Honshu was the main island. Hokkaido was where they go skiing. Shikoku was an island not too populated. And then Kyushu, which is in the south.

MG: I was thinking of the Kurill islands that used to be under Japan.

PT: Q means nine in Japanese, and Shu means a prefecture. Sure. So that's how they got its name.

MG: And you met this German soldier, Hans, in the US right?

PT: Oh, yes. So I tried to avoid him. And when I sat on the bus from the barracks to go, oh, we were stationed, oh, I told you it was an ordinance. So we were in an ammunition depot. He always sat next to me. So I said, Hans, why are you sitting next to me? I'm Jewish and you are German. Did you kill Jews in Europe? No, we had invaded Russia. Okay. Bologna. Whenever they got to a town with Jewish people, they killed them all. Murdered them.

MG: Einsatzgruppen and all those guys?

PT: Yeah. Well, no, he was a regular soldier. And eventually we had a peace treaty and he got to be friendly with this. Sergeant; Moore, who was such a nice guy, and they invited us to dinner. The mother, the wife said, why don't you get your friends to come here for dinner?

MG: Hans Weber's wife, you said?

PT: No, Sergeant Moore.

MG: Sergeant Moore. Okay.

PT: So Hans and I went to her and they served us a beautiful meal. So that was the thing I was happy about.

MG: Did he immediately know you were Jewish? Did he know?

PT: I don't know, but I told him I was Jewish. Why do you want to be friends with me? And he said, I was not part of that group. Who knows? But anyway, the interesting thing is that he became part of my little coie. I had a small group and he disappeared. Whatever happened to Hans? Nobody knows. I think he went to some kind of spy school course. He was fluent with German. Yeah. And German, of course he was German.

MG: Oh, wow.

PT: So that's what I thought happened. Or he was really a spy for the Russians. I don't know what happened, and I never heard from him again.

MG: But that's such an interesting relationship that you were able to have being a Jew and then meeting an ex-German soldier.

PT: And the soldier that said you Jews did this.

MG: Oh, that was Sergeant Moore. That was the—

PT: No, that was not Sergeant Moore. That was Sergeant Chance. Oh, Chance. When I was stationed someplace else, there was a barracks. It was in sushi, Higashi Sushi. A small town outside Tokyo. Sushi higashi means east. So it was east sushi. So there was a barracks, and then the bathrooms and showers were across the road. What kind of business is that? So in the winter, we all took showers there. Then we had to run to the barracks. I mean, I took some clothing with me, but I never got sick. Anyway, so we was in the shower, and this fellow Brim McComb came, and I knew him a little bit. He was a little nut job. Tall guy, but thin and a nut job. He says, I did some damage in the whore house. Could you guys help me out? I need \$10 from each of you. We were about eight people. The first guy said, sorry, I have no money. Second guy, no money. No money. When it came to me, I said, sorry, Biko. We called him by his last name. I don't know his first name. I said, I don't have any mother either. You Jews are all alike. Now. He never said anything to the Christian soldiers, whether were they Catholic or Protestant? Some were Protestant. And to me, he picked them out. I never saw him again. I never looked at him, and I had no trouble.

MG: I mean, did you really not have any money to give him?

PT: I saw nobody gave him money. I didn't want to give money.

MG: Exactly.

PT: What was he going to do with the money?

MG: Yeah, it was his issue, not yours

PT: Not only that, he would not give it to the whore house. Sorry. He would spend money on liquor or something. So that was my experience.

MG: Right. So now I going into teaching. So now we're going,

SI: Can I ask a quick question?

MG: Oh yeah, sure.

SI: You said you were in the Ordinance Depot. What was your job?

PT: Oh, good question. I was the safety inspector, but not for the ammunition, for the whole whole depot. So I would get a new poster every week. So I put them up. I check the ladders, I check the roadways. The roadways. There was an iron mesh on the road all over the camp of the depot, and I think maybe it was an airport saw before. I just guessed at it, and I showed movies. And so that was it. If somebody did something wrong, all Japanese workers. So I went to the

head of the Japanese and told them, this is unsafe, fix it. He fixed it right away. And then on the base, they found a snake and they caught it, and they roasted it, and they wanted me to have a taste. I said, I have never eaten snake meat and I cannot eat it now.

MG: Is it kosher even?

PT: Oh, it's not kosher. That wasn't not my problem. My problem was who eats snake meat? And they all enjoyed it.

MG: So you didn't try it? No,

PT: I did not

MG: Try it. And thank you, professor actually accidentally skipped over that question about the ordinance. So thank you for that. Now, you always told me you had a favorite round of ammunition. What was that round of ammunition that you liked? You said that you had a favorite round or a favorite bomb or something?

PT: Oh, which we were not allowed to use. Oh, I forgot the name of

MG: It. I forgot the name too. That's why I'm asking.

PT: It's a chemical. Has a chemical in it. The bomb—

SI: One of the mortars.

PT: No, it was a bomb. But instead of explosive name

MG: A Bomb?

PT: No, it had a smoke. Woodstone, or I forgot the name of it. We were not allowed to use it. Now, where did our ammunition go?

MG: Didn't you tell me it supplied the French and Indochina?

PT: That's right. It is the go. And we thought we were going to go there eventually, but we never did.

SI: Were you told to not talk about that?

PT: I did not care. Yeah. That's a good question. We were not allowed to, but each one whispered, where is this going? Indochina. Shh. Don't say anything.

MG: Right. So now for teaching, did you have any kids that were difficult to deal with? And was there one student that particularly stood out to you that you still kind of think about from time to time? No, not really.

PT: No.

PT: They were all white kids. When I was principal of a school, we had some real doozies that I had to suspend and expel, and they said it was my fault. I said, this kid is going to harm another kid. And there was something that was right. This kid kept beating up another kid in the playground. So I warned him I was going to suspend him. And when I did, the parent of the kid that was beaten up came to complain to me. She have been thankful that I suspended, she says, but I live in the same neighborhood and she's telling everybody that I pick on her kid and that it's my kid that caused it. And so she complained that she was a victim because of that. I never thought of that. But eventually that kid disappeared.

MG: Right. So I remember someone in your, wasn't there a teacher that was trans or someone?

PT: Oh yeah. You told me a little, my first experience. Yeah, we had a kid, teacher or something. Kid. Tommy, THO, or T-O-M-M-I-E, something like that. Blonde kid. Irish, Tommy Brady. I met the parents, lovely parents. He was a teacher. Had no control over the office, over the kids. He didn't know what he was doing. One day a teacher comes, has to talk to me privately. I thought, she's pregnant. She's got married. Okay, Ms. Rosovsky, what's the problem, Tommy? What's wrong? He's becoming a woman. I said, how do you know? She says, look at his chest. He's growing breasts. How do you know that? She says, we know, but that's not the problem. He's not allowed to come into the ladies' room. He never asked me, so don't worry about it. But I did worry about it.

PT: So I called him. At first, I went up and I didn't see anything. So I had to do something that I would never do in a million years. But he was a man. So I figured, oh, so what? So terrible. He wore short sleeve a shirt. So on a short sleeve shirt, if you are queer or whatever, you could look up and you could see if there's a breast growing. So I didn't see it in his chest. So as I was leaving, I looked, I said, oh, God, pervert, I'm a pervert, and there's a breast growing. So ah, the teacher was right. So eventually I got somebody to cover his class, and he came down, oh, Tommy, is there something you want to tell me? No. Something private that I should know. No. Are you growing breasts? He said, yes. Why? He says, because I'm really a woman. I said, do you have a penis? He said, yes, but I'm going to get rid of it. Are you sure? Yes. How did you get to Grove Breast? He says, I take hormones. Oh, oh, well, you cannot use the ladies' room here. I don't intend to. When I go to another school, I will use the ladies' room because I'm going to have surgery. And how will you dress? I'm going to dress like a woman here. He didn't. So that June, he left and he went to another school. In the middle of the year, the principal of that school says, did you ever hear of a Tommy Brady? I said, yes. He was a teacher here. He said, your school? Yes. I just fired him. Why? Like I was concerned. He stole money from the kids. How he told them that subscribing to a magazine, Scholastic or weekly reader or something, and they all had to give 250 or whatever. He collected the money and never subscribed. What did he do with the money? He bought a female hormones.

MG: Whoa.

PT: And meanwhile, in his neighborhood of Greenwich Village, there wasn't so tolerant. Then they beat him up. So eventually, I think a terrible thing will have happened to him. So Oh, I said, that's terrible. Yes. And he had surgery. Oh. But he can't stay here. So that was the end of—

MG: So he wasn't fired because he was transitioning. He was fired because he was stealing?

PT: Yes. And guess what? He stole money from my school.

MG: Also. How much money did he steal?

PT: I don't remember. It was the same thing with the weekly reader or the Children's magazine. My goodness. And he didn't buy those magazines. And the parents once told me, how come we never got those magazines? I said, I didn't even know what you're subscribing.

MG: You were like, what magazines? Probably.

PT: Yeah. Oh, weekly reader. Okay. Oh, it's too late . He's not here anymore.

MG: Wow. Wow.

PT: Yeah, it was a terrible story.

SI: When did you become a principal?

MG: Wasn't it roughly when my mom was born? Or roughly around there or earlier?

PT: Oh, oh yeah. 19, 1970.

MG: Okay. So roughly when mom was born.

PT: Well, your mother was born 1968, right?

MG: Oh, so what was it? Aunt Debbie was born?

PT: Yeah, mom (Grandma) was pregnant, and I went in 1970. 71.

MG: Right. Okay. And when did you retire?

PT: Oh, yeah, you asked me that.

MG: When did you retire?

PT: 20 years later.

MG: Oh, so 1990? '91.

PT: '91. '91. Okay. Oh, yeah. I was principal of January, 1990, 1971, and retired 1991. And then 1991, I was very lucky. And a friend of mine who I carpooled with retired, he was working at a Jewish day school as assistant principal, and he retired and said, I'll get you the job here. So I had another 10 years. So it was wonderful because I had a pension from the board, and I was getting money here, and I could pay for three weddings in a row. And they were not inexpensive. And I never said, no, you want a \$5,000 bridal gown today? That's not no money. But at that time, \$5,000. And I said yes to everything, whatever. And the weddings were very expensive.

MG: Who was that for?

PT: Everyone.

MG: Oh, like my mom or—

PT: Your mom? Oh, and Debbie and Alison. Oh, okay. 1996, 1997, 1998, 3 in a row.

SI: Wow.

MG: I didn't know they got married in a succinct order.

PT: Yes. And I wrote a poem.

MG: My grandpa's great poems.

SI: Oh, great.

MG: I don't 96, 97, 98. I made wedding straight. That's my poem. And then there was other stuff. I don't remember.

MG: So now for the final part of this interview.

PT: Oh, okay.

MG: Yeah, right, we're getting to the end of the road.

PT: Oh, I just want to show you the pictures.

MG: Oh, yeah, Sure.

PT: Here is I'm in uniform, and those are bottles of wine. And here I am. These were the cabs.

MG: You were a looker grandpa

PT: [Grandpa is showing photos of hsi time in the army] Here. And here I am, after Hans Weber disappeared. Here is my best friend, Jack Rignary, who came from a town I never heard of in my life.

MG: What was it called?

PT: Kenosha, Wisconsin.

MG: Oh, Kenosha [Professor laughs in the background probably knowing the recent events that took place there].

PT: And that's how I heard the word Kenosha. And he said, what? You don't know, Kenosha. We make fire engines. At that time, what did I write here?

MG: Here's my grandpa with the M1 garand that I was telling about earlier.

PT: Jack and I, oh, saki jugs.

MG: And then here's a magnifying glass in case you Oh, we looked at it before you Oh, you did?

SI: Yeah.

MG: Did you see my grandpa Max already?

SI: Yeah. Okay. But he said that there was a person in there that he met later on in life.

MG: Yeah. That didn't know each other, right? Yeah. thirty years ago or something.

PT: Elliot? Yeah, charcoal and rice straw. Oh, I'm sorry. This is not wine. This is charcoal. It says. So who wrote that? I don't remember.

MG: Maybe you did. So now we're going to get into more into politics. So who was the first president that you voted for and did that—, whoever that candidate was, did that decide your political affiliation, or did you have a political affiliation before?

PT: No, my parents were Democrats. My father was in the union, and the union at that time was Democrat and no blacks. So no blacks were allowed to join the carpenter's union. So I was a Democrat, and we voted democratic.

MG: So you vote, what was it, Truman?

PT: Except we voted for Nixon.

MG: You voted Truman the first time.

PT: Oh, Truman, yes. That was Eisenhower. But we voted, voted for Stevenson. But Eisenhower is a wonderful president.

MG: Why did you vote for Adelaide?

PT: He was a Democrat.

MG: Oh, well, yeah.

SI: Was it in 60 or 68 when you voted for Nixon? Or 72?

PT: 68, I think.

SI: Okay. Alright.

PT: Because he had, there was a terrible Democrat from South Dakota or something,

MG: Right? No, that was 72. Grandpa. Yeah, McGovern. In 68, he went up against Vice President Humphrey.

PT: Oh. So we voted for Humphrey, but we didn't vote for that Senator. What's his name?

SI: George McGovern.

PT: Oh, yeah, McGovern. Oh, he was very anti-Israel.

MG: Oh, he was?

PT: Oh yeah.

MG: I did not know that. So now you've seen the Cold War from literally the beginning to the end.

PT: Oh, is it over?

MG: Well, phase one, but to put it lightly.

PT: Actually it was over when in 1991. It was over for a short time,

MG: Right? The 26th of December.

PT: And then the dictators started again.

MG: Right. So what did you think of the Russian people? How did you view them? Did you view them in positive light? Negative?

PT: I don't know if I had any view of them. We were a little scared of the Russians, but when I think of it in the Second World War, and it was Great Britain and the United States that supplied all the tanks, not all of them, but many of them. Munitions and tanks and bombs. And that's how the Russians were able to defeat the Germans because of our supplies.

MG: Lendlease. Yeah.

PT: Oh, Lendlease.

MG: Did you think that it was more of a battle of ideologies or a battle of governmental influence?

PT: For what?

MG: The Cold War. What was it like? So let me rephrase it. Did you think it was more of liberal democracy versus communism? Or did you think it was just who can get the more influence when and where?

PT: No, communists were terrible. We heard of all the camps. They had their gulags and this guy Navalny, he was in the Arctic and tortured there.

MG: and he died.

PT: Yeah. So this is the Russians. They always have a dictator.

MG: Now, you spoke highly of President Eisenhower, and I don't know if you remember in '56, towards the end of your service, there was the Suez crisis, and Eisenhower heavily criticized Israel along with Britain and France. Do you remember what you thought about the Suez crisis and what he thought? Did you agree with what he said about Israel? Or no.

PT: I thought it was a bad move that we should do anything to antagonize the United States. But eventually it ended peacefully. So it was a short time of agitation.

MG: Were you scared about the Cuban missile crisis?

PT: Oh, terrible. Of course.

MG: You Thought highly of JFK as well?

PT: I thought he was weak and that the Russians would win out. Oh, wow. But it turned out the Russians gave in.

MG: Were you shocked by JFK's death?

PT: Oh, absolutely. Oh my God, it was terrible. And who's Johnson? Anyway, we didn't know him at all. And he turned out to be okay. He was a Texas boy through and through,

MG: Right.

PT: He gave, he would be the bathroom and keep the door open and give orders, and he didn't care who came

MG: In. And I know this interview is about you, but just as a side note, I had read a book about the 1960 election, and they said that when he was running with Kennedy, he purposefully would change his voice to have more of a southern accent.

PT: Oh, really?

MG: Yeah. He changed it up a little bit. And that's just something very interesting that he changed it up a little bit to really connect with the deep South where he was from.

PT: I'll tell you, my wife and I once took a trip to San Antonio, and one of the trips and one of the side trips that you could take was to Johnson's Ranch. And we went there and they did a simulation of putting us in a Jeep, like if we were the president. And he said, okay, now get ready. We're going into the lake. I said, what are you talking about? He said, that's what they did. They would have a, let's say Johnson was with the premier of Canada. I don't know, Trudeau, the father and Johnson said to the driver, okay, let's go into the lake and we'll go swimming in the Jeep. And the guy who was with Johnson began to climb out. And Johnson got so angry with him, he said, what do you think I really mean it? He says, what kind of buddy are you? And they turned around. So he did the same thing with us. But of course, we didn't go into the lake.

MG: So now into the 1960s, what was it like seeing the Civil Rights movement, the death of Emmett Till, which was the late fifties, but seeing all that come to fruition, what was that like for you?

PT: I was very sympathetic to the blacks and to the march on Washington. And 1965, they passed the civil rights laws, and then that was not my interest anymore. And then the blacks have become very, very strong and politically powerful. So my sympathy has waned. And that's all just another group seeking power and influence.

MG: Right. So now back to Israel with the six day war, were you afraid that Israel would be conquered by the Arab Army?

PT: We were terrible, afraid, terribly upset. And then suddenly the Israelis did something miraculous.

MG: They triumphed.

PT: They not only triumphed, they destroyed all their airplanes and conquered Palestine. The Palestinians formed an army because Palestine at that time was under Jordanian rule, and they never formed a country. They could have had a chance to form a country. But the King of Jordan refused or resisted, I don't know.

MG: And you never thought about joining the IDF? Did you ever think about it?

PT: No.

MG: And now you said that before that President Johnson was an okay guy, but did you approve of his escalation in Vietnam, and were you supportive of the war in Vietnam?

PT: We thought what he said was true, that the Communists were going to move south and take over Indochina (Vietnam) and then Indonesia, and then attack Australia. So we were worried about it. It turned out not to be true, and he had the wrong information, and he knew that it was the wrong information, but he wanted to win the

MG: War. So from then on forward, were you disapproval? I mean, did you disapprove of the war after you found out there was no

PT: Truth? Oh, absolutely. I read a book on the Vietnam War, how awful it was.

MG: Now, were you shocked that Nixon, now we're going into a couple of years in the future with Nixon and Watergate. Were you surprised that a politician in the United States did that? Or were you surprised that he got caught?

PT: I was surprised that he did that. He was a very popular guy. He did not have to do that. He won anyway.

MG: And during that same year, there was the Munich massacre.

PT: Oh, that was terrible.

MG: Were you shocked by those events?

PT: Absolutely shocked. And I'm shocked by Steven Spielberg's movie that he was not, he did not sympathize thoroughly with the Israelis.

MG: Now in 76, Jimmy Carter is up against President Ford. Now you were a Democrat, and I think you have told me in the past that you did vote for Carter in 76.

PT: Yeah.

MG: Despite him just being a one term governor of Georgia, practically nobody, peanut farmer. Why did you

PT: Vote for him over a, we thought because he's a Democrat, I would never vote for him again. He is terrible.

MG: So you voted for Reagan in 80?

PT: I think we may have. We went to his museum, Carter's Museum in—

MG: Plains (Georgia) I think it's in

PT: Or Atlanta. I don't remember where. And when we went in, as soon as you see there's a picture of Palestinian refugees. And I went up to them and I said, why is this happening here? Why is he sympathetic to the Palestinians? They're the murderers. And they said, that's not our business. That's Carter.

MG: Right? They're just, he's

PT: He is still alive, by the way.

MG: Yeah, he's like 90. He was born in 21. Grandpa.

PT: Oh wow. No.

MG: No, 26. 26 I think.

PT: Yeah. He's not 26,

MG: I think. Yeah. He was born in 1926. Lemme correct that. I think he was Now, when you talked about the USSR before the shock, it was like the shock hurt all around the world. Right When it dissolved, no one was expecting it and it just collapsed. Now, what was your reaction? You heard that all of a sudden the USSR is just gone.

PT: I didn't believe it. I did not. I said, how could that happen? It's a very powerful country, and they controlled all these eastern European countries, Romanian, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and what's happening. And then it seemed to be going toward a democracy. And then it didn't. Meanwhile, Poland established itself, and Czechoslovakia became two countries, Romania. And then there's a country Moldova. And my time that was called Besssarabia, it was part of Romania. And my parents, my parents happened to come from the same town, and it was right on the border or not far from the border of Romania. So that's how we know and Hungary, and that's how we know some Romanian food and Hungarian food. Now, I haven't had that in ages. My mother's gone.

MG: So now we're at the last three questions of this interview.

PT: Oh wow. Okay.

MG: Yeah, the time is flying when you're having fun.

PT: We're ready. I'm ready.

MG: Alrighty. So now being that you've seen so much in your life, is there anything that you wish that you would've done or would've done differently?

PT: That's a very good question. But I married the right woman and the right, I had the right number of kids, and they're beautiful kids. So I did a good job as principal, very hard. But I was lucky. And when it's all over, I said, wow, how did I get so far Right.

MG: So is there any advice that you would give to your, if you had a time machine, you went back in time, what advice would you give your younger self?

PT: Oh, I don't know if I would give, I was very lucky that the teachers in my school had a ski party at the Concord, and I was 35 years old, and they said, Mr. Thau, why don't you join us? And I said, okay. And I went up there, I figured maybe I'll meet somebody. I met the teachers very briefly, and then there's a ski place at the Concord. I was not ready for that, but I went to a place called the Bunny Hill, and I went down once and I said, I had skied before,

MG: So I didn't know you skied?

PT: Oh yeah. I was never great.

MG: Were you avid or you not?

PT: I went many places, but I once had a strained ankle from it, and I didn't like the idea that I was "wounded". So I went down the bunny hill and no one was there except there was a young girl by the fence. So I said, okay, I'll say hello. And that girl turned out to be who I was going to marry.

MG: My grandma.

PT: But she said, where are you from? You speak in a different tone and way. I'm from Waterbury, Connecticut. Maybe you never heard of it. I said, I did hear of Waterbury, but I never met anybody from it. Why are you there? And she says, because my father is the cantor there. Really? Oh, then she was pretty important.

MG: And my grandmother was originally born in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

PT: Oh yeah. I always—

MG: Always, grandma's been everywhere.

PT: Yeah, she was an infant there and had uncles and aunts and they went back. Her mother was the one who had two brothers there, and they passed away.

MG: Now the final question is that if there's any advice you could give to this current generation, my generation or generation that's following me, what would you give the advice of that hear this interview?

PT: Well, first, do not take drugs. Do not go near anything that will be a habit that's harmful. Be very mindful of good eating habits, which I am. Be mindful of, good hygiene with your body and

your teeth. And then pursue educational hobbies. If you're good in physical hobbies, skiing or whatever it is, motor boating, tennis, continue. But continue educational matters.

MG: Thank you, grandpa. That is a wrap.

SI: Thank you very much.

PT: You are very welcome.

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Reviewed by Maximilian Gropper 4/2024

Reviewed by Phillip Thau 4/2024