

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JAMES VELCHECK

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

MOLLY GRAHAM

PISCATAWAY, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

MOLLY GRAHAM

Molly Graham: This begins an oral history interview with Jim Velcheck on February 29, 2016 in Piscataway, New Jersey. The interviewer is Molly Graham.

James Velcheck: Yes. Now, the stuff that I've been going through today, some of it I think you've seen. Some of it maybe you haven't. I think I told you the other day, I had put a folder in the "689" folder on the computer with copies of stuff to give to you. Most of what this is is that kind of stuff. Have you seen this? Did I give this to you? Now, when I went through, looked at my emails to you to see what I had actually emailed to you, I didn't see this kind of stuff.

MG: No, I haven't seen this.

JV: But we were talking about how many people might have been lost in that Khe Sanh 689 area from the battalion. You can see there that there's a fair number of names. I don't know how many it is altogether, but they're broken down by company. The dates are all there. It's in that first half of 1968. Now, there are names missing. You can see, what you're looking at there, the two that I added that weren't in there from Delta Company. Just today, I wrote that one on there, who was this guy. Now this, I know you did see.

MG: Yes. I remember you talking about this last time.

JV: Yes. That was the guy who blew the bunker with the LAAW and was subsequently killed. That's still part of that confusion as to the two bunkers and who actually blew this one and who got credit for it and who didn't. I'm still confused about the whole thing.

MG: This is Howard Williams. He was posthumously awarded a Silver Star.

JV: Silver Star, yes. That's his citation or at least information about it. He wasn't on that list. Alpha Company, it's only got these few people. The first name on here, he was with Delta Company. Who he was and what his job was and all that, he is supposedly the one whose body was left at the bottom of the hill that then started all the recovery efforts and that the NVA set up ambushes around because they knew we'd come to recover him. That's what started the whole thing off. What I'm finding out, as I looked at that, mostly at that, but other stuff, is I thought all the activity was between July 5th and July 7th. I thought it was July 5th that he had been killed. It was later that day that Bunch, my assistant gunner, had gone down with recovery efforts. He got then killed at the wire coming back up. It was that night that I went down to try to recover him and got my little wound. That's why I thought in my record where it says July 7th that I was wounded, I thought was in error because his date of death in the directory is listed as July 5th, which is--but he wasn't on that list either. Now, I don't know where I got that list from. But I didn't put it together. I should have made some kind of record as to where it came from, but who knows. It was a number of years ago that I came across that. It might have been from one of the company or battalion websites. I don't remember. But you can see from his date of death it was 7-1. Him, the first guy, LeCompte, the guy who started the whole thing off, who, rumor had it, was the son of an Air Force General, who insisted his son's body be recovered, even though there was the Marine Corps ethos of nobody left behind and nobody recovered who was at all possible to be recovered. That's what resulted in so many more people dying. All those that are

in July on that list including Williams on the 8th--well, the night of the 7th, 8th--were because of that one body left there and the NVA taking advantage of it. So, there must have been a couple day lag between when he was killed on the 1st and the main recovery effort of his body on the 5th because there's a bunch killed on the 5th for Delta Company down there particularly.

MG: This says July 8th.

JV: That was when everybody got there on the 7th and they got through the wire again. It was the 1st that the patrol got hit and LeCompte was left. The 5th that the recovery people got ambushed trying to get him, and then the night of the 5th we got NVA in the wire, but that might not have been when we were trying to recover Bunch. Bunch was killed on the 5th as part of the recovery effort. I was remembering again, apparently erroneously, that it was that same right after dark that I had gone down the hill to try to recover him. I don't remember leaving him out there until after dark on the 7th, but apparently, that was what happened. The evidence for that is not just in the date of the record of me being wounded on the 7th, but also, there is my letter home. Now, that's a newspaper article about the letter home.

MG: Yes. I have a copy of that.

JV: Here's the letter home. I studied it this morning. I started to write it on 12 July, as we were waiting to leave Hill 689. I finished it on the 15th if it's fresh in your mind as to what's in here. It's in here. You just have to study it carefully. When it says, "About two weeks ago, fifteen NVA soldiers sneaked up the hill and into our lines, we didn't do too bad that night. We killed the fifteen of them and took a couple wounded ourselves." So, that was probably the end of June, because from the 12th going back two weeks, but it says about two weeks.

MG: Maybe it was the 1st.

JV: If it was the 1st, then this doesn't make sense this next paragraph that says, "About a week and a half ago, first platoon went down the hill and got ambushed and left the body behind." That would have been around the early--but that was the body, LeCompte, and it says there the 1st. So, this one is still cloudy in my mind. When I look at the command chronology, it doesn't say anything. Now, I should look at June because maybe in those last days of June, now that I think of it, it might say something. It doesn't say anything about it until the 5th of July: "During the past six to eight days, Company D had been subject to mortar fire, rifle grenades and sniper fire. On the 5th, elements of company D came under intense mortar and AW attack." Automatic weapon, I don't know. "Which resulted in heavy friendly casualties on the 5th." But really, what we were doing on the 5th was trying to recover bodies. So, on the night of the 7th then, enemy got inside the perimeter and it was that night of the 7th that the whole battalion had been there as a result of action on the 5th, when they came on the 6th. Then the 7th, we had them in the lines, but the whole battalion was there by then. So, there's still some confusion in my mind as to the exact chronology of the whole thing. Now, I had tried a couple of months ago to put down in writing what I was actually recollecting of all this. I was putting down all the sources. But that was when I was still thinking it was only the 5th and the 7th when everything took place. Did I give you this?

MG: I have seen that.

JV: Okay. This is Bob Black. He lives in Tenafly. He was the CO [commanding officer] of Bravo Company, who was a main source for Mike Archer. Again, as I had said, really, he writes the whole thing from Bravo Company perspective. So, you have to take that with a grain of salt. There's stuff in this Molly folder. There's something else I was going to print out too, I think. This one. How many pages is this? It's only nine pages. I'm going to print that out and give it to you.

MG: Okay. Do you know what happened on May 31st? There are many casualties listed for B Company.

JV: No. If we looked into May command chronology that would say where Bravo Company was at the time. The companies operated independently. The only time--what I heard and I think it says in the command chronology--on Hill 689, on the 6th and 7th and 8th of July, is the first time that the whole battalion had operated as a unit since the Korean War or World War II or something. It wasn't common for us to be in the same place. This is the citation for Bob Black when he got the Silver Star. Now, I didn't read that today. I don't think that that's for Hill 689. I think it's for Hue City. I think. But he's someone you might want to get in touch with since he's here in New Jersey, and get his story. Be prepared. He talks more than I do. Did I give you the picture of him and me?

MG: Yes.

JV: That was just from this past August when we were at the battalion reunion.

MG: It says he was there the night of July 7th.

JV: Oh, yes. He's the one who Tom Mahoney was in his company--oh, it mentions in there?

MG: Yes.

JV: Okay. So, maybe it is--oh, okay. I guess it is related to 689. I don't know that he did anything particularly heroic. ... There's a Khe Sanh folder that I'm going to send to you, a Khe Sanh article that's fifty pages all about Khe Sanh. Did you read the book?

MG: I still have your *Dirty Little Secrets of the Vietnam War* book.

JV: Have you started that?

MG: Yes.

JV: There's a lot in there, but it's really a great book because it's got lots of statistics and information and comparisons with other wars and time periods. So, yes, it's a new book to me. I just got it. I forget when it was published, but I don't think it's new because it was on the

clearance bargain area at Barnes and Noble or something for six or seven dollars, something like that. That's the kind of books I usually buy. That's what it is. Bob Black's version of Hill 689.

MG: What date did Bravo Company come on?

JV: They were the last one to get there and it was on the 6th when they were about to leave 881. I haven't read that today--I haven't read it in a number of years--but I think he goes into something about Tom Mahoney in there because that's what delayed them. They were the last company to arrive on 689, so it was either late in the day on the 6th or might have been on the 7th when they actually got to 689. There is something in the command chronology here also about that, but I don't remember on what page it was. But I just read that. It did say that Bravo Company was delayed. That's what a lot of Mike Archer's new book is going to be about. It's about that delay. I'm really looking forward--I was quite disappointed when I saw on his website the other day that it wasn't coming out until now April. So, that was somewhat disappointing. At my age, I don't buy green bananas anymore. [laughter]

MG: [laughter]

JV: You don't have to transcribe that.

MG: I'm curious what the holdup is.

JV: Yes. Well, I haven't talked to him yet. I haven't anything more on that email that I think I told you about Saturday that I had started to write. When it's an email that's going to be involved, I start it as a word document. Then, when I get it all done, then I copy it and paste it into an email if it's not something that's going to end up attached to an email because it is hard to get it all done in one shot. So, I started and didn't get any further, but it's about that phone call that I got the other day from that investigator who's putting together a trip to Vietnam. I would think he would have been working intimately with Mike Archer right from the beginning, but apparently not because he said Mike Archer was going to be his next phone call, but that he'd already talked to Bob Black. That goes back to the thing about Bob Black being really involved. I wouldn't want this to sound too insulting or negative to him, but he is quite a bit of a self-promoter. If he ends up ever seeing or hearing this interview, I wouldn't want him to take that too negatively. He probably realizes about himself. But he does end up involved in things. Whether he exaggerates--I don't want it to sound too negative. Anyway, he was involved with this guy apparently before Mike Archer was. By now he should have talked with Mike Archer. So, I'm going to be sending this email out to both Mike Archer and Bob Black and trying, in whatever way I can, to be involved in it in whatever way is appropriate to be involved in it. Whether that results in me going to Vietnam as part of this group or not, it's probably unlikely because I didn't have any direct involvement in that activity on Hill 881 where Tom Mahoney was lost because I was over on 689 at the time in a different company. So, if they're short on people to go and help and do work, if they can't find squad members willing to go because that seemed like what this investigator was looking for when he asked specifically if I had contact for any squad members and particularly this Ken Fernandez who was supposed to be the squad leader. I couldn't help him with any of that.

MG: What is the purpose of this trip to Vietnam?

JV: There has already been an effort, and Mike Archer has been over there. If you have seen Mike Archer's website, he has information and pictures from his trip over there. Whether that was the only effort or whether there was another effort where he wasn't involved in and whether his was not a real effort to find, but just to go over there, I don't remember the details. But, there has been at least one attempt to actually find Tom Mahoney's remains because the way that supposedly it happened was Bravo Company was preparing to helicopter off the hill when Tom Mahoney, for some reason, without his weapon left the lines and started to go down the hill, and coincidentally, ran into a group of NVA who were dug in just outside the wire and then a shot rang out. People looked and saw Mahoney laying out there, but when they went to recover him, they came under fire from these NVA and they didn't get to recover him. Battalion supposedly ordered Bob Black off the hill. He said, "But I just lost a man out there. We need to recover him." Apparently, he didn't have a brigadier general insisting that his body be recovered. They ended up leaving the hill and leaving his body behind. But they saw him out there laying there dead. They've been in touch with one of those NVA who was one of the ones who shot him. The reason those NVA were in that position was because they knew that Bravo was about to helicopter off the hill. They had taken up position where they could bring the helicopters under fire as they flew right overhead at low altitude. So, it's thought that Tom Mahoney, in unknowingly giving up his life, for whatever reason he had left the wire, may have saved lives because it blew their ambush because presumably then they took a different route or whatever when the helicopters left the hill. There's a lot of speculation as to why Mahoney had left the wire. It might have had something to do with a death wish even, because he had just recently supposedly gotten a "Dear John" letter from a longtime girlfriend or fiancé or wife or whatever it was. I don't remember all the detail. You read so much stuff and just a certain amount, particularly as you get older, stays. It's not just that your memory changes overtime, but things are somewhat selective in what actually sticks in your head. But that's why Bravo was the last company to get to Hill 689, that it might have actually been on the 7th when they got there.

MG: How long did they stay?

JV: We left on the 12th. Now, there is stuff in the command chronology about other companies. Apparently, there were companies of 2-1 that were also on the hill. There was a company from 4th Marines. I have here the July command chronology for the 3-4, 3rd Battalion 4th Marines, one company of which, apparently was on the hill with us. These are all recollections that I don't remember of any of that, as to who was there and who wasn't. A lot of the information that I currently have is from all these documents. My recollection of it is either erroneous or nonexistent about a lot of stuff that was going on. But a lot of guys don't have access to this stuff. Either don't know how to find it or haven't had enough interest in it and they have big blanks about all this stuff. Although I have blanks about it, I've tried to fill in those blanks as much as I can, which is resulting in a lot of confusion and frustration, frankly. It's part of your interview process that's making me try to clarify this stuff that results in frustration, but also things like Mike Archer's book where I've also been trying to clarify this stuff to be able to give him good information. That also causes frustration. It's the same frustration. So, it's not your fault. It's not his fault. It's my fault, where I'm trying to put this information together and clarify it for both my own purposes and other purposes.

MG: It is not your fault. It sounds like there are a couple versions of a very chaotic couple of days.

JV: Yes, yes. There was a lot of confusion and uncertainty and misinformation about the whole thing. I'm sure this is just one example of--it's my major involvement in Vietnam. Other actions that went on, I'm sure it's all the same kind of thing, which makes authors' jobs really difficult. I can appreciate what they go through because they're the ones trying to gather all this kind of stuff and put it into a cohesive narration when there is no cohesion to it.

MG: That is very common in oral accounts.

JV: I'm sure you encounter that all the time.

MG: Last time we met, we talked about coming home from Vietnam and up to meeting and marrying your wife. Can you clarify the timeline for me? I know you started in family in 1971.

JV: I got home from Vietnam in '68, August of '68. Did nothing for a few weeks, but then went back to American Cyanamid in the factory where I had worked before I left for Vietnam, for the Marine Corps. I think when I went back it was work in the control lab. I had worked in production before going in the Marine Corps. Then control, we test various batches of chemical that they were making. American Cyanamid in Bound Brook, Bridgewater, where the Patriots stadium is now. Right there is where American Cyanamid was. My father worked there most of his career. I had aunts and even my brother worked there for a period of time. We were a Cyanamid family, as many people in the area were because it was one of the major employers in the area. For whatever reason, I then decided to go to college. My grades in high school were never particularly good. I was not a good student in high school. I wasn't really interested in it. I spent my time fishing and trapping muskrats and hunting and things like that. I was very shy and quiet and I always sat in the back of the room, never really got involved, and got by. On tests, the formal kind of testing--I don't remember what was done in those days, but I did fairly well on those kinds of things. I remember that when my parents would go for--what are they called?

MG: Parent-teacher conferences?

JV: Parent-teacher conferences. They would always say things like, "Well, Jim is not working up to his potential." [laughter] I just wasn't interested in it. Then, after Marine Corps and coming back and working for a year at American Cyanamid, I decided that yes, I should try to go to college. Now, a friend of mine whose girlfriend at the time had gone to Tusculum College in Greenville, Tennessee--she didn't graduate because there wasn't enough period of time there. She may have been there just for a year or two and then dropped out of college because I don't remember her going anyplace else or beyond that. They were people who were invited to the party Saturday, who were going to be out of town for that weekend, who I had lost touch with over many, many years, but have been back in touch with the last couple of years, like I have been back in touch with the Mitzaks, who were sitting across from you at the table. [Editor's Note: Mr. Velcheck is referring to a recent party to celebrate he and his wife's 45th wedding

anniversary party, which the interviewer, Molly Graham, attended.] She said, “Well, why don’t you go to Tusculum?” In fact, [the man] who became her husband, Tom, during that year after I came home from Vietnam, I paled around with him quite a bit. We drank a lot of beer together. I was never involved in one of his trips to Tusculum, but Donald was, who was Debbie’s brother who died. They would spend the night drinking and around two o’clock in the morning decide, “Let’s go to Tusculum.” They’d pile into the car and they’d drive off on a drunken trip to Tusculum, East Tennessee. It’s not right down the road from New Jersey. It was wild and crazy in those days. I know people did die in car accidents, but how we didn’t is still an unknown to me. Just like it’s unknown to me as to how and why I didn’t die in Vietnam because there were times when I could have, given a difference of seconds or inches or whatever. I went that one year to Tusculum. I did okay. I went as a sociology major. I did spend a fair amount of time fishing, trout fishing up in Paint Creek, I remember it was, up in the Davy Crockett area on top of a mountain. But I did okay. I don’t remember why, but for some reason, I decided I wasn’t going to continue at Tusculum. I was getting the GI Bill, which in those days wasn’t much money, but it didn’t cost much money to go to college. Tusculum College was a small college, about four hundred students and it was the oldest Presbyterian college in the country. You didn’t have to be Presbyterian to go there. I wasn’t. Elaine, the girl who was the reason I ended up going there, she wasn’t either. They were Catholic. I was Catholic. But you didn’t have to be Presbyterian, so it didn’t really matter. I remember asking the dean one time why so many of us were from New Jersey. Did I tell you this? Do I need to repeat it? Is it in there?

MG: You said it last time. Yes.

JV: So, I knew why I was there and why so many others of us were there from this area, but as I told Saturday, a big reason on how my wife and I met, the roots of the story, go all the way back to the Great Depression because if it hadn’t been for the Great Depression, Sara and I never would have met because Mike from down the street here and his girlfriend Cathy from down the street there, I never would have known. We never would have ended up at Sara’s house. Everything is connected. For whatever reason, I decided to transfer to Montclair State. I applied to Montclair State. I was accepted.

MG: Why did you want to transfer to Montclair State?

JV: I don’t know. As I look back on it, I can’t come up with any reason at all. I did okay at Tusculum. I don’t remember them inviting me to leave, but there were some things there. I came home in August of ’68, worked for a year and ended up at Tusculum in September of ’69. That’s when the height of the anti-war demonstrations and efforts were going on. I believe that’s when Kent State happened. [Editor’s Note: On May 4, 1970, Ohio National Guardsmen fired on students at Kent State University, killing four and wounding nine others. Some of the students had been protesting the United States entry into Cambodia, while others had been passing nearby or observing the demonstration.] That’s when Cambodian Invasion happened and Nixon and Johnson and Nixon and all this stuff. [Editor’s Note: The United States expanded the Vietnam War in Cambodia in 1970 under President Nixon in search of the Vietcong’s headquarters. It is known as the Cambodian Incursion.] I grew my hair somewhat long and I had a bit of a beard. You wouldn’t think I had been in the Marine Corps. I didn’t hide it, but I didn’t flaunt it either. I didn’t really agree necessarily with the anti-war effort, but it was what everybody was doing.

We took over the administration building and it was just a lark, something to do. Yeah, I was in the building during--there was a whole bunch of us in there.

MG: A Vietnam War protest.

JV: Yes. It was when Nixon invaded Cambodia. It happened all over the country, where uprisings on college campuses with the Students for Democratic--SDS [Students for a Democratic Society], whatever it was, which supposedly had Communist, Socialist foundations, but we weren't in it for that. We were just in it because it was something to do. The great majority of people who were in it were in it for something to do. When John Kerry ran for President a few years ago, whenever that was, he had come home from Vietnam and totally disavowed his Vietnam service, said, "Vietnam veterans are baby-killers and murderers." [Editor's Note: On March 16, 1968, hundreds of unarmed civilians were murdered by US Army soldiers in the Americal Division, an event that, when made public over one year later, turned public opinion against the war. Vietnam veteran John Kerry, later a US Senator and Secretary of State, testified before Congress on April 22, 1971, on the Vietnam War. Kerry was the nominee for the Democratic party in the 2004 Presidential election.] You're young. [laughter] It wasn't that long ago that he was running for President; I forget what year. But when he came home from Vietnam, he was totally against Vietnam. Then, he became a Senator and was a Senator for thirty or thirty-five years. Then, when he ran for President, he didn't run on his Senate career accomplishments because he didn't have any. He's running for President and all you hear him say is, "I'm a Vietnam veteran. Vote for me." Yet, when he came home, he totally turned his back on Vietnam. I was totally against him for that reason. Of course, I went along with some of that when I went to college, but not nearly to the extent that he did. I didn't really believe in the whole thing. Like I said, it was just something to do. And we did some marijuana and hashish. I remember I made some extra--I drank a lot of beer, too. In fact, I was a little older and I had a car. I was the one on my floor, which was all freshmen who every night, I would take up a collection from the other guys on the floor. About three or four or five miles away was a package goods [store]. It was a dry county, so all you could buy was beer. It was a Burger King next to it. I would collect money for food and beer and get a few cents extra from everybody, over and above what they wanted, and that would pay for my beer and burgers. I'd come back, maybe not every night, but many nights. Then on the weekend, I'd make a run to Johnson City, that was about thirty miles away, where you could buy hard liquor to supply everybody for the weekend. Then, there was some marijuana and hashish on campus too. We sampled that. I never did anything beyond that. There was LSD, acid, around. Not a lot. Not a lot of people involved in it. But I never got involved in any of that. I think I told you about my roommate and I went to New Orleans and ended up in jail there. That was fun. Other than that, as a sociology major, I had an introduction to sociology, but some other preliminary requirement kind of stuff. Then, when I transferred to Montclair State, for whatever reason, they told me what I'd have to take as a sociology major. No. Well, no. Let me change all that. Because I transferred to--oh, I remember what it was. Again, it's the memory thing. I don't remember what I told you before about [my] major at Tusculum, but maybe I told you correctly before in that I think I was a biology major. [Editor's Note: Mr. Velcheck adds: "Biology major at Tusculum -- had a sociology course. Told me at Montclair what I would have to take as a Biology major, so I changed to Sociology."]

MG: I don't know if you told me that.

JV: I think now that I was a biology major in my first year of college at Tusculum College. I had maybe an introductory biology course, I don't remember. But, when I transferred to Montclair State as a biology major, and then they told me what I'd have to take as that major, with all these advanced mathematics and all this crap, I said, "Oh, can I change my major?" That's when I changed to sociology.

MG: What interested you in biology? And then, what interested you about sociology?

JV: Well, because I was always interested in animals and hunting and fishing and all of that. I had a garden when I was a kid at home. We had chickens and they were mine. So, biology always kind of interested me. My daughter inherited that. I don't know if you had any interaction with her really on Saturday, but she is now the permanent director of academic affairs at the Penn State satellite campus in Schuylkill Haven. She's number two on the campus. She was telling me Saturday that the chancellor, who is number one, has been talking to her about-- "Yeah, well, one of these days, when you are chancellor of this campus, then blah, blah, blah." She was telling me Saturday--I was thinking of him as an older man and maybe he's going to retire and she'll become chancellor within some number of years, but she said, "No, he's younger than I am." She's forty-four or so. She said, "But he's a fast riser. He started out here and then has been promoted here, here, here." So, the thought may be that he might end up being promoted out of Schuylkill Haven to main campus or something as a vice president or something, who knows. But there's a possibility she could eventually end up as chancellor. I know she was saying a little while back that in order for her to advance beyond--she never did become full biology professor. She was an associate or assistant biology professor for ten years. She was doing research and some writing, not a whole lot of it. She told me a little while back that in order for her to advance she would need to become--at the same time she is Director of Academic Affairs, she's also assistant professor, she would need to become full professor and Director of Academic Affairs in order for her to be able to move up from where she is. So, she's got much more of that ambition than I ever had, but all the family has always had a biology interest. We've always been frustrated country people stuck in the suburbs our whole life because it costs more to live in Hunterdon County out in the country than it does to have this little house here. But we always had African pygmy goats for ten years in the backyard here and chickens and ducks and rabbits and the big garden out there. So, we've always been biologically-inclined. Also, I had looked into Paul Smith's College. Paul Smith's College is in Upstate New York. I even might have applied there, but if I applied, I wasn't accepted. But that college--and I remember this fairly well--Paul Smith's College, it was known for two majors, hotel management and conservation officer, game warden training. I had applied there because I was interested in the game warden, conservation officer training because I had thoughts of that kind of career. I also had thoughts of career in law enforcement. During that year that I was at home--no, I guess it was beyond that because I was married then. So, we'll get to it eventually, so remind me. But I applied to a number of different police departments and the post office. But that was after marriage. I transferred to Montclair State. This same Tom Harvat, friend of mine, was a student at Newark College of engineering, the one [from] the drunken trips to Tusculum. By the way, he went on to become a New Jersey state trooper and had a career as a trooper.

MG: Pulling over people like him.

JV: [laughter] So, he got me into the fraternity there, Tau Lambda Chi. I was actually pledging a fraternity of Newark College of Engineering on Bleecker Street, which doesn't exist anymore. The Newark campus of Rutgers expanded the building, did away with that block or those blocks of Bleecker Street and became Rutgers buildings. Living at the frat house and going to Montclair State, which was some miles north of there.

MG: I didn't know you could pledge a fraternity at a school you didn't attend.

JV: They looked in the bylaws and couldn't find anything against it. So, that's why they let me in. But it was during that year that I met Sara at her front door around August 20th, just a couple of days before my birthday, August 22nd, in 1970. That was after the year at Tusculum. She had done her first year at Lutheran Concordia College in Ann Arbor, Michigan. For whatever reason, before she met me, she transferred from there to the Concordia College in Bronxville, New York, to live there, as she lived in Ann Arbor, but then she was going to live on campus in Bronxville. It's Westchester County. It's just north of the city. Then we met and we both started school a couple of weeks after we met in September of '70. She went off to there and I think I started commuting from home to Montclair, but some short time after that, I think I moved into the frat house. I remember she was at the frat house a few times, but I was going up to Bronxville quite a bit. I remember tossing quarters into toll road machines--of course, there was no E-ZPass. I still don't have E-ZPass. I still toss quarters into machines when I'm on toll roads or hand dollars to--but I remember in those days--you still see it--around the coin basket, people miss a lot of times. There will be quarters either on the sides of the basket on the little support or on the ground under it. It's illegal to do so, but I remember many times, when I was about to toss coins in the basket, looking first to see if there was any quarters laying there or underneath it. If there was, I'd open the door and grab and throw them in. But then, at Thanksgiving, we ended up engaged. Just a few months after we met. In deciding when to get married, for whatever reason, it was why wait? [laughter] If we're going to do it, we do it. So, we ended up, in February--February 20th, six months to the day of 1971, we got married at Kirkpatrick Chapel because her parents both worked for Rutgers, so we were eligible to use the chapel. We had the reception at her house, her parents' house in Piscataway. So, it was a relatively small reception, not a whole bunch of people. Her family, my family. None of my cousins or anything. The cousins who were at this 45th anniversary the other day, they weren't at our wedding. It was just immediate family and close friends. For some reason, the Mitzaks weren't there either, even though I had been best man at their wedding two years before, three years before, whatever it was, in August of '68. So, it was three years before. We had already, I guess, drifted apart for whatever reason. Then, for their 25th, we got back together for a period of time and then drifted apart again. Now, this last few years, we've been back in touch again, partly because of the internet--we email--and partly because of the Marine Corps League. He's in the Marine Corps League out there, where he lives by the Delaware. In fact, he's in Marine Corps League on the other side of the Delaware in Pennsylvania. I'm in the Marine Corps League here, so we have that connection. That's how we got back together three years ago. I was involved in the Basilone Bowl, an all-star football game between high schools in mostly Somerset County that was sponsored by the Marine Corps. So, I ended up working with that as a volunteer, as Marine Corps League coordinator, to get the word out to marines to come to the

game. He saw one of my emails that ended up getting circulated all the way out to him. So, he showed up at the game. That was the first time I had seen him in many years. He really hasn't changed much since high school, but I didn't recognize him when he walked up to me and said, "Hello, Jim." "Who's this?" [laughter] But that was three years ago. So, Montclair College. I know it was sociology because we got married--I was still in school and finished out the whole year, whereas Sara dropped out of Concordia after the fall semester. So, she went half the year. Then, when we got married in February, we ended up living in Montclair. I don't know if you know Montclair. There's Lower Montclair and there's Upper Montclair. If you're anybody with anything, you live in Upper Montclair. Lower Montclair borders Bloomfield and it's that urban setting. We ended up living in an apartment in Lower Montclair that was the converted attic of a house. So, there was three rooms in a row. You came up the back steps to get into it. Then it was kitchen, living room and bedroom. Three rooms in a row. I remember not having any great--she got a job. While I finished out the year, she got a job as a telephone switchboard operator. She had all these--it was the old-fashioned kind of thing where she's got the headset on. She's plugging these wires in. This was 1971. That lasted, I guess, until we moved out of there. Was sometime later that year. The first several years that we were married, we moved every year. We went from there to--well, the places we lived were Pleasant View Gardens apartment in Piscataway; a half a house on Main Street in South Bound Brook, my hometown; a garden-type apartment in Flemington, right on Route 31, just down from what used to be the fairgrounds, there's a traffic light there and the apartments are still there. It was where Main Street comes out and hits 31. Each place we may have lived for a year, but then it was 1975 when we moved here.

MG: To this house?

JV: To this house. So, we've been here forty years. During that first spring semester of '71 that I was at Montclair State, being a sociology major, we didn't have a honeymoon until spring break, whenever that was in March. Married in February and then a month or two later, we went off to Tusculum. I showed her Tusculum College and had made reservations, something I had found in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, fifty or sixty miles away from Tusculum, up in the mountains. Billed itself as the honeymoon capital of the southeast. There was a national park there. Great Smoky Mountains National Park I think it was. Gatlinburg, a bunch of restaurants--what we had was a one-room log cabin on the banks of the Little Pigeon River in downtown Gatlinburg. They had a ski lift, but it wasn't a ski lift, it was a ride that you would go on that would take you up to the top of the mountain. Someplace I think we have pictures of all this, but I don't know where they are. We did that. We went horseback riding in the Great Smoky Mountains. As I remember, and [Sara] might remember it differently--I don't know--she had wanted to go horseback riding. I was not big on horseback riding, but we were out and about one day and I said, "All right. If we're going to go, we're going to go right now." She wasn't wearing the jeans that she would have worn if she was going to go. Her pants split while she was on the horse. I remember that. [laughter] But we had a very good time in that one bedroom cabin on the banks of the Little Pigeon River. Then, once the semester ended, I got a job in a factory in Franklin Township making copper foil for printed circuit boards. That eventually, was the industry that took me to China some years later, but that was in 1971 I started there. Probably the summer of '71 I started working at Materials Technology, Incorporated, MTI, on Churchill Avenue in Somerset. Before that, when we were still in Montclair, I started to say I had no big interest at the time in starting a family, but I guess my wife's maternal instincts were very strong.

I guess she was keeping track of all that womanly schedule kind of thing as to when she would be most fertile. She had started taking birth control pills as I recall. Then, obviously, she must have stopped taking them. I don't remember anything necessarily underhanded or nefarious about it, meaning that she didn't tell me or anything, but she scheduled "baby day" where she didn't let me out of bed all day. She'd be embarrassed me telling you this because she gets embarrassed about things like that. Nine months later, Darcy was born. She was born in January of '72. When she came out, and I was in the delivery room--didn't intend to be in the delivery room, but she came out as this--she was like a piece of rope. She was full length, twenty inches long, but she was less than six pounds. She was like, five pounds, twelve ounces. Healthy enough and full term, but she was small. She was okay and healthy enough. In those days, they kept you in the hospital for several days after you gave birth. My wife had had experience babysitting, so she had experience with young kids. Whether she had experience with newborns or not, I don't remember. But she had been babysitting and probably had experience with newborns, but I remember the day that I brought them home, we were living not in Montclair by then, we were at Pleasant View Gardens in Piscataway. She was kind of nervous. I was working shift work at the copper foil factory. I had had to go to work that day. I think I brought them home and then I went off to work, I think, working afternoon shift or something. I remember when I got home, Darcy was crying and making a fuss. Sara was rather frustrated, but I remember taking Darcy and calming her down and then everything was fine. But before that, when Sara went into labor, I was at the bar in South Bound Brook. She had told me, "Why don't you go over to the bar, have a couple of beers?" "Oh, okay. Good idea." So, I headed off to South Bound Brook to the bar on canal road, the Riverside. It was the local bar. She called me an hour or two later. She said, "Okay, I'm here with my girlfriends and we're timing contractions. It's time to go to the hospital." I said, "Well, alright. Let me finish my beer." "No, come home now." [laughter] This was in January of '72. The contractions apparently were quite close together. The road was kind of icy. I had my little Volkswagen bug. I remember driving to Somerville to Somerset Hospital where all the kids were born and where I had been born. I had no intention of going into the delivery room. Now, they have all these classes to get you familiar. The nurses, I remember. I was with her in the prep room and then the procedure normally was once they've got her prepped and she's ready to go, they take her to the delivery room and the father goes to the waiting room. Well, the nurses were teasing me and offering me these booties and hat thing and gown, and saying, "Why don't you come on into the delivery room?" But I found myself--there I am in the delivery room. Then, two years [and] four months later, when the twins were born, they weren't going to let me into the delivery room because they said, "Well, twins are not a normal birth." Not that there was any reason why it wouldn't be perfectly normal, but of course, I'm getting ahead of myself here. At that point, I insisted. I said, "No, I'm going to the delivery room, so I did." But that was the first kid. We moved from Pleasant View Gardens to Flemington and were there for a year. Then, from there, we moved to South Bound Brook. No, from there, we moved to my in-laws' house for a couple of months because while we were in Flemington, Sara believed in the wives' tale of nursing giving you a natural birth control, where you're not likely to get--this information may be of value to you someday--that if you're nursing a baby, you aren't going to get pregnant when you have sex. Well, it's not true. [laughter] She ended up pregnant some months after Darcy was born, while we were still in Pleasant View Gardens or shortly after we moved to Flemington. I don't remember exactly when we made that move. I'll be right back. You may want to shut it off.

[Tape paused]

JV: Where were we?

MG: Sara was pregnant again.

JV: And didn't realize she was pregnant until she was four months pregnant maybe. Then, however, she came to realization, went to the doctor--then at six months, I don't remember that there had been any indication of problem, but we were living in the apartment in Flemington and she was in the bathroom on the toilet and called to me. Luckily, I was home. Spontaneous delivery right there. Yeah. Here was the little tiny baby born alive, about a pound, a girl. She did splash the toilet water. I don't think she ever was immersed in the water, but the cord all attached there. I picked her up out of the toilet, got her wrapped up, called 9-1-1. The ambulance took them right to the hospital just up the road from where we lived. It was less than a mile away. We named her Diana Lee. That next day or that same night, I don't remember the details, but she went by ambulance from there to a hospital in Neptune at the Jersey Shore that had the best equipped neonatal facility in the whole area. Then we got conflicted--I didn't go along. I went the next day or a couple days later. Maybe it wasn't the next day, but I remember my father and father-in-law and I going. One version we got was that she died in the ambulance on the way. The other was shortly after she got there she died. We never did get a death certificate. We had tried to get a death certificate, but never did and I don't remember why. To this day, we don't have a death certificate for her. We have someplace, I'm sure, a birth certificate. That was in October of '72. Darcy was born in January of '72. In October of '72, this baby was born. We had two kids in '72. Then, the twins were born in April of '74. So, less than a year and a half later, the twins were born. So, my wife got pregnant very easily. Just within two months after we got married, she was pregnant. After Darcy was born, whenever it was after that we were able to, she got pregnant again very easily. Then, after that, there was a more extended period of time because they didn't know why the spontaneous birth had happened. So, they said, you want to keep from getting pregnant for at least a year. So, she was back on the pill again I guess. Then, once she stopped the pill, whenever that was, presumably, she got pregnant again. Very easily. [laughter] It's kind of ironic where some people who want to get pregnant and can't. It's not as though she didn't want to get pregnant. She did. But she had no trouble getting pregnant. But she did have trouble being pregnant, with the twins particularly. I think she had had some high blood pressure issues with Darcy maybe. She definitely did with the twins. The way we found out we were going to have twins was the doctor suspected it at one of her checkups. So, he sent us to the hospital to have the low-grade X-ray kind of thing, whatever it's called. There was a technician there. I was in there with her. The technician does whatever it was she did. It was a female, I remember. We're talking to her. We're saying, "What do you see? What's there?" She kept saying, "I can't tell you. You have to get the information from the doctor. I can't tell you. I can't tell you." I remember we were saying things, "Well, come on. We need to know right away," because apparently, she was fairly advanced, although I don't remember when it was. But we said, "If there's twins we need to go out and buy two of everything." "I can't tell you. I can't tell you." Then the test was over and she showed us to the door of the hallway. We're walking down the hallway. She's standing there in the hallway by the door. I turn around to wave goodbye to her because she was friendly enough. She goes--[Mr. Velcheck holds up two fingers.] So, that was how we found out.

MG: What did you think when you found out you were having twins?

JV: My mother said she knew it. She knew it. She could tell. There's a lot of excitement and some concern because Darcy was only two years four months old when the twins were born. For that last couple of months of her pregnancy with the twins, the doctor had her confined to bed because of blood pressure and having lost the baby just a year and a half before that. We moved in with my in-laws so that she had somebody to help with Darcy. My in-laws both worked, but during the day, Darcy was at my mother's house in South Bound Brook. My mother was watching her, I guess, pretty much every day for that couple of months anyway. Then, she had the twins and they weighed--fifteen pounds combined weight between the two of them, seven [pounds] seven [ounces] and six [pounds] thirteen [ounces].

MG: That is pretty good for twins.

JV: How about that? [telephone rings]

[Tape paused]

MG: We were just talking about the twins.

JV: Fifteen pounds combined weight. Since the doctor had her in bed for that last couple of months, it was thought that you got to keep her from going into labor because twins tend to come early anyway. Well, the due date came and went. The doctor said, "Alright, well, it's time now." They were even starting to talk about eventually having to induce within a few days if she didn't go naturally. They didn't want to do that. The doctor, I remember he told me, he said, "Alright, well, we've had her in bed for these last couple of months, but now get her out of bed and take her for a long ride on a bumpy road." [laughter] Well, we were having dinner this one night. We were having Hamburger Helper. My in-laws, Sara, me, we were all sitting around the dining room table, and my wife's younger sister, who's now the divorce lawyer who wasn't there Saturday because she was doing lawyer convention thing in Key West, Florida. Poor baby. She sent Sara a picture of the view of the water outside her hotel room. Having Hamburger Helper. I guess we had never had it before. Nobody liked it. There was some chaos going on and laughing going on. Sara, she suddenly started having not labor pains, but pains, which was total different from any labor pains that she had had when Darcy was about to come out. So, we called the doctor after a little bit and the doctor said, "Well, you're past your due date. So, get to the hospital." So, we took her to the hospital. Another thing that always happened with her--well, the spontaneous birth as the second one, but with Darcy we weren't at the hospital very long when she was born. With the twins also. We get to the hospital and they start popping out relatively soon. So, she never had really the long labors. That was in April of '74. Then, we moved to South Bound Brook once they came back home. I don't remember--the boys were probably just weeks or a month old. We got out of my in-law's house and got into half a house in South Bound Brook. My mother and father were still helping out. My father was still working at American Cyanamid then. Mother never worked; she was always a homemaker. She never drove, but she was available and willing to help out with the kids. In that house as the boys were getting older and they were then sitting up and able to eat in high chairs, I remember

they were totally different when they were little. They weren't identical twins; they were fraternal twins. I don't know how good a look you got at them.

MG: I could tell they were fraternal twins. They do not look alike.

JV: They're both still large, but they don't look alike. Peter has light hair. Brian has dark hair. Brian came out first, reluctantly. Let's go back to their birth again. The doctor had to use forceps on Brian's head. He ended up with a hematoma, a blood blister on his head, a lump that went away in time. The doctor was pulling. We think Peter was inside pushing. The doctor was this little short guy and he stood on a stool to do his deliveries. He's pulling on Brian. I'm up there at Sara's head pulling her this way. It was quite comical.

MG: Did Sara think it was funny?

JV: No, not at all. Now she probably would think it was, but not at the time. I didn't think it was funny at the time either, but as you look back at it. They were totally different in their habits even back then, their sleeping and eating. Brian was a night owl. He would be up until midnight and sleep until nine o'clock in the morning. Peter, on the other hand, he would be awake at four thirty, five o'clock in the morning, but by six or seven in the evening he was ready to go to bed for the night. So, there was only between midnight and four or five in the morning that you had overlap that they'd both be sleeping. It was a tough time there, especially for Sara because I was off at work. But when I was home it was tough for me too. I remember that they'd be in their high chairs eating dinner. We'd be eating dinner at a time when Peter was going to be ready to go to bed soon. There would be times when they were eating real foods, so it was still in South Bound Brook, I remember. They were probably upwards of a year old because we were there for probably a year, maybe a little over. I can remember Peter. He'd be in his highchair and his plate of food would be in front of him, spaghetti or whatever, and we'd feed them. They'd be doing some things on their own. You could tell when it was going to happen, and it happened more than once. He'd be sitting there. His eyes would roll back and he'd go [imitates toppling over] and fall asleep right in his plate of food. It was humorous even then, not just looking back on it as humorous. They were totally different. They remained totally different. When they were born, I remember the doctor or nurse or somebody saying that we had to give Peter some oxygen because he was having some breathing difficulties. We don't know if there was some damage done because of it, but Peter had some issues. He had some learning issues as he got older and he had temperature control issues. The treatment for the temperature control issues might have ended up having something to do with his learning issues because he was on phenobarbital every day full-time to keep him from having convulsions. Normally, when a kid is teething or gets sick, they get a relatively high fever. It's relatively normal. What the body normally does when it gets a fever is that surface vessels dilate to allow more blood to come to the surface so that heat can be dissipated from the skin, which is why you feel hot. Your skin feels hot when you have a fever. There was something reversed in Peter's brain where when he got a fever, his surface vessels constricted. He never felt warm and yet, he would get up to one hundred and six internal temperature when you put the thermometer up his butt. And he would have a convulsion. That happened a couple of times. He ended up in the hospital. The doctor put him on phenobarbital as a preventative, so that he didn't go into convulsion if he got a high fever, whether that was appropriate or not--after a few years, it reversed itself. It didn't keep him

from getting a high fever, but it was a convulsion control to keep him from convulsing with a high fever. After a number of years, several years, of phenobarbital every day, the temperature thing normalized and when he would get a temperature from teething or being sick or whatever, it wouldn't shoot up that high. But we had to force the doctor to take him off the stuff eventually. Whether that stuff had a--because it's kind of nasty stuff--learning impact on him, I don't know. But as they went through school, they ended up two years apart. Brian graduated from high school two years before Peter did. Brian being a year ahead of where he should have been chronologically and Peter a year behind where he should have been chronologically because Brian tested as high IQ and we pushed the school to advance him. Whether that was something that was smart to do or not, I don't know because he was reading at three years of age. Socially, he was not advanced. For social benefit, maybe we should have left him where he was. I don't know. Anyway, that was the way it went. Then we moved here in 1975. For a while they went to a school in Metuchen. Or, at least, Brian went to school in Metuchen because there they had a gifted program. This was part of the skipping, I think. They had a gifted program there in a public school that they didn't have in Piscataway. So, we enrolled him in that and paid for it. Basically, they had the laws in place at the time, where whatever a kid needed, he was supposed to be provided, but Piscataway wouldn't pay for him to go this program. They said basically, "Sue us." Of course, we never did. We did talk to a lawyer once, but it never went anywhere. So we paid for him to attend this special program in Metuchen. Whether it ever really did him any good or not, I don't know. But from there, all three kids, we put them in Timothy Christian School, which is Piscataway, South Plainfield, Edison--I'm not sure where. I think it's Piscataway yet, off Stelton Road, which was a religious-based school. They were there for a couple years. Then, we put them all in Piscataway Public Schools. By that point, we said, "Just put them into public school. Forget about them." But they did okay. Peter was the one that we needed to help him with his homework. Learning was difficult for Peter. He ended up a year behind. But he's been working at microstamping for over twenty years and presumably he's doing okay in his job. He's married and got two kids. I guess they're doing okay. Brian's working for Rutgers. He ended up graduating from Rutgers eventually. In his first couple of years, he did a combination of taking difficult courses and not working hard enough. He took Russian language as a freshman and all this crazy stuff. He ended up flunking out. Then, he got married and started having kids. Then, like I did, went back to school and eventually graduated from Rutgers and ended up in the waste management field. Darcy, of course, got all three of her degrees at Rutgers and went on to become a biology professor and then director of academic affairs. Who knows where she'll end up. There was a lot of years in between me working at that factory, which was a miserable place to work in Franklin Township, making copper foil. It was a privately-owned company. These two guys owned it. They hated each other. They kept trying to get rid of each other, almost to the point where I wouldn't have been surprised if they had talked to hitmen. It was not an employee-friendly company. I don't why I stayed there so long. I started as a machine operator and ended up being production manager after a number of years. It was a miserable place. It was a huge waste of time for me to have spent so much time there. But it was because of contact made there with California, a company in California, that eventually took me to China in 1990 and '91, several trips to China in the copper foil industry. So, it was interesting. I was telling Debbie at the party on Saturday because she's changed jobs any number of times, my whole career also seems to have been a search for work. I've done some interesting things, but there's been a lot of uninteresting and unproductive periods in between. So, I don't see my work career as being any great success. I don't look back at my life

and say that I've had a particularly successful career. Done some interesting things. Right now, I'm working part-time, collecting social security and waiting for a project to come along. In 2015, there were no projects even though there was supposed to be one in Arizona earlier in the year and there was supposed to be one in California later in the year, but they never happened. In 2014, I was in Ohio, North Carolina and California on projects that totaled maybe three months' work. But that's okay. There are a million things to do in between. I ended up leaving that factory finally in mid-'80s, like '86, and did a combination of bartending at the bar in South Bound Brook and painting and power washing. I had developed a process for power washing decks. Decks were popular back in those days as they are now, but it was all natural wood or pressure treated wood and it would get ugly looking. I'd power wash it. I got pictures of the fantastic job that the power washer would do on a deck. So I did a fair number of them and painting projects. Most of the painting I did by myself, but I had a guy [who] worked with me who was out of work for a while. His wife was complaining I wasn't paying him enough. She worked with my wife in one of the moving companies that she ended up getting work at. I told her, "He's making more than I am from these jobs. So, don't complain." I was never a real success at that on my own either. I was a good bartender, but that got old after a while, too. Then, I graduated college finally. Then, got into this quality management stuff.

MG: I am curious about that. I have a couple of question before we get to that. I wanted to ask you about Sara's father. I have heard he was quite a character.

JV: Yes. That's him there, the picture on top. Underneath, back when they first got married, when he was maybe still in the Army.

MG: He looks like Captain Ahab.

JV: Yes. He was a character. He was a World War II veteran. He was in the Army during World War II. He had a couple of claims to fame in the Army. One was that he worked in supply in the building of the ALCAN Highway. Do you know what the ALCAN Highway is? I don't think I ever have, but if you were to Google ALCAN Highway, you'd probably find a ton of information on it. It had to do with building--it was similar to the interstate highway activity in the Eisenhower administration. The purpose for building these--do you know what the purpose of building these interstates was? It wasn't so that you and I could drive to Chicago or whatever and do it effortlessly on a good road. It was to move ballistic missiles around the country. That's what the purpose of the interstate highway system was. To me, it was never intuitive. It was always counterintuitive. I would think interstate would mean within a state, but intrastate would mean between states. But no, interstate is between states. Okay. The ALCAN Highway was before that and it was during World War II. It was to make a land connection, an effective way to get from this country--and I don't know the exact route of where it went--but it went from someplace in the northern part of this country to Alaska through the Yukon. It ain't easy to build a highway through that kind of terrain, where there wasn't any. I don't know if it had to do with oil in Alaska or protection of Alaska because the Japanese ended up on some of the islands, Attu and whatever the other one was. So, we had a battle up there. He was involved in supply for the building of the ALCAN Highway. His other claim to fame in the Army was at the end of the war or towards the end of the war when we knew we were going to win, the Allies were going to win, it was just a matter of time when it was finally going to end. We had eleven

or fifteen million troops that we needed to have some effective system for getting them out of the Army and Navy, but particularly the Army. Up to that point, discharge or separation had been a local affair, where individual units had their own documentation and procedures for getting people out. He was involved in developing the system, effectively one system, that would be used by everybody, or at least by the Army, for getting people out. I remember he would tell the story about how when they had the whole system in place and they were ready to implement it--before that, it took a period of time to do everything that needed to be done to get somebody out. What that period of time was, I don't know. But, he said when they first implemented the system and the first people they ran through it, it was: "Go here. Do that. Go here. Do that." The financial stuff, medical stuff, whatever else was involved in this process. It was a matter of minutes that they did it in. [laughter] That was probably his greatest activity that he was involved in, his contribution to the effort, getting people out. It was a big thing. After that, he went back to work. They were all born in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. My mother in law, father in law, they were natives of Sheboygan, Wisconsin on the shore of Lake Michigan. They got married during the war. The two of them got married during the war. My wife has one older brother and then her sister and younger brother, or younger brother and then sister. The sister is the youngest. So, there's four of them altogether. They got married. I think they had their first kid relatively shortly after they got married because they're a little younger than my parents. I have an older brother. Sara's got an older brother. Sara's three years younger than I am. Her brother is two years older than I am. So they had a bigger spread between their kids. He came home, went to work at whatever. I know he talked about factory work that he didn't fit in with, whether that was before the Army or after, I'm not sure, but he ended up becoming a Wisconsin State Trooper and did that for a number of years. I'm not sure how this happened, but somehow, he got loaned to the state of Michigan to participate in the Ann Arbor study, which was the largest to its time--and maybe there's never been a bigger--alcohol and driving and accident, traffic kind of study. He was involved in the development of the breathalyzer. He was involved in the development of the pneumatic tubes that count cars and such. You see the tubes across the highway. He was involved in those kinds of things. In the early days of computers, they would use punch cards. He became an expert in alcohol and driving. They moved from Sheboygan. They lived in a couple of places in Wisconsin. Then they moved to Bloomington, Indiana when he got a job. He left the state troopers and got a job with the university in Bloomington in their Center of Alcohol Studies. He was a researcher, writer, presenter. He traveled around. I'm not sure exactly what he did there at Bloomington, but it was in the Center of Alcohol Studies. That might have even been where he was developing the breathalyzer. I think the pneumatic tubes was Ann Arbor study. He would travel to various police stations, gathering data from reports and all this stuff. This, again, is part of the story about how Sara and I met. He got a job at Rutgers in the Center of Alcohol Studies. They moved here to Rutgers in probably the latter part of 1968 or the early part of 1969, halfway through Sara's senior year of high school in Bloomington. They brought her out here kicking and screaming, as I told the story Saturday, halfway through her senior year of high school and put her in Piscataway. She hated it. She had already met the guy that she thought she was going to spend the rest of her life with at Bloomington. So, he worked at the Center of Alcohol Studies here and did that for a number of years until funding for that position ran out. He would travel the world presenting papers, writing and all this. It was based on data from the Ann Arbor study. That's how big that was that it was still relevant. When funding for the position ran out, he got into the real estate field and worked for about a year or so showing houses and working his butt off. He never sold a

house. [laughter] But, what happened during that year, something that he had been doing part-time, even when he was still with Rutgers Center of Alcohol Studies, he was on his own acting as an expert witness. If you got arrested for drunken driving and your lawyer was one of the lawyers that knew him and knew his reputation and worked with him---and he had quite a number of lawyers that he worked with throughout the state. If your lawyer thought there was some reason to bring him in to study and do whatever he did, they'd bring him in and he'd charge as an expert witness, as a consultant. Around that time that he was doing the real estate, the laws changed here in New Jersey where they really cracked down on drunken driving. So there were lots and lots of people arrested for drunken driving, DUI [driving under the influence].

MG: Do you remember when the laws changed?

JV: Certainly throughout the '80s. It might have happened in the '70s. It was during that time. He retired probably in the early '90s, early to mid '90s. He retired because they changed the laws again to make it less helpful or likely that he would be able to help because of the particular type of defense that he was providing. He had a number of years where he was very busy. They were traveling all over the world. They were world travelers. They'd vacation several times a year. They went on Alaska cruises. They spent three weeks in New Zealand, Australia. They never actually made it to China, but they made several trips to Europe, around Europe. Several trips I think to the Netherlands because he was--just the other day, Sara and I, when we were in Connecticut, we went to a Barnes and Noble bookstore because she, for the last year or so for each of the grandkids, or at least the younger ones, have been buying and giving them each a book every month. So, while she was looking for kids' books, I was reading book that the title was *Useless Information* or something like that. I opened it to a page on the Netherlands. The Netherlands, Holland and Dutch--the name of the country is the Netherlands and it has been. Holland is a certain area within the Netherlands. It's not synonymous with the whole country. The term Dutch was a derogatory term coined by the British when they were at war at one point with the Netherlands. Even today, the term Dutch has negative connotations when you say you're going on a date and going Dutch, it means you're each paying. There's a term that says if you're "in Dutch," it means you're in trouble of some sort. The Pennsylvania Dutch, well, that's not Dutch at all; they're German. The term was Pennsylvania Deutsch, Deutsch meaning German, but in this country, we switched it to Dutch. It had nothing to do with Dutch. That was the couple of pages in that book that I read. He's from the Netherlands, but he always called it Holland. My mother-in-law is of German heritage. But they would go over there--and he still had family over there. They found his family's roots. They went and visited relatives over there. They really enjoyed traveling all over. He developed a lot of medical problems. He died, I think he was probably eighty or eighty-one. It was probably eight or nine or ten years ago already that he passed away. My mother in law lives in a condo that they had moved into when they moved out of Piscataway. They spent several years in that condo before he died. That's where he died. He went well also, easily, in that they were at home. He sent her off to go do something. He was in his lounge chair and gone. She came home and found him there. He had had issues with aneurysms. He had aortic aneurysm repair once, but then it developed again and they couldn't operate. They told him one of these days it's going to burst and you're going to go, to the point where his doctor when he'd go in for a periodic doctor visit, the doctor would say, "Oh, Dick.

Are you still with us?" [laughter] A morbid thing, but it was, I guess, humorous to them. I don't know. That's basically the story of my father-in-law.

MG: I know that a lot of Germans settled in Sheboygan. The Kohler Company is based there, which is an Austrian company.

JV: Yes. There was a Kohler plant right there in Sheboygan, in or just outside of Sheboygan. Yes. For whatever reason, there were a lot of people that ended up there. I think the reason that there was a lot of Germans there was because maybe during World War I, World War II, we brought a lot of prisoners over here and put them to work on farms in this country. Then, when the war ended, whether it was World War I or World War II or both--I don't remember the details--and we said, "Okay, now you can go home." They said, "We don't want to." [laughter] A lot of difference from our prisoners of war when they're held by these other countries. They can't wait to get home because of the poor conditions that they're held in. We treat people in general and on average a whole lot better. We treat prisoners better than a lot of other countries do. They didn't want to go home. That's how they ended up staying here. A lot of them were in the Midwest, in Wisconsin and other areas. You can probably find the information about that on the internet too. Everything is on the internet as I'm sure you know. If you just know how to look for it.

MG: You talked earlier about joining the police department.

JV: Yes. I did testing at a number of different police departments: Bridgewater; Raritan Township, I think, which is what surrounds Flemington; New Hope, the small town on the Delaware River; Franklin Township, also, I think, across the river over here. Yes. At least those four. I would always do well on the written test because it was two parts. It was a written test and it was a physical test. It was a number of years after the Marine Corps, maybe ten years after I got out of the Marine Corps. Even though in the Marine Corps I was in good physical condition, I never had a lot of upper body strength. I could run all day in the old days. These police tests, the physical tests, were geared towards more upper body strength. So, I never scored really high on the physical test, but on the written test I would do well. I was only offered a policeman's job as a result of one of those, which was--no, I'm sorry. Wait a minute. New Hope is on the Pennsylvania side. Lambertville is on the New Jersey side. Lambertville was where I was offered the job. Not New Hope. I never tested in New Hope across the river. It was Lambertville. They offered me the job. Lambertville, even today, is a sleepy little town. In those days, that was when we were living in Flemington, which wasn't that far from Lambertville. So, that would have been when the twins were small. The twins are forty-two now. So, it would have been over forty years ago. They said, "If you want the job you can have it." Well, the investigator who had investigated me, the detective from the Lambertville Police Department, he had a confidential meeting with me after I was told that I could have the job if I wanted it. I remember several things that he told me. He said, "Yes, you scored real well on your written test and you scored adequately on your physical test." Maybe there wasn't even a physical test there, I don't remember. But the one thing I really remember was he said, "I investigated you and talked to family members, your old friends, your neighbors from South Bound Brook." He said, "I could not find anybody who would say a single negative word about you." So, that was good. "But," he says, "I have to tell you. You've got a wife and three kids.

A requirement of the job is that you move into Lambertville. You have to live in the town. Another requirement is that a new patrolman in the first, I don't know, five years is not allowed to have a part-time job." The pay, I think at that time, it was something like seven thousand five hundred dollars a year, some ridiculously low amount. He said, "We all have part-time jobs. The chief is a rural postal deliveryman. He drives a postal route." He says, "I have a photography studio and all the other"--I don't know how many there were. There couldn't have been too many--"But they all have part-time work. But you would have to do nothing else but be a fulltime patrolman for five years or so. You have to realize that before you take the job." I think he was being honest with me. I don't think it was that he didn't want me for some reason. He was being honest that it was going to be difficult. So, I didn't take it. That was my police career. [laughter]

MG: Did you take advantage of any service benefits, such as the GI Bill?

JV: There were two benefits connected with the GI Bill. The education benefit that I got, that I never used all of I don't believe, but there was a requirement that you had to use it within a certain number of years. The other benefit I used was the ability to buy a house with no money down. We bought our house here in Piscataway with a VA Loan. So, when I went to Tusculum, I was getting it. When I went to Montclair State, I was getting it. It wasn't a whole lot of money. Once I got married it went up because I had Sara and it was maybe a hundred and thirty dollars a month. Before that, when I was going to Tusculum, it was maybe eighty-five dollars a month, something like that. That was a lot of money in those days. I remember when we got married and she got the job at the telephone switchboard operator thing, I don't have any recollection of how much she was making, but it wasn't much. I was working in the cafeteria at Montclair State serving people. I don't remember if I did that the whole time. I don't know. I also worked part-time at Al's Market, a butcher shop in Bound Brook on Main Street that I had worked at even before I went in the Marine Corps, making hamburger and such, slicing bologna. Never doing any of the really good butchering of cutting up sides of beef and all. It was all the grunt work. I remember, we were going out to dinner once or twice a week. I remember we were buying shrimp, especially when we lived in Flemington. I remember we were buying shrimp at the seafood market there that was part of or next to the Flemington Hotel in downtown Flemington, which is where the Lindbergh kidnaping trial had been held back in the '30s. [Editor's Note: The trial of Bruno Hauptmann, accused (and subsequently found guilty) of kidnapping and murdering famed aviator Charles A. Lindbergh's son, took place amid unprecedented media coverage and public interest at the Hunterdon County Courthouse in Flemington, New Jersey, in January and February of 1935.] We stopped buying these huge prawns when they got to be three dollars a pound; we thought it was too much. [laughter] But we've never had any money. Back in the early days, we didn't have much in the way of money. When we got married, I think we had fifty dollars cash between us. It just wasn't much. We still don't have much. There was a period of time when the kids were growing up that Sara didn't work. She was a stay at home mom. I never made a whole lot of money working in factories, tending bar, painting. The painting in particular was not a money-maker. [laughter] We still don't have anything much in the way of money, which scares the hell out of me because at some point--I collect Social Security and do my part time work. When projects come along, it varies according to the project. Sometime I'll make forty dollars an hour, which sounds like a lot, but when you're away from home--expenses are covered also. One of those projects, in 2014 when I

was in Ohio for three months, it started out at a hundred dollars an hour, but then the last month or two that I was there, it bumped up to a hundred and twenty-five dollars an hour. Most days were something more than an eight-hour day. I was sometimes working ten hours a day for a hundred and twenty-five dollars an hour, eleven hundred dollars a day. We were hoping that one was going to last longer, but it didn't and it didn't have a good ending. So, there was sometimes I would do well. Sometimes I'd do interesting stuff. A lot of slow or empty periods in between. It's still that way.

MG: Tell me about the connection between what you were doing in the copper foil industry and California, which you said eventually brought you to China.

JV: Yes. We had a customer--there's two different types of copper foil. What we did was electrodeposited copper foil. What you do with that is you take scrap copper, old wire with the insulation burned off of it so it's just coils of wire and you dissolve it in a water and sulfuric acid bath. There were these huge dissolving tanks that had filled with this fluid and air system where it would bubble up. The agitation was air agitation, which would dissolve the copper. That would then be pumped through a filter and then inside the building where you had these large fiberglass tanks, maybe ten by ten and six feet high and horizontal axle through this big stainless steel drum that would rotate slowly. Depending on what you were making, it could take ten or fifteen minutes to make a complete revolution. Or if you were making thinner copper, it would make a revolution in a minute. But the copper solution would come up from the bottom and in between the surface of the drum there was a gap--the surface of the drum and a lead anode. You would supply direct current: low amperage, large voltage. Anyway, it would plate the copper onto the rotating drum. Now, copper foil plated from an acid bath onto stainless steel, the industry eventually went to a titanium drum even, but we had stainless steel drums. It's not plated for adhesion; it doesn't stick very well. When it comes up, the copper foil is peeled off, goes over a number of rollers and through a water bath to rinse the acid off of it. Then, a stain-proofing bath that gives it a protective surface. Then it's dried and then rolled up. So, you have a continuous roll of copper. Thicker, you have less footage. Thinner, you have more footage on that roll depending on what its use was going to be. The thicker stuff would go to customers that would laminate it to tar paper. It was used in shielding and roofing and commercial applications. The really thin stuff would get laminated to Mylar and slit and would go into coaxial cable as an electrical protection to maintain the integrity of the main signal within the cable. It would siphon off any extraneous signals or currents or whatever. But the main reason, the main purpose and the highest quality stuff would go to be laminated to a substrate. That's what your printed circuit boards would be made out of. That required the highest quality. This company that I worked for was such a miserable company. We were never able to really make the high-quality stuff. So, most of what we made went for roofing and coaxial cable use. The other type of copper foil--took me a minute to remember where I had been, where I started from--is rolled copper. You start with a pure ingot of copper and go through a series of high pressure rollers, copper being a fairly malleable metal. You would end up with a relatively thick copper. They didn't make it really thin in twenty or forty-inch-wide rolls. That was rolled copper versus electrodeposited copper. That had a somewhat different use. I don't really remember--I have a ton of information on all this stuff, documents and instructional stuff on all this. Some of it went for printed circuited boards, I think, but a different kind of stuff. Then, what you did with both the electrodeposited after it was made and the other was that in order to laminate it, for printed

circuit board use, you needed to improve the surface of it to get a better bond. The way you improved the surface of it was you ran it through another machine, a series of tanks and rollers and you plate it onto the side that's going to be adhered to the substrate. You plated a surface on it that was a rough surface so that it had teeth so that it would dig into the substrate and give you a better bond. This company in Southern California didn't manufacture either electrodeposited or rolled copper, but they would buy rolled copper and they would buy electrodeposited copper and they had a treating system where they would then make it for printed circuit boards. So, we would sell them some raw untreated copper because our treater was never--that was part of the quality issue and why we didn't sell a lot of foil to the printed circuit board market because our treater method wasn't all that good. This guy, he would treat it. Our company here, after a period of time, even into the '80s, in the early '80s even, before I left in the mid-'80s--in ['86] I think I left--they weren't interested, these two owners, in running the company here and making quality product as much as they were interested in selling the technology to other countries around the world. There were numerous countries around the world that were interested in developing this process and doing it themselves. Now, a major manufacturer of this product that made quality product was in Trenton, just north of Trenton in Bordentown. We had a connection with that company. One of the original guys who started our company was a stepson of the guy who started the Bordentown company. So there was some conflict there between him and his stepbrothers in running that company after the old man got out of it. So, he broke off and started his own company in Franklin Township. So, that's how we had gotten started. He ended up leaving the company and sold it to these two guys who ended up running it and hating each other. They made quality copper in the Trenton factory. There was another company in McConnelsville, Ohio that made quality product also for this printed circuit industry. So, they were interested in selling the technology. They would travel all over the world not caring about the company here, but traveling all over the world making presentations in China, in Ireland, in other places. Those are two places I can recall right off the top of my head, but other places in Europe and other places around the world, trying to sell them the technology. Well, they would then have delegations from these other countries coming over to meet at the company. They would give them this flowery speech sitting in their offices. Then, they had to take them on a tour of the facility. I'd be there. I never had anything really to do with them while they were giving them the snow job, but I was out there on the floor. You could tell, as they're bringing these people out into this filthy, disgusting factory, and you see them after they've been in negotiations for a while, their first visit to our factory, they'd walk out and they'd go: the eyes would open wide, the jaw would drop open. You could tell the thought that was going through their head was, "He wants to sell us one of these?" Because it was a mess. Well, they never were successful in selling any project to any place around the world. Negotiations would all fall apart, usually when he brought them in to show them our facility. But there was one project with the Chinese that went farther than any other. Then, eventually, Madam Fan, who was the female head of the delegation for this project, head of the group, she finally realized, "We don't want to do a project with this company." So, she went to an agent in Southern California, who was in La Jolla, and said to him, "You have to find us somebody else in the United States to do this project with. We can't do it with MTI because we've got bad feelings." Now, they had been--I don't know if they were at the Ohio company, but they had gotten a proposal from the Trenton/Bordentown company. Nobody knew this initially. Me, being in the position that I ended up eventually being in, I got all the information from the various places, and I put it all together. The company in Bordentown gave them a \$27 million-dollar proposal to build them

this copper foil turnkey operation. The Chinese were to provide the building and the labor to put everything together. The company would provide all the equipment and the technology, the know-how, and the training to make it work. 27 million. Well, nobody knew that initially; it's something I found out afterwards. They said, "Well, that's too much." So, they went to MTI. MTI came up with a proposal. I don't know if they knew about the figures from Bordentown--probably not--but they came up with a proposal to do the same project with the same output for, I believe, about eight million dollars. So, the Chinese said, "Oh, that's great. Yes. We'll proceed with you." But then they found out that we really don't want to proceed with them. Presumably, it was within a few weeks of the time to actually sign a contract. That's when they went to the La Jolla agent and they said, "You got to find us somebody else to do it." MTI was going to do it for seven million dollars, so that's what we'll offer somebody else in the United States to do it. Did you catch that?

MG: Yes.

JV: MTI was eight million, not seven. The Chinese figure they're going to be smart and they're going to save another million dollars. So, this agent approaches this company who had been our customer in Southern California and says, "Well, you know MTI. You bought product from them. They were going to do this for seven million. Can you do it for seven million?" Even though they had never made electrodeposited copper itself, this project was to manufacturer it and do the subsequent treatment to it. They said, "Well, if MTI could it for seven million, yeah, we could do it for seven million." The Bordentown company also had a facility in Southern California. So, they thought they could get somebody from that facility to help them develop the actual manufacturing process. I left MTI in '86. This was probably in '87 or '88, they called me up because they had remembered me and said, "Can you help us with this?" So, okay. I said, "Yeah, I've been away from there for a while, but I can help." My purpose was to teach the Chinese how to make copper foil because that's what I did here, and also to give input on the design. So, I first went to California in '89. They had come up with these two guys who used to work for the Bordentown/Southern California company, but they had left that company twenty years earlier. Get the connection here. Bordentown and our guy, who left there and started our company, was around the same time that these guys had left the same company, but their Southern California location. The technology in both facilities was the same. This is 1960s technology. That Bordentown company and the Ohio company went on to improve the technology on a regular basis, so their process, by the time the late '80s came around, the technology that these guys were offering was late '60s. What Yates had been quoting on for 27 million was late '80s technology. Titanium drums and all this. The process is totally different for maintaining a titanium drum as it is for maintaining a stainless-steel drum. Nobody knew; not these guys from Southern California, not MTI. Nobody knew how to maintain a stainless-steel drum because it was a secret industry. They'd make these developments and we didn't share in any of that. So, what MTI was offering the Chinese and then what our Southern California company was offering the Chinese, without the Chinese knowing it, was at least twenty-year-old technology. Of course, it was sold to them as state of the art. They said, "We want titanium drums," because they knew from their Bordentown experience that titanium drums were the way to go. "Okay. We'll give you titanium drums." Nobody had any clue. All this is leading up to the ultimate failure. It came crashing down in flames. It was a disaster. Do you need to know more details about that [disaster]? I can give you more details.

MG: It is interesting.

JV: Not too relevant. However, speaking of interesting, by the time I got to China after the company in California failed and was acquired by another company in Southern California, I thought I was out of it. That company, the Chinese, they were continuing the project without knowing what they were doing either. But when these guys finally had built this plant in China with old technology and new drums that nobody knew what to do with--when it was ready to start up, the Chinese said, "All right. Where's Velcheck? He's supposed to come over and teach us." Because I had had them over here by that time. Took them on a tour of New York City, had all their tickets stolen--it was a mess. [laughter] They said, "Where's Velcheck? He's supposed to come over and teach us how to make this." They didn't even know me, but they got me involved in it again. So, that's how I got re-involved. In 1990, made my first trip to China. The Tiananmen Square thing was in June of '89 and that had shut China down for a period of time. So that by the time I went there in whatever month of '90 it was, I don't remember, it was just reopening. So, there was very few non-Chinese people in China when I made my first trip. But I remember telling the California new company people, I said, "Yeah, I can be involved in it." I said, "How about if I come to California and work with you for a while, get reacquainted as to what's going on and find out how the construction of this plant went?" Because they built the plant without me being involved. They said, "No, it's ready to start. We'll get you straight through to China. You can go over there and start it up." I said, "Well, these two guys, they're going to be there, right? The two developers/designers who had been from the other company who designed this whole plant." They said, "Well, we want you to go in three days," or whatever amount of time. We did a real quick visa. "When you go, they're going to be on their way home, but we think that you're going to be able to cross paths in Beijing and you'll be able to meet with them and get caught up on the project." Well, as it turned out, I arrived at the hotel at midnight or so and they were leaving at six o'clock in the morning. [laughter] I woke them up. I said, "Well, is the plant ready to start?" They said, "It's a disaster." Good luck. It all went downhill from there. It was an ultimate disaster. Things didn't work right. What it was, was that seven million dollars was nowhere near enough to do the proper job. Eight million dollars was not enough to do it. Maybe you could have done it for less than twenty-seven, but twenty-seven was a much more realistic number. Plus, we weren't giving them the latest technology because we couldn't maintain that Titanium surface. So, it all was a disaster. Then, I went from there to going back into college and finally getting a degree in environmental studies from Cook College, Rutgers. By that time, I was a good student. I graduated with honors, 3.6 [grade point average] I think it was. Instead of sitting in the back of the room and keeping quiet, I'd sit up in the first row and was always in the professor's face questioning what they were saying and giving alternate opinions on things. I was much different. There was talk Saturday at the party about how some of these people who haven't seen me in many years, like Debbie and John Mitzak knew me as this quiet kid in school, but as you know, I'm not quiet anymore. Darcy, my daughter, who I had that who's going to talk conflict with [Editor's Note: "conflict" marked with a question mark in corrections. Reevaluate corrections to be made here], she was like me back in those days when she was young. She was quiet. She was a much better student than I was, but she was quiet. She ain't quiet anymore either. [laughter]

MG: What brought you to the environmental studies program at Rutgers?

JV: Before I went to Cook, I had taken some courses at Somerset County College, Middlesex County College. It was the same kind of biology thing. I was interested in the environment. I took a course at Middlesex County College, a general introduction to environmental science course, and did well in it and enjoyed it. When it came time to major at Cook, again, it was similar to my transfer from Tusculum to Montclair. They told me what I'd have to take as an environmental science major with all these heavy-duty math and science courses. They said, "But we have this international environmental studies major." So that's what I was, an environmental studies major, not an environmental science major. I did very well and graduated with honors. Then, after I graduated was when I got involved in this quality management stuff, again, through MTI. It was funny. I maintained a good relationship with them after I left and I'd periodically stop by and visit because I was friendly with a couple of other middle managers, the maintenance manager and one other guy. I don't know if you know what ISO 9000 is, but it's International Quality Management Standards. The US was slow to come into it, but back in the '90s we got involved in it. Now lots of companies are certified quality management systems. It's all around records and procedures and doing things in a standardized way and management involvement. But there's also a standard for environmental management. The ISO organization comes up with standards for all kinds of stuff. In photography, back in film in particular, you may have heard of ISO 100 film, ISO 200 film. It's all around film speeds and it's all standardized, standardized through an ISO standard. Credit cards are the same dimensions and thickness throughout the world because there's an ISO standard for how to build a credit card. There's thousands of ISO standards, but the big ones are the ISO 9000, the quality management standard. Again, if you do a google search on ISO 9000, you'll come up with millions of hits. That's what I got involved in when MTI was interested in getting certified to ISO 9000 because the motivation for getting certified to it is if your customers are requiring it from you. They want to be assured that the quality of the product they're getting from you is high quality. Well, one way of doing that is do lots of testing on the product when you bring them in, but that costs you money. Another way is to make sure your supplier is adhering to some kind of standard in what they're doing. That's why they would encourage--if they've got two suppliers that are supplying the same kind of product, and one is certified and the other is not, they're more likely to buy from the one that's certified. So, MTI wanted to get certified, but they didn't want the hassle of going through and adhering to these standards, so they brought me on part time to be their ISO coordinator. At the time, the Department of Labor was offering free membership in these consortiums where companies were joining together and going through training for this ISO stuff without cost to the company. So, the only thing it was costing the company was the twenty dollars an hour, or whatever they were paying me, to attend these sessions, create the documents that were being trained, come back and supposedly implement it in the company. Well, nobody in the company was interested in it. That's why they brought in the outsider, me, to do it. So, as a result, that was a big failure and didn't go anywhere. However, the company that was doing the training, STAT-A-MATRIX, that's the company that I still do projects for as the projects come up. In 1999 to 2003, we had a three-and-a-half-year project full-time basically in Richmond, Virginia. It's what I did in 2014 in North Carolina, Ohio and California. There are problems with those projects too, where some of them were more successful than others. In 2011, I spent eight months in Memphis, Tennessee on a project, living on an island in the Mississippi River. I tell people I was sent up the river for eight months. I was living on Mudd

Island. It's an upscale island. It's really nice. They put me up in a nice apartment. If or when I work again, that's likely what it'll be, another project with them.

MG: Did your degree or coursework at Rutgers prepare you for this work?

JV: It gave me a college degree, which is yes, what got me in. If I hadn't graduated from college, and didn't have the ISO experience at MTI--those two things are what qualified me for these projects, because they are ISO-related projects and I needed the college degree in order to be able to do it. I remember when it really got rolling. Initially, when the consortium was going through, we were doing the training and creating documents, they assigned a consultant to our company. There was one guy doing the training. Then there were several consultants. There was maybe fifteen or twenty companies all together as part of the consortium. Each consultant would have several companies that they came out and did onsite work with. So, it was onsite work with the consultant from the company and going to these training sessions. This one who came to us kind of liked me and saw some potential in me. When there was an opportunity within the company to do some work for the company, the training company, she brought me into it. From that it blossomed into the projects. But it never did become a fulltime thing. It was always just as an outside consultant working on these projects. They would charge their clients big bucks and then pay the consultants relatively--it is a privately-owned company, but the guy who started it back in the '60s, he always said, "Yeah. Well, the billable amount, the amount they charge the clients, one-third to the consultant, one-third to overhead and one-third to me." [laughter] Whether it's still that way, I don't [know]. Depending on the project and how much they're charging the client, that hundred and twenty-five dollars an hour, I can't imagine that they were charging three-seventy-five an hour. There was eight or ten of us working on this project. That's part of why it didn't go through to completion. There are problems with that company too. Problems with companies out there. Did we take something through to a conclusion of what you asked? What was that last thing you asked?

MG: I do not even remember. It was so long ago. [laughter] I wanted to get a sense of your work and career. Was there anything else you wanted to add?

JV: I think you had asked how I got into the environmental thing and how I got into the work that I did, the projects. The environmental standard, which there's no teaching of it in school or anything because it's a business thing, but it never caught on to the degree that the quality one did. It's out there and there are a lot of big companies that are registered to the ISO standard for environmental management, but there's not the same motivation. There's not that supplier/customer motivation that there is with the quality management system. It's more governmental with the environmental one with the EPA pressure and all, which theoretically would be less on a company that's registered to the standard than if a company is not registered to the standard. But with the quality standard, you've got that stronger motivation of a company saying, "Before I buy from you, I want assurance that what you're giving me is good. So, get registered to the quality standard." A customer is not going to say, or not to the same degree, "Yeah, we're interested in the quality of the environment, so you have to go out and get registered." To tell a supplier, "You have to go out and get [registered]," it's not as strong. A lot of motor vehicle, automotive companies, there is that--that's probably the industry that has the

strongest. But the ISO 9000 is quality. ISO 14000 is environmental. Again, if you do google searches on them you'll find a ton of information.

MG: When you travel to these areas for work, what is a typical day like?

JV: I'm the documentation person. The other consultants that work with us are the experts. Some of them have come from the FDA [Food and Drug Administration] because a lot of these projects, the FDA is pushing these companies to improve their quality management system. The FDA comes in and audits. Where they find deficiencies, they can shut a company down. So, the company has the incentive to improve their quality management system and they would bring us in. I'm a junior consultant. The other guys have, for the most part, more impressive credentials than I have, but I'm the documentation person. I create the documents. So that's what I do. I go in and look at documents they have and see where they're deficient and we go from there in creating documents--process mapping, flow charting, all that kind of stuff.

MG: For all kinds of companies?

JV: All kinds of companies, but in recent years, it's mostly FDA-related companies, [like] medical device manufacturers. They're the ones that have the strongest motivation to avoid being shut down.

MG: The last thing I want to talk about with you is your revisiting our Vietnam experience through participating in parades and getting involved in veterans' groups. Do you want to talk about that today or save it for another time?

JV: Well, it's relatively simple. When I was in Parris Island in 1966 and on the other bases that I was in during my two years in the Marine Corps, I don't remember seeing a lot of old fart marines around visiting like you see today. What I've determined, in my opinion, is I was there just twenty years after World War II ended and less than fifteen years after Korean War ended. There were a lot marines in World War II and a lot of Marines in Korea. You would think that if Marines were going to come and visit, we'd have had them in '66, but if you think about it, the reason there's a lot now and the reason there's been a lot for twenty years is because there was a lot in Vietnam also. So, you've got World War II, Korea, and Vietnam veterans coming to visit these bases, but not until more than twenty years after their time of service. Up to twenty years--and I just use that as an arbitrary figure--in the years after you come home, what did you do? You took your uniform off, you hung it in the closet or you threw it away. You tried to forget as much as possible about what you had been through with varying degrees of success. You got married or if you were already married you had kids, you started a career, and you went on with life. It wasn't until twenty, twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five years later that the kids are grown, maybe you're retired, maybe not, but you really start now thinking about this kind of stuff. For many of us, that involves a yearning to reconnect. To me, that's where it all comes from. After a period of time, then you're ready to get back involved in it. That's why, in '66, we didn't see many of these old farts on bases because they were busy. Before World War II, the military was very small, the Marine Corps was small; there weren't that many. So, you didn't have twenty years later people ready yet to come out and get involved. It's not just visiting the bases, it's being actively involved in veterans' groups and such. Now it's to the point where our veterans

are really aging and these more recent veterans, the ones from 1990 on, are still involved in raising their families. There was that long period of time between Vietnam and the Gulf War. Vietnam ended in '75, or really before that. The Gulf War wasn't until 1990. So, you had that fifteen years in there of the military. It takes combat veterans for a large part to want to get back together. It's that life and death experience that you shared with others that really is a big incentive for wanting to get back together again with these people. So, to me, that's where it all comes from: time and numbers.

MG: You are very involved in some veterans' groups.

JV: Yes. Not as much right now as I was because of the fact that I've got so much I need to be doing. I was more involved over the last few years than I am right now. In 2012 and 2013, it was like 2015; there were no projects. It was in 2012 that I started collecting Social Security and that I started doing this part-time work. But 2011, I worked basically for the whole year and for the years before that. Some of the years before that I was working for a training company, which I haven't really given you much information about yet, I guess. That would be somewhat involved too and we probably should do that next time. Where was I going with that?

MG: I am not sure.

JV: [laughter]

MG: I had asked you about the veterans' groups.

JV: In 2012 and '13, that's when I got active in the Marine Corps League, which has been the thing that I'm most active in. Before that, I was active in the first Marine Division Association, but that died out. People literally died off and we dissolved that state chapter a couple of years ago. For ten years or more, I've been involved in the Middlesex County Veterans Advisory Council, where we put on information seminars for veterans and things like that. We don't do a whole lot of stuff, but we do do that. We coordinate. This is where you're going to have an interest. We've got representatives from Middlesex County College veterans group from Rutgers on our council. Do you read the *Rutgers Magazine*?

MG: Sometimes.

JV: In this recent one, that I think I read and disposed of already because I try to limit the amount of stuff I keep, a woman that had either joined our council or came and gave us a presentation at one of our last meetings is the new Rutgers veterans coordinator, who took over for Steve Abel who retired a little while back. So, she's somebody that you should know. Between Middlesex County College and Rutgers University, there's a vast number now of relatively recent veterans that are a source pool for you to get in touch with do interviewing with for more recent veterans.

MG: I will reach out to her. Okay. So, there is more for us to cover.

JV: Yes. More career and recent stuff. My vision for the future. [laughter]

MG: Yes. [laughter] And the grandkids I want to hear about.

JV: Yes. That will take some time.

MG: In the meantime, I will read that fifty-page document you sent me.

JV: I haven't sent it yet, but I'll do that hopefully today or tomorrow.

MG: I want to listen back to this session and our last session to see if there is anything I overlooked.

JV: So, one more session and we can wrap it up.

MG: Yes. I will be sad when that happens.

JV: Me too.

MG: We will have to stay in touch.

JV: Okay,

MG: Let me turn this off for now.

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Reviewed by Molly Graham 1/3/2018

Reviewed by Jim Velcheck 12/15/2018