

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL WEINBERG

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kathryn Tracy Rizzi: This begins an oral history interview with Michael S. Weinberg on August 10, 2018, in Metuchen, New Jersey, with Kate Rizzi. Thank you so much for having me into your house today to do this oral history interview.

Michael Weinberg: My pleasure.

KR: To begin, where and when you were born?

MW: I was born in Paterson, New Jersey on August 22, 1939 to Judith and Henry Weinberg, my parents. We were brought up in a modest home, in an apartment, where we lived for twenty-two years, and finally my parents moved. They left a forwarding address, by the way, but it was only a block-and-a-half away from where we lived. They had bought a house in the City of Paterson. There I remained living until I got married a couple years later.

Living in Paterson was quite comfortable. It was a good middle-class community. We had our share of very wealthy people, and we had our share of not-so-very wealthy people. It was a city, at that time, that you could walk anywhere. There were no problems in the City of Paterson, none that would cause consternation by any means. [It was] comfortable living, a lot of good friends, went through grammar school, went through high school, Paterson Eastside High School. Just enjoyed my friends, we enjoyed being together; [it was] the normal upbringing of kids back in the '40s and the '50s, just a nice time to remember back to.

I was too young to really remember very much about World War II, because I was born in '39, so by the time the war was over, I was only like five or six years old, but a lot of stories from relatives and my uncle, who happened to serve in the Army. My father was an accountant, and he got a second job working in a dye house in the City of Paterson. The dye house happened to be dying materials that were used for the war effort. So, obviously, not wanting to have to serve, he got a job working for an auxiliary portion of the government's operation in making uniforms. My mother was a hair dresser by profession and a housewife. [It was] just a nice family upbringing.

We lived with my grandparents for a while. Then, my grandparents got fed up with us and moved to an apartment of their own, and that was only about a half a block away. The whole family circle seemed to be probably within a six-block area, which was not uncommon in those days. Families kind of stayed in the same neighborhood in maybe different locations, different homes, but usually within walking distance of each other. There was much closer family ties then. When people went away, say, on a vacation, the whole neighborhood came out to wave goodbye, so they could go off to the mountains for a week. [laughter] It was just a nice time of my life being brought up in that era. Of course, then I didn't realize it, but looking back on it, I realize how good I really had it. It was just a pleasant time. It was a pleasant time.

I graduated from high school in 1957. I worked for the summer as a camp counselor at a day camp. I then enlisted in the Navy, where I spent four years on active service and two years of Reserve, so my total time was six years in the service. Looking back on my experience and my enjoyment of what I was doing in the service, I kind of have slight regrets that I didn't make it a career. I think I would've enjoyed that, being at sea and then ashore for a given period of time

and then back at sea again. I loved being at sea. We did spend a lot of time at sea when I was aboard the ship. [laughter] Some very good friends that I made in the service, none of which, at this point, I have heard from since I got out of the service. I keep looking for reunions, but so far none has come up. The officers I dealt with were very nice. We got along very well on the ship. There was no, with the exception of the respect that you had to show the officers and your chief petty officers and whomever you were working for, there was no line drawn between friendships. You got along well, you worked well, [and] there was very little irritation aboard ship that would lead to permanent damage to your brains. Everybody got along; it was just a nice, friendly atmosphere. We had our [arguments], everybody has arguments, but that happens. I just enjoyed my time in the service.

[I] came out of the service [and] went to work in retailing in the menswear business. I stayed with that probably for at least twenty-five years, selling men's clothing. Before going into the service, while in high school, I always had a part-time job working in a retail atmosphere. So, that's what I knew, and that's what I stayed with. After about twenty-five years in men's clothing, I was offered a change by a friend of mine and went into New York to work in the engraving business, high end stationary, and business cards. [I] left that about two years later, not really being that happy with what I was doing. I was offered a job in the appliance business, home appliances, which I did for twenty-five years, and then retired a little over six years ago, retired at the age of seventy-two. Here we are, living the life. [laughter]

KR: I would like to go back and ask you about your family history. What do you know about your family history, on your father's side?

MW: Not very much. My grandparents were unique, in the fact that the both of them were deaf-mutes. I'm not sure which one, but one had scarlet fever as a child and was rendered deaf-mute. The other one was born that way, but there was no less love or communication in some way, either by a hand sign or just by writing something down on a piece of paper, and his parents, my father's parents, were great people. My grandfather was a custom lady's tailor. My grandmother was a homemaker. They also lived in an apartment in Paterson. Their families were originally, I guess, probably from Russia or Poland, as were my mother's side. Both my mother's parents were from Poland, from Lodz, Poland. That's L-O-D-Z. My grandfather came to the U.S. probably in the late '20s or early '30s through Ellis Island. Lodz in Poland, at that time, was the hub of the textile industry in Central Europe. So, he came with skill of being a weaver. That's why he came to Paterson, because Paterson was the Silk City of America. [Editor's Note: Located in New York Bay, Ellis Island was an immigration station from 1892 to 1954. It is now a museum.]

Something humorous that my grandfather told me--he said [that] back in the '40s, silk was a hard thread and a raw material to get from Japan, because that's where it all came from. Japan was withholding goods, for whatever reason. So, a lot of his working constituents said, "Oh, we're going to stockpile all the silk we can, so we can continue working." Well, unbeknownst to them, silk does not fair very well if it's not processed, and it rots. My grandfather said, "Maybe I won't do that." He said, "I heard about this new material to make linings for coats with." It turned out to be rayon, and that's what he did. He continued weaving using rayon. He owned his own mill. He, unfortunately, was going back to the mill one evening and was hit by a car, at the age of

sixty-five, and he was killed. He is sorely missed because he's quite a character. My grandmother just kept on keeping on, and she lived until the ripe old age of eighty-nine. After she passed, it was my parents, and, of course, my mother has a sister and my mother's brother-in-law, who we were very close with, and [we have] stayed close with their offspring, my cousin Jeff and cousin Melinda, for years now. We do meet [them] periodically and have lunch together. We have yet to go on away on a cruise or go on vacation with, but we still see them, still keep in contact.

I have a brother. His name is Joel, and he lives up in North Jersey, up in Clifton. He was an accountant also, and right now he's retired. He and his wife live a very happy and good life up in Clifton. They travel a lot. We try to travel as much as we can. We have good things to look back on. No horror stories from our family, except for maybe the passing of a close relative or something like that.

KR: What was the name of your maternal grandfather's mill?

MW: Called Super Textile. He was in partnership with another man by the name of Perleman. His last name Sugar. So, they combined the two words and made super, S-U-P-E-R, and that's where the name came from.

KR: After your grandfather's very tragic death, did his partner continue business?

MW: I do not know because my grandmother had kind of a falling out with his wife, with Pearlman's wife, and never had contact with them after that.

KR: Were those the grandparents that you lived with?

MW: Yes, yes. The story went that when my parents had me they were living in a one-bedroom flat in Paterson, a few blocks away from where they lived. When I was born, my grandparents said, "Why don't you come live with us? We have the room, and then when you find a place, you can move." Well, thirteen years later, they moved. [laughter] We still maintained very close contact with them.

KR: I am curious about something. You said that your mother's parents were both born in Poland.

MW: Yes.

KR: Did they have relatives who stayed in Poland?

MW: Unfortunately, my grandfather--maybe I'm telling tales out of school--[who] was married to a woman in Poland, had a daughter. He was afraid of being conscripted into the Russian Army, because, at the time, Russia controlled Poland. It was before the Germans took it over. He ran away, leaving his wife and young daughter in Poland. [Editor's Note: In the late 1700s, the land that is now Poland was incorporated into the Russian Empire, Austria and Prussia,

which would become part of Germany. In 1918, after World War I, the sovereign state of Poland was created.]

He came to America, settled in Paterson, met my grandmother. They married, had two daughters, my mother and her sister Martha. One day, there's a knock on the door, years later. There's this woman standing at the door, and it's, "Hello, I'm your sister." So, she was the half-sister of both my mother and my aunt, who then became like the third sister. They just got together, and they had a daughter by the name of Frances, my aunt and her husband, Morris and Helen were their names. That's one of the cousins that we're also very close to. Frances is the matriarch of our family at this point. She is just about four years older than I am, which would make her about eighty-three. I am the patriarch of the family. I'll be seventy-nine this month.

KR: Do you know what year your mother's half-sister emigrated from Poland?

MW: Hard to say. I really don't remember, but it had to be in the early '40s, probably. I can't pin it down to an exact date.

KR: I am wondering what effects the Holocaust had on your relatives who were still in Poland.

MW: There's nobody left, nobody. They were all wiped out. I think there was one cousin that survived and got out. They lived in the Bronx, New York. She was Cousin Lily. My grandmother's sister [also] got out, and she lived in Newark. That was Cousin Esther, but they were the only ones. Everybody else was destroyed.

KR: Did your grandmother's sister live in Poland through World War II?

MW: No, no. She got out early enough, so that she wasn't affected by the war that much.

KR: Yes, I see. Tell me about your father's education.

MW: My father went to, at that time it was called, Paterson Boys High School, which eventually became Central High School, [and] which is also Paterson High School now, as opposed to the school I went to is Eastside High School, two different ends of Paterson. The reason why it was called Paterson Boys High [was] because the men went to school in the morning, so they could go to work in the afternoon, and the girls came to school at the high school in the afternoon. That's the way the schedule worked. He graduated--I don't remember the exact year--but he went into New York to what they called at that point Pace Institute, which is now Pace University. He studied accounting. He told me funny stories about having twenty-five cents in his pocket, so he could go to the Automat and get a piece of pie and a cup of coffee. He commuted into New York every single day. He would take the bus into New York from Paterson. He was not a big man, he was probably five-six, five-seven, quiet, didn't say anything unless you ... [Editor's Note: The telephone rings.]

KR: I will stop.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

KR: Okay, we are back on. You were talking about your father.

MW: He graduated from Pace, and he started working for various companies as their bookkeeper. He had a degree in accounting. He worked until he was working for a furniture company in Paterson as their accountant. In fact, I even worked there part time for a while. After I had come home from the service, my father got sick. He was having problems going to the bathroom, so my mother took him to the doctor. The doctor probed and pushed. He said, "I want to check you out." They found cancer, and ten days later he was dead. He never knew he was sick, until he started to have a bowel problem. He was fifty-three when he died. It kind of shook us up. A quick punch to the face, that's exactly what it felt like. I was out of the service at that particular point because it was 1963. He was born in 1910. My mother never remarried. She saw a few gentlemen. They went out and dated, but for whatever reason, she never married, much to my disdain because some of them were really nice men and could probably treat her to a life she never had. But she decided not to, and she lived to the ripe old age of eighty-nine and that's when she died.

KR: How did your parents meet?

MW: To tell you the truth, I honestly don't know. Probably, it was during high school they may have met, but I honestly could not fill you in on that information. I really don't know. It was never really discussed how they met, so how would I know.

KR: I am curious about the World War II years. You said that your uncle served.

MW: My uncle served in the Army. My uncle was a musician. He was a very accomplished piano player, and he also played the xylophone. He travelled with the Army band all over the country, playing these various benefits for the war. Before he got out of the Army, he was contacted by one of the Dorsey Brothers to go on the road with them, to play with their band, and my uncle being a little on the lazy side, no, he didn't want to do it. [laughter] So, he missed a very big opportunity of really getting into the music business proper. He was really a very, very good big band jazz player. [Editor's Note: The Dorsey Brothers Orchestra, consisting of Jimmy and Tommy Dorsey, was active from 1928 to 1935.]

KR: You said that your father got a second job during World War II.

MW: He got the job in order--I hate to say this but--in order not to have to leave his family and go to the war. So, he got himself a job in a dye house, and it was evening work, night work. Between doing his job during the day and working nights, he earned a couple extra bucks, but he also got a deference from having to serve in the service. He wasn't sorry about that because he didn't want to leave the family.

KR: What was that dye house doing that was a part of the war effort?

MW: They were dying materials used in making uniforms.

KR: Yes. What do you remember about the World War II years?

MW: Very little actually. I was born in 1939, and that's when Germany had invaded Poland. We were not into the war until [December 1941]. So, from '42 to '45, when the war was over, I was maybe four years old, so I really don't have very much recollection of it. That's about it. I really don't remember very much about the war, only what was documented and shown after the war was over. So, that brought back some memories of what I remember, but only from whatever I heard from somebody else. I never had any personal contact with it.

KR: Where did your family stand politically?

MW: They were Democrats. They were pro-Roosevelt. I think they liked him, and my grandparents liked him, because he was the man instrumental in getting a lot of the refugees out of Europe after the war and getting a lot of people into this country to pursue their interests and their professions. That's why they were Democratic leaning. Why they didn't become Republicans, I have no idea, but that's what they did. That's what they did. [Editor's Note: Franklin Delano Roosevelt served as the President of the United States from 1933 to 1945.]

KR: What are your earliest memories of growing up in Paterson?

MW: Walking to school after a snowstorm. We had some pretty heavy snow falls in Paterson. I can remember walking to school on tops of five-foot piles of snow, just a lot of fun. Being in class, at that time, I guess I was a bit of a lazy kid. I was never great in school, but I got by. I passed my courses; I got all passing grades. I was never an A student, but I had a lot of fun. I had a lot of friends. [It was fun] coming home from school, getting my homework done, and then go out and play in the street until it was time for supper. It was stickball and tag and ringolevio and stoop ball and climbing trees and making campfires. [It was] just a good child's upbringing, and one you respect--my parents taught me respect, that you just didn't open a mouth when you shouldn't.

KR: What professional sports teams did you follow?

MW: I was a Dodgers fan up until they left Brooklyn and went to Los Angeles. Then, I became a Met fan, and those were hard years in the beginning because they did so badly. Football, I never really followed. It was strictly baseball at that point. I think every kid was in love with baseball. Football came later. The Dodgers were my number one team. [Editor's Note: The Brooklyn Dodgers Major League Baseball team relocated to Los Angeles in 1957. The New York Mets were created in 1962.]

KR: What do you remember about Dodgers baseball, when you were a kid?

MW: I went to a couple of games, not a lot, but we went to a couple of games in New York. It was just exciting being out there with throngs of people, but it's funny to go to a game then and to go to a game now. Men would go to the game dressed in suits with ties and hats on. Today, you're lucky if they get on a pair of Bermuda shorts to go to a game. A hot dog was a nickel, and now you get a hot dog and a soda and it's twenty dollars. [laughter] Things were a little different

then. If you got a nickel a week for an allowance when you were a kid, that was a big deal. That was a big deal.

KR: Do you remember when Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier?

MW: I sure do.

KR: What do you remember about that?

MW: I thought it was a great thing. I never really thought about it as a color barrier. I just thought about it as he was a good baseball player and he added to the worth of the team and it turned out that way. [Editor's Note: Jackie Robinson was a Major League Baseball player who lived from 1919 to 1972. He became the first African American baseball player in the Major Leagues when he began playing for the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947.]

We were brought up as kids not to have a color barrier. You were either friends with somebody or you weren't. That's the way it was. So, we grew up in a fairly liberal atmosphere. Very little discrimination. Paterson was a city of about 130 to 140,000 people. It had a very, very large Jewish community in Paterson. There were probably [about] thirty thousand people who were Jewish living in Paterson. My family belonged to a synagogue in Paterson called the Temple Emanuel, which no longer exists in Paterson. Their main sanctuary could seat eighteen hundred people. They had two ballrooms. When they were put together for the High Holidays, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, that could also together seat eighteen hundred people. So, you're talking 3,600 people in one building at one time; that's a lot of people. Plus, there were other synagogues in Paterson, a Reformed synagogue in downtown Paterson, various small Orthodox synagogues around the city. Temple Emanuel was the largest. I think they've since resettled, in recent years, up in Franklin Lakes, New Jersey.

I drove by the old building, and it had been originally bought by a church. When I drove by it, about four years ago, there were no stained-glass windows left in the building. There were weeds growing through the concrete. The building was totally abandoned. Nobody had done anything with the building. It broke my heart. That was in what they called the Eastside section of Paterson, which was considered the wealthier section of Paterson. The park was there. There were many large stately, literally mansions around Eastside Park in Paterson that a lot of the old silk barons used to own, and that's where they lived.

Paterson was a very diverse community. We had a lot of Poles living in Paterson. We had a big Italian section in Paterson. There was a black section in Paterson, African American. Very few Hispanics at that point. It wasn't until probably the late '50s, early '60s when the influx from Cuba and Puerto Rico started to move into Paterson.

Now, it's changed again. A lot of Islamic people live in Paterson; a big Muslim community there now, and Hispanic and African American. So, it's changed. The diversity is still there. It's just the faces have changed, that's it. Unfortunately, Paterson has become a crime-ridden town, which they're trying to restore at this particular point.

I can remember when I was a kid, going up to see the Passaic Falls. That was the spot at which Alexander Hamilton said, "This is a great spot for water power to power the mills." Paterson was famous for the original Colt firearms factory, [which] came from Paterson. The railroads, locomotives, were built in Paterson. The weaving industry developed in Paterson. The only other big spot in the United States that had the weaving industry was Fall River, Massachusetts, but Paterson was the hub. [There were] department stores in downtown Paterson, many fine restaurants. [There was] one Chinese restaurant, and I remember going there quite often with my family. It was enjoyable to go. That's when the only thing you could order was chow mein and chop suey. Today, it's a whole different ball game. Now, it's all Asian fusion. I enjoyed my days in Paterson. It was really fun. It was a lot of fun. [Editor's Note: The Great Falls of the Passaic River powered textile mills and other industries in Paterson. In 1792, the city was founded with the support of Alexander Hamilton, who believed water power would be a key to building the new American economy. The Great Falls are now a National Historic Park. In 1936, Samuel Colt established a firearms manufacturing plant, the Colt Gun Mill, in Paterson.]

KR: What section did your family live in?

MW: We lived in a section in between the east side and the west side of Paterson. It was between 8th and 9th Avenue on 24th Street in Paterson. It was mostly six-family apartment buildings, three floors, two apartments on each floor. The apartments had quite a bit of room in them. They weren't spacious, by any stretch of the imagination, but they were comfortable. They were walk-up, no such things as elevators in those buildings. Still remember my mother and my grandmother, hanging out wash on the line to the pole, and the line always coming off the pulley. The landlord always had to come and put the line back on. [laughter] The building was coal fired, before the changeover to oil. We played a lot with the other kids. We'd run up on the roof of the garage that was in the back. We tried to climb the pole, but we'd always get yelled at by the neighbors, "Get off there. You're going to kill yourself." It was a neighborhood that looked after itself. Everybody was, not in everybody's back pocket, but everybody looked out for everybody else and made sure that no bad stuff happened. We were not policed, but we were cared for. It was just a comfortable place to live.

KR: Your neighborhood, what was the ethnic and socioeconomic makeup?

MW: It was mixed. It was a lot of Jewish people living on the block. There were quite a few Italian families living on the block. In fact, when my parents moved to their house on 8th Avenue, we had a Sicilian-Italian family living next door to us. We had gone there for dinner a couple of times, and talk about a feast. We're used to sitting down to dinner. You prepare, and it takes you three hours to prepare a dinner you finish in fifteen minutes. There, you sat at a table for almost three hours on a Sunday afternoon having dinner, and salad was always the last part of the dinner. [laughter] It was fun. You sat, you relaxed, you talked, and it was real family.

We didn't have that in our family. We didn't sit for hours at a table, except during the Jewish holidays. We probably had the largest house among our family, so we usually had the holiday dinners at our house. It wouldn't be unusual to have twenty-five, twenty-seven people sitting around the table.

KR: What occasions would those be?

MW: That was the Jewish holidays, Thanksgiving. Occasionally my Aunt Martha, who lived a couple blocks from us, would have Thanksgiving at her house, but it was a pitch-in. My grandmother and my mother, and my Aunt Martha and Aunt Helen, all four women would be bouncing around in a kitchen off each other getting the meal prepared, and it was a lot of fun. It was a lot of fun with the cousins.

KR: I wanted to ask you about Temple Emanuel. Was it a Reformed or Orthodox congregation?

MW: No, it was a Conservative. It was the in between. It was a step back from the Orthodox. Whereas the women and the men sat together in the synagogue, in the Orthodox, the women and the men had to be separated. Whether it was the women [who] sat behind, or up in the balcony, or on the other side, and the men were on the right side and the women on the left side. In Reform, it's, again, a mix, but it's a little more abbreviated service, and a lot of it is done in English, a lot in Hebrew as well, but it's a lot more liberal. The synagogue I belong to now [Temple Emanu-El in Edison] is quite a liberal synagogue. We have a lot of mixed marriages in our synagogue. We have a lot of converts, a lot of African Americans who have converted to Judaism, freely practice the religion in our synagogue. They partake in everything the synagogue has to offer, plus being on the Boards of Directors and different committees. Everybody gets along; it seems to be very congenial.

In Paterson, at the Temple Emanuel, it was a little more stiff collar. The rabbi, I don't think I ever remember him smiling, and you had very little contact with him, except you saw him at services when you went to services. I went to Hebrew School there. I was bar mitzvahed in Paterson, at that temple, so was my brother. We were taught by one of the teachers from the Hebrew School, not by the rabbi, whereas in the temple that we are at now, it's the cantor--the one who does the musical part of the service--is usually in charge of teaching the bar mitzvah candidates and works with them. She has also worked with the Hebrew School, whereas the teachers at the Hebrew School, I never saw them at any other function except Hebrew teachers. We had a few cantors that I remember, [and] some were professional voices.

My parents belonged to the Temple Emanuel Choral Society. They put on concerts at the temple, at the 92nd Street Y in New York. They did radio broadcasts. They were a choral society of about, in full force, eighty voices. They had a conductor who was a professional conductor. He had done, or was doing at the same time, conducting the Interracial [Fellowship] Chorus in New York City and other various small choruses. He would come in from New York, and every Wednesday night, there was a rehearsal. I joined that chorus for a couple of years.

When my parents were in the chorus when I was a young child, I had gone to one of their concerts. It had probably been my first outing--and the concert was done in an evening--for me, at the age of six or seven, to go to a late-night concert, that was a big treat. There was one woman that stuck out in the crowd, and I was told later on, "Do you know who that was?" I said, "No." "That was Eleanor Roosevelt." She would come to the concerts. It was a very well-known choral society, and they made noise that you could sit there and shut your eyes and dream. They made good noise.

KR: Did Eleanor Roosevelt go to a concert that was in Paterson?

MW: Oh, yes, at the temple. The concert was not just the Choral Society, but they used to have a professional symphony orchestra come and play with the Choral Society. They would do part of the concert themselves. The Choral Society would sing. Sometimes, it was the both of them together. They did a lot of big works, big choral works, and they were well known, very well known.

KR: You ended up joining this chorus.

MW: I did join that choir. In fact, now, with the present synagogue I belong to, I am also now in the choir. Don't have the voice that I used to have, the voice control or the breath control, but hey, what the heck, I give it my best.

KR: What sticks out in your mind about being a member of this choir as a child?

MW: I wasn't a child; I was already in my twenties. It was after I came out of the service. I just remember the feeling you got when the sound came out of everybody's mouth, and it sounded so beautiful and I was a part of it.

KR: What would you do in the summertime when you were a kid?

MW: When I was about seven or eight years old, my parents enrolled me in a summer activity at the Paterson Y. There was a YMCA and there was a YM and YWHA [Young Men's and Young Women's Hebrew Association], the Jewish Y in Paterson. They would have a summer program for the kids, and it was held at the Y in downtown Paterson, which had a swimming pool in the building. There were a lot of activities, and of course, there were field trips that we would go on to somebody's farm or to an amusement park.

Then, there was an organization at the Y called the Veritans. They were a men's group who did philanthropic work, and they opened up a camp in Wayne, New Jersey. So, we would get bussed from Paterson up to Wayne, and it was a day camp. That's where I went as a young child. The summer before I went into the service, I was a counselor at that same camp. I have no idea what happened to the camp after I got out, no idea if it even existed much longer than after I got out of the service. It was a fun camp with all the activities. We played baseball and basketball, and there was a large swimming pool that they had built in there.

As a young child, I was five and six years old, my parents sent me away to a camp up in the Catskills. It was the Workmen's Circle Camp. That was a Jewish organization that had slightly socialistic leanings. Mostly the men who worked in the silk industry in Paterson, at the dye houses and whatever, formed this group called the Workmen's Circle. That's where I spent a couple of summers up in the mountains. That was a unique camp. That was a large camp on Sylvan Lake in New York State. It was just short of the Catskills. I don't think it was in the Catskills proper, but in any case, the camp for the children was on one side. The camp for adults was on the other side, and they had separate cabins that people would rent for a week. Families

would rent [them], and they would go up there. There was a common dining hall. The kids would eat first, then come out, and then the adults would go in and have their lunch and dinner and breakfast. So, it was a very interesting time.

KR: What would you do during the day at camp there?

MW: There was various activities. It was a Jewish camp, so a lot of it had to do with learning how to speak Yiddish, which I was brought up with when I was a child. At one point, the only language I heard in my household was Yiddish because both my grandmother and my mother spoke it. My father struggled with it. It was mostly my mother and my grandmother because my father was always working. So, I heard Yiddish, I learned some Yiddish, and I was able to speak in Yiddish while I was living at home. The funniest part is, when I first started grammar school, in kindergarten, I was speaking English with an accent [laughter] until I got into being in school and then it disappeared. They kept reminding me of that when I was growing up. [laughter] I'm glad I was able [to learn it], because I think now I'm using more Yiddish phrases than I ever have in my entire life, just remembering back to the good old days, and they were. They were.

KR: You said that at this camp you fit right in. You were speaking Yiddish. What were some of the things you would do during the day?

MW: Well, there was swimming instruction, free swims, or classes, whether it was a drawing class or an art class, lectures, where they would teach us history of the Jewish people or of Israel's beginnings. Every Friday night, there were Jewish services. Every Friday night, you put on your white shorts and your white shirt, and you went to services.

On Saturdays, there was always entertainment at the camp, concerts. My grandfather, my mother's father, was a lyric tenor, so he would sing. In fact, one funny instance, I remember going to a wedding, I believe it was, and I must have been in my teens. My grandfather would go with his satchel full of sheet music, and he would walk up to the band that was playing at the wedding. He'd put his satchel on the piano, and he would say, "You play. I'm singing." He would sing. You would literally have to pull him down from the piano, [laughter] so that they could get on with their business. He had a nice voice, a very nice voice. My mother had a good soprano voice. My father was a bass, and I'm somewhere in between. My brother has a tin ear. He was a musician, but he was a drummer. Maybe that's why he has a tin ear. [laughter] Again, just random things that pop back into your head about growing up, it's a lot of fun to remember.

KR: I am curious about when World War II ended and as we are going into the immediate post-war years, what was spoken in your family about the Holocaust and what had happened?

MW: There was always mention of fact that there was nobody left, but they never really dwelled on the subject of the Holocaust itself. My grandparents on both sides, whoever got out of the country got out before the horrors really started. It wasn't until later, when they started showing films of the Army going in to liberate the camps and soldiers going into those camps and getting physically sick to their stomach, [after] seeing what went on in those camps.

Not to jump too far into the future from that point, but a couple of years ago, friends of ours and myself and Anne, my wife, were going to what was called a Jewish Heritage Cruise, from Budapest, Hungary, and we were getting off at Passau on the river and going up to Prague. We were visiting Jewish Heritage Sites all along. Before the river cruise started, we decided to go and spend five days in Poland. We went to Krakow, Poland, and from Krakow, you're right near Auschwitz and Birkenau. If you can remember the scene in *Schindler's List*, where you're looking down the track and you see the gate with "*Arbeit Macht Frei*" on the top of the gate. Standing on those tracks, looking at that arch, a shiver went through my body because somewhere down the road, or back on the road, people who I could have known were probably on that train or one of those trains. Then, walking into the buildings, they have displays of different rooms, one with luggage, one with clothing, another with hair that was shaved off the people's heads, another was silverware that they had amassed, all kind of items that were taken from the people brought into the camps. The first one was luggage. I looked down, and I almost fell off my feet because there was a suitcase with the name Weinberg on it. It shook me up, shook me up, still does, but then is when you get the feeling that this really happened. [Editor's Note: *Schindler's List* is a 1993 film directed by Steven Spielberg and starring Liam Neeson. "*Arbeit Macht Frei*" is German for "Work Sets You Free."]

Auschwitz was pretty much torn down when we got there. A lot of the buildings were still there, but the crematoria were [destroyed by the Nazis]. Originally, Auschwitz was a labor camp. People were sent to Birkenau [and] that was the extermination camp. Birkenau was almost completely destroyed by the Germans before they left. The Germans being very meticulous record keepers, they found very well-kept records of some of the stuff that hadn't been destroyed, of people that had been in the camps, how long they were there, when they came in, when they were exterminated. It was amazing how gruesome these people were and the records that they kept on these atrocities. [Editor's Note: More than two-and-a-half million Jews were transported by train from all over Europe to Auschwitz-Birkenau. The Nazis selected the able-bodied, tattooed their forearms, and forced them into labor. Over a two-and-a-half year period, two-and-a-quarter million Jews were killed in the gas chambers at Auschwitz, their bodies burned in crematoria (from Martin Gilbert, "The Final Solution," in *The Oxford Companion to World War II*, ed. I.C.B. Dear and M.R.D. Foot (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 290).]

Then, our next stop was Warsaw. We finished in Warsaw. Warsaw was almost destroyed during the war, so whatever's there is anything beyond 1945. Krakow, on the other hand, was not touched at all. That was Adolf Hitler's museum. He wanted to keep that as his museum to display all of the artworks that were stolen by his people during the war. That was going to be his pride and joy. Thank goodness he didn't last long enough to see it. The town is as it was hundreds of years ago, when it was first there. Nothing's been changed, whereas in Warsaw, they have a little brick path that shows where the ghetto wall was, but that was done many years after. [Editor's Note: Following the German invasion of Poland in 1939, a million-and-a-half Polish Jews came under German control. In 1940-1941, the Germans instituted the ghetto system, in which Jews were deported from their homes and confined in restricted areas of cities and towns, where they were subjected to slave labor, unsanitary conditions and food shortages. The Warsaw Ghetto held half a million Jews. Death rates from starvation reached 2,000 a month by the summer of 1941 (from Martin Gilbert, "The Final Solution," in *The Oxford Companion to World War II*, ed. I.C.B. Dear and M.R.D. Foot (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 287).]

Then, we went up to Prague. We went to another camp, and that was Theresienstadt. That camp was the camp that the inspectors went to when they heard that there were concentration camps. The people who were interred in the camp were ordered to go out and, like a big picnic area, play ball and have picnics. That's what was shown to the inspectors when they went to see the camp. As soon as they were gone, it went right back [to normal]. It was basically a labor camp, but then they also, later on in the war, started some of the chambers. Again, thinking back, it kind of slows me down a little bit. [Editor's Note: During World War II, the Nazis established Theresienstadt partly as a ghetto and partly a transit camp. Over 33,000 Jewish men, women and children died there, and 88,000 Jews were deported from Theresienstadt and killed at death camps (Yad Vashem, The World Holocaust Remembrance Center, "Theresienstadt," accessed on March 21, 2019).]

KR: Okay. What do you remember about Budapest?

MW: Budapest is a gorgeous city, absolutely beautiful city. It's got the old-world charm, if you watched an old 1940s movie of Europe, or a '50s movie in Europe, and you could just see a movie star like Humphrey Bogart walking through the city and all of the artwork and the statues. One of the oldest bath houses in Europe, that's hundreds of years old, is still in existence and being used in Budapest. The food there is wonderful, and the people are pretty friendly. The unfortunate part of what's happening in Europe now is that there's a tremendous amount of anti-Semitism in Europe.

Friends of mine are over in Europe now. We were supposed to be with them, but circumstances intervened. They went to Denmark, and then they're going on a cruise from Bergen, Norway. They went to Oslo first for a couple of days, and then they go to Bergen. Then, they cruise from there to Scotland, to Northern Ireland, to Southern Ireland, to Liverpool, to Dover and then back to London. We were supposed to be on that cruise, but it didn't work out. We went to Spain to visit my granddaughter, and we're going to Israel in October to visit my other granddaughter, so that makes up for it. Budapest is a beautiful city, a lot of nice places over there.

KR: I wanted to ask you about Zionism and what effects Zionism had on anyone in your family when you were growing up.

MW: We were never really big supporters. We just didn't get involved very much in the State of Israel trying to be formed. That happened in 1948. They contributed through the synagogues, through different organizations, but I think that's pretty much as far as it went. We never attended any rallies to support the State of Israel. We were Jewish. We were not big observers of the religion, but we did our share. We did go on the holidays. We would attend a Sabbath service periodically, but we were not devout. We were, what you might call, moderate. I think it's carried through. I think I'm more observant now, and I just go to the temple to learn more and do more with the temple than I ever have in my life, at this point. I'm retired now. I have the time. I don't have to work, so I can do what I can.

KR: What were the celebrations of the high holy holidays in your family like?

MW: It was always a happy time. Rosh Hashanah is the New Year. Actually, all of the holidays, through that period, are considered part of the New Year's celebration. The culmination of the New Year is Rosh Hashanah. That's when they start reading from *Genesis* in the Torah. Yom Kippur is the day of remembrance of past misdeeds and the dead, and we atone for our sins. Then, there are various other holidays that we observe during the course of the year, but most of them are joyous. There's Hanukah and there's Sukkot, and there's quite a few different holidays that are observed. We take part in whatever we can. We enjoy ourselves doing it, but we are not heavy observers. We go to temple when we can. I try to get there for Friday night services at least a couple of times a month. I don't go every week. I've got to go out for dinner every once in a while, too. [laughter]

KR: When you were a kid, what were Passover celebrations like?

MW: Passover was always a lot of fun. There were a lot of foods that were served around Passover that you really didn't eat the rest of the year, like gefilte fish. Matzah was strictly Passover; you didn't eat matzah the rest of the year. That was like eating the collar off your shirt, unless you smeared it with enough cream cheese or jelly or something. Even now, when we do Passover here at the house, we pretty much go through the ritual of cleaning the house, cleaning out the cabinets. We don't use separate plates or cooking utensils, but nothing in the house is served that isn't not for Passover. So, we maintain the tradition during the entire week.

KR: What would your mother do when you were a kid during Passover?

MW: It was more traditional than it was religious. We would have the matzah. We would have the fish. We would have all the things that went along with it. The first or second night, we would have Seders. We would read through the book, the Haggadah, and we would go through [and] learn about the things that Moses went through and then the slaves coming out of Egypt and wandering in the desert for forty years. That was it. It really didn't carry on the entire week. We weren't Orthodox or observant enough to really do that. We didn't not celebrate every year. We always did, but it was usually the first and/or the second night. It was never the full week, and that's the way we were brought up. It was the way we did it.

I always said that Judaism is a religion of convenience. Whatever fits your lifestyle, that's what you do. I'm sure other religions are the same way. It's no different whether you're Catholic or Protestant or Episcopalian, you do what's comfortable for you and that's what we do. I find that it's more comfortable for us to be closer to the synagogue now, because a lot of our social life revolves around the people we know from the synagogue. We have made more friends and eaten more meals out than you can count from our friends from the synagogue. We've been on vacations with them. With two other couples, we went down to Myrtle Beach, played some golf and went in the ocean and just had a good time.

KR: What type of travel did you do with your family as a child?

MW: We went up to the mountains. We went down to the Shore. We went to Belmar for a couple years, stayed a week down in Belmar. That's when I was a teenager.

Earlier, when I was younger than that, we would go to a bungalow colony up in the Catskills area. There are some fond memories of that. My cousin Jeff and my cousin Melinda, my mother's sister's two children, and us. I'm not sure whether my cousin Fran was up there with us or not; I don't think so. It was just the four of us, my brother, myself and our two cousins. All the women, my grandmother, my mother, my aunt, and the four kids were in a bungalow. The men would come up on weekends, spend the weekend and then go back to work the rest of the week. We spent the whole summer up there for a couple of years. That was fun.

The first summer I was up there, we went to an area they called the Apollo, which was their swimming area. It was basically a stream, and, at a certain time of the year, they would dam up the end of the stream. It would fill up like a big bowl, and that was a swimming place. Well, before they had dammed off the end and filled it up, I was out there. I was playing in shallow water, playing with the stones and digging holes and whatever I did. I got such a sunburn, and then, who knew from all the new creams and remedies, I got bathed down in vinegar to take away the sting. I must have smelled like a pickle for about a week, [laughter] but it was a lesson you learned. You didn't go out in the sun for that long, but it was fine. We still had a good time.

KR: The vinegar worked?

MW: The vinegar worked. It stunk like hell, but it worked. It was fun, just being with the family. Fridays, there was a ritual. My grandmother, who was the cook of the family, she and I would walk down to the kosher chicken man. He would kosher slaughter two chickens, and he would hang them upside down and drain them out. Then, he would give us the chickens, and he'd say, "Flick the feathers off." We would stand there, hand flicking the feathers off. "Don't tear the skin." Finally, we would take the chicken, he would wrap them up in newspaper, and we'd bring them back to the bungalow, which was about a quarter of mile away, and we would always have fresh-killed chickens for Friday night dinner. That was [the] tradition. It was great, because the men would come up from the city and spend the weekend up there. It was a lot of fun. There were a lot of other families there, so there was always somebody to play with, always things to do, always an activity. That's what I remember from that area.

We never went to the big fancy hotels up in the Catskills. We were, I guess you can call it, lower-middle class. We didn't have the money to go away to those hotels. It wasn't until after, oh, I guess, when I first got married to my first wife, that we went up to the Catskills and we were at the Grossinger Hotel, which doesn't exist anymore. There were a lot of hotels up there that don't exist anymore.

KR: What was the name of this bungalow colony that your family went to?

MW: It was called the Lipshitz Bungalow Colony, by the name of the family that owned it. That was it, no fancy name, the Lipshitz Bungalow Colony. I'm trying to think of the name of the town that it was in. I can't remember the name of the town. It just slips my mind.

KR: Did your mother keep a Kosher home?

MW: No, no, she did not, nor did my grandmother. For whatever reason, they were never heavy observers. They were not brought up Orthodox, apparently, nor was my grandfather, when he was single and growing up in Poland. I learned later on, in fact, in my later adult life and around now, that Reformed Judaism precedes Orthodoxy. Orthodoxy didn't come until probably four hundred years after Reformed Judaism. We're the older people. [laughter] Not to pin a star on myself or anything, but we've been around longer.

KR: I want to ask about your schooling. So, you went to P.S. 21.

MW: Right.

KR: In Paterson.

MW: Yes.

KR: What sticks out in your mind about your teachers and the academics?

MW: Well, I guess, things were a little different then than they are now. I mean, you learned history and you learned mathematics, actually, was called arithmetic. No languages [were] taught in the grammar school. There were some science courses, as much as they could teach it, at that particular point. There was gym. It was very difficult to play basketball down in the gym because it was a very low ceiling. We used to have foot races, and we would have, every year in the spring, they would have what they called field day. Everybody would go out, and they would have track events and throwing events and just athletic things for the kids to do. Teachers, some of them were friends of the family, and others, one teacher used to walk around with a thirty-six-inch ruler in her hand and God forbid you should be talking to somebody. You'd get a rap across your knuckles. In those days, if the teacher yelled at you and your mother found out about it, you got it when you got home, too. [laughter] Today, it's a whole different ball game. If the teacher yelled at you, there's a lawsuit. Not like years ago, and you learned.

Paterson, at that time, had a very high percentage of people going through grammar school and into high school and ninety percent of our graduating class from high school were college bound, in the academic courses. They had academic and they had commercial courses, those people that were taking typing and going into being a secretary or whatever. Academic courses were people who were studying to go on to college. They took language arts, and they studied various types of histories and some advanced courses as they were then, not like now. Some of them went on to some very prestigious colleges, became doctors and lawyers, and whatever they became. I graduated from my school and went right into the service. It wasn't until after I got out of the service that I went away to college. Grammar school itself, it was a good prep for going into high school. They taught you good basics, how to learn, that's important, not what you learn, how to learn. As long as you could pick up a book and you know how to read a book, you could learn anything. It's like the difference between listening and hearing. Anybody can listen, but when you hear something, you learn something. It was fun in class.

I remember--the joke of it now was not a joke then--when you were in grammar school and you had to crawl under your desk in case of an air raid warning. Like if an atomic bomb went off,

that desk was really going to save you. Then, they made us go down to the basement, because there were concrete walls around us.

It was fun. The whole experience in school was fun. It was a relatively small school, P.S. 21. I forget how many schools in Paterson at that time. There had to be fifteen to eighteen grammar schools in Paterson. There were two high schools, and then of course there were Catholic schools in town, church schools, Saint Benedict's, but they're not there anymore, as far as I know. P.S. 21, I'm not even sure if that's still there; it might be. I know that Paterson Eastside High School, that's grown over the years, they expanded the school, and what was Central High School is now Paterson High School. That has also grown over the years. The high school that I went to, our mascot was a ghost. The reason why it's a ghost is because our football field was built over an old cemetery. So, it got the name, the Ghosts. Then, they expanded the school. They took away the football field, and they expanded the school out over the football field.

KR: So, it is the Eastside Ghosts.

MW: That's Eastside's Ghosts. [I'm not sure] where they played football after that. I know there was a stadium in Paterson, up in the west section of Paterson, called Hinchliffe Stadium, up near the Passaic Falls. That was always used for the traditional Eastside-Central Thanksgiving Day football game, [where] I sat and froze my rear end off at many times. I'm not sure whether they used that after the school was expanded or not, but things change.

I enjoyed grammar school because I made a lot of nice friends. I went with a lot of good friends from my neighborhood, and we all had things in common. Everybody came from similar backgrounds economically, and whether they were Jewish or not, it didn't make any difference. I mean, my parents, my grandmother especially, would prefer I hung around with all my Jewish friends, but I had a mixed bag. I was friendly with everybody.

KR: You mentioned doing these air raid drills, in which you would go under your desk. How else would the Cold War and the fear of Communism manifest in your childhood?

MW: We really didn't give it much of a thought. We went on with our normal day's activities. There was always that threat somewhere in the far distance, but not being world travelers, we really had no concept of what it was to see what things were like in other countries. We saw what was in our own [country]. There were a few, I guess, in our class that were wealthy enough to travel places, but probably Miami, Florida [laughter] was the favorite destination. As far as European travel or Asian travel, not that much. I guess it was there, it was around, and you saw it on television.

The thing that bothered me more than anything else was the McCarthy era. This man had an agenda. He was against anybody who wouldn't stand up and devote one hundred percent allegiance to a U.S. flag. As far as he was concerned, they were deemed Communist. I'm glad he wasn't that successful. I mean, I'm, by no stretch of the imagination, a Communist sympathizer; but when you're brought up in an era or in a country, I should say, where that's the norm, what else do you know? You fear for your life if you don't go along with what they want

you to do. Here, at least, we had some freedom of thought. You could go any way you wanted to go. People may not like it, but you didn't get shot, at least not that I know of.

KR: What were the discussions that went on in your household about Senator McCarthy and the witch hunts he was doing against supposed Communists?

MW: It never really came up very much in conversation. I think it was more day-to-day life that was discussed and what Uncle So-and-So did and what Aunt So-and-So did and the neighbor down the street, or, "Don't forget, you've got to do your homework." It was normal, day-to-day living. We really didn't dwell on the "threat" of Communism taking over our lives in America. It really wasn't a big deal, not at least in our household.

KR: Do you remember when your family got its first television set?

MW: Yes. It was a RCA. It was a seventeen-inch screen, came in a very large console, a big wooden box with doors that would close like a cabinet door in the front, and it was black and white. We were kind of late, compared to some of our neighbors in getting them. I remember, as a kid, one of the neighbors down the street had a thirteen or fifteen-inch set. They were one of the first in the neighborhood to get a TV set. Every Tuesday night, at eight o'clock, the entire neighborhood and the kids would crowd into their living room to sit in front of their TV set to watch Milton Berle on Tuesday nights. That was the thrill of the week, to go watch Milton Berle on Tuesday nights. Then, eventually, we got a TV, and she didn't have to put up with kids coming into her living room anymore. [laughter] It was fun watching some of the old programs and eventually the *I Love Lucy* show and some of the others. [Editor's Note: Milton Berle was an actor and comedian who lived from 1908 to 2002. He hosted the television variety show *Texaco Star Theatre* from 1948 to 1955.]

KR: Before your family got the television, what were your favorite radio shows?

MW: There [was] not much during the day. It was in the evening that we would listen to Tom Mix on the radio or listen to *Superman* or *The Shadow* or various other characters that are now all Marvel characters. [laughter] We would listen to them on the radio, and we would sit there rapt listening to them. My grandfather loved the radio because on Saturdays his favorite show was on. At one o'clock came the Metropolitan Opera, and I think I heard every opera that was ever written on Saturdays, when I would sit with my grandfather and listen to the Metropolitan Opera. I was young then. I was probably five years, six-years old, but I got an appreciation for music. I liked music of any kind. Some of it's noise, but the noise I discard and the music I keep. We would sit there listening to the radio. I used to joke about the soap operas on the radio being called "John's Other Wife's Other John," but it was fun. That was our form of entertainment.

My father, occasionally, would have a bunch of his friends up, once a month or whatever, and they'd have a poker game. Then, he'd go to somebody else's house the following week and have the same game. Funny, funny stuff. The guys would joke, and smoking, everybody smoked. The house reeked for a week after the poker game. Both my parents smoked. I eventually did. When I was fifteen, I started smoking. Nobody looked down on it. They yelled at me when I

was fifteen, but then they stopped yelling because they knew they couldn't stop me from smoking if they weren't around. So, they let me smoke when they were. My aunt Martha smoked. My uncle Ted never smoked cigarettes, but my mother did, my father did, my aunt Martha did. My grandparents, I never remember them smoking. My brother did, eventually. I don't think Jeff, my cousin Jeff, or cousin Melinda, they never smoked. My cousin Fran, she may have smoked, but that's the way it was.

KR: What brand did your parents smoke?

MW: My father smoked Camels. That's what I first started smoking. I think my mother smoked either Camels or Chesterfield. Then it went through, as the filters came in, and it evolved. In fact, I still remember my father's words. He was in the hospital. It was after his surgery, and I went to visit him in the hospital. He says to me, he says, "You know, I think I'm going to stop smoking." Unfortunately, he didn't live very many days after he said that. My mother quit. I quit smoking when I started dating Anne, and that was in my forties. So, I smoked for a little over thirty years, almost thirty years, yes.

KR: How did your family get the news?

MW: Newspapers.

KR: Which newspapers?

MW: There were two newspapers in Paterson. There was the *Morning Call* and there was the *Paterson Evening News*. We used to get the evening paper. They liked the coverage in that paper. It was a thicker paper anyway, so it had ads, coupons. That's where they got most of their news or listening to the radio or eventually watching it on TV. That's where most of the information came from. In fact, my neighbor, who lived downstairs from us, he was a salesman for the *Morning Call*. He used to come around, when I was working in retailing, he used to come around and sell advertising to the different stores for the paper. We preferred the evening paper, and that was delivered right to the mailbox every night. It was fun. Funny papers were good. I never was really that much into sports at that particular point. I think sports didn't come until later, in fact well into my adult years, never really followed it that much. I mean, I used to enjoy going to a ballgame or listening to a ball game on the radio or watching it on TV eventually. I tried to always watch the Dodgers.

KR: What was the process like when you were being bar mitzvahed?

MW: I started Hebrew School in the third grade, in regular grammar school. I went to the Temple Emanuel Hebrew School. You learned how to spell, how to say the words, and then eventually, when you're about eleven-and-a-half years old, you started taking bar mitzvah lessons. The teacher that taught me my prayers, he had his own record making machine at home, and he would make a record of the prayers for the bar mitzvah. Then, it was a much more simple process for the bar mitzvah candidate to do, because you said a prayer before the reading from the Torah and then a prayer after and that was it. Today, the kids are literally running an entire Saturday morning service as part of their bar mitzvah training, so it's gotten a lot more

sophisticated now than it was then. Like I say, the rabbi that I was under, at that particular point in Paterson, I never saw him smile. He was, if God could be personified, that's who he thought he was. That's who I thought he was.

KR: What was his name?

MW: Rabbi Arthur T. Buck. That was the rabbi, at that particular point. Of course, I was a little kid, but he was a towering guy, wore glasses, very stern looking all the time, always dressed up in his suit with the vest. The only time you really saw him is when he was up at the podium leading services on Friday night or Saturday or the holidays.

KR: What was your bar mitzvah like?

MW: It was on a Saturday morning. It was a turnout of the regulars that went to services, plus my family and some of my friends. They came to the service. Again, my part in it was very short. There is an old saying that became a joke, when you got up to make your speech after you've finished, when you were given your Bible and your certificate of bar mitzvah, I was told to say, "Thank you, today I am a fountain pen," because that was the traditional gift to the bar mitzvah was a fountain pen. [laughter] So, I got up and said it. It was a laugh, and [I also said], "I'd just like to thank my parents" and the usual stuff. It was nice. Then, they had a little bit of a reception at a place in Paterson called the Women's Club. They had a little catered reception there, and that was that. Basically, it was the same with my brother when he was bar mitzvahed.

Now, things have gotten--you go to a bar mitzvah reception now, it's like going to a wedding. In fact, we were to one a couple of years ago. We walked in, and one of the caterers was standing at the door handing out foam rubber ear plugs for every adult that walked into the place because the music was so loud you couldn't hear yourself think. [laughter] It was unbelievable. You had to leave the room to change your mind, literally. It was really too loud, but that's what it's become. It's a party for the kids. Unfortunately, adults are invited, too.

It was fun. I continued on after bar mitzvah. We went to services, like Saturday mornings, we would get together with a group of the kids, and we'd all go and we'd sit up in the front. Little by little, the romance wore off a little bit, and you stopped going. My parents continued. They were never observant Jews. They just, I think, enjoyed singing with the Choral Society. My mother was never a member of Sisterhood or any of the other organizations at the temple, but they enjoyed the singing and that's what kept them going.

KR: What were your high school years like socially?

MW: I guess the first year it was mostly male friends. I don't think I had any girlfriends during my first year of high school. Socially, there was always something going on. There was one gal that, every Friday night, she would have a get-together at her house. She lived over in the East Side section of Paterson, and she would have a bunch of kids come over. I became a part of that bunch. We would go over and we would put on records and we would dance, just have a good time, and drink soft drinks. Nobody drank any hard drinks. Nobody brought any liquor. We would just have a good time.

It became, as we got older, then things started to get more social. You used to start dating, and I had a few dates. My parents often wondered why I never dated any Jewish girls. I always dated somebody who was non-Jewish. They never figured that I would ever marry anybody who's Jewish, and I did, I married somebody that was Jewish. Then, at that point was the first time in my life we ever kept a kosher home. My first wife came from a kosher home, and she wanted to keep that tradition so that her grandmother could come and eat at our house. We kept it that way until her grandmother passed away, and then we eased back a little bit. In our house, it was all kosher. We didn't change plates for milk and dairy, because we figured you if wash the plate, it's clean. We never mixed meat and milk and we never ate anything that was non-kosher in the house. We bought kosher meats. In high school, we never kept kosher at home. We were not heavily observant. We weren't, at one point, even lightly observant.

It was fun; high school was fun. I remember going to my prom. The prom was at the high school, and, on the way to the high school, I borrowed my father's car. I'm going up Market Street, going to the high school. I'm stopping for a light. There's a car in front of me. I step on the brake, and it goes all the way to the floor, no brakes. Thank God, I was only travelling maybe three or four miles an hour, when I tapped the guy in front of me. My father had just had the car serviced, so he took it back to the mechanic and he said, "You owe me some money." So, they came to an agreement, but that was my only accident. The only time, that was my only accident, the only time I ever had an accident. I never got a ticket.

KR: Did you end up making it to your destination?

MW: Eventually, yes, yes. I called my dad. There was a store. I went in, called him, told him what happened, and he sent a tow truck and they towed the car away. One of my friends was called. He picked me up with his car, and then we went to the school. The prom was fun. I went to the prom, danced our brains out, then went into New York and went to the [nightclub] Copacabana in New York. I don't know if you remember the name, Pearl Bailey, singer, black singer, great, popular stuff, jazz. There were a few dignitaries. Tony Bennett came to see her sing that night. Sammy Davis, Jr. came to see her sing that night, so we saw a lot of big names. Everybody ordered some fluffy kind of drink because in New York, at that time, eighteen was the drinking age. So, you could get away with it a little bit, and then we went back home. We got home probably at four in the morning, but that was the big excitement in those years. Nobody went down the Shore and spent the entire weekend down the shore. Life was a little simpler then, a little simpler, but we had fun.

KR: I am curious about popular culture in the mid-1950s, music and movies.

MW: Movies, there were idols. There was Tab Hunter and Marilyn Monroe. Elvis came a little bit later. The big singing groups then were The Platters and, too numerous to mention, a lot of rock 'n' roll and doo-wop groups then. It was fun; it was danceable music. You could understand the words when they sang. We just had a good time. We just enjoyed ourselves.

KR: Did you go to the movies much?

MW: I did go to see some movies, mostly cowboy movies, when I was a kid, some war flicks. Nothing really serious. I really didn't get into the serious stuff until later on, after I came out of the service, and I then started watching some of the movies on TV. Then, of course came Turner Classic Movies and the *African Queen*, you know, Humphrey Bogart. There were a lot of big stars back then, a lot of glamour in Hollywood. I'm sure a lot of stuff went on behind the cameras that you never saw on film, but it was never shown on film. Things were a lot more prurient, when I was growing up than what goes on today. Almost anything goes on today [laughter], and it's accepted and that's the way it is. Then, if you remember the *I Love Lucy* show, if you remember their bedroom scenes, did you ever see them sleeping in one bed? It was always two separate beds, with a table separating the two. That was the thinking of that time.

Of course, growing up, you always try to get as far as you could with whoever you're going out with. It didn't always work. I got slapped in the face a couple of times, but everybody was friendly. Nobody looked down on anybody. We all got together, and we all had a good time. You wanted to just want to be with those people. If you estrange yourself from those people, then you were the outside and you never knew what was going on with your friends. If you wanted to participate, you became friendly and didn't run off with the mouth.

KR: What was high school like in terms of your classes?

MW: Like I said, I wasn't the greatest student in the world. I was supposed to graduate high school in the beginning of 1957, January graduating class. I did badly in one course, so I had to repeat it and I didn't actually graduate until June. As far as classes went, my favorite subjects in high school were the science classes. I loved it. In retrospect, I think I probably would've made a good nurse, not a doctor because I don't think I had the intellect to be able to absorb a lot of the maths that would be necessary. As far as liking biology and all the sciences, astronomy, [I] ate that up, always did well in those courses. Math was not my forte. English was okay. History was okay. I was an average student. I was never was a stellar student. I think I'd probably do better now than I did back in school. [There was] too much distraction. [I'd] rather talk to the person across the aisle than study or read a book. I don't think that's uncommon, even today, but I got through. I was fine.

KR: What sports or extracurricular activities did you do?

MW: I was never really into sports. I tried out for the track team, not running, but I tried out for shot put, and I just was not big enough to be able to do well at the sport. In gym class, I did all right. I never excelled at anything, but I did okay.

I could remember--and this is a funny story; I think it is--there was always one guy that I never got along with. I don't really want to mention his name. Anyway, he was always kind of picking on me. I guess he had felt I was a softy, and I just put up with it and put up with it and put up with it. One day, I'm in gym class, and, all of a sudden, he jumps on my back. I just reached back, grabbed him by the nape of the neck and flipped him over the top of my shoulders, and he landed flat on his back. I put my foot on his neck, and I said, "If you ever try that again, I'm going to really hurt you." That was the last time he bothered me.

We graduated from high school, I worked the summer, joined the Navy, went to boot camp at Great Lakes, Illinois, left there, went to school, naval school for engineering, worked in the engine rooms, left there, was transferred to Norfolk, Virginia, [to] a holding company, waiting to be transferred to my permanent duty station. So, I got friendly with one of the guys there, and we went to a movie one night on base. I'm sitting there. All of a sudden, in march these guys with dungarees, the chambray shirts on with "P.A.L." across the back of the shirts. It means, "Prisoner at Large." These were guys that were on good behavior, being given the privilege of going to a movie. [He] sits down, and I'm looking at this guy in front of me, "Boy, does he look familiar." [Editor's Note: The telephone rings.]

[RECORDING PAUSED]

MW: Anyway, I'm looking at him, looking at him, "Boy, does he look familiar." I called the guy's name, and he turns around. It's the guy who jumped on my back in gym class. He was there, and, of course, I started to talk to him. Then, he was tapped on the shoulder by the guy that brought him in, by the patrolman that brought him in, and, "No talk." It was funny to see him there. I learned later that after he got out of the service, he became a cop in Paterson.

KR: So, he was in the Navy, and he was in the brig for committing some crime.

MW: He was in the brig for whatever he did, I have no idea, and came out of the service and became a cop. I guess he liked prison so much he figured he'd join them rather than fight them. That was fun. Then, finally, I was transferred from Norfolk, up to Newport, Rhode Island, and got onto my ship, the USS *Rooks*, DD-804. Within three days, we got all of our provisions aboard, fueled up, and headed for the Mediterranean. That was in May of 1958 and spent the rest of the summer in the Mediterranean going to different ports. [Editor's Note: The USS *Rooks* (DD-804) was a Fletcher-class destroyer that was in service from 1944 to 1962.]

KR: To go back a little bit before your time in the Navy, when you were still in high school, what were you thinking about for the future?

MW: I really wasn't thinking that much about it. I was always leaning toward the fact that maybe I'd like to go into the service, and the Navy was my first choice. I was a member of the Sea Scouts when I was in high school, and we had applied for and got the opportunity to go on a weekend cruise on a destroyer escort out of Brooklyn Navy Yard. We did. I think that's what sold me on it. I saw shipboard life, and I saw what the Navy was doing. I fell in love with it and decided that's probably what I want to do, so that's what I did. [Editor's Note: Sea Scouting is operated by Boy Scouts of America. It was founded in 1912.]

KR: How did you get involved in the Sea Scouts?

MW: Through some friends that I had met. One of them had just joined, and I decided to go and see what it was about. It was great. Aside from going on camping trips with them, we used to go to a place in Wayne called Pancake Hollow Reserve, that was our campground. We'd set up tents and build our fire, [in] all kinds of weather, any time of year. I mean, I can remember

camping out in the snow, huddled up inside of a tent, in a sleeping bag, freezing my butt off, but it was fun. Then, doing that trip with the Sea Scouts on that destroyer escort.

KR: How often would the Sea Scouts meet?

MW: We'd meet once a week, and that was at the temple, that Temple Emanuel that I was talking about, that's where it was. The leader of our group was a retired veteran from World War II who had lost his leg in the service. He was a Navy man and, apparently, aboard ship or somewhere, had had his leg hurt and had an artificial leg on. We found that out because somebody, at one of the camping trips, had dropped a log, and it bounced and hit him in the artificial leg. Yu heard a clunk, and it didn't sound like a real [leg]. He said, "You're lucky that's not real." That was the words right out of his mouth, and that's when he found out he had an artificial leg.

KR: Did he ever talk about his time in the service?

MW: No, he never really brought it up.

KR: I will pause.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

KR: Okay, we are back on and recording. What was basic training like at Great Lakes?

MW: When we first got there, it was a totally foreign existence. I wasn't used to being under the gun, in other words, constantly being pushed [to] what we thought, at that time, was beyond the limits, which later on in my service career I found out was not even close. We were trained to do certain things, to listen, to observe commands, and react to those commands the way they expected us to react and basically, they were teaching you how to react to wartime conditions, in a laid-back kind of a way. We didn't think it was laid back. The company commander that we had was a chief petty officer who, again, had been through Korea, and he was hardened. He was a tough guy, and then we met him after we graduated. He was one of the nicest guys in the world, but he had a job to do and that's what he did.

I got involved with the Jewish chaplain on the base while I was in basic. I started attending services on Friday night. Two-fold, I was interested in going to services, and I was also interested in getting out of barracks cleaning on Friday night, so I would go to services instead. It got to a point where I knew enough about the service that I was able to run the service. He and I together would run the service, and that lasted all through boot camp.

I thought I would lose my company at one point because I developed rubella, German measles. So, I was sent to the infirmary, and they were able to clear that up in about three days. So, I was sent back to my original company. Otherwise, I would've lost the week and would've had to gone to a different company. I'm glad I didn't, because I had a lot of good buddies in that company. We all got a long, and there was very little off-color stuff, because we were a mixed bag in there. We all got along. At the end, it was good when it ended, but there was a lot of

pomp and circumstance, as you can imagine, because you're marching and everything's a big deal, but you don't know because you're learning.

Once I got out and I got into the fleet, then I found out what being in the Navy was. Again, it's a regimented way of life. You do things by the clock, you follow orders, you don't talk back, and you do your job. We are the hardest working and lowest paid bunch of people you ever met in your life. The old song of twenty-one dollars a day once a month, well, it wasn't far from that, but we did what we did and we had a good time doing it. We got drunk every once in a while, and we played around every once in a while when we went ashore, but [I] never got in trouble. I never overstepped my bounds that far, where I could get in trouble.

Then, when I was aboard, I guess about a year, I was in a landing party. Landing parties are to go ashore, to do reconnaissance on the beach, to make sure that whoever is going ashore during any kind of wartime activity could do it in the safest possible manner. We had to go for training. It was never documented that we went for training, but we were trained by, at that point, what was known then as underwater demolition, which is now known as the Navy SEALs. If I thought I had it tough in boot camp, you have no idea what tough is because we were there for thirty days.

KR: Where was that training?

MW: Camp Lejeune. [Editor's Note: Camp Lejeune is a Marine Corps base located in Jacksonville, North Carolina. It was established in 1941.]

KR: Oh.

MW: We were put through hell week, that first week. I thought we were going to die. You were lucky if you averaged two hours of sleep a night, and we came out of that training feeling like we could take on the world with a straight pin. I was in probably the best shape of my life at that particular point. It teaches you how tough it could be, and the willingness to survive makes you survive. We did. Nobody washed out; everybody made it through. Maybe they weren't as tough on us as the guys who joined UDT [Underwater Demolition Team], but we had a good time.

KR: When you were at Camp Lejeune, were these Marines training you?

MW: No, it was actually Navy personnel, because UDT was all Navy.

KR: Describe this training. What was involved when you were training to be in a landing party?

MW: Well, we had to learn the basics of how to operate the equipment that we had to go in with. We were not heavily armed; we carried minimal weapons. We were there for reconnaissance. It's not like now when they send these guys in on special ops and whatever. We were there strictly for reconnaissance. One of the problems that we had to deal with was one training exercise where we were flown out to about a quarter-mile offshore, with full packs on, dumped into the ocean, from twenty-five feet over the water, had to make it into shore, and then

survive for two nights out in the wild with nothing but your pack, a knife, some minimal equipment. You had to survive out there for two days, but we did it.

KR: Did you jump out of a helicopter into the water?

MW: Yes.

KR: Then, how did you get to shore?

MW: Swim. I imagine the packs that they used then were much lighter weight. You didn't have all the heavy equipment and ammunition and stuff that they would use now, but whatever we had to have.

KR: What else sticks out in your mind about training to be a part of a landing party?

MW: Getting your mind set, determination, success was the only way, there was no other option but to succeed. You figured, if you were under actual conditions, the alternatives are really terrible, so success was the only thing on your mind. You got there, got the job done, and got out. That's what we had to do. We, thank goodness, never had to put it into practice, but we had to go through the training to qualify to be that landing party on the ship.

The only other big, outstanding part of my shipboard life was when we trained with NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration] for recovery detail of Alan Shepard on the first manned suborbital flight. We got to meet him. We got to train with a mock capsule on the ship, going into the water, retrieving it, hooking it up to the davits, so that it could be taken aboard ship. That was fun; that was a lot of fun.

You know, then, it was all experimental. The capsule wouldn't be that much bigger than this refrigerator, and a guy was sitting inside of that thing flying out into suborbital space, not knowing whether he was going to survive or not. He did. It went off flawlessly. We were the first ship right off Cape Canaveral. We actually saw the rocket go up, but we had to be there in case of an abort. We would be the closest ship to where he would be to pick him up. Then, there were ships all the way down the line, all the way to the coast of Africa, and that's where he landed, just off the coast of Africa. We got to meet him. He was a small guy. I don't think he was much taller than you are, but he was very nice, very friendly. [We] didn't meet the rest of the astronauts, just him, but that was the Mercury [mission]. [Editor's Note: On May 5, 1961, American astronaut Alan Shepard became the first American in space, achieving suborbital flight in the *Freedom 7* capsule as a part of the Mercury-Redstone 3 mission. Shepard landed on the moon in 1971 as the commander of the Apollo 14 mission. The early space missions were launched at Cape Canaveral Air Force Station. In 1962, Kennedy Space Center, adjacent to Cape Canaveral on Merritt Island, became the primary center for launching missions to space. Alan Shepard stood at five feet, eleven inches and weighed 170 pounds.]

KR: Yes, right, and he was the first Mercury to launch.

MW: He was the first man in suborbital flight. It was before they made the circle.

KR: Tell me about the training that the USS *Rooks* went through as a part of this Mercury recovery mission.

MW: We would go out into the Atlantic. We would have a mock capsule aboard, and we would dump it overboard and it would float. We would go circle around, come back to it, get up next to it. We would have people go into the water and put flotation devices around it and then make sure it wouldn't sink. It wouldn't anyway because it was completely sealed, but we had to do that because when he was in it, once that hatch popped open, it could take in water and sink. So, he had to get out of there as quickly as possible. Then, make sure the ship would ease over. They'd have a whale boat out there also, a long boat, and it would ease the capsule into where it could be hooked up to a crane, called a davit, and it would be lifted up and pulled on deck. We went through some nice trainings out there.

KR: Did he actually come aboard your ship?

MW: We met him on our ship, yes. I think he visited probably all the ships that were in that fleet that went out for the recovery.

KR: I would like to ask you about when Alan Shepard's rocket actually took off. That day, what was it like?

MW: We were all on deck, except for the people that were in the engine room. We were all on deck, and we literally were probably two miles offshore, three miles at the most. You actually saw the rocket go up, and everybody wide-eyed and bushy-tailed. Everybody was very excited and with their fingers crossed, absolutely. Again, it was a new thing. It had never been done before by us. They had sent Yuri Gagarin up there, but this was our first guy. We enjoyed it. [Editor's Note: When the Soviet Union launched cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin aboard the spacecraft Vostok on April 12, 1961, Gagarin became the first human in space, completing a single orbit of the Earth. Shepard became the first American in space three weeks later.]

KR: Now, Shepard was actually recovered by a different ship. When was it that you heard the mission was a success and that he was recovered?

MW: It was that same day. We got a radio message all the way down the line. They transferred the message all the way down that he had landed and was recovered safely and everything was fine. I don't remember the exact time, but it didn't take that long. I think the whole trip probably lasted maybe about twenty, twenty-five minutes because of the speed that he was going. It came down, and he was fine. [Editor's Note: The Mercury-Redstone 3 mission lasted fifteen minutes and twenty-eight seconds. Alan Shepard and the *Freedom 7* capsule were recovered by the aircraft carrier USS *Lake Champlain*.]

KR: What was the atmosphere on the ship when you heard the good news?

MW: Oh, yes, there was a lot of yelling and jumping and cheering. We were happy to be a part of it. In fact, quite a few years ago, we were down at the space center down in Orlando, and we

sat in on a lecture down there. I think it was about, not Mercury, it was later on, I don't remember which series they were talking about. "Anybody have anything to add?" So, me, being a big mouth, I stand up, "Yes." "Identify yourself." I told them my name. I said, "I was involved in the recovery of Alan Shepard in the Mercury Project." Applause. I mean, it was an audience full of people, and I'm standing there red-faced. [laughter] Anne was sitting next to me, "He's a show off." [laughter] It was nice, nice to be involved in something like that, than in something bad.

KR: I just want to ask you one more thing about the training as a part of this Mercury mission. You talked about the capsule being in the water and it opened. One of the astronauts on a later Mercury mission, when he tried to get out of the capsule, it actually submerged. He did make it out though. What were you being specifically trained to do? [Editor's Note: On July 21, 1961, astronaut Gus Grissom became the second American in space as a part of the Mercury-Redstone 4 mission. Although the hatch on the capsule *Liberty Bell 7* accidentally blew open after it splash landed in the ocean, Grissom was recovered safely. On January 27, 1967, Grissom and astronauts Roger Chaffee and Ed White were killed when the Apollo 1 command module caught fire during a launch rehearsal.]

MW: We were being trained to--well, I was not part of that particular group that went in to make sure that the flotation devices were securely attached to the capsule, but that was part of the mission, to keep it from going down. On the later ones, the flotation devices would deploy from the capsule itself. In the earlier ones, it had to be put around the capsule. There had to be ships around somewhere, in close proximity, because once that thing opened up, if it tilted over too fast, it would start taking on water and it would go down with everything in it.

It's amazing how small it is. I mean, it's like literally like going into a coffin. You're sitting there, and I don't think the space is much wider than your shoulders. You crawl in. You sit in the seat, and you're looking up at all your dials and push buttons. Then, it was dials; it was not push buttons or electronics. It was all like a lot of manual stuff, a lot of mechanical stuff. These guys had to be part scientist as well as being an astronaut. They had to know what they were doing. It was fun. It was a lot of fun. Now, that kind of stuff interested me.

KR: I would like to go back and talk to you about basic training. You said that in your company, it was a mixed bag.

MW: Yes.

KR: Describe the people that were in your company during basic training.

MW: From all over the country. People from California were in that group, people from New York were in that group, Ohio, Texas, didn't matter. I think I was, no, there were two of us who were Jewish in the company. The rest were mixed Christian. There was, I think, two or three African Americans in the group. They kind of were friendly among themselves, but they were friends of ours, too. In the beginning, it was kind of standoffish, but then once you got to know everybody and you saw that everybody wanted to be friendly--a couple of the guys didn't really want to be friendly, but they came around after a while--everybody turned out fine.

I got friendly with one of the guys more than some of the others, and he had a last name that I'm still having trouble remembering the spelling of. Gutzgalicz was his last name, probably from who knows what Eastern European country background. He and I would usually, when we were allowed to go off base, get together and go somewhere into Chicago or up to Milwaukee. Milwaukee was fun because they had a big dance hall with a polka band. [laughter] We'd go up there to meet girls and dance, and we did. We had a good time. Chicago, it's a big city, like any other big city. I can remember walking in Chicago when the wind was blowing so hard, you were walking at a slant to keep yourself from falling over, right on Lake Michigan. In fact, the base was right on Lake Michigan, and when I was going to school up there, after basic, we had some snowfalls up there. When you walked around the base, they had cleared the sidewalks up, but you were walking through canyons up above your shoulders, and you were lucky, if you looked over there, if you could see a head moving by. It was cold weather.

Basic training itself was not that difficult, when I look back on it. When you're there, of course, everything is a pain in the neck. One funny thing happened. I was there maybe three, four weeks, and I get a letter from home, from my dad, "Dear Mike, guess what? You've been drafted." [laughter] I got a draft notice, after the fact I had joined the Navy. So, obviously, I was already in the Navy. That was funny. I got a good laugh out of it, but the food was rotten, to say the best. Who was used to eating off a metal tray and eating that famous SOS dish?

KR: Yes.

MW: Which actually, if it's made properly, is not that bad. Cream chipped beef on toast, that was a breakfast staple.

KR: Right. SOS, shit on a shingle.

MW: Shit on a shingle, yes. [laughter] The food wasn't bad. When I got aboard ship, the cooks did special stuff. They would create menus; they wouldn't just go by, "The Navy says you make this." They would make stuff; they would make special soups. There was one cook on the ship that made, you could tell how drunk he was by how spicy the soup became. [laughter] When he was loaded, boy, you couldn't hardly swallow the soup. He must have put more hot sauce in there. [laughter] Again, [it was] fun, poker nights at night in the mess hall. The only two places on the ship that were air conditioned was officer's country and the mess hall. The rest of the ship, no air conditioning. An occasional fan, that was it, but that's the way it was, so you live that way.

Boot camp itself, you had your bunk, and like all of the military organizations, you kept things tidy and neat and you stood inspection every morning. We were on the second level. The company that was below us, it was a constant rivalry between the two companies, always battling one another, never violent stuff, but on field events and training and shooting, we were always at odds with each other who could outdo the other. The company commander down there always came up to yell and scream at our guys, because he had a big, loud voice and he had to make himself heard. Then, our company commander would walk in, and he was at least a head shorter than this guy, and he would look at him and he says, "My boys are okay. You leave them

alone." He would walk out, tail between his legs, but I think they did it more for show than anything else.

Again, I enjoyed the time there. I was happy to be finished with it. I was happy to get out and become part of the Navy and not just training, but the training never stops because you're always doing something that you're learning something. That's what we did; we learned.

What else did we do? Oh, yes, one of the other experiences when I was in the fleet. I was in a squadron of five ships--a couple of them I can't remember the name of--it's our ship and the *Gainey* and one of the ships was the USS *The Sullivans*. The Sullivans were, during the early part of World War II, five brothers that were killed aboard a [light cruiser], and that passed a ruling in the Navy that no brothers could serve together on the same ship. Well, that was relaxed later on because there were two brothers from Atlantic Highlands that were aboard the ship that I was on, when I was first assigned. Anyway, *The Sullivans* itself, part of our squadron was being decommissioned and transferred to the Pakistani Navy. So, we went, the whole squadron went, for the ceremony, and, wow, what a ceremony. It was held at this magnificent, almost a palatial hotel. The bathroom fixtures were gold. We enjoyed ourselves, ate foods we never had before in our life, and it was fun. At that point, we were friendly with Pakistan. Things did change, but it was fun to do, fun to see. [Editor's Note: The USS *The Sullivans* (DD-537) was a destroyer that was in service from 1942 to 1965 and is now part of the Buffalo and Erie Country Naval and Military Park in Buffalo, New York. It was named after the five Sullivan brothers who were killed in the Battle of Guadalcanal in 1942, when the USS *Juneau* was sunk by a Japanese torpedo. In 1997, a new destroyer named USS *The Sullivans* (DDG-68) was commissioned and remains in service today.]

KR: What port was that at in Pakistan?

MW: Karachi. When you tell people, "Oh yes, I was in Karachi," [the response is], "Oh, did you see fighting?" I say, "No, we were not at war with Pakistan at that time." That was in 1959, yes.

KR: Where did you go after basic training?

MW: After basic, I stayed at Great Lakes and went to school. It was enginemen school. I spent three months in school and from there was transferred to Norfolk, Virginia. I stayed in Norfolk for about two weeks in a holding company just waiting for orders for [the] fleet. I finally got those orders and went up to Newport, Rhode Island, and that was my home base. I was aboard the destroyer for three years and two months. We travelled a lot.

I started off in the engine room, hot, oh, you have no idea. I was in the engine room at the point, where we were coming out of the Mediterranean going through the Suez Canal, and you were doing a four-hour watch in the engine room on your duty. It was so hot that we split the crew in half that was working, and you would go down and work fifteen minutes and come up. The other group would go down for fifteen minutes, and you did that the whole four hours. Then, the next duty watch would come on and do the same thing. You're talking outside temperatures of 109-111 degrees. So, you can imagine it was like 130 degrees or more down in that engine

room, and it was hard almost to take a breath. So, you did what you had to do, you came back up, and you got cooled off in 109-degree temperature and then went back down. You couldn't keep a tan. If you got any kind of a suntan on your skin, you sweat it right out of you.

I was lucky, maybe not, but I was lucky to be transferred into supply division to do my mandatory three months of what they call mess cooking. My station on mess cooking was in the scullery, scrubbing pots and pans. So, that's what I did. I worked the steam line occasionally but mostly scrubbing pots and pans and the trays and running the dishwasher. I'm there for a while, and one of the guys from supply comes to me and he said, "How would you like to come into supply division, because we need some of you to come into the dispersing office, because one of the guys is leaving. He's getting discharged." So, I said, "Sounds good." So, they made up the papers and transferred me into supply.

When we got back into port, in Newport, the dispersing school was at Newport. So, I went there for three months, finished there, came back aboard ship, and I was the paymaster. The other guy that was in the office, he was a bit of a screw up. He knew his stuff in the office, but he was constantly getting into trouble. He drank too much. I think he was thrown in the brig more times than he was out. Finally, he was then, I don't know if he was, honorably or dishonorably discharged for something he did. So, I was the only guy in the office, and that's what I did the rest of the time. As long as my work was done, I had what they called open gangway. Any time the ship was in port and I didn't have any work to do, if it wasn't a pay day, I could go ashore. Other guys had to wait for their liberty section to be able to go, "You can't today, but we're going to be here tomorrow. You go tomorrow." Then, you have duty. My duties were done as long as all my paperwork was all done, so it was a pretty good gig.

KR: To you, it was a step up from engine room.

MW: Oh, you bet you. [laughter] You bet you. It was great, and that's where I stayed the rest of the time. I came out of the service actually designated as a seaman first [class]. I had taken the exam and passed the third class petty officer exam but had not yet gotten the designation, and by the time I got discharged, it still hadn't gone through. I couldn't put the patch on, and I wasn't actually a petty officer. I was still a seaman, so that's how I came out.

KR: When did you go to the landing school, the landing party school at Camp Lejeune?

MW: Actually, it was in June of '59. No, earlier than that. It was before we went to the Mediterranean. It was April, end of March, April of '59. Yes, because it was getting pretty warm down there because they're in the South. Again, it was a whole different ballgame. You get there; your head gets shaved. You're a recruit all over again. Finally, the hair grew out again, and now it isn't. [laughter]

KR: I am curious about what life was like onboard the USS *Rooks*. What was daily life like?

MW: Got up at six o'clock in the morning, S, S and S, shower, shit, and shine. Got in, well, it depended on what you had to do. If you had no other duties, you dressed in dungarees, chambray shirt and bell bottom dungarees, black shoes, white hat. No such thing as camouflage

uniforms at that point. Had breakfast, went to quarters-- meant they want to find out if you're still alive and kicking--and then went to your job. Opened the office. My hours were like eight in the morning, break for lunch, back, finished at four. Clean up after work, get in line for chow, have dinner, and then you go do what you got to do, write a letter, or whatever you're going to do. At sea, there was always a movie every night. Sometimes, during one cruise, you saw the same movie four or five times until they were able to get to another ship and get more movies and transfer. That was basically the daily routine, just like civilian life. You get up in the morning, you have breakfast, you go to work, you come home, you have supper, you watch TV, and you go to bed. That's basically what you did aboard ship, except you wore a uniform. You had a job to do, and you did your job.

We had training exercises occasionally for fire drills. We would have artillery exercises. My duty station, during general quarters, was a five-inch mount, and that's where I think I lost part of my hearing. That's why I'm wearing hearing aids now. I was pointer in the mount. My job was to raise and lower the turret, the barrel in the turret, and squeeze off the round in order to do so. The trainer, his job was to move the mount laterally. We would coordinate, and we'd both be wearing ear phones, not sound-deadening ear phones, but just a little can that went over your ears. You'd be attached to communications with the bridge, fire control. We would go out, and they would tow a sled behind another ship on at least a couple of hundred yards or more of cable. You would try to burst or throw out these shells with no explosive in them and make a splash as close as you can to that sled. Well, I got a zero-in on the sled, and you never shot when the ship was rolling down. You only shot when the barrel was coming up. So, I waited. The ship came down, the ship came up. I keyed off a round, hit the sled and sunk the sled, very good. They loved me for that, but I guess they saw I could shoot.

Second thing, the gunners on the back, there were two five-inch mounts up front. There was a five-inch mount on the deck, of the rear deck, on the stern of the ship, and on the O-1 level, which is the next level up, instead of another five-inch mount being there, which was originally there, they put what they call a three-inch .50 caliber, basically, anti-aircraft weapon. So, they would run a plane dragging a sleeve, like you're down the Shore, and you see them pulling these banners, except that the sleeve was a lot further away from the plane. They would fire bursts-- now, you were using live ammunition, and they were firing bursts around the sleeve to see how close you could come. Well, again, one of the bursts went off. Some of the shrapnel hit the cable and snapped the cable. So, here comes the banner floating down. The three-inch .50 locks on the banner and starts chewing it up in the air, and you can see pieces of rag flying off of this thing. [laughter] We got kind of a commendation as being one of the better artillery groups.

I think the noise from that five-inch gun going off did things to my ears. I've been fighting with the VA [Veterans Administration], I can't tell you how long, to try to get some compensation. Now, they gave me compensation for the ringing in my ears, but they wouldn't recognize that my hearing loss was because of that. I really never noticed it when I was in the service, and it came on slowly. There must have been some damage done that affected my hearing, but they haven't relinquished, so, hey, it is what it is.

KR: Yes. What was the crew like on the USS *Rooks*?

MW: The crew was mixed. Again, there was only one other Jewish guy on the ship, besides myself, and then he got transferred and I was the only one. The rest of the crew was a mixed bag, all walks of life. The black crew members were basically cooks and stewards for the officer's country or cooks for the ship. The only other black guy I knew on the ship that had a job that didn't entail cleaning up or cooking was the guy that I worked for in dispersing, Johnson. His last name was Johnson. He was the only other one, but that's the way it was back in those years, that black personnel did not do anything else except be stewards or cooks. That's the way it was. Anyway, a very nice bunch of people, generally. I got along with everybody on the ship. I told them, "You want to be paid? You be nice to me."

KR: Yes, you had a little power there.

MW: Well, I didn't really have power. I used to joke about it, but that's the way it turned out. We got along; everybody got along. There was always a card game almost every night, after the movie was over. You had to be ready to perform the next morning, no matter what time the game quit. There was always payday night, that's when the big card games were. It was fun.

KR: Who was the captain?

MW: The captain when I was discharged, John T. Murray was his name, a nice man. He tried to be friendly with the crew as much as he possibly could, without knocking himself off his own pedestal. We had a softball team on the ship, and we played at the base before we were deployed to the Mediterranean. Every year, we would be in the running for base champion, and every year the ship was deployed just before the game and we'd never get to play in the game. [laughter] So, the captain went to the base commander, and he said, "We ain't going anywhere until after the game." Well, we won the base championship that year. He tried out for the team, the captain. He wasn't good enough, so we told him, "Sorry, Sir, but you can't play." [laughter] He ceased to be the captain--when you come out on that team, you're another team member. So, we treated him as another team member. He tried, but we were teenagers. He wasn't a teenager anymore. He was probably in his thirties. He was an old man by then, and we were eighteen, nineteen, twenty years old and full of pep and vinegar and ready to do anything. We had a good ball team. We played all around the world. Every port we went into, we got a game up with the foreign nationals. We went up to Prince Edward Island, and we played against a team up there. Two people on that team wore a glove, the catcher and the first baseman. Everybody else played bare [handed]. We played softball, bare-handed softball. Now, we played slow pitch; they played fast pitch. We couldn't hit their fast pitch; they couldn't hit our slow pitch. [laughter] One of their guys got lucky and whacked one, and the score was 1-0. They beat us. We got out and got so drunk that night. We had such a good time together yelling and screaming at each other and having such a good time, no fights, just a good bunch of guys. We had a good time.

KR: Were there any officers on that team?

MW: No, all enlisted men.

KR: Was the captain, John T. Murray, the captain of the ship for all three years, two months that you were on the USS *Rooks*?

MW: No, there was another captain that was aboard that was transferred or discharged. I'm not sure whether he had put in his time or not. I'm trying to think of his name. No, I can't remember his name, but the one I was discharged under was the second captain of the ship. The last name of his executive officer was Orbeton, O-R-B-E-T-O-N or I-T-O-N. That was his name. He was the executive officer. The captain was a full commander. The executive officer was a lieutenant commander. Then, there was a few lieutenants, some lieutenant junior grades. I think we had a couple of ensigns on the ship as well.

On one of the cruises, we went down to Norfolk from Newport and picked up a bunch of midshipmen from the academy that had come to Norfolk. [Editor's Note: The telephone rings.] We took them on a cruise to the Mediterranean, and we put them through the paces. These were college kids, and we wanted to show them what shipboard life was like. We worked them out a little bit, and do you want to know something? They were good guys about it. They put up with us. We had fun.

When we went up above the Arctic Circle, you were considered a Bluenose, and you got a certificate saying you were a Bluenose. I don't know what happened to my other certificate, but I went down below the equator and became a Shellback. They put you through an initiation. One of the guys with the biggest belly on the ship, they grease him up, and you've got to kiss [his belly]. They throw you overboard and they make you do all kinds of shenanigans, and then you become a qualified Shellback. I'm both, a Bluenose and a Shellback. It was fun. It was a lot of fun.

The ship was rigged for action. We were a warship, a smaller World War II class warship. The size of our ship now would be what a destroyer escort is now; it's much smaller. The destroyers now would be about the size of what a cruiser was then, so they've gotten a lot bigger. You don't have to duck as much going through doorways on the new ships as you did on the old ones. We were through some rough weather. Oh, we were coming back from the Mediterranean one year, and there were two hurricanes working around in the Atlantic. One was north of us and one was south of us, and I think there's probably eight hundred miles of water in between them. Well, nevertheless, it was rough out there. We were more underwater than we were on top of the water. We were working with a carrier by the name of the USS *Essex*, old World War II class carrier. When you see an aircraft carrier take a nose dive like this and bring up green water on the flight deck, which is sixty feet above the water level, the water line, it's rough. [Editor's Note: The USS *Essex* (CV-9) was an aircraft carrier that was in service from 1942 to 1969.]

We went over--we hit a rogue wave one time--we were operating out of Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and a rogue wave came. I'm standing on the bridge having coffee with one of the signalmen, and I'm looking over his shoulder and I'm going like this. He said, "What are you looking at?" I said, "Well, if you turn around, you'll see the biggest wave you ever saw in your life." The ship rode up on the wave and went over, and I didn't think we were coming back. It just stood there and vibrated. Finally, it had righted itself and came back up. I thought we were gone, but we weren't. The fun things that happened. When you look back on them, they are things to talk about, but then it wasn't so funny.

KR: What did you do to combat seasickness?

MW: I was lucky, I never got seasick. I think I can remember twice. I think I had gone out fishing with my father one time on a fishing boat out of Belmar, and I got seasick. I was probably ten years old. The other time was--and I think it was my own fault--I went out fishing again, which was about two years ago, and we were out fishing for sea bass. It was eight-foot seas out there. We had no business being out there in that kind of [weather], but we were out. I wasn't eating, so, apparently, it got to me and I got a little upset. That was the only times I've been seasick in my life, so I weathered the storm pretty well and in some pretty nasty weather.

KR: Describe some of the missions that the USS *Rooks* went on.

MW: Basically, they were mostly goodwill and training missions, because there was no war going on at that particular point. We would go to the Mediterranean, or we would be cruising down in the Caribbean and we would go into Guantanamo Bay. When we were at Guantanamo Bay, that was before Castro took over. He was still a rebel running around in the woods with his buddies, and it was too dangerous for us to go off the base because of what was going on down there. So, we went and we spent whatever time we had on the base and in their rec halls and going to a movie or whatever. [Editor's Note: In 1953, the Cuban Revolution began, and in 1958, Fidel Castro's forces toppled the regime of Fulgencio Batista.]

Other than that, just training exercises, going to the Mediterranean, goodwill tours pulling into various ports, spending our money in Italy and--where else were we--in Barcelona, in Civitavecchia, Rome. We went through the Red Sea and into the Persian Gulf. Wherever we stopped, it was kind of a goodwill stop, not posing any threats to anybody, not making sure that they were doing what we wanted them to do, probably were, but didn't think of it that way. It was strictly training.

It was in between; it was between Korea and Vietnam. Vietnam didn't really start to heat up until I was out of active service. I was in reserve status, and that's when they were sending advisers over to Vietnam. I came that close to being called back in, but they never did. I got out at the end of my six years. I was discharged.

I almost, I came that close to trying to make it a career. The captain, Murray, he called me down to the cabin, and he says, "Congratulations, I'm putting your four in." He says, "I know you're going on to college after you leave the service." He says, "But," he says, "if you're interested." I had passed the third-class exam. I hadn't been rated yet. He picks up his hat, moves it, and there's a second-class petty officer pro [promotion] sitting on his desk. He said, "You want a ship for six years, that's yours," which means at the end of my second hitch, I could've been first class; third hitch, chief petty officer. I could've gone up the ranks pretty well, but I decided not to and the rest is history.

KR: What was it like going through the Suez Canal?

MW: We were a little nervous, because things were getting a little rocky over in the Middle East at that particular point. I think I can remember seeing some splashes alongside the ship. I think there were people throwing stones at us, but that was about it.

KR: It must have been quite a sight going through the Suez Canal.

MW: It's a lot of sand. It's really nothing picturesque about it. You come in at one end up in the Mediterranean, and you come out down at the base of the Red Sea at the other end. Then, we went up into the Persian Gulf. The biggest thing I remember about being down there really was, hot, it was hot. Sometimes, we would have water hours, where we would not have enough water for bathing properly, so we would take saltwater showers on the rear of the ship. They'd drape a hose over the gun barrel of the five-inch mount, and we would take showers on the rear deck. It was, again, part of the way of living out there. You didn't know any different, so that's what you did. You wished it was different, but that's the way it was. You accepted it, but that's the whole idea is acclimating yourself to your surroundings because if you don't, you can make yourself crazy and I wasn't going to do that.

KR: You mentioned the drinking onboard the ship, which officially would not have been allowed by the Navy.

MW: No, it would not. There were a few people that had snuck bottles of booze back aboard ship, and every once in a while, they'd open up their locker and take a shot. Generally, it was not rampant aboard ship. Every once in a while, on very rare occasions, they'd have a little blow out. In a port somewhere, go to a beach and then have a beer party for the guys, a little barbeque, but that was about it. That was about it, unless you went into town and spent your own money on booze. That was the extent of it. Some guys came back pretty lit. Aboard ship, it was frowned upon, but some people got away with it.

KR: You mentioned being at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba in 1959. That would have been when the revolution was going on.

MW: Right.

KR: What was Guantanamo like?

MW: It was a naval base. It was not the maximum-security prison that it is now. I imagine they had a brig there, but they weren't locking up terrorists and throwing away the key. People think it's inhuman; I really don't. I think anybody who is out to cause major mayhem should be locked away and should be forgotten about. If people think that that's horrible, think how horrible it would be if your family was involved in being blown up by a terrorist. I think it's a necessary thing, and I think when people break the law and Guantanamo is brought up in the conversation, all of a sudden that hardcore criminal sort of softens a little bit. Nobody wants to go to Guantanamo. It was a naval base, just like any other naval base, and it was off-limits to any personnel, except Americans or people that worked on the base that went off the base and went home every night. Those were probably some Cuban nationals, but for the most part it was all

American Navy. I didn't really think that much about it. It was just another port and another Navy base.

KR: How long were you at Guantanamo?

MW: No, not long at all. It was just a port of call. If we were there ten days, it was a long time. Just went in to pick up supplies and refuel, and that was basically it and spend a couple of days there.

KR: You were travelling all over the world, and you mentioned some of the places that you went on leave. What were some memorable occurrences?

MW: Well, when you're a teenaged sailor, women and booze seem to be the number one thing on everybody's mind. I'm not into going into the Sistine Chapel if I go to Rome. [laughter] It was mostly bars. You went to various places. When we went to Athens, I saw all the sites and the ruins and whatever. I never took a camera with me, so I didn't take pictures. Some guys probably did, but I just never had a camera to take pictures with. I did see those places, and it was very interesting to see. Most of the time was spent ashore, you went to a bar and you were with your friends socializing, as they say.

KR: Did you ever stop at any other American bases that were in other countries?

MW: Norfolk, Virginia, the Navy yards down on the other side of the river from Norfolk. In the Caribbean, we pulled into Port-au-Prince, Haiti one time, but there's no base there. We pulled in for liberty. Guantanamo. We went up to the dock yards at Prince Edward Island. Newport, of course, was our home port. As far as Navy bases, we never really went into very many other Navy bases, with the exception of going into Pakistan and dropping off the ship there. Mostly, it was liberty ports that we went into, but most of the time was spent at sea. Even when I go on a cruise now, I enjoy most of my time at sea more than I do going into some of the towns because I enjoy being at sea.

KR: You were in the Navy when the Cold War is going on.

MW: Right.

KR: Were there any joint exercises with navies of other nations?

MW: I'm trying to think. We never really got up to the North Atlantic to work with the British. There may have been one small joint exercise in Italy, with the Italian Navy, but that was just a practice exercise and I think it lasted just the one day. So, we didn't really have very much contact, unless we went ashore and ran into other national navies or army personnel that were stationed there, but that was it.

KR: Did you ever get to go through the Panama Canal?

MW: No, our ship never went through the Panama Canal. That, I did in civilian life, when we took the cruise. In fact, the first time we went, we went half way in, went up to the lake, turned around, and came back out on the Atlantic side. Then, we took a repositioning cruise from Miami, we went down and went through the canal and went all the way to Los Angeles. So, then, I went all the way through, but that was the only time. That was on a civilian cruise ship, but, no, we never did go through.

KR: Did you ever experience any anti-Semitism when you were in the Navy?

MW: I did. In the beginning, when I went to boot camp, a little bit. The biggest one I ever--it wasn't anti-Semitism, it was just lack of information from the other person's part. He was led to believe one thing, and I tried to dispel that by explaining where the idea came from. I was stationed in Newport, and there were four of us riding down toward New York for weekend liberty. I was coming home. They would usually drop me off on Route 46 in New Jersey, and they would take off for Pennsylvania. I would hitchhike home from there. On the way down, we're in Connecticut somewhere, and the guy I'm sitting with in the backseat, we're introducing ourselves, names, whatever. He says, "Weinberg?" He says, "What kind of name is that?" I say, "I'm Jewish." He says, "You're Jewish?" He says, "Where's your horns?" I say, "Let me explain that to you where that came from." He didn't know. I said, "Have you ever been to Rome?" He said, "No." I said, "Well, in Rome, there's a statue of Moses. That statue of Moses, if you look at it, from his eyes are coming rays of light, and that was picked up mistakenly as being horns. So, Jews had horns." He said, "I never knew that." That was that. No anger, no animosity, no teasing, nothing. I explained it to him, and he understood. He wasn't a stupid guy; he just didn't know any better. He was from the South. Unfortunately, he was from where people talk about things like that. So, no problem. [Editor's Note: *Moses* by Michelangelo is a sculpture in the Church of San Pietro in Rome, Italy.]

I handled myself rather well when I was in the service. I either could explain it out. I don't think I really had any down-and-out fights when I was in the Navy, because I felt like it was a waste of time. I just turned around and walked away. If you want to call me a coward, call me a coward. It's not worth my effort. So, I just walked away, but if I had to confront somebody, I made sure I did it but I made sure they understood where I was coming from. They, in most cases, did. Either that, or they just walked away. So, I never really had much problem. No, I didn't find very much, or, if there was, it wasn't brought to light. Nobody just came out and said something nasty. It just didn't happen. I was lucky.

KR: How did you commute with your family while you were in the Navy?

MW: Wrote letters. Sometimes a little remiss about how often I wrote letters, but I did. I communicated through letters. When I got home, I spent as much time as I could with them while I was on leave. They understood where I was, and I knew what they were [doing]. We got along. I had no problem with family, but like any teenager and their family, there's always a lack of communication somewhere and I guess we had that a little bit. Everything worked out.

KR: When you were in the Navy, John F. Kennedy was president. The world was going through some major changes. What sticks out in your mind from that era?

MW: Kennedy was assassinated after I got out of the service. He became president ...

KR: Kennedy was elected in the election of 1960. He took office in 1961, and then he was assassinated in 1963.

MW: '60, all right. I got out of active service in '61, so it was right in the beginning of his career as president. I never really gave it much thought. Eisenhower was president when I was in for the most time and then Kennedy toward the end, so I never really gave it much. We were on lifeguard duty for Eisenhower when he flew over to England. We were above the great northern fish banks, up in the North Atlantic. That's where we sat in fog, waiting for his plane to pass us by. Other than that, no real connection with who was president and why and what he was doing. I just had my daily routine to do. They had enough to worry about their thing; I had enough to worry about my thing. I never really gave it much thought who was president.

It shook me up when Kennedy got shot. In fact, everybody could remember where they were when it happened. I was recuperating from a minor surgery. I was already working, at that point, after I got out of the service, and somebody called me from the place I was working at to let me know and everybody, I don't think there was a dry eye in the house. Everybody was mourning the death of Kennedy, but he was a well-liked president, probably not the best one we've ever had, but I think a well-liked president. I think the guy I admired more than anybody else was Harry Truman. He was a strong-willed guy and the sign that was on his desk said it all, "The buck stops here" and that was it.

KR: You considered a career in the Navy. What was it like readjusting to civilian life?

MW: It wasn't bad. I went away to college, so I had something to occupy my time right away because I came home, I packed a bag, off, I went to Oklahoma. My thinking was college at that particular point. I had classes to attend, and I had things to do. It really wasn't much of an adjustment. It was already set in stone what I was going to do. It was after I left college, I came home and I found a job. So, really, there was very little adjustment.

KR: Why Oklahoma, and how did that application process go?

MW: I had applied to, I guess, a couple of different schools. Oklahoma accepted me. My grades were never the greatest in the world, so that's probably what my biggest downfall was in getting accepted. I was going to go for physical education, and I was there for almost two years, a year and a half, three semesters, and ran out of money. I had to come home and get a job, which I did. I took some courses, when I got home, but my head just wasn't in it anymore. So, I just continued working.

KR: Were there GI Bill benefits?

MW: Not at that point, no, nope. I would've taken advantage of them if there were.

Anne Weinberg: Are we almost done?

KR: Yes, I will pause for a second.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

KR: We are back on. We were talking about Oklahoma. How did you get back and forth between Oklahoma and New Jersey?

MW: Originally, I was going to drive out there. My car broke down and had to be towed back, so I hopped on a good old train and took the train out there. I met a bunch of guys that were there that were from the New York area, and one of them had a car. We would drive back and forth, straight through from Norman, Oklahoma to New Jersey and eventually--they lived in New York. So, that's how we transported back and forth. We had fun doing it. It was something we'd never done before, not that long a trip, and we just enjoyed it. We did it safe. It was one guy drove no more than two hours. There was always two guys in the front seat, one guy would drive for two, the next guy would drive for two, they'd go in the back, and the back guys would come up in the front and also do two and two. It would keep rotating that way the whole trip, so nobody got worn out. It's too long a trip to have something happen. The scenery was nice, and we did it. I guess they finished. I left them behind when I left school, and I haven't heard anything from them since I left.

KR: What were your impressions of Oklahoma?

MW: Everything was slower, more laid back. When they say you could see a country mile, you could see a country fifty miles because it's so flat out there. The horizon is twenty miles away instead of only three miles away. Everything moves at a slower pace. I was in Oklahoma City walking down the street, and somebody walked by, tipped their hat and said, "Hello." Nobody does that around here, and I thought that was a little out of the ordinary because I'd never experienced that before, of people saying hello to you on the street. So, that was a little different. People are people, no matter where you're at. It depends on the circumstance by which they're raised and how they're living, and that's what governs the way they run the rest of their lives. I liked it out there. It was very nice, but I was glad to come back to New Jersey.

KR: What was the next step when you came back to New Jersey?

MW: Get a job, which I did. I went to work for a publishing house, a small one, it was called Oxford University Press. [laughter] I worked for them, well, a few years. I was in their packing department, and I was also doing gold-leaf lettering on the Bibles that they distributed. So, I was doing all right. Then, little by little, I drifted back into retailing and got a job, and I was selling men's clothing. I worked around a few different stores, some bigger, some privately owned, no department stores, I never worked in a department store, but that lasted for a good twenty-five years. Then, I worked in New York for a couple of years, came back after that, but I really didn't care for it. Well, there was other circumstances, but I left that and came back here. I think I worked for a paint retailer for a week, until I got paint splattered on my clothing, and I said, "This is not for me." Then, I heard about See-More Television, and I worked there for twenty-five years before I retired.

AW: You missed the bank. You missed places.

MW: I missed a couple of places, but that's basically the routine.

KR: I want to go back to the 1960s. When the Vietnam War was going on, how did the war affect your family, your friends and your community?

MW: Some of my friends got drafted into the service and they went. My brother was drafted into the Army, and he didn't spend time in Vietnam. He didn't go overseas at all. I think he went to Fort Dix; that's where he spent most of his time. Then, he got discharged, and he went to work.

I'm meeting more guys now that were in Vietnam, and they were there during the shooting war. One of the fellows that I'm very friendly with, through our temple, he was a platoon leader in Vietnam and saw battle. Another fellow that we're friendly with, he was a motor mechanic over in Vietnam. I don't think he saw battle, but he was in the midst of it anyway. I'm sure a few of my friends went. I don't know of anybody that didn't come back that I knew. They never really talked about it. In fact, I find a lot of people that were in Vietnam don't like to talk about it. I guess it wasn't too pleasant for them.

KR: What did you think about the anti-war movement?

MW: I've always considered myself a bit of a patriot and I'm not a total freedom guy. I'm not any kind of a radicalist, but I think that you live in this country and you live by your own rules and regulations, but you have to adhere to basically what the country is about. If you haven't got the loyalty to the country that gives you so much, leave the country. To me, these radicalists that got up and burnt flags and shaved their heads or grew their hair too long that were protesting against our doing what we were doing ought to think back that if it happened here what they would do. Would they be the same radicalists that would burn flags and say we're doing the wrong thing, if it happened here and not somewhere in the Far East? I wasn't for the protestors at all. I think they should've been a little more supportive of our guys. When our troops came back and guys came off the busses and they were being spat at by the crowds, I thought that was the most horrible thing in the world. They laid their life on the line, at least give them some respect. So, it turned me off.

KR: Tell me about your family and your children.

MW: Okay, I was married the first time. My wife died, after nineteen years of marriage, and we had two daughters. I met Anne about a year or so after my first wife died, and we got married. Anne had three children of her own from her first husband, and after nineteen years of marriage ...

AW: He passed away.

MW: He passed away. So, we got married, and we're now married thirty-two years. We figured we would never live long enough to celebrate our fiftieth wedding anniversary. So, when we were married twelve years, we each had nineteen behind us and twelve adds up to fifty, we'll celebrate. We went on a cruise, celebrated our fiftieth wedding anniversary. It's been great. Anne has taken in my kids and I've accepted her three, and it was fine for the most part.

AW: Yes.

MW: It's been good. There's been ups and downs, like every other marriage, but I'm very happy that I met and married this lady.

KR: How did you end up settling in this area?

MW: I originally lived in Paterson. When I got married, my first home was in Wayne, New Jersey, and I lived in an apartment there. We left Wayne. We moved to what then was West Paterson, which is now Maple Ridge or whatever they want to call it [Woodland Park], and lived there for a few years. We had two daughters. We decided maybe we would want to move down here, because we'd be closer to my wife's family. She came from Perth Amboy, and her sister was living here in Metuchen. So, we came down here, and we were just looking around, looking around, finally saw a small house here in town. We put a bid on it, and we bought the house. We moved down here. It was a few years later that she got sick, and she passed away. After she died, I met Anne, and we got married. We moved over here, since this house is obviously bigger than the one that I had. It was just a small Cape [Cod] we were living in. That's it. We got married in '85.

AW: '86.

MW: '86. We're here since '86. Anne's been here since the house was built. [At the] end of this month, she'll be here fifty-four years, and that's it.

KR: What veterans organizations have you participated in?

MW: Well, I'm a member of the VA. I belong to Veterans of Foreign Wars, because I qualified, being my Reserve years were part of the Vietnam era. I think that's about it, yes. That's the only two veterans organizations that I've had contact with, and I haven't really been very active with either one really. I got my hearing aids through the VA. Occasionally, I'll go over to the VFW hall, and their drinks are cheap. A friend of mine belongs there, and he's a pretty big organizer with them, so sometimes I'll meet him there very, very occasionally.

KR: Well, I have reached the end of my questions and I want to ask if there is anything you would like to add that you skipped over.

MW: Nothing comes to mind, but I really appreciate being able to participate in this program, because those who ignore the past are bound to forget it. The more we can put on record, that will help people remember what happened and what didn't happen, is going to just perpetuate the history a little more. It feels good trying to help out. [Editor's Note: The telephone rings.]

MW: That's a garbage call. Just pick it up and hang up. I hate those things. It's been nice. It's been very good, and I appreciate you including me in your work.

KR: Well, thank you so much for doing this interview, and thank you both for having me into your house. I will conclude the interview.

MW: Thank you.

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